

A Hundred Years ago

20th April 2009 is a very special day, for it is the **100th** anniversary of the day Pauline Sophia Straatman was born.

She was my mother – Sam, Jan, Ruth, Michael, Lisa and Patti's grandmother – and great-grandmother to our sixteen grandchildren, whom she unfortunately never knew. A real clan-mother one might say. Especially if you consider that her other children, Jan, Marijcke and Ruth, each produced a lot of children and grandchildren as well.

When Lien (as she was called) was born, her parents lived in Amsterdam, where her father was the principal of a teachers training college. She was the youngest in that family, with brother Jan and sister Pum (Albertine) who were 18 and 17 at the time and youngest sister Pop (Wilhelmina), who was two years old. The eldest two were already at university, so Lien and Pop grew up together. Lien told her children lots of stories about her youth, it sounded fascinating.

The Straatman parents were in their late forties already, my mother always remembered her youth almost as if she grew up with grandparents. But she had a lot of fun at school, always had many friends and after her matric she bought a sailing-boat and spent most weekends on the water.

After Lien left school she took some commercial courses in languages (English, French, German and Spanish), and shorthand and typing, as well as an evening course at the Amsterdam School of Housekeeping, for she not only wanted to be well-equipped for a good job, she also wanted to be able to run a household when the time came.

Her first job was as a secretary at a bank, where she was promoted to Director's secretary after a year. This is where she met Arie Bakker, her future husband, who was slightly younger. They got married on 16th June 1936 and moved in with Lien's parents, having jointly bought a house in Bussum with them.

For Lien this must have been a whole new life, for married women were not allowed to work in those days, so she actually had to give up her interesting job and become a full-time housewife. As a consequence they had to function on Arie's salary alone, which was quite a struggle.

Shortly after their marriage Lien's mother became ill with Alzheimer's Disease and Lien nursed her at home until Oma Straatman passed away in 1938. In the meantime daughter Jacqueline had been born and Lien was expecting Jan. A few days after his birth World War 2 broke out and Arie had to join the Dutch army to try and defend his country. When this battle was lost he came home again and resumed his job at the bank.

The five war-years were heavy going for them, with shortages in food, coal for heating, clothing and just about everything else. Things were also not safe at all, Arie having to hide every time the German soldiers came to search for able-bodied men to send to the work-camps in Germany. Imagine Lien's worry each time this happened, with four small children knowing exactly where their father was hidden and most of them too small to realize the danger of talking about it!

Lien had a hard time, living in the European climate in a house, where only the living-room – and not even the kitchen - could be heated! She also regularly had to go around the country on a bicycle, trying to swap the few valuables they still had for food for the children. During these trips she sometimes had to sleep in a haystack on a farm. Arie took his turns to do this as well.

Four hungry, bored children to keep amused especially in winter, when darkness came at 5 p.m. and the room was barely heated for lack of coal. To keep us happy she put us on pillows in front of the heater, with a clothes-rack full of wet washing at our backs in an effort to dry the nappies etc. at the same time. There being no electricity the only light came from two or three home-made candles on the mantle-piece and then she would start telling us stories. An ongoing fairytale about three fantasy characters, Kabouter Puntmuts, Berie-Jan and Plaaggeest: a gnome, a teddy-bear and a little man called Teaser. The story never ended, she always gave it a new twist the next day, so we'd look forward to the next installment. Eventually she wrote some of the stories down and after the war they were published in three children's books.



No wonder that Lien thought she had landed in paradise when after the war the family moved to Indonesia, where the climate was so much better, food and everything normally available and no more threat of war. All of a sudden she was able to lead a normal life and she even had servants for all the work she'd been doing herself in Holland. She took up tennis again – not having played since she got married – went shopping with friends and was always waiting when the children came home from school, ready to go over their home-work with them or play board-games.

After the whole family was evacuated back to Holland because of political problems, Lien and Arie moved to South Africa, in the wake of Jacqueline (by now married to Sam and mother of two small boys), both to escape the Dutch climate and to have a chance to see their grandchildren on a regular basis. Lien was always extremely proud of all her grandchildren and used to tell

all and sundry of their accomplishments.

Lien and Arie on Sam's baptism day

They should have settled in CapeTown to achieve this, but Arie found a good job in Johannesburg, so they stayed there and only came to the Cape on frequent visits. Our children were always excited when Oma Lien came to stay and she patiently played endless board-games and mahjongh with them.



Oma on a visit in Disa Street

In later years her health started to give great trouble and Lien eventually lost both legs to thrombosis. Those five mostly bedridden years were extremely difficult for her, but she always stayed interested in the family and prayed for each of its members individually every day. She passed away on the 22nd of February 1982, a very much loved wife, mother and grandmother.

It is with love and gratitude that we remember her on her 100th anniversary.