

Down Memory Lane

Grandma and Grandpa Theron
– present in the years I grew up

As remembered by their granddaughter
Neëltjie Zehnder née Strydom

Grandma:

Neeltje Johanna Elizabeth Theron née Storm
*02-12-1893 †25-12-1982

and

Grandpa:

Daniël Johannes Jacobus Theron
*07-10-1875 †16-07-1960



My sister, Sophia on Grandpa's lap and I on
Grandma's lap . Skaapplaas circa 1946

As I was writing for *Down Memory Lane*, I recalled the thought expressed by Maurice Maeterlinck in his book, *Blou Voël* (Blue Bird) that those who have passed away live again in the thoughts of those that are left behind.

I appreciate the opportunity to record and share my memories.

My father bought the farm *Skaapplaas* in the district of Heilbron when I was about three years old. A wetland, running east to west divided the farm into two areas with different soil types. We called them the black slope on the one side and the sandy slope on the other side.

We lived on the sandy slope of the vlei. On the other side of the vlei my parents built a house for Grandma and Grandpa Theron as they needed a place to stay. My grandparents had three children – my mother, who married a farmer, a son who lived in the USA and a daughter, a teacher, who taught in Pretoria and married a teacher.

Although Grandma was named Neeltje, everyone called her Nellie.

Grandpa Theron was already an old man in my eyes; he was 18 years older than Grandma. He was not a farmer and never amassed anything in his life. He had some cattle on the farm. I cannot really remember how they managed. Whether my parents supported them financially, I cannot remember either. My parents were poor when they moved to *Skaapplaas*.

I remember Grandpa Theron as a man who enjoyed playing checkers with his son-in-law from Pretoria, all the while puffing on his pipe; as a man who liked to read newspapers. When my father went to Wolwehoek (station and post office) every now and

then to fetch mail, he would bring back a bundle of newspapers. These Grandpa would read with great fervour. He was actually a frustrated politician. He was an ardent Nationalist, so I would wilfully ask him about General Smuts in answer to which he said, "I do not know what became of him – he used to be such a good man". This was a reference to the days he fought the British under Smuts during the Anglo-Boer War. And then Smuts became pro-English. Unforgivable, in Grandpa's eyes. He was a big rugby fan and liked to listen to matches being broadcast on the radio. In those days the radio was connected to a battery – usually a tractor battery. It was switched on for news, scripture and rugby only.

Grandpa had a car with a Dickey seat. I remember when my sister and I were in the seat for a ride and the engine died. We had to get out and push. Two little girls ...



Example of a 1937 Chevrolet with a Dickey seat. The one Grandpa owned was green

Grandma was "my" grandmother, because I was her namesake. She was a well-mannered and gentle person. Sometimes I spent a night at their

house and then we had "chocolate" porridge for breakfast. The porridge plates had pictures of flowers at the bottom and then we had to see who could see the flowers first as we ate. She baked pumpkin, sliced with the peel still on in the oven with cinnamon sugar on. She taught me to crochet – with wool, because it was easier.

When they visited us, she told us stories of her childhood and of what happened to her and her family during the Anglo-Boer War. We could not get enough of it.



She kept turkeys for an income

Earlier in her life, to make a living, she made clothes for other people. She always dressed tastefully despite having little money. We had to make a blouse for Home Economics when I was in Standard 6. She did the buttonholes for me with precise stitches – and had me practise on a piece of cloth so that I could master the buttonhole stitch.

Grandmother Strydom had six children and quite a few granddaughters were named after her. She

crocheted an apron for all the granddaughters named after her. My sister got one. My grandmother crocheted one for me too, totally impractical, but she did not want her namesake to feel neglected.



One night there was a strong wind that took the roof off their house. They sent a worker to convey the news with the instruction not to upset my parents. The worker said Grandpa was asking for tobacco. His tobacco was wet. Why? Because the roof ... (That was before we got hand-crank wall telephones – about 1955 – on the farms.)

Grandpa in my view, was cantankerous. He never put enough fuel into his car because it was "either stolen or it evaporated". More than once Grandma had to walk to the nearest farmhouse when they ran out of fuel on their way to Wolwehoek. He had a heart problem and could not walk that far. And she was much younger.

Grandpa passed away in my matric year. By then they no longer lived with us on the farm and were in an old age home in Heidelberg (Transvaal). After

Grandpa's death, Grandma went to America to visit her son, who went there at the end of 1945. It was a wonderful experience for her. He paid for her plane ticket – R800.

We corresponded when I was at university.

After that she went to Vrede Nursing Home to be close to my mother because my parents lived in the district after the farm in the Heilbron district had been sold. Then I saw grandma during visits.

Later in life Grandma had many ailments. Her



My grandmother with our family. My mother is front left, Grandma in the middle and I am in the back on the right (1966)

body no longer absorbed the necessary nutrients from the food and then she had to go to the hospital for a series of injections. She once jokingly referred to all the medication she had to take: "When I die, I can be ground into pills."

She died in Vrede on Christmas Day 1982, shortly after her 89th birthday. And I said goodbye to my dear grandmother in the cemetery at Heilbron on a sweltering hot day at the end of December when she was laid to rest next to Grandpa.