

Chapter Eight

WINDHOEK

As Hermann told Marie in his letters, he had found that there were several schools in Windhoek that taught through the medium of German. In effect there was only one school that he would consider for his children - the German Primary School administered by the government. The other German schools were both private institutions one run by the Roman Catholic Church and the other one was funded by Germany.

So it was the school in the Peter Muller Street, led by a kindly man, Kronsbein by name, that Marie and I were sent to in January 1934. In later years it was called the Orban School, named after a long time Director of Education in the SWA Administration. Built in colonial style it is a big square building with classrooms facing the central courtyard. A staircase led to the hall upstairs. I cannot remember any functions taking place in that hall but we had singing and art lessons there. I do not know if there were any other rooms upstairs. It is sixty years since I left that school so the memory is a bit hazy.

For Marie it was a fun year - she soon made friends, had a kindly old lady who was teaching this standard six class - in those days all primary schools ended with standard six so that children attended the school for eight years. Later it was found that Marie lost much of the English she had learnt in England during that year and struggled a little when she attended the English section of the Windhoek High School in 1935.

In order to help us younger children we were sent to the English section of the Leutwein Street Primary School in 1940 where we spent the next two and three years respectively. It did help us when we attended the high school even if we were not very happy about the change of schools at that stage. Walter, in particular, was exposed to some ugly jibes and fights, because he was seen as a *Duitser* (Afrikaans for a German person) by his new school mates.

Our arrival in this country, which was to become our new country, coincided with end of a long and severe drought. The whole country must have presented a desert-like

appearance. When on Christmas Eve Ernst Rudolf took Marie and Walter for a long walk a cloudburst of awesome proportions struck. They must have found shelter somewhere but on their way home their path was blocked by what appeared to be a raging torrent. It was decided to cross the river via a railway bridge, stepping from sleeper to sleeper. Ernst Rudolf put Walter on his shoulders and held Marie's hand. It was the first and important lesson to learn that in that environment a dry riverbed could become a very dangerous place almost within minutes.

Life at the *Ausspannplatz* house was very busy as Huka got his business established. I have little memory of the sequence of events but the Chevrolet lorry was purchased



*Hermann (Huka) at his desk in the
Ausspannplatz*

quite soon. A man was employed who was to accompany Ernst Rudolf and Huka on their travels as they drove to the east, north and south from Windhoek to visit farms. [There were not many farms in the west because the Namib Desert lies beyond the mountains that lay to the west]. Were farmers contacted in advance? Or was there a list requesting this service? I have no idea but they certainly went on these trips regularly. Known as

going *auf Pad* it certainly meant that they would be away for a week or so.

On occasion they would camp out in the open, but often they would be invited to spend the night on the farm. In that way they soon got to know the country and although I doubt that Huka actually enjoyed the trips, it was good that he got to know the people. Ernst Rudolf, however, did build up an extensive knowledge of the country that in later years was to be of utmost importance to him. After Huka contracted pneumonia in 1934 or '35 and was seriously ill, I think it was decided that it would be better if he did not accompany Ernst Rudolf on a regular basis.

A chicken run was built in the back of the large garden at the house and chickens kept which meant that we were mostly supplied with eggs. The run also served as a hold for the odd ram that had to be kept for a few days and was fed with lucerne that was bought and stored.

For Walter as only child in the house while his sisters were at school that year 1934 must have been exciting. So much was happening as our parents were making a new life for themselves and the family. Even shopping expeditions to the nearby shops would have been an adventure in the beginning: there was the bakery, the butcher and a small general dealer. Although this shopkeeper sent a messenger round in the morning and one could order the necessary goods, a visit to his tiny shop was often also necessary. Once or twice a week a greengrocer came with donkey-drawn cart and sold fresh fruit and vegetables.



*Ernst Rudolf Scherz
as he was in ± 1936*

Of course Walter would have watched as Ernst Rudolf began to establish the garden and he could admire the latter's workshop in one of the outbuildings in the yard. He learnt the fundamentals of woodworking there, which he kept up as a hobby until his studies, and work, prevented him from doing any more.

Many of the boxes in which goods had been brought from Berlin were stored in the two garages - the vehicle was never kept there as access to these garages was difficult. As these boxes were gradually unpacked familiar articles appeared in the house. Bookshelves that had come as separate planks were reassembled and gradually filled with books. Forty boxes of books had been left behind with the idea that they might possibly be forwarded if necessary later on. I think they would have certainly been destroyed when Berlin was bombed during the war. As it is the walls of the room that eventually became the living room were lined with books.

The owners of the house, having let it with furniture for the year, suddenly decided they needed the furniture before the year was over. Some bits of furniture like two desks, a dining room table and chairs were hastily bought on auction sales, but also much use was made of petrol boxes. Petrol was sold in large four-gallon tins and these were packed two at a time, in strong wooden boxes. These boxes were put together and served as open cupboards and shelves, and a number of them were covered with material, and with some stuffing, made good seats.

No furniture had been brought from Germany except two large cupboards that came in three separate chests. One had come from Halle and was known as *Grossmama's Schrank*, while the second one belonged to *Tante Anna* and she had it in her room until she left Windhoek in 1937. Marie now owns that one while I have the other. They are both beautiful bits of furniture and indeed have plenty of storage space.

Many visitors came to the house. One a lawyer, Günter Stulz from Germany was on his way to Israel where he settled although at that stage the state of Israel had not yet been established. As there really was not enough space in the house to accommodate him he stayed in the annex of the hotel next door.

He must have been with us for several weeks and when he left by train he whiled away his time composing a little poem dedicated to the family. He managed to mirror the atmosphere of the household, describing how Huka was the soul and the intellect of the house and Eva was the actual centre while *Tante Anna* was a quiet pole amongst the lively crowd - she apparently darned some socks for him. Ernst Rudolf gave advice, and acted on it, both in the house and the garden. Stulz didn't have much to say about the children except that he could hear all three as they were playing in the garden - a bit of poetic licence as he could not have heard us from the room in which he slept. Marie remembers that he spent many hours explaining the complicated British measurement system to her. She thinks that in England the children already knew the system and she found it all very complicated. I don't think we ever heard from him again after that, but this poem is there as a reminder of his visit to the home that the Loening family had created in Windhoek. [A copy of the poem can be found in Appendix D]

Others who came to stay for a night or two would be travellers from Germany. I also remember a man who had an eye injury caused by barbed wire that got into his eye while fencing a property. He had to lie in complete darkness so a bed was made for him in the little storeroom next to the garages - as there were no windows it must have been very stuffy. Marie spent some time reading to him and decided that he was rather stupid!

As a result of friendships formed through contact with farmers, Walter and I were

invited to spend school holidays on farms. I am surprised today with what confidence our parents sent us off to spend weeks away from home when we were very young. On two separate occasions we were sent by train in the company of some adult [once it was only the teenaged son of the host family] and had to cope with some confusing conditions. That holiday was to mark the first of Walter's migraines, with which he battles to this day. We were warned not to drink from the artesian well as it contained salts, which would give us diarrhoea. However, we did not heed the warning - with dire consequences. They were good holidays though, we enjoyed the life on the farms and it was healthy as well as educational as we got some idea of farm life. We wrote letters, as did the hosts so that there is a record of these holidays.

Within a very short time Eva was invited to join a Women's Benefit Society and was asked to be the secretary. This organisation ran an old-age-home, a children's home and was responsible for the maternity home known in the town by its nickname - *Storchennest*. [Stork's nest- pink /blue flags were hoisted when a baby had arrived!] Many years later Heidi Loening was born there!

Fund raising was obviously one of this Women's Benefit's Society main concerns. Through this society Eva especially made contact with many people. Sadly after about two years, as the Nazis established themselves more firmly in the country, the leadership of this society decided that they could no longer make use of the wife of a non-Aryan as secretary. The typewriter she had been given to use to do their work was summarily collected and all contact was broken. She didn't need them and had

plenty to do without doing their work but it hurt, as did so many niggly insults from other Nazi sympathisers at that time.



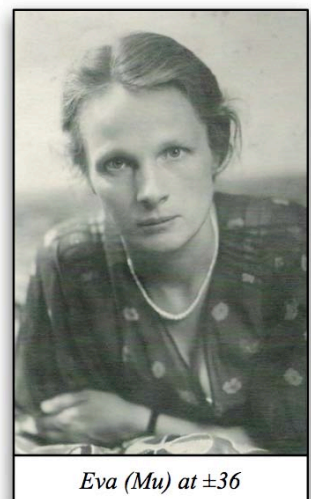
Marie with her father on the steps of the Christuskirche

A highlight for the family was when Marie was confirmed in the *Christuskirche*, Windhoek's most well known building, in 1935. The religious ceremony meant little to me at that time but I was looking forward to the time when I too was to go through this process. It was not to happen in that church and not at

the age of 15 as Marie was then. It was, however, a family event and because she had received instruction together with the other German children she became friendly with girls who attended the private school, which gave us an insight into that school. A woman who taught there was the granddaughter of Heinrich Hoffmann, friend of our ancestor, Carl Loening, who published Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*. We did not have much contact with her but she must have been at the house a number of times. Marie recalls that she took her to her first experience of a football match.

Some unfinished business necessitated that Huka had to return to Germany in 1936. Germany was thriving as Hitler was rebuilding it. The Olympic Games took place in Berlin that year. He would not have been very interested in that but he was there during the time and his letters described all he observed. Some of Eva's letters written to him give us an insight into how life went on without him at the *Ausspannplatz*. Marie came to sleep in the parents' bedroom, thus vacating a room that could be let out. With that the first boarder moved in. Over the next 15 - 16 years she was to be followed by many, some of whom became family friends. An amusing little anecdote concerns Tobias, the Ovambo man, who came in daily for household chores, including polishing the concrete floors, and looking after the stove in the kitchen. It appears that as it was school holiday time he was also taking things lightly and decided to arrive late. It had to be explained to him that the person whom he regarded as yet another visitor was not a visitor but a paying guest. Eva expected him to be there early enough to light the Primus stove so that the boarder could have her morning tea or heated milk. It seems that he had been given the job and the boarder had agreed to that, saying that Eva should stay in bed a little longer. So Tobias had to be spoken to very firmly!

Eva certainly needed the rest as her life was busy indeed. Apart from running this household she had to walk to town - even in winter it became hot and tiring - in order to visit the bank, see the dentist and occasionally visit a friend. As a highlight she had been invited to tea by the magistrate's wife and wrote amusingly how she practised her 'excellent' English. [Till the end of her life she would query English expressions as we became more familiar with this, our second language, and as our children spoke it as



Eva (Mu) at ±36

their first language.] The acquaintance came about as the magistrate's daughter had become friendly with Marie. It seems to have been a good afternoon. At the end of the year the magistrate was transferred back to what was then referred as the Union. So although there had been a return visit it did not develop into a closer relationship.

In the meantime Eva was envious of Huka being back in Berlin and seeing their friends and relatives there. While he was there he did visit many, stayed with some and could report back on conditions. He also met up with Ilse, one of Ernst Rudolf's many lady friends from the Lankwitz days. She had a Jewish friend who had managed to escape to England and Ilse hoped that she would be able to join him there at a future date. As that was impossible at that time she expressed the desire to join us in Windhoek.

She arrived sometime during that year and eventually found employment with a photographer who had befriended us. Quite how she fitted in during those early days I am not sure - once Huka was back the boarder moved out and Marie and Ilse shared a bedroom. She was not really suited to the rough life of Africa and I think at times she must have annoyed Eva, but of course she was a friend who needed help and got it in our home. As she was very attractive, she soon found admirers and led a busy social life such as was possible in Windhoek.

Huka's return trip was by air and it must have been a most exciting and entertaining journey. It took ten days as the plane landed all over Africa and the passengers slept in hotels en route. We were a little too young to really absorb the significance of the difference this made to intercontinental travel, and one remark he made after relating some of his experiences was that his children would in the distant future laugh about the ten days it took by air to get from Berlin to Windhoek. I don't think we ever really laughed but I am sure we would love to do a trip like that today. Alas, the days of peaceful Africa were over in the 1960s and it would be virtually impossible to do now.

The 1935-38 period is crowded with memories of incidents that affected the family life. A significant one was that *Tante* Anna decided to return to Holland as she was

not very happy in Windhoek. In Utrecht she had her friends and an assured income derived from her husband's pension. She found a comfortable apartment and established a life more suited to her cultured and intellectual needs. The war was to destroy all that and with many others she suffered many hardships. She did, however, survive and died many years later in 1961.

As the room she had occupied became vacant the next boarder moved in - a young lawyer from Germany who, like us, was non-Aryan. He had found employment with a local law firm and decided to study Roman Dutch law so that he could be admitted to the Bar. He was one of the young people who had found our home a congenial place to visit. Whilst Jewish immigrants were absorbed into, and were cared for, by the established Jewish community, non-Aryans were not as easily absorbed in the Windhoek society. So it was that Hans Ludwig Meyer came to live with us at the *Ausspannplatz*. Soon he became part of the family - much the same age as Ilse and Ernst Rudolf and while ten years older than Marie, found her very attractive!

During the time Huka was away Eva was stung by a bee. It was always presumed that it was a bee sting although now I do wonder if it was not perhaps another insect - a spider, possibly? The sting affected her rather badly and the female doctor who was attending her at the time suspected a heart problem. Windhoek's altitude was always blamed when people developed heart problems. The best remedy was a few weeks at the coast. So it was that she and we two younger children went off on the first of several annual holidays to Swakopmund. We were both recovering from quite a severe attack of chicken pox and the doctor advised that we too would benefit from this holiday even to the extent of missing some school.

In retrospect I wonder how much Eva gained from that holiday. We had found accommodation in the boarding house run by the grandparents of my school friend. She and her sister joined us there, as Marie did once she had finished her year-end exams. It was, however, a very long and rather exhausting walk to the beach where we would spend all day. We children certainly had a wonderful time. My friend fondly remembers evenings when our Mu read to us all which made it special for her. Walter must have got a serious throat infection, with a raging temperature, which sparked off a delirium during which he yelled 'blue murder'. This obviously

discomfited Mu considerably, as the other holiday guests thought she was beating the poor boy!

In subsequent years we stayed in a private school hostel and always loved being there. As asthma would plague Huka whenever he came to the coast, he never joined us, which meant Christmas without him. That Eva benefited enormously from the change of air is obvious as the hay fever that affected her in Windhoek was not evident at the coast. Huka would stay behind in Windhoek cared for by Christine, who had replaced Tobias, and Hans Ludwig kept him company. I can only think that he would have taken care of the shopping, as I cannot imagine our father doing any household shopping.



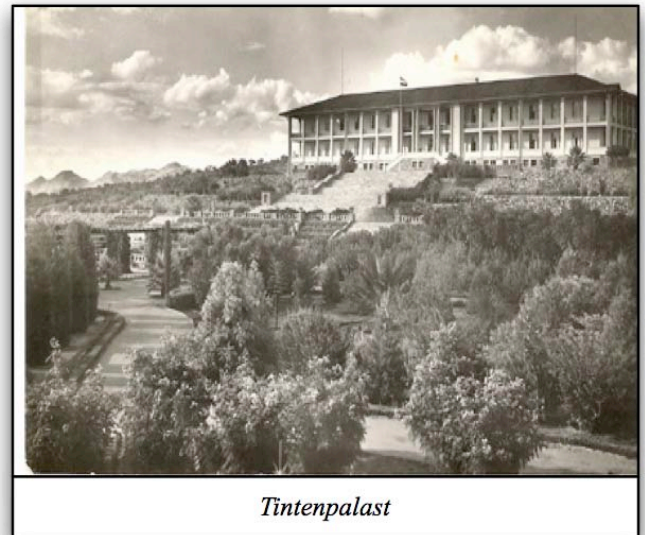
*Annelise Fusshippel
(Füsschen)*

In 1938 a visitor from Germany was to bring a drastic change into our life. She did not really come to visit us but Ernst Rudolf. She was Annelise (Lie) Fusshippel, always known as *Füsschen* to us in the family. When she had seen Huka in Germany during his visit she told him that she really very much longed to see Ernst Rudolf so he encouraged her to come and visit. It was very exciting when they decided to get married and we as a family attended the quiet wedding ceremony in the *Christuskirche*. It had to be quite soon as she needed to get back to Germany in order to close her photo studio and pack her belongings to come back to establish a home in Africa.

Also 1938 brought about a change that was to affect us all for the rest of our lives. In August of that year Hermann Loening had been in South West Africa for five years and he could apply for South African citizenship. As South West was still a British protectorate it was in fact British citizenship that was later converted to South African. It meant relinquishing his German citizenship and by that time he was not sorry as he had seen and heard enough about the horrors brought about by Hitler and the Nazi regime. He also sensed that war would break out sooner or later and felt his family was safer being British rather than German. [There was a major political crisis in September 1938 which was averted by the British Prime Minister travelling to

Munich where some agreement was reached]. In a letter to her sister-in-law, Anna, Eva asked her not to inform brother Otto about this change of citizenship. He had from the beginning been very much against Hermann's decision to emigrate and been critical about the move to Africa.

Most important for Hermann himself was that he could now at last earn money by using his intellect. An acquaintance who was employed by the SWA Administration as a translator of the official Government Gazette that appeared in English and Afrikaans into German for the benefit of the quite considerable German population, was leaving Windhoek. So she suggested that Hermann should apply for the position and she may have given the authorities a hint as well. So he was appointed and daily walked to the *Tintenpalast* [ink palace], as the Government Buildings were known.



Tintenpalast

He became acquainted with South African legislation, which was a familiar field to him. It meant that he was meeting many officials and it meant he had contact with people with whom he could discuss political and economic matters.

The naturalisation also meant the end of the partnership with Ernst Rudolf and the whole business of trading with Karakul rams was closed down. Ernst Rudolf moved to a farm where he and his new wife made their first home. They did not stay there for very long as he got employment with the SWA Karakul Breeders Association and they could make their home in Windhoek.

Another important result of the naturalisation was that Huka could now allow his wife and children to travel to Europe. This was financed mainly by the Gierke family in Polanowitz, as Luise was anxious to see her daughter. So it was that in April 1939 Eva and her two younger children embarked in Walvis Bay to set sail for Antwerp.