



In the Shadow of a Volcano

The Adventures of Growing Up in Java

Heng L. Thung

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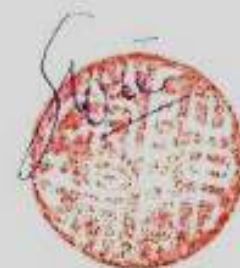
SEAMEO Regional Center for Archaeology and Fine Arts



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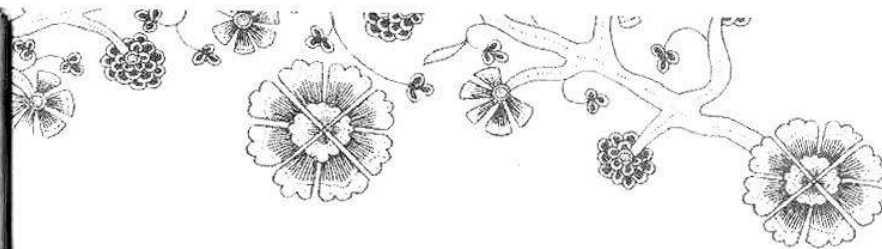
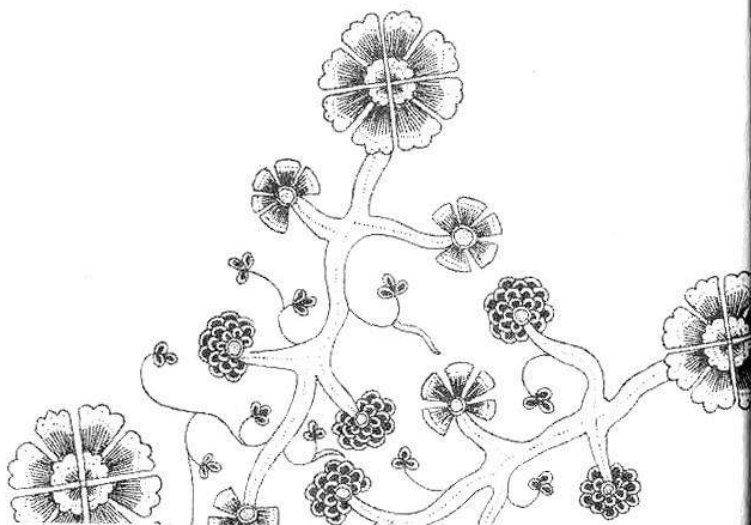


SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts

Indonesia as a nation state, few titles have been made available in English, thus restricting the possible scope audience readership.

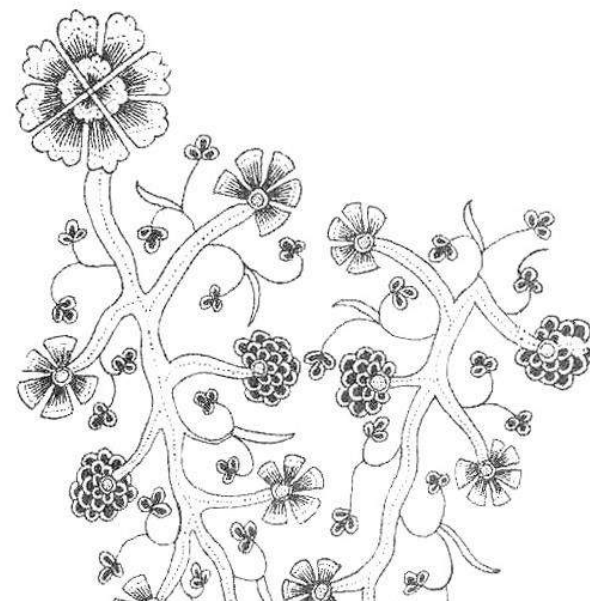
'The Adventures of Growing up in the Shadow of a Volcano in Java' recalls his life as a son of a planter in Java prior to World War II, and his pursuance of an education after it ended. This is a fascinating autobiographical account set in a time about which we are eager to learn more. SPAFA firmly believes that history is not an abstract notion; history happens because people make it happen. The life of any individual not only provides a valuable personal record of the past but it also contributes to help understand more fully the 'bigger picture'; in the same way that another jigsaw piece will help complete the puzzle. In this regard, SPAFA is proud to present this work which we believe you will find to be enjoyable as well as informative.

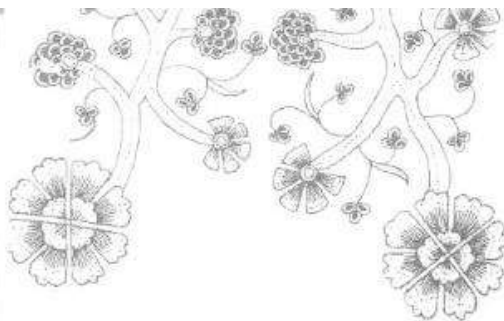
Dr. Pisit Charoenwongsa



*I dedicate this book
to my wife Yvonne.*

Heng L. Thung





A Word of Thanks

I would like to thank my wife, Yvonne, for putting up with me during my many travels and during my efforts to write this book about my childhood.

It was Jay MacLean, my boss at ICLARM in Manila, and soul mate, who finally gave the book impetus by offering to edit the manuscript and to convert the Dutch/English version to a more readable English.

I would like to especially thank my daughter Tina, who was, from the very beginning, committed to see this book published and who spent numerous hours pouring over the manuscript to proofread and finalize it. I cannot thank her enough for all the patience she maintained throughout the process to finalize this manuscript. I would also like to thank my wife Yvonne for assisting me in this endeavor

In the end I would like to thank Dr. Pisit Charoengwongsa, the Director of the Seameo Centre for Archeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA) for offering to publish this book as part of SPAFA undertakings, and the SPAFA staff for the work they have done to put the manuscript together as a book, especially Khun Wilasinee Thabuengkarn for being instrumental in organizing the publication of this book, and Khun Ratchaporn Tesjeeb for helping in the

design of the Book.

Of course, I like to thank my brothers and sister and my cousins for the input they have provided. During the process of putting this book together I realized that I barely covered the surface of the many aspects of the family's history. It should be the effort of all the family members, because both families on my father's and mother's sides were unique among the movers in the economic development of the Colonial Dutch East Indies.

Heng L.Thung

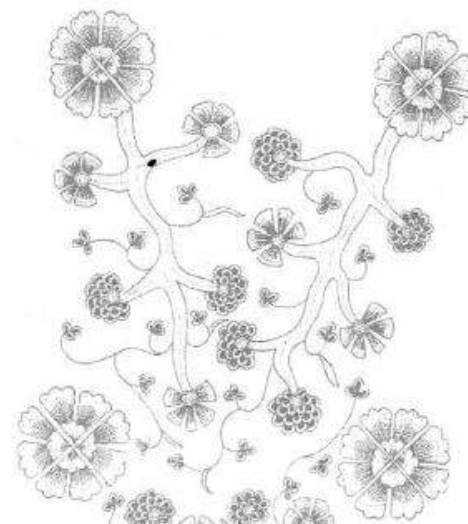


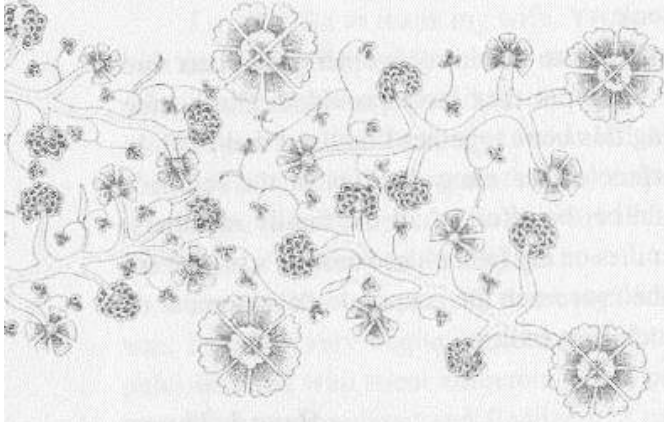
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Preface

I wrote this book about my childhood for my daughters. They grew up moving around the world, far away **from where I was born** and was raised. Traditionally my family would send their kids to the Netherlands for further education, and many went there after World War II and settled there, while others stayed in Indonesia. These uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews living in the Netherlands or Indonesia, were exposed to the family history as it happened, which was closely tied to that of the colonial rulers at the time, the Dutch, and now the Indonesians.

For my children the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, remains a strange and faraway place where my wife Yvonne and I grew up. A lot of books have been written by my family and many others, in the Dutch language, which go back into the history of the islands and describe the family's adaptation to life in the Netherlands. Unlike their Dutch and Indonesian relatives, my children grew up in various places in the US, Asia, Europe, and Africa. They went to college in the States, got married and settled down there. **My daughters** never mastered the Dutch language, which is Yvonne's and my mother tongue. The many books written on the culture of the Dutch East Indies are written in Dutch and the new ones in Indonesian are not accessible to them.

I was a child of the Chinese elite, and was privileged to grow up among the "haves" who were straddle between the Dutch and the Chinese/ Indonesian cultures. That life is now past and gone, but a sense of nostalgia for that time still lingers on. Uncles and aunts would get together once a year, most of them sons and daughters of planters, the "privileged rich." Some of them to this day still live off the wealth they

brought with them, wealth born of sugar, tea, coffee, rubber and rice.

My father's family is complex and bizarre in origin, and disputed by opposing sides of the family:

One version says that the family came from China, and settled in Tjampea, west of Buitenzorg, now Bogor. The family prospered, moved to and settled in Buitenzorg, and established a trading company under the name of the "Company of the Nine Brothers." They were prosperous. They were active in the emancipation movement of the Chinese in the Dutch colonies, and struggled to have **their** children allowed to attend Dutch schools. Some of them even graduated from Dutch Universities and managed to become professors in the Dutch higher education system, which **was** considered an achievement.

The second version claims that the family established itself in the same place, west of Bogor, but that it originated from the House of Bantam, a ruling Indonesian royal family. This version of an Indonesian origin has not been well met by either the indigenous original Bantam family or by the majority of the Chinese group above. The family felt that the discovery of its Indonesian origin conveniently surfaced at a time when it was politically correct to have an Indonesian name. What could be better than to have that name change associated with a true royal origin? The truth may never be known.


The story of my mother's family is also fraught with intrigue and drama. They came from a village named Tjeng Tjaw, 150 kilometers northwest of Xiamen or Amoy. The Tan family is unique in that they had fixed the middle or

generation name of the family for 20 generations. My mother was the 17th generation. With these names it is easy to track down the family, because each generation has the same middle name. The first Tan came to the Indies in the beginning of the 19th century. They were originally traders, but eventually invested in land when Raffles, the British governor, sold land to obtain funds to run the colonies. The Chinese, among them my ancestors, bought the land and cultivated crops for the Dutch colonial government obligations. During the last part of the 19th century they intermarried within the network of plantation families.

Exactly **one** hundred years ago my mother's father died at the age of 29 years under mysterious circumstances, leaving behind a beautiful illiterate wife and six children. My grandfather was once in charge of the second largest estate in West Java, Tegal Waru Landen, spanning 60,500 hectares of land. Since the marriage had not been arranged, **my grandmother** was not accepted by the family. With my grandfather's death, the family became "paupers" among the rest of the clan. What remains are our memories, which I hope to pass on to my children and grandchildren through the writing of these stories.

Heng L.Thung

Bangkok, October, 2007

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My mom and dad at 1950's.

Chapter 1

My Colonial Past

Growing up in Java in the Dutch East Indies in the thirties and forties was a unique experience. It was a transition period between World War I and II. Things were just returning to normal after the depression and people were starting to make plans for the future. It seemed very peaceful, especially for us kids. Everything was calm and routine. There were no crisis and every day the sun came up, the clouds gathered and it rained in the afternoon, for a very short time, to cool things down; it was a daily cycle. The sound of chatter was heard in the villages and the workers' compound. Everybody seemed so content, including us noisy children out in the fields, full of mischief. We chased birds and caught insects and frogs to feed the fowl in the cages. It was a happy life without the burdens that probably troubled our parents.

My father had a dream to build himself a nice house outside town, which would have the mountains in the back, and rows of paddy fields in the front. He had already built a small cottage on the lot, which was to become the servant's

quarters later. He had stockpiled all the hardware for the house, whose architectural design was already complete. I had seen him many times looking at the diagrams and discussing this and that with my mother. Unfortunately his dreams were shattered with the outbreak of World War II when the Japanese invaded the Dutch East Indies. Our carriage driver occupied the cottage for the duration of the war to make sure no one would squat on the property.

With this invasion, the peaceful environment rudely awakened to the realities of another foreign occupation. The difference was, however, that the Dutch had become a familiar sight after three centuries. The Japanese invaded the country to exploit the rich resources needed to feed their own people and their war machine. It was no different from the original objective of the Dutch when they landed three hundred years before looking for the priceless spices. But for us, the Japanese invasion destroyed the stability reached after these centuries of Dutch presence. And this war would change our lives forever. The tranquility, dreams and a way of life of the last years of the colonial period had ended.

Growing up as the children of the Planter, as my father was known, was a privilege. You were one of the lucky people who had everything, and the future was geared towards an education in the "Fatherland," which for us in the Dutch East Indies, meant the Netherlands. It was what Great Britain was for the Commonwealth of Nations. That was the future, and like our parents we were all to study there, and secure our future among the Dutch colonial "masters". In actuality there was very little difference between them and my parents. It was more of an economic stratification rather than a racial

grouping. My parents were members of the "Soos" or society, which was very similar to a country club in the United States. They had balls during New Year and "Koninginnen dag" (birthday of the Dutch Queen), just like in British India during the Raj.

Holland was really for us the "Fatherland." The history of the Netherlands was called "Vaderlandse Geschiedenis" or a History of the Fatherland. We spoke Dutch, which was the ruling class language. We also spoke the local language, Pasar Maleis or Malay, the lingua franca of the islands, and then we also grew up with Sundanese, which is a completely different language from Malay or Indonesian, although with the same roots. There is no comprehension between a Sundanese speaker and Indonesian speaker. It is amazing that on the one island of Java there were several distinct languages, and incomprehensible to each other.

My mother's family was rich beyond dreams at the turn of the 20th century. There is actually very little known about the passing away of my grandfather in 1907. My cousin showed me the Agricultural Gazetteer of that time, in which the land my grandfather managed as the Tegal Waru Lands was listed as 61,098 hectares, just slightly smaller than the largest estate of the Michiel Arnolds family, one of the oldest Dutch dynasties. In Holland it was about the size of the Province of Utrecht, and in the States probably as big as the State of Rhode Island. The estate was acquired by his great-grandfather, who was the Kapitein der Chinezen in Buitenzorg, or his father. Besides the Tegal Waru Lands my great-grandfather owned a smaller rubber estate called Tjimanggis consisting of 3,992 ha. We heard that the

Indonesian Government has restored this estate and planned to use it as a museum of past glory. But I understand that it is now used as housing for the TV station there.

As I wrote before my grandfather passed away at a relatively young age of 29. The rumor was that someone in the family had him poisoned. I thought it was a rather absurd story. But my cousin said that his father, who was eight at the time and thus old enough to be a witness to all happenings at the house, told him that, indeed, they had food tasters during the main meals, when the shareholders of the family corporation (i.e. my great-grandfather's offspring and in-laws) which "owned" the land, got together. It is strange that my grandfather as the third son took care of these large holdings and ended up taking care of the estate and looking after my grandmother and the kids. Some day one of my cousins will try to put things together about the family history. We also understand that after my grandfather's death the land was slowly broken up and in 1960 the lands were purchased back by the government.

My grandfather's ancestors came from southern China, somewhere in the middle of the eighteenth century. They were Tans, known for their wanderlust, and were actually a group that had trouble acquiring land in China, thus having no real place to settle in China. Their desire to acquire land was the reason they ended up in the Indies. There are family records that told us that, during the interim period of the British occupation of the Indies, during the Napoleonic war, the British Governor General Raffles was assigned to the Indies to govern, but without funds. He found a way to raise money by selling so-called "State" land. We were told that my ancestors started digging into their mattresses for their gold

sovereigns and bought as much land as they could get hold of. It is said that when the Dutch returned to the Indies, General Daendels, the Dutch Governor General of the Dutch, was also short of funds, and thought that if Raffles could raise funds that way, he could do the same and sold more "State" lands.

I did not realize there were such large holdings until in the 1980s I met Dr. Sukotjo, who was a descendant of the Indonesian Noble House of Bogor, the town where my family ended up residing and where they built a large family land house called "Gedoeng Dalem," or house located far removed from the street. He told me that my grandfather had great land holdings. He said that his father and my grandfather split almost all the land that the Dutch did not occupy. I did not believe him then, but now I wish I had prodded him further.

The first indication of some documented activities was a contract dated 1835 between my great-great grandfather, Tan Soey Tiang and the Dutch colonial office, which I have in my possession. This contract was, I think, the beginning of the great family fortune. It promised that my ancestor would grow tea for export. They were given land to grow the tea for the government, which I believe was the core of all the other expansions into almost every kind of plantation crop, from tea to rubber. There was rubber, tea, coffee, rice, sugar and whatever else would grow on the rich volcanic soils on the slopes of Mount Gedeh of West Java. The map showed the property all the way to the northern coast of West Java. We calculated that the land covered almost half the slopes of the volcano. I had doubts about that, but the official statistics were clear on the size of the holdings as 60,500 hectares, because they were used as the basis for taxation.

I also knew that my grandfather spoke Dutch because he attended the same school that my father attended a generation later, the Dutch boarding school named Koning Willem III or for short KW III. Of all the documents in my aunt's collection, only one note was saved. This was a letter he sent to my great-grand-father requesting an increase in his pocket allowance from two guilders to a larger amount of one rijksdaalder, or two and a half guilders. The letter was in Dutch. Whether he spoke other languages was not clear, but we know that the family had a subscription to a French magazine. I only remember that my aunt showed me the etching of Captain Dreyfuss being dishonorably discharged and his insignia ripped off his shoulder. This gave the date of the magazine as 1894 when it happened. My grandfather appeared to have a life membership of the National Geographic Society. My aunt told me that they never reported his early death and so the life subscription of the magazine continued into the 1920s. The reason that we had so few documents was that my aunt *Non* or *A-ie*, the eldest of my aunts, became senile in the 1970s and started to burn these private papers of my grandfather. My brother just saw it happening and told me about it instead of rescuing the papers. It was very unfortunate. If only a couple more documents had survived, it would have answered a lot of the mysteries about the family.

We do know that my grandfather took a trip to Marseille to bail out his younger brother who got into some trouble. He did go to a Dutch high-school and languages were mandatory. There is an anecdote about his trip to Marseille, which my aunt told me.



My grandfather, brother and their aunts.

During this trip my grandfather wore a top hat. It was not to look smart, but the volume within these hats was such that it could be used to store my grandfather's queue, or pigtail, which he still wore in his days. I guess few people realized that these hats were very handy for such purposes and thought that they were just for style and pomp. I was told that when he checked into the hotel, because, something the Dutch taught him and decided to take a small room under the eaves. On the way up the narrow stairs, the hat bumped against a beam and fell off, and his queue came undone. The hotel owner saw that and figured that my grandfather was a rich Chinese Mandarin. So when my grandfather came back from his business he found himself installed in the largest and most luxurious room. We are not sure whether he was upset or honored by this treatment.

Unless more information surfaces on my ancestors' background, we can only speculate about the wealth of the family and the intricate relationships between it and other wealthy families of that time. For instance, there is a boulevard in old Batavia, now Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. There are three identical houses in a row on this boulevard, designed and built by the same architect. The first house from the south was occupied by the widow of my grandfather's youngest brother, Tan Tjoen Lee. Some of her offspring lived in what you would call the two adjacent pavilions, or attached smaller houses. The next house was occupied by K B. Han who married my grandfather's sister and whose sister in return married my great-uncle, Tjoen Lee. The last house was occupied by H.H Kan, who was the brother of K.B. Han. It was really a very cozy family

arrangement. Some of their children intermarried further with some disastrous consequences.

We only knew that these families were very rich and related to us. My mother and her brothers and sisters were like a family of orphans compared to them. But we were closest to my great-uncle Tjoen Lee's wife. K.B. Han wanted to adopt my mother when she was born. It was a custom in those days to adopt a child from a family where a member of the family was suffering some sickness. By giving the child away, people believed that the ill-fated sick patient would recover. Whether it had something to do with the illness my grandfather had as part of the poisoning, we do not know. But apparently, my grandfather said, "Over my dead body." And he soon died. My great-uncle K.B. Han and I would later cross paths during my studies in the United States in the late 1950s, but that is another story.

Interestingly enough, a similar house to the three in Jakarta was built for my grandmother in the city of Buitenzorg, now called Bogor. Whether the similarity had to do with being cheap or using the same design and the same architect, I do not know, except you could have walked through each house blindfolded and found your way around. There was something very interesting about my grandmother's house, which we knew rather intimately, because we used to gather there during special occasions. The house had so many rooms, and I thought there were at least three guestrooms for the times when the children and the grandchildren came to visit her. In our eyes in the years before the war, the house seemed huge. It was probably because we were small kids - at least I was.

It was never clear, whether my grandfather was a hunter, or whether his brother Tjoen Lee left some of his trophies to fill my grandmother's place. But deer antlers abounded on the walls. The place was spooky to a six-year-old kid. I found the place totally impossible, especially when I was told to go to bed alone. I used to skirt along the walls and then open the door and make a running jump onto the huge four-poster bed. I would crawl under the blanket fearing hands reaching out from under the bed. My grandmother always made us blankets in the form of a big bag, one side was flannel and the other side consisted of patches of material. It was cool at my grandmother's house, because it was located at a higher elevation from the coast and it rained almost every night. These blankets were our safety net. Once we had crawled into them we felt safe. No ghost or spirits could threaten us in our grandmother's blankets.

When my grandfather died she was in trouble, and ended up only with the house, the cash and the jewelry. Apparently none of the estate was allocated to her, as she was not considered part of the family. Only the youngest brother of my grandfather took care of her.

It seems that the kids were fairly mobile. At one point, my mother and her sisters ended up in a Catholic boarding school, Klein Klooster, run by Catholic nuns in Batavia. This was the custom in the better families. We also know that all the kids went to Holland, except the second son who preferred to use up his inheritance and had fun. Apparently, my grandmother with the help of my granduncle, put an ad in the newspaper for a governess and then hired one, gave her a check, (a bag of gold coins would have been more romantic), and sent all the kids off

to Europe for a wonderful "vacation," or to become young gentlemen and ladies. My mother kept showing us the house where they boarded in Scheveningen, Holland. I sure wish I knew more about these stories. I also remember my mother skiing in the Alps as it was proper for young ladies to do that. They were stuck in another boarding school for ladies in Lausanne. We have a movie of my mother climbing the Egyptian pyramids in the twenties. She was wearing one of those funny mid-calf frilly dresses and one of those round lady's hats.

How rich were we for being the "pauper" family? Well, we were not as rich as the other members of the family, who married into other rich families. As a matter of fact, my mother's second sister married into Sugar, that is, into a family who owned a sugar estate. My eldest and youngest uncles married into Sugar also, apparently into two Sugar Barons' families from East Java. At the turn of the century and during the following years, sugar was considered the commodity to be in. There was an expression that these people swam in the sugar and did not know what to do with their money. My poor mother was considered the unlucky one, marrying this poor guy, my father, who only managed a tea estate. I guess my father was not very rich compared to the others. My second aunt, who married into Sugar, rubbed this fact into me. It was rumored that my grandmother at one point divided the jewelry into six piles for each of her children. My mother got her little pile, which we eventually inherited, consisting of a necklace and bracelet of blue sapphires with diamonds, which is with my sister; three huge two-carat diamond pins given to each of us; an engagement ring which Yvonne, my wife, has stashed away somewhere; a bracelet with a hundred



*My mother, my grand mother and great grand mother
and the rest of clan early 1920.*

small diamonds, which fed the workers on the plantation during the famine of 1945; plus a pile of odds and ends.

One of the "bad" habits of my father, whom we originally suspected to be socialistically inclined, was that he always helped people in need. My mother used to complain that his generosity towards others was the reason why we were not rich. However, later we simply realized that my father was just one of the remnants of a feudal system, who took his feudal responsibilities towards his people seriously.

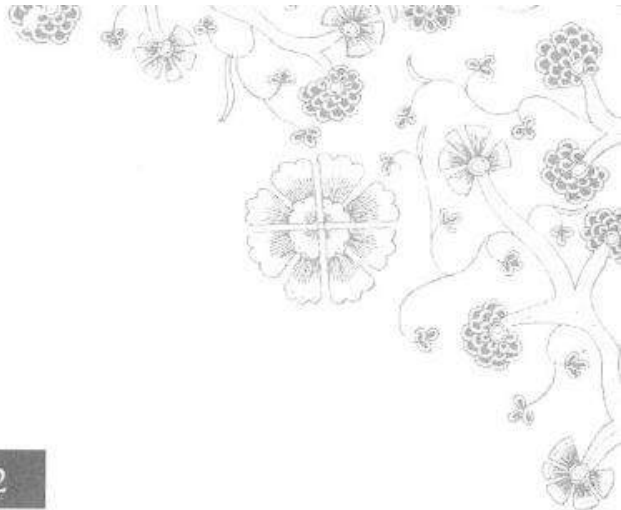
I liked the wife of my youngest uncle. She was really beautiful and vivacious. She was always happy and very simple in spite of their wealth. They lived simply, but were always proper. I came to visit them often when I had my problems at home. They did not have any children, and my uncle had the greatest stamp collection. In many ways he was sort of my guardian father, and listened patiently to my problems. When I left for the United States, my contact with them faded, but my sister ended up being close to them as she took care of my mother in her later years.

The eldest sister, aunty Non, who I mentioned earlier as the one who burned our family history, was called A-ie. The name is a short for *Twa-ie*, or in Chinese it means *taa* as the biggest or oldest, and *ie* is aunt from my mother side. The same aunt at my father's side would be *A-koh*., koh meaning sister from my father side. *A-ie* was my favorite aunt, even though I was very scared of her. She uses to order us around and insisted that the kids go to bed before nine in the evening. She was very special to me, because during the period after the war, when she stayed with us, I slept in the big four poster bed with her. And before I fell asleep she

would tell me tales about her childhood. That is when she told me that my grandfather had one of, if not the earliest, cars to arrive in the Indies. He used to take drives with the Dutch Governor General, who was his buddy when my great-grandfather was the Kapitein of the Chinese in Buitenzorg. My family kept close ties with several Dutch Governors General after my great-grandfather's death. I wish I could remember all the tales she told me, but most of them I forgot. I wrote a whole chapter on my aunty Non towards the end of this book as she had great influence on my life.

We, on my father's side did not have a real plantation with gardens, but a tea factory, which serviced the native tea gardens surrounding the town of Sukabumi. We did not have women who walked up trails in between the tea bushes picking the leaves as they were often romantically depicted in movies or in the National Geographic magazine. Those images I saw much later, when I moved around to other tea estates. Each afternoon the factory's trucks would return from gathering points all over the countryside and unload all the tea leaves, which would be piled high in the center of the factory. We kids had a great time there, jumping time and time again into fragrant leaves. I have a lot more to say about playing around the tea factory in a later chapter.

The story about my father's family is even more bizarre and I will copy it verbatim later with comments. In short, we belong to a member of the House of Bantam, who took refuge in a Chinese settlement, Tjampea, and took a Chinese identity. The story has been verified by the Office of the Archive of the Sultanate of Bantam, but there is still debate on its authenticity among the family.

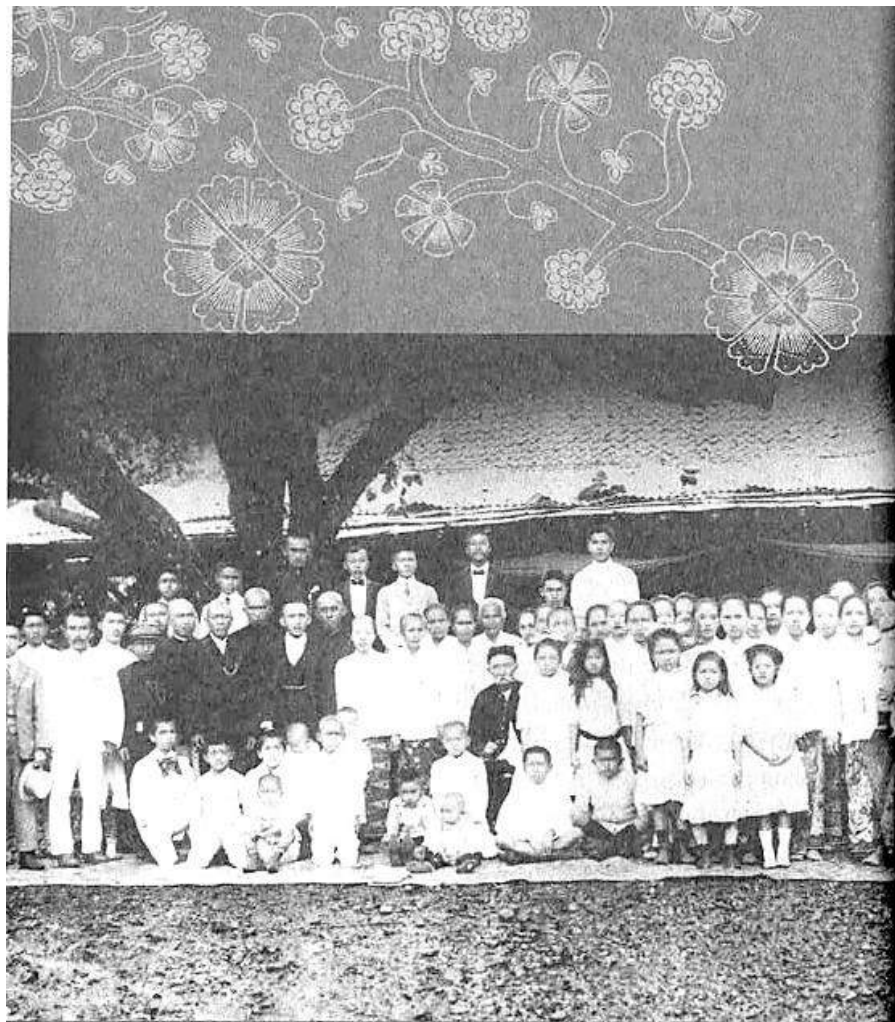


Chapter 2

My Grandmothers, Parents and Siblings

We came from families of planters, except my grandmother who caught the eye of my grandfather, the rich planter's son. Now I wish that I know much more about all these strange uncles and aunts. When I grew up I took it for granted that we were a well to do family, but we also realized that we had other grand-uncles and grand-aunts, uncles and aunts, who were very rich. My mother would tend to whisper their names when she talked about them.

In contrast, my grandmother came from a rather big and humble Chinese family. Her brother was just the town's baker of the next door town of Sukabumi some 50 kilometers south of Buitenzorg, where my grandfather's family resided. We heard that my grandfather was smitten in love with her and married her and probably upset some other marriage the family had planned for him. I am sure he was lined up to marry a rich planter's daughter.



The clan of my mother's mother in 1900.



My mother's mother

His untimely death changed the routine, although my grandmother with the help of her brother-in-law tried to ensure that they would receive a proper education in Europe. The boys went to study engineering, except the second uncle, who preferred to squander his inheritance. The girls probably went to finishing school to prepare them for life as the wife of a planter.

My grandmother was very organized. Her big house in Buitenzorg was spick and span. She was an herbalist, and every dry day she would be drying her herbs, and then grind them and put them in bottles and labeled them. After each visit we would get a few bottles of new supplies. My grandmother also dried flowers which she put in small packs and gives them with us too out between the clothing, to make them smell good. That was the smell I always associate with my grandmother Bogor, as we called her according the name of the town. Tante Kit, the wife of my mother's youngest brother lived in the pavilion of the main house, and every morning she would take care of all the flowers of the house, either trimmed them or cut new flowers and placed them into the vases, which their were distributed throughout the house.

Dinner at my grandmother was a black tie affair, if you may compare it with our wild dinners at home. Grandmother would sit at one end of the table and whoever senior across from her. Then the family sat at the black table for twelve. Then Mansoer, the major domo would come and do the serving. He would be dressed in white with a half sarong across his hips. My cousin said smiling, recently, that it was just a tradition for the old colonial time. It was amazing that my grandmother would maintain the tradition.

My mother was just like her mother and her sisters very petite, but do not think that she was born for dancing in the ball room only during the Dutch Royal festivities in the Soos, the equivalent of the country club in the States.

My mother as wife of a planter had a lot of responsibilities... While my father was busy with running the tea factory, it was my mother who was responsible for the running of the house and also took care of the sick and wounded of the personnel of the plantation. She had to make sure that the people were well. She was the one who disciplined us kids. The house itself was run by A-nong, the major domo, then Pulung, who did all the other work in the garden, then there was the house maid and the laundry maid. And when we were young the appropriate number of nursemaids, *amahs* or what we kids called our shadows, who were responsible for each of our movements from dawn to dusk.

While the servants disciplined us silently as I will tell you later, it was A-nong our major domo who firmly and persuasively controlled us kids in the house and during meals. Together with my mother they would plan the action of the day, the meals and also the special meals as he was also the cook.

That does not mean that she could not cook and cakes and special dishes were her specialty. She would sweat in the afternoon heat to make Koeweh *Lapis*, on a portable charcoal oven. You have to bake each layer at a time, or she would make her own egg-roll skin, where by she would swing the dough in the air and then stamped it onto a flat skillet, and peel it off when still sizzling hot. When we moved away



from Sukabumi, she would hire the new cooks, and train them one whole week in all the dishes the family liked, while adding new recipes later on. She also prepared some special sauces, which we now simply buy in the store. However, we had to make many of those, such as salted eggs, fermented bean sauce, and you name it. She had a storage room for all these dry goods, and when you are locked into that place for bad behavior, you could smell all those herbs.

You could hear my mother come, because her important attachment is her key-ring. It made the ringing noise wherever she went. If she ever lost the key-ring it would have been a disaster, because she had every cabinet door, storage door and whatever had to be locked.

When we were sick we came under her treatment first, the doctor was called when all the other home remedies did not work. But treating bruises and cuts was her standard fair. Her mother gave her all kinds of herbs. One for fevers, one for sore throats, one for bruises. As a matter of fact I carried the medicine for bruises all over the world. I even used it on the field on my friends who bruised their legs or feet.

She had very strong hands, and if necessary she would massage us. My sister got her massages when my mother was almost ninety years old, and frail. But she had one great method of getting rid of a fever. It was a very painful procedure when it took place. She would rub you with genuine Tiger Balm, and then she had a special tool of bone the size of a dollar coin. And she would scrape with that implement over your back. In a few second that area would turn purple. She would sit on you, while you screamed. But it was guaranteed that the fever would leave you

almost immediately. She told us that it was an ancient Chinese method.

She provided the animal security. She felt that we kids were a bit squeamish. When necessary, that is when the assistant mullah was not around, she would slaughter the chickens. Every year she made sure that new rattan sticks were brought for killing the snakes which had invaded the house. The rattan stick broke the vertebra in one good well-aimed swish. She killed a *Tokeh* a giant wall lizard right on top of my head with her well-aimed slap with the result that the miserable animal died clutching my hair, and my hair was cut to removed the corpse from my head. A *musang*, family of the civet cat, made a nuisance of himself by lifting the roof panes every night looking for insects and so my mother trapped the animal, and once caught asked one of us to kill it, but again we were just a bit too civilized as she called us, and she just took a big swing with a pole and that was the end of the animal.

Come to think about it, it must have been boring for my mam when we moved to the big city. Her friends and relatives were left behind. Actually I went to school and thus was out of her sight, and thus I remember less of her activities. The city was also very large and it was less easy to move around.

My mother could swear like a trooper. If she was mad she would swear in Dutch, if she get madder, she would swear in Malay, and when she was really boiling then the language changed into our Sundanese language. It was handy to gauge her anger.

My father was a short and stocky guy. Rather taciturn, maybe as shy as I was and he did not talk until spoken to.

It is hard to talk about my father when I was a kid. He was too busy with the tea factory and I do not really remember him talking to me. The main problem is that we did not have our meals with our parents, and if you think that is a lot of communication time lost between us and our father. I most often see him as a shadow that walks to the factory, or someone I watch doing something in the factory when I come for a visit. So, the one time he talked to me is etched in my brain. I was eating sliced tomatoes with sugar on the porch and he happened to walk by, and stopped and patted me on my head, and said: "Good boy." That one short moment I would never forget. Other times I would be watching him having conversations with friends and drinking coffee on the veranda. I always longed to talk to him, but he seemed so aloof. He never told me anything about his father and his family. The only time he opened up was when he told me about Paris, when I showed him the photo album of Paris. But it was just like a candle light that went on and died again.

But when we all had moved to Batavia or Jakarta he did have a habit of taking one or two kids with him on the bike for a ride and a lunch somewhere, and when he had a car we all would go with him for this special lunch. He liked to eat. Every Sunday it was another restaurant. For special noodles we went to the downtown where there was a place with these wonderful *Pinangsia* noodles, named after the district. Other times we would have noodles with wontons under the Cherry tree at *Pasar Senen*, or once a month we would crowd his aunt's house in *Bogor*, sit all noon catching the food vendors coming by the house of his aunt, and sample

one dish after the other, the famous *gado gado*, Indonesian salad to pork intestines pickled in soy sauce and *lumpia goreng* or fried egg rolls. These were not just egg rolls, but very tasty ones as we would not be traveling and spend half a day waiting for these food vendors to come by. But sometimes in the evening my father would catch a vendor of *sate* or shishkebab, or *lumpia goreng*. Often he would just order the whole load, so that the vendor could go home after having served us. These were the times when my father was happy and smiled.

Other times I would catch him in an easy chair on the veranda, and we would talk. It was not easy drawing him to a conversation, or maybe I was the one rather reluctant to chit chat. All the times I thought that my father did not like me, so we either argued or we shouted at each other. That happened more at the dining table. I did not know why. I know that he spanked me and proudly announced that I was the child he had ever spanked, but I do not remember why. He did throw his sandal at me when I answered him that I wanted to be world traveler and not a doctor or economist. So, I kept it as a secret that I was applying for a scholarship and announced it when I actually had the scholarship in my hand.

My sister Olly told me that I had misjudged him, and I now agree. She said that of all the children he had the most respect for me, and was the most proud of me, because I never asked help for getting my scholarship and plugged on by myself. It is too bad that we did not talk a lot more, because he was such a wise and smart man. I could have learned a lot more from him. He did not like me to become a professional,

because he felt that I would be OK, but not rich. He said that I had to find a commodity to sell it a million times, and make ten cent profit every time I sell one, and in the end I will get rich. Well, I did not listen to him.

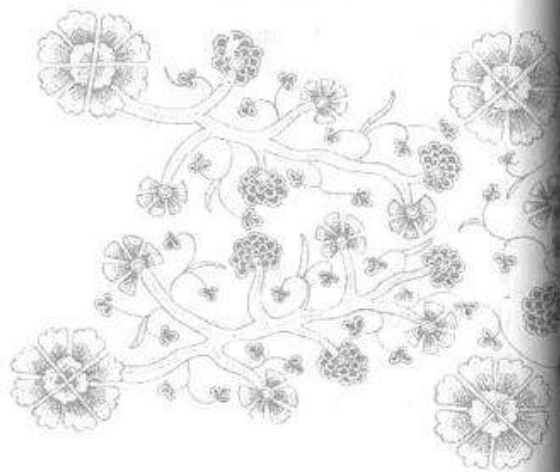
I really loved him very much. Every afternoon I sat on the veranda doing my homework and he would come in from work. I watched him come out of the car and go in, but within ten minutes he would come back to clean the car. He looked and I would say to myself, please not now. I will help you. But no he would go on and with a sigh I dropped my homework and would go to help and the next day I was not doing so well in school. And at the end of the year I failed class. I was not sure who I should hate; myself, my father or my brothers and sister who never ever offered to help him.

My elder brother was four years my senior and he was the most talented of all of us. He could play many musical instruments naturally and he only got violin lessons; he could play the piano and the guitar and could sing. He could draw naturally without much effort. He was good in almost any type of sport, from soccer to softball and whatever other sports you could think of. He was good looking and usually he would not ride one girl home from school, but at least two of them. So, sometimes it was such a surprise that he did not manage so well during his adult years.

My sister was a cute girl with natural curls, and she was always complaining even as a toddler and she soon got the nickname of "*Nenek Tjomel*" or complaining lady. Of course, she was my father's favorite, and he was very sad when she left home to come to America, where she married a Dutch student at Cornell.

The Benjamin was my youngest brother who could do no wrong. He had a wild streak and at one point my uncle, the Police Commissioner ask my father's permission to lock him in jail for a week or so to straighten him out, but my father bailed him out. He probably was the smartest of us all, and actually managed very well raising his family of almost a dozen kids. He always had some scheme going on.

It is sad in a way that we all scattered and ended up below the expectation of our Grandfather, one of the richest persons in West Java. If he had lived beyond the 29 years of age to guide his six young children through their growing years and perhaps was able to manage our future to continue the tradition of an expanding empire. We can only look back to a glorious past, but look forward to a faltering future which is not even a shadow of that past.

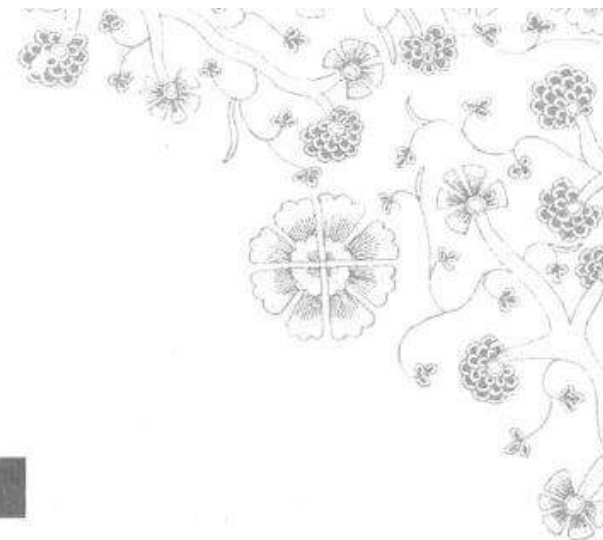


Chapter 3

The Town in Java

Java is the clasp of the belt of emeralds that are the green islands of the East Indies strung along the equator and called the *Insulinde*. It is remembered by thousands of Dutch citizens who have lived there or whose ancestors toiled on those beautiful islands. Java was the small island that was the cultural heart of the archipelago, where kingdoms rose and fell over thousands of years of history, even before the people from Europe discovered it in their search for spices.

People from Holland now return to Indonesia in droves to enjoy the memories of the days when the Dutch controlled these islands as part of their far-flung colonial empire of thousands of verdant islands, which enriched the motherland, just as India did for England. However, while temples and awesome scenery of the Himalayas studded India, Java was a pretty island that is lush green all year round with red-tiled cottages in between. Some ruins, remnants of ancient kingdoms



lie in the shadow of volcanoes still smoking and spewing hot ashes in the air and lava down the slopes, keeping the island rich and fertile. The mountains also forced the water-laden clouds up its slopes to cool the air and every afternoon the rain sprinkled this moisture back to cool the earth and to wet the fertile soil to produce rich crops year after year.

The yellowing rice fields during harvest season glisten like golden panes, and in the rainy season the fields are brilliantly colored in light green. The terraces reach up the mountain slopes and fade into the blue haze of the distant volcanoes. The water flows through the rice terraces and small little rivulets connect one terrace to the next. In essence all these terraces together form a huge water reservoir and slow down the flow of water and allow it to saturate and fertilize the soil. The volcanoes, some smoking still, slowly disappear in the clouds of the afternoon. The volcanic soil and the rain secure the harvest and food for the most densely populated island in the world.

Even today the roads still wind like the trails where the water buffalo trod in the not too distant past. The result is a picture that remains beautiful. The red tiles of the houses of the villages contrast nicely against the green of the fruit trees in the gardens. But a change has taken place in the sense that, the open spaces along the roads through which you could see the rice fields flashing by, are now closed off with rows of houses and hundreds of shops lining every single transportation route—small eating places, shops with construction material, garages, and you just name it!

I was born in a small town, Sukabumi, on the slope of one of these volcanoes, the *Gedeh*, the major volcano rising

up from the plains in West Java, exactly one hundred kilometers south of Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, now called Jakarta. We lived in a small, simple house not as imposing as those of my other relatives. I still hear my aunt, my mother's sister say that my father was a poor catch. Yes, he may have been, but we survived. I guess my mother could have said no, when she was proposed to marry my father. She probably could have done better, but maybe at that time the stable of prospective rich husbands had been thinned out by older sisters and cousins. Maybe there was no sugar-baron heir left by the time my mother's turn came to get married. But having three of her siblings, two brothers and one sister, married into the sugar dynasties was quite a record for the family. But it could have been worse, even though my father was considered at the bottom rung of the ladder of plantation owners. My mother's eldest sister wisely decided to stay single. We heard that whenever a potential suitor visited the house, my aunt would climb out of the window and disappear into the huge garden or the slave quarters. Good for her, because she remained carefree all her life.

So, we only had a tea factory in the end. My father was studying economics at the time in Rotterdam, but then his father passed away and the family called him back from his studies in Holland as he was the eldest son. He was promised that he could go back to Holland and continue his studies in economics. But then they told him that he should get married first, and so as a dutiful son he got married. Then he was also told to administer one of the rice mills of the family. Finally he was sent to Sukabumi to run the family tea factory on the southern slope of the *Gedeh* and *Pangerango*

mountains, the twin volcanoes. I guess his uncles, the members of the Tong, forgot the promise, and with my grandfather gone my father could only be a nice son. I always felt sorry for him. I guess in some ways he got cheated, but maybe there were circumstances that prevented him from going back to Holland. He was just trapped. He had a French girlfriend whom he visited every summer while in Europe. And during one of his nostalgic moods he told me that I could have had a French mother. I sure would have liked that. I have always loved France and I like the beautiful language. Perhaps that is a thing I inherited from him. But throughout his life I know that he was always sad and serious. It was a rare occasion when he laughed.

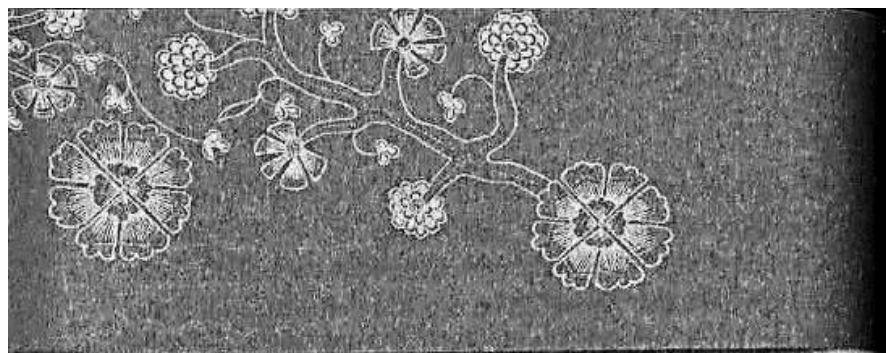
The volcanic cone was the dominant feature of the landscape. It sat majestically north of our house. The town was strung up the lower slope, and then petered out into the rice fields and those red tiled village houses between the green fruit and coconut trees. The mountain stood as a sentinel above this wonderful scenery of rice terraces with the water flowing from one field to the next below.

The town was the center of the plantation business and a resort town, plus a government-training center for police. As I said, it was exactly one hundred kilometers from Batavia. The 100 kilometer marker was almost in the center of town. The main road was part of the *Grote Postweg* or the general mail road, built by Dutch governor Daendels after the Napoleonic war when the Dutch were given some of their colonies back by England, except for South Africa, Malacca, and several other small enclaves, which the English kept. But the Indies were the richest islands, and were the source

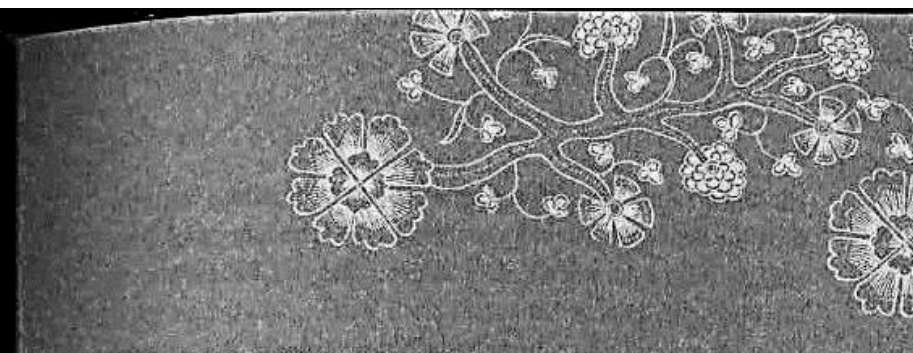
of prosperity for Holland for centuries, first under the *Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie* or the East Indian Company, just as the British equivalent controlled India during the same period, then the colonial office after the Dutch Government took over the colonies and terminated the monopoly of the Company.

This little town was very picturesque. The center of town had an *aloon-aloon* or town square. Facing it was the house of the *Resident* or Dutch District Officer and next to it was the small shopping area with two of the largest stores in town, owned by relatives. My mother's coffee tour used to include all these relatives.

The *Grote Postweg* or the Great Mail Road ran the length of the island for one thousand kilometers from West to East or from the town of *Merak* in the West facing the island of Sumatra to *Banjumwangi* in the East, where the ferries link Java with the Island of the Gods, Bali, with its unique Hindu culture. The road was not straight, but sort of winding and swinging along the mountains and valleys. I always remarked that most of the roads probably followed the earlier buffalo tracks. Even today most roads in Java wind through the countryside, making the trips very scenic and beautiful, especially if you have the time to meander from village to village. Now the only straight highways are limited to the urban network of the capital city, and a few connecting thruways. The traffic jams are now fabulous. But part of the road going east is now a one-way road. I have never figured out how it worked. This meant detours of hundreds of kilometers. For instance the northern road around the *Gedeh* mountain goes eastwards during certain hours, while the



My Father's Mother and my sister Ling



My Father

southern route through my town goes westwards. So, you have to time your travel according this schedule or plan to make a huge detour. I am not sure what has been done to alleviate this chaos.

The town was a little better than a village. It was even connected by train across the island. The main artery was east to west, but the main towns were more north-south, because of the slope of the volcanoes in the north. We were located south of the railway. The Dutch area was north, where a vacation resort hotel sprawled northwards along the slope of the mountains. However, the main reason for the existence of the town was that it was also the supply center of the various plantations spread throughout the surrounding areas. These were mainly tea estates, such as the one of my father's. It was also the location of the Police Academy which supplied the new officers for the whole country.

Surprisingly, this town of Sukabumi became the center of my father's immediate family's activities, where my father started to run the family tea factory. They moved and mother settled there. It was also the town where my mother's father met and fell in love with my grandmother, the pretty illiterate daughter of the town's baker, who stole the heart of the one of the richest people in the colony. It was a fairy tale and would have been a wonderful story if it did not end so sadly with the death of my grandfather without a will, just 29 years old.

One other reason for the importance of this town as a resort area was the wonderful climate. Being high on the slope of the mountain, the humid air of the coast was left way below along the coast. It was sunny most of the time and there were some showers for a very short time in the

afternoon, when the coastal winds came up the slope and the rising clouds carrying moisture would condense and release the water as a nice rain, cooling the streets and watering the trees and plants. Then the sun would shine again and the afternoon was pleasantly fresh to welcome the people who had had their siesta in the hot afternoon.

Of course, because of these regular rains the streams were always running down the mountain slope, irrigating the rice fields on their way down to eventually collect into the large rivers flowing into the Java Sea in the north or Indian Ocean in the south.

Now the town I was born in has now been engulfed by the progress of development. The carefully made baskets in the villages have been replaced by plastic ware from China. The plastic sandals are the common footwear, although it seems that people in my village often still go barefoot as they did in my childhood years. Shoes or sandals are kept for special occasions. Of course, the tracks of stamped earth have been replaced by stone trails or even covered with asphalt and cement. I remember these things with great nostalgia. The old timers, not many are left, share the same feeling, and we reminisce about the *tempo dulu* or the good old days.

Down from the main east-west highway is *Jalan Baros* or *Jalan Oto Iskandardinata* now, which passes our old tea factory. The road is wider and better paved and the traffic busier, although in the mornings people still walk up to town bringing the harvest in baskets suspended from a bamboo yoke like in the olden days. How long this will last we do not know. So, now I will turn the pages back to where I was born and grew up.

The House

The house I was born in still stands, though a little dilapidated. Today it seems not a very impressive house for the dwelling of the administrator of a tea factory. It is a white washed wooden house with green shutters. The red-flowered *bougainvillea* does not cover the red-tiled roof anymore as it did when I was young. The trees in the yard are gone and the house seems forlorn, not the lively house we lived in some sixty years ago.

I still remember the bamboo matting wall, which was hollow. It had an outer and inner layer, with bamboo diagonals between them and at times you could hear the mice running between the outer and inner layers. White sheer curtains covered the inside glass windows and at night the wooden shutters were closed. These had slats to let the air in and later my father added mosquito screens, so that we did not have to sleep under a *klamboe* or mosquito net anymore. The floor had cool, shiny, gray tiles, which were swabbed every day.

There was a one-meter wide terrace around the whole house, where potted plants were lined up in antique Chinese pots that would fetch a good price today. The front entrance of the house had an open receiving room or veranda, which connected to the living room—we called it the “salon.” Visitors were usually received on the veranda at the front entrance, and rarely ever invited into the house unless they were close friends or family, so the entrance was not often used. It was a cold and empty area anyway, with a huge aquarium in the right-hand corner, occupied by a lonely fish that could sometimes be seen drifting among the algae that covered much of the glass. The aquarium was one of my father’s hobbies. He abandoned the hobby, but apparently could not abandon the fish. Actually, Dad had many hobbies. At one time he had dogs—pedigree chow-chow dogs until they were all poisoned by some of the people living around us. The Moslem population was not keen on dogs, which are considered unclean, almost like pigs. You will notice the difference when you enter a Moslem village and a Thai Buddhist settlement. In the first you may encounter some children, while in Thailand a bunch of dogs will announce your arrival with their loud barking. My father’s dogs’ cages later held my rabbits. That would be another story and it was a chore to gather grass for my rabbits in the extensive gardens of the tea factory.

The house sat in the middle of a garden and the whole place was encircled by a steel fence. The gates were always closed, except in the morning, when my mother would sit in front of the main gate facing the street, and did her daily purchases of food and vegetables. The rest of the time the family used the kitchen door or a gate next to the house.

The main house had two connected bedrooms. The front room was our parents and the back room was ours, all the boys, my two brothers and I. But sometimes they were reversed when my mother felt bored with the existing arrangement. The family room ran across the back of the house, its centerpiece was a huge above-ground air raid shelter in the form of a wooden box covered with sandbags. There was a huge coat cabinet, occupied by all manner of objects collected by my mother. My mother was the greatest packrat in the world but she did store everything neatly in locked cabinets around the house! I remember that my mother and all my aunts had key rings which opened the cabinets and storage rooms. It must have been a colonial custom of not trusting the servants and locking everything up.

There was also the most important cabinet where my mother kept our toys. It was for us a very important occasion when my mother would open its doors and let us play with the toys for an afternoon. The concept was very interesting: none of us owned any toys, except one or two special things—I had a teddy bear. The rest of the toys were communal and locked up in this cabinet. We could play with them, but afterwards we had to store them away neatly, or we would not be allowed to use them again for some time. So, as a result there were never any toys spread around. It made sense because many games could not be played alone. It also made those moments very precious, when my mother would open the cabinet and we were allowed to play with the toys.

The living room was very little used, except in the evening because it had a rug on the floor that felt soft and warm at night. There was the huge bookcase of my father,

filled with books—a Dutch encyclopedia set, books about mysticism and even some of my books about animals. It had glass windows in the doors and you could see the beautiful bindings of the books from the outside without having to open the doors and the books were kept clean. There was a teak desk in the corner with an old fashioned telephone on top and a settee set in the middle of the living room, and to one side was a bronze table on which every evening a pot of tea in a tea-cozy sat in a nicely plaited bamboo basket. I found it funny and curious that the tea served was Chinese green tea. I guess my father was tired of drinking his own black tea, because he produced black tea by the tons to export and had to drink this black tea whenever he had to taste the tea, so that he could blend the different lots of tea, as they were never exactly the same. So every week in the factory he would check the flavor of the lots of tea produced that week and mix the different batches to achieve a good product.

There was another huge cabinet that contained all the chinaware. There were all kinds of pots and cups in there. Some were as dainty and delicate as egg shells. My mother sometimes opened the cabinet and we would gather around her and gaze at these treasures. My mother would take the items out and place them on the floor in front of her. There was a ritual of taking a silver spoon, bowl and teether that each child was given at birth. But on one of these occasions, I realized that I did not have these silver items that the other children had. I asked my mother about these missing items. Somehow my mother could never give me a good explanation and it haunted me for a long time. I even thought that maybe I did not belong to the family and was an orphan picked up somewhere.

One side of the dining room was an open veranda that extended from the main house to the kitchen. Between the two was another room, which had so many functions, but was called the *gudang*, or storage room. It was always amazing what could be found in all its nooks and crannies, mainly the result of my mother's packrat behavior! I believe that nothing was ever thrown away but taken to this room as a temporary or even permanent resting place. The door to the kitchen was uniquely Dutch. It was made of half doors, upper and lower like a horse stable. Why they were there was a puzzle.

Part of the dining area had a glass wall, next to which there was a large reclining *Makassar* chair or *kursi males* (lazy chair), where dad used to lie back in and rest. At the end of his chair a door opened into the narrow backyard where there were two dog kennels. The backyard was narrow because the land was sloping and had to be excavated to build the house. A lot of flies would get caught against the glass panels. They made such a racket that my mother used to buy those rolls of sticky fly paper that hung from the ceiling in spirals. They looked like bizarre Christmas decorations. Gradually they turned black with the bodies of flies and were then replaced.

The hallway to the kitchen in front of the storage room was the place where all the ironing was done. And two black, high-back, wooden rocking chairs with rattan seats sat there before a bamboo awning. This was really where Dad would have his rest in the afternoon and drink his *kopi tubruk*, black coffee—pure coffee scalded with hot water and a scoop of sugar stirred in. The coffee grounds were not filtered out. You waited until it settled down to the bottom of the cup, and slurped the coffee off the top. There he smoked his pipe

or just sat chatting with friends or employees.

The kitchen was not only the cooking space, but also yet another storage site. At one end were the bicycles. The open charcoal stoves were in the middle on the side next to the outer wall and close to the main door. This was an important place. The area around these two charcoal stoves was slightly raised. Small stools, *djinkleks*, just a few centimeters off the ground surrounded the fireplace. Here the kids sat in the morning keeping warm waiting for breakfast, while A-nong would cook and hold court. He was also the major domo, our "father," and educator. A-nong was the great man to us. Every morning he would ask us what we wanted for breakfast and cook it for each of us as a special order, while we sat next to him. His menu was very varied. We could have different types of fried rice or fried eggs. Before the war we also had great pancakes, which were eaten with fine sugar mixed with ground cinnamon. That was a real treat and the best part of breakfast. But later we had to drink our milk separately. We were very privileged to get milk. My uncle next door kept several milk cows especially for feeding all of us, junior relatives. The milk alone would have been OK, but my mother was told that we also needed calcium for our bones, and she would mix two calcium tablets with the milk and for added health threw in a raw egg as well. Even this concoction would have been palatable if she just added the beaten raw eggs. But the calcium pills had a peppermint flavor and the combination of milk, peppermint and raw egg in the morning was really stomach turning. Whenever we could, we would try to throw the concoction into the drain, sometimes into the flower pot. We never did

think to see if the plants grew better with all that protein.

There was a large stone-floor washing area in one corner of the kitchen. Water flowed through the wall from the water reservoir next to the water well behind the kitchen. One of the servants would make sure that the reservoir was always filled. The well was the main source of water for most of the household chores and there was tap water for drinking. The well water was clean and clear though. It was an open well over a meter wide and nearly seven meters deep. Water was raised in a bucket and poured into the large square basin that served as a reservoir.

There was something sinister about this well. When you looked down at mid-day you would see a white and black ringed snake on a stone ledge sunning itself. This banded Krait seemed to live there forever. We could never find out how it survived. There must be a way to get out, we reasoned, but in that case it would be wandering in our territory. Thus, we expected an encounter with this serpent at any time, but it never happened and nobody got ever bitten.

Other kinds of snakes were everywhere. It was a great tradition for my mother to buy *rattan* or flexible wooden canes one centimeter and two centimeters diameter thick and four feet long. The first were for the kids and the second were for the snakes. There were occasions when a snake would be found in the house and therefore, it was a must that behind every door a rattan cane stood, so that it was within reach if ever the need arose to kill a snake. It happened a few times during my time there. We never tried to identify the snake when we encountered it in the house, because snakes do not belong there and were killed without question.

The storage room in the kitchen was full of food and herbs. It smelled like and really was a grocery store, full of big jars with rice and flour, soy sauce bottles, salt bricks, eggs in brine aging away, dried spiced meat and whatever else was needed to keeping the household going. This was my mother's ultimate penitentiary; it was dark, dank and smelly. We would end up in this room if we did not listen to her after the first warning. The worst features were the cockroaches and mice running around among the supplies and occasionally over you.

Behind this kitchen was a shed—the outside kitchen. It had a wood-fire oven made of a stone tunnel with two holes on top. The rice was cooked above the front hole and food for the dogs was made over the rear hole. The rice was pre-boiled and then transferred into a bamboo basket, which fitted on top of the funnel-shaped opening of the rice cooker, and then steamed. The dog food was all the leftovers thrown together.

We hid in this outside kitchen when we tried to imitate the adults smoking cigarettes. We used to smoke palm leaves, which the servants used to roll their tobacco in. It tasted all right without the tobacco and we pretended to cough.

The scariest parts of the house were the bathroom and the toilet, because they were outside on the other side of the house. If you had to go out at night, it was an adventure, because of a dark green fishpond stood menacing next to the path to the bathroom. A collection of fish was yet another of my father's hobbies. Every time I had to walk past it, I had a feeling that some monster would rise out of the slimy green water and reach out and take me down into the dark world of the pond. Often I thought that there must be snakes and

crocodiles in that pond. It was a good thing that we had a potty in the bedroom, so that we did not have to venture out at night, unless it was an emergency.

My father. How little do I know of him. When I was a little child, we did not have dinner with him and my mother. We were just nuisances. We ate at a little table an hour before my parents did. The best I could hope for was a pat on the head when he walked out of the door on his way to the tea factory next door.

He and mother would eat after the children, in peace at the large table. It was a great idea from the parents' point of view. They did not have to cope with their unruly bunch of kids. However, it meant we never saw much of my father until after the war, when our habits changed to more informal living. My mother was the disciplinarian with the *rattan* stick, while A-nong would use his gentle persuasion to educate us. Our eating habits were enforced by him—spoon and fork for the rice meals, fork and knife for European food, but sometimes he would allow us to eat with our fingers. Then at dinner he would get our spoonful of cod liver oil. Thank God it was straight out of the bottle and not one of my mother's great mixtures like the milk for breakfast. It was terrible, but A-nong would insist that we take our dose, or we would have to face my mother, who would force us to swallow it with a lot of noise and commotion.

The house was part of the tea factory, which my father managed for the *Kongsi* or the family clan. It looked large when I was young, but when I returned as an adult, it had shrunk a lot, maybe because my stride was longer now and I didn't have to look up at adults and stand on my toes to see

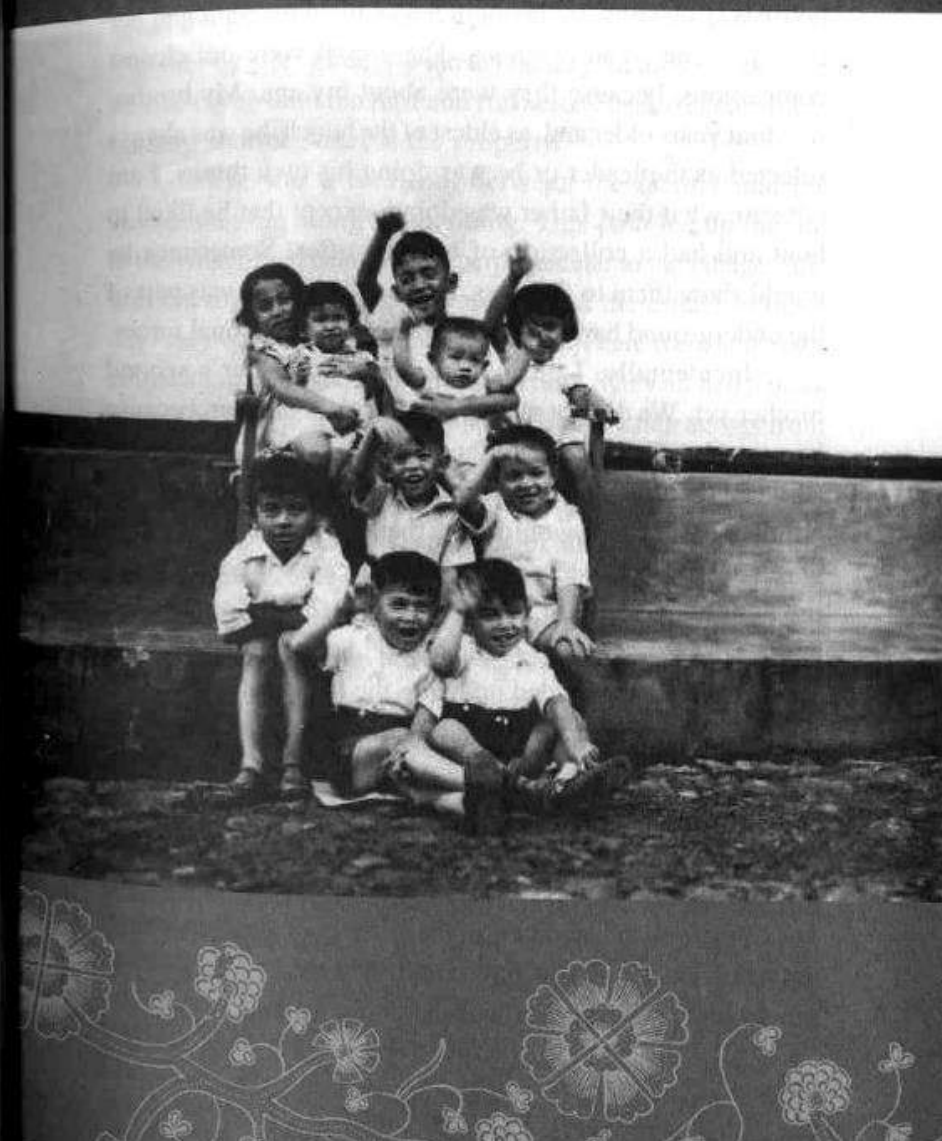
the cabinet contents any more. It was like a small village consisting of a conglomeration of houses, where also part of the rest of the family lived, plus a row of houses for the workers or *Koelies* of the factory and the large sheds, which were also part of the factory. Fences separated the different compounds of the estate and all were connected with gates. Ours was in the middle of the compound next to the tea factory itself. There was the *rumah ketjil*, the "little house" on the other side. It was sort of a transient house of the family. I remember the family of my father's youngest brother, Oom Freddy, lived there for a while. I do not quite remember how long they stayed there, but they went away. I never quite knew my aunt, probably because she left the estate early. She was a mousy lady. Then my father's younger sister and her husband, plus my father's mother lived there during the Japanese occupation. There was a big double garage where my grandmother's black Dodge sedan, with the emblem of a ram on top of the hood, was stored. It was later confiscated by the Japanese.

Across the street was a big mansion, where my father's mother originally used to live with all the unwed daughters. One by one they got married. These sisters of my father were great cooks, but were rather tubby compared to the dainty sisters of my mother. I am not sure how they finally got married. Maybe it was my father who went out looking for rich husbands for them. They all did well eventually. My father's eldest sister married a widower, who had six children of his own. After they were married, the whole family moved into the mansion. We children thought they were usurping our territory. However, these instant cousins were very nice.

Most of them were older, but the two youngest were my age. We thought they were sort of funny because they always kept to themselves and were very polite and shy while my siblings and I were a wild bunch of children whose playground was all the land surrounding the tea factory. The two eldest daughters taught me to bake different breads when they found out that I was interested in cooking, and even taught me how to make mayonnaise, which I liked to eat as salad dressing. I thought they were very pretty and I had a crush on them.

We kids were always somewhere other than we were supposed to be. As the children of the "planter," as my father would have been classified, we were the elite. We were not supposed to be running around in the village behind the estate, but we had a lot of friends there. The best place to visit was the house of the carpenter, whose wife always had some nice tidbits for us to nibble on. They lived in the midst of the paddy fields. His place was a real local house, which he built himself using wooden beams and bamboo. The house stood on stilts a meter high and had walls of bamboo matting like our house and, in fact, all village houses were built that way. He actually built the servants' quarters of my parent's retirement home. But that's another story. The bathroom of their village house like all the others was very interesting. They were located above the fishpond and all the waste went into the water to feed and fatten the fish. Just recently, such a system was rediscovered by foreign aid agencies as the epitome of proper recycling, often by putting pigs or chicken barns above the fishponds. This system can produce two benefits through one integrated system. So the Javanese were well ahead in the technology. Later a United Nations foreign expert saw

My brother and sister and I (center) with our cousins.



this, copied it, and introduced it as his invention. He got the credit for a great invention and another good paying job.

There was also another house behind ours. It was even simpler. My father's third brother and family lived there. This house was on stilts. In the main house lived my aunt and her three daughters and two sons. These boys were our closest companions, because they were about my age. My brother was four years older and, as eldest of the bunch, he was always selected as the leader or he was doing his own things. I am not sure what their father was doing, except that he liked to hunt and had a collection of hunting rifles. Sometimes he would show them to the boys. During the war he was part of the underground harassing the Japanese occupational forces.

Incidentally, I did not mention my father's second brother yet. We did not meet him until after the war, because he was given away in childhood. That was not unusual in Chinese families. When one couple among the family was childless the others would give them children. In a way it was a very good system of adoption because it kept them in the family. An uncle of my mother wanted to adopt her, but her father said, "Over my dead body!" So, her uncle adopted another niece, who ended up being the heir to a millionaire! And my grandfather instead died mysteriously at the young age of twenty-nine years.

Our main playground was the concrete-surfaced badminton court behind the house. There we played soccer with a small ball and learned to ride bicycles. It was basically the place where all the members of the families of the three houses gathered at dusk. It was paved and very clean. The children ran around while mother and the aunts walked around and

chatted. I could never really figure out what they would be talking about that kept them busy at it every evening.

So far I have been talking about the housing part of the estate. Last, but not least, in the center of it all was a squat monster made of corrugated iron, roof and walls, held together by steel girders—the tea factory. In those days I was able to climb onto the roof and run across the extensive roofs making shortcuts across the property.

There was a foot trail between the factory and the stream that ran along the building. This path led up the hill to the village, and near the top, perpendicular to the village path, was the row of houses of the workers of the estate. In those days they were called *Koelies* or coolies. There were neat rows of black tarred bamboo and wooden huts. They all had a main room with one bedroom and an attached kitchen across from the main hut. The bathrooms were in the back and connected to the main stream running behind the compound, which functioned as the sewer. In front of these houses was the house of the factory supervisor. The supervisor was changed a few times as I recall and the last one moved into our house when we evacuated to Batavia as Jakarta was called then.

That was the world I grew up in. Those were the days when I lived carefree and oblivious to the agonies our parents went through to keep us clothed and fed, which of course I came to realize later, when I grew older and had my own family to worry about. During my early years, my parents suffered a lot of hardship. Their dreams of a peaceful life were dashed by war.

The Garden

The houses were set in a complex of gardens. Our main house itself had a small garden full of fruit trees. The best were the tangerine oranges, called *Djeruk Siam* or Siamese oranges. When full of fruit, the branches used to bend down from the heavy load. Then all my cousins would join us in the trees and we sat on the branches like monkeys eating the fruit. We filled the pockets of our work clothes full of oranges. At the time, we actually wore what was called a *Tjelana monjet* or monkey suit. It was a simple rectangular piece of material sewn together with four holes at each corner and a round hole on top for our neck. In the front it had a huge pocket like a kangaroo pouch. At least mine was huge, because I asked my mother to attach an extra big bag to the front of my monkey suit. They were really not much of a cover, but as children we were not too concerned about walking half naked—we did not wear underwear either. The pocket

was where we kept all our treasures, such as fancy stones, marbles, a sling shot and other things of value to us then.

There were also whole sets of different birdcages in the garden. I already mentioned my father's hobbies. The birds came first, then the fish and later the dogs. In the middle of the garden were two large birdcages for the pigeons my father had for a while. One was made out of metal and the other was out of teak wood. A huge purple flowered bougainvillea grew over the roof of the wooden cage, and we were sure that a few snakes lived in the foliage. The main house was also covered by the same bougainvillea. By then there were only leftover pigeons inhabiting these abandoned contraptions. But there was an active pigeon roost attached to the bathroom annex and we could hear the birds cooing all day long. Then there were those nasty geese and the dumb ducks.....

The pigeon cooed and the turtledoves made their beautiful sound, and the other birds chirp and high in the *Kapok* tree the Piet-van-Vliet announced the morbid news of someone's death. In the back the geese made their noise, and the cock crowed. Then a steady thumping told us that the women were chafing the rice. In the morning the cacophony of these sounds awakened us.

Sometime during the fish phase, my father must have bought that algae covered aquarium in the main entrance of the house. It wasn't the only one. There were several, but all were abandoned and stood full of water and green algae. They were so green that I could imagine that there were snakes in every basin. We often tried to peek between the algae and would spot a lonely guppy which had managed to survive all the years in that green and slimy world. The worse

one was that small pond, which we had to pass on the way to the bathroom as I mentioned before. At night it would be absolutely scary. Once in a while there would be an attempt to clean these fish tanks, but this lasted just a few months before they were again filled with the green stuff. I imagined if I were a fish that I would be scared to live in such a place.

There were also a few huge earthenware jars under the rainspouts to collect the rainwater. We didn't need them; we had enough water and they bred mosquitoes. I guess it was an ancient practice to have these water jars for an emergency. There was another jar where the maid would store the urine from the night-potties. My mother saved it to fertilize the garden. Then there was a rather huge, pure marble bathtub. I often wonder how this fancy European piece of furniture had ended up in the Indies, and finally in our yard. I will never know where it came from—never thought to ask my mother. As long as I could remember it stood under a rain pipe and collected rainwater. Sometimes it was a treat when my mother decided to drain it and clean it and we were allowed to have a swim in it. And we could have a real wash. Obviously, this only happened on special occasions, and usually when it was raining, so that we could scrub the inside of the tank and then fill it with fresh water. This tub was so huge that the six of us children could jump in together and bathe in it. Underneath this tub was a family of toads and when we cleaned the tub we would also flush the toads down the drain and they would suddenly find themselves in the stream.

There were also two dog kennels in the back of the house, where at one time or another some purebred chow-chow dogs lived until they were poisoned by some villagers, who did



My cousin, Eng Swie, my brother, and I, and the marble bathtub.

not like dogs! After that we just had a few mongrels to guard the property. Later I raised some rabbits in these enclosures.

The gardens were not well organized. There were pots here, and pots there. Some were actually old antique glazed pottery from China. We handled them with little care and they stood in the sun and the rain, day in and day out. In later years I wondered about all those pots around which we played. I realized that these were indeed antique jars, which could fetch a handsome price, if sold. We will never know where they went; nobody attached much value to them at that time. My favorite was a huge cream-colored hexagonal glazed pot on a pedestal, full of ferns. It had pictures of blue horsemen on the sides.

Then there was a sandbox. When other kids visited we played in the sandbox. My mother took a movie of me dancing and horsing around in the sand at one time. But most of the time it was covered. We could not just play in the sandbox any time we wanted. As with all other toys, we had to ask my mother for permission, and we were required to put things back neatly.

It seems that the garden area was packed with plants, pots and structures. It must have been quite a large garden, but when I visited the place in recent years it seemed to have shrunk to a very miniscule little garden. I grew much bigger while the garden did not.

My mother learned a lot about herbs from her mother, who was a very knowledgeable herbalist. So my grandmother had her plant all kinds of herbs in the garden. We had a tree whose sap would dry our tonsils. I was told that my brother's tonsils were removed by painting them with the red sap of this tree. They dried up in a few days and fell off. Lucky none spilled on his tongue! Then there was a plant that was

grown specifically against snakebites. You would crush the leaves, made a poultice from them and put it on the bite; more leaves were used to make a tea for the victim to drink. As I mentioned, snakes were common in the garden and the surrounding estate and we were always careful, but not overly concerned. Most of the area was covered with river stones, which were carefully imbedded in the soil. There were just a few grass patches, and then the so-called flower beds. There were a few patches where we could dig around and pretend that it was our garden. At that time we did not know that you needed sun to get things growing. My little garden was in the shade and never did grow anything.

As I said earlier, the estate was a conglomeration of gardens. They were separated from each other by chicken wire fences. The largest lot was behind our house and the tea factory, and ran all the way to the fence that separated us from the paddy fields in the back of the property. We cut holes in the fence so that we could get into the rice fields straight from our garden. This was also where the huge macadamia nut trees grew and the tree where the old ugly witch lived. That is another story.

When we were young the land of our plantation appeared to be such a large area with many different buildings, structures, fruit gardens, ponds and canals. Another large area was the estate grounds between the stream and the workers' houses. In there was the orange and grapefruit grove of my uncle. It was nicely cleared, except where he grew crawling plants with blue flowers to put nitrogen into the ground. It was his hobby to try out many different plants. We had tall avocado trees, mango trees of different forms and varieties, and different kinds of banana groves, from the large *Pisang Tanduk* (horn-

shape bananas) to the small bright yellow *Pisang Emas* (gold bananas). You name it and we were growing it somewhere.

At the edge of this fruit garden was the big battleground where we played war games. It was adjacent to the land of some cousins, who belonged to another Thung tribe. As far as we were concerned, they were just a bunch of "savages." They did not speak proper Dutch or the proper local dialect. They spoke Dutch with a terrible accent, and the other language they spoke was a very low class, rude Malay. They always used bad words, as my mother would say. So we rarely saw them, except when we had our war games. Their father owned the rice mill up the hill from us. A deep creek separated the lots. So it was always war between our groups. On rare occasions we had a truce. That was when my mother would go and visit their mother. We were very cowed by their father who used to address us in the same rude manner. We thought they were really primitive. However, they were very friendly in their own way, and we often had to visit them to buy milk. The younger uncle was in charge of the cattle, and he greeted us with, "*Da-ek Na-on?*" ("What do you want?" in Sundanese, the language spoken in West Java). It was spoken gruffly, but he always said it with a smile. He was just scaring us. There was always something interesting going on there. Once they butchered a cow—entrails and pieces of limbs everywhere, so I never forgot. At the end of the war they started making soap when supplies were difficult to acquire and soap was precious.

The strip of garden between our barbed wire fence and the stream was usually the battlefield between the two clans of cousins. We were, indeed, two different clans. It was like the Lowland Thungs and the Highland Thungs. During these

little battles we fought, the prize was always the conquest of that strip of land. The main reason for using this as a little war zone was that it was not a very clean patch of garden, but full of bushes and banana trees. We did not doubt that the area crawled with snakes and other vermin. However, the din of battle was usually such that any living creature would try to avoid us or be trampled between the two bunches of kids. We would make clay balls, just like snow balls, except they really hurt. I decided that they should smoke like a real canon fire, and filled mine with ashes. But as it did not do such a good job of exploding we decided to bake them to get a stiff crust. However, these became dangerous projectiles and pretty soon some of us got hurt and so the battle ended.

Actually, there was another interesting thing on this strip of land—a mountain of rice chaff. We would climb up and slide down this huge yellow pile, just like kids in Europe and North America would slide down a slope covered with snow. When I grew up I could not imagine diving into and rolling around on this rice chaff. Today it would put me into a fit of sneezing. We were just immune when we were young. It could have been a state of mind. It was the most normal thing to do. When we came in touch with urban civilization, perhaps we lost most of our natural immunities. Hay fever from pollen, dust, and cat and dog hair is so common now. Rice chaff would simply be disastrous now.

Last but not least were the rice fields that spread from behind our land for miles towards the horizon. They were the greatest gardens. There we would venture and watch nature follow its course. And whenever we had time, we would wander among the rice fields during the different seasons.

The Rice Fields

Beyond the garden was the unlimited expanse of rice fields. During the growing season, the light-green color of the young seedlings covered the terraces. It was golden yellow when the rice ripened. The fields stretched until the next tree line, which hid the next stream and terraces of fields. Then after the harvest, the fields either lay fallow or were flooded and stocked with fingerlings of the fast growing multi-colored carp. Then the fish were harvested and the hand-sized fish were dried and sold in the market or *passar*. This is the annual cycle of use of the land on the rich volcanic soils, which have nourished for ages millions of people living on the slopes of the life-giving, but often catastrophic volcanoes.

For many people, the rice fields seem like a monotonous environment of rice plants. For us kids it was the greatest place for adventure. When the land lay fallow,

we could run over the dry ground, where the myriad of weeds started to grow, some edible, some poisonous and other just simply benign. We would gather, wherever we could find them, the edible plants and bring them home. We would dig in the mud for all kinds of creatures from frogs to small crayfish. It was always a great feeling to have something to bring home. I guess that is a primeval instinct of man to be a hunter-gatherer. Even the urban human has this instinct, reflected in his search for treasure when he goes to a flea market. Such a person always comes home with one piece of junk or another, which is usually set aside because he does not really know why he bought it! He is a hunter-gatherer in the modern jungle.

The abandoned fields are flooded after their fallow period, and fish fingerlings are grown for several months in these shallow flooded *padi* fields. In the mean time, some small patches of fields are plowed and carefully cultivated, and seeded densely for the next year's rice crop. During this period all over the area you can see the luminous light green rectangles of the young plants dotting the landscape. After the harvest of the fish, the large fields are dried and the plowing starts. Water buffaloes stud the landscape. Their profiles are a typical sight at this time of the year. I guess they will be slowly be replaced by the iron buffalo, a two-stroke engine-driven plow. These are noisy and do not really leave some benefit behind. Actually, the rice fields which are plowed by the buffalo often show some effect of their digestive system, because the rice would grow much denser everywhere they have left their message!

The most picturesque time is when the people are planting the seedlings. First they collect the seedlings from those dense green rectangular nurseries, cut the top off the leaves, and bundle them. This is still done by hand. Then they bring them to the prepared fields. Here the men and women stand in a row in the mud with a bunch of seedlings in their left hand and stick a bunch of three or four seedlings in the wet soil some twenty to thirty centimeters apart. Unlike in some other countries, the people are dressed very colorfully and make wonderful pictures of rural life. Especially on the island of Bali the colors of the people's clothing surpass the festive scene. The people are happy and call out to each other across the fields.

During the growing period, everything is green and here and there someone is weeding the fields. But these are often the periods when people spend their days doing other work to fill in the time, such as braiding baskets and weaving cloth.

When the rice was maturing and the grains stick out of the rice stalk and harvest was near, the villagers get the scarecrows together and put out all kinds of noisemaking paraphernalia, such as cans with stones in them, and pieces of flashing metal on strings and flags. These would radiate from a shelter, elevated above the field, where someone would be on watch and shakes the ropes off and on trying to scare the birds. Usually they were young kids sitting in these small huts taking care of these contraptions. They pulled the strings that activated these pieces of cloth and cans, or wave colorful flags. You could see the ricebirds flying around and up again when they were encountered by one or other noisemaker,

At the end came the harvest. It was a happy time. The fields were golden yellow now. The people cutting the rice are like colorful jewels in the gold of the fields. In Java, it is a different process than anywhere else in Asia. People follow an old tradition and cut every ear of rice separately with an *ani-ani*, a small tool consisting of a wooden handle with a cross bar in which a small knife is imbedded. The handle is held in the hand with the bar between the fingers with the knife sticking out. Then the harvester grabs a stem of a rice ear and pulls it against the knife and cuts it. It was a rather inefficient way of harvesting the rice. I was told that this system dates back to the ancient times, when rice was given to humans by the Goddess *Dewi Sri*, who told the people that rice was precious and holy and should be accorded careful handling. No grain should be wasted, either cooked or raw. One will not find a single grain of rice abandoned by people in Java. It is the gift of the Goddess.

Growing rice is a communal labor and everybody in the villages helps each other. Those that do not have their own field to reciprocate in would be given their fare share for the work. In good times there was never a shortage of food in a village, as they always helped each other. Those were the good times. I am not sure how this tradition is kept in the race towards modernization, when people are not satisfied with what they have because the TV blares in their ears and dazzles their eyes to make them want more. Now I reminisce and wonder whether progress is bringing happiness or hunger to the stomachs of the rural people. But when I was growing up it seemed that there were bountiful harvests every year and enough for everybody.

It was really a lot of fun roaming in these fields. Earthen dikes separated them. The rice was usually a bit taller than us — we were still young. It would limit our vision to the area along the buns (dikes). We learned to run on these narrow paths on top of them, chasing whatever we were trying to catch. During the so-called dry season the water buffaloes had a hay day, because they were able to graze in these fallow fields, instead of being fed grass cut from the rice buns of other fallow land. Of course, there were the ducks that during the growing season fed between the stalks and roamed free when the fields were in fallow, looking for snails to eat. Surprisingly, a lot of these snails were edible, and we harvested them in earnest at the end of World War II, when the country was stripped of food by the occupying forces who confiscated the rice to be sent to feed their people at home.

There were nights when the kids sneaked out of the house and took torches in search of frogs: frogs to eat and frogs to feed to the chickens. It was fun, but at times it could be dangerous. Very few times did we realize that our world was shared by many reptiles from lizards to snakes.

Catching frogs was great at night. First of all, it was an adventure either with or without parental permission. We would be hunters, walking single file on the rice buns, with water at either side. The sound of the night was exhilarating. Here was the chirping of the crickets, there was the high pitch sound of another night insect, the blinking light of the fire flies buzzing around us. Then came the deep croak of the frog - our victim of the night. The stars flickered brightly in the sky.

We snuck up on the creature. If we missed we heard the sudden swish and loud plop in the water. It was not a complete loss, because we would shine our torches in the water and see the poor frog at the bottom of the shallow rice field. Grasp! And we had a frog and threw it into our bamboo basket. They were slippery—you would need to hold them between the legs and the body, otherwise they slip out of your hands. The big ones made a good meal only if you got enough because frog bodies have little meat. It was their legs which were the delicacy. We were not as successful in frog hunting as the farmers who make a living of it; they are the professionals.

We used to feed the small ones to the chickens. It was rather cruel, because we would throw them into the chicken cage and you could see the chickens running after them and swallowing these poor creatures in one gulp. We would see the struggling frog go down the long neck, especially the long necks of the roosters. I guess in the countryside, life was just a matter of eat or be eaten.

I used to like frog legs. They are tasty and good to eat. You either fried them or mother would cook them into a good stew with bean sauce as flavoring. However, one day I managed to watch the frog peddler clean frogs, which my mother had selected from the large basket. He proceeded to cut off the head with a dull knife, while the frog was frantically protesting the action. Then he stripped the skin inside out. I was fascinated by the process and watched one frog after the other going under the knife. Well, when the frogs got on the dinner table my vision of frogs getting their heads cut off and squeaking seemed to take away my appetite. I have never eaten frogs since then.

The Stream

Our land was on the mountain slope and the rice fields terraced up the mountain like staircases rising up to the land of the Gods hidden in the clouds. From high up the mountains, where the forest covered the slopes, a myriad of streams would find their way to the sea, most of them flowing between the rice fields. Thus, they ran in parallel channels down the mountain, watering terrace after terrace, and eventually flowed back into the same streamlet. These were the irrigation ditches, which have been in Java for hundreds or even thousands of years. They seemed to have been there forever, bringing the necessary water to the rich volcanic soils of the land, in which rice had grown since time immemorial.

These systems of little streams are well regulated. They are both the life-bringing water carriers and the sewer, blended into one, a novel eco-system. The water brings life and takes the waste, only to deposit it to fertilize the fields

below and feed the fish. Many of the villages are strung along these little streams or ditches. All the outhouses sit near the water, either directly over it or over a pond next to the house, where the human waste becomes feed for the carp and catfish thriving in these water holes. Nothing is wasted and nothing really pollutes the water because whatever waste there is does not travel very far but soon finds its way filtered through fish stomachs or diluted to a thin film to fertilize the rice field.

The large stream, or kali, was the dividing line between the tea estate of my father and the rice mill of my uncle, except for the small strip along the upper part of the river next to a grapefruit and orange orchard that belonged to another uncle. But it seems that the area was a whole pattern of water ways.

The ditches were small, always less than a meter wide and were full of water plants, debris, and organic garbage. It never bothered us wading through them. The only thing we were careful about was the glass shards. We often ventured into these waterways, looking for fish. There were not many, but we were always preoccupied with gathering these little morsels for the chickens in our yard. I guess our harvest was not much, but we could not just catch something and waste it. So, the chickens had a feast. Well, we would have a feast of the chickens later. Most of our catch was only a handful of guppies. The females were always pregnant to keep the streamlets populated. The chickens loved them and that was all that was important. Now and then we would catch a large fish that managed to escape from a fish pond. That would be a great catch and we would troop home full of importance to show our catch of the day.

On these fishing expeditions, we would go straight into the water with a bamboo basket with an open weave as a sieve. We would work the little holes and crevices with our hands chasing the fish into the basket. It never dawned on us that there could be snakes in these hiding places. In later years, we figured that the snakes saw us coming with a lot of commotion and slithered away before becoming a victim—every snake was considered dangerous, and it meant instant death to a snake if it were caught. Maybe that message got to the snakes because there were very few caught. Many were seen though, causing huge commotions in the household.

When I think back about pollution these days I wonder about it. As I said, we never thought about it then. We would simply swipe a chunk of feces coming our way with a slosh of water or a stick. Or we simply let it flow past us. There were no plastic bags and other garbage in these canals because they were part of a system and it was required that they be kept clean, except for these organic materials.

A little stream followed the outside fence of the estate. It was sort of the border between our land and the villagers' rice fields. A little channel ran from it through a hole in the fence into our pond at the edge of the garden. Then through another hole the water flowed out again. Thus, it kept the water "fresh"—never mind that the color was a light tan to a chocolate brown depending on the season and the weather.

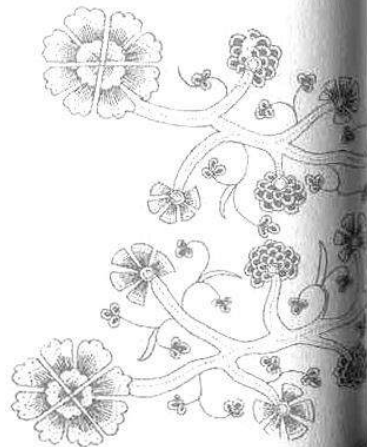
The pond was a squarish affair, cement and part bare ground. There were some steps leading into it. This was not for our use but for the geese and the ducks, which inhabited this part of the grounds. This little empire was run by a few geese. They were mean and were always trying to snap at us.



One of them managed to get me and I can tell you it hurts! I had a big blue bruise for weeks.

But the ducks were dumb. I could never understand why we had these animals. We never slaughtered them. They didn't lay many eggs. My mother told us that their eggs were fishy tasting and not good for human consumption. I guess the ducks were yet another leftover of my father's hobby of keeping birds.

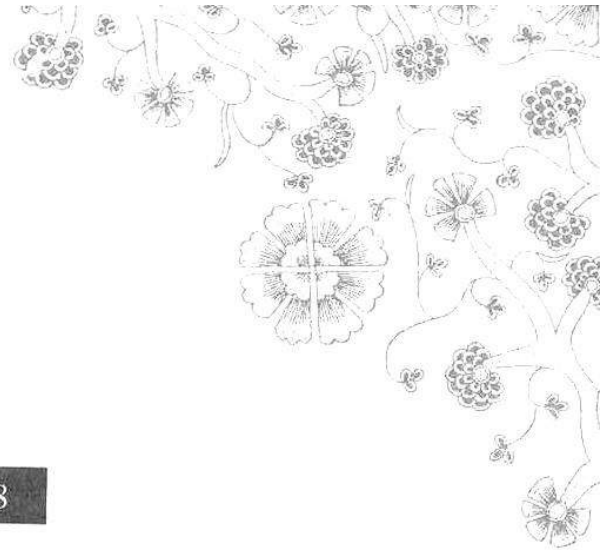
This pond was a place with some great memories. To us it was the largest open area. My brother on day thought up a crazy scheme. We would be Eskimos going on a whale hunt. I guess he must have read one of those adventure novels. The whale was one of the large prized carp of my father and our canoe was the feeding trough of the feathered animals. Well, we did manage to launch the "canoe" and we managed to harpoon the large fish. My brother gave it a mortal wound, as it was found floating belly up the next day with a gaping hole. I do not quite remember whether the culprit, my brother, was ever identified. I just remember that we panicked after harpooning the carp, and went high-tailing to the house where we got washed up in a hurry.



Chapter 8

The Tea Factory

The center of our activities was the tea factory described earlier as a squat gray corrugated iron monster with a red painted band of four feet high around the whole building. When we were kids it did look huge, but when I came back as an adult, it was really small. I guess I used to have to look up to see the machinery and the high ceilings. The main entrance to the building opened up directly to the street and trucks bringing in the tea leaves would back up into the factory through two big doors. Or they would take the processed tea out to the train station for shipment to far away places. There were many other doors into the building complex which consisted of several buildings interconnected in a grand maze. In one, the tea was stored in huge wooden bins. Another was the office, and in front next to the entrance was the woodshed, where the firewood was stored. A larger shed was located across the street near the river below. The



firewood was required to feed the ovens for roasting the tea to make the familiar black crispy wrinkled dry tea leaves, which were eventually packed for shipment in their large plywood boxes. Skirting around the roaster, a monstrous oven, which usually was hot when the roasting of the tea leaves was in progress, you ended up in the main factory hall, where the tea was processed and the equipment lined up in clusters.

When the trucks came in the afternoon, they would dump the fresh tea leaves on the open floor behind the entrance, and the workers would pile them into what was for us kids a huge mountain of green leaves. We used to climb up into the steel rafters, jump down onto the pile of leaves, and bounce around in the fragrant smelling green leaves.

Some workers would load bamboo baskets with tea leaves and take them to the wilting racks, which stood in a row with their doors wide open until the process was started. The workers spread the fresh leaves by hand on the racks made of chicken wire nets, which stood on an angle like wide shelves. A huge suction fan stood at the outer end of this row of wilting chambers and sucked heated air deflected from the furnace of the roasters. This warm air would flow over the leaves and blow it over the leaves all night, so that in the morning they were soft and pliable. If the leaves were not wilted they would be brittle and break into little pieces in the rollers and the tea would end up as small dark pieces of tea like we find in tea bags today. But real tea, of course, looks like little dull black worms, mixed with white specks of the top leaves. The white pieces were the top leaves, which were still covered and protected with fine white hairs. The

more white spots there were the higher the quality the tea. It meant that only the top three leaves were picked for this premium quality.

Then the process was reversed and the *Koelies* would shake the nets and the leaves would fall on the ground and be gathered back into the baskets and loaded into four big bronze rollers. They were lined up in a row on the left of the main hall of the factory.

These rollers consisted of huge bronze cylinders that stood on top of huge ribbed trays. The wilted tea leaves would be dumped into the machine through a gaping hatch on top. Once the machine was turned on, the cylinders would roll over the ribbed bottom. After a while the wilted leaves were turned into the green worm-shape wet tea leaves. When roasted, they would turn black or green depending on the next process.

After the rollers had ground away for the required period of time, the operator would disconnect the drive and open the hatch on the bottom of the trays and drop these wet rolled leaves into another basket which they took to the shaker, where the leaves were sorted by size. First were the coarse leaves, then the middle, then the best, called *Orange Pekoe tip*. Further down you got the BOP or broken orange pekoe, then dust. We did sweep up the "dust" and put it in a special container marked as dust. This stuff was sent to the tea buyers as a bonus, because otherwise it would be thrown out anyway.

Before World War II, the factory was only producing black tea, of which the Orange Pekoe was the prime quality. Some green tea for the local market was also produced, as it

was more favored by the local villagers and during the occupation, favored by the Japanese forces.

The decision had to be made right after rolling the tea leaves, whether it was going to be black tea or green tea. The tea designated for black tea would be sorted into different leave sizes in a leaf shaker and then sent to the oxidation *wilting* room, where water mist was sprayed into the air and overnight the green tea leaves turned black because of the oxidation process. The reason that green tea is much healthier than black tea is that the green leaves have not been oxidized overnight.

On the right were the roasting ovens. These two huge machines were connected to the furnace. In the old days the unoxidized tea leaves would usually be transported unsorted directly to the roasting ovens. Then they would end up in the roaster, which consisted of steel perforated bands, which zigzagged through the ovens' interior. The speed of the band and the blower would determine the roasting rate of the tea leaves. We would always like to look into this interior, which you could see from the top where the worker would spread the wet tea on the flat top and then tip them into the warm hole or from the side, which once in a while would be opened for inspection.

The tea was always on the move as it went through the softening, grading and roasting processes. In the end the roasted tea would appear at the bottom of the huge machine and the workers would scoop it up into baskets. From there the leaves would go first to another sorter, which was similar to the shaker for wet leaves, and so the leaves were further sorted. They finally landed in temporary storage bins in a

barn-like structure. The inspector would check and smell the tea and direct each batch to its own container, lined with foil. A ladder led to the top of these containers, and each of them had a trap door through which the tea would be dropped into the dark void. We had to be careful, because if we ever fell in those boxes it was hard to get out unless they were full. At the bottom of each box was a guillotine door for taking the tea out.

During the war my mother's eldest brother and family took refuge with us, because the Japanese soldiers were looking for them as he was part of a demolition team, which blew up the oil storage tanks in the harbor. So they would hide in one of these bins half-full with tea and stay there until the danger was past.

The boxes were just for temporary storage. Next began the hard part, the hand-sorting. This required a lot of women, and the wives of the workers were hired to do this tedious job and to manually clean the tea. The women were in a special large airy room with roof windows to give it better lighting. The sorting tables were partitioned trays at a slight angle. On top of the tray they kept the unsorted tea. The tea would be moved to the center where the work area was. The women would spread the tea and remove sticks and other unwanted material. Waste went to the left into a waste hole and to the right was a small chute for the sorted tea, and which led to a container. Then the good tea would be put into a new bin and labeled, and was then ready for mixing.

Every so often my father would taste the tea, so that he could mix them to get the right flavor. I do not know how he did that, but he mixed the tea from one container with another.

When they were going to do tea tasting, they would place small white tea pots in a row with a cup in front of each spout and a timer. They would boil the water and then a certain amount of tea was weighed and placed in the pot, which was numbered according to the container it came from. Then the boiling water was poured into the small pot, and the top closed and the timer set for a specific number of minutes. I forgot how long it needed to be. When the bell rang they would pour an exact amount of tea into the cup. Thus, one after the other the tea was poured from the pot into the cups. Then after the tea was sufficiently cooled my father and his assistants did the hocus pocus of tea tasting. They took a swallow and sort of swirled the tea in their mouths, closed their eyes and spat it out into a pail. Then each of them would scribble something on a pad. I never knew what or how they decided, but somehow in the end the tea from container A was mixed with that of container D, and so on.

In another part of the estate they made the triplex tea boxes for shipment. There was a special way in which they were manufactured. The boxes were each about 30 inches high and 24 inches wide. They were put together with metal strips which were nailed together to a square stick, which formed the corners of the box. The nails were split-nails, which split open upon being hammered into a steel plate on the work bench. They lined these boxes with aluminum foil. The whole thing folded into a cube with one side left open.

A trail built with handset stones led to the upper terrace where a huge storage barn stood. In the front was the carpentry shop. There were two small locked rooms, where

some of the ancient travel gear from my father's and mother's travels was stored. It probably would be a treasure palace these days. Then there was the big area where all the spare parts of the machinery of the tea factory were stored. That was also a very interesting place, full of wheels, gears, screws and you name it. We would always try to get in when someone was digging for parts to repair one or other engine. The tea factory was quite self sufficient, because we had our own electric generators to provide the electricity for the factory and the staff housing. Regular electricity grid was only used for emergencies. For this reason we had ponds to cool the generators. We kids never knew what all the canals with water were for. I guess natural springs on the hill slope behind the factory provided the water supply.

One hundred pounds of tea had to go into each one of those boxes. The tea was weighed and the worker would pour the box half full of tea. Guess what was next?? He then jumped into the box and started a dance to pack the tea tightly, so that the whole hundred pounds would get into the wooden container. Then he would climb out, pour more tea in the box, and proceed to stamp on the tea again, and finally he would get a full hundred pounds into the box. It was a bit like pressing the grapes for making wine. I never knew whether these people would wash their feet or not. They walked around with bare feet. Well, that was the joke about the sanitary art of packing the tea. And perhaps it made the tea my father produced better tasting.

One day my father had a salesman over, who sold him a contraption to automate the filling of the tea boxes. My father thought it might improve the system. He read in one

of the business magazines that they had invented this new machine, which could fill the triplex wooden boxes with one hundred pounds of tea in record time. So he ordered one, which had to come all the way from Europe. Then the day arrived when this contraption arrived at my father's tea factory. The mechanic arrived and put the machine together. The brochure showed that you could fill four boxes at the same time. There were four large funnels on top machine. These were filled with fifty pounds of tea each, and then my father switched the machine on. All the workers were standing around to watch this modern contraption. It shook and rattled; and the tea leaves poured down the funnel and filled the boxes. The only problem was that after fifty pounds the containers were already full. The machine kept shaking and rattling, but to no avail, and fifty additional pounds spilled over onto the floor. My father shook his head, and then told his packers to go back to using their feet. All the people were laughing. I guess the whole village heard about this catastrophe. And for years that machine stood there reminding us that modernization was not always the best way of getting things done.

Then the war came and the markets for tea were not accessible anymore. The only tea that was produced was the green tea. However, eventually there was too much tea and the factory had to stop producing tea. Finally, the factory was closed and the tea was ordered destroyed by the Japanese occupying forces, and black tea formed small hills in the orchards. People were told that they could take any amount of tea they wanted, and there was enough for the whole town

for years to come. The rest of the tea rotted in the rain and the soil was spoiled. In the beginning, we played on the mountains of tea and we did not understand that this waste was a financial disaster for my father.

Later my father was interned for a while because he was member of the Rotary, which was an American institution. The factory was closed and sealed, and so was our house. We ended up living with my cousins in the small house. But after a few months of uncertainty he was released, and we were allowed back into our house.

However, the closure of the factory affected the livelihood of the surrounding villages, which were dependent on the factory to buy their leaves. The factory never opened again and the tea gardens were planted with other crops. In the end the factory was converted into a foam rubber factory and many of the laborers from the tea factory were employed in the rubber processing plant. Most of them had lived and toiled as part of the plantation, which had its own housing. I am not sure what happened when the factory, converted to foam rubber manufacturing was sold and the new owners dismantled the place. The closing of the factory was the end of a tradition and an era.

A little anecdote is associated with this place. In front of the factory grew a huge durian tree. Durian, the king of the fruit, which smells terrible, is still considered the epitome of delicacies. For decades the tree did not bear fruit, though it grew so huge at the side of the road. Suddenly at the end of the war it started to bear fruit and we could not give these wonderful spiked monsters away. I guess it decided to "celebrate" the end of the bad times.

The Awning

A large awning covered the footpath beside the tea factory. People would rest in its shade from the sun or shelter there from the rain. It was also a routine stop for the people on the way home, especially the vendors, who often stopped there on their way to or from the market. It was an ugly grey corrugated iron roof extension which extended along the whole front of the factory, covering the sidewalk from one end of the building to the other end.

I used to watch these vendors carry their heavy loads up the hill towards town in the morning. They carried woven bamboo baskets heavily laden with produce at each end of a bamboo yoke over their shoulders. The yoke would bend up and down with the weight of the baskets, following the rhythm of their steps. The baskets held the products of their harvest from the field the day before to be sold in the market up the hill in town. They would rest here on the way up and

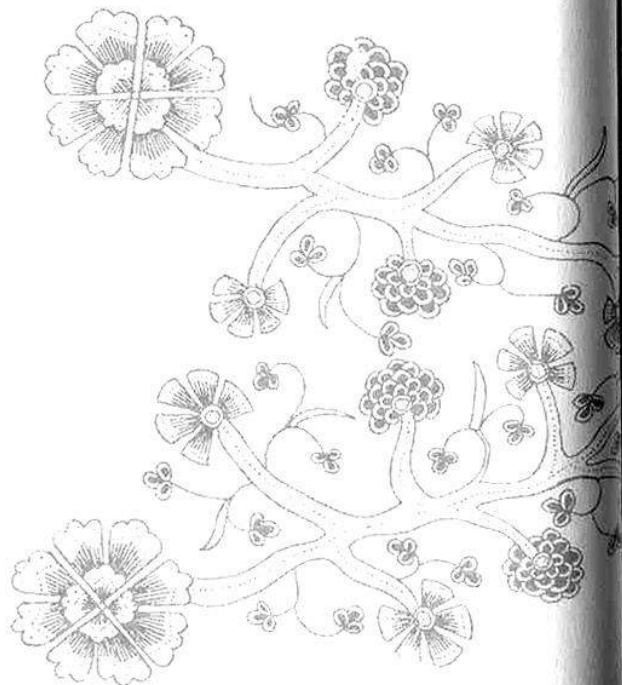
usually they would rest here on the way down to their homes in the villages.

The awning never failed to attract these vendors, especially because it was the half way point between town and farm. On reaching this spot, they would lower their baskets and the yoke, and sit in the typical squat position, or *Djongkok*. Then they would count their meager earnings. A buffalo cart would rumble pass on its steel wheels. Passing trucks would honk their horns and the vendors would disappear behind temporary dust storms in their wake. The awning had been there for many, many years and watched the coming and going of the peasants for several generations, welcoming weary limbs in its shade and shelter.

I will always remember the afternoon ritual. The vendors would stretch and then take the money they earned out of the large leather pouches in which they carried their valuables—tobacco and paper, the lighter, and other important little things as well as their money. Their earnings were often so little, but for them very precious. Their fingers would caress the paper bills carefully, flattening and removing the wrinkles from each crumpled bill. It seemed that with each stroke they assigned each bill to a future need. Each stroke reflected their dreams, their hopes or despair. Their gaze seemed so far and distant while they did this, perhaps they were thinking of some special delicacy for the table, new seed for the field, and some coins for the children, some for a little savings. They would rest awhile, roll a cigarette of tobacco in a dried palm leaf the way the poor smoke their tobacco, then relax and sit lost in thought. After inhaling a few times they would rub the cigarette on the stone pavement,

rise with a deep sigh and lift the yoke onto their shoulder again. The baskets were light and empty but the vendors turned homeward with weary steps. The awning had witnessed another day sheltering the poor and their worries and dreams.

Every day this scene took place, a seemingly never-ending story that unfolded under the awning of my father's building. The people would continue their journey home and I would follow them with my eyes and in my thoughts I would wonder about their continuous struggle to eke out a living, while I grew up with little or no worries.



Chapter 10

My Mother's Lap

As a child it seems that your mother's lap is the most secure place from which to view the world. I guess at three I had the privilege to have the monopoly on mother's lap. My brother was too old at eight and my sister was too small at one. As she grew up, she started to contest me for that most privileged place in a child's world. First she would sit with me together on my mother's lap, but when she grew bigger she wiggled so much that somehow I ended up on a little stool next to my mother. It was reverse peer pressure so to speak.

What is important about sitting on your mother's lap? Many people only sit on their mother's lap when they get fed and are difficult. Otherwise you quickly end up in a baby's chair with a little table in front of you and a seat belt to keep you in place. But my mother's lap was important as my mother would sit on the front steps of the house and watch the vendors pass by our place. This was her moving morning-market. The villagers were bringing their produce from their



Play

My beautiful mother with my brother and sister.



fields to the town, and our place lay between the two destinations. Thus, my mother rarely went to the market, because that was the place for buying dry goods like onions, dried fish, soy sauce, beef and the like. A trip to the market was usually an excuse for my mother to go visiting friends and family in town and have tea or coffee.

Almost every morning she would sit on a small chair, specially made by the carpenter of the factory. I remember it to be green with a wicker seat and a back. It had no sides. It was just about twelve inches low. Not quite a kitchen stool, which we would call a *Jingklek*. Then there were a few other stools for us, when we outgrew my mother's lap.

What was important for my comfort when sitting on her lap was that at home my mother would wear a sarong, a real batik sarong, which is a skirt formed by a tube of cloth from the waist down to the ankles; it was folded over and a silver belt kept it in place. When she sat on the stool, she would then spread her legs out and then you had a very nice seat between her legs in the fold of the sarong. You leaned against her and watched the world go by, like a baby kangaroo in his mother's pouch. It was a bit of a nuisance when she had to get up to select some vegetables or something else. You had to vacate your seat until she sat down again and crawl back into the fold until she had to get up for the next purchase.

There was so much to see from that perch. The stream of farmers flowed by. They hung big bamboo baskets off swinging poles, which they carried on their shoulders. These were loaded with carrots, cabbage and many other vegetables. I mentioned that these poles would whip up and down in the rhythm with their step as they approached the shelter of the

tea factory awning nearby. Then came the chicken vendors carrying chickens in special open bamboo cages, with a door on top. Mother would select a chicken by pointing to the "lucky" beast. The farmer then grabbed the chicken by the legs and pulled it out. My mother would squeeze the breast to see whether there was enough meat and hefted the bird a few times to get an estimate of its weight. After making her selections, in the case of the chickens, they were strung up by their legs and left on the ground until we took them in. If they were lucky they would stay in a cage for a few more days until my mother decided that it was time to make a curry or something else. She did the killing herself. In the olden days it was taken care of by the night-watchman who was also the assistant mullah. He would slit the throat of the chicken with a few prayers and then let it go. We would always watch it because the chicken always made a few circles dripping blood all over the courtyard, and then fluttered its wings a few more times while uttering gargling sounds.

Sometimes there were frogs to buy and I enjoyed eating the legs until I saw the frogs being slaughtered as I mentioned earlier. Besides these animals we saw whole buckets with fish going uphill to town. Whatever fish my mother and the other women on the main road bought were a few pounds less for the farmers to carry to town.

Our house was located below the town. While all the commodities moved toward the town, some things would move to the villages. There were ram fighting contests down the hill in the *dessa* or village. So, when I grew out of the seat of my mother and onto my own chair, I started to have the wanderlust.

The most fascinating show was the parade of rams, male sheep. Once a month they would walk up or down past our house for the next ram fight. They were all dressed up with bells and colorful blankets. For years I kept watching these rams go back and forth while I sat on my mother's lap, until one day when my mother was not shopping I simply left my post on the little chair next to her and wandered off down the hill with one of my many cousins. We followed the rams all the way to the next village. There they were gathered for a fight. The owners were brushing them so they looked nice and shiny, and they had those bells, which would tinkle all the time, as these animals were a nervous bunch. So we stayed to watch these stupid animals run into each other and hit each other with their heads with hollow thuds. Actually it sounded more like the smashing of two coconuts against each other. Rarely did any of the animals fall down. They simply gave up. Probably they had a first-class headache. Obviously, our absence caused some consternation, because we were just a bit older than being toddlers. On our return our parents caned us. My mother was the best. She made it an art. It sure hurt.

Though I had graduated to my own little stool, I am not sure why I sat there with my mother. Perhaps I was ordered to do so. Or maybe I had nothing else to do. Of course, this all ended when I had to go to school at the age of four. I guess that was when my youngest brother took over my sister's seat on my mother's lap. She took over my little stool and I went out to go to the great blue yonder. So, my youngest brother would probably have sat on my mother's lap until he had to go to school too, if the war had not interrupted this

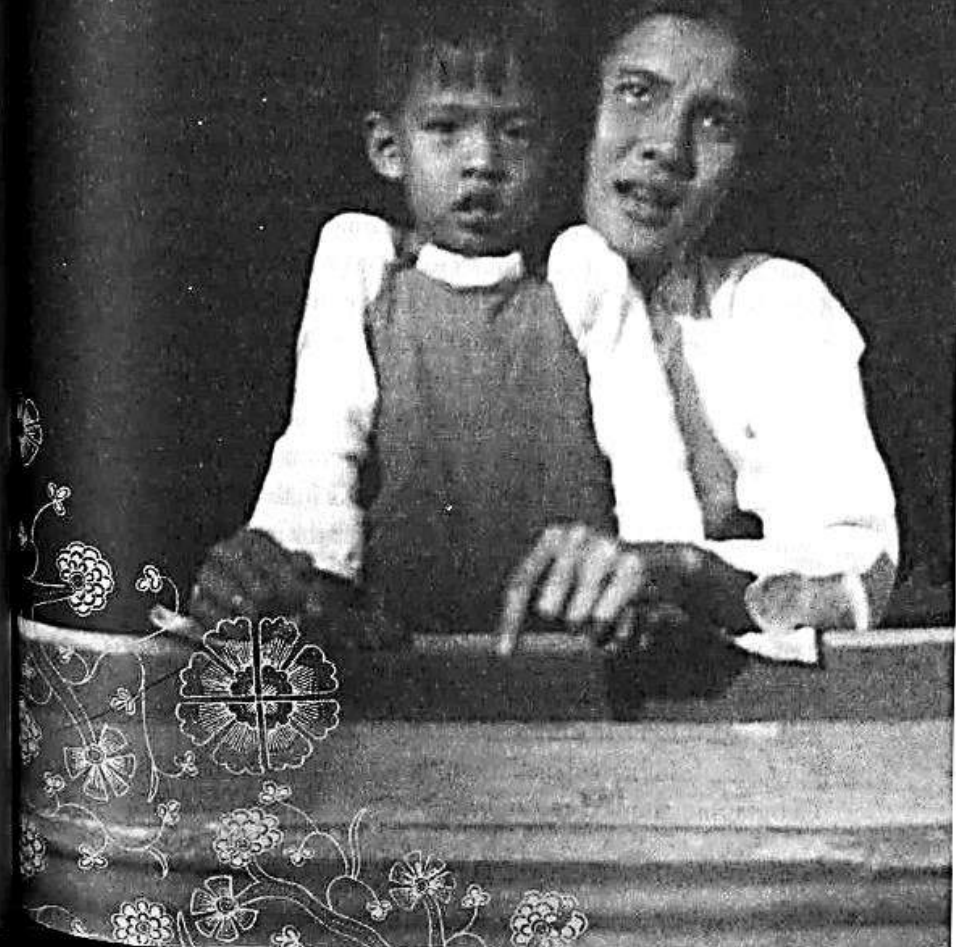
ritual. But I do not remember much of my older brother as he was four years older than me.

Do you think this was all I did? As I was not of school age yet, I had to accompany my mother to town to do her other shopping or have coffee with her cousins, and we had many. I was mobile and therefore selected for this duty. It was not much of a chore because we went by horse cart. The one with the door in the back was called a *Delman*. It had a front seat and one and a half short rows of seats in the back. One of the seats in the back was shorter, and there was some space between it and the front seat. Thus you could seat three passengers in the back and one in the front next to the driver. The other type was the *Sado*, which came from the French term "dos à dos" or back to back. This one had a wide bench for the coachman and one passenger in the front, with a seat for two passengers facing backwards in the back. Thus you literally sat back to back.

We had one horse cart we always used. The coachman was called *Ading*, and he ended up living on our patch of land during the war. He should have inherited the land that he and his kids tended between taking care of the horse and the cart, but somehow my father's manager short-changed him and was able to take over the place and evict these people. My father was a good guy, but often easily manipulated. It was always the case that people down the social ladder ended up being thrashed, and I often wondered how they managed to eke out a living.

So, when we had to go to town, which was not very far, it was very bad for the horses, because it was a rather steep slope and they had to more or less zigzag up the road.

My beautiful mother and I in 1937.



Going down was also bad because the cart used to push against the horses and they would start to slip and skid on the pavement. There were times when they had to go down on their haunches. To give the horses a better grip they cut an old rubber tire and stuck pieces between the horseshoes.

Once my mother got up in town, she would make the rounds. That meant that I would be dragged from one aunt or cousin to another. I would then sort of hang against my mother's legs and wiggle all the time, and would get a kick from her to quiet me down. I guess my youngest daughter Tina got that same habit from me. We both would wiggle and make a nuisance of ourselves until we got slapped. I would sort of squeeze in half under the table, lean back with my head just below the table edge, and watch the ladies talk while I waited for the chit-chat to end. You would not believe what an agony that was. Thank God that I was so young that I did not know what they were talking about.

However, there was one place I loved to visit every time we went to town. This was Toko *Beng*. It was a small department store that sold many things. I called it the many something else store. In the back of the store were the living quarters. There were two or three daughters in their late teens who usually took care of the store. They had the most fabulous collection of National Geographic Magazines. From the first time I was introduced to those magazines, I enjoyed them thoroughly that they must have been the cause of my wanderlust. It seemed as though I could read the stories by just looking at the pictures. I still do the same now: scan the photographs of magazines when they come in. The National Geographic showed me many places in the world. I only

needed someone to identify the places as I could not read a single word, because I was too young, and besides it was in English. But the pictures spoke enough and I could daydream about traveling to these countries, although I had not the foggiest idea where they were. Sometimes the cousins took turns telling me about the photos. I learned quickly about the different people and countries, like the Arabs living in oases in the desert. Later I ended up with my grandfather's old Bosch atlas and started looking for places to explore. It was a large atlas with a beautiful brown cover. I learned about the many countries of the world, before I could even read. Later I ended up with a huge collection of my own National Geographic magazines, but I never really read the stories, just the captions. My biggest wish was to see my photographs published in the magazine. I actually did try but I guess my photos were not good enough for a story.

There was another aunt in town, who lived in a rather large house with fish ponds in the backyard. There she had so many birds in cages, which were sitting above the water, and the fish got well fed from the fruit waste and bird waste. They sure made a racket. I always admired the things she had and it was fun watching the birds, but there were other places where I was bored to death and wished the coffee chat would end. The town was full of family, because that is where my grandmother came from. She was the pretty girl who charmed and married the handsome son of the richest planter around. My grandmother had a huge family and I have a copy of part of the panoramic photograph in which all the family was lined up, with my grandmother squeezed in between all her folks.

Spirits and Ghosts

The island of Java is often called the island of the Gods. There is mysticism in the air, and when twilight comes and the bats are flying out, making chirping sounds, we children all think that it is the wee-hours of the day's ending and all the bad spirits will rise out of every nook, cranny, tree, and any other sinister dark place where they hide from the daylight.

Therefore, spirits and ghosts dictated my childhood and kept a strange grip on me even into adulthood. It may seem very strange, but in that cultural environment, I grew up with these images and smells, and the unexplainable sounds. Thus the reason for writing this chapter is to see why I believe in all those spirits hiding away until the moment comes when they appear and shake my bones to the marrow.

I grew up pampered by servants. They had to take care of us: my two brothers, Pho and Han, my sister, Ling, and me. One of the servants' problems in managing such an unruly

bunch of kids was that they were not allowed to physically spank us. Sometimes though, when things were getting out of hand they would, in a spur of anger, revert to giving us some physical punishment. They actually would only do this as a last resort. When that happened we deserved it, as they were putting their jobs on the line.

Thus, the one way of handling us without physical punishment was by what one would call religious guidance. That meant that we would endure the most ancient of spiritual rules and threats. It was how pre-historic and primitive people guided their daily life and life in general in ancient times, namely by explaining each and every event with ghosts or spirits as the reason behind natural phenomena, from a bright thunder clap to reading the future from the intestines of a chicken, or asking for the blessing of a new house by making an offering to the gods. For a big house the offering was a buffalo, and for a small house a goat would appease the gods, who were perhaps inconvenienced by the location of the new building. By tradition, the head of the animal would be buried underneath the main post of the house, and it would protect the house from evil spirits. We never questioned it, and even our parents would duly perform or have the ritual performed, so that no ill omen would befall us or the new structure. It was not only important to our well-being, the occupants, but our total cultural environment. It appeased not only the gods, but all the people with whom we were in contact. If the house was not properly sanctioned, people might not wish to enter the abode as the wrath of the unappeased god might also befall our guest.

So, we had good spirits and bad spirits. We had nice ghosts and scary ghosts. In every nook and cranny there was

something lurking. The result was that we usually did not like dark places unless we were in a group and even then, we would try to scare each other and scoot pass the ominous spot.

Among the Dutch, the most common personality influencing the children's lives was the good *Sint Nikolaas*, the original Santa Claus, and his bad black helper *Zwarte Piet*, who would put the naughty kids in his big bag and take them to Spain, where the good saint lived. I always wondered how *Zwarte Piet* managed to put us all in that bag. In contrast, the good old saint on his white horse would bring presents every year. He would ride his horse on the roof of the houses, and again I wondered why the tiles did not break, and how did his helper crawl down the chimney to deliver the presents? Until one day we discovered that it was our parents, who would sneak into the living room and leave the presents for us.

In Indonesia, there are many more minor and subtle characters. The old lady in the tree about whom I will tell you more in another story was the one who controlled the garden during the twilight hours. She was really mean the way she was described to us. Of course, we never saw her as she was simply the creation of our imagination and fear. We visualized her as being like the witch out of the book by Hans Christian Andersen. She had a big wart on her nose with hairs, ugly teeth and a big hole in her back where she would deposit naughty kids and then take them through a hole up in the tree and down into her underground cave from where they would never escape.

During daylight hours we were courageous and we would attack her. We stuck many big nails in the trunk of the tree right under the entrance to her secret place, so that she would get caught on the nails and hang herself when she climbed in

and out of the hole. But we never caught her, even though we unrelentingly hammered bigger and bigger nails in the tree.

When it rained while the sun shone—a sunshower—we were told that someone had died with his or her eyes open, or a panther was stalking through the forest in the mountains. It was true. Many people die with their eyes open, and who knows, there was always a panther stalking around. They were never telling us untruths. But sometimes it made us pause and look at the blue mountain ridges in the south and imagine the animal stalking through the sunlight dappled forest looking for prey, which could have been any of us.

In our old house, the bathroom was outside the house. It was not an outhouse, but really a very fancy bathroom and toilet combination. It was outside the house probably because ours was an old and primitive house, which originally did not have these facilities, and thus it had to be added on. So, before going to bed, if we had to go, we had to go out of the house in the dark and walk down a long veranda that had just one dim bulb lighting the path. The rectangular green, slimy fishpond, which was a remnant of my father's abandoned fish hobby, looked as if any time green arms would reach out and catch me and drag me into the green world of snakes, crocodiles and you name it. Of course, it did not help my fear that there actually were snakes slithering in and around the house.

I was scared to go to bed alone in strange places. My grandmother's home was one place that I thought was scary the minute the sun went down. It was in the eyes of a little boy a huge place with deer antlers hanging on the walls. My grandfather must have been a hunter, or they were souvenirs from his youngest brother, my great-uncle Tjoen Lee. He

used to hunt all over the world and we have a photograph of him with a group of Graf Otto something and people with huge mustaches and beards from Germany. My grandmother told me that they were relatives of Crown Prince Wilhelm, who was unfortunate to be the last Kaiser of Germany.

As mentioned before, my grandmother's place was identical to all the houses belonging to my grandfather's brother and brothers-in-law. I was told that they were designed by the same architect, and all of them had the same high ceilings and dark corners. The front had a porch, followed on the left-hand side by a lobby, where the altar for my grandfather and his ancestors was located. On the right was a row of bedrooms. Behind the altar room was a huge dining room in which my grand mother had a black table and chairs for a dining set, seating some twelve people. It was usually used when the children and grandchildren came to visit for some special occasion, like my grandmother's birthday or some other celebration in Bogor, which was the birthplace of both my mother and father. I heard that the house might still be standing and I would like to visit it again before they tear it down.

Going to bed alone at her place was something else. When I was told to go to bed, usually before the elders went, I would protest but to no avail. The place was always so dimly lit and it just looked so sinister. I would crawl along the wall facing the center of the big dining room, getting goose bumps, cross the dark hallway quickly, then sneak into the bedroom, and make a dive into the huge four-poster bed. Put all the pillows around me like a fortress, and jump into the blanket and hide myself in it. I literally crawled into this huge bag, because for some reason or other all the blankets

we had were bags. They were gifts of *Oma*, our grandmother. One side had the patches that my grandmother painstakingly stitched together by hand, and attached to it was a flannel bag. I never had any other blanket, and every other year I would get a bigger one from my brother and my smaller one would go to my sister until I left for the United States to go to university.

I was certain that my grandmother's place had a lot of bad ghosts. I never saw them, but I was convinced that they were around. For I was a little boy then, and the ceilings were high and always in the shadows. Her furniture was black which did not help either. I could feel it, because I would get those goose bumps and swear my hair was standing up straight. If you think that this house of my grandmother was huge, you should have seen my grandfather's house. That house was supposed to have twelve bedrooms, and even had slave quarters, and there was a slave bell, which I never saw. But my mother probably pointed out the concrete pillars, which held the bell. Grandmother as a child had an amah, or a personal female servant, who was a lifer convicted of murdering her husband. The way to acquire slaves was to go to the prison and go through the files and select a suitable prisoner. My grandfather decided that a particular woman was harmless, bailed her out of the prison, and employed her. However, he was responsible for her and all the other prisoners in his employ, who he obtained from the prison in this way. It was a good deal all around, because my grandfather got servants and the prisoners got a good life, instead of withering away in prison. He even gave them pocket money and they were treated as if they were regular servants.

My mother was always full of religion. As you know, my father and the rest of the family worship ancestors as was common among the Chinese. My mother at a young age ended up in a convent school called the *Klein Klooster* on *Jalan Pos*, located in the middle of Jakarta, and was raised as a Catholic. The country was Moslem and the common people still believed in spirits and animism, a practice called *Kepertjajaan*, or simply translated as Belief. We did not have a house altar. That was located at my other grandmother's place. I never met either of my grandfathers. That was the main reason why, my father, did not get his economics degree from Holland. He had to come home when his father passed away, because he was the eldest son and had to take care of the estate. I am still not very clear about the whole thing. Who determined the fate of my father? Now I have started to vaguely understand that the family was run by a clan led by one of the uncles. But the details are still vague. It was the same with my mother's family.

So, my mother ensured that we worshiped all the gods and somewhere in a corner of our garden we had a spirit house. They were not as elaborate as the ones in Thailand. They were just a little simple platform made out of bamboo or even banana stems, where we put food to offer. When in trouble, my mother would also burn incense in a little charcoal pot, especially made for the purpose. She would walk seven times around the house, and end back at the spirit house. Usually it would take place on Fridays, which is a Moslem religious day. If things got more serious she would also visit the Chinese temple or "*Klenteng*" to pay homage to the *Tua Pe Kong*, the Chinese god sitting on the altar. If things got

much worse we would pray to all the Catholic saints. That is when we knew we had some real trouble. I remember this very well. She was praying loudly when we left my father in Sukabumi, while we fled to Batavia (Jakarta now) to safety. I am not sure but I think that the Chinese community blamed my father for something and I understood that someone he tried to help tried to have him killed. So he finally joined us in the capital city. He muttered about the ungrateful people. That was also the last time that he got involved in local politics.

We stayed at the home of the eldest brother of my mother, Oom Tek Tsjoan. It was a huge house and it was also scary because we were told that a Japanese officer who used to live there had committed suicide or *seppuku* there at the end of the war. That was all we needed to be even more uncomfortable in that house.

Now I have to tell you about the fancy weapons we had in the house. We had a pretty nice Golok or dagger and a small rusted and decrepit knife, which was handed down from father to son. They were each supposed to have a spirit. Every year they were taken from the wall, where they hung uneventfully behind the door. They were taken out of their cloth covering and washed by the "*Dukun*" or mullah, the Moslem priest. He would wash them in special fragrant water and wipe the rust off with slices of lemon. The lemon juice did clean the blade, but I also think it caused the rusting of the steel. Clean and washed they were ready then for the ceremony.

Several times a year we would have a ceremony or a "*sedekahan*," as it was called in Sundanese, or in Indonesian, a "*Slametan*." Rice steamed with turmeric and mixed with pieces of chicken was spread out on banana leaves on the

floor. Delicious smells would emanate from the piles of yellow rice. The people, mainly all the workers of the factory and the neighboring village would sit cross-legged on the floor, facing each other across the long mountains of food. The *Dukun* would sit in the middle of the row of people and would wave another one of those small charcoal pots, like my mother used in front of him. He would sprinkle the incense on the fire and the fragrant smoke would spread through the room. He would then take the family blades in both hands, one after the other, and run them through the smoke while saying Moslem prayers. It was a great combination of religions being worshipped under one house. The owner of the house, my father, believed in ancestor worship from old China and spiritualism, my mother believed in just about everything from spirits to Christianity, and the workers were Moslem, but all of them believed very much in the power of spirits and thus animism, the silent religion of Java, the *Kepertjaan*, Belief.

When I was born, my mother went to the "*klenteng*." She asked the priest to write out my "*Pedji*" or horoscope, which I still have. It was developed by following the instructions in an age-old book written by Lao Tze during that ancient period in Chinese culture. It was a carefully documented formula, based on some kind of statistics. They copied particular phrases and combined them into nicely written prose on a piece of red paper. But nobody can understand it unless trained in classical Chinese. I have never been able to get a proper translation. My Chinese friend told me that their colloquial Chinese did not teach them these strange verses of birds and other omens. The nearest

interpretation I got was that I would be traveling fifty years of my life. That is almost true.

So you see, one of the reasons for all the religious confusion was that my father was curious about the different religions that existed around us, but not really stuck to one single religion. He practiced ancestor worship, the country was Moslem, my mother was influenced by both the Catholic religion and the Chinese spirits, and animism surrounding us, and the best school in town was Protestant. So, I went to a Protestant school.

One day Dr. Wawoerontoe, the veterinarian in town visited us. He dabbled in the occult and performed water dousing to find radiation. He was able to detect earth rays that caused sickness and stiffness in persons. He said that if you sleep right across an earth ray you will feel sick most of the time. He simply went to check with his dousing stick the location of water or earth rays. He found that my father slept right across such an earth ray and he had us move the big bed, so that it did not run across my father's body. I had never thought to ask my father whether it helped. Today you would probably call this pseudoscience *Fengshui*.

In the 40's it seemed like some crazy science, but today it seems like this crazy veterinarian doctor was not very far off. He also had a crystal, which he would suspend over objects to see whether it had spirits or any power. Today, there is a great following by people who believe in the power of crystals. Even Elizabeth Taylor, the famous movie star, believes in crystals. He also checked to see who the heir was to the family weapons. First of all, the big blade turned out to be a fake and had no spirit at all. All the sons had to hold

a hand over the blades, and the doctor held his crystal over the hand by a chain. It did not move over the large dagger. It did not move either when he checked my brothers' hands over the other rusted piece of the small dagger's blade, but it moved like a pendulum when I held my hands over the blade. It had chosen me as its guardian, but I was too scared of it, and left the blade with my mother. It is now probably with my eldest brother, who must have kept it behind the door the way my mother kept it in her days. The family blades were supposed to have their bearers. My younger brother wanted them, but it was not up to him.

The veterinarian doctor proved that dousing had a scientific base. He experimented by connecting himself to a cardiograph. When he ran his rods over water the gauge went haywire. He told us that only alkaline people were able to do any dousing, because the body functioned as a simple electric resistor. Today, such resistivity meters are geophysical instruments and are used exactly for the same purpose of locating water. We used this scientific method in Tanzania to locate water also. So, there are mystical phenomena that later are explained by modern technology. But it does take away the magic!

My father sure believed in spirits. Whenever he heard that a spiritualist was in town my father would invite him to call upon my dad's father's spirit. My poor grandfather had to get up from his grave and answer the prodding questions of his son, my father. I remember two different occasions, when something sensational took place. It happened in Sukabumi, our town in the hinterland in the 40's. The other one time was after the war in Batavia (Jakarta.) This event was important as my "grandfather" predicted that I would go



My Golok.

abroad, and I did.

In the ritual they dressed up a Chinese bamboo cookie basket, which had a handle looped over the middle of it. They dressed it with my grandfather's shirt and his key ring. I even think that they had my grandfather's pipe stuck in the pocket. They ran a bamboo pole through the hoop and suspended the basket draped in my grandfather's clothing. The spiritualist would start with burning incense and begin calling up my grandfather, burning josh sticks and asking him to appear by throwing two coins in the air. If they paired it meant that my grandfather had agreed to appear. Sometimes my grandfather would refuse and it was a dud. However, in this case, which I remembered very vividly, they went through this same ritual, and, my grandfather agreed by rattling the keys and causing the basket to swing back and forth. If he was asked a question and the answer was "yes" the basket would swing back and forth, and for a "no" it would twist sideways, like a person shaking his head. My father's brother watched the show and since he was a great cynic, he kept saying that it was fake and that the people holding the bamboo poles were manipulating the movements. So, he came forward, saying that he was going to prove it, and he grabbed the pole. I will never forget the image of him trying to hang on to the pole for dear life, because it lifted him off the floor and swung him around at the end of the bamboo stick as if my grandfather was angry. There was this surprised look on my uncle's face. He was dumbfounded, but he still did not believe it. So, I am not sure what it was all about, but I assumed that he was surprised, but would not admit it.

The next time my dad used a similar basket and they

stuck a pencil down through the side of the basket. Four people had to hold the basket on their forefinger. After a lot of praying by the spiritualist, my grandfather consented to answer a few questions. I remember my father asking whether the business would make any profits. The answer disappointed my father a bit, because the figure was not too big. When my turn came I asked my grandfather's spirit whether I was going abroad. He answered with a scribble on the paper and it said: USA. And I went six months later.

My father once explained to me that when a person died the spirit would leave the body through an opening on top of the skull. It seems to be the same idea the Gurkas have in Nepal. The spirit was like a cloud leaving the body. You could not see it. For that reason all the mirrors were covered by white cloths to prevent the spirit from being shocked by not seeing itself in the mirror. We wanted the good spirits to stay with us. I was not so sure about that. I thought maybe that is why some houses were haunted.

I witnessed the death of both of my grandmothers. For some strange reason I was the grandchild who was always asked to come to the deathbed. I was too young to understand the importance of those requests. When my father's mother was buried, she was laid to rest next to my grandfather. There was a hole connecting both cement cribs. I crawled down the hole and checked the connecting tunnel between my grandmother's grave and my grandfather's. I guess it was done so that they could visit each other. The funeral ceremony of my grandmother's mother was rather elaborate. I think it lasted several days and nights. We burned gold paper so that my grandmother had some money in "heaven."

The War

When World War II broke out, Japan invaded the Dutch East Indies to obtain the necessary resources to fuel their war machine. The Dutch East Indies, now called Indonesia, was a rich country with oil, sugar, rice, and rubber. For the people of the island, the Japanese conquest and following occupation shattered many dreams, but it raised also many hopes. In a way it seems strange that when you want somebody's resources you just wage war, conquer, loot them, and bring the spoils home. However, that was always the case when we look back in history. Even democratic entities, such as Greece and Rome, were the same. They would attack another country to loot it and bring home its riches. The Vikings did the same and likewise the British would wipe out whole villages of a tribe on the most ridiculous pretext of some or other affront. But when you are confronted by the ugly face of war yourself, it is a lot different from reading about it. I both read about it and experienced it, and so now I understand how people suffer.

It was awful when the Dutch capitulated. There was looting and other vandalism. It took some time before the Japanese came into town to bring some order. Many of the people were afraid of the Japanese, because they had heard about the atrocities they committed in China. So all of us packed in busses and trucks and moved out of town to one of the larger estates in the countryside, called *Djampang Kulon*, so the people could be more easily defended in the event that we were attacked by looters. Every able-bodied male had a hunting rifle and stood guard, while the women and children were herded inside the large estate houses, including my brothers my sister, and me.

It was scary and we were afraid, that we would be attacked by the looters. It took some days with us camped out together before things returned to become normal. Most of the people were Chinese merchants from town, whom we all knew. After a while word came that everything was back to normal in town and that the Japanese did not loot and massacre the population as in other places as they were rumored to have done. There were some scares when we thought bandits would attack us. It would have been a fight, because we had superior fire power. Even though our guns were just hunting rifles, some of them were good double-barrel big game hunting rifles. My brother had his little air rifle, which made him a bit important among the kids.

We had to get used to the disappearing white faces. All my classmates with a few exceptions were taken away and put in concentration camps. Some of the Dutch were born in Indonesia or were married to natives, and they could stay in their houses. However, we were afraid to see them. Yvonne's mother, who was Dutch but married to a Chinese,

was also able to stay out of the camp, but wore the native dress, the *sarong*, and *kebaja*, a native shirt. She must have looked a bit out of place with her blond hair and blue eyes.

We were allowed to stay in our house, because we were Chinese. For those who were interned it was three years of hell. They were mistreated—some were tortured and others died of malnutrition and poor health. My father was in jail twice because he was a member of the American Rotary Club, and his brother was suspected to be involved in guerilla war activities. He was tortured by the *Kem Pei Tai*, the Japanese secret police, but survived even the water treatment, whereby they put a hose in his mouth and filled him with water. But he did not confess and they let him go as they could not prove anything. During this period of my father's confinement our house was sealed, and so was the factory. We moved in with an aunt in one of the smaller houses and made do. We had to leave most things behind, and when we needed some things, one of the servants plus my mother crawled through the roof, entered the attic, went down into the house to retrieve needed objects by passing them through the window, which was not sealed, and then climbed back out. We were a bit worried although the area was guarded by our own watchmen.

The Dutch schools were closed down, because all the teachers were also put in camps. For us kids it meant a long vacation. The mothers got together and tried to teach us, but we were such an unruly bunch of kids that they gave it up after a week. We really roamed the countryside, as there was nothing else to do. At one point my mother tried to teach me English for some strange reason, because we could not speak Dutch in public anymore. That failed, because between

my impatient mother and the wild kid I was, it always ended in a shouting match.

Strangely enough, the Chinese were allowed to keep their schools open. So, my brother and I ended up going to a Chinese school in order to keep us off the streets and out of the fields.

For my parents the war brought uncertainty. They were going to build themselves a new house on the outskirts of town. They had bought themselves several hectares of abandoned rice paddy land. It was on a dirt road branching north of the Postweg east of town. The Postweg was the main artery crossing Java from west to east. The land sloped down southwards, while in the back rose Mount Gedeh. It would have been a nice place for my parents to retire. It would be the first house they personally owned.

They had carefully planned this retirement place and nobody thought that there was going to be a major change in all our lives. They had an architect make the plans of their simple dream house. They had ordered all the fixtures, and we had boxes full of them: hinges for the doors and windows, door knobs, window latches and all kinds of pretty things. They were going to be used for the main house. Whenever they had time, my parents would look over the house plans, and dream of their little house.

The first and only structure built was the servants' quarters. That was the easiest and the cheapest to build. Soon the ground was leveled, and then there was a ceremony to bless the construction of the building. We all gathered together, including the workers from the factory and the faithful servants. A chicken was offered to the good spirits to protect the house. It was just a small structure and thus a

chicken sufficed. On the floor the women had set up banana leaves on which the rice and food were piled high. The people sat in two rows on both sides of the banana leaves on the floor. They waited for the blessing ceremony to start.

The mullah came and brought with him the family's weapons, which consisted of one twenty-inch dagger and a small completely corroded smaller dagger. Earlier he had taken the weapons out of their sheaths and prepared the charcoal brazier in which he sprinkled some mire which started to smoke. Then the mullah moved the large dagger over the smoke, said his Moslem prayers and then followed with the small dagger. The truth is that the big dagger proved to be a fake, while the small decrepit knife had a soul, according Dr. Wawoeroentoe, our veterinarian who also dabbled in mysticism. The chicken was then sacrificed. Its throat was cut and set in a hole, where one of the main posts was to be set. After that everybody started to eat their meal which consisted of the food that was laid out on the floor on top of banana leaves. They also used these banana leaves as plates and their fingers as fork and spoon.

The tea factory was closed by the Japanese occupiers and also because there were no markets for this premium black tea my father's factory produced. The original markets in Europe could not be reached as they had their own war. It was not only a disaster for our family, but also for all the people in the area, because we all lost our source of income overnight. The reason was that unlike many tea estates, which had their own tea gardens, my father's tea factory served the surrounding villagers who had the tea gardens on the mountain slopes and sold the leaves to my father's factory under contract. Thus the women who picked the tea leaves

every morning lost their jobs. The people who owned the gardens had no place to sell the leaves. This was all because we could not sell the tea to England. I bet those English would have loved to get a shipment of my father's good Orange Pekoe tea. It was good tea and for special friends my father had a blend called Orange Pekoe tip, which means they were blended from the selected top three leaves of the tea plant. The fine little white leaves, with the silver velvet-enclosed tip of the last bud, which was white because of the hair.

At the tea factory, everything was idle and only the guards and the mechanics were still employed to protect the estate and maintain the expensive equipment. The tea bins with thousands of pounds of export quality premium black tea just sat there. Then the Japanese occupiers ordered the supply destroyed, because they drank only green tea. A huge mountain of tea ended up in the middle of the plantation, rotting away. It must have been heartbreak for my father to see all his work vanishing into nothing. For us kids who did not understand the implications, it was a playground. It was one big mountain of black tea to play on.

So many villagers ended up in desperate state. The farmers were more fortunate than many others in town as they were able to continue to grow rice and other food crops to sustain themselves, but the tea factory workers lost their jobs. It was my father's duty to find them employment or feed them.

My father was something special. He always found ways to generate work for his people. They remained employed, but with no pay, because there was no money. They could stay in their workers' houses (*pondoks*) because where else would they go? There was no place for them to

go. The workers' quarters were the place they grew up in, and some of them were born there. So, they all stayed and just continued gathering food in the fields, while my dad tried to cultivate food for the community.

I must tell you that everything my father did was a serious affair. He also believed that the whole family should participate. We were never excused from work even though we were the boss' kids. At the end, I must admit that he was right. He said that you cannot order people around unless you have experienced doing the work yourself.

When he visited me at school I followed him to his hotel room. Once settled he rang the bell for service and checked how long it would take the room service to arrive. Depending on the performance he gave the house boy a tip and said that there would be more if he was attentive. When he entered the dining room the waiters would fight to serve his table. He then asked who was going to serve him and put a bill under his plate, and said: "If you do well there will be more." He then explained to me that it is better to guarantee good service rather than to risk having the soup dropped on your head and then still be obligated to give a tip. He said be generous and you can enjoy your meal without feeling the irritation of poor service.

Chapter 13

The Chicken Farm

The closing of the tea factory during the war was a disaster for all of us. It was not only bad for our family, but also for the workers and their families who lived in the workers' quarters. The factory workers and their families were an integral party of the community and were my father's responsibility. We could not pay them, but we needed to feed them. So, my father created all kinds of jobs to keep them busy and paid them in kind with food. They could also stay in the cottages built for them, as there was no place to go.

But misfortune rippled through the distant *desas* or villages that had supplied the young tea leaves for the factory. We would never know how many people were affected when the tea trucks failed to come and collect the young tea leaves picked in the morning, and the paymaster came for the last time to tell the people that it was the last pay until the times returned to normal or as the people called it, *Djaman normal*.

Unlike the plantations with integral tea gardens, ours was set up to service the native tea gardens, where the local population participated in the profits of the factory. So, its collapse had a far reaching effect. Although some growers had additional rice fields and were able to continue growing the staple food, others in town could not. The rest uprooted the tea plants and started to grow whatever food crop they could to survive.

My father, being innovative, tried very hard to provide employment for all these people, food for the tables of all the workers of the tea estate. So he leased out the empty space of the sorting room of the tea factory to install looms for a textile company of a friend of his, who had to start making thread out of *kenaf*, because cotton was not available anymore. *Kenaf* is brown tree bark and mainly used to make brown-colored rice bags. So, he built the spinning wheels. They were driven by one of the drive belts of the motors of the closed-down tea factory, and hundreds of wheels were connected to this one drive shaft. These were very simple to operate. You had a lever between your legs, and when you wanted the wheel to spin you just moved it left so it would touch the continuously running drive. You first twisted the yarn into a long thread, which you connected to the one already in the spinning wheel. Then you held the *kenaf* in your hand to feed it. I was not very good at making the thread, and my thread had too many bumps.

The *kenaf* did not make very fine thread, but could be used for weaving coarse material. Originally it was for making rice bags, but during the war we had to make finer weave out of it, so that we could use this twine for clothing. This way we were able to keep the staff employed, especially

the women who previously sorted the tea in these same halls.

Besides this effort my father started a chicken farm and sold the eggs to the more fortunate people. This was not a small enterprise of a few chickens—we had hundreds. My dad always attacked everything very scientifically and read up on raising and breeding purebred chickens. We learned to clean the cages, pick the eggs from the nesting boxes, weigh them and date them. Then we would screen the eggs and some were put in the incubator. You would not believe how it was possible for him to dig up information about breeding chickens and building incubators. He was a perfectionist.

The carpenter built the chicken cages according to specifications from Dutch farm journals, which suddenly appeared from a pile of books. Where he found these magazines was a puzzle to us all.

The boxes for the chickens to lay their eggs in were attached to the back of chicken coops, while the front was open to an enclosed area, so that the chickens could roam free but return to lay eggs. It was not like the modern battery farms where the chickens are crowded together to just lay eggs. So, during the day the chickens would run around and scratch in the soil or dust depending on whether it had rained or not. The whole area was fenced in with chicken wire and there was only one entrance. To enter, one had to step onto a rug soaked with disinfectant before entering the enclosed area. That was important to make sure that no disease from the street would affect the fowls. My father was very strict about it, because it could mean losing all your chickens to either cholera or some other chicken pest. My brother who raised chickens some twenty-five years later was more casual

about it, and so one day he lost his whole flock of thousands of chickens, and went broke.

Special feeding boxes were made with a bar through the length of them, so that the chickens would not climb into the feeding boxes to start scratching the food the way the good local chickens went after worms. The feed was next on the agenda. The mixture was all scientifically measured. It had regular grain, bone meal or ground up shells for the calcium, and dried blood from the slaughter house. In the morning the chickens would get fine ground food. I guess that was for better digestion. In the afternoon the feed was coarsely broken grain. I remember helping grind the corn and the other ingredients, blood, shells, *mung* beans, and rice grain. That was fancy chicken feed in those days, while today you just go and buy the stuff ready made. In the beginning we had a hand grinder, which was not very efficient, but in the end we used an old-fashion stone wheel for the fine stuff. It is a good way to exercise and to get chest and arm muscles.

These hens were supposed to use the nesting boxes and we would make two runs a day to gather the eggs. The door of the boxes would trap the chicken, when it crawled into the nesting place. The hens had numbered rings around their feet. We could keep track of the best chickens, as the eggs were brought home and weighed. My father kept statistics for each chicken, so that he could select the best layers for further breeding. And the bad egg layers usually ended up in the cooking pot. The eggs were sold by weight, so it was very beneficial to have chickens that laid big eggs. The average at that time was around 60 grams, while the largest were about 80.

Breeding was another affair and the carpenter, who used to fix the houses of the factory, ended up making the breeding boxes. They were constructed again according the specifications found in one of those Dutch farm magazines. My father also managed to find a thermometer specifically designed for measuring the temperature in those boxes. I vaguely remember that the breeding temperature is 103 Fahrenheit. The rest of the system was manual. The temperature control was a flap on the top of the breeding boxes and it worked by raising and lowering the heating lamp. My dad found all these things in spite of the war and occupation; everything had to come from old supplies. The eggs were set in a breeding tray in rows and every day we had to turn the eggs by hand. Dad told me that it was to prevent the yolk from sticking to the shell as the yolk was heavier than the egg white.

I still remember how he wanted me to follow each step from egg to chick. After one week you looked through each egg over a light. The light shone through a hole in a can over which you held the egg. If there was a black dot and arteries radiating from the nucleus it was a fertilized egg, and if the eggs were blank they ended up in the cooking pan for a nice omelet. A week later, we scanned each egg again. If it had turned completely black it meant that the embryo had grown into a chick and those that remained a black blob or somewhere in between had just simply failed. The ones with blobs were also sent to the kitchen, and the cook would fry them up minus the red nucleus of the failed chick which he fished out. Sometimes we gave these eggs to the dogs and cats. In the Philippines this stuff would be called *Balut*, and

would be a source of protein. Actually, *balut* is probably closer to a fourteen day old embryo. Some of the *Balut* eggs were so old that the chicks had sprouted some feathers. I never had the stomach to try this Philippine delicacy.

Then after three weeks we would watch the great wonder. Through the glass window we would peek to see whether any of the chicks were breaking out of their shells. It was fun to watch see the stupid chicks try their best to cut a hole big enough to crawl out. At first there would be a small crack, then it became sort of a miniature pyramid, then finally the beak showed. The chick had a little reinforced point for breaking the shell, which would eventually disappear as the chick grew older. Then the chick would widen the hole, make a sort of circle of holes, and then kick around until the shell flopped away and there was a bedraggled little chick with feathers stuck to its body. After a few minutes under the warming lamps it would dry out and there would be a fluffy little ball of down on two little sticks hopping and scrambling over the other eggs with chicks in different stages of emerging. Now and then we would help the chicks by moving them into a more open space to get rid of the shells.

Then we moved the chicks into another box, where a lamp stayed on to keep them warm, as they did not have any mother hen to keep them naturally warm. They would huddle together at night when it was colder, and when it was warmer in the day they would start to feed. After all that nonsense of eggs, it was fun to watch those wet feathers puff up under the warmth of the lamp, and become nice and downy.

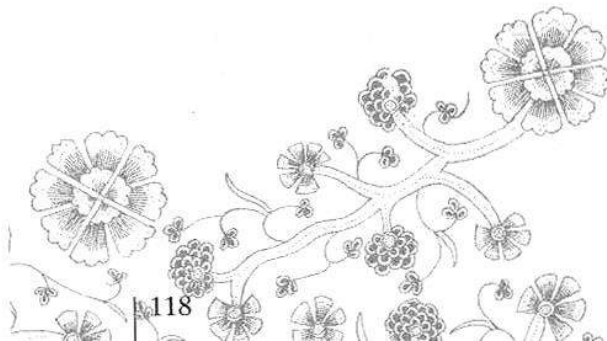
I also had to clean the chicken coops. Whoa, what a pile of smelly manure. Chickens really smell. I'd rather take the geese and the ducks. At least they smelled like grass. Cleaning the cages was a special exercise. First I hit the wire bottom of the chicken cage with a long bamboo stick from above. Then I had to crawl under the cage and use a wooden hoe to scrape the chicken shit into a container, which was collected at a central point and used to fertilize the gardens. I was paid a few pennies for doing all this. I tried something else to make some money, but it utterly failed. What I was doing was gathering some sort of young leaves for salad, but I did not sell a single bunch. That was my first and last try to start a commercial venture.

My help really was not needed, but it was simply a way of getting me out of my parents' hair. I am sure that my older brother had a more responsible job, and so did the few tea factory workers who ended up working at this chicken farm. I am not really sure whether this venture kept us alive. We also needed an income besides selling my mother's jewelry, which was regularly used by my father to fund these enterprises or to augment the food supply of about a hundred workers and their families. My mother still lamented the fact that she did not have jewelry to wear. The truth was that she actually did not care for all that glitter and my father used it properly by converting it to cash, and helping other people.

One piece was a diamond bracelet with 120 small diamonds, which apparently kept us and the rest of the workers alive. In the end she gave me the last four stones that were left of this bracelet, which we gave to our two daughters for earrings. Actually my mother had a lot of other

jewelry that remained, of which we all inherited a few pieces. My sister has a bracelet and necklaces of diamonds and blue sapphires.

It seems that whenever the family ran into some financial trouble they would start raising chickens. My father started raising chickens again when he retired for the second or third time back in Sukabumi in 1968. For him it was more of a challenge than a necessity. My mother continued it after my father passed away. She would go around town and sell the eggs. There was an amazing clientele for these beautiful large eggs. But somehow the eggs became an issue between my mother and my sister-in-law, with whom my mother was staying. Actually it was my brother who was living in my mother's house. I found out that even though my mother's chickens produced such a wonderful harvest, my sister-in-law, Mary still had to buy eggs from the street, because my mother refused to sell them to her. I thought I had a great solution and offered to buy a whole year's harvest. But when my mother found out that it was for Mary and her family, she refused. That was actually the indication for me that relations were not so good and I made arrangements for my mother to move in with my sister in America.



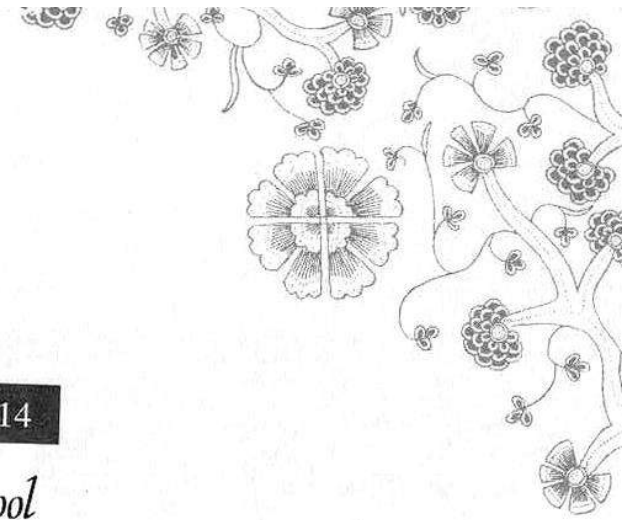
Chapter 14

Grade School

Kids, you know your grandmother was the most complex person about religion, but that is another story. My father worshipped his ancestors in the best Chinese tradition. While my mother spent her early years in a Catholic convent, where she went to school. She visited the Chinese temple frequently, but the Protestants ran the best school in town. It was called the *Koningin Wilhelmina School*, named after the Queen of Holland. So, that's where she sent me to school—and I learned a lot about Jesus Christ.

The kindergarten was located behind the rest of the school, and we kids were there having fun. I cannot remember my first day at school. I probably bawled like any other kid, except Cintha, our oldest daughter, who simply turned around without so much of a wave to us and joined the rest of the kids, as if she had gone to school all her life.

This *Froebel* class was the Dutch name for Kindergarten. It was a place I would remember for a long



The Kindergarten in Sukabumi in 1939. Pim Bangert in back second from left, myself in front third from left.



time, because the teacher was the mother of my best friend, Pim Bangert. I kept in touch, exchanged letters and visited him, until one day I received a note from his son, who told me about his father's passing.

I do remember the class and my best friend Pim. It was a nice class and we did a lot of fun things. Then I moved to the first grade and then to the second grade. There was not much to remember, so it must have been dull. I do remember my first writing exercises. I still remember getting the first pen. It was one of those small metal pens with a groove in the middle and a hole in the center. They were bronze colored and called "crown" pens. We had a bottle of ink and we were careful in dipping our pens in it and writing. We had long-hand ABC in Green notebooks with light blue stripes. One narrow strip on the bottom for the regular size letters, and a wider strip in between the narrow lines for the parts, which stuck above and below the line, such as Aa, Bb, Cc etc. and Gg and Jj etc. Usually A-nong, our major domo, brought me to the school on the bicycle.

I did not realize how much effort our grandfather and his brothers had gone through to get our parents accepted into the Dutch school. When our time came it was already liberalized, so that we could advance ourselves. This part of the story was reported by my cousin Tan Twie Nio, who wrote about the integration of the Chinese-Indonesians and the struggle of one of the brothers of my grandfather, to get us accepted as equals by the Dutch. A regulation was eventually instituted to recognize the Chinese as equal to the Dutch or *gelijkgesteld*. Therefore, my father and my mother both had Dutch passports. That also allowed me to attend a Dutch

school. It was important in the sense that in the future I would have equal chances in society. Of course, by the time I grew up things had changed.

The school was designed for our further education in Holland. We had the same curriculum as the schools in the Netherlands. We talked about the meadows and the sheep and the cows, the windmills along the canals, wooden shoes and “*boeren*” and “*boeretrien*” (farmers), and milking cows. We talked about spring and summer, and skating on the canals in Holland in the winter. History started with the Stone Age people in Holland, who built the *Hunnenbedden*, somewhat similar to Stonehenge in England. Later we were taught about the knights in armor jostling on those big horses. Then we learned about the revolution of the Dutch against the Spanish King. We also listened to the heroic admirals of the Dutch fleet, who were equal to any of the other seafaring nations. They defeated the Spanish Armada and beat the English on the oceans, and even chased them out of places in the Indies, and the Cape. Very little was taught about the rich history of the Indonesian archipelago. It was cursorily covered as an orientation at the high-school level, and no more.

It was very interesting how our social life was arranged before and after the war. We either cut through the fence and disappeared into the rice fields and villages behind our estate, played with our cousins, or played with my Dutch friends. Usually my parents would call the Bangerts to ask if I could come and play with their son Pim. Then A-nong, our major domo, would take me on the bicycle to their house. There were not too many cars in those days. My grandmother was

the only one who owned one, a black Dodge Sedan, which was wheeled out only on special occasions. Pim’s family had only a small car. When the war came, the school was closed down and my teachers disappeared. I was in the second grade in school. What a mess!

My school friends were mainly Dutch with a sprinkling of Chinese—my group. Then there was a smaller group of “*Inlanders*” (natives) as the Dutch called the indigenous people. This was a very important distinction, because it affected my life when I was going to marry Yvonne. She was classified as Dutch, while I was considered tribally Chinese. Thus, when we were going to get married at the Indonesian Consulate in New York, it appeared that the Dutch Colonial Law or Tribal law was still in effect, which had some rules in the case of inter-tribal marriages. The intention to marry was to be advertised six months ahead. It was not like in America, where the pastor would say, “Those who object should speak up or forever hold ...etc.” The reason for these rules for inter-tribal marriages was that, in some events, it could cause some serious inter-tribal fights. It did happen in the case of my younger brother who wanted to marry a girl from the *Batak* tribe of central Sumatra. However, that is another story.

During the first part of the war we had no school as the Japanese interned most of the Dutch teachers. We were not allowed to speak Dutch anymore, but my mother tried to teach us Dutch at home. And for a while, my Mom was followed by one of the aunts who was trying to teach us English. But we were too young to get the hang of it. So, eventually I was put into a Chinese school to simply keep me off the street and out of mischief.

Horrors! The Chinese teachers were mean and the language was more horrible than any other language I knew. It was simply memorizing all the characters. I could never understand the singsong way in which we had to recite the lesson. Later I finally understood about the tones, and that singing was the only way to get the tones right. I must admit that I made very slow progress. First, I had to learn tones and singing was not quite my best talent, and then it was memorizing these boxy scribbles. However, I now wish I remembered them as it would have come in handy during my travels in Southeast Asia, the Golden Triangle and China in recent years.

But the Chinese teachers had a way for a student to learn very fast. You would get dictation every day, and for every mistake the teacher would use a ruler on our hands. That hurt and I assure you that it was a great persuader to learn fast. It is amazing that until today I still remember the first lesson in Chinese. It went like this:

<i>Khai men tjien san</i>	Open door see mountain,
<i>San san yu su</i>	On mountain is tree,
<i>Su san yu niauw</i>	On tree is bird.

During the Japanese occupation it was all about discipline and the Chinese teachers were very much adaptable to this regimen, which they transferred on to us. There was another characteristic about these teachers. We were children from the Chinese elite before the war and the Chinese teachers were usually first or second generation Chinese trying to climb the social-economic ladder. Suddenly they were in the position to impress their will on the spoiled brats of the elite, and they made sure that we were now the minority, and that

the good times were gone. There was so much a feeling of Asia for the Asians. We were considered brown Dutchmen. But I never understood why the Chinese were allowed to run around free since a major war was taking place in China. My Dutch teachers were all put away in concentration camps. These camps were the invention of Lord Baden Powell, the father of the Boy Scouts, when he was a British General in South Africa during the Boer war, where they used the system to break the back and heart of the Boers.

My first Chinese teacher, I remember, was very arrogant. We had to learn everything about China. He was also our gym teacher. Well, he sure let us work the rounds. I never liked this guy even though he was in a way a good-looking fellow, especially for a Chinese.

The day would begin with the singing of the Japanese anthem, starting with *Kimigayo-owa*, etc. We had to raise the Japanese flag while singing this song. Then it was morning gymnastics or calisthenics. It was: *it, ni, sam si*, etc. The counting was in Japanese. I guess it kept us healthy. Then we all stood in a row before we filed into our classroom.

From that time I had another friend whom I have been trying to reach since he moved away at the end of the war. His name was Kam Yew Kian. We were real buddies. He originally came from Penang, which was a British colony. He spoke English which I admired very much. He and I had our hair cut short, or literally bald. My mother could only use the clippers to cut all the hair off, which she did once a fortnight. She would sit me naked on a stool, and then I would take a shower afterwards. She proceeded to shave all my hair off. For several years I walked around with short or no

hair at all. After the war Yew Kian moved away, but we had one or two letters, which I wrote in Chinese and he wrote back in English and told me that he had started to forget his Chinese, and then nothing anymore. I wish I could still meet him and I tried telephone books in Singapore and Penang when I was visiting those places. Who knows where he ended up?

The good part of going to school then was that we had to walk. It was always an adventure. We would wander away from the main road, take small alleys, and explore the area between school and home. We would play games and it was a lot of fun. I thought that kids who were picked up by cars or bus were very unlucky as they did not enjoy the adventure we free-roaming kids had. We usually took different routes or even went into unknown little streets. So, during that time we saw many things along the route.

After the war we moved to Batavia or Jakarta and I went back into the Dutch educational system. This was an accelerated school, where you covered two grades in one year, each grade lasting 6 months. It was a more rapid and concise version to bring students up to their appropriate level. It was like play catch up, but I still lost two years because they stopped after two years just before I could get back to my original grade. I made four years in two, but one more year and I would have managed six year in three. From then on I was always trying to get to where I should be.

I eventually graduated and took my entrance exam for high-school. I made it, albeit two grades behind people of the same age, who had managed to enter the accelerated system one year before me. Never mind, I had a great time in school.

Chapter 15

The Famine

The end of the world war was terrible, because of the famine and the revolutionary war that followed. Most of the food supply had been requisitioned by the Japanese army and the country was left with barely enough food for the people to eat. There were many people going through garbage cans looking for bits of edible things. Many of them suffered *beri-beri* or vitamin b deficiency. We could see the symptoms of swollen legs and undernourished bodies. There were beggars everywhere and people dying in the streets.

My father had anticipated this famine and stockpiled anything that was edible. He bought up as much rice as was available for our whole ex-plantation worker community. Here the diamonds of my mother came in handy to provide the cash needed. All the workers were mobilized to cultivate every bare patch of estate land. Rice could not be grown on the dry ground of the estate, but cassava, sweet potatoes and manioc could provide the additional carbohydrates in case the rice supply dried up and ran out as it did at one point.

Then the time came for him to start feeding his workers and their families. Most of the estates had been abandoned by the owners, who had left for the cities. But my father felt obligated to take care of his people. He was a very responsible "feudal" lord. He gathered them together one morning. The people sat on the floor of the empty factory. Over a hundred people streamed into the abandoned factory. My father sat, by tradition, on his high chair from where he used to make judgment on the petty cases he was delegated to take care of. This time he explained to all the people gathered there, the workers and their families that he had set up a communal kitchen to feed all the people who belonged to the tea factory. The food supply was just going to be enough for all the tea factory people, our family included, but there was not going to be enough to feed all the people who had come and joined us from the outside villages. There were no exceptions. He reiterated that he might not even have enough to feed the workers and their families, let alone those who came from other villages. These outsiders could not be helped, if the community as a whole was to survive. So, in essence he excluded the old parents of the workers from participating in the communal kitchen. It was a very cruel decision, but in the end my father's judgement proved to be right, because the supplies dwindled dangerously low, and eventually he had to substitute rice and the other staples with almost inedible substances, like saw dust, just to fill our stomachs and alleviate the hunger pains.

Even with the large gardens and the preparations for growing food, we were barely managing. The people were organized into groups. A group of elderly women worked in

the kitchen, and the younger ones and the children were sent into the fallow fields to look for edible plants to supplement the vegetables from the gardens. The women went out in the field and taught the children to gather edible leaves, to learn which plants we could eat and which were poisonous. They came back with piles of leaves, which before nobody had cared to eat. All of us kids also went into the field. Of course, the first few days it was fun, but then it became boring. But the women kept us gathering. It is interesting that when times are bad, people seem to remember what can be eaten and what cannot. However, it is customary among the Sudanese, people living in West Java, to eat a lot of raw leaves with the meals. Usually a big platter of different greens will be the center piece of the table even during normal times.

The communal kitchen was set up in such a way that all the food had to be consumed in the eating area, and could not be taken out to supply the people left behind without food, as there was not enough food to supply the workers and their extended families. I heard that many of the elders did die. But the people never blamed my father for the firm rules, because they saw the food supply slowly dwindling and the children lose weight. They all said that it was God's Will – *Insiyah Allah*. In the end my father did rescue the community and they survived. I think that painful decision was the one that turned his hair white overnight.

Rice was the main staple for the people in Java, while sweet potato and cassava were not. So, when the rice supply was getting exhausted my father forced people to eat these roots. He had the roots cut into small cubes to resemble rice grains and mixed them with the rice. He told everyone that

they had to eat all the food, and not to try to separate the different type of staples and leave the bad tasting ones uneaten. It tasted terrible, but the worse came when there was only a little rice, and no sweet potatoes or cassava left. He tested the different concoctions as he had once tested tea for export, and selected the ones which gave us nourishment, even though they tasted terrible. But we could not buy food anymore. There was nothing available, so either we tried to survive on this or perish. My father found that the best palatable food substitute left was the core of the palm tree. Those trees were cut down to make sago flour, but the brown waste was saved and mixed with the little rice we had left. It was horrible and we had trouble swallowing the concoction. But he said that eat we must until the new harvest brought relief. The farmers were the only people slightly better off.

Animals were slaughtered and every bit was carefully saved to provide the stock for vegetable soup. The blood was collected and made into cakes to provide protein. Nothing was wasted. Any living being, frogs, rodents and insects in the field were caught and cooked.

But the workers stoically believed in my father. The men toiled the land and, the women gathered the dwindling plants in the abandoned fields. The people in the kitchen carefully mixed the little rice we had with the terrible tasting palm tree sawdust.

For buying all these supplies it was my mother's bracelet again. She would dislodge a stone from her bracelet, one at a time, and use it as currency. My grandfather and my grandmother could never have foreseen that several hundred people were saved from famine because of his gift

to my grandmother and her further gift to my mother. My mother sometimes mumbled about my father being so generous with her jewelry. But even the precious stones could not buy food anymore when the end came, as there was none to be had.

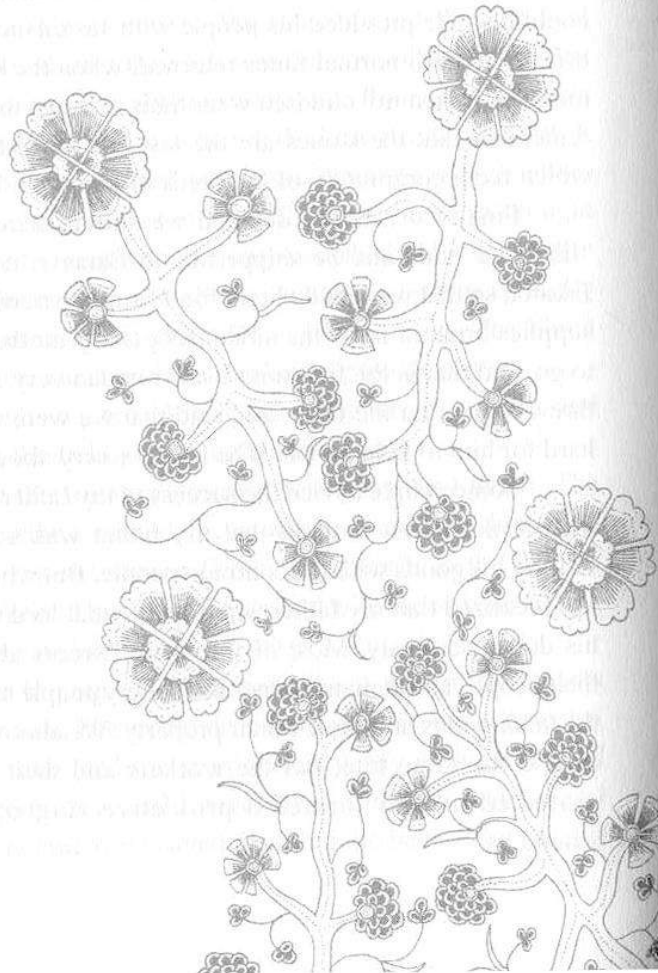
Eventually when some more supplies arrived from some clandestine sources, my mother's precious stones came in handy once again and Dad went out to find as much as he could buy. He provided his people with sustenance to carry them over until normal times returned, when the new crops matured. When my children wear their earrings they should remember that the stones are the last left of all the stones which fed a community of hundreds of people.

Finally my father decided we should leave for the "liberated" side and he shipped us to Batavia, now called Jakarta, so that we could obtain food from the newly arrived supplies brought in by the allied troops. My mother refused to go, and that is the first time I saw my dad very angry. He threw a glass on the floor, and said that we were making it hard for him to help people if he had to worry about us also.

Some people envied the success of my father in saving his people. I first thought that my father was a socialist, sharing his goods with the common people. But when I grew up, I realized that my father was a real feudal lord who took his duties seriously. Most of the estate owners abandoned their people, and at many estates the hungry people massacred the landowners and looted their property. We almost did not escape the same fate, but the workers and their families protected us and formed a protective ring of people around us.

Whatever we had was loaded into two train wagons and shipped to the capital city. We took refuge at my uncle's, my mother brother's residence, where we stayed until my father joined us there and we got housing allocated.

A chapter of colonial history had ended.

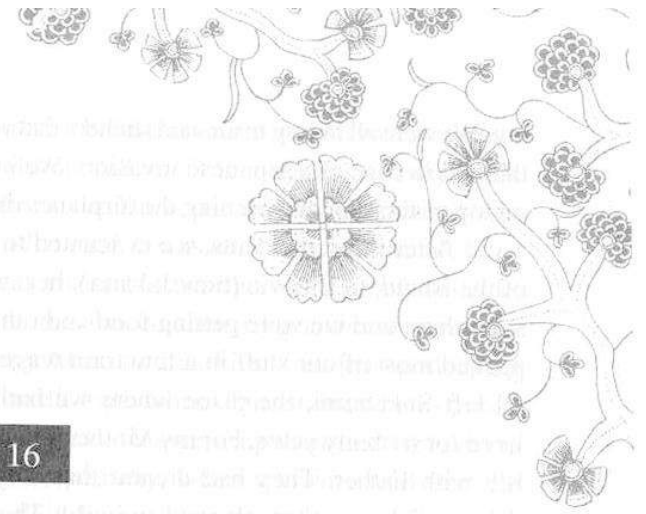


Chapter 16

After the war

The war ended and the Dutch came back, but the revolutionary war had started. It was a time of great turmoil and a time of anarchy and looting. The only thing that helped us was the kindness that my father had genuinely extended to our native workers and the villagers. So, when we were threatened by looters, these people formed a chain around us and protected us. I remember hanging on to my mother's sarong while my brother was being taken away, accused of being a spy for the Dutch. He was only fourteen years old. Somehow my father managed to have him rescued.

The British Indian and Ghurka troops were the first to travel through our town, as we lived on the main trunk road, connecting the island of Java from east to west. The convoys of troops were continuously harassed by Indonesian freedom fighters. There was a lot of shooting. We even saw a dive bomber strafing the barricades of the fighters, after which they fanned



out. We were all hiding in air-raid shelters that were built before the war in case of a Japanese invasion. We kids were sitting on top of the shelter watching the airplanes dropping bombs.

After these incidents, we evacuated to the Dutch side of the island, to Batavia (now Jakarta), because it was much safer there and we were getting food and other supplies. We packed most of our stuff in a few train wagons and then we all left Sukabumi, the place where we had grown up and lived for so many years. For my Mother it was all her married life with Father. They had dreamt that they would live in their own house they planned to build. The pile of rusting hardware they had bought before the war was all that remained of their dream. In the end they gave the land away. As I mentioned before the land did not go to people who rightfully deserved it, the people who had taken care of the land for us during all those years of turmoil—the driver of the horse cart and his family—I think it was eventually given to some people who manipulated my father in the end. My father did not evacuate with us. He stood forlorn on the railway platform waving good bye to us and we were not sure that we would ever see him alive again.

In the mean time my mother took charge. She always took charge, because that was the duty of a planter's wife. She would look after everybody at the estate, whether the family or her extended family, namely the workers and their spouses and children. She was the one who administered the cough syrup, the malaria pills, and even first aid when there was an accident. She was like her mother, who always made us bottles of medicine and sent them to us. One was for coughs and others were for sore throats.

As I mentioned before after we moved to Batavia we stayed with the eldest brother of my mother in a fancy house in a fancy neighborhood. The house was a white painted two-story villa with a flat roof. It was very large and we all fitted in there. There was my uncle's family, consisting of my uncle, aunt, two cousins, and a niece; then my grandmother and my aunt; and then my Mom and us kids. I ended up sleeping with my mother on the top landing of the stairs, which opened onto the flat roof. It was a bit creepy up there and I refused to go to sleep alone especially, when we were told that the previous occupant of the house was a Japanese officer who had committed suicide or *seppuku*. I was always afraid to go up there alone. The house was on a cul de sac and we had to go round and round to get out to the main street. I always wondered how my uncle was able to secure such a fancy house in such a classy neighborhood. I was told by my cousin that they had lived somewhere else and had been evicted. Thus my uncle went to the housing authority. He met an American officer, who was the liaison officer on duty and, since my uncle was an officer in the Dutch East Indian Army, the US officer told him to get in the jeep and they went around and found a house which had been occupied by a Japanese officer. The American asked my uncle if he liked the house, and so my uncle got the house.

My mother went around to see the officials to get our ration cards, which were given out by the Dutch authorities, so that we could get free food. I had made a little cart with wheels, which turned out to be very handy. A couple times a week we went to the distribution halls and got our supplies, which consisted of canned food and some loaves of fresh

bread, which had not been available during the war period since flour was scarce. We liked the cheese and the peaches the most. I would put everything on my cart, pull it behind me, and follow my mother home. There was also jam, sardines and corned beef. Most of the supplies came from Australia. It was something so new to us, and when we opened the food cans I would save all those colorful labels. I was so proud of them. This went on for several months or even a year until things stabilized. My dad was still in Sukabumi at that stage, and he joined us only later. My mother set out to get us organized with the help of her brother, with whom we stayed until we got our own place to live. That did not take place until my father joined us, so that we qualified as a family and were assigned a place.

After we lived apart for several months my father finally joined us. He had made a wise decision. He left the group of Chinese merchants who he had stayed behind for to help, but who would not listen to his advise and in the end blamed him when they got into trouble. After my father left the Chinese section of town was looted and burned down.

He then tried to get a house assigned to us. The first one was so big that he traded it for a smaller one, which we could better afford to maintain. The first house was a beautiful mansion in the plush *Tjikini* neighborhood. It had a very large garden with many mango trees. We were there long enough to harvest the fruit. Whoever planted the trees was very selective and put many varieties in the garden.

The house he traded for was smaller, with hardly any yard at all in a less than desirable neighborhood of small houses. It was a very long house with windows on one side

only. The other side was just a windowless wall against a wet alley, and it had some air vents up high. It was not as nice a house, because the rooms were dark and the walls were always moist. This house was really crowded. It had three bedrooms in a row, from the front to the back. One was for my parents, another one for the kids, and then one for my grandmother and my aunt. As there were too many kids I first temporarily slept with my aunt in a large four poster-bed. Later I think my sister was moved to this room after my grandmother passed away and got her own bed. I remember the passing of my grandmother, because somehow I was the only grandchild whom my grandmother asked for. I was very fond of her and often talked to her, although she did not speak Dutch. She was such a lovely lady. I shared the middle room with my two brothers. There was very little space beyond the beds and the cabinets. We each had only one or two shelves for our clothing, but we hardly had any clothing. To do my homework I ended up with an old dresser of my mother's as a desk, but when it rained I could not work, because it was in the hallway, which was open to the outside. I had made a little nest under that dresser with cardboard sides and I would hide myself there to be alone. Later I managed to build something like a tree house between our house and the neighbor's.

There was a small room where a cousin, Giok An, lived for a while and then another cousin, Ong Sek, replaced him. Next to that was the kitchen, and behind that were the bathrooms, then the servant quarters about which I do not remember much. I do know that there was a place in the corner where two motorcycles were stored. One was owned

by my uncle Kang, a fisherman with whose boats we often went picknicking on the islands in the Bay of Batavia.

The other motorcycle had rather vague ownership and my brother and I decided to confiscate it as our own. We cleaned it up, got some gasoline, and filled the tank, which had been empty several years. We were able to kick start it and we were surprised when the motor actually ran. So my brother tried it out. I needed a driver's license. My uncle Ating Natadikusumah, was the Police Commissioner of the city of Batavia. After I talked to him, he sent his assistant to bring me to the test area and told them to test me and to issue me a driver's license. I did OK, but was not outstanding. I am not sure whether I deserved to have the license or whether it was in deference to my uncle that I was given my license. But so far I have not had any accident except being rammed by a *Betja*, or tricycle.

I rode that motorcycle for a few years. My brother found the motorcycle too dilapidated and rusted to ride it. I painted it green and was proud of it. It was not the greatest, but it was free. My brother did not like the motorcycle as it looked like a piece of junk, which it was. It was a British made Excelsior, with the shift gear sticking through the middle of the gas tank. It was very reliable, always started and hardly used any gas at all. The only problem was the front shock absorbers, which always ended up rattling. I kept fixing them, and they would work for a while, but then started to rattle again. Once I broke the gear cover, but my cousin had a new one cast, and it kept going. Until now I still do not know whose motorcycle it was and I rode it without having any ownership papers. One of my duties was to pick up my sister

from her ballet lessons. One rainy day I slipped with my sister on the back and she fell with the motorcycle in a puddle of water.

She sure was mad at me and promised never to go home with me again. But I was the only one who faithfully picked her up, because my brother had many other activities.

I even made a long trip up the mountains with that dilapidated vehicle. I had to stop a few times to let the engine cool down. I was also rammed by the "*betja*" or tricycle, and the scars on my right leg are the only sign left from that accident. One time I gave one of my high school friends, Inge Rosenow, a ride which she would never forget. She told people that I was the wildest rider and that she would never go with me again and sit behind me again. Even though that motor cycle was so old and rattling, it was a status symbol, because it was one up on the bicycle. Then other kids with rich fathers got better and newer motor bikes, so in the end I was back at the bottom of the pile.

The big thing was that my father somehow got a car. We were still a bit unclear about what my father did to earn money, because our plantation was closed and pretty much abandoned. Some of his friends managed to get him work, because he was a very smart economist. He gradually made it up the ladder, but he was not someone who could move in the fast lane. He managed to provide us with a comfortable life, but we were never as rich as our relatives. He could never really apply his knowledge to enrich himself. He would preach to me not to get into a profession. He said that in a profession you can only sell yourself once. Instead you must find a commodity to sell a million times. I did not follow his

advice and so I am comfortable, but not rich, just like he was. I guess I followed in his footsteps.

After a few years my father managed to get a better house assigned to us, along the canal. Our side of the street was *Jalan* (street) *Madura* and across the canal it was *jalan Gresik*. It was located in the plush area of what the Dutch then called "*Weltevreden*". It was in a newly built residential area where the Dutch had moved to and away from the vermin-infested downtown or "*Kota*". This house was well built with excellent masonry and good teak timber. It had three bedrooms, all interconnected, and each had a wash basin. There was a bathroom attached to the last room, which was my parents'. Later my parents had a bathroom built for the rest of us, outside, along the row of rooms of the annex, following the typical Dutch design called the "pavilion," often used to house married children. This is the annex to the house, which consisted of the garage in front, the kitchen, storage and maid's quarters. They had their own bedroom and bathrooms further down the property and ours used the well water directly from a well on the property. As the municipal water was irregular, my father had a hand pump installed to raise the well water to a tank and we used it for washing, showering and flushing the toilets. It was the kids' duty to make sure that there was enough water in the two water tanks. Then there was a veranda in the front, followed by the salon where we received guests, then a dining room, and after that the family room, where we actually had our meals.

This house at first did not bring us much happiness. When the new Government was installed, our house was confiscated by a new Member of Parliament. It took a lot of

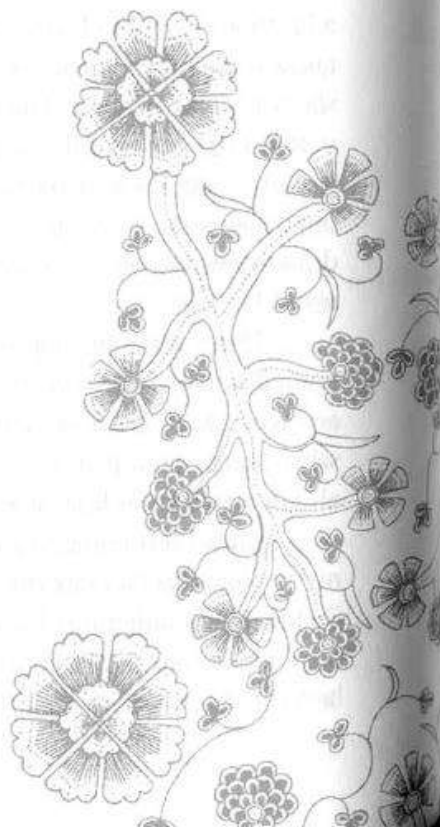
work and agony to get it back. We had to vacate it on very short notice and we could only take our most needed possessions with us. The rest we had to leave behind. I never knew whether the temporary tenants stole anything.

In the mean time we had to live with another cousin, and we had to sleep on the floor for all the months we were evicted. Eventually we got our house back and life went on, in steady pace, from then on. It was a very comfortable house, even though it was crowded again. We boys stayed in the front room, while my sister and my aunt stayed in the middle room. But around this time my aunt Non or A-ie got into hot water with my father, and he finally asked her to leave. I was a bit shocked and sad. However, my aunt was a bit eccentric and always walked around in castaway clothing, even though she was richer than all of us together. Well, she found a place with her old aunt, Tan Tjoen Lee, about whose houses I wrote earlier in the book. However, she never trusted the water there and came to our place every day to fill a container of drinking water. She was obsessively clean. I will tell more about her later.

These were our important years when we were going to high school. We went on the bike to the school every day and we had our fun and encounters. My happiest years were when we lived in that house. I had a lot of friends until we all graduated from high school and parted ways.

After I left home to study in the States, I learned that my younger brother convinced my father to sell this house. Suddenly my father lost his major asset and became a bit of a wanderer. He kept trying to help my older brother, who had very little luck in his profession as a planter. My father

passed away in Sukabumi after suffering from a stroke. Somehow it is very sad that he ran full circle, and that in the end his children were not able to help him have a better life. Perhaps my sister and I should have brought both my mother and my father to the States, so that they would have had a good life together, but at that time both Ling and I did not have the capability to help. In the end my mother came to stay with my sister, and had a good life.

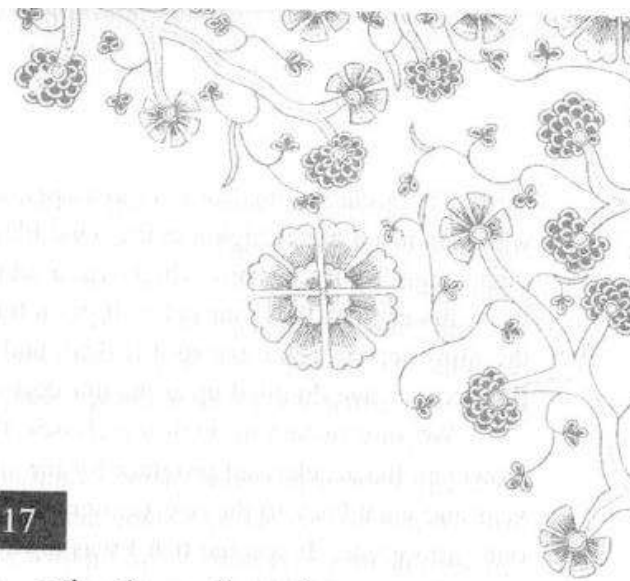


Chapter 17

The Dutch Schools and Girls

After we moved to Batavia, I went back into the Dutch educational system. As I mentioned before, this was an accelerated school, whereby you did two grades per year instead of one. Many people went to school as soon as the Dutch returned to the capital city. But we were stuck in the hinterland and were a year late in re-starting. I was eleven years when I returned to the Dutch school.

The first emergency classes were held in empty houses, which had been used by the occupying Japanese forces to intern the Dutch women and children. It was called the *Tjideng* Concentration Camp for Women and Children. The houses were slowly rehabilitated and painted. At the same time bamboo school structures were built in an open field nearby. These had *atap* or coconut leaf roofs, and the structures were built of simple bamboo lashed together, while the walls were bamboo matting and the floors were tamped



earth. These classrooms were almost open air, because one wall was just a meter high and the wind blew in freely. But then we got a corner room, which was a bit stuffy and dark; the walls enclosed all four sides. It got a bit muddy during the rainy season when the roof leaked, and when the floor flooded, we just doubled up at the dry desks.

We sure rushed through the classes, two in one year. However, the accelerated program for me stopped after one year and went back to the one-year crawl. So I gained only one extra grade.. It seemed that I was always playing catch up and sitting with kids a year younger.

We lived very close to the neighborhood school and our main means of transport in the beginning was walking. Then later it became the bicycle. We would zoom in and out the street. Those were great years. People never realize how great these vehicles are; and they gave us a lot of freedom. We rode back and forth to school, but on weekends some of us would make some distant trips to the beach or other places. Later we rode the bicycles on excursions. It was real fun and exciting.

My first new teacher was an overweight lady who was a tough teacher, but very good in getting us going. The next teacher was a very fashionable and beautiful young teacher. I guess she was my first crush. We all had our favorite girl or even teacher. It was true that, as in some stories, kids would bring apples for their favorite teacher. I had some girls I admired, but I was too busy with all kinds of boys' activities for girls to be part of my immediate awareness. But somehow I was catching up on admiring girls.

But I must hardly have been out of grade school, about twelve years old — when I thought I fell in love with a girl.

At Christmas, when we gave presents to each other, this one girl got two in exchange for one. There were some oohs and aahs! Of course, it was a secret expression of puppy love. Everybody knew that someone was in love with her, but nobody knew it was me, because as I said, I was shy and nondescript and probably hid behind a pole when she opened my present.

Later on, in high school, there was another girl, Jane with gray-blue eyes that could twinkle very naughtily. She was part of a very wild group and was very good at dancing. I somehow got into the group. Why, I could never understand, because I sort of participated at the edge of the circle, not really in the group though I always wished I was. I was very shy and never tried to dance with anybody, although I never stopped hoping that someday I might bring up the courage to dance with her. So, I stood on the side as indistinct as possible and perhaps even better, I was hidden in the shadows. I must have looked like a little puppy dog in love, but then again that was probably not the case, because I was probably even too shy to show that. I eventually managed to attract a bit of her attention.

The big thing at that age was to take someone home on the bicycle. In America, boys impressed girls by having Dad's car to drive them home or drive to a school event or something like that. That is a thing you see in the movies and it is true. But in our humble primitive country, riding on the bicycle beside a girl was a great achievement. I did not usually take her home, because she was too popular and I was too shy. But I managed to take her home once in a while, when her regular crowd was not around. I was just honored by default.

I would not give up. I tempted her with a sailing trip. Of course, I did not dare to do it alone, but used someone else as a cover. She did come with me on one trip and it was fun, but those were just days when we were young and innocent. That was like taking a girl out in Father's car. Often this started with some other boys as chaperones, because the admirer did not have the courage to do it alone. As a matter of fact going unchaperoned was unheard of where we came from. I also tried to take pictures of her. It was just another attempt to attract her. I was not a good photographer and the pictures came out rather fuzzy.

Well, my efforts were all superfluous. At the end of the year her family returned to the fatherland, Holland. I remember seeing her off in a sailboat. I guess she was waving at us from the deck of an ocean liner. I think it was the ocean liner *Oranje*, but it could have been the *Willem Ruys*. Anyhow, she became smaller and smaller and finally disappeared completely. Out of my life, or so I thought...

For some reason or another we kept up a correspondence. It went on for a while, although I was sending most of the letters while I continued with my education. She later had a serious illness, but all through the years we exchanged cards and I visited her when she became an invalid. I was always faithful and kept writing a lot of letters to many of my friends. One of my friends was Pim Bangert, with whom I went to kindergarten. I kept writing to him until he died of cancer—I got the last letter from his son, Freekje.

I remained shy for the longest time—until I got into the third grade high school. Actually, there were quite a few



Lucy and Roald the best school dancers

kids who talked to me, and if you talk to me you find that I can be very funny. I was quite a character I was told. I told a lot of jokes and still do, but some people do not appreciate my jokes.

"When I was in fourth grade, at the awkward age of 20, one of my close friends was a girl named Lucy." She sat in front of me. She and I were competing to be smartest in the class. I guess we were neck and neck, but one quiet little girl beat the both of us. Her name was Hilly, and she had a sister in the same class. Later she went on to the University to become an engineer. I used to send jokes to the front where Lucy sat, and Lucy would send me jokes back. She was a friend; this was not even puppy love. We thought of each other as buddies and we shared some secrets. We were real friends. She went out with Roald and we always respected each other's relationships. She always thought that I would marry Jane, the girl we talked about. She was always trying to get me to participate in activities, but I was really shy. Lucy was the wildest of us all. She was about the best dancer there was. Roald and she were great dancers, but she and Ronny, Roald's best friend, were the absolute best. She had great parties at her house. These were what you called in those days, real fun high school parties. We ate, drank *stroop* (flavored sugar water), and danced around the record player.

I never took any dance lessons, and because I was shy I never took the opportunity to get onto the dance floor. I am still that way and you won't get me on a dance floor where there are many people doing fancy dancing. If everybody was just jumping around I would do the same. Thus, dancing was not for me. I was scared to death to be seen dancing.



During high school parties, I was usually the one taking care of the record player, changing the records. That was a safe place, because I could hide behind the piano, where the record player was, next to the electrical outlet in a little dark corner.

One day Lucy decided it was time that I got out on the floor. She realized that I was really shy, except when talking to her. So, at one of the parties she sneaked into my safe haven and dragged me out. Or tried to, because I was stuck in that corner like an octopus with its arms around each piece of furniture resisting to be extracted. In the end, it took four girls to drag me out of my corner. I was then tossed around from one girl to the other, each of them trying to teach me how to dance. I was beet red and sweating profusely. The minute I was let loose, when the next girl was not fast enough to grab me, I managed to scoot out of their hands and disappear behind the piano again.

I am not sure what Lucy thought of me, but she made it a project to get me out of the little dark corner where I hid. She knew that I was bashful, except with her when I could be free and funny. Lucy then came up with a brilliant idea to get me over my shyness. That was the day I changed. It started with Lucy's crazy idea that I should help Fred Bangert as assistant master of ceremonies. Actually, they wanted me to present a "risquE" poem, about a *jonkheer*, (young gentleman) and a *jonkvrouw* (young lady) who were courting each other. I became a class project, and everybody got into the act and coached me over my shyness. I think the most risquE thing was the fact that the *jonkvrouw* gave the *jonkheer* a kiss. With Lucy I could manage and joke around, but in public I thought it would be a disaster. When I was in first grade

I was asked to recite an English lesson in front of the class. I broke out crying out of fear or embarrassment, and the teacher had to send me back to my seat. Oh, how awkward that was.

The night of the show the whole class sat in the front row. My class mate told me that I should not look at other people, but just look at them. They would encourage me and clap in their hands, smile and cheer me up. The rest of the hall was put in dim light so that I would not see any other faces. When it was my turn, I was nervous but it turned out to be a spectacular success. I was not sure whether Miss Pilon, our director, liked it, but I lost my fear and became a terror. After that, I made for the dance floor without fighting off the girls.

So, the rest of the time in high school was more eventful. My popularity rating went up. The first I really dated was Olly, who was Jane's friend. I even took her home on the bike. My courage went up. I was still too shy to ask a girl, but when the girl asked me I was fine. Then the trouble started. Olly became the chairperson of the CMS school association in the fourth grade and I the editor of the CMS *bode*, the newsletter. We got into some good fights. I was jealous and pretty nasty and used my newspaper to blacken Olly. I hope she has forgiven me. It was so bad that we were called in by Miss Pilon, the director of the high school, and were told to stop acting like kids. That was the end of the row and in the end we became really good friends. She is now my "sister," a second sister whom my father adopted.

Later I managed to ride home with another girl also named Jane. I dated her much longer than I did the others. We were almost going steady. But come to think about it.

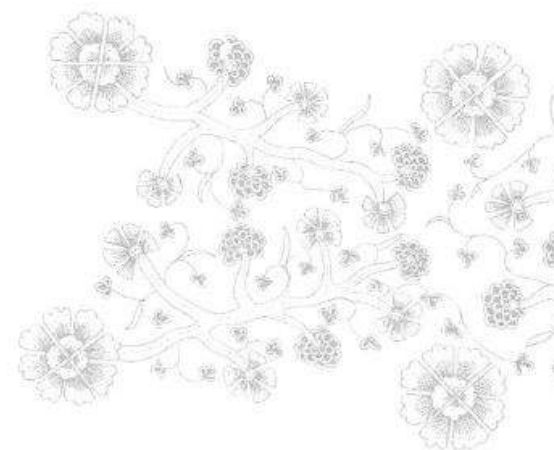


The graduating high school class 1955.

The relationship was not quite sanctioned by her parents, so she broke off with me. She became a classmate of my sister. But time healed all and at the end of that year I graduated and we went our separate ways. I went to the University. Through my sister I stayed in touch with her.

Lucy started calling me the "Sultan," because it seemed that the ugly duckling always managed to rope an innocent girl. So Lucy was the Sultan's first wife and so when she got married to Oskar I jokingly sent her a card with a "*surat pisah*" or divorce papers, so that she could officially get married.

Now a small group of students from high school still get together during class reunions. We have aged and we have changed, and time has shaped our lives in different ways, but the feeling of friendship we still have for each other is a priceless commodity instilled in us students accidentally thrown together at the CMS high school after the war.



Chapter 18

Olly, My Sister

Olly and I went to high school together. We had our fights and our great friendship, but somehow we stayed in touch after school. Olly got married to Yogi and lived in Bandung, where I was at the University. I ended up visiting them a lot as I was asked to “rescue” and court Yogi’s sister who was being pursued by an undesirable little man. Then while I was studying in the States Olly and Yogi spent several years in both London and Manila, where Yogi was military attach . We got back to Indonesia at about the same time.

That was about the time when my younger brother eloped with a daughter of a rich Batak businessman. Since I had left for the States Olly got involved in resolving the conflict which arose because of this intertribal marriage. She often came to the house when problems with the future in-laws of my younger brother erupted. After I went back to the States to continue my studies, she became part of the family

Olly and Ricky her oldest son.



and took care of my father's problems and won his heart.

One afternoon, Olly came to the house at Jalan Madura 26, but did not see my Pap, although the car was parked at the side of the house. He must be at home she thought, and asked Mam where he was. Mam said that he was resting as he was feeling tired. Olly went into the room and sat in front of the bed. Olly asked him what was wrong. He answered, "Olly, wait a minute, I cannot talk right now, I need to rest a bit."

Olly was worried and remain seated until he started talking. He suddenly said, "**From this evening onward you are my daughter.**" Olly just smiled, because she had heard him say this before, and she did not quite realize the meaning of being a foster child. Maybe Dad was not feeling well, because he was worried about the situation with Han, his youngest son.

Olly remembers coming along when our Pap and Mam went to see Han's future in-laws to ask for the hand of Sjoelie, their daughter. One of the sons of my father's younger brother came along as well. They went to the house of the Pangabeans family at Jalan Tungku Umar. After they were seated, the Thung family was greeted with a speech of the host, and was formally asked the purpose of the visit. The meeting was to negotiate the price of the dowry. The Pangabeans asked for about 20,000 rupiah, after which Pap turned around to Olly and agreed with a counter offer, which was accepted.

The young couple got married and they moved into our family home. It became crowded. For some unexplainable reason, the house at Jalan Madura was sold and the family moved to Lembang in the mountains, where they were planning to start a vegetable business. Han, and Sjoelie, and

their first born joined them, and eventually got their own house. Pho, my older brother, who lost his job at the P and T Lands, which was a rubber plantation on the other side of the volcano, also joined them with his family. And they started a vegetable garden, which turned out to be unsuccessful.

They sold the land in the mountains and then moved back to Sukabumi, where Pap bought a house for them to live in. Olly was not very happy with this move, because she saw it as a degeneration of her foster family from Jalan Madura, a prestigious address, to Lembang in the mountains and then, to a simple house in Sukabumi. It was a downwards spiral of the fortune of the family, from ownership of a tea factory to a shack a few blocks from the original house where they used to live in style.

When our Pap went to Lembang he received a pension from the foam rubber company SUNRUB, which he had set up. But the company went bankrupt because the people left to run it lacked management skills. Oom Freddy, the youngest brother of Pap, managed the factory and Pho, our eldest brother managed the sales. The board consisted of the in-laws and family (the sisters Thung, Oom Freddy, Djoen San, Ho Biau, and Oom Kiat Koen). At that time I had come back from the United States. Pho was the manager of the SUNRUB Company in Jakarta. During the board meeting my dad asked me if I would be willing to take over the company from my brother. I declined because I did not feel comfortable removing my brother from his job and also, I did not go to school in the States to become the family business manager. The company without our father's hand went downhill and was finally sold through Robert, a cousin,

to Chinese investors from Hong Kong. However, for some reason my brother had included the huge property of my grandmother at *Sawoh Djajar* in Bogor, as part the company inventory, and the Chinese investors made a killing in the purchase of this wonderful family mansion and land.

Our Dad, or Pap as we called him had bought a garden along the main road in Sukabumi, after the collapse of the company, so that my brother Pho could do some work in agriculture again, such as growing peppers and tomatoes. Mam had her little garden in the back of the house to grow peppers and tomatoes. Pap started to raise chickens for eggs, which Mam continued successfully after he died, until she left for the States. When she visited Jakarta and passed by Olly's place, she would bring the produce from her garden and chicken eggs. Olly was very touched, because Mam brought very little, but it was the gesture that was so important to Olly. Olly was happy and sad, knowing that she had known the family during better times, but still our Mother shared the bounty of her little garden. Olly and she would chat. Mam would stress two points and said to Olly, "Some day when you are in a better financial situation, please keep in mind that money must not dominate your life, but you must be the master of your money." She said that she always remembered this advice.

Mam taught Olly how to make coffee extract—every time she walked past the coffee pot, she would pour some water into the pot. Olly still uses this method. Mam also taught Olly to make *sajur asem betawi*, a famous local soup with *ontjom*, fermented bean cake. And she taught Olly to eat *Ontjom baker*, which was roasted bean cake.

In the fall of 1965 Olly got a message that Pap was seriously ill. She and Yogi came to visit and check on Dad. He passed away a week later. Olly told Mam to hold firm. She told Olly, "I will be OK, because I have you both."

Mam then left for the States and Tante Non, our mother's eldest sister, stayed with Pho, our eldest brother, and his wife Mary. They later inherited the house as we felt that they needed the money to move to Jakarta. Tante Non is the eldest sister of my mother and I have dedicated a chapter to her alone, because she was so unique and lovable. It was Tante Non who generously financed Mam's travel. Olly visited Tante Non after Mam left. Tante Non called Olly to come up to her room in the attic. Olly for the first time realized that Tante Non had to climb a steep ladder to get to her room. Tante Non was a strong woman. Olly was surprised about the condition of her room. It was not fit for an old lady. Tante Non pointed to two pieces of furniture, consisting of a beautiful oak and rattan chair and its foot stool. She asked Olly if she wanted them. They were old and in need of repair, but Olly loved them and had them refurbished. She was very touched by this wonderful simple gift. The chair was made at Winter's famous furniture store in Windsor, England. Until today it is the most precious memory of our Tante Non, she said.

After seven years Mam came back to Indonesia, and there was a reunion at Olly's place at Djalan Tirtayasa. Mam stayed with each of the children. When it was time for her to return to the States, she was ill and had a fever. As she lay in bed, she asked Olly why she did not accept the inheritance Pap gave her. Olly said that Pho needed the money and

borrowed it. Miraculously Mam recovered and went back to the States. In 1992 she returned to Indonesia again, not knowing that it would be her last time.

On her ninetieth birthday all the children came to Oxford, Mississippi, where my Mam lived with my sister Ling. She called Olly, saying that she must come, because all the others were going to be present. Olly answered her jokingly: "Mam, Oxford is not from here to Passar Baru." She meant that it was half way round the world. Mam answered: "Try to come."

Mam passed away in 1996 and her true last trip to Indonesia was to join Pap. Ling and Mat carried her ashes to Jakarta. Mass was held. Olly said her prayers and wished Mam a good journey to Heaven. The next day they went on a boat and scattered the ashes of Mam in the Bay of Jakarta to join Pap whose ashes preceded hers.

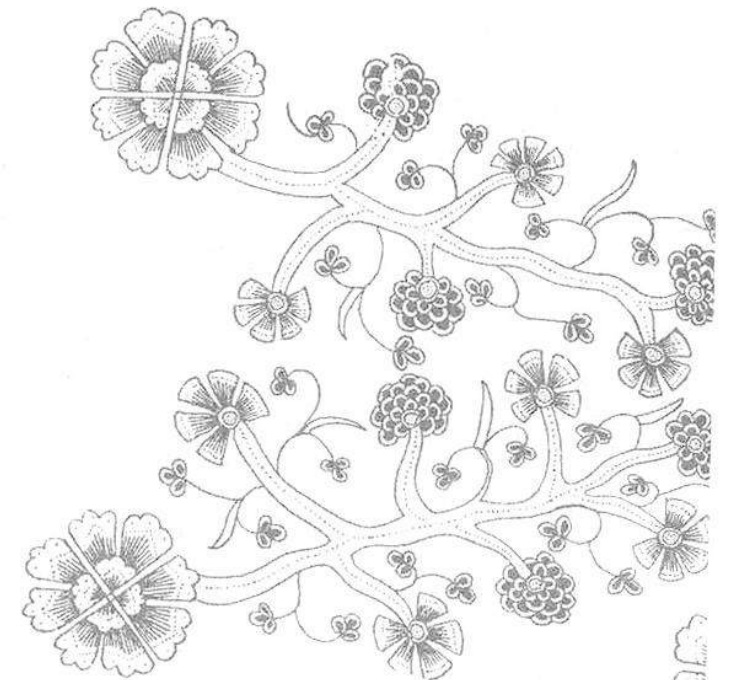
I promised her to see her soon and write her biography and show her this chapter she dictated to me as a chapter in the history of our family of which she felt a part.

On the seventh of March Olly traveled to Yogyakarta to celebrate the birthday of her granddaughter. She took the only available seat in the short Garuda Airline flight with the birthday cake on her lap. The rest of the family took the long drive by car.

Then the news broke that the Garuda flight overshot the runway in Yogyakarta and burst in flames. Ninety-five people survive, but twenty-one did not. Messages went around the world to her old school mates, and further sent on to me in the United States where we was visiting the children. Throughout the day we kept hoping against hope, but finally

the sad news reached us that she perished in the crash. Our highschool class in the Netherlands got together to pay her their last respects and a message went around through Oskar, which said: "Olly is no more!" With those words we said good bye to her.

On the tenth of March 2007 she was laid to rest and one consolation is that she is now with my father and my mother in Heaven, who love her dearly. Olly is my Dad's gift to me as sister.



My Aunt Tante Non

One person who had a great influence on me was my *tante* or aunty Non, called A-ie, or the eldest sister of my mother. I loved her as she was my best friend, although when I was young, I was scared of her. She was very stern, and when she visited us in Sukabumi, she was very strict about us going to bed on time. She did not accept us dilly-dallying. I can still see her pointing with her finger to the bedroom. She used to order us around and insisted that all the kids should be in bed before nine in the evening. The reason we were so close is that, after the war, we lived together in our small house at *Jalan Canne* 46 in the *Tjideng* district of Jakarta. She shared the big four poster bed with me. And before I fell asleep, she would tell me stories about her childhood or about my grandfather. That was when she told me that my grandfather had one of the first automobiles in the Indies. He used to take afternoon drives with the Dutch



Governor General, who lived in the big palace in Buitenzorg, but who himself did not have an automobile yet. They were buddies as my grandfather was the Major of the Chinese at that time.

I wish I could remember these stories. I remember only a few and will tell you about them later. All three sisters, including my mother, were very pretty girls and had no problems finding suitors. My aunt Non was the prettiest. She did not want to get married and, every time a gentleman came calling, she would climb out the window and hide in the garden, according to my mother.

She never changed. She was slender and petite, and always dressed simply or maybe too nonchalant. She never really cared about her clothing, which in the end caused a bit of a conflict between my father and her. She was very practical and had big pockets sown in front of her dress, and she always wore short pants under her dress, which also had big pockets sewn in front, for stashing her wallet. Sometimes she would forget that she was in public and raise her dress to reach down and retrieve her wallet.

She and I had a common interest in books. Or perhaps it was she who instilled the love of books in me. When I was young I visited my grandmother's house, where my aunt lived in the days before World War II. There was a huge cabinet full of books. It was the greatest treat when she allowed me to browse through the books. Later, many of these books reappeared in our house. There were classics like Greek and Roman Mythology, the unabridged 1001 Nights, consisting of not one, but four huge volumes. I did not realize that those fancy volumes were for adults only. There were many more

books, but many of them did not make the move to our house. Somewhere I still have a book she gave me with Dutch songs.

I remember that my aunt would explain to me pictures in the magazines from a pile in my grandfather's library. In the days after the war we sold these magazines as paper by the kilo, for wrapping peanuts. What a shame. Today they would be valuable.

My aunt, my mother and her other sister were very delicately built and very pretty. I think they inherited the delicate features from my grandmother, who even in her old age was a very pretty woman. I have a copy of photograph of her family. There were almost one hundred people. These were very popular family photos taken with one of those monstrous cameras that took wide angle photos. My grandmother was just a little girl stashed in a corner. While her sister and brothers married into money, my grandfather married for love. Later on his brother, great uncle Tjoen Lee, did a better job arranging the marriages of his nephews and nieces, when he became guardian of the family. Two of my uncles and my middle aunt Betsy married into sugar money. My mother was less fortunate. According to my aunt Betsy, my mother married below her station. Probably, by that time all the rich guys were spoken for. My mother was the youngest and my father was the only candidate left. From my father's point of view it was also not a great arrangement, because he was in love with a French girl in Paris. He was talked into returning home before he managed to complete his studies in economics at the Economic University in Rotterdam Holland, when his father died. His family promised that he could return to Holland after he got married first. In reality

that was a trap. After he got married, they suggested that he should manage a rice mill first, and after that he was transferred to a tea factory in Sukabumi, where my mother's mother came from. That is how all of us kids ended up being born in that small town. I guess he was cheated, but he never complained. Maybe that is why he seldom laughed. He was a rather serious person.

My aunt never worked in her life. She and my grandmother actually lived off their inheritance. In the beginning, they lived in the house which grandfather's brother build for them in *Buitenzorg*, which is now *Bogor*. I think it was in exchange for the family mansion, named *Gedoeng Dalam*. (Which was located away from the road.) As I wrote earlier that house was the exact replica of the houses of my great-uncles. My grandmother lived in one room and my aunt in another, while two other rooms remained empty and were assigned to other members of the family, when they came to visit. Traditionally these big houses have an annex, which we call the pavilion. These small annexes are usually attached to the main house, and relatives would stay there. This is also a security measure, my mother's younger brother and his wife lived there with them.

During the war my grandmother and aunt had to abandon the house. There was a lot of looting.

My grandmother and aunt had to escape from the house. My aunt told me that she carried her leather bag of jewelry, the one sixth of my grandmother's inheritance. While running she saw a storm drainage-hole. She conveniently dropped the bag in the hole, and continued to run. When I asked her whether she later went back to retrieve the bag of

jewels, she told me that she was so relieved to have gotten rid of them, that she never thought of attempting to recover them. Well, someone has either found the jewels, or they are still there in the dark interior of a storm drain. That is something very typical of my aunt. She was actually very rich. I know because I have the list of her blue-chip stocks and when she died she had a lot of stocks. I wonder who inherited those valuable notes

She was very generous, because when I went to college, she provided me with funds until I was able to earn my own living. She also often cashed in some gold to have money to buy candy for the kids in the street.

The process of providing me with the funds is a story in itself. She ripped a page out of a notebook, and scribbled a note to the largest bank in the Netherlands, authorizing the bank to provide me with a monthly allowance while at school. She then folded the scrap of paper and gave it to me. She explained to me where I should go and according to her recollection, that was forty years ago then, I should meet the gentlemen behind the low wooden barrier at the bank, and to hand over her note to them. I was not able to visit the Netherlands on the way to the United States, but went there later, when I was going to Spitzbergen for oil exploration work. I did exactly as she had instructed me to do, and went to this very elegant building on one of the canals in Amsterdam. It was, indeed fancy, as she described it to me. What was really amazing was her memory, as she had not been back to the Netherlands for those forty years. I hesitated at the entrance and saw the row of gentlemen behind the wooden railing at their massive wooden desks. I shyly

proceeded to the fence. One of the gentlemen got up and asked me whether he could help me. I unfolded the scrap of paper and explained to him that my aunt had told me to come here to get my allowance. I hesitantly handed him the piece of paper. He took it as if it was the most normal thing to do, and told me to sit down and wait a few minutes, while he checked the records. Sure enough he came back after five minutes. He then told me that everything was fine, and asked me how much I needed, and how much did I need immediately. I gave him my calculation and he went back to get it done. So, when he came back with my money and had set up transfer for the money to be sent to me as my monthly allowance. I apologized to him about the unconventional way my aunt handled the matter by giving me a "Vodje Papier" or scrap of paper. The man smiled and said: "Young man, if it was not a scrap of paper with your aunt's scribbles, you would not have received a single penny. We have many scraps of papers like the one you gave me, and we honor it as the only authentic communication from her. We have done this for decades and she is a fine customer."

Money did not have much value for her, although somehow she kept track of her stocks and money in the bank. I was not attentive to her business, and when I started to work, I completely forgot to sign her papers, although I faithfully executed her instruction of the disposal of her funds. Originally, I suggested to give some to my sister and brothers. I did get the first payment sent, but people were not happy with the decision of my aunt to provide my eldest brother with money to buy land, but it was her money, and she was fair and without prejudice.

The fact was that my aunt walked around like a pauper, and that was why she was evicted from our home by my father. He warned her to dress properly when he had business partners visiting him. I guess one day it became too much for him. While he was busy with his friends, my aunt paraded past them with her wet hair in a knot on top of her head, wearing patched up clothing. I have never seen my father as angry as when he chastised her, and told her she should find another place to live. That was a sad day for us. My aunt was hurt but found another home.

In the end she ended back again with my father, mother and my brother and his family when she finally moved back to Sukabumi with them. One day I got a letter from my brother in which he apologized for the little pocket money he could give our Tante Non. It was, indeed, very little. But I wrote him that she did not need any money, as she had plenty of her own. So I asked him to tell me how much she needed, because she never asked for any money. I guess I was the only one who knew her secret of her source of money then. I followed her instructions and sent my brother an allowance instead.

When she died, I told my brother to search her room and her mattress for some gold bars. I was sure that she had a hoard, on which she had lived for half a century. And sure enough they found several bars, one of which was shorter than the rest, because my aunt had used it for her latest transaction. What she did all these years, or decades when she needed money, was to go to her trusted jeweler in town and told him the amount she needed. The jeweler then weighed the bar of gold she brought with her. He put it on

the table, squinted, and chopped off a piece of gold, weighed the piece and gave her the necessary cash. What a wonderful secret that was.

My mother told me that she was not happy living in Sukabumi. That was when I asked my sister if she would be willing to give my mother a home for a while. She agreed, and I asked my aunt if I could use her money to pay for my mother's ticket to the US. Of course, that was also agreed upon. My aunt was a very sweet person and would help anybody in need. She also attracted affection from all the kids and everybody else around her, even though some people thought of her as being eccentric, which she was. As I mentioned, she often bought candy for the kids in the streets with the money I sent her. Some people thought it was a waste and tried to stop me from sending her money, but she was happy, and she had so much money anyway, and it made her happy.

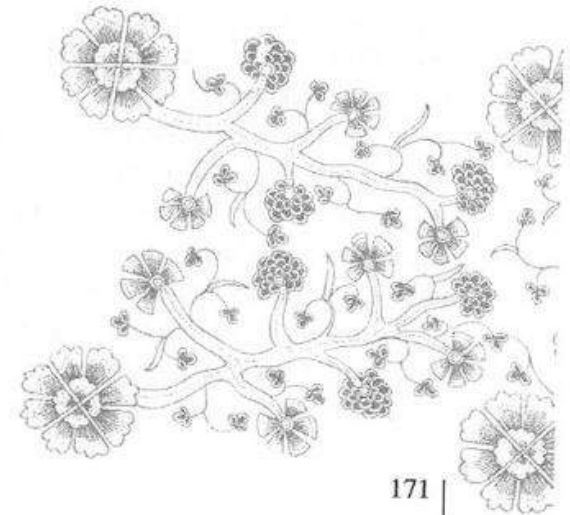
Towards the end of her life she became senile. I noticed that during the last visit to my home town, she would repeat herself and rattle about the good old colonial days. Unfortunately, she started to burn documents when she reached an advanced state of senility; My brother did not pay any attention and only managed to rescue the last card of my grandfather to his father asking for money, which I now have. I also have the first contract between my-great-great grandfather and the Dutch Government dated 1835 to grow coffee for the government, which could have been the beginning of the huge fortune. The rest of the family's history went up in flames. That was a great shame. Now we know so little about the family, as it is gone forever. At one time

she gave me a book to deliver to her eldest brother for safekeeping in the Netherlands. It was written in Chinese. It turned out to be the record of the family history, which eventually was translated by my cousin Kiem Toen.

It is really amazing what my aunt did with her time. She read, and read. She read in Dutch and in English day in and day out, and she was always knitting something, whether it was a sweater for this niece or nephew, or socks or something else.....?.

In so many ways she was one of the last true elite colonials; she always spoke Dutch and very clearly and fluently. She rarely spoke Indonesian, except when she had to communicate in town, but she always spoke Indonesian or Malay like a Dutch woman. She never sounded like a Chinese or Indonesian at all.

To me she was that wonderful small, petite woman with whom I held more conversations than with anybody else, my spirited mentor and guide.



Sea Scouts

When we were kids we used to tease the Boy Scouts. We thought that they were such Mama's boys. They had fancy tan-colored uniforms with knee high socks, a scarf around the neck, big pockets and all kinds of tags on their shirt-sleeves. The most important things were their five-foot long poles and a string of rope attached to one of those fancy leather belts. We always thought that the kids who were Boy Scouts were ninnies.

Well, then my older brother became a Boy Scout leader and I guess in the end I was dragged into joining the group. Every Saturday afternoon we congregated in an old building and we did our tricks. It turned out that we were not really such a silly bunch of kids and we learned a lot of practical things, which would continue to be helpful into our adulthood. Such things as tying knots and camping in the jungle were very handy in the end. How many times have

you used the knowledge of knots for different things?. The truth is that for every occasion there is a specific knot. Of course, most of these knots were designed for sailors, because their life depended on good knots, especially in bad weather.

I learned First Aid, and that was useful knowledge when I grew up. When I started working as a geologist in the jungle of Sumatra, it came in handy, because we were isolated and needed to help people far from doctors. I remember being assigned one afternoon as the "field doctor." We had a big box with all kinds of pills, and a rather big manual. It told me to dispense quinine pills for bad fevers, aspirin for headaches, *norit pills* or activated charcoal pills for diarrhea, and if you did not know what was wrong, then you gave calcium pills and hoped it would go away. Even today, I know that one should carry liquid ammonia for insect bites, which most people have forgotten. How many times did I get stung by a wasp or a bee, and still managed to get along without bad after effects? When I was in the jungle of Sumatra I backed into a wasps' nest, and the effect felt like someone had dropped a pail of burning coals on my back where the dozen or so yellow wasps had stung me. But a good dose of ammonia, which I carried in my first aid pouch on my belt, did the trick. At the yacht club of Jakarta there was a huge jar of the same smelly ammonia liquid with big cotton swabs because jellyfish were very common in the water. Their stings would really hurt when their tentacles became wrapped around your body. So we would dash for this jar and start swabbing the places where we were stung. We never thought for a second about how dangerous these attacks could be;

we had confidence in the ammonia cure. And without fail we would recover quickly and with no adverse effect.

One of the big Boy Scout activities was camping out. Every kid dreams about camping out under the stars. We would look forward to these camping trips, where we were tested for our different outdoor skills.

There was one problem: our manuals came from the Netherlands and some of the exercises were meant for a different environment. The most confusing was the cooking of stock bread, which meant that you strung a piece of dough around a stick and toasted it over a fire. In the Indies we eat rice. Well, anyhow it was fun. It was actually amazing how the Boy Scout leaders could invent all those games for us, but then later we found their secrets in the various manuals.

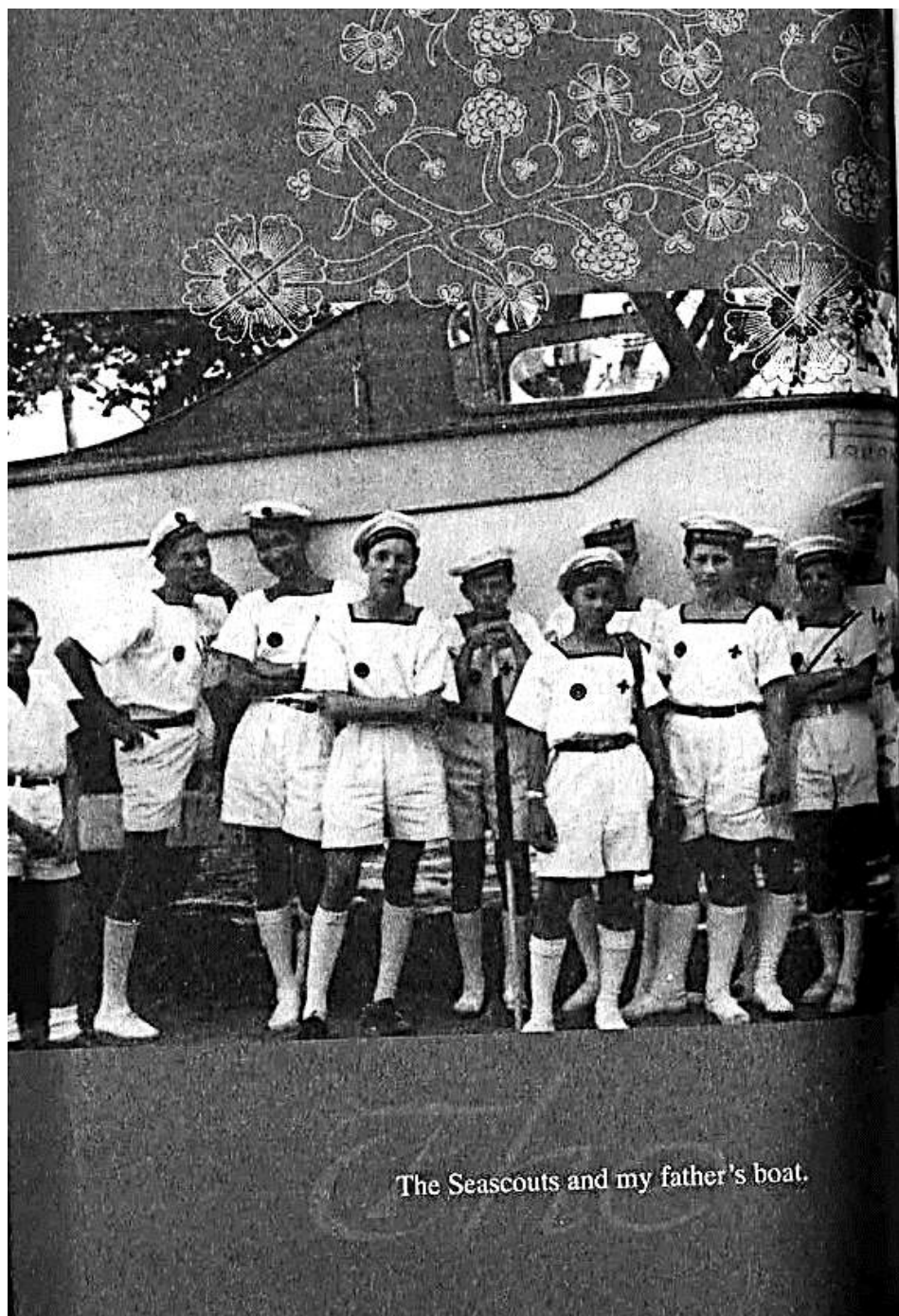
Of course, every time we met we had to repeat the ten articles of the Boy Scout Commandments. If you took it seriously, you would be in trouble. I took it seriously, and was always shocked about the behavior of students when I got to Cornell University. It took me a while to adapt to this unruly behavior, until I became a bit more like the rest of the students.

I was always hoping to become one of the patrol leaders, but I guess I was too skinny, and perhaps my brother did not think that I was good enough material to become a leader. In later years, I became much more aggressive and organized. Maybe he just did not want to be accused of nepotism. By the time I qualified, we had changed into a group of Sea Scouts and that was a different ballgame.

It was very exciting when we decided that we would Learn knots for different things?. change our troop into



Robbie Tan, my cousin, Ted Bangert and myself.



The Seascouts and my father's boat.

Sea Scouts. I guess our Boy Scout leader had sailed in a small boat in the lakes in Holland when he was young. He was very happy when one of the parents organized the changeover, and even helped fund the operation. The Royal Dutch Packet Line had an old sloop, which they donated to us. The mothers helped sew up the new white uniforms and again the shipping company donated authentic sailor shirts. The *Hopman* or Troop Leader thought that this was his grand opportunity to follow the steps of his seafaring Dutch ancestors, who were really more feared than the English pirates. Because it was just a small country, few people knew how fearsome the Dutch sailors could be. Few people knew how they defeated the Spanish Armada and attacked London up the Thames.

So, I became a Sea Scout in a white uniform. It was the first Sea Scout troop and we were quiet proud of our unit. Every Saturday we biked to the yacht club at the seaport of *Tandjung Priok*. In the end we were the proud owners of a rather big sloop with a dozen oars. From then on we would practice rowing every Saturday. Later on we were given the use of two sailboats in which we practiced sailing. We eventually took these boats to the Thousand Islands archipelago, a group of coral islands strung northeast, between Java and Sumatra, about one hundred nautical miles into the Java Sea.

My father decided to become our benefactor and had a boat built for himself that we could use. It was unfortunate that my father listened to his younger brother, who advised him to buy a speedboat with an outboard motor, instead of refurbishing an old, but solid teak wood, admiral sloop with

a new diesel engine for a fraction of the cost of the speedboat. This modern boat and the ancient 22.5 hp *Evinrude* outboard motor were nothing but trouble, and we usually declined to borrow it after several scary crossings to the islands in the Bay of Jakarta in bad weather. We rather used the sailboats.

It is hard to imagine how cumbersome the boat was. It was the last model engine before they had a shift and clutch, and a separate gasoline tank. So after you got the engine started you had to quickly steer the boat, or you ended up on the quay or the beach. It really drank gasoline, which you had to premix with oil because of the two-stroke engine. It was scary when you had to refuel the engine in the middle of a wallowing sea. Once, my older brother and his family went for a cruise to one of the islands in the Bay of Jakarta. I insisted that he take my cousin along, who was a great mechanic. I am glad he did, because they were not watching the weather and got caught in a storm. We were on duty at the yacht club, and watched them struggle in the heavy seas, through huge binoculars. We could see my cousin trying to fill the gas tank, while the boat was wobbling in the waves. We were about to order the rescue boat to tow them in when we saw that they got the engine going. But it was not a very comfortable ride for sure. That was about the last time we used this boat, because we were actually scared to take it out too far from shore. Although later on we got used to its bad habits and used it for more for trips to the islands. But we would not bring any children with us who could not swim. I was actually a bad swimmer, and barely made the hundred meter test mandatory to become eligible to become a Sea Scout. No thank you, I did not want to be on that boat!

One of our Seas Scout leaders worked for the shipping line KPM (*Koninklijke Pakketvaart Maatschappij*), and he always managed to find us some scrap. One day he told us that he got us a small "jol," a small Dutch utility boat and we could have it, if we fixed it. So together we did our own repairs and had fun doing it. The worse part was scraping the paint off the bottom of the boat, because it had barnacles growing on it, as it had sat a long time in sea water. So, we had our favorite little sailboat, which I managed to capsize one day, while we were sailing alongside a big Brazilian four-master training ship. What an embarrassment!

The best part about being a Sea Scout was that we ended up with a much wider area of adventure. The Bay of Jakarta had a few coral islands within an hour or two of sailing, and it was also the beginning of the Thousand Islands archipelago. We were always on the water and once a month we would sail out to one of the many islands, camping out either on the beach or in the boat. We would fish for our meals and dive around the coral island. I guess we were a very privileged group of kids. We took our luck for granted. We became very familiar with life around the coastal islands, and while many kids were just going to the movies, we were exploring the secrets of the sea.

In addition to these advantages, one of my uncles, the one who had the motorcycle, had a fishing fleet. He often invited friends and family to go for a picnic on one of the uninhabited islands. We snorkeled among the coral islands, and I was taught to scream in the water to scare away sharks. We did not want to go into the water after the noon hour. For some reason the color of the water became eerie then and

very sinister. The scenery became darker blue, and we thought that there were more sharks lurking around in the afternoon than in the morning. It was always very interesting to find ourselves sitting in a cone of light, like in the middle of an amphitheatre. We would see the colorful fish darting in and out of this light cone. The sharks would come out of the blue, literally, into our vision. First the head and then the body, and eventually the whole fish came into view. We tried to practice what we were taught, so we screamed underwater and the sharks did turn around quickly. So, we always felt assured that we were safe. Perhaps that was just some false sense of security, but we never had any trouble. Maybe those sharks were well fed or friendly. During these trips we had only one accident. One of the visitors on my uncle's boats was not careful enough, and got drawn by the current and drowned. We jumped after him, but the current took him down rapidly and out of reach.

Two friends and I borrowed my father's lousy boat one weekend, and took it to the western edge of the Bay, a bit further away from the three islands we usually visited. One had an old Portuguese fort and cemetery on it. One was a bird sanctuary and so it promised a nice place to stay, watching the noisy birds. We anchored my father's infamous boat and went fishing. We caught a really nice yellow-tail fish and barbecued it over a fire. Then suddenly the birds stopped screeching, and the wind stopped blowing. It was scary. We realized that a storm was in the making. We made sure we were properly anchored, and sure enough a dark cloud formed in the west. Then suddenly the birds started a frantic commotion, the wind came up, and the sea became

very choppy. Our anchor was not holding very well, and we just prayed. We were deadly scared. All we could do was curl up in the boat and pray. Well, we made it, but the anchor had dragged. Had it dragged another dozen yards, we would have ended up on the reef. After that experience, I was not sure if I wanted to wander around in this boat in the sea again.

The Sea Scout training became of great value later, because we learned to be independent, and we were able to deal with problems. At sea we could not hesitate, and we became quite resolute. So our group ended up being an exclusive club. We were always on the water on the weekends. We never questioned what other kids were doing, because we were just busy having fun.

My cousin Robbie had a sail canoe, a *Klepper* made in Germany. It was a great boat and one weekend he and I decided to get to the nearest island and camp there. The one great thing about a kayak type canoe was that it rode very low and you had a spray cover, which kept the water out. Even if you dove into a wave you came out dry below deck. So, we got the canoe ready, put up the sail, and then launched the boat into the inner harbor, which was calm. We did not realize that the weather had changed. We did look at the weather warning on the mast of the yacht club, and saw just one black ball. So, Robbie, who was the more courageous of us, decided that we should just go ahead and have fun. So, we paddled out of the piers, stored our paddles, raised our small sail and caught the wind, which had started to become quite strong. The waves were choppy, but we did not feel threatened because the boat

handled itself beautifully and literally flew over the waves. The yacht club disappeared behind the waves. We saw a few people jumping up and down, waving at us. We just waved back and went on. We later realized that they were calling us back. We made the island in no time. We dragged the canoe up the beach, tied it down and enjoyed the windy but dry weather. We dug a hole, crawled into it, and slept on the sand. The next day we just sailed back, and got an earful from the management of the yacht club for taking off when the storm signs were out. I must admit that these canoes were excellent and light. They had a rubberized canvas cover over a wooden frame. We never felt threatened while we skimmed the waves.

Of course, not every weekend was so eventful. But for some reason we had a great time whenever we went out. One of the best sailors of the yacht club wanted to make a sailing trip to the northernmost island of the Thousand Islands chain, which strung along the northwest edge of the Bay to almost touch the first islands off the Sumatran Coast, some one hundred nautical miles away. He recruited three of us to crew the boats. We got permission from our parents and the yacht club to undertake this trip, as this man was the most experienced long distance sailor of the club. He took one of our more experienced colleagues with him, and my cousin and I manned the second boat. These sailboats were really not designed for open water, because they were Dutch "*Vrijheid*" or Freedom class, for use on the inland lakes in Holland.

We had a great sailing trip, first going up the western side of the Thousand Islands archipelago. Our boats were

not very high in the water, but we passed many islands that looked like dark blue low hills, strung along like a bunch of whales. It was sunny and we got sunburned in no time. It was a fantastic trip with a good wind from starboard. We made good time. The only tricky time occurred, when we started looking for a berth to anchor the boats one evening. The maps we used were old, and coral reefs had grown dense, closing up many of the channels shown on the maps. Some were much narrower than we thought. We made it a habit to start looking for a place to anchor before sunset. Otherwise we could not see underwater, and we could be stuck outside the reef, which would be a problem if we got caught in a storm. Once, we were late in getting to the next island, and it started to become very dicey navigating in the dusk. The boats had the main sails reefed and we sailed only on the jib. The lead boat went ahead with one person sitting on the bow with a hook in his hand, while we followed at a distance. I got a bit dizzy staring into the water, looking for the open water to avoid the reefs, and telling the captain to go right or left, but we made into the deeper lagoon where we were safe to anchor the boats for the night. The evenings were wonderful with the stars twinkling above. That night we had a storm, but we had good anchorage and managed to hang on. That was not the worst event, however. On the return trip, the captain in charge decided to travel day and night. There was no problem at first, but after staying up two nights in a row we started to hallucinate, because we just did not have enough sleep. I kept seeing coral reefs below us, and kept worrying that we would crash into one of them. We made it back home, but we were sure exhausted.

The best part of the Sea Scout program was the offer made by the KPM coastal shipping line for some of us to spend the summer on their ships. They were in need of officers and wanted to see whether they could tempt and recruit some of us to join them, ultimately going to school in Holland. One of us did take the offer and joined them after he graduated from high school. I myself spent two cruises with them, but declined to join the merchant marines.

The ships were used for coastal shipping and carried regular passengers, as well as deck passengers who were poor and who shared the deck with all kinds of cargo, including cattle, chickens, and the rest. Most of these people were sick throughout the voyage. When we did the between-watch inspections we had to walk between these people and the cargo. These ships traveled at night and docked in the morning, loading and unloading all day and departing in the late afternoon.

Our troop was spread over two or three boats. We were quite proud to be working on these ships, and we wore our white uniforms on duty. We were appointed as "fourth mates." Each ship officially had three mates plus the captain, and we were just trainee attachments. But it sounded very important. We then were assigned a watch to "assist" whichever officer was on duty. They taught us navigation, using the sun and the stars, measuring speed using a log, and every change of duty checking water samples to be sent to the oceanographic institute. One evening one of my colleagues needed to go to the bathroom. He decided to pee into one of these sample bottles and forgot to clean it afterwards. The captain told us laughingly that he got a nasty letter back from the lab for the joke, which was not appreciated by the lab's personnel.

One time I was assigned the first watch, at the end of which we had to walk through the ship to make sure that it was safe. We had the first class cabins, and second-class cabins to which we were assigned, and the cheap class for the deck passengers. These people were not provided anything and literally slept on the decks on whatever bedding they brought with them. They paid little for the fare, and it was a cheap way for the local population to travel from island to island. This shipping line connected almost every island group on a weekly or monthly basis, depending on the need of the population. These passengers were given basic food, which was really not fit for human consumption. The reason that this was done by the company was, to prevent people from lighting stoves all over the deck and causing fires. Then there were the cattle and chickens and you name it. The people were sprawled all over the place, and many were sick and vomited on the deck, which smelled so sour. Then we would go down the engine room to see whether the crew was awake. It was ear-deafening down there. I was amazed that the crew managed to stay down there. After this inspection walk at midnight I was usually wide-awake because of the filth and needed to take a shower. But it usually took a while before I could get to sleep.

You did not get much sleep if you got this watch, because usually the ship would arrive at the next harbor or anchorage around four in the morning. It was then all hands on deck. You could hear the business of getting ready. The anchor chains started to rattle, and the sailors would start moving things around. We usually got up and joined the rest of the crew on the bridge and watched the activities. We could see the other passengers stick out their heads between

decks waiting to get on land with all their "hand" cargo. If there was a harbor, the landing would be straight forward, otherwise like on the outer islands, the ship would anchor off-shore and lighters would come alongside, to take on the passengers first, and then the cargo and the cattle last.

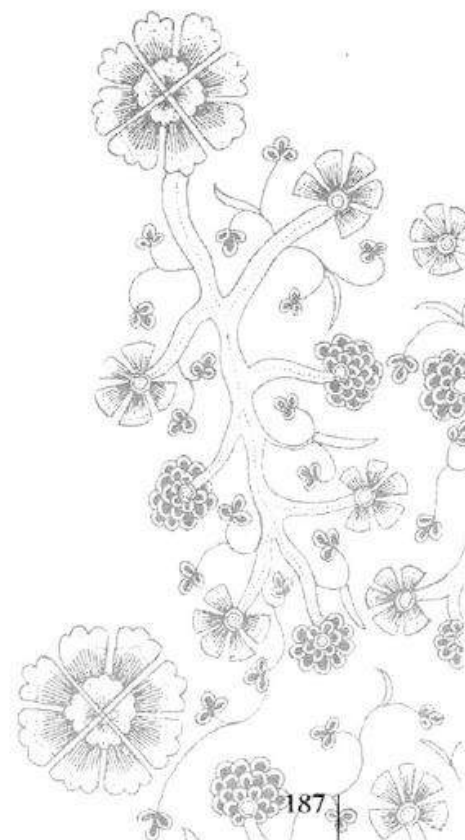
During loading we were forbidden to come near the opening of the cargo hold. Even the officers did not come down in the hold. It was the territory of the stevedores and a very dangerous place. A lot of pilfering took place.

We could look down into the hole from the bridge and often see boxes being broken open. The only thing that could be done was for an officer to stand at the stairs of the hold and frisk the workers. It was some kind of a game. This is why freight insurance can be expensive.

On one of these ships the daughter of the captain came along, during the summer vacation. One of my Sea Scout mates fell in love with her, and they were always smooching. I remember one time, we were all having dinner, except this fellow who had duty on the bridge, and suddenly, the first mate threw down his napkin, swore loudly and jumped up the stairs and onto the bridge, followed by the captain and the rest of us. What happened was that the first mate saw the coastline going around in a big circle, as if someone was turning the wheel, which was the case. The two lovers were fiddling around the steering wheel, while the steersman was not paying attention either. So, the ship was making this gentle turn. It was good that the channel was wide enough, but the boat was listing and that was what the first mate noticed. Obviously, the captain's daughter was not allowed on the bridge anymore.

The rest of the time we were watching the dolphins, and the native sailing vessels. At night we had to be extremely careful watching for these sailing schooners, as they would sail without any lights. Our job was to keep our eyes peeled for these coastal ships.

It was fun while it lasted, but I did not think that I wanted to work on a coastal shipping line. It was just too much work and very boring in the end. But it was a great experience for a high school kid, spending his summer working on a ship.



Natural History Trips and others

I was a bit different from many of the students at school. While many would do the regular highschool stuff of going to the movies or playing sports, I would be doing something else. Especially on Saturdays when I had my Sea Scout activities and on some Sundays I rode my bike behind scholars who had let me join them on their excursions. I always had an interest in nature and animals

Once I was late coming home from one or other event at school, and as I walked down the corridor I saw a gathering of distinguished people listening with great interest to a lecture given by Dr. Herman Verstappen. It was a lecture about the coral islands of the Bay of Jakarta. I quietly sneaked into the last row of chairs, and listened to the discourse on the creation of the islands sitting in the shallow bay, where Jakarta was located. It turned out to be his PhD dissertation. I was so impressed that I reported this lecture in the CMS

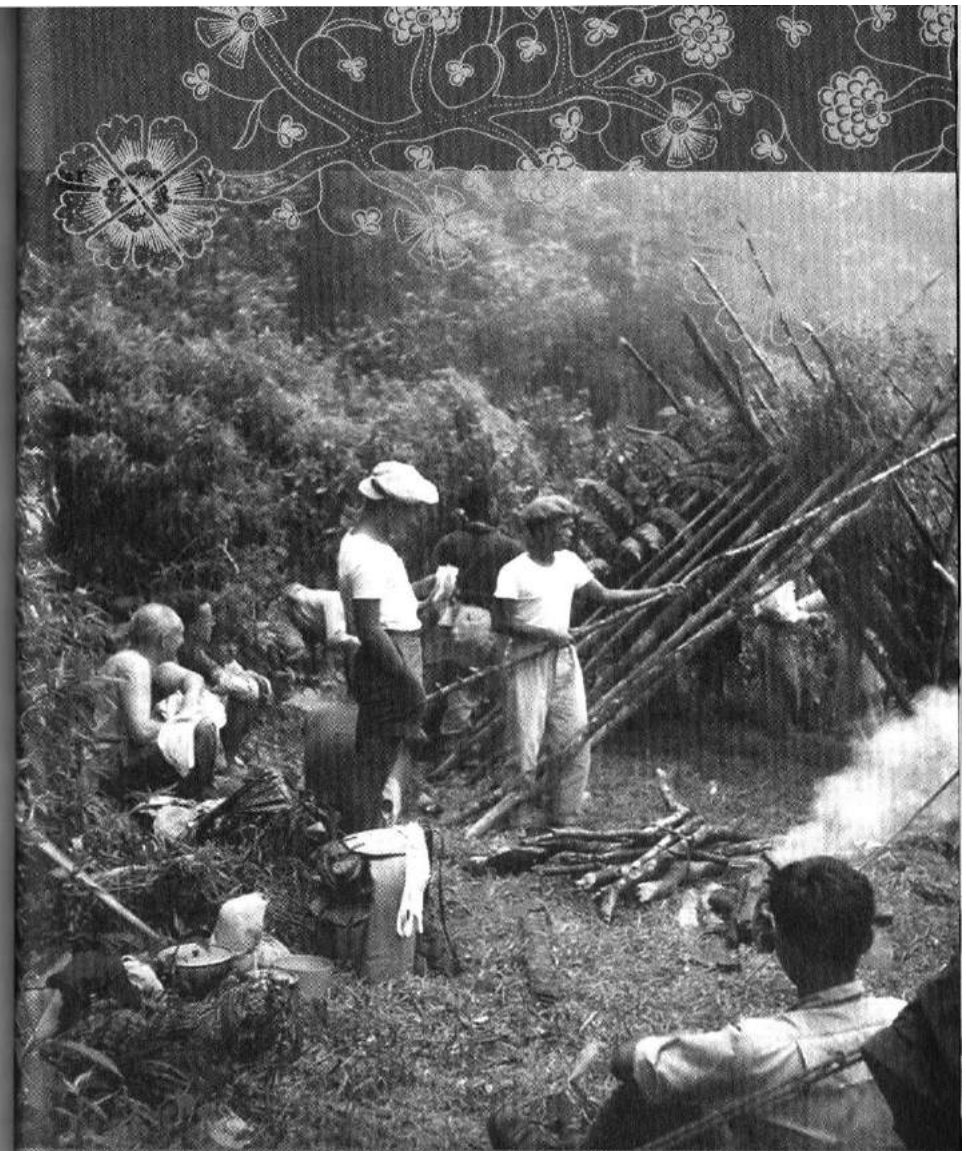
bulletin, the school paper, of which I was the lonely editor. It was very interesting, especially since I had joined the Sea Scouts. But this lecture also introduced me to a famous geomorphologist, Professor Verstappen, when he was working at the Department of Surveying as a geographer. This chance encounter was the reason why I ended up studying geology later. He was also instrumental in the invitation for me to teach at the International Training Center (ITC) in Holland in 1975.

I managed to talk to Dr. Verstappen after the lecture, in which I expressed my interest in these topics and asked him how I could participate in some of the excursions by the Natural Historical Society, which sponsored this lecture. He suggested that I contact the office and see if I could take part in the activities, although he told me that the Society was for scholars and lecturers and, as far as he knew, there was no category for students. I was not to be discouraged and the next week I visited the office of the *Koninklijke Natuurwetenschappelijke Vereniging* (Royal Natural History Society) at the prestigious address at the *Medan Merdeka Selatan* or originally named *Koningsplein Zuid* in Dutch. It was a rather impressive building. But again, I was not to be discouraged. I walked into the entrance hall and found the office. I shuffled inside and a couple of elderly ladies behind the desks asked me very nicely what they could do for me. So, I told them that I had talked to Dr. Verstappen, and that he had advised me to inquire at their office. I asked them how I could become a member, so that I could participate in their trips. After a few coughs one of the ladies explained that it really was a society for scholars and teachers. They did not

know how I could become a member, and there had never been a case like this. They were very sorry that they could not help me, but they would see whether something could be done by the Council and they took my name and address.

I was a bit disappointed. During my biology class I mentioned this incident to my biology teacher, Mr. Swanborn. He knew that I was really interested in biology, as I had earlier expressed my interest to become a forester. By that time I had read a lot of books about explorers, and my most favorite book was the volume by Eva and Martin Johnson, who photographed wildlife in Africa. I even saw their famous movies, in which Eva shot a rhinoceros just seconds before it was about to crash into her husband, who continued to film the scene and had great faith in his wife's ability to drop the attacking animal. She gave him the unbelievable opportunity to film this hair-raising event.

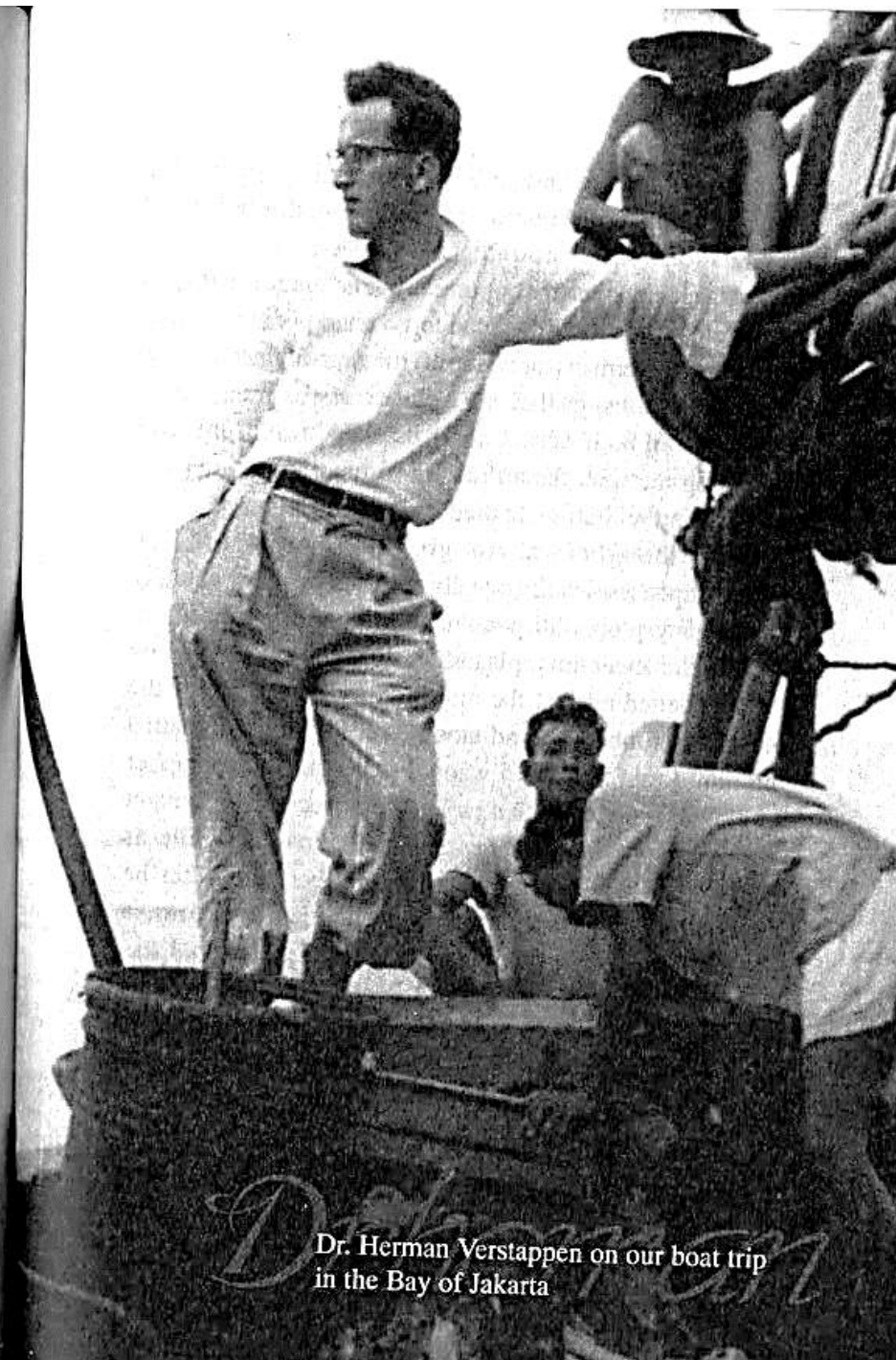
My teacher was really excited that one of his students was so interested in biology. He went to inquire about a way for me to become a member of the society. He then talked to some other members to find a solution to get me included on excursions. And one day he called me after class and told me that he had managed to get permission for me to come along on excursions. He said that a few important members - I suspect that Dr. Verstappen as Chairman of the Society had favorable input - had agreed to make an exception, which later was extended to a few more adventurous highschool students. So once a month I would tag along behind these scholars exploring natural sites, such as the mangrove forests and the Mount *Gedeh* Volcano, where I met Dr. Kostermans, who became a mentor.



Setting up camp on the slope of the Gedeh Volcano.

The climb up the *Gedeh* volcano was not very good for my feet. I had borrowed my brother's boots. A nail came through the sole and hurt my foot. It was a steep climb up the volcano, and the forest changed from tropical evergreen to tropical alpine vegetation. We had planned to stay there overnight. The *koelies* had brought *goloks* (big knives) with them and started to build shelters for us to sleep. The rest of us wandered higher up the mountains, because in these altitudes the tropical Edelweiss grew. So, we climbed up higher, but suddenly we stopped because we saw that other people had camped there previously. We were a bit worried, because these jungle-covered mountain slopes were occupied by Moslem rebel groups, the *Darul Islam*. They most likely had been the occupants of this abandoned camp. The camp consisted of round nests of dried leaves and branches on the ground to sleep in. So we hurried back down to report our findings to the excursion leader. He and a few of the *koelies* went up, and after a while they came back with the conclusion that the camp was several days old and abandoned. So we all felt a bit more at ease.

In the evening, we lit a campfire and roasted some meat we brought for the occasion. This is when I met Dr. Kostermans, the famous botanist. I chatted with him and heard that he was organizing an expedition to Central Borneo, the least explored drainage basin of the *Mahakam* River, which flowed eastwards into the *Sulawesi* Strait at the sea port of *Pontianak*, on the east coast of Borneo. So I asked him whether there was any chance that I could come along on the expedition. He said that he was going to think about it and let me know in a month or so, and suggested that I visit



Dr. Herman Verstappen on our boat trip
in the Bay of Jakarta

him in Bogor, where he lived. It was amazing how such a chance meeting turned out to be so important that it decided my fate.

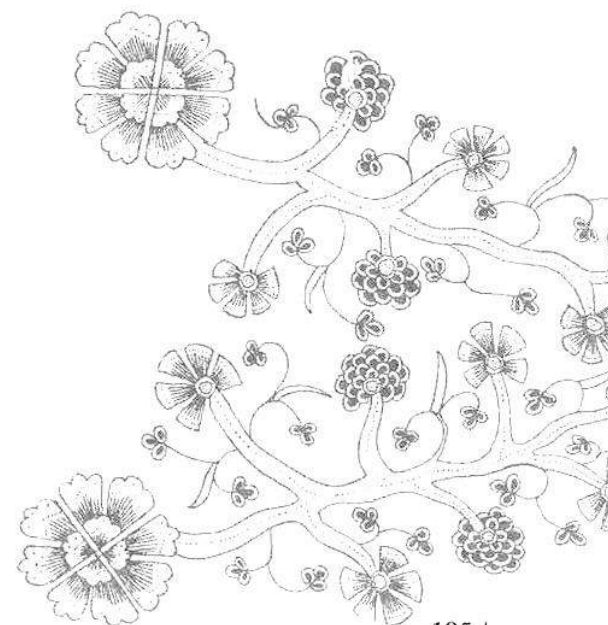
At the same time the opportunity to continue my studies in the states came. I still wanted to go on expedition, but in the end Dr. Kostermans threw me off the expedition to Borneo because he was sure that my education was much more important. To be honest, I never thanked him for this and for helping me with the airfare for Yvonne to join me and marry me in the States. He died in 1994 in Bogor.

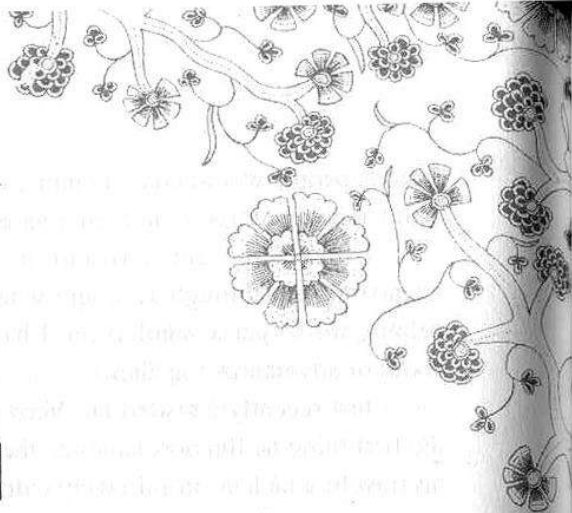
My thought was to go into geography like Dr. Verstappen and lead an equally exciting life. He eventually visited many places all over the world, and promised me later to write about those places. Early in the morning, I saw him silhouetted against the morning sky on the rim of the volcano. I climbed up and stood next to him and chatted with him. I told him that I wanted to become a geographer like him. He suggested that I try geology because he thought I was better in the sciences and mathematics, while as geographer I needed more writing skills. I did what he suggested as there were more opportunities to become a geologist. But at Cornell University, where I ended up, I was allowed to select the mixture of topics. I was interested in. In the end I found that I had a very extensive background in physical geography, which became a handy background in my future work in remote sensing and aerial photo interpretation. Walking into Dr. Vrestappen's lecture so long ago and meeting him on various trips also had a long term effect, and eventually he invited me to join him at the International Training Center in the Netherlands. These two

famous people would come popping into my life again and again and were important in guiding me in my early years.

I met also James Brandon with whom I made interesting trip through Java and who was instrumental in helping me to get a scholarship. I have a separate chapter about or adventures together.

Just recently I visited Dr. Verstappen in Holland and the first thing he did was hand me the book he wrote about his travels, which he promised my wife and me to write thirty years ago. He is now long retired but still very active. He and Mr. Kannegieter, my boss when I was teaching at ITC and me spent a whole morning together on the market square of Enschede, near the ITC building, and enjoyed talking about the wonderful times we had together in the old days.





Chapter 22

Go to Borneo

Of course, adventure is every boy's dream—the wish to see the wide world.

As agreed during our encounter on the *Gedeh* Volcano, I visited Dr. Kostermans at his home in Bogor, where I met a dozen or so kids, who were living at his huge house. He explained to me that these kids came back with him from villages he visited during his various expeditions to the interior of the many islands where he searched for new plants. He was the world's authority on the *Lauracea* plant family. Later he told me that he had named a new plant species after me, as *Lauracea hengii*.

These kids were gathered whenever he was in the jungles of the archipelago. When he saw a gifted child in one of those far-away villages—many were located days or weeks by boat from civilization—he would discuss his idea with the parents and promised to give their child an education. Most of the parents were very happy that their child was

selected by this famous *Tuan Doctor* (Mister Doctor) to be given an education. There was another purpose for this recruitment; he was trying to build up a cadre of young botanists to take over his work and the work of other senior scholars. But they were free to choose and only a few of his “kids” or “*Anak-anak Tuan Doktor*” took up the career he hoped would keep the botanical studies going as well as maintain the extensive Herbarium in Bogor, which he established. He had hoped that perhaps I had the inclination to become a botanist and a scholarship for me would be waiting if I so decided, as it did for the others who chose the career to keep the knowledge from fading. However, soon after his generous offer to take me into Borneo, I was offered my own scholarship, through the direct application I made via the USIS (United States Information Service).

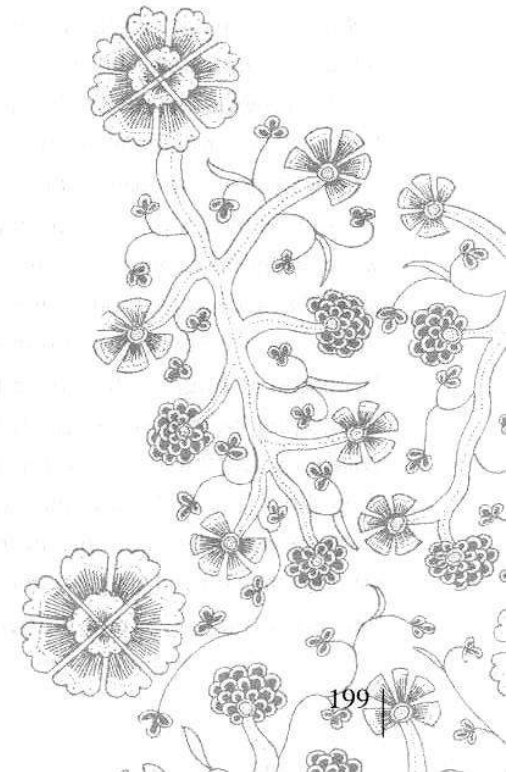
Dr. Kostermans gave me instructions for the trip to Borneo, or Kalimantan, as it is called now and provided me with my personal, waterproof, galvanized field container, which consisted of two cans that slid over each other. The top fitted completely over the first. In case the can fell off the canoe, it would float and could be fished out with little water damage. It was about one foot square and one and half feet deep. That was all I was allowed to take with me as we would be traveling up the Mahakam River in a dugout canoe. I had spare clothing, odds and ends and, on his advice, ten yards of red cloth and a slab of good tobacco for trading. I was in heaven. I felt like a little Livingstone. Dr. Kostermans appointed me as the staff photographer for the expedition. Dr. Brandon of the USIS, about whom I will write more, was an avid photographer provided me with the color film for my trip.

When I was awarded a scholarship to Cornell, it put a wrench through the wheel, because mine was a private scholarship acquired by direct application, which was not considered proper by the Indonesian Ministry of Education. They did not approve funds for my travel to the United States and also refused my exit permit. Dr. Brandon and Dr. Kostermans decided that perhaps they should allow me to go on part of the expedition and return to civilization by "dugout canoe express." However, the red tape became a problem, even though USIS was able to provide me with the travel grant of a student who had rejected the offer to go to the US. Dr. Brandon thought that it would be prudent if I hung around until my status was settled. I had already decided that I preferred to go to Borneo and forget about my scholarship, but Dr. Kostermans decided that I was too young to make the decision. My education was more important and I would find going to America an equally great adventure. We promised to stay in touch. So, there I stood forlorn at the quay waving goodbye to the expedition, which was sailing in the ship taking them to the *Pontianak* on the east coast of Borneo.

Years later, Dr. Kostermans came to Cornell for a visit and showed me the photographs of the expedition I missed, and told me of a huge limestone plateau north of the *Mahakam* River, which appeared isolated from the rest of the island. I would love to have been there. Another photo showed him arguing with a *Dayak* chief about the bad practice of head hunting, especially since the victim was a member of the expedition.

His unending support continued into the future when I was to return to the US and faced difficulty in getting my

return visa. He introduced me to a senior US official, who wrote on my behalf to the US Consul to have me issued a visa to return to the States for further education. He also advanced me funds for Yvonne, my fiancée, to join me in the States, where we got married. The last time I saw Dr. Kostermans was in Thailand, where he was on a visit to the Forestry Department. He admonished me for not settling down and that for the sake of the family I should consider settling down with more permanent employment. But I guess I never listened and forty years later I am still wandering around the world.



Geology Bandung Klomp'e

I graduated from the Dutch *Christelijke Middelbare School* (Christian High School) in Jakarta in 1955. Now what? I spent many hours searching through catalogs and wrote numerous letters applying for scholarships. To be exact, I wrote 27 letters. Of course, most of the replies were 'thank you' letters from institutions that did not have any scholarships. Two universities offered me partial scholarships, but those were not good enough, as I did not have any funds for travel and other expenses. In the mean time I had to keep busy and the closest to what I had in mind was a course in geology, as I thought it might offer some more adventure. I preferred geography, but Dr. Verstappen thought that my background was more in the sciences and suggested geology, which I then did. Ultimately my studies did diversify into geography, as I was interested not only in the environmental landscape, but also the cultural aspect of the earth. In any case, geography was not yet being taught in Indonesia.

As I waited for a scholarship, I signed up at the Universitas Indonesia to keep myself occupied. I found out that I could only register as an auditor, because I had graduated from a Dutch high school. It was not recognized and I would be required to take exams in Indonesian. This was a problem. I had not studied the Indonesian language since childhood, and Dutch was my mother tongue. My Dutch education was superior to the newly started Indonesian-based education, especially in the languages. However, this was both an asset and a disadvantage. The advantage was that I was a good English speaker and all the lectures were given in English because Dutch was outlawed by then. I could take the classes in geology, because the lectures were conducted in English by Dutch professors. I ended up with the best lecture notes, and they became a valuable commodity, copied by many other students. I was always assured of a good seat during lectures, and these English notes would immediately be circulated among a group of students. Thus, I became a rather popular student and I think in the end my lecture notes became the source of notes for the whole class.

I was always in a hurry and wanted to take other classes, so I tried to register for each and every subject that did not conflict with my own schedule. I began taking classes with the second- and third-year students. These included zoology, stratigraphy, historical geology and some other classes. These were easy courses because of my Dutch education. I managed to take exams in biology and chemistry, passed and was given credit at Cornell a year later. Taking upper class courses was just to keep me busy, because the freshmen classes did not require much time. I had a good time although I did not have

much money. Often I did not have a penny to my name. You know, it was amazing that in those days you could get along fine without any money as long as your room and board were paid for, and you had your bicycle. I also had a bus pass, because my uncle owned the bus company, so I could go home once in a while.

In the mean time I observed the many little cultural conflicts between the Dutch chairman of the geology department, Professor KlompĖ, and his upper class students. He was pretty gruff, and I heard many rumors about him. It was obvious that most of the students were afraid of him. During class break we usually sat in the shade of a China berry tree. It was a favored spot and our chairs were a pile of Mastodon skulls, which the students had collected in the field. Maybe it was favored because it looked straight into the office of Professor KlompĖ. Often we witnessed the spectacle of a student being summoned by the Professor, and many times we saw the fear these students showed when they were called. Even knocking on the door was a cause for trepidation, and when they finally did they were welcomed by a gruff "Come in!". While it never failed to entertain the rest of the students for the victim it was a painful experience.

Professor KlompĖ was a typical Dutchman. He was big and stocky, with a pinkish complexion, and there was always something of a frown on his face. But it was his voice and sharp statements that everyone feared most. After watching these scenes for several months my curiosity got the better of me. So, one Sunday morning I took a walk to his house, which was not very far from where I lived at my aunt's student boarding house.

I walked up the *stoep*, the doorstep of his house, and knocked on the door. As I anticipated, the door was suddenly jerked opened. "Oops," I thought. Professor KlompĖ's head appeared through the door with a frown and it was half lathered. I guess I interrupted his shaving activity. He sort of snarled, "What do you want!"

I thought it was not the right time for a conversation, so I apologized. I told him that I only wanted to have a chat with him, but I said that I would return some other, more opportune time. But by that time, something dawned on him. Maybe I was the first student ever, who had the audacity to visit him. So, he grabbed my hand and said, "Come in and sit there until I am finished." And he pointed to the couch. I sat down and twiddled my fingers.

I was plain curious why everybody was scared of him, and why he always acted so brusque. So, there he came and this time with a much more friendly face, which relieved me.

"So, what is it all about?" he asked.

"I just wanted to chat with you and see why you always seem so angry. The rest of the students are absolutely petrified of you."

"And you are not afraid of me?"

"Not at all, and perhaps that is the difference between me and the rest of the students. I am totally Dutch educated and speak Dutch fluently. My friends are Dutch, my parents' friends are also Dutch. So, I know you are a Dutch professor, but that does not mean that I am afraid of you. Can't you just be a little more friendly and not shout so much, like a *boeman*?"

Suddenly a smile warmed his face. And with that smile he looked so wonderful and friendly. He seemed like a completely different person. We chatted for hours, and finally he asked me whether we could break the ice with the other students. He said that he did not realize that he scared them.. He wondered what we could do, because he really was not what we all thought. In a way, he was shy and being gruff was just a way to protect himself.

He told me that apart from a few of the upperclassmen I was the only student who had crossed his doorstep. So, what could we do to help him to create a friendlier aura around his personality?

I said, "Give a party here!"

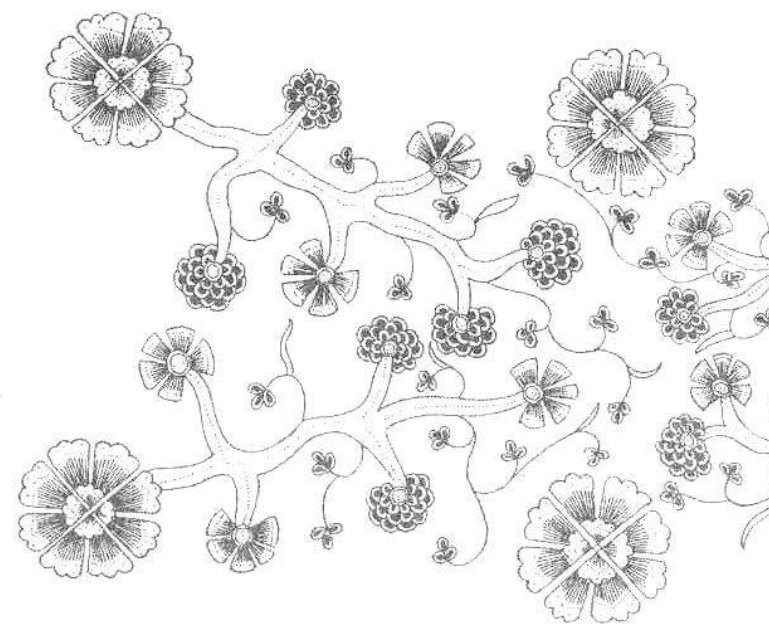
After a lengthy discussion He then asked me to organize the party. So I put it together for the first and second-year students at his house. It was a great success, and slowly the tension between this big professor and the students disappeared.

Towards the end of the year, Jim Brandon, the officer from USIS, came by to pick me up for a trip, and he decided to stop and visit professor KlompĖ at the faculty. They had a long chat about me. After the meeting Jim briefed me about the conversation and told me that it was not possible for me to graduate there, because of an edict to limit the number of ethnic Chinese in the graduating class. In addition, Professor KlompĖ told Jim that my Dutch background and education would make it very hard for me to ever to graduate. He told Jim that times were changing, and he himself was not sure how long he would be able to stay. Professor KlompĖ pleaded with Jim to help me get a college education in the US. He

said that it would be a waste of time for me to try pursuing further education here.

After I left for the States, we exchanged a few letters. Professor KlompĖ wrote me that, since my departure, the other students had withdrawn again. He wished I could have stayed to keep the harmony, but he wished me good luck in the future.

In the end, he also left Indonesia because of the political differences between Indonesia and the Netherlands and he moved to set up a geology department in Thailand.



Jim, who made it happen

Earlier I mentioned Dr. Brandon another individual who came into my life. He was a young Assistant Cultural Affair Officer of the USIS (United States Information Service). He was a specialist on Asian Classical Dances, and he was just assigned to Jakarta as an assistant cultural affairs officer. He inherited me from his boss. The director of USIS thought that we were a better match and that he was better able to handle my frequent and persistent visits inquiring about my scholarship applications. There was no money at home for study abroad, and I just had to find my own way. So, while my friends were playing ball or going to the movies, I was busy locating institutions offering grants. I was at the USIS, UNESCO, and every other possible venue looking for sources of scholarships. I wrote 27 letters by hand asking for help in the States and in Europe. I did not feel discouraged writing these letters, even when the answer was a rejection

letter. I filed them away as a reminder of my failed efforts.

One day I was at the USIS inquiring again about my scholarships. John Getschell, the Director, smiled at me and said that he had just the right person for me to meet. It was the newly arrived assistant cultural affairs officer, who would be just the guy for me to meet and would handle my scholarship applications. I guess he was glad to get rid of a persistent student.

After being introduced to Jim Brandon by his boss, we chit-chatted about things in general, and since he had just arrived in Indonesia he asked me what there was to see. I am, as mentioned earlier, someone who likes to travel. And I had a set of photos of my most recent trip with my cousin to the coral islands in the Bay of Jakarta. I showed these to Jim as an example of one of my recent trips. These were photographs of one of my sailing trips to the coral islands in the Bay of Jakarta, which I had just picked up from the photo shop. I showed these to Jim as an example of one of my trips. Jim cleaned up his desk and laid down a map of Java and said, "Where are we going next weekend?"

I thought a bit, and I had always wanted to see some of the scenery in the southern part of West Java. I heard there were gold mines there and suggested to Jim to take a trip going south from Jakarta to the bay on the south coast, called *Pelabuhan Ratu*, where I had always wanted to see sea turtles laying eggs. We thought we could make a tour along the south coast of West Java and visit the famous beach of *Ujung Genteng*, then proceed along the coast, driving as far as we could westwards, and come back north to Jakarta. He agreed to make the trip the following weekend.

For a young Indonesian student this was a lucky break. I would function as a guide and companion and Jim would pay the expenses. I had not seen very much of the island of Java myself, but I ended up seeing more with Jim than at any time before that. So, I was there that Saturday morning early, and was invited to my first American breakfast, which I did not care for. It was cornflakes with milk, followed by fried eggs and toast. Missing was the fried rice I preferred.

Jim's Volkswagen beetle was loaded and ready to go. He had his camera, film and some cigarettes, which I had advised him to take along as gifts. My father told me that these could prove useful if you needed some help. They were a lifesaver on one trip which I will write about later.

We first drove down to Sukabumi, and I showed him the tea factory, which had been converted into a foam rubber plant. We met my uncle who had a lot of advice. My uncle knew the area well, because he regularly hunted wild pigs there, in a place called *Jampang Kulon*. He also told us how to get to the turtle beach. In the evening we went to a local *Sandiwara* or puppet play. I found out that theatre was Jim's specialty and that he eventually went back to study in Japan and became a professor at the University of Hawaii. My uncle and I still have some arguments about the boat he advised my father to buy, which was not seaworthy. That is another story.

So we went down south in the next afternoon and saw the famous bay *Pelabuan Ratu* or Queen's landing. We watched the waves breaking over the rough, rocky coast, where many people have drowned because of the undertow.

Then we set off east, on a dirt road running roughly along the bay's coastline, to the beach at the southern tip called *Udjung genteng*, which meant the cape of roof tiles, perhaps so named because the rocks were layered like roof tiles. There was a huge white beach of sugary soft sand. Here the turtles would come on shore and lay their eggs at night. So Jim and I camped out at the edge of the beach and waited for the turtles to show up. We were not the only people. Many other people were there to gather the eggs. In those days there was no protection for the sea turtles. We often had the eggs as a delicacy at the table. I found them rather gooey as the egg whites did not solidify during cooking.

Suddenly some people near us pointed to some dark shapes crawling up the beach. They were rather big and they paddled sluggishly, leaving behind a tractor-like track in the soft sand. We were advised to wait for the turtles to dig their nests, so they could not escape. It was such a painful effort which lasted hours. They dug the hole with the back fins and then spread out the sand with the fore fins. When the holes were about two feet deep and one foot in diameter they started to lay their eggs. Jim and I watched this process and took some photos. Then the turtles covered the holes with sand, but some of them were immediately opened by people waiting there to harvest the eggs which commanded a good price in town. The turtles were so big that on the way out Jim tried to ride one into the sea and so did I. But finally we pushed them out into the sea, because it seemed such an effort for them to crawl.

The following day we followed the trail along the southern coast of the bay westwards. There was really not

much of a road, but a dirt track used by trucks, which dared to venture into this sort of uncharted land. Ours in 1956 was probably the first Volkswagen beetle to ride through this area. Kids standing along the road would wave to us whenever we came across them at lonely village. Jim brought enough food for us, mostly canned food and he brought some containers full of water. At noon we would just pull off the track and eat our lunch under the shade of one or other tree. It was nice and quite there, while watching the sea crash onto the land. This was in contrast to my experience later in Africa, where we could not be stationary for more than a few minutes without being surrounded by a mob of curious villagers, while just minutes before it was a quiet and tranquil spot along the African trail.

There were no clouds. At night we did the same and found a nice spot along the road on the beach. Jim taught me how to prepare myself for a comfortable sleep on just a ground sheet on the sand at night, and showed me how to dig a hip hole, so that my hips would be nicely settled in the sand. He also told me to drink a lot before we went to bed, so that the fluid would be absorbed into my body. We scouted around and Jim climbed up a cliff to get a better look at the land. Then we went to sleep on the beach, and woke up when the sun shone into our eyes. We got up and stared at some tracks which circled our spot in the sand. Jim observed the tracks and wondered if they were made by a tiger that was curious about us, but had left us alone. Lucky us!

The next day we had some excitement, because when we came over a hill, we found a river about thirty feet wide with no bridge across it. We got out and I waded into the

water, which came to my knees. It was too deep for a Volkswagen beetle. Well, I found a sand bar where it was shallower, and Jim decided to drive across upstream from the sand bar. If necessary, he would sort of land his car on it, and hope that the wheels would get a grip on the sand and then gun down the engine and get across. The problem was the exhaust and he had to keep the engine going to keep the water from flooding the engine. I went to the other side with his camera and was ready to take pictures of the crossing. By that time I was surrounded by the villagers from the settlement at the river's crossing. They watched the crazy white man try to cross the river. Jim gunned the car down the river bank, and the car moved about a third across the river, but the Volkswagen was watertight and started to float like a boat. The water was churning behind the car as Jim gunned the engine, so that it would not choke in the water. The car bobbed in the water and started floating downstream. I shouted at him to open the door to let the water in, so that the car would get lower and grip the sand and not float over it. He did, and I saw the car settle down. The wheels gripped the sand and the little car lurched across the sand bank up the river bank. I was furiously clicking the camera taking photographs. The villagers, who by that time had collected along the river, were cheering him on. That was a close call. He told me later that he sold a photo to Volkswagen for publicity.

Well, we arrived safely back in Jakarta, the capital city, and we promised each other to make another trip together.

The second trip was to the mountainous area southwest of West Java, where several volcanoes lie dormant around

the city of *Garut*. Jim had spotted on the map a warm water spring deep in the mountains, and wanted to visit and soak in the hot water. I heard from someone that there was a small resort, and I suggested for us to stay there for the night. So we went to the address of the reservation office in Bandung, where I met a very pretty girl, by the name of Yvonne, who took our reservation. I immediately had an argument with her about an amethyst geode which was on display. This was the girl I ended up marrying, and we have been disagreeing about things ever since. I should have known that she would be a very difficult girl, but she was so pretty.

The next day Jim picked me up at my student guesthouse and we drove straight south into the mountains and ended up in the afternoon at Hotel Malabar in Pengalengang, Yvonne's father's place. I never thought that he would become my father-in-law and it was really the first and last time that we would meet. He turned out to be a classmate of my father in high school; or rather he was my father's fiercest competitor as my father described him. It was a cute place and the rooms were comfortable. But Jim complained about the watery soup. I guess he was not used to Dutch soup since in the States all soups were creamy. Yvonne's father inquired where we were planning to go, and Jim showed him the map with the locations of the springs high in the mountains. Mr. Thio did not think that it was advisable, as the area was controlled by the *Darul Islam*, the Moslem terrorist group, who wanted Indonesia to become a Moslem state. They were dangerous, especially since their uprising had failed, and they had resorted to banditry to survive. Whole villages had been abandoned because they



terrorized the villagers, and many male inhabitants were either taken away or killed.

Jim was adamant that we should see the springs, so the plan was to take the trail up the mountains, then follow the tracks, and kept going to the right all the time, so that in case we got lost, we would end up back on the main trail. We were both young, so who cared. We took off on an overgrown track into the jungle. After a while we noticed scattered clearings with abandoned villages. The windows and doors of the houses were flapping in the wind. It looked a bit ominous and we got a bit worried. So, I suggested that Jim get the cartons of cigarettes on the dashboard and rip off the tops. I felt that with these we could manage to squeak through in an emergency. The trail through the forest was overgrown, and there was no sign that someone had used the trail any time before us. I was getting nervous. I am not sure Jim was. We followed the rule to keep taking the right branch of any forked road so that we would end up back in civilization. At one point we broke through the dense vegetation into a clearing, and as I had feared, in front of us stood a band of a dozen people in very ragtag clothing with some weapons and *goloks*, or the Indonesian equivalent of the machete.

Jim turned his head towards me and asked, "Are these army regulars or bandits."

I said, "From their clothing they look unfortunately like bandits." I had told him to bring cigarettes on my father's advice, as they could be useful when you needed some help. In this case they were a life-saver.

Jim braked the car right in front of them, and grabbed a carton of cigarettes and a lighter he had ready. And he

walked towards this band. They were as surprised as we were. Jim greeted them and handed each a pack of cigarettes and then opened a pack and gave each of them a cigarette and lighted them. These people had not had a cigarette in ages, let alone real American cigarettes. We chatted a bit, Jim in his broken Indonesian. Then Jim wanted some pictures taken of him and the bandits, and me with the bandits. Everybody was happily posing with the cigarettes hanging of their lips. Such photo sessions in many cases are often the ice-breakers, and for a short moment when you put your arm over a stranger's shoulder there is an instant camaraderie. Then Jim said to them that we had to go on as if there was nothing special and we said good bye to them. We shook hands with them. We shouted, "*Tabe, tabe,*" or good-bye, good-bye." We climbed back into the Volkswagen as if it was the most normal thing to do. Jim started the engine and waved good-bye to these "friendly people." They waved back as they opened up their ranks to let us through. It was all big smiles. I admired Jim for his coolness under duress. But when we had driven a half an hour he stopped and was shaking badly. It was sort of a delayed reaction. Yes, we were lucky again.

In the end we found the springs, but the water was not so hot and it was getting late. So, we got our bearings back to return to Pengalengan where the hotel was. Again we came upon an open area, and there before us stood a sand-bagged guardhouse with some policemen. They were surprised to find us coming in on them from the area where the terrorists were. Jim told me not to say anything about our encounter. We were led to a tea plantation and the manager chewed us out for driving up into terrorist country.

I had also arranged a trip to take photos with Jim and Dr. Verstapped to Ujung Kulon, the wild life sanctuary of the last remaining Javanese rhinoceros on the southwest point of Java. Jim later showed me the photos later, which were blurred, because he told me that he was so nervous when he was finally confronted by the animal.

Jim came by again a few months later to take me across Java. Unfortunately I had exams and could not go. I would have loved to have gone with him. On this trip, he parked his car along the railway tracks. The train came by while he was taking some photographs, and the car was totally wrecked. I later heard from him that he was ordered by the ambassador to stay in the city for a couple of months when it leaked out that he was wandering unauthorized in terrorist held areas. Whether it was the trip with me or another, I am not sure.

During this trip of his across Java he visited the geology department where I was a student and met professor KlompĖ, the Dutch Chairman of the department. I had become quite friendly with the professor and during the conversation he found out that Jim was trying to get me a scholarship. He told Jim to make every effort, because I could not graduate from the university there, due to my ethnic background and the fact that I went to a Dutch high school.

Two months later I received a cable from Jim advising me that I had been awarded a private scholarship to Cornell University and to report to the USIS office to prepare for my trip to the US. Of course, I was elated and showed up at his office. We spent the morning looking for information on Cornell University. Jim, being from the Midwest, was not

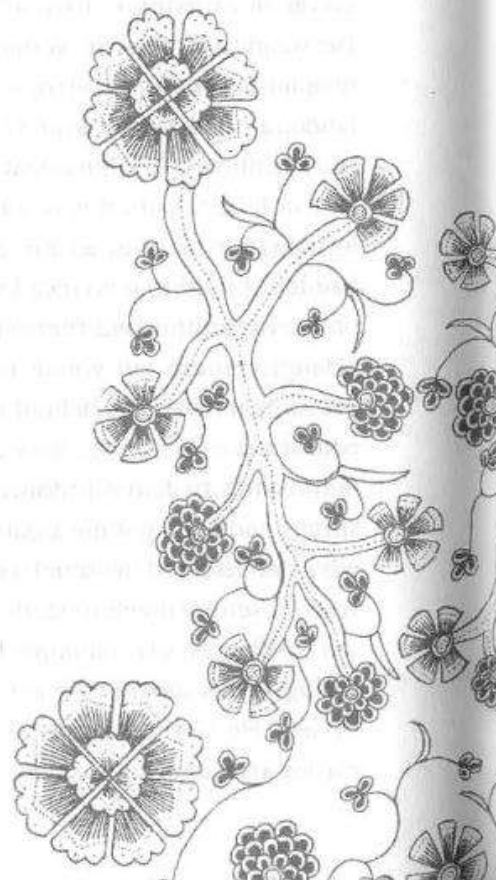
quite sure where it was located. Later I found out that Cornell was famous for Southeast Asian Studies and in particular, Indonesia.

But my excitement cooled down a bit, because as I mentioned before, I had been preparing myself for the trip with Dr. Kostermans to East Central Borneo, now called Kalimantan. I had really wanted to go on the expedition. Fortunately, Dr. Kostermans, who was the expedition leader, made arrangements with Jim for me to go up for a month into Borneo, as it was a rare opportunity for a young man to go on an expedition. I would skip the orientation course at Bennington College in Vermont. However, there were a lot of administrative problems because of the fact that I had landed a private grant from Cornell University. The Ministry of Education refused to clear me for departure and I had to stay in Jakarta until it was sorted out. It took Jim many days to convince them to let me go, but by then the expedition had left. I tried to convince Dr. Kostermans that I should go on the expedition and find another scholarship. But he said, "Heng, you are too young to decide and I have made the decision to leave you behind so that you can pursue a proper education." Of course, he was right. Eventually, I got the permission to leave Indonesia because Jim pulled some strings and even got me a partial travel grant from someone who had declined his scholarship. So off I went to America, where I settled down to study and enjoy my stay.

When he was on home leave Jim came and visited me during my freshman year at Cornell in the middle of Spring Break.. He was curious after I described to him the wild parties and orgies at Cornell. He came from the University

of Wisconsin, where such things did not take place, and after spending the Spring Break with me he told me that he was not familiar with such rowdy parties as they had at Cornell. He agreed that they were really wild after I took him to a party at my fraternity. In the end I adapted myself quickly to life in America and ended up staying there permanently.

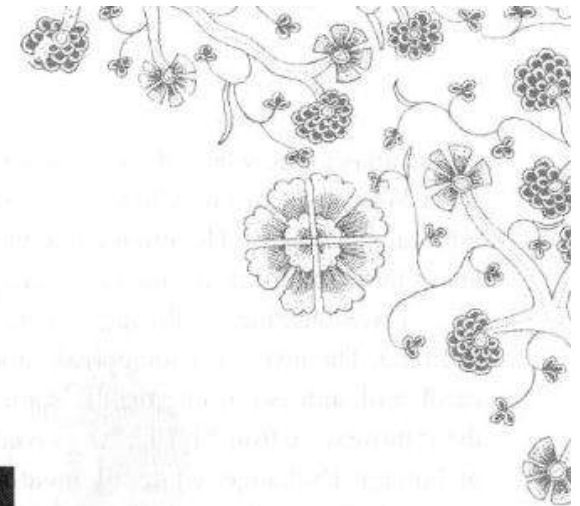
But without Jim I would not have gone there at all, and I would not have had those exciting trips through West Java.



Leaving Home

The day arrived for my departure to the United States. Of course, I was excited. I had seen all the photo books at the library and all the *National Geographic*. So, I knew that it was going to be somewhat different from Holland where my parents and other members of the family had visited. My parents and the rest of the family took me to the airport, Kemajoran. In 1956 the airport was very simple at the edge of town and the procedures friendly.

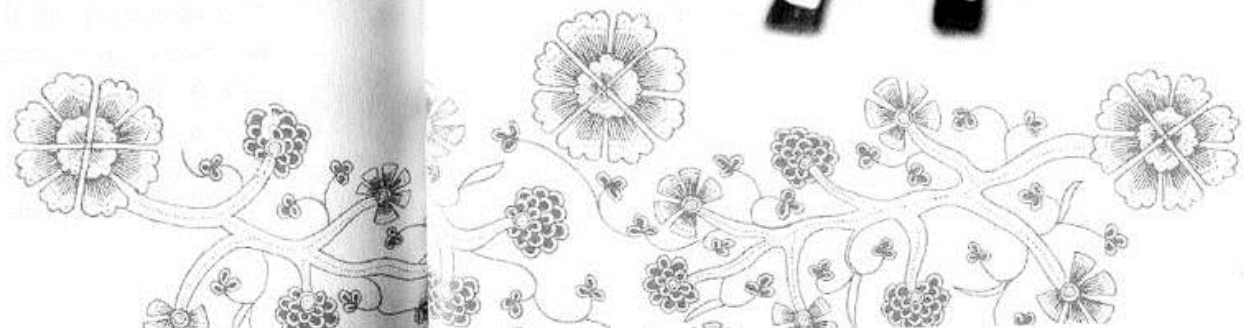
We all sat on the veranda of the airport restaurant, which simply opened onto the tarmac. The photographer of USIS showed up and needed to take a photo of me. Jim was there to see me off and calm me down. The day before I was at the USIS office where they gave me my fat airline ticket. I did not realize that I would be changing planes so many times before I arrived in Albany, New York, where I would take the bus to Bennington, Vermont. Jim and I were looking

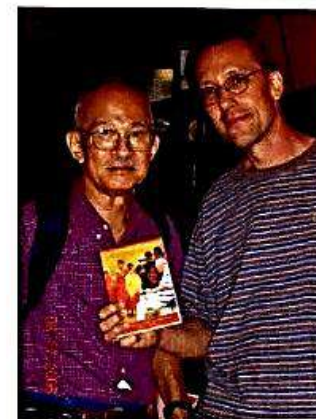
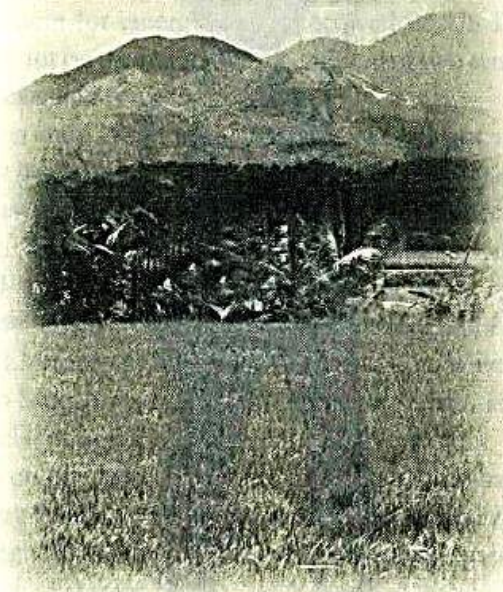


on the atlas to see where these places were. He himself was from Wisconsin in the Midwest and so not quite familiar with the places east. He told me that my trip would take me about three to four days, and he was right.

I was wearing an old suit of Dad's which was altered to fit me. The rest of my total possessions fitted into a small cardboard suitcase. Dad gave me some money for the first days; those were from his carefully saved and meager savings of Foreign Exchange, while my great-aunt Tjoen Lee gave me some more for emergencies. I received 25 US Dollars from USIS for on the road, which consisted of two ten dollar travel checks, and five singles.

When they announced the flight, we all got up and everybody had to give me a kiss. Jim walked me to the plane which was parked just a few hundred meters from the restaurant. He shook my hand and wished me good luck, and then I waved to the family, climbed the stairs into the airplane and turned around once more at the door of the plane. It was a KLM four-engine Boeing Constellation, which took me first to Singapore, then Manila, Tokyo, Guam, Hawaii, San Francisco, and finally to Albany, New York. I had embarked on the greatest journey of my life, one that took me far away from my childhood years in Java. My adventure had just begun and I ended up traveling the globe for decades in search of adventure.





The Author and Don Gilliland of DASA bookshop in Bangkok with a copy of the book the Pigeons and the Witchdoctor.

Heng L. Thung,
senior advisor SPAFA

Heng Thung was born in the Dutch East Indies, which later became Indonesia. He grew up on the Island of Java until he left for the United States to pursue his further studies. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Geology, a Master of Sciences in Aerial Photo Studies, and a Ph.D. in Transportation, Regional and City planning -- all from Cornell University.

The author worked and traveled in many countries from Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, the tropical jungle of Sumatra and the veldt of Africa, the Arctic Islands of Spitzbergen north of Norway. These stories are published in his earlier book "The Pigeon and the Witchdoctor."

He is now retired and reside with his wife, Yvonne, in Bangkok, his home away from home and serve as advisor in Remote Sensing and Environmental Studies of the SEAMEO-SPAFA Regional Center for Archaeology and Fine Arts in Bangkok.



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IN THE SHADOW OF A VOLCANO

This is a story about the privileged life of a planter's son, growing up carefree in Java where the sun always shone, the rain always fell, and the land was always green. These were the last good days before World War II, when life passed by peacefully in an idyllic little town named Sukabumi on the slope of Mount Gede. From the dormant volcano's crater edge, Heng dreamed of studying geography and seeing the world. That he did and more, ultimately writing a book, *The Pigeons and the Witchdoctor*, that recounted his many adventures making maps around the world from the tropical jungles of Sumatra to the cold Arctic archipelago of Spitzbergen north of Norway, from Holland and Spain to the islands of the Pacific.

In the Shadow of a Volcano was originally written for his daughters who were born and now live in America, alien to the period and environment in which he grew up in Java. For Heng, it was a land of plenty and happiness, where he was always protected in a seemingly carefree environment, unmindful of the hardships his parents endured to provide his siblings and him a good life. His family life and history fill this book with rich and animated anecdotes from a way of life long past.