

## Chapter Ten

### CONCLUSION

I started this story of our family with the idea of giving my children, my nephews and nieces and their children an idea of our roots. It has become very much the story of the family that seventy years ago moved to South West Africa now called Namibia. I have been asked how far was I going to go and decided that it had to end with the death of our parents. As our father died in 1943 and our mother thirty-one years later in 1974 that has to be the actual end.

Once Walter had left home at the beginning of 1947 in order to pursue his medical studies, life must have been lonely for Eva in that large house at the *Ausspannplatz*. She continued to work for the SWA Administration. Happily, in later years she was asked to look after the library of the Legislative Assembly in the *Tintenpalast*. This was a job much more to her liking and typically she made it her own by beginning to understand much of what was required by the officials in the Administration. She certainly became sufficiently proficient in Afrikaans to comply with any demands made on her.

She took in boarders to help pay for the rent of the house and that gave her an interest as she met some young people who needed a temporary home. Week after week she would write – type in triplicate - long letters to us children giving us an idea of her life. The family friends, and especially and most important of all, Ernst Rudolf and his wife, Füsschen, as we always called her, would call in. Occasionally she would be invited out, but much of her life would be a slog – work and making sure the boarders were satisfied.

She eagerly anticipated holiday times - either we would come home or she would use her annual leave to visit us. First of these was to be the wedding of Marie to Ernie Vorwerk in May 1948 in Pietermaritzburg. Ernie had come to Windhoek at Christmas 1947 and met the family then. Then in December 1952 she travelled to Cape Town to attend Walter's graduation. A year later we all met in Windhoek for Christmas when the youngest of the three Vorwerk boys was baptised there. It was an emotional day as on that occasion we were saying good-bye to the house at the

*Ausspannplatz* that had been our home for twenty years.

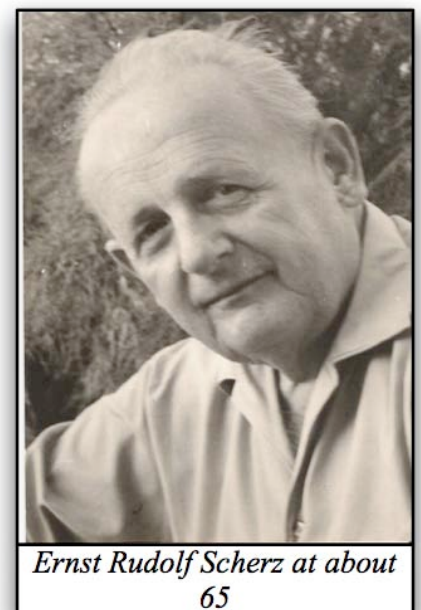
Once the Vorwerk family had left in early January 1954 it was time to pack up the household, as Mu was to move to a flat attached to the Scherz house at the other end of Windhoek. The last of the many people who had over the years rented the room at the back that had once been our bedroom and then had often changed occupants, moved into a flat also attached to the Scherz house. This was a young Danish-German couple, Per and Kara Borum, who were both congenial, friendly people. It was convenient as they had a car and could give Mu a lift to work.

Immediately after the move Eva and her two younger children travelled together as a threesome for the last time. On 30 January 1954 Walter married his sweetheart of most of his student days, Hilary Wille, in Paarl in the Western Cape. They spent the first year of their married life at an Anglican mission in the Transkei where Walter had served his houseman year in 1953.

Back in Windhoek the next wedding had to be planned – I spent three months with Eva to prepare for my wedding. This was luxury as I had already resigned from my post as assistant librarian in Bloemfontein and decided to stay with her in Windhoek until the day in April when Piet Joubert came with his parents for the wedding in the *Christuskirche* – it had been a childhood dream that I might get married in that church. That the dream actually became a reality is a happy co-incidence.

News of grandchildren arriving made life exciting for Eva. She had visited all our homes so could picture the young families: the three boys in the Vorwerk home in Pietermaritzburg were given a sister in 1955 soon after the first of the four Loening girls was born. A year later the first of the three Joubert girls was born at Michaelhouse in the Natal midlands.

Living in the house with the Ernst Rudolf and Füsschen as well as the Borum couple brought quite a bit of



entertainment as well as distractions that varied her life. Among other things she was asked to help with the nursing of sick friends and family. One such a case was Kara Borum's sister who became seriously ill and needed special care and diet. Another was a farmer's wife (a friend of the Scherz couple) who was suffering from cancer and needed care and attention. Somehow Eva fitted all this activity into her busy life.

During these years she met and got to know the Claassen couple – he was the Chief Justice in SWA and he and his wife were very involved with the Moral Rearmament movement. Marie Claassen encouraged Eva to take an active part in this movement. It brought about a change in her and her religious awareness. Through this association she also met many more people. She had an active social life that was described in some detail in her weekly letters to us.

Walter and Hilary came to live in Windhoek in January 1955, partly to fulfil his student days' dream, but also to work off a government study loan. It was a totally different Windhoek from the former days as many of the historic buildings in the main street had been demolished to be replaced by very ordinary semi high-rise structures. Mu was still working in the *Tintenpalast*, and probably still went there twice a day as she was used to go home for lunch.

Two of the Loening daughters (Hilda-Marie and Heidi) were born there, which gave Mu an opportunity to see some grandchildren at close quarters. She developed a warm relationship with the two grandchildren, especially the older one - Hilda-Marie - who spent quite a lot of time with her at the Scherz house. Walter and Hilary got to know some of the old family friends but also met many young families.



Walter was offered a transfer to Ovamboland as Regional Medical Officer at the beginning of 1958. Although it had many attractions one had to accept that it was not a suitable climate nor was there a reliable water supply for a family with little

children. They decided to take up a locum job at Ceza Mission Hospital in Zululand and sadly had to leave Mu alone once again. The 'locum' job turned into ten years of medical mission work before Walter achieved one of his aims, to become a paediatrician. Eva was to get to know the work of the Swedish mission well during the years that the family was there as she spent part of her leave there.

By 1964 the Joubert family had moved to Johannesburg and a trip to Windhoek by car didn't seem quite so daunting so we visited Mu in August of that year. It was not easy for her to accommodate all five of us but with her usual capacity of facing up to problems and with the help and advice of the Scherz couple she managed.

By this time it had become clear to her as well as to us, her children, that she should move closer to her children. It was during this holiday we spent with her that we discussed possible plans as to her future. It was then that she stated quite firmly that before there was any further discussion on this she wanted to see all those who were dear to her in Germany.

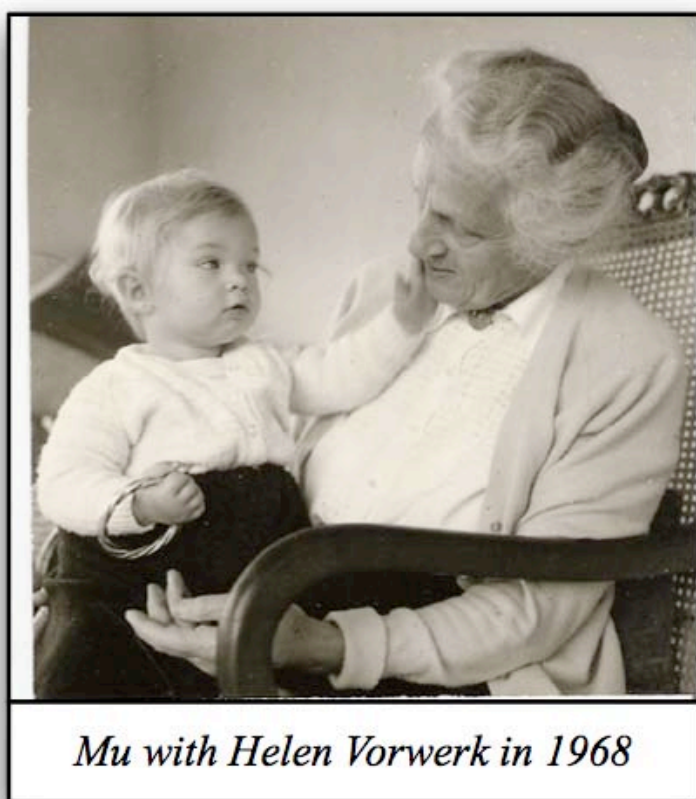
This trip to Germany was a wonderful success. I seem to remember that she slept in sixty-five different beds during the weeks she was away: she saw her surviving siblings and also all the nieces and nephews, the surviving *Carmenstrasse* cousins as well as friends in Berlin. We must remember that this was in the days of the infamous Berlin Wall and to get official permission to visit the Communist ruled East Germany was not without hassles. But she did it and particularly saw an old friend closely associated with the Soviet government. It gave her an insight into the life of those living 'behind the wall' of what was then the DDR – *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*. She did not live long enough to know that that was to become part of history in 1991.

In a way she broke the ice for all of us as we all with our families followed with visits to the families in Germany and made it easier for us to find contact with the many relatives when we in turn visited Germany later in the 1960s. I met her at the airport in Johannesburg and so got a potted version of her many experiences.

Immediately after her return she went on to Pietermaritzburg where by a happy co-

incidence a little house within easy walking distance of the Vorwerk home was for sale. So the die was cast – she would move there once the sale was complete.

I am sure packing up in Windhoek was not easy and the decision as to what to take to her new home and what to discard – and parting from friends must all have added to the trauma of the move. However, the new home in what used to be the garage under a huge avocado tree became a very comfortable flat. With typical enthusiasm she managed to get a disused garden into some sort of order. She also accepted a job in the Provincial Library Services.



Visits from the Loening family and the Jouberts and also, surprisingly, from her siblings brightened these days in her last home. Both Konrad and his wife Charlotte visited the country and were intrigued by the life she led. A few years later her sister Tina also paid her a visit. Of course she had daily contact with the Vorwerk family who all had to pass her gate to and from school and work. Also, in 1967, she was with them when the last of all the twelve grandchildren, Helen Vorwerk, was born. At

last she could really enjoy cuddling a grandchild and watch her development at close quarters.

Marie has recalled that in that period the knowledge and experience Eva brought to the Library Services was much appreciated. Both there in the library and in the neighbourhood she soon became known as “dear Mrs Loening” and not just as Marie’s mother. She very soon established her own small circle of friends and could entertain them in her flat or garden.

Sadly her health deteriorated and she had to give up the work at the Library Services. A little dog, Moritz, was to be her companion on daily walks in the area. While the Vorwerks visited Germany in 1973 she spent the period with us in Johannesburg but this was to be her last visit there.

The last months of her life, she spent with the Loening family in Durban, during which time her health rapidly deteriorated. Early in January 1974 she had to undergo an exploratory operation that revealed an advanced cancer at the entrance to the stomach. As a result of a serious complication she became mentally disturbed. Her death in March 1974 was a merciful release from a very confused world.

Her ashes were put into the grave where Huka had been laid to rest in 1943 in the Windhoek cemetery. What follows is a translation of a letter dated 24 June 1974 from Ernst Rudolf addressed to Marie, Walter and me:

“I felt I wanted to tell you about the interment of the urn of Mu ... we set the date for Saturday 15 June at 10.00 a.m. Lie and I met her friends whom we had contacted and the following came (he mentions the names of four women, one the sister of my erstwhile school friend who has moved to the States and another the wife of the former neighbour at the *Ausspannplatz*). At the gate of the cemetery we were met by the representative of the undertakers' company that had dealt with the arrangements. He handed me the small noble cask containing the earthly remains of our beloved Mu. I carried it to the grave in which a small shaft had been prepared.

I addressed the assembled friends and the ashes. I did not find it easy to speak about the long road that the young girl took when she left her parents' home to follow the man whom she loved. It was to become rougher than either of them could possibly anticipate. Often it was expected that the wife so much younger than the husband had to be his support. The words duty and love ruled her life and this clear directive gave her life the necessary strength and support. They carried her over the death of Huka and the difficult years when she was alone to guide you, her children, into life.

How wonderfully the aim was achieved – gradually she could permit her willpower and her hands a little more peace and she could afford to rest occasionally. Only a little because the Prussian



spirit in her found it almost more difficult to accept rest rather than duty and work. I know, however, that having achieved the aim, the thought of children and grandchildren warmed her heart. Here at Huka's grave the circle is completed.

The little that constitutes her earthly remains we added to those of his. But the spirit of them both continues to live in you, her children and her grandchildren and in us, her friends.

I laid the ashes into the shaft and for some time we stood remembering her as we knew her. She had been very close to us.

You children must decide how best the gravestone can be altered so that her name can be recorded".

We know that they arranged to have the name added to the existing stone as can be seen on the photograph. We are indebted to these dear friends that they not only arranged all that but also- typically - photographed it so it can be included in this work

In conclusion it is perhaps good to add that our father achieved his object: to give his children the chance to grow up as 'free' young people, safe from the horrors of Nazi Germany and the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.