

### 3. A DIGRESSION

#### *Pedigree*

Before I continue the chronological record of my life, I'd like to give some family background. Skip this short chapter if you wish, you can always return to it later.

Had my Norwegian father been entered into a human version of Crufts he would have had a pretty good pedigree, one recording large swathes of his family tree back through many centuries. It is dotted with lords chamberlain, generals, business tycoons, titled nobility and assorted "pillars of society". However, I never met my paternal grandparents, because I was in Kenya and they lived in Norway. I know my Norwegian grandmother can be traced back to Thomas Parr, who is buried in Westminster Abbey. Parr's grandson and heirs established an ice business, cutting huge blocks of it from frozen Norwegian lakes inside the arctic circle during winter and storing it deep inside caves cut into the edges of nearby fjords. In summer, when demand for ice in England was high, it would be transported to London by their fleet of fast clippers. Eventually the Parr family ended up in Norway. My Norwegian grandfather, an advocate from another "pedigree" family, was also a fencing champion and I have a large silver chalice on my bookcase. It is the President's trophy of the Norwegian Fencing Association which he won in 1914, 1915 and 1917 and having won it three times was allowed to keep. My father, and in their turn his two younger brothers, were despatched to England for a full and proper education at a public school, Cranleigh, near the Southern border of Surrey.

During the early twentieth century there was much talk of Kenya in British public schools and by the time my father had completed his schooling he had absorbed the British urge to become a pioneer. He had also become an accomplished pianist and even gave concerts in Oslo, after returning there at the end of his school days. Indeed, throughout his life he always had a piano in his house, usually a top quality concert grand. Eventually, though, the urge for adventure won and he set out for Kenya in the early 1930s.

Near a town called Kakamega, 150 miles west of Nairobi and thirty miles from Kisumu (a town on the shores of Lake Victoria), there was a gold rush and that is where he headed. Here he searched for gold by day and played jazz on a honkey tonk piano in a rough and ready saloon by night, sharing a tent with two men who were to become his lifelong friends. One was called Ruebens and the other Block and they soon realised that the real money was not to be made by finding gold but by supplying services to the others. Ultimately Ruebens founded Express Transport, which was to become Kenya's largest transport company and Block eventually built up Kenya's largest chain of hotels. As an eleven or twelve year old child I sometimes sat at the top of the

stairs, eavesdropping whilst these three old friends reminisced about their escapades of those days. I remember them describing one of their favourite sports, which was to ride into Kisumu town and go on a pub crawl. Kenya's early towns were very similar to the ones one sees in American wild west movies, with dusty streets lined by boardwalks, furnished with drinking troughs and tethering points for horses, and with swing doors into the bars. Their pub crawl involved drawing straight lines between the bars on a map of the town and then following it as exactly as possible; ducking through the legs of a tethered horse, vaulting a railing, scaling over a roof top; ... they were young and high spirited and no obstacle could block their way!

By contrast, my mother's background is shrouded in mystery. Whenever we asked Mummy Ingeni about our grandfather she would smile sweetly and then change the subject, so for years we assumed she had never been married. She called herself by the double barrelled surname "Hillman-Hale" which we assumed was her father's name, especially since we had a birth certificate for George Hillman Hale (although there was no hyphenation) which showed him to be some 33 years older than she was. It was 20 years after Mummy Ingeni's death that my son, searching the internet during a bet with a friend as to which of them had the least common name in the UK, unearthed an intriguing piece of information - it was a certificate issued in South Africa for a marriage on March 31, 1920 in the Wesleyan church. My son didn't originally know exactly what he had stumbled upon, he had sent us an e-mail asking if by any chance he was related to someone called George Hillman Hale. We were astounded, because birth dates and all the names, even Mummy Ingeni's middle name, tallied. However, there was something else. The marriage records stated that at the time of her marriage Mummy Ingeni's name was Hurwitz, and that her maiden name was Hall. Had she been married twice?

Armed with all the data we could send him, my son continued to search web sites, before eventually paying a man to take a camera down a disused drift mine in Utah, where the Mormons keep all manner of old records. We now have photographic evidence that she was indeed married twice and that her first husband, Max Levine Hurwitz, was Swiss. She had married him in a civil ceremony in January 1915, a baby girl was born to them (*my mother's birthday was 31st December, 1916*) and Hurwitz was granted a divorce in March, 1918 after Mummy Ingeni had abandoned him. That made my late mother half Swiss and half British - or so we thought.

A further mystery appeared; although Mummy Ingeni's passport stated she had been born in Wimbledon, her newly unearthed marriage certificate stated she was born in Colesburg, Cape Province, South Africa: They can't both be true, and I am inclined towards Colesburgh because growing up here would explain her deep love for Africa, farm life and cattle. Long after after Mummy Ingeni had retired she still kept one cow, Chrissie, and retained an old employee, on full wages, whose sole job was to look after Chrissie!

To date I know that I am Kenya born, half Norwegian, a quarter Swiss, and a quarter (the Hall bit) debatable but quite probably South African. Furthermore, I think I am a quarter Jewish, I was brought up as a Roman Catholic, I am no longer religious, I think like a product of Africa, I live in Spain and I am a British citizen. I definitely do not have an impeccable pedigree and would be thrown ignominiously out of a human version of Crufts!

We don't know when Mummy Ingeni divorced again, but we do have records of the subsequent re-marriages of both Max Levine Hurwitz and George Hillman Hale. There is also circumstantial evidence to believe that her second marriage was even shorter than her first.

In photographs of her standing alone, Mummy Ingeni was good looking but nothing remarkable. Since she was also wide shouldered her height was not apparent except in rare group photos where she stood out, being nearly 6 foot tall. My mother though was only half an inch above 5 foot, so I assume her father was short, as are many Swiss.

Some time in the early 1920s, mysterious Mummy Ingeni made her way to Kenya, leaving her daughter behind, because part of her divorce from Hurwitz had stated that the child could not be taken out of South Africa and we assume that my mother, who was also rather secretive, remained with her step father, George Hale. When she was ten years old, in 1926, my mother finally went to Kenya to rejoin Mummy Ingeni.

Meanwhile, in Kenya Mummy Ingeni had established a dairy farm, only a mile and a half from Nairobi. Now thirty years old, she also seems to have found true love. Facts are thin, but from my mother I gleaned that he was called Patterson, his wife was in England, he worked for the government and that he died in her arms, suffering from black water fever. This is a virulent form of malaria that causes blood cells to burst, the kidneys to fail and dark haemoglobin to appear in one's urine, hence the term "black water".

According to my mother, from Patterson's death onwards there were no more men in Mummy Ingeni's private life. As more and more people settled near her farm, to the North west of Nairobi, it was a mixed blessing. People right on her doorstep created an ever increasing demand for her dairy products, but she was unable to expand her lands as her farm was hemmed in by their houses. Despite the 1929 depression she seems to have been highly successful, and when the Karen Blixen coffee estate, of "Out of Africa" fame, was subdivided and put up for sale in 1931 she was able to purchase the entire lower section of it, partly because the land value of her existing farm had risen greatly in response to the demand for residential property near Kenya's future capital city. She ripped out all but 20 acres of the Blixen coffee trees, and moved her beloved cows to their new home, the dairy farm where I spent a large part of my childhood. Co-incidentally, when I first met my future wife she was living on Patterson road, on land that had once been part of Mummy

Ingeni's first farm, and years later we lived with our two children on yet another part of it. The road, however, was probably named after the Railway Patterson, who had gained fame hunting the man eating lions of Tsavo during the building of the "lunatic line".

On the threshold of her teens, my mother was enrolled in a convent in Belgium for her education. Why a convent and why Belgium I don't know, perhaps it holds another clue to Mummy Ingeni's past. Anyway, because of her nationality, my mother was allowed the concession of taking a weekly bath, although she was not allowed to remove her chemise during the process. As her command of French grew, she asked why she couldn't wash properly and was told she should not gaze upon her body, and on further questioning was firmly told, without the chance to argue, that it was sinful. Talking about this period she says she tried to fit in but her down to earth, practical upbringing would not blindly accept dogma and, to their exasperation, she frequently questioned the nuns' teachings, although many seemed to have had a soft spot for her. But problematically, encouraged by my mother's constant questioning of dogma, other girls in the convent school had also started to question the stock answers of the nuns and priests. She told me that things came to a head when one day, in front of all the other girls, she stood up and asked a series of carefully thought out questions.

"God made us, didn't he?"

"Yes, my child, God made us"

"God is good and wonderful, isn't he?"

"Oh yes, God is indeed good and wonderful."

"God never does anything wrong, does he?"

"No. God never does anything wrong!"

"Well, if God made us, and God is good and wonderful, and God never does anything wrong," she asked in feigned puzzlement "*Then why is my body sinful?*"

Game, set and match!

As the other girls also clamoured for an answer the mother superior sent a telegram to Mummy Ingeni in Kenya to come immediately and remove her disruptive daughter from the school. Still twelve, she had achieved the impossible distinction of being expelled from a convent, without breaking any rules.

At great expense Mummy Ingeni had to arrange urgent passage via the Suez Canal to Belgium and eventually placed her daughter in a school at Tonbridge, where my rational (*sometimes infuriatingly so!*) mother received a more normal education. Pedigree the old girl was not. As my three siblings would all have to agree, our unconventional mother was a bright, alert and usually pragmatic, but sometimes barking mad, mongrel.

*(...and we - plus our descendants - carry her genes.....?)*