

The Tom Coolman Story

# The **Tom Coolman** Story

"I did my best"

Part 1 - English

Part 2 - Nederlands

# The Tom Coolman Story

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For more information, please look-up on the  
Gigengack history web side

Gigengack genealogy

<http://history.gigengack.nl/>

The Tom Coolman Story

**Tom Coolman**

*I started my life,  
with comfort and love,  
where problems were shared,  
and facts were accepted.*

*Then I learned,  
I felt,  
I knew,  
that there was more beyond the  
horizon.*

*So I packed our gear,  
and we were away,  
to a future with open skies,  
and room to move.*

*We found the unexpected  
a great land,  
a vast land,  
but it did have its limitations.*

*Now, the fight for the future had  
begun, and we were ready to  
succeed.*

*The fight was long, and not easy,  
When at times worn out, there was  
always a door open to return - it  
would have meant failure - and  
failure has no future.*

*And with all that, life still went on  
The family all important  
the home they reside,  
And the friends they acquired,  
And learned to appreciate.*

*There were big hurts and small,  
Sometimes I was standing quite  
tall,  
with achievements that showed a  
result.*

*I now live a life,  
Of comfort and love,  
Where the moments are shared,  
And I know it was all worthwhile.*

***I did my best***

*Melton - 1 July, 2014*

# The Tom Coolman Story

## **Main highlights of our life in Australia**

These are not sorted in importance, but in some sort of sequence happenings.

- 1954 Don Bosco technical school
- 1956 At age 16, spent 3 months military service in the Dutch Air force
- 1958 Successfully completed a small business (midden stands diploma) course
- 1958 From July 3, at age 18, spent a further 21 months in the Dutch Air force, under the 'National Service' scheme.
- 1958 Met Ann for the first time, on our certificate night at the Krasnapolski Theatre on the Dam, in Amsterdam.
- 1960 June 8, Ann and I married at the registry office.
- 1961 April 11, Ann and I married 'for the church'  
We had three lovely children, Marcel, Frits and Yvonne.
- 1963 March 27, First child Marcel born on
- 1964 May 3, Second child Frits born
- 1965 Ann and I migrated to Australia, I was 25, Ann 26.
- 1965 Aged 25, our first car was a Holden FB panel van.
- 1965 Moved into the Ainslie Hostel Canberra
- 1967 We moved to rent a bungalow from my electrical contractor employer in Queanbeyan, NSW.
- 1966 We moved into a rented 3 bed room house owned by Alf Ward in Altona
- 1968 We build our first home in Blackwood Drive, Melton South.
- 1970 29 January , Yvonne was born in the Bacchus March Hospital
- 1970 I started running marathons.
- 1975 Invested into the share market on a small scale only
- 1977 Naturalised at the Melton Council office, by our Mayor Jeff Robinson a friend late years.
- 1978 September, My father died in 1978.
- 1986 My Mother died.
- 1985 Marcel married Carmen Peters.
- 1989 The birth of our grandchild Jamie
- 1990 The birth of our grandchild Lee.
- 1990 Union driven retirement for APC in 1990
- 1990 Started my own business in 1990 as the 'Ace of Spades' home maintenance. (unregistered)

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- 1991 The shocking death of Frits during his travels in Perth, Western Australia aged only 26.
- 1993 Started registered business in electrical and Instrumentation as 'Multi Skilled Engineering'
- 1995 Designed and built our home at 14 Raleighs Road, Melton
- 1995 June 8, 25th anniversary party in the now newly completed house.
- 1996 Yvonne married Rohan Burns
- 1998 By June, sold the last investment house.  
Over the years we bought 5 rental properties as investment.
- 1998 The money from the property sales was used to increase our share market portfolio.
- 1999 The birth of our grandson Nathan
- 2001 The birth of our granddaughter Tara.
- 2002 Became a volunteer at the Melton Information Centre.
- 2003 Volunteer at the Aged care facility in Melton.
- 2004 Started as a chess coordinator at Melton Christian College
- 2005 Probus member; have been president twice. Held many other executive functions.
- 2005 Rotary member, club President in 2008.
- 2005 Sold off share market portfolio's. Proceeds in pension superannuation funds.
- 2010 February 27, My brother Frans died on.
- 2010 July 16, Our first great granddaughter Lily was born. Lee and Jo were living in Geelong
- 2012. March, Lee married Jo.
- 2012 Our great grandson born on March 10.

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## Introduction:

It is Sunday, 21 April 1996, and I am now finally making a start with writing my story! The weather is not what you would call 'sunny'. It's been raining and it is cold, which is more than anything else, why I start to write my life story now. Also to get a better understanding of the workings of my new computer's (W95 and later models) Word processor.

This booklet intends to describe my journey in life. I write this just to let others know, that in 1940 there was born a man known (at the time) as:

Antonius - Adrianus - Maria - Gigengack.

The matters I write about are as close as possible to the way I spent my life with my family and friends; at least as close as I can possibly remember. You should know that I am not an author, just a Dutch migrant who has worked hard all his life. So please take the good with the bad when you try to read my scribbling.

Ann, my wife since 1960, has gone for a walk to exercise and stretch her legs.

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## Gigengack & Teunissen history:

### Introducing my grand parents:

From my father's side:

- Opa Chris Gigengack
- Oma Petronella Smith - Gigengack

*1920  
My Grand parents,  
Opa & Oma  
Gigengack, Smith*



From my mother's side:

- Opa Gerard Teunissen
- Oma Anna Vermey Teunissen.



*1925  
My grand  
father Gerard  
Teunissen*

*1938  
My Grand  
mother  
Anna  
Vermey  
Teunissen*



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Unfortunately I never knew my grandfather, Opa Gigengack or grandmother, Oma Gigengack, or Opa Teunissen. The Gigengack / Teunissen families lived only a few doors away from each other on the Rozengracht in Amsterdam

## The Family album



Chris Gigengack (1868-1927)



Petronella Smit (1872-1934)



Gerard Teunissen (1866-1936)



Anna Vermeij (1866-1954)



Hendricus (Henk) Gigengack (1900-1978)



Hendrika (Riel) Teunissen (1904-1987)



Het gezin Gigengack (april 1965) John, Nel, Frans, TreesTom.

## My Father Henk and Mother Rieka Gigengack

My father:

Hendricus, Christianus, Petrus, Adrianus Gigengack.

Born: 27th December 1900.

Died: 29th September 1978 aged 77.

My mother:

Hendrieka, Maria, Catherina Teunissen.

Born: 27th May 1904.

Died: 6th March 1986 aged 81.



*1930 My parents wedding  
Henk & Rieka Gigengack*

## Introducing my brothers and sisters



**1958**

***Standing:*** Hans, Jaap, Trees, Tom, Lees, Frans.

***Seated:*** Nel, Pa & Ma Gigengack, standing John.

There were two brothers and two sisters in the family:

Nel	twin	born on 27th November	1932
Frans	twin	born on 27th November	1932
Trees		born on 12th August	1936
Tom		born on 4th March	1940
John		born on 4th March	1942

John was born 2 years after me on the same day, he was my birthday present; Hans and Jaap are my brothers in law and Lies is my sister in law.

My father died when he was 77.

My father died of a massive brain haemorrhage in the middle of the night on September 29, 1978. He had always been a terrific letter writer and kept us well informed about family happenings; almost every week, there would be a letter in the mailbox.

He was a great writer and was also very interested in what we were up to, here in this far away land, Australia. I will never forget the fact, that he wrote us a letter, only a few hours before he died that same night, saying that everything was fine with him and my mother. He mentioned that they had happily played cards that afternoon, with their friends from across the street, in the Elisabeth Wolffstraat. - Only a few hours later he had died.

My Mother died when she was 81.

Before my mum married she was a kindergarten teacher. Her father, opa Teunissen was in the fur trade; at home on the Rozengracht in Amsterdam. Her whole family was in the fur trade and was well known as such. I can remember my mother with her white, silver hair. She was a lookalike of my grandmother, always ready with a smile and a joke. She loved her food.

My mother just loved cream cakes and ice creams she bought from a stall on the 'Ten Katen Straat markt'. Even later in life, after she had been diagnosed as a diabetic, she could not resist the taste. The doctor had her cake intake reduced, but forgot, or simply said nothing, about her love



for real butter, nor the margarine on her sandwiches. And that is what she allowed herself as a luxury, and loved it. We did not mind that so much, because we also took advantage of the treats. My mother died of a stomach bleed and heart problems. She was overweight at 200 pound, and of course, a diabetic.

My Grandmother passed away in 1954 aged 88. I have met my grandmother, at her home on the Rosengracht, on only a few occasions.

### Born in 1940

I was born on the fourth of March 1940 at home, on the first floor (we called that an 'Etage' at the 'van Oldenbarnevelt Plein' 21, Amsterdam West. The Second World War (WW2 had already started in Europe).

### The coldest Winter: 1943 and during WW2.

Up until WW2, my father worked as a prison warder. The Dutch goals and inmates were just as bad then as they are now. During the war years, food and wood for our heater became very scarce. In the end we had to go and look for food and heating elsewhere.

Our church contacts encouraged us to move all the way to go and live with farmers in the province of Friesland, 150 km away. We were told that the people there, were still enjoying the necessities of life. So, in the winter of 1943. My sister Nel, and her twin brother Frans as well as my sister

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Trees joined some other people to travel with nuns , ahead of our family, to Friesland. My niche Agnes, brother John and I had to make the trip, travelling in a Billy cart with a canvas roof. My uncle Chris had built the cart, using the wheels of an old bicycle.

My Father and Mother and sometimes Agnes too, walked the long distance to Friesland pushing the cart.

It was a particular cold winter that year We all travelled via the 'Afsluitdijk' (A 32 km long dike which was build in the 1930's, joining the provinces of Holland and Friesland. The dike also served to change the 'Zuiderzee' - an inland sea - into the IJselmeer - an inland lake)

What little food and drinks we could scrape together before we left our home, was carried with us on the long walk. Snow was melted and given us to drink when we were thirsty

Several times along the trip, my father was stopped by the German soldiers at different checkpoints, to have his papers checked. Each time again, when the soldiers stopped him, we were never sure if they would release him, or hold him and send him to a work camp in Germany.

It was a scary time, with few options. Starve to death at home or be shot at a checkpoint or carried off to Germany by the German soldiers. My parents had to make a decision and, in the end it was proven to be the best and only decision to try and escape and survive by moving to Friesland. The farmers in Friesland did not have all that

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much food either, but we were made welcome in their home. We did stay in Friesland until the end of the war. On some of my regular visits to the Netherlands, I have visited one of those Friesland farmers the Beekema family, mainly Ami Beekema.

When the war was over, we moved back to Amsterdam, and my father took up his work as a male nurse at the Zeeburgerdijk Hospital in Amsterdam. My parents did have to start life all over, and that was not so easy with a family of five children and two adults. In a country that had been robbed bare by the invaders, and destroyed by bombing.

It was at this time that my father also started to work from home, in his spare time, as a Podiatrist. So our living quarters had to be converted for Pa's practice. A bedroom was converted into a waiting room for the patients, and a smaller side room was set-up for his practice.

We lived on the first floor. While my father was working, treating his clients, one of our family had to attend to the front door, to let the next client in. When the bell rang, we had to pull the rope from where we were on the first floor, to unlock the front door. (The patients were then guided up the stairs, and into our back waiting room. We all had to take on this task in turn, but it was mainly the children who had to do this job of receiving the patients; and we did get well and truly fed up with these tasks. We often tried to disappear.

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Thins were a fair bit limited in those years; no television, an old radio that only worked sometimes. The walls between the houses were very thin; we could hear everything that was going on at our next door neighbours, like parties, and when they had visitors. I remember those parties next door, which they had a few times a year, very well. They were, at times, very noisy.

Two men were living there together. We called them "lievertjes" (poofsters) but they were no bother at all. They looked after themselves and went shopping together, with one of the man carrying the shopping bag. As children we found that real funny. We all called out to one another, as they went past; making sure that they did not hear us - it was a different era back then, you would not do that anymore.

My parents were always busy; working and caring for us children. At the same time we children enjoyed freedom to a great degree. But we were also called upon to do our chores though.

Our home heating consisted of a coal heater in the living room, as well as in the patient's waiting room at the back. During the cold winter months both heaters were lit to keep the place comfortably warm.

My father could not afford the extra outlay, or was not too worried that he could buy the coal, and have it delivered in bulk at a cheaper price. I well remember the many times we children each in turn, had to go and buy coal briquettes in

bags made from very heavy paper; bringing them home, on the baggage carrier of our push-bike.



*We lived here.  
At 73 Elizabeth Wolff Street,  
A' Dam West*

Initially I managed to handle two bags at the time on my bike, but later I was carrying 4 bags in one go. With two heaters going we had to make many trips back and forth.

Our hands were just about frozen stiff on those freezing days after school; when we would come home and the coal briquettes had run out. Even after the hard work of getting a new load of briquettes, the house was still very cold till the heaters were

lit using old newspapers and small timber kindling's.

The best way to describe my father is as a hard working and caring man. He and I were very much alike in our ways, our looks, in the specific way we walked and also in always being busy doing things. He sang in a choir "Arsa Nova Et Antiqua". And followed English lessons from one of the

Dutch radio stations; he even had a tape recorder with very large spools of tape. Needless to say we loved him and we had great respect for him. He hated going to the dentist, though. His teeth's were rattling in his mouth but he would not let a dentist near him. One of my brother in law's father was a dentist who convinced my father to let him have a go at it. So he sat my father down on a chair in our kitchen, all the time coaching him into feeling a little more relaxed. All went well until some of the dentists' tools were taken out of the bag. My father just shot past him out of the kitchen. All of us had been hanging around to see it happen, see my dad get some decent teeth - and nobody laughed or teased him about it - for that we had too much respect for him.

## Our family upbringing

Our upbringing was strictly Roman Catholic. We did have a good upbringing and a good family life. A bit like a business life upbringing; this means cool, but fair, caring and loving.

As children, we never had the luxury of a car, just push bikes. We could park the push bikes on the footpath against the house, or with a lot of effort haul them up the stairs and park them in the hallway or on the balcony. To stop them disappearing.

My mother was always a happy-go-lucky lady. We all loved the way she could play the piano and we could sing along all her favourite tunes. We had a grand piano in our living room. Frans, Trees, and Nel all had lessons and could play

the piano well. I think Nel was the best piano player of the three.

### Our Education:

- The *kindergarten* we all went to, was run by the nuns of the 'Maria Liefdes' church on the Bilderdijk Straat. This was only a 15 minute walk away from home. None of us children liked the nuns.
- *Primary school "Sancta Maria"*  
My brother John and I attended the same primary school "Sancta Maria" on the Prinsengracht 29. From where we lived it took us about 30 minutes to walk there, or 20 minutes if we ran. The Rosengracht tram could take us some of the way, but at a cost of 15 cents. Sometimes when we were running late for school, mum would give us money for the tram fare. But I would keep that for an ice cream after school. It only meant that I just had to run a bit faster to get to school on time. Coming late for school was just not on. And then of course after school I had a feast an ice cream from Jamin - a beautiful layered ice-cream with thin wafers on the top and bottom
- Wartime heroine 'Anna Frank's house' is also located on the Prinsengracht; I used to walk past there every day on my way to school. At the time I did not realise the significance of the house though.
- Another point is, that my primary school experience started off badly, with me, in the holidays before,

breaking an arm, falling of a cupboard. My sister Nel had hidden a biscuit tin from us, on top of the cupboard and I was climbing up to get to it. I slipped and fell hard.

### Wagging school in the first year

I didn't like the Brothers of the Catholic school much either and spent many days wagging school too in that first year; a further reason that I had to repeat that year. While wagging school I spent a lot of time walking the streets of Amsterdam. My favourite was the passenger ferry behind the Central Station, and I used to go across the "IJ"-harbour on that ferry. I had to watch it though; The police were on the lookout for me. In the winter months I spent more time at the Hek restaurant on the 'Rembrandtplein' to keep warm. My father was very angry with me when he found out that I had been wagging school.

- For the rest of my years in primary school, I mostly behaved myself and achieved good reports.
- *Technical school Don Bosco:*  
Somehow I came out all right and went to the technical school. I studied hard to get into the electrical trade. I had already been interested in technical equipment. I spent three years at Don Bosco, on the Polderweg in Amsterdam East. The school was about a 30 minute bike ride from my home in Amsterdam West.



- *Just to show you that life was not all that easy in those days:* I had to ride my bike every day for the 30 minutes it took, to get to school, come rain, hail or shine. Even at the young age of 13. Now, in Holland, there are not as many of those sunny days as we have here in Australia, just the opposite so, whatever the weather; rain or shine, wind or frost, lightning or thunder, every day I had to put in an effort to get to school. In the winter months, snow made the streets also very slippery and dangerous.
- *Did Ann and I meet?* It is quite likely that Ann and I did meet in my years at Don Bosco. Ann's school was quite close - in the streets behind Don Bosco really - and I used to 'roam around' a fair bit in those days.
- *Some of my old school friends*  
My best friend at both, the primary and technical school, was Ben Dunker. We spent many happy days together. But as that goes we lost contact. The last time I did meet him was in May 1979, when we were on a holiday trip to Holland. He was always a very strong and athletic person.

At one time in our technical school days, he and I went to Germany on our push bikes, for a ten day trip – Aachen, Mondshaw and also a little closer to the Schwartz Walt. Another mate I remember well, was Rolf Wolf.

## 1950 Scout group.



1950  
Young Tom at a Scout camp,  
aged ten.

For many years, starting at the age of 11 I think, my brother John and I were members of the Boy Scouts. That is where I spent a lot of my spare time – Scouting. Our Scout Hall was situated at the Beulingstraat in Amsterdam Central near the Singelgracht.

Some weekends we spent away at camping grounds near Bussum. This took about an hour and a half, riding our push bikes, and carrying the tents, equipment and all our luggage on the back of the bikes.

Setting up the tents, making a camp fire and gathering fire wood – it was all good fun. We had to wear the Scout uniform consisting of shorts and a shirt with badges and hat. Later the Scouts taught me many practical uses of the 6 foot round hardwood pole. We had to carry it everywhere we went. It is a pity that I have hardly any photos of that time. The principles of scouting too, played a major role in my upbringing.

## 1956 In the Air force

After my technical schooling, now aged 16, I had a 3 months' stint in the Dutch Air Force for a trial period; but the hard regime was not to my liking. I managed to get out before having to sign up for the compulsory 7 year contract.

## 1956 Work as an Electrical apprentice.

In October, 1956, after my time in the air force, I started my working life as an "Electrical Apprentice" for an electrical contractor. Part of the deal was that I had to attend evening classes one night a week for 2 years as Electrical Apprentice, and also another 2 nights a week during the same two years for my electrical mechanic licence and diploma. I completed both these courses for the electrical tradesman licence. It involved evening study three nights a week plus homework as well as working 45 hours a week.

## Bird's pigeons and chess with uncle Piet.

From the age of ten, Saturday nights were usually spent with my Uncle Piet Gigengack and Aunty Bets. This is where I learned a lot about birds - canaries and pigeons. Piet had the most fantastic, and strong carrier pigeons, that I have ever seen. We took them to places quite some distance away, to release them, and then try and race them home. But more often than not they had returned home well before us. We also played chess nearly every week on Saturday nights.

Also interesting to note is that a bird market was held every Saturday afternoon, opposite the primary school on the Prinsengracht. The combination of my involvement with Ome Piet, and the bird market, I just mentioned, saw to it, that I had birds all my life. From an early age I had chickens; on the back veranda I trained them, perhaps even hypnotised one of the chickens (at least I thought so), to sit on a swing while I pushed it back and forth. Later I bred pigeons, canaries and beautiful coloured birds. Saturday afternoon was mainly spent buying and selling at that bird market on the Prinsengracht, opposite my school. We used to buy pigeons for the dinner table as well. My mother fried them wrapped in a slice of bacon. I only took the young birds for cooking. Pigeon eggs, were also very nice.

One day I tried to pinch a pigeon from the Dam, which is a large square, in front of the Royal Palace in the centre of Amsterdam. I held some food in my hand and as soon as the pigeon landed on my hand I got him. The police caught me red handed, after putting the pigeon into my push-bike basket. I have never tried that trick again.

I often had day-old chicks, and sometimes they just died on me. This made me quite curious, so I decided to try and find out what killed them. One day, another day-old-chick had died. I sneaked into the kitchen and got mum's favourite (and sharpest) knife, and started to dissect the chick. As soon as I opened it up (there was after all not too much of it) I saw a hairpin sticking out of its stomach - or at least I thought it was the stomach. So I quickly wrapped the dead bird in some paper, and in the bin. And Mum's

knife back into the kitchen drawer. I had discovered something!

### 1958 Military service - Dutch air force.

I was called up for national (military) service at the age of 18 as a conscript. I managed to get a short delay in starting my military service until I had completed my small business course (Tradesman's Diploma - mainly basic book keeping) and also after successfully completing electrical apprenticeship studies. The basic book-keeping course I did was great. I found the course very interesting. This was my first ever education in a mixed class with young men as well as young women attending. I had always attended boys' schools and been in 'men only' work environments. I finished both courses a few months after the initial call-up date. I found the twenty one months in the military service that followed to be quite a long drag.

### 1958 Meeting Ann for the first time.

While I was participating in my small business course for my 'Tradesman's Diploma', unbeknown to me (after all we had not met yet) Ann was also following a course in Dutch Literature, in the same institute. As it goes there was a special night at the end of the school year when they hand out certificates. So here I was, on my first 'Leave' from the Air Force in my nicely pressed blue Air Force uniform, just standing around, when those two girls who were near me were looking my way and giggling. So I moved a little closer to them and we started talking to one another, and that's how it all started.

Because I was on foot, and they had arrived there by push-bike, and our homes happened to be in the same direction, we decided to walk together to my place, with our certificates under our arms. After we had walked and talked and joked for a little while, Ann suggested that I ride her bike, with her riding on the baggage carrier. I did not mind as everybody used to cart each other around like that all the time. So with Ann and me riding on Ann's bike and Willie on hers, it was not long before we were around the corner from my place. From there we said our goodbyes. I had agreed to come and see them the next day. I went around the corner to my place, and Ann and Willie rode their push bikes back to their place in Amsterdam East, a 20 minute ride from where I lived. The next morning, which was a Sunday, I took the tram to Smith street. Willie was hanging out of the 3rd floor window with their dog beside her. Ann let me in, and introduced me to her family, but she first had to ask for my second name. When I told her it was Gigengack, they all laughed out loud and could not believe the kind of name that it was. It was a bit embarrassing for me.

But I liked the Koelman family. Pa Gerald, Ma Annie, Ina - Bertus - Ann - Frits - Stance - Willie - Gerard - Kees - Wim. And they sort of adopted me. We all loved dancing and had dance lessons in style dancing. My favourite was the waltz. Both Ann and I danced nearly every Saturday night in the church hall with Connie and Kees and many of our other friends. We got there on Saturday nights on our, now motorised, push bikes (Also called: Mopeds). Every one in

Holland had at least a push-bike, and some a moped (a small 49.9 CC motorised bike).

All the Koelman family became involved with dancing; that we did to the music played on the Sunday mid-day show: *'Mr Sandman: 'Good listening and dance music.'* - this was on cable radio; a rather primitive forerunner of cable TV.

Tables would be moved out of the way to make room for dancing. Every Sunday afternoon we all enjoyed the same ritual. Ann liked dancing and that made her a good dancer. We celebrated our engagement on January 3, 1960, only a short few months after our first date. We held a small party – just our families and a few friends at home. And I of course was still in the Air Force, with many of the 21 months still to go.

Time passes very slowly, when you have been called up as a conscript in the air force. After my initial training at the Nijmegen military base. I received further training in radio communication repairs for radios installed in aircraft.

This was a bit better! It also helped me quite a bit in later years in my working life, in the choice of schooling and work. I particularly liked radio techniques, and the old electron valves which were in use at the time. I spent my service time at the Soesterberg airbase, a short train ride from Amsterdam. I didn't have any other transport except for a pushbike.

A conscript in national service gets paid poorly – about one guilder, twenty five cents a day - just enough to buy a

## The Tom Coolman Story

packet of cigarettes – but if I was I would get minimum wages and I would also be allowed to live at home instead of in the barracks. Ann and I thought that to be worthwhile. So that was one of the reasons, that we got married after only knowing each other for such a short time. And to us, marrying 'for the law' was not our real wedding; that was when we married 'for the church'.

I did not like the military discipline all that much. I wanted to be free. The officers did not like me all that much either' after I accidentally dropped a radio transmitter from the back of a truck. After that, the last 12 months in the air force was not one of my best times.



1958  
*Basic training - Military service in Nijmegen*



### 1961 Our wedding.

On June 8th, 1960, we married 'before the Law' in the registry office in central Amsterdam. All we did was have a cuppa and a drink after that part of the wedding. The real 'church wedding' took place later, in the Catholic Church on 11 April, 1961, with a 'Reception' in a hall on the Ceintuurbaan.



That was a big wedding with all the trappings. After we were married, we moved to the fourth floor, above my parents' place at 73 Elisabeth Wolffstraat. This was a small flat built by Hans and Nell from an attic storage space. They had lived there for 4 years, and had made it into an attractive one-bedroom flat, with a lounge / bedroom and a kitchen. The toilet was located more towards the stairs, and it belonged to different neighbours.

Housing was hard to get in Amsterdam, in the years after WW2, but this was a very good proposition. We would reach the flat by climbing four levels of winding stairs. Our push-bikes could stay at my parents' place on the first floor. It worked out very well; we were happy to at least have our own place.

### Bird cage, above our bed.

No matter how small our flat (in the attic, in Amsterdam) was, I liked my birds. I had about a dozen finches and pigeons. I have always had pigeons or gold fish and even a chook on the veranda or one day chickens. The fact that, in my young days, I spent many a Saturday afternoon, with Uncle Piet at the bird market, buying and selling birds, must have had a lot to do with that.

Just after we were married and were living in the upstairs flat, I built an aviary against a wall, for the tropical finches. It just happened that this aviary was above our double fold up bed in the living room. This was the only free wall space available. Sometimes during the night the birds would become unsettled. We would wake up and switch the lights on, with feathers, dust and dry poo, flying everywhere and also land on top of us – in our eyes and mouths, in our hair and on the blankets. We had to leave the lights on till the birds found their place again and went to sleep on a perch. I soon had to get rid of them; obviously not a good place to keep birds!

## 1960 Became dual qualified, Electrician and Instrument mechanic.

Having completed my military service I managed to get a job in the chemical industry, The Cindu in Uithoorn, 20 km from Amsterdam. The Cindu produced tar, for road asphalt and naphthalene, for linoleum floor covering. It was a good job as an Electrical Technician. I worked myself up to be placed in the Instrumentation workshop and that was an even better job and it paid a lot better as well. The only thing was that I had to do a correspondence course in Instrumentation lasting two years conducted by 'Hoog Ovens'. I did not mind.

Marcel was born.

March 27, 1963 at Anna Pavilion in Amsterdam East, 14 months before Frits.

4th Floor, 73 Elizabeth Wolff Street  
Amsterdam, West.

Living on the fourth floor gave some problems as we had to carry everything by hand, up four levels of spiralling stairs. So we used to drop off Marcel, our baby, first at Mum's, together with the shopping. After that we brought the pram to Aunty Annie who lived around the corner, on the ground floor and had space for the pram. Then we would carry all

the shopping upstairs to our flat. And of course, go back down again to pick up Marcel from Mum's.

## 1961 Moved to Uithoorn

Later we managed to secure a company house from the Cindu in Uithoorn. It was there that I was promoted to Instrument Technician. This was a big promotion as many of my colleagues were trying to get there as well. I had to further my study for another two years. I successfully completed my study early because we wanted to migrate to Australia in 1965 aged 25.

The move to Uithoorn was a real big improvement for us. It was a big house compared to our flat in Amsterdam. The ground floor consisted of 2 - combined - living areas, with a kitchen, and toilet under the stairs. Upstairs were the bedrooms and shower. Above that again was an attic with a pull-up ladder. In Uithoorn we were not allowed to have any pets, because it was a company house.

May 3 and May 4, 1964 were two very important days for me. Our son Frits was born at home in our new home in Uithoorn and I passed my Electrical Installers exam the next day. Two fantastic events in just two days. Marcel had been born only 14 months earlier, but he had been born in a Hospital.

After a further year evening classes and lot of studying, I became an Electrical contractor in 1998. Now I could start

out working for myself as a fully qualified electrical contractor, which I never actually did!

We worked hard and took on lots of extra work. Ann took on filling envelopes for advertising companies. After completing my two years written Instrumentation course from home, I got my certificate as a 'Meet and Reegel Monteur', translated by the Australian Embassy at the time of emigration as a 'Measurement and Regulation Mechanic'.

This should have been described as an 'Instrument Mechanic'. But what would those dumb authorities know? It proved to be easier to translate my electrical licences. Another big question was: Would there be a demand for a Measurement and Regulation mechanic in Australia? It took me 2 years to find that out. But they certainly needed electricians; no translation errors there. I had already learned via the brother of my neighbour in Uithoorn, that I was required to get an Electrical Rights Certificate; so that is how I could start working for Jan Van Keulen, an electrical contractor in Canberra - and a Dutchman to boot, immediately.

### 1964 Frits born May 3.

In early 1964 we moved into our new company house at 43 Nicolaas Beets Straat, Uithoorn. Frits was born there on May 3, 1964, at home in our bedroom; delivered by a midwife. Frits was a lovely and handsome baby. With a thick black crop of hair that soon turned to blond. The next

day, May 4, I passed my final exam for Electrical Contractor (Electrical Installer).

### 1965 Immigrated to Australia.

Ann, Marcel, Frits and I – just the four of us, left Holland on a DC 8 plane for Sydney. It was not easy travelling for so long with two little ones. We had packed all our worldly possessions into two wooden boxes or cases. They had to be exactly two cubic metres to be carried for free.

I had the two cases made to measure. (The use of one case would make the case too heavy, and hard to handle.) Anything over two cubic metres would have incurred an extra charge to us. We packed as much as possible in them, even using the space inside our washing machine, fitting towels and blankets. We took everything including the light fittings. But we took the daily stuff we thought we would need for the first few weeks in Australia, with us as hand luggage.

Arriving in Australia at Sydney Airport, all we had with us was around three hundred pounds, plus fifty pounds we received on our arrival from the Immigration Department. Jan Van Keulen met us at the airport in Sydney and we flew together to Canberra. We were welcomed at his private address in Queanbeyan by his wife.

### 1965 Hostel living in Canberra, ACT.

## The Tom Coolman Story

During our first three months in Australia, we lived in the Ainslie Hostel Canberra; close to the War Memorial, Civic Centre and shopping precinct. I worked 40 hrs. a week which gave us an income of 26 pounds and 10 shillings.

Life in the hostel was difficult, we looked forward to getting our own accommodation. During our first two or so years in Australia we were not in a position to return to Holland; otherwise the Australian Government would charge us the cost of bringing us over here.

But Ann especially, would have walked back on foot, to Holland if she could have. She hated it there. We could hardly speak any English and writing it was out of the question. Hostel life was hard on us and we could not bear it much longer. It was a little easier for me I think because I went to work every day, and met my workmates; plus Jan van Keulen spoke Dutch too; but I did not like it in the hostel either. After living there for three months we were advised that our luggage had arrived and we had to provide a delivery address.

Jan van Keulen offered us a Cottage, situated at the back of his house, for rent. The luggage could now go directly to our new cottage. We were very happy to see our familiar stuff again. No damage done. From the largest case I made a chicken pen. The smaller case we kept clean and used later when we moved to Altona, Victoria. We moved on the 15th of February 1966; the reason I can remember the date so well is that is the date on which Australia changed currency from pounds to the dollars.

Still, we had to make the best of it for a little while longer. We soon made contact with some other Dutch people who we made friends with. We connected with them playing cards: Klaverjassen, on Tuesday nights, mainly at our place because we did not have transport. It was a Godsend for us.

After a while it became easier and we became more settled. We started to speak some broken English and we could also understand the language a bit better. I worked every Saturday morning to make the standard 40 hour working week. I went fishing for eels in low water-level creeks, and rabbiting on Saturday nights, after work. My friends would drop me off back home, at the cottage, early on Sunday mornings.

I liked that part of the free life. Walking the paddocks with a gun and when you saw a rabbit, just shoot. No way that you would have been able to go rabbit hunting in Holland, with the strict gun laws in place.



## The Holden FB Panel Van car.

In 1966 we bought our first car. It was a Holden FB panel van that lasted many years. We both managed to pass a driving test and received our driving licences. The car became a real workhorse. The engine blew up after only 3 months and I had to replace the engine, lucky at no cost to us. The warranty looked after that part. It was a great car without any problems, from then on.



1967

*Our FB Holden panel van fully loaded.  
Marcel & Frits slept in the back of van on our  
way over from Queanbeyan NSW.*

## 1967 Found work in Footscray, Victoria.

We found an advertisement in the Dutch Australian Weekly newspaper (A Dutch language weekly newspaper, specifically targetted at Dutch Migrants in Australia) in which Monsanto Chemicals in Footscray advertised for instrument mechanics. As well as we could, Ann and I put a letter together in English, with the help of a dictionary.

It must have been in half Dutch or 'double Dutch' but a laboratory chemist at Monsanto was somehow able to translate the application form. They must have had a great laugh about our spelling. But again I was lucky and had a job interview at the factory and managed to get the Instrumentation job. They were impressed with all my Dutch certificates.

So we packed everything in the panel van, and what didn't fit in the car, we loaded into one of the wooden boxes we brought with us from Holland. The van was loaded to its maximum. We had never travelled to Victoria so it was a real pioneering adventure trip for us. We sent the box by road freight to Altona.

Looking for accommodation in Altona,  
with no help from the Dutch Embassy.

There we were, in Victoria, but we didn't have anywhere to stay. The Dutch Embassy could not or would not help us with accommodation or with a contact person for assistance. We asked for hostel accommodation, but they told us to find our own way. The first night we spent in a caravan park at Tottenham Road in Sunshine, next to the railway line. But the mosquitoes attacked us from everywhere. Frits got so badly attacked by mossies that the chemist shop assistant thought he had chicken pox.

### Renting in Altona, Victoria.

The next morning we were driving around, looking for accommodation. We ended up in Altona where there seemed to be a fair number of real estate agents, advertising properties for rent in their shop - windows, something quite new for us. So we went from shop to shop, taking note of what was on offer. And luck was with us, because then we found Alf or rather Alf found us. Alf must have seen us talking to different real estate agents, so he started to talk to us about being willing to rent out his house in Altona West to make some extra cash. What a coincidence, hey? We would rent his house starting the very next day.

He wanted to think about it first. He told us where the place was and we could have a look at it first before we committed ourselves. This we did, and his house was quite large so we were certainly interested, but we were not so sure about Alf himself; we had noticed that he looked a bit grubby. After we had seen the house and went outside, we noted the next door neighbours. So we said 'Hello' and . That is how we met Peggy and Mike Van Dijk, who of

course also were Dutch; and they assured us that it all was above board. Alf could be trusted.

## Our landlord Alf Ward of Altona

So in February 1966 we moved into Alf's house at 13 Dove Ave, Altona West. This was quite close to my Monsanto work place. We had come to an arrangement that he could stay with us, occupying the lounge room and sleeping on the couch. He would also keep the use of his shed, with tools and fishing gear.

He was to join us for evening meals, as long he supplied the meat (that was his idea of course). He worked in the meat industry as a wool classifier, so it all made good sense. We arranged a rent of \$13 a week

Alf became a good friend of ours. He took me fishing in his wooden boat, catching snapper in the bay. We learned from him how to eat the Australian way, and he introduced us to the Essendon Football Club. He also taught us about the Australian way of life. He loved the boys, Marcel and Frits, and was very protective of them. We all had a good time in Altona; everything worked in our favour.

## Meeting our friends Michael & Peggy van Dijk.

Right from when we met, we found a friendship with the Van Dijks' that would last for twenty odd years. Mike and Peggy were really our best friends. We had many late parties and went on many holidays together. We even went

on a cruise on the Fairstar, for ten days together, sleeping in the same cabin. We had lots of fun.

When their son Michael died in a car accident we were the first to comfort them. The friendship with Mike & Peg van Dijk sort of faded when we got upset and found the true selves of the Van Dijks. They would not provide a proper funeral for their own mother, Mrs. Van Oss, who died at the age of 92; even though they had the money to pay for a proper funeral. No one made a speech or even gave a proper farewell at the graveside either.

## Footscray Institute of Technology

My Dutch electrical certificates were not recognised here in Australia, but I made an application to get an Electrical Rights certificate. At least I could now do electrical work here, but only as an assistant. In Holland I was a fully qualified electrical mechanic, dual traded with the instrument technician trade. But my Dutch certificates were not recognised here and I would have to go back to school and qualify all over again. So in early 1967, working for APC, I was employed as an Instrument Mechanic, but in the oil award it was a requirement for an Instrument Mechanic as the highest classification to have done the Industrial Electronics course.

So I started with this course and had an exemption for one year because of my experience in the field. I did the remaining 2 years at the Footscray Institute of Technology,

attending evening classes two nights a week. The courses I did in Holland were of a far higher standard than the ones at Footscray Tech, but for the higher pay I had to do it. After these two years of schooling I was fully qualified in the Instrumentation field, as required by the oil award, and reached the top bracket for pay.

### 1967 Our move to Melton.

Peggy and Mike had told us about a block of land they had in Rockbank as an investment and suggested to us to have a look around the place. Melton land was reasonably priced and had a good future by the looks of it and was well away from the Industrial area.

As history shows we bought a block at 21 Blackwood Drive, Melton South. The land was a bare piece of undeveloped land with unmade roads and no power. Mail delivery consisted of picking the mail up from the post office in Melton South. The land cost us 595 pounds (or \$1190.00) with a 7-year outstanding Council rate of 5 pounds per annum, a total of 35 pounds. The vendor paid the rates. In 1968 Melton's population was only 3000. We saved up as fast as we could and paid the land off by the time we started to build our first home.

We contacted Dewar home builders who were well-known in Melton. They built our house at a cost of \$9,200.00, complete with driveway strips. We obtained a (at the time) maximum mortgage loan of \$7,200 from the Victoria State

Savings bank. We saved up the difference and were able to start building.

Naturally we were very excited about getting our own home and went regularly to check on its progress. We just made it to get a power supply cable connection to our house because three houses in the street were going up at the same time, normally this would have taken much longer. We moved into our home on December 7, 1967. By then I had changed jobs to APC in Altona as an Instrument Mechanic. With my steady work income, our hard saving and lots of extra overtime work we managed to pay the mortgage off in the next four years.

During that time Ann worked at Woolworth in Melbourne on the cheese counter. In her spare time she also managed to sew garments for other people and she was very handy with that. The extra income was a big help as well. She also had to look after our two boys; it was not easy for her at all.

Marcel went to the Melton South primary school, while Frits started out attending preps at Victoria Hall, also in Melton South. When we moved into our new Blackwood Drive home we soon became friends with other Dutchies living nearby, Joan & Keith Harkink, and Bill & Mary Groenewoud. They lived a few streets behind us and moved into their new homes only weeks before we did. The Groenewoud family became our best friends and we still enjoy each other's company. We play cards almost weekly, rotating with each other's place. It's a special fun night. Ann stopped working for a few years after Yvonne was

born. Yvonne was born on the 29 January, 1970, in the Bacchus Marsh hospital. Our baby girl was lovely!

I decided to start running marathons.

In that same year too, I decided to start running marathons. Athletics have been my major sporting activity. Have completed more than six marathon runs, with my 'personal best' three hours and 12 minutes,

### Ann as receptionist

In 1972 Ann started to work for the local medical clinic as a doctor's receptionist. She worked for Dr Mitchell for the next 15 years and made many friends. At the time, Dr. Mitchell came to the Melton clinic only one Tuesday afternoon a week in the Mechanics Hall. Soon the clinic grew bigger and Mary Groenewoud started working for the doctor, after Ann recommended her.

### Altona Petro Chemical Company.

Life was reasonably good with lots of work at APC. Our house in Blackwood Drive, Melton was well established, the gardens set out and all rooms furnished. We got a garage built at the end of the driveway and we powered it up to 240 Volts.

Fence around our house block.



To improve privacy we started fencing the right hand side of the block. Neighbours on both sites of a block of land are supposed to pay for half the building cost of fencing, as they own half of it. But our neighbours did not want to pay their half for the fence, and at the time it was not easy to enforce it. So to get the job done, the least expensive way was, to do it ourselves, digging the post holes by hand. That part of the fence stretched for 142 feet. After that we build a chook pen and put in fruit trees. That finished the back garden. We only had to fill in the drive strips and an area between the drive and the garage, a piece of dirt about 8 metres long and 20 metres wide.

### Mixing concrete by hand

We concreted the garage floor, mixing the concrete by hand in a wheelbarrow, setting out a section at a time. It took many months of hard work to complete. It was a busy time for the whole family.

I will never forget the time when concreting the garage floor had been completed, but the 8 metres between the drive and garage was still to be done. I parked the Holden FB panel van on a soil patch at the end of the drive as I usually did, coming into the house through the back door. But on this particular night it rained so heavily that the soil became muddy and very slippery.

The next morning - a Saturday, it took me six hours to get the panel van out of the mud and onto the concrete drive, which also became very slippery. Ann and I we were

covered in mud. Needless to say, I was late for work on that Saturday and so missed out on the overtime pay.

## Naturalisation ceremony and Name changes

On August 11, 1975, we became Naturalised Australians at a ceremony in the Melton Council chambers, conducted by the Melton Mayor, Jeff Robinson, with all other councillors in attendance. (Later Jeff and I became friends).

The Certificate of Australian Citizenship, which we had presented to us, not only made us Australians but also changed our names from Gigengack to Coolman.

Tom Coolman	before:	Antonius, Adrianus, Maria Gigengack
Ann Coolman		Anna, Maria, Antonius Gigengack - Koelman
Marcel Coolman		Marcel, Antonius, Maria Gigengack
Frits Coolman		Frits, Antonius Maria Gigengack

Yvonne Maria Gigengack:

Yvonne's name did not change, because she was born in Australia and therefore was not on the Naturalisation Certificates list. But she could use the Coolman name by usage. Her name changed to Burns after her marriage to

Rohan Burns.

### Frits developed appendicitis.

That was also the same period that Frits, while helping with mixing the concrete in the back yard, started to complain about a tummy ache. Ann took him to the local doctor in Bacchus Marsh. A few hours later came an urgent phone call from Ann, that she had taken Frits by car to the Williamstown Hospital, for urgent appendix surgery. Frits stood always ready to help and had a soft character. Marcel was more the tough guy. He would help me, but also liked to go with his friends and play. Nothing wrong with that but every child is different

### Marcel, Frits and Yvonne school days

All three of our children did well at school with top marks. We always encouraged the children to do their best at school. We gave them \$25 in their first year at high school and increased that by another \$5 each year if they had a good school report at the end of the year. That for them was quite a lot of money. Doing the Maths times tables at dinner time.

Yvonne spent all her young life at Melton High School, where she completed her HSC exam. She worked for six

months, to save up for a six months holiday with John in Holland, in her "gap" year. She then studied at the Royal Melbourne IT University. She studied for and completed her accountancy BCA. Of course we all are very proud of her. Nathan was born on August 8, 1999. Nathan is the handyman. He likes working with tools and is even thinking of becoming an electrician, following in my footsteps. Tara was born on June 12, 2001. She is our first granddaughter, pink is her favourite colour. When she was little she always liked being dressed in pink, so I gave her the cuddly name of Pinky. She is my shadow; she follows me wherever I go. She is very precious to all of us. They are all beautiful children. We love them dearly

### Paid our house off and bought rentals.

By hard work and saving the pennies we managed to pay off our house in only 4 years. Mind you the repayments were \$48 at the start but climbed to \$50 per month the following year. We bought a two bedroom unit from my chess mate Johnny Tarabene. He is a builder and wanted to move on to build more homes around Melton. It all worked out well and later we bought a second unit from him for \$28 500.00.

### Design and build our new house.

In 1984, due to the high maintenance required on our Blackwood Drive house and also because there was a free way coming nearby (to within 200 metres), with all the heavy traffic noise, we decided to sell and shift. Design and

build a new house close to the golf course; a better area. We bought the block of land and I did the conveyance myself again. The cost of the building block, which was situated on a government road, was \$10 500.00 and we could now start with the planning.

I got a copy of one of Johnny's house plans that we liked and we changed it further to our liking. This made it bigger and higher, to 8.5 foot ceiling height, and with a garage built under the same roof line. I increased the strength of concrete construction with more reinforcing bars. I started with building the slab in the first week of December, 1984. I took my 13 weeks long service leave starting on March 4, 1985. I managed to have the building of our house completed, at a total building cost of \$48 000, by June 4th, 1985. Four days before our 25th wedding anniversary we moved into the house. We still needed a final Council inspection certificate to say that all was according to the plan and was ready to live in. We had a great 25th anniversary. The garage was set-up for an entertainment and dancing area with tables of food and we had the best party you could wish for.

### Got badly ill.

But all that working took its toll. I think that I was so much involved with it all, that I finished up with vertigo - dizziness in my head and middle ear imbalance. Even now, after so many years, I still get the dizzy spells. I am very proud of my achievement of having built my very own house and in perfect time.

## Dual skilled Electrical & Instrumentation

I was still not happy about not being only classified as an electrical mechanic here in Australia. So back to school and,

after attending night classes again, I qualified first as an Electrical Apprentice. Back to night school again and I also qualified for a B grade electrical licence. Back to school yet again – all the electrical classes were held at the Footscray Institute of Technology – and I finally completed the requirements

**MULTISKILLED ENGINEERING**  
**ELECTRICAL & INSTRUMENTATION CONTRACTOR**

**RESUME - TOM COOLMAN**

**NAME:** TOM COOLMAN

**ADDRESS:** 14 Raleighs Road  
Melton Victoria 3337  
Ph: (05) 9745-5588

**DATE OF BIRTH:** 04/03/1940

**QUALIFICATIONS:** 'A' Grade Electrical/Contractor Licence and Instrumentation certificates obtained in Holland.  
- Completed equivalent studies in Australia to obtain 'A' Grade Electrical Licence in Victoria.  
- 3 Years Industrial Electronics

**EXPERIENCE:** I have had a total of thirty years of work experience in the electrical and instrumentation fields, in heavy industrial Plants, as highlighted below.

**1992 To Present: Self Employed - Multiskilled Engineering**

-My main contracts so far have been with: Kennecor Australia; Newport Power Station, and some smaller contracts of various degrees.

**1. Newport Power Station:**  
Listed below are some of the projects I undertook:  
-Successfully trained 3 electrical Apprentices to obtain their instrumentation qualifications.  
-Bentley Nevada Vibration Installation on Turbine and Generator.  
-Overhaul B.F.P. 4 & 1 Instruments  
-Fuel oil system Calibrating and installation  
-F.A.D.'s in Boiler House replace Daily Actuators with Valtek  
-E.D.C. Replacing Battery Chargers  
-Reverse rotation modifications, and speed indication.  
-LAB wetrack, replace analytical instruments

**2. Kennecor**

-Assist co-ordinate turnarounds.  
-Assist in maintenance of instrumentation during peak times.  
-Teaching on Bentley Nevada vibration monitoring system.

for my A Grade electrical licence in 1989. I was a fully qualified, dual skilled technician once more.

### Always union troubles

In 1990, aged 50, I was more or less forced to resign from working at APC due to Union pressure on me for being dual skilled, as stated earlier. My health was worth more than persisting with working at APC. The unions were unrelenting. Mind you, I was in the ETU trade union!

The Instrument workshop at APC has never been a single union workshop. At different times we had instrument mechanics in diverse unions, like the ETU, the ASE and the AMWU. We never had problems with that. The main problem was that some instrument mechanics just hated the electricians. The reverse is also true; the two trades could not work in harmony. You were always looking over your shoulder.

At a lunch-time union meeting in February 1990, it was voted on that the instrument workshop should be single union membership – only the AMWU. At the close of this meeting no one would work with me any longer as being an ETU member; I was forced to sit in an office for the next 3 months so long as it took. I found that not all of management was sympathetic towards me any longer and that they tried to make deals with the unions behind my back. They would not risk more union disruption or strikes. My nerves got the better of me and I was 'rat shit' with high blood pressure. It also affected my home life.

The dispute came ultimately before an industrial court. The first court hearing was held in Adelaide in May 1990. I did not even know about the hearing and so did not attend. But the second one was in Melbourne in June. Then I decided I would cut a deal and retire early. By subsequent enquiries I found out that I could retire if both parties agreed, APC and me. APC was happy to see the dispute and the problems disappear. In June 1990, at a special industrial court hearing held now in Melbourne, this proposal was accepted by both parties. I could now retire on July 1, 1990 aged 50. Some of the meetings held with management I recorded and I still have the tapes in my possession.

I received a payout of all outstanding leave plus a pension scheme with the payout. That came to a total of \$186 000.00. From that I paid off the rentals investment mortgages, on both Barrie's Road and Child Street. The rest of the money went into a CBA roll-over fund and into investment accounts.

So many of our friends.

Mary and Bill had a caravan permanently in the 'Time out' caravan park at Tocumwal on the Murray River. We visited them on many occasions and of course had a very good time together. We got to know each other's families very well. They also had small children – two girls. We went on many summer holidays to Wilsons Promontory with our families.

Rose and Fred Benello also used to come to the park. The kids played cricket on the beach.



I must also mention Joop and Suze Wilke, from Werribee. I got to know Joop through working at APC. He also was an Instrument Mechanic. They had five young children. We became good friends with them also, not as much as with Bill & Mary, but we went on holidays together to Halls Gap and to Jan Jack beach. Suze is Yvonne's Godmother. We saw each other regularly, but mainly when we were close to where they lived in Werribee.

### Ann and I fully retired

Now that Ann and I are both retired, and life has become less pressing financially we have more time for ourselves and to go on holidays and we went on many better and longer holidays. We used to go to Adelaide, where we stayed with Kees and Connie Keizer. Connie was of course Ann's sister. Or we all went to Halls Gap, not far from our place, just a few hours' drive away. We always had a good relationship with Kees and Connie. That started already when we were all much younger and used to go dancing together on Saturday nights, in Amsterdam.

We used to spend happy times with Ann's sister Connie in Adelaide: we used to love the Saturday dance nights at the Adelaide Dutch club, playing cards and eating Dutch croquettes. At those times we would hear all about Bertus and Hilly Koelman who live near them in Adelaide. Ann's brother Wim lives in Newcastle NSW and her brother Frits in Holland. We keep in contact with Wim, but any contact with Frits and Gerda is out of the question. The best contact we have with Ann's family is with Willy and Gunther.

## The Tom Coolman Story

When on Holiday in Holland I must always see and stay with them.

Kees passed away on September 19, 2001, June 26, 2012, and Conny died in Adelaide on June 2; only three days before her 70th birthday. Another big shock to the whole family and Ann took this hard too. We did attend her funeral, which was well attended by the many friends. Anja and Sandra Connie's 2 daughters, and I gave speeches, a fitting farewell to Conny and Kees Keizer.

Over the years our relationship and friendship had been very close.

.....and family

*July 16, 2011. L to R  
Jamie, Rohan, Yvonne,  
Marcel, Julie, Ann,  
Tom, Lee, Tara,  
Nathan, Lily and Jo*



## Marriage of Marcel and Carmen.

Marcel and Carmen married on October 19, 1985. We liked the Peters family and had many great parties together. Jamie was born on June 2, 1989, a lovely boy. Second was Lee, born on August 16, 1990. Of course another lovable boy and grandchild. We loved both boys dearly. We minded them and looked after them quite a lot. Jamie and Lee loved it when we took them to the local playground. The swimming pool was also a favourite treat for them. We spent many happy days together with them.

Marcel and Carmen started house hunting, working on the plan of a house to be built on their property in Greendale. So Ann and I thought it would be a nice gesture to help them using some of our retirement money so they could



*Ann, Tom, Yvonne, Rohan, Tara, Nathan*

## The Tom Coolman Story

pay off their house mortgage and finance the building of their new house in Greendale.

That would make it easier for them to start afresh. Marcel and Carmen where of course very thankful for the gesture. Repayment was prompt when they sold their home some few years later in 1991. And their new house was ready to move into, I charged them a minimal interest fee.

### Rohan and Yvonne

Later when Rohan & Yvonne built their new house in Echuca I promised to pay; and we did pay for their huge shed to a maximum of \$15,000 as a special present for them. Marcel & Carmen were living in their Greendale home and we gave them an equal amount to pay for finishing their house.

### Death of Frits.

After I stopped working for APC, I registered with Skilled Engineering and worked on a few sites for them, mainly at Monsanto in Footscray. It was here that I received an urgent phone call on Saturday morning January 5, 1991. Ann told me on the phone that Frits had died earlier that morning. We were all devastated. I went home in a daze. None of us could ever think that something like that could strike us down in such a way – a son and brother who had so much to live for, the whole world had been open for his taking.

He was healthy, did not have any known problems. He had a good job working for Mr King as a fitter and turner, which he liked, and who had a loving family and many friends.

Living in Western Australia which he so loved, looking for adventure. But all was not well between him and his girlfriend Vicky. He loved her very much and was willing to get married and start a family. But Vicky let him down meeting other boys and teasing Frits with this. Vicky was an immature and wicked girl. I hope never to see her again. Every year we get a nice card from Mr King remembering Frits on that special day in January. Mr King is a kind and thoughtful man who also has many problems of his own. The shock of Frits' death has affected everyone deeply and has caused big health problems for Ann who has developed diabetes and other heart problems.

I think that even Marcel and Yvonne have been hurt very much by Frits' death, but they have not gone through the proper grieving process. They held up so well. They also must have suffered terribly, but have been fighting silently and in private. We admire them for that.

## Refuge in religion

Myself, I took refuge in religion and became an active member of the Uniting church in Melton. I found lots of love, happiness, and understanding. Even so, very few church members knew about it. I have unsuccessfully tried on many occasions for Ann to also put her faith in God, but she rejects the thought. She is only prepared to accompany me on a few occasions, mainly Xmas and Easter.

Lately, I have also been disappointed in the Church as they are more and more closely involved with the trade union movement. As they seem to stay on the same platform during rallies in the City, like the stand they took at the rallies against the Formula 1 Grand Prix together with unions and the stand they took against the privatisation of public utilities. The stand they take in relation to refugees is another problem for me.

## The Ace of Spades

In 1991 I started up my own business and called it: 'The Ace of Spades'. This was a home maintenance and repair service. I mainly worked for real-estate agents in Melton. I worked like that for only 14 months.

## Mutiskilled Engineering

Then I received a phone call from Skilled Engineering to work for 8 days at Newport Power Station, the big power generator plant was something I wanted to be involved with.

I must have impressed the staff at NPS because the maintenance manager himself asked me back some months later to become the apprentice trainer for 3 partly multi-skilled electrical apprentices. He also offered me assistance with setting up my own business. This was a good opportunity to start out as 'Multi-skilled Engineering', a more appropriate name. I registered the company in my name and fixed up the insurance and all was in order. We

The Tom Coolman Story

worked out the hourly rates and I could start. I worked at NPS for over 6 years as a trainer but also started contracting small electrical work jobs for NPS only.

The business really took off when I started advertising with the local chemical industries. I worked at Kemcor Altona (ex APC) and a few other companies. Some days I worked for 14 hours a day 7 days a week.

CORPORATE AFFAIRS  
1984/4

FORM 2  
BUSINESS NAMES ACT 1962  
Sections 7 (1) and (2)

No. 1178918E

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**CERTIFICATE OF  
REGISTRATION  
OF BUSINESS NAME**


I hereby certify that the business name  
**MULTISKILLED ENGINEERING**

was on 30 August 1984

registered, pursuant to and subject to the  
Business Names Act 1962.

Given under my hand at MELBOURNE, this 30 August 1984

  
for Commissioner for Corporate Affairs



## Invested into the ASX stock market

As a sideline, I followed the stock market and sold and bought shares frequently. I did well and made some money that way; better than what we made from the rental income. I attended lectures and free market updates at the stock exchange every Wednesday afternoon. I learnt much about investment pitfalls. I bought some books to read. No computers were available in those days but the old way of TV telexes helped.

## Yvonne and Rohan married

On November 9, 1996, Yvonne married Rohan Burns. It was an excellent wedding day. All went to perfection. Rohan is a quiet man who fits in well in our family. By trade he is a cabinet maker, but the money is lousy. He started driving trucks; the open road freedom is more attractive than working in a dusty workshop. Rohan went on to get back into his old trade in the furniture moving business and enjoying it. He still loves doing carpentry in his own Workshop / Garage and is doing well.





*Xmas 2009.*

*Marcel, Julie, Yvonne, Rohan, Jamie.  
Ann, Tom Nathan and Tara*

## More about holidays

Our whole family used to go on an annual holiday almost every year, camping in a tent or with the caravan, either to The Grampian's, Wilsons Prom or Queensland.

In 1979 Ann and I went back to Holland for the first time, and we took Yvonne, aged 9 with us. It was a big welcome home. And again in 1995 Ann and I went for a holiday to Holland. I only stayed for a few weeks while Ann stayed

on, visiting her Mother, who was very sick and soon after passed away. Ann was happy to have said her final farewell to her and done whatever she could for her.

In 1998 Ann and I went together with Bill & Mary to Europe on a 22 day guided tour to Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Paris, Spain and Holland. That was a very good holiday with the four of us. Only the tour bus itself was a bit difficult; with a very limited leg room. And with my long legs I really did have trouble sitting down for the long trips in these cramped conditions. There were 52 passengers in the bus and there were no seats with extra leg room. But overall the trip in Europe has been very enjoyable to us all.

We have been on two cruises, the first one in 1997, for 12 days, visiting Noumea, Vanuatu, and Mystery Island. The second one was for 10 days. We both loved the relaxing atmosphere, entertainment and good food on board. We have some very fond memories of the trips.

For many years now, Ann has lost interest in overseas travel' and I have therefore been on different overseas holidays on my own. I don't mind being on my own all that much as I can go to whatever places I feel like going to at the time, do lots of walks and sightseeing in the wonderful cities of the world. I love travelling; even if I get terribly jet lagged. The last few times returning from my European trips, it took me three weeks or so to get over the jet lag.

I tried stopping over in Malaysia or England for a few days, but I found that trying to sleep during the 4 or 5 stopover days would not work for me. The high humidity and

temperatures at night in Singapore or KL in particular, made sleeping near impossible. In July 2012 I went by myself again on holiday, but this time went around the world. Started with Hong Kong for five days, Amsterdam 18 days, Prague 4 days, Los Angeles for 3 days and finishing at San Francisco for 4 days. It was the nicest holiday I can think off.

### More wedding Bells

Lee and Jo were married on 30th March 2012; they have a daughter Lily, born 6th July,2010 who is my great granddaughter. She was followed by Harry on 10th March 2013.

Marcel and Julie were engaged on 23 March 2013, to be married on 25th October 2014..

### Walking every day.

I like my walks – the bush walks in Halls Gap, including the walk up to the Pinnacle. I joined the Melton Bush walking club in August 2008 and every second weekend we do a long walk. It is also a social club, with dinners at different restaurants four times a year. Walking is my main fitness item and it is working well for me. Lost some weight and feeling one hundred percent health wise.

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*Amsterdam  
2010 World cup Soccer. Café at the Rembrandt's Plein.*

But by now I do believe:

"I did my best.

Signed: Tom Coolman

## Day book, diary

As an aside: I have kept logging my daily activities in a diary since 1976. If ever anyone is interested in finding out what I did on a particular day have a look see. Throughout my working life I have wanted to retire aged 50.

And also: Many thanks to Mr Herman Jansink.

Herman's expert advice in getting this booklet into a more printable form is very valuable. The Dutch editing and translation skill shown, transformed my English version to a much more readable and some lovely extra anecdotes he has mastered and put into practice.

Even with being Dutch from birth, I have trouble in editing and translating from English to Dutch. The sentence building is so much different and a direct translation just won't do. I call myself lucky to know Herman who is not shy in taking on the task of editing and translating.

Herman has helped me with such enthusiasm and energy. He has been my main inspiration in getting this booklet finely into a printable form.

Further my thanks must include Emmy, Herman's better half. They do have a busy life themselves but just as the saying goes: "Ask a busy person and the job will be done"  
Thank you Herman we got to know each other a lot better and I can call you a friend.

Tom Coolman, Melton - Winter 2014