

A LETTER FROM BEAUTIFUL SOUTH AFRICA

by Hans Somsen [430]

At our request Hans Somsen [430], born in Wolvega, Netherlands, in 1967, writes about his life and work in South Africa. We are pleased to listen to what he says in the South African language, which has become his colloquial language. In the Dutch version of Somsen Horizon we don't translate this article in Dutch, because the two languages are quite similar. Please listen to what Hans Somsen, who travelled to the sun, has to say.

Well, I wouldn't like to make anybody jealous!

With so many Somsens abroad we also decided to take this step. Well, it was not altogether alien to us, since my wife is South African and, moreover, the country is exceptionally beautiful and the climate ..., well, I wouldn't like to make anybody jealous!

Eight years ago, having lived in Almere, Netherlands, for two weeks, I met my wife Riana Brummer [3621], who was in Holland as an au pair with a Dutch family, in a pub. She was waiting for a couple of friends and I was in a very positive mood since Holland had successfully finished an international football match. The following evening we had an appointment for a dinner in Amsterdam and four months later I had my first holiday in South Africa.

A real Somsen does not let the grass grow under his feet, especially not when important matters are concerned, so after several holidays to and fro and a couple of years later I asked her father for permission to marry his daughter. After all not such a foolish move to continue the tradition asking the parents for permission since he is a sturdy fellow and he has a considerable collection of weapons.

The answer was positive and after having married here in South Africa we returned to The Netherlands, where Riana studied at a college in Diemen and I resumed my work for *Dunlop* in Amsterdam.

The desire to return to South Africa kept gnawing at us though and during a regular Dutch rain shower we decided to pack our furniture in a container and to go to the sun -with an empty purse- into an exciting and insecure future.

We found a place to stay in a small house in Rustenburg about 35 miles from Sun City. In order to make money we decided to pack and sell mango-chutney to shops in the Pretoria and Johannesburg area. I will explain what mango-chutney is and how it all works. Riana's parents have large a farm where they grow mangos. Well, when you harvest the mangos, add a little salt, chilli and other spices and let them stand for a while you have mango-chutney.

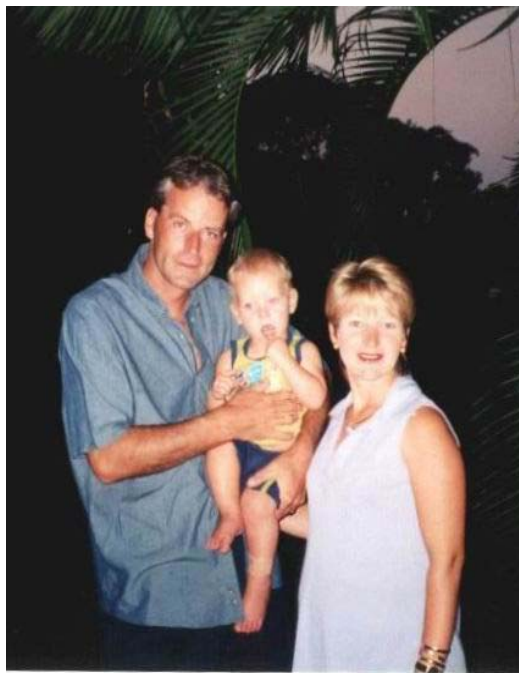
Actually this is not so difficult, but the difficulty is that food can go bad, especially when you have large quantities of it in store... and this is what happened to us!

An illusion the poorer and with more experience we went to Pretoria, a city where South African is the predominant language and which is – to African standards – rich in culture. Being short of money and without a social safety net that enables you to relax we entered a world of selling laundry baskets.

Riana sewed the pieces of cloth together and I made the wooden frameworks and subsequently we went out on the road to sell them.

But believe me, selling laundry baskets only is not enough to make a decent living, so then we decided to buy and sell tropical plants as well, since Riana's mother also had a nursery for tropical plants at their farm near the border with Zimbabwe.

Street vending, which is called 'smouse' here, is what you people in Holland do at the birthday of the queen when everybody offers something for sale in the streets, but then only for 24 hours without the police bothering you and who you do not have to keep quiet with a small bribe.



I.-r.: Hans, Duarte and Riana Somsen - Brummer

This business grew bigger a bigger and we could afford more and larger trucks for transporting our goods

and then we took the decision to start a nursery garden in Johannesburg, so again we packed everything and moved to the 'gold-city'. This is much nicer than being on the road where you are also exposed to rain and wind and to the biggest danger of South Africa: crime.

This is a thing by itself and I do not feel very much like dwelling on it for a long time except that it also happened to us. Amongst other things we had armed robberies and we have a house that looks like a prison with bars, dogs and sensors. Violence is really getting out of control here. You could say that there are moments that are really nerve-racking and this is a pity for such a beautiful country and we do hope that we will not get a situation like in our neighbouring country Zimbabwe. That is our greatest concern!

Well, and then, about eighteen months ago the most beautiful thing in our lives took place: the birth of Duarte, a lovely baby, a Somsen chin and beautiful blue eyes.

This is such a miraculous experience, becoming a dad is the finest thing that can happen to you! Together having a bath in the morning and when I come home in the evening the little fellow is waiting at the gate so that he can drive the last few yards together with me like a real racing driver.

And then there is the second great event. We are expecting our second child around the middle of April. According to Riana she is ready for it and since it is rather hot at the moment she wishes of course that the moment will be there, but she will have to be patient for another six weeks or so. We pray that everything will be all right for mother and child and that Duarte will have his brother or sister to play football with or to tease the dogs together. We will inform Somsen Horizon of the birth of the latest Somsen!

I know that those who know me, will say that I talk too much, but the reason for this story is Gree (editor of Somsen Horizon) since she invited me to write something about our life here! I would also like to send my best wishes to all the other people behind Somsen Horizon, who have created such a beautiful Somsen magazine. It is very professionally done and many friends here look at it out of the corners of their eyes when it lies on the kitchen-table.



Duarte in the swimming pool

So we have lived here on a nice 'plot' of land, a couple of miles north of Johannesburg, for a year now. We use the word 'plot' here when you live in a rural area with a fairly large garden of a couple of acres and a nice house on it. It is also a very nice place for the dogs, three German shepherds and a bullmastiff. They run up and down the plot and they also give us a sense of a little security this way. We have a splendid large view from the house and this is especially breathtaking when there is a thunderstorm with flashes of lightning in the sky.

A swimming pool is standard for most houses here and we enjoy it a lot after a long day's work.

The nursery garden takes a lot of our time and for the past year we have worked for seven days a week to get it in the shape it is now in. Today we have put into use our new department with a large bamboo bridge and a pond underneath in order to show the tropical plants like bamboo and coconut palm-trees still better. Yesterday I worked till midnight unloading a truck and put everything right so that everything is in perfect condition today (Saturday).

We work with a team of eight permanent employees and some extra people at the end of the week when we do the landscaping for our customers. Every day we learn to make better and more beautiful gardens with fountains, sprinkler installations, tiles and rocks for gardens paths and we learn more about the different plants and how to use them. The variety of plants is enormous and this is a very interesting and challenging job.

As if we have got plenty of time! All the same I am going to start another nursery, together with a friend who is also a nurseryman, but now something more like a discount shop of about two acres with low service and low prices. It lies a little over one mile from our existing business and it will require a lot of work before we can open this business. Then we will have to tighten our belt for the winter months May, June and July since that is not the best time for a nursery garden. Then we sell firewood for the stoves and things for in people's homes like pots and plants.

In South Africa you need a minimum of diplomas and licences to start a business and the rules are very vague and there is a lot of corruption and so you learn that you never have to ask for a licence when you want to build something, etc. you simply have to do it!

This has been quite a change for me, since in The Netherlands everything goes by the rules. However, I have never regretted my step to settle in South Africa four years ago, except for missing a nice sailing-trip on the Frisian lakes and my football club Heerenveen. But since two weeks we have been able to see Dutch television programmes like *Studio Sport*, *Nova*, and many other programmes, thanks to a new Dutch satellite transmitter.



Garden centre with Bamboo bridge

It seems to me that this is enough talking for the time being, you have all had ample opportunity to update your knowledge of the South African language and I greet all of you.

Lots of love, Hans, Riana and Duarte Somsen
hanssomsen@hotmail.com



CAMPING WEEKEND IN IJZERLO FROM 23 - 25 AUGUST 2002

by Wim Somsen [518]

For a short time it was not clear whether the camping weekend would take place this year because of the reunion in America. Yet we have decided to organise a camping weekend, for the sixth time in succession. We cannot reveal much about the programme this time, but let it be a surprise.

The visitors to the America Reunion will get ample time and attention for their experiences in any case.

If you need some more information by the summer holidays call or mail **Wim Somsen** before 6 August, for after that date I will be away on holiday myself.

Non-campers are always welcome for a visit to IJzerlo and they can easily join in the activities. Will you please register before 6 August at the address below so that we get an impression of the number of visitors we can expect.?

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