



I was a child of nine when we first settled in South End in 1937 - in Earl Street. Next door lived old Mrs Redondo, a son and two daughters. How fascinated I was by her stories of her childhood in Spain - especially the one about her stealing fruit from a neighbour's orchard and he tying a rope around her waist and letting her down into the pond with only her head sticking out! As a young girl she was very keen to learn Afrikaans, but after trying out at a party the few sentences one of the Brito boys had taught her, the shocked silence was enough to tell her that she had used some very bad language. She refused to learn another word for the rest of her life.

Mr George, who sold wood, the Japthas, Woodburys, Prinsloos, van Rooyens and du Piesanies. I remember the day the eldest du Piesanie son joined the Air Force and now lies buried somewhere in Italy...

The children, except the very young ones, played in the street, which was quite safe as there was no traffic to speak of. If two cars drove through our street in a day, it was a lot and then at such a low speed that everyone had plenty of time to get out of the way. When I picture that scene - so many different groups playing different games, and I compare it to the streets in most suburbs now, I can't believe the difference. The other day I had the depressing experience of driving from Diaz Road to the Collegiate School without seeing one person. No wonder so many people are lonely in the world of today. A child had only to go into the street to have plenty of playmates and, as the women walked to the shops, the many acquaintances they met on the way, or those just standing at their gates, gave them all the companionship they needed.

Dana's café - where we pinched the odd 'coronation' and 'black jack'... This kind Indian gentleman and my father remained good friends till they died.

I can still see dear old Mr Son Kee in his tiny shop in Forest Hill Road; and will I ever forget the war years of rationing when he sent a bag of sugar to my mother, telling her that he did not know when he would get another shipment and that she must not worry, but pay when she could. No white flour was available, so my father made a little wooden sieve with organdie for the meal to go through. We loathed the task of turning the handle for ages to get enough flour for the cakes my mother was always baking.

Many items were rationed during the war years - sugar, condensed milk, butter, rice, cooking oil, meal, potatoes - the list is endless. For certain foods you had to buy coupons and many is the time I stood patiently in a queue at the O.K. Bazaars in Main Street (the only branch), for two tins of condensed milk. I walked to town and back. No mother was going to dish out tram fare for anything less than two miles from home. We knew all the short-cuts. Going home from town you walked down behind the E.P. Herald offices, through a tunnel, over the Baakens River, up the hill and home. It was impossible for any boy or girl to be unfit or have weak legs with the amount of walking we did; anyone who knows Port Elizabeth is aware of how many hills there are.

Twice there was a glut of oranges and, instead of dumping them in the sea or destroying them to keep the price up, lorries came and just tipped piles of them into the streets. Isn't that a wonderful way of getting rid of them? This was thoughtfulness - not economics. I know which I would choose! The term 'price increase' was totally unknown when I was a child. Years and years went by with prices remaining the same.

All the grocery shops were owned by Chinese - Jack Kee, Date Chong On Hing Forlee Hormon... the two butcher shops by Malays and most of the cafés by Indians. At the United Dairies' depot we bought 'twistee' ice creams for a tickey each - you peeled the paper down as you are; Lailee's home-made toffee bars topped with coconut could keep you happily chewing for a long time and the London café where a hefty bag of chips cost a tickey.

Then on to our Webber Street house; Andrade's 'Elite Cafe' across the road, with Evans displaying his tombstones next door and around the corner the Viviers boys with their songs and guitars; the Indian and Malay tailors - especially Noor, where a group of teenage boys would sit on his counter and talk the afternoons away. The Anglican minister lived across the road from us in Walmer Road - his transport? - a bicycle!

Who will ever forget Nadesen Dorasamy. I could not even guess how many people had their hair cut by him. As a boy of twelve he started cutting children's hair in the afternoons in his father's shop. For this there was no charge - if the mothers were satisfied, the fathers came! He cut hair for 50 years in South End before the demolishers came and broke up what was, to the residents, the best place to live in all of Port Elizabeth. So many nationalities - English, Afrikaans, Coloureds, Chinese, Portuguese, Greeks Italians and Malays... There was love among people in those days and a sense of timeless well-being.

The trams clanked their way up Walmer Road to First Avenue and back to the Russell Road terminus. Very few people had cars. They walked, had time to stand and chat and in the top part of South End everyone knew each other. No burglar-proofing, no security gates or closed front doors and not much concern about locking doors, even at night, but I certainly never heard of a burglary, robbery or assault there.

What a day it was when my father came home with a Model A Ford. That faithful car took us on many a visit to my grandparents at Plettenberg Bay - almost a day's journey up hill and down dale, along the winding, dusty road. There must have been at least ten gates to open and close along that road, but sometimes there were little Coloured children waiting to open the gates for the pennies which would come their way. The Kromme River still ran across the road and many a car stalled if the level of the river was a bit high.

We used to go to Schoenies where my father would stack that old car to the tops of the doors with driftwood from the wreck of a ship which lay not far from the road. We children would sit perched like monkeys on top of the load all the way home.

An old lady in Balfour Street was always poking her nose into other people's business. Some boys living in Portview Flats often threw stones from behind the flats onto her corrugated iron roof and when she ran out, shouting abuse at the top of her voice to the empty street in very salty language, it made their day.

Very often in those days, when people died, a coffin was bought, the body put into it and placed in the lounge awaiting the funeral. An old man who lived in Webber Street with his son had died and was in his coffin in the lounge when this same old lady trotted in. The son, who had had enough of her, saw a golden opportunity of having some fun and when she asked him

where his dad was, he said "in the lounge". We still split our sides at the picture of her streaking down the road, shouting insults at him over shoulder! Her arthritis did not seem to worry her so much right then.

The Cunningham School still stands, almost unchanged since I left there in Std. 6. Years before I first went to school there - during the depression - soup was given to the children during the lunch break, as there were many very poor families living in the area. Long afterwards, at the yearly inter-schools athletics meetings, we had to endure the cat-calling of the children from other schools: "Cunningham sop-vreters" we were, no matter that the soup was history by then. The games we played are still fresh in my mind - ladylike games, but also 'bok-bok', which was rather dicey at times as there was barbed wire on either side of the 'pole'. We also played rugby with the boys, for which we got cuts. As far as I know there are still two of our teachers living in Port Elizabeth - Miss Werner (now Mrs Fischer) and Miss Schultz. Dear Mrs Symond, dead for many years, with her little pre-war D.K.W. She used to buy ice cream for us if she wanted us to be really good for a particular reason. What angels we were for the next couple of hours but, tomorrow was another day! There was only one rugby team made up of Std. 6 boys, with not one pair of rugby boots between them. We walked to the South End Grey School for cookery lessons once a week, which we enjoyed - anything to get out of school, but the trouble was we had to eat what we made.

During the war years I was in a classroom looking onto Randall Street, which led to the cemetery. Many a funeral procession I watched, though I seem to remember only the slow-marches of the Royal Air Force airmen, who were based at Driftsands - the site of the present airport, and the bored soldiers waiting to go 'up north' in the temporary transit camp where the present Victoria Park schools are situated. A total black-out was strictly observed during that time, with wardens going from house to house looking for a chink of light. What was referred to as 'government lorries' came to certain spots throughout town with rationed goods twice a week - only so many items per person and when Whyte's Bakery delivered the first white bread after the war, it was a special occasion.

Our last home in South End was in Wyndham Street, which had a 'shocking pole'. The concrete base of one street light gave you quite a shock when you touched it and you were really something if you had the nerve to touch it with a metal nail file. No-one seemed to bother about it and, as far as I know, it stayed that way until the houses in that area were demolished.

I could not leave a certain old lady who lived near us out of these recollections. Her husband was a dear, refined old gentleman, who did not drink, but it was a different story with 'mama', as his wife was called. She used to send the servant to the bottle store and her poor husband would spend hours looking for whatever she had bought. One day, according to her daughter, the old lady pretended to be ill in bed and "papa couldn't find the bottle because mama was lying on it"!

Johanna Reed was the last Coloured person to leave South End. She made clothes for hundreds and hundreds of women from all over Port Elizabeth in her little house above the Seamen's Institute.

When I was a teenager, you just did not go dancing without a long dress. The first thing the boys bought when they started working was an evening suit or a tuxedo. The jackets were always cream or blue and, as very few of them had cars, we were sometimes six in a car. There was always a dance at the Park Hotel on a Saturday night (now a nurses' home). Best of all, there were no traffic police. The boys did not really speed, but I remember a particular New Year's Eve when we had six in the car, one on both mudguards in front and two on the bonnet, cutting right through the



mayor's garden where only the trams went. The good, clean fun and the laughter as we drove to Humewood Beach for a swim after a dance on a hot summer's night. I don't think any of us were even aware that anything like dagga existed or, if we did, it was just a word we had heard somewhere.

How can I mention all the people, alive and dead, who made up our happy community? A community where I certainly never heard of a quarrel or bad feelings between people. Names pass through my mind - Morrison, Brassey, Long, Duthie, Gerber, Parkin, Botha, Coetzee, Venn, Symes, Phelan, Marks, Blackbeard...and who doesn't remember Mrs Stroebel?

What happened to the blind man and his little Coloured guide who led him from house to house once a week? They always got a plate of food and coffee from my mother, who roasted her own coffee beans in the same type of pot which is now used for potjiekos. When the beans were ready we ground them in a coffee grinder. Instant coffee did not exist then. I can see them now, sitting on our red polished front stoep. The postman, too, never passed our home without getting a cup of coffee in winter and a cool drink in summer. If there was cake in the house, he got a good slice of that as well.

Whenever I meet anyone who lived in South End in the old days - no matter from which walk of life - the first subject of conversation is South End. There is such deep nostalgia in their voices and a longing in their eyes, which no other place can satisfy. Just the other day I met someone who had made a detour on his way home from the university just to drive through South End again, to see the things and people of yesterday.

What happy, running, laughing children we were. Those golden days were too short to cram in all the tree-climbing, hop-scotch, rounders, soap-box rides down Balfour Street with no brakes and toktokkie (postman's knock), so every evening we played outside just a bit more under the nearest lamp post until it was bed - and no arguments!

I don't see the need for South End to be re-named but, should it ever be - just call it Avalon.

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