**A short history of an old Swakopmunder.**

Eva Frida Kleinschmidt was born in Windhoek on 14 April 1916. She died in Swakopmund on 29 November 2015. Her desire to celebrate a century the same year as the Allgemeine Zeitung, was not to be. She personified the Swakopmund of the 20th century. Her parents, Hermann and Frida Jatow and her siblings lived in this village and loved it.

As I push her in her wheelchair in one of our last outings, after coffee and cake at Woermann & Brock, she points at Atlas, the figure that adorns the Hohenzollern Haus, and remarks, “I wonder why nobody has climbed up there yet. The workers who built this landmark in colonial times, are said to have placed a bottle of whiskey inside the globe”.

On the corner of Brücken and Bismarck Streets we pass a new and non-descript building except for the coat-of-arms atop it, all that remains of the former colonial single-story butchery that once stood here. She reminds me, not for the first time, that the proprietor, when she was a child, was a Hungarian named Ludwig Recsey. The prophetic truism he offered the farmers when supplying him with produce was: “Kommt sich Regen kommt sich Geld; kommt sich kein Regen, kommt sich Rechtsanwalt” (When it rains, money comes (can be made), when the rains fail, the lawyer comes).

Papa Jatow received his training as Funker (wireless operator) on German naval vessels and is said to have been one of the first to read, rather than transcribe Morse code. This got him a job with Telefunken to build radio communications in Togo and Cameroon, before taking his family in 1911, to Windhoek to build the most powerful of the Funkenstationen (the colonial radio communications stations). WWI in this German colony was brief. South African troops defeated their German counterpart in 1915 while the war in Europe raged on for another three years. Not knowing whose colony this territory was eventually to be, the victors imposed martial law, which lasted until the end of 1920 when the League of Nations mandated South Africa to administer the country. For the Jatow’s those were five difficult years. The absence of a capable South African administration and the antipathy toward the German population meant that Papa Jatow struggled to find work.

Despite their relative poverty, the German community of Windhoek celebrated Papa Jatow’s birthday on 31 December 1915, six months after German capitulation. Papa was thirty and his friends sang “Du bist ja erst dreissig und warst schon so fleissig” (You are only thirty and yet been so diligent/busy). They referred to his wife, pregnant with Eva, their fourth child.

When the world war was finally over, the Jatow’s wanted return to Germany, but the letters from Germany were not encouraging. The family in Kiel advised against it. If you are poor there, your suffering will be worse in Germany. Mama Jatow remembered how she used the last of the bed linen to make Papa a starched white suit, so he looked good at job-interviews.

Eva Jatow, her parents and four siblings arrived in Swakopmund in 1921 when Papa got a job with Woermann & Brock. His immediate boss, Geschäftsführer Wardesky allocated the Jatow’s the house in Kramersdorf, later known as the Scultetus house, a lonely single house, then far out of town, near the graveyards. Wardesky told him: you need it you have a large family. Papa Jatow was also allocated a company car, an ‘Opel Siebensitzer’ (capacity to seat seven people). The other means of getting to Kramersdorf, was on the ‘Knüppeldamm’, a wooden boardwalk, to avoid endless sand in your shoes.

Toward the end of her life, I asked my mother what she knew about the Swakopmund concentration camp for Herero people during and after the Herero and Nama rebellion that started in 1904. I took her to see the countless sand mounds behind the Christian and small Jewish cemeteries, near the Kramersdorf house. Without a moment’s hesitation, she replied that they were the graves of Herero who died during the 1919 Spanish influenza. Although she knew Dr Vedder, the missionary who complained about the camp and the treatment of its inmates, my mother seemed genuinely astonished at my reference to such a camp in her beloved Swakopmund.

She had passed Standard 7 when the depression ended her schooling. At age 15, she started work as a nanny for a well to do family. Already confined to a wheelchair, when we passed the ‘Alte Kaserne’ (the base of the German colonial garrison), my mother, pointed at the different windows and recalled: “hier ging ich zur Untertertia, hier zur Obertertia, hier war die Untersekunda und dort die Obersekunda, und da war unsere Aula” (they were German names for the school grades). Without fail she would add, “we had to go here because the ‘English’ took away our school after the war”. Her reference was to the former German school opposite the Lutheran Church which served German children until mid 1915.

On one of our walks when she was already deep in her nineties, she pointed toward a cluster of modern Swakopmund houses and stated flatly, “here lives Mrs Hitler”. Mother, what are you saying, I asked. “Oh”, she explained, “that is not her real name, but your sister and I call her that ever since she stopped us in the street and asked whether I had applied for my ‘Arierausweiss’ ” (Aryan identity document). My sister interjected and told the woman she was talking to the wrong people as we had Khoi genes in our family. Mrs “Hitler” retorted: Don’t talk about it! Don’t admit it! My sister Heidi added: “The Mrs H story was definitely not tongue in cheek, she was serious and she was shocked by my disclosure of having the black gggrandmother! Mutti, she said, didn't need to fill out an Ausweis because this woman knew her since schooldays and girl scouts and thus considered ‘Arian’. She wanted us to come to her family reunion which was at Goanikontes and all who attending had to have their 'Arierausweis' - I didn't attend (I opposed the Arian passport) but Mutti went because she was a friend from schooldays”.

The 1920’s moulded young Eva Jatow with a strong sense of threat to German identity. She would say: “If the English have so many colonies, why should *we* not get back ours?” And she and the young women of the Bund Deutscher Mädchen (BDM) (the federation of young German women, affiliated to the Hitler Youth movement in Germany) marched for it. By 1937 she was the Hortenführerin (group leader) of the women’s section of the Pfadfinder in Swakopmund (German Scouts, the name they adopted when association with Nazi organisation was outlawed in SWA). She would say, “das war alles so positiv” (it was such a positive time). When pendants with a swastika adorned rocky outcrops on their outings into the desert, she said, “das war halt so, wir wollten Deutsch sein” (It was like this, it was part of being German).

For year’s she and her classmates collected the silver paper wrappings of South African chocolates. The silver paper was sent to Germany to help Graf Zeppelin build his airships. A chemical in silver paper could not be purchased by the Zeppelin Company under terms Germany was forced to sign at the end of WWI.

After 1935 she was part of the Elly Beinhorn young women’s contingent. Beinhorn was a German legend in her lifetime when she flew solo across to the five continents, also landing in Windhoek.

During this period, Papa Jatow was advancing up the ladder of the NSDAP in Swakopmund. He was its secret head when WWII started. An old friend of my mother’s told me that he used to give the ‘Heil Hitler’ salute when entering shops he knew had German proprietors and clients. None of this impaired his loyalty and admiration for Mr Wardesky, a German Jew and still his boss. Hermann Jatow was interned during the war and after the war (initially) not allowed to return to SWA.

The first time she flew was in the 1930’s. My mother remembered her flight in a two-seater aircraft to Windhoek. Her Papa had sent her to Windhoek, to deliver a secret (presumably political) message. But politics was not her thing. Much later when her husband defended the old political aspirations she regularly said: Nun hör doch endlich auf, das ist vorbei (Stop recalling this, it is in the past)!

Another favourite in our wheelchair outings was Café Treff, which my mother continued to call Putensen Bäckerei. Without hesitation she would address the black waiter in German and ordered on my behalf without asking, “Zwei mal Kaffee, eine Obsttorte mit viel Schlagsahne, und für meinen Sohn, ein Brötchen mit ‘toter Missionar’” (two coffees, a fruit tart with lots of cream and for my son a roll with ‘dead missionary’). Neither waiter, nor my mother seemed to see the slightest irony in placing this order. Old Swakopmunders, like my mother, did not know that what they ordered was known elsewhere in the world as steak tartar. Sometimes it comes garnished with a raw egg yolk and chopped onion.

A few years ago, Sam Nojoma, then already a former President of Namibia made a speech in which he threatened that the White people of Namibia should be shot. I asked my mother what she made of his statement. She looked up in the air and said ‘der sagt viel wenn der Tag lang ist’ (he says lots of things on a long day).

A highlight throughout her life was her participation in choirs at the annual Musikwoche, often held in Swakopmund. She also became the oldest member of the Kantorei choir of the Lutheran Church.

Eva Kleinschmidt (she married Wilhelm Kleinschmidt in October 1944) remained a member of the Altpfadfinder (old scouts) until her nineties. She enjoyed the outings with people she knew since childhood. Most of all she enjoyed singing old German folk songs, and what she called “das Südwesterlied”. When asked how this fitted with the new national anthem, she would simply say, “das ist halt under Lied” (it’s our song).

After our last lunch at the Deutsches Haus, as I push her wheelchair, she tapped her knees as though she played the piano once more, and hummed the hymn, ‘Wie gross bist Du’. Encouraging her, she sang in German, with me pushing and in harmony, singing ‘How great Thou art’.

Horst Kleinschmidt.

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Jatow family photo ca 1923, in the garden of the Kramersdorf home.

From left to right: Lucas, the house help, Mama Frida and Papa Hermann Jatow with children Ruth, Horst and Ilse behind. In front Hermann junior and right, Eva. The child behind Hermann junior is a visitor, name not known.

Ca. 1937, Eva Jatow, far right as Hortenführerin of the Pfadfinder.

The coat of arms of Ludwig Recsey’s butchery.

Kraft durch Freude Ausflug 1937.

Kramersdorf ca. 1930.