

woke up the next morning, boy it was rough. We were both very seasick and did not even try to get up for two days. When the weather improved somewhat, we managed to wash and shave. We were hungry and after something to eat we started to feel better. Although Jan Ouwejan proved to be a rather dull person, I was kind of lucky to have him as a roommate.

Most of our fellow passengers were a rather rowdy bunch. Almost all of them had been away from Holland before. Some of them had worked in the East Indies and some of them had worked for the Shell Company in Curacao. There was a lot of heavy drinking going on and although we were tolerated, we did not belong.

When we came further south, the weather became beautiful and the ocean very calm. A kind of swimming pool was rigged up for us. It was a large wooden box lined with canvas on the inside. Every morning it was filled with seawater and in the evening it was emptied and cleaned. We had a lot of fun there. Still it was the object of an almost serious accident. One of the hard drinking fellows decided one evening that he needed to take a dip before going to bed. He had forgotten that the pool was empty and dived right in. He was a sight to see the next day. He was very lucky that he did not break his neck. More about him later.

Boy the food we got aboard that ship: All kinds of things that I had never tasted before. We all learned to say "mahlzeit."

The officers of the ship were very correct and I would say almost militaristic. I should mention that this was the time when Hitler became very powerful in Germany. One day we were invited to watch a ceremony where the German national flag came down and the so-called new flag with the swastika was hoisted. We Dutchmen did not pay much attention, but later I came to realize what a significant moment in history I had watched.

Aside from looking at the Azores from a distance, we did not see any land until we reached the West Indies, better known as The Antilles. Our first stop was to be the island of Barbados. As we were told that it would be possible to catch a shark there, I got permission from the first engineer to go down in the workshop and make a big fish hook. We obtained a large piece of rope and a hunk of meat from the cook and when we entered the harbor of Barbados we started to fish. Sorry to say nothing came of it. The sharks just were not interested. As our ship was mainly a freighter it depended on how much they had to do as to how long we could remain in port. However, we had sufficient time to have a look at an entirely new world for me of strange people, strange fruits and strange flowers. I remember that we stopped at a place where shelled coconuts were spread out in the sun over a huge area. Our next stop was Port of Spain on the island of Trinidad. I do not remember much about

it.

The next and last stop before Aruba was La Guira, Venezuela. We were told that we would be there all day. We had heard about Caracas, the capital of Venezuela. Some of us decided that we may as well go and have a look there. At that time the highway which now leads to the mile-high city did not exist. We went by a small-track railroad which wound through the tropical jungle. It was an exciting and beautiful trip. We met some colorful and interesting people, natives of the country and homey folks. They had with them live chickens, some pigs and one had a large snake in a basket. Although we could not converse with them, I remember a huge square with a statue of Simon Bolivar, the liberator of much of South America. We did not have much time before we had to go and catch the train which took us back to the harbor.

ARRIVAL IN ARUBA

In the morning of the 28th we arrived in the harbor of Oranjestad, the capital of Aruba. At that time the island was still under the Dutch flag.. A company representative was there to meet us. He took us to the other end of the island where the refinery of the Lago Oil and Transport Company was located.

HOME IS BQ

We were shown around a bit and then taken to the bachelor quarters. At that time there were six quarters and some of us were taken to each one of them. I do not remember the number of my quarter. I was not too happy with my roommate. It was the same fellow who had dived into the empty swimming pool.

Let me tell you a little about these quarters. They were two-story buildings. There were no windows in them, just louvers and screens, so that the trade wind could blow freely through them, which made them very comfortable most of the time. Between each two rooms was a bathroom, so there were four persons to a shower. We also had washing facilities in our room.

THREE KINDS OF WATER

Soon we found out that all the drinking water as far as the Company was concerned, had to be imported. Tankers with drinking water would come in and leave filled with oil. We actually had three kinds of water. There was seawater for the toilet, well water for the shower, which was not recommended for drinking, and then drinking water. There were water coolers on each floor of the bachelor quarters. There was also one faucet with fresh water outside of each quarter for washing our hair. I do not know how true it was, but we were told that using well water would make you lose your hair. As I had quite a bit of hair to lose I washed my hair in well water.

THE DINING HALL

We all ate at the dining hall, which was open twenty-four hours a day. This was because the oil refinery operates continuously. It did not take us long to find out that you could go there any time of the day. The food was excellent. It was cooked by French cooks and served by Chinese. Our rooms were kept clean and our beds were made by Chinese also. We soon learned that giving them a small tip at the end of the month to those people would improve their service.

THE CONTRACT

Now let me tell you about the contract I had signed with the Company. To begin with I would be paid 1.40 guilders/hr. The work week was six days of eight hours. Yes, we had to work a full day on Saturday also. After the first year of work I would get fourteen days of local leave. All this was a tremendous improvement over what I had ever received in Holland. If I did not want to stay, but could stick it out for eighteen months the company would pay my transportation back to Holland. After two years I would be granted another fourteen days vacation. At the end of three years I would get sixty days vacation plus transportation and travel time.

It sounded wonderful to me. So, on March 29, after a good breakfast I found my way to the blacksmith shop. I was the only one of the Dutchmen who would work there. Although I probably looked a little strange in my new, much too warm coveralls, I was well received by my new boss. His name was Bob Harrison and he was from Scotland. There were three more smiths, a German, an Italian and an American. To make a long story short, from the beginning I did very well. Of course in the beginning I still had my difficulties with the language. But, after all, I did not come to talk, but to work. Our helpers were all black. Sometimes the job would take as many as three helpers, and sometimes just one. We used air hammers instead of steam. These blacks were very good hammer machinists. I never had any trouble getting along with them. Pretty soon they would do anything to make my job as easy as possible. I was not boasting when I say that as far as Bob Harrison was concerned I was number one. When it was time for him to go on home furlough he recommended me to take over his job. So, way ahead of the others I became General Foreman of the Blacksmith shop.

But I soon found out that I still had a lot to learn. I had to make reports and also had to attend meetings on planning and safety. I am sure that the other fellows had some fun at the way I expressed myself. Still, all in all, I do not think I did too badly. But I was glad when Bob came back and I could go back to work again.

“GOVERNMENT JOBS”

A lot of that was going on at Lago. Oh yes, the big shots were in it

also. So I was picked to do most of that kind of work. I made several nice fences and gates for the big shots and also was asked to make iron work for some grave yards. I never asked any questions because it was none of my business and I loved the work.

MY LIFE AWAY FROM THE JOB

To begin with, I had made arrangements so that part of my wages would be sent to my parents. I also started a little account for myself in Holland. After we arrived we met other Dutch people who had come before us. I got acquainted with Toon Gongriep, a machinist. As we both did not like our roommates, we went to the Personnel Office together and were allowed to change and have a room together. Soon Toon and I became good friends. He was engaged and was saving his money to get married, as soon as he was assigned a bungalow in what was called The Colony. We did not have much money to spend and kept away from those who spent their money drinking and gambling. We both liked to swim and there was ample opportunity for that. Don't get the idea that all of our fellow workers were drinkers and gamblers, but there was a lot of that going on.

It did not take long for us to discover that there were two double tennis courts which were also lighted so that you could play at night. We went to the movies often and bought magazines in order to improve our English. One day we met a fellow at the tennis courts who took an interest in us and taught us how to play the game with very good results. I would have my name in the Pan Aruban, the weekly paper of our Colony, as an upcoming champ. Sorry but it did not last. Soon our main and only big expenses were to have our rackets restrung and buying new balls. There was so much salt in the air that none lasted very long.

OUR FELLOW WORKERS

Although there were other nationalities present, the Americans were dominant. Lower as well as higher management were all American. For a long time there was little contact between us and the Americans. There was a reason for this. There were two different payrolls, a dollar and a guilder payroll. We started at 1.40 guilders/hr and soon were up to 1.95 guilders/hr. The dollar at that time was worth 2.50 guilders and the Americans doing the same job we did received 1.04 dollars per hour. Our wages were still below what they were making. Not going into detail, there were still a lot of other benefits going with the dollar payroll that we were not entitled to.

We did not grumble, and most of us were not even aware of the differences, but as more and more workers came from Holland, the others probably felt, and justly so, that they were there to take their jobs. I had a taste of this difficulty one day. The blacksmith shop was part of a large building where all metal crafts were under one roof. Except for the

roof, the building was open on all sides. It did not rain often in Aruba, but when it rained, it poured. That day it rained so much that the place around my anvil was in a pool of water. I looked around and found a board to stand on. No sooner had I taken it than a fellow came over and claimed that it was his board. We quarreled and he invited me to come to the lighthouse to fight it out. I did not want to back out, so I told him I would be there. I went, but he never showed up: Lucky for me, because he probably would have made mincemeat out of me. He was about twice as heavy as I was. When I went to him the next morning to tell him that I had been there he just laughed it off. He probably figured that the long walk to the lighthouse had been sufficient punishment.

I think it was sometime in 1934 that President Franklin Roosevelt decided to take the dollar off the gold standard. As far as the guilder was concerned, it went from 2.50 to 1.85 in value. Now we were making more than our fellow American Workers. The Company figured that the best way to remedy this situation was to give us a cut in wages. This met with heavy opposition, not only from the Dutch, but also from all others who were on the guilder payroll. The Dutch Government became involved. In the end we were all put on the dollar payroll. This was a big improvement because in this way we also became entitled to all other privileges. The one exception was that the Americans were granted home furlough every eighteen months and we had to stay three years.

ATHLETICS

The Americans tried to get us interested in baseball, but we preferred to play soccer. We had a kind of soccer team. Alas, at the corner of the playing field there was a tavern, owned by a Dutchman. We would start with eleven men, but after half time intermission, you never knew how many would show up again.

MY FIRST FURLOUGH

I went back to Holland on the Esso den Haag, an 18 day trip from Aruba to Rotterdam. I got married to Sis and returned to Aruba by way of New York, crossing the Atlantic on the "Staatendam", the flagship of the Holland-American Line. After a stay in New York City we went to Boston and caught the tanker "Drake" to Aruba.

There was somebody to meet us and we were taken to Bungalow 193. I got word that Bob Harrison had left the morning we came in, so I was expected to be on the job and take over the shop again. Not much time for me to make Sis comfortable. There was so much new for her to get accustomed to.

PROMOTION

I was happy at my job and when Bob came back I went back to work. As far as I was concerned things could remain that way until I was ready to retire. But, alas, they had other plans for me. One day, not long

after Bob came back, I was called into the office and was told that I would be transferred to a supervisory position in the, of all things, Carpenter and Painting Department. My Foreman would be Mr. Turner. I had met this gentleman before in connection with a job we had to do for him. Sorry to say, but it was a question of not liking each other from the beginning. As I always have been someone who likes to work with my hands, I hated to leave my job in the first place. Mr. Turner did not make it any easier to accept my new position. From the beginning I got the idea that he would like to get rid of me as soon as possible. I was put to work checking paint gangs over a very large territory. All I had to do was sign time cards, order materials and move crews from one place to another. I could not quit. We were expecting our first baby. I decided to stick it out and at least finish my contract.

MR. CHIPPENDALE

I was usually able to pick up a ride home at noon. One day I was very late, missed my ride and was walking home, when a car stopped. It was Mr. Chippendale, the head of Maintenance and Construction Department. He knew me because he talked to me once while visiting the blacksmith shop. He asked me how I was doing. I told him not so good. I told him that at the present my job consisted of seventy percent walking from one place to another. Also, although I was now a supervisor, I still had to punch a time clock. Mr. Chippendale listened, but did not say anything. A few days later Mr. Turner came to tell me that I would be allowed to use my own car on the job. Also, that I did not have to punch a time card any more and would be put on the private payroll. This was a big improvement for me.

OWNING A CAR

The trouble was that as yet I had never owned a car and did not know how to drive one. With the help of a friend I went out and bought a cheap second-hand car. He also taught me how to drive. The morning of the day I had to go for my drivers' test I made a wrong move and drove the car right over a water line and into a ditch. That caused trouble for me with the Company police, and their chief was a big, cowboy like fellow who felt very important. When I told him that I was just learning and had to go for my license that afternoon, he had a good laugh. But he sent the boys to get my car out of the ditch, gave me one of his big cigars and let me go. That afternoon I got my drivers license. From then on things were better for me and I did have more time for learning. Mr. Turner did not bother with me any more, at least not for the time being.

RICKIE, OUR FIRST DAUGHTER

I do not remember how long we had to wait, but we knew that we were entitled to a larger house because of the birth of Rickie. Then one day we had a very pleasant surprise. Word came that we were to move to Bungalow #251. Oh Boy, one of the choice locations in the Colony.

It was right at the seashore with a beautiful view across the lagoon and at the sea, only a few minutes away from two beautiful beaches.

The birth of Inez followed. At the beginning of World War II I was drafted into the Dutch Army in Aruba. I continued working at Lago during the day and reported to Army duty at night. I did that for one year, until Lago managed to get me excused from Army duty.

The Elspeth Laurenson Family Story

As told by Karen Clubb

My mothers name was Elspeth Valerie Laurenson. She moved out to Aruba in 1947 at the age of 8 years old and stayed until she was 15 years old in the Colony, then returned with her mother and father to England because my Grandmother was very sick.

My Grandfather was a sea captain and worked on the oil tankers (Lake Tankers). His name was Francis (Frank) Sinclair Laurenson, a Shetland Islander by birth. My grandmother was called Esther Dale Laurenson, originally from North Sheilds in England.

My dear mother, Elspeth, died in 1993 and I only have the vaguest of memories about her stories of being a child and growing up in Aruba (I have two of her year books from Lago High, and one very precious handmade basket from Aruba). I live in Shetland - the farthest north Scottish island of the UK, and I hope to visit Aruba someday to see the island so far away that my mother knew so well and loved so much.

The Bill & Pauline “Bud” Learned Story

In 1937 Bill and Bud (Pauline) Learned were living in Port Washington, Long Island. Bill was working for the WPA but knew there was a better life out there somewhere. He saw an ad for employment in some place called “Aruba” with Standard Oil. He followed up on it and, shortly thereafter, he went to Aruba with the family following in a few months, traveling the 13 days on a tanker.

After a few temporary houses, we settled into our first real home in Aruba, Bungalow #346. We all took to the Aruban lifestyle and enjoyed many trips around the island on weekends. Picnics on Palm Beach, driving every back road we could find, BA beach, the little lagoon, going to the top of Colorado Point to get a better look at Venezuela and so much more.

Both Bill & Bud enjoyed working with Don Schlageter on the Pan Aruban (Bud pounding away on a very old Underwood) and finding friends to play bridge with. These were the friends that became like an extended family to us. Shortly before the attack, we moved to #635, up on the hill where Bud was hoping for a glimpse of the Caribbean Sea from her living room. Following the attack, Bill stayed in Aruba while his family went to Florida. Bill took a trip to Maracaibo along with other families that

After a year, with the return of the Tulsa, Oklahoma, by an ice plant in Louisiana. While we loved Standard Oil. In January, 1945 Bill transferred to the Technical Service Department. The ice plant and we headed back to

It was wonderful when we moved into Bungalow #346. The numbers on it were NA21. However, since the NAZI. No matter, we had a cook, was usually on a committee organizing the Club or playing

Son Bob



Elsbeth Laurenson, 1954 Pan-O-Ram Yearbook.

Photograph courtesy Karen Clubb

return, Bill transferred to the Technical Service Department and Bill decided to return to Aruba and in the Technical Service Department belonging were sold

with our friends. We had the numbers on it were NA21, everyone called it the NAZI. Bud, a fabulous cook, was usually found on some committee organizing functions at the Golf Club or playing bridge.

graduated in 1948 and

went to Colorado School of Mines. Daughter Dotty graduated in 1952. Bill and Bud retired in 1960 and went to Santa Barbara, CA. They both decided it was too cold and moved to Florida after 1 year. Bill died in 1977 and Bud died in 1988. They both thought that the smartest decision they ever made was to take the offer from Standard Oil in 1937 and move to Paradise.

As told by Dotty (Learned) Dill

The Bryan McCall Family Story

As told by Bryan McCall.

My father, Captain McCall, was in command of the lake tanker *s/s Pedernales* when she was torpedoed, along with the *s/s Oranjestad* (Capt. Morgan--father of Pauline & Bill Morgan) by U-156 Feb. 16 1942. The Oranjestad sank at anchor - Capt. Morgan was rescued from the sea - and the Pedernales broke her moorings. Her back was broken, and she drifted seaward--later to be taken in tow and beached near Savaneta. My father and surviving crew members were later picked up drifting in a lifeboat. The midships section of the vessel was cut away and the remaining bow and stern sections were towed to dry-dock in San Nicholas and then joined. My father sailed the much shortened ship to a shipyard in Baltimore where a new centre section was inserted. The rebuilt *Pedernales* returned to service in Aruba.

Another lake tanker of World War II interest was *s/s Bachaquero*. She had the distinction of being the first ever Landing Ship Tank -- LST110-- sailing as *H.M.S. Bachaquero* and took part in the 1942 landings at Madagascar, landings in North Africa & also Normandy. She was released by the Admiralty in 1955--re-converted to an oil tanker and joined the lake fleet in Aruba.



The Esso Club the day after the fire.

Photograph courtesy J L Lopez family. Source unknown.

The William "Bill" McMaster Family Story

As told by Bill McMaster

I cannot say the exact date when my family first arrived in Aruba and those who could have told me have now unfortunately passed on.

However I can say that my father commenced working for Lago Shipping Company in June 1927, though it is possible that he was in the Caribbean area before that date.

Both my parents came from a small peninsula on the East Coast of Northern Ireland, called Islandmagee. At that time every eldest male son inherited the family farm at Islandmagee and it was left for the younger siblings to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The majority tended towards seafaring and at this time, most British ships had at least one crewmember from that place sailing onboard, as in that period during and after the great depression, making a living on the land and indeed elsewhere was very difficult.

My grandfather was a shipmaster, as was his father before him, and had been born on the small family farm. My grandmother, in addition to raising the inevitable children who arrived regularly after his vacations (11 times), worked this farm: Cows for milk & butter, hens for eggs & eating, and a large vegetable garden for all the family. It is also possible that adult relatives helped, or casual outside labor was hired, as necessary for plowing and cutting grass and making hay for winter cattle feed. Undoubtedly all of the growing children helped with the chores as much as they could, both before and after school and during the school holidays.

My grandfather served in a foreign going sailing vessel as Chief Mate from 1887 and then Captain between 1891 until 1893. One of my aunts described how the family existed in those days before social security, during his long periods away at sea.

This sailing ship, the *Braque Polly Woodside*, the 1885 product of another Belfast shipyard, sailed around the world. Its voyages took it from Europe to the West coast of South America on the nitrate trade, to Australia and New Zealand for grain and wool. In 1904 it then was sold to New Zealand then Australian owners before finally being used as a coaling hulk, then in 1922 being left to rot, falling victim to the onslaught of the steamship. **H o o i b e r g**

Much later it was recognized as one of the last vessels of its type and was extensively rebuilt and brought back from a decaying hulk in 1987 and is now on permanent display in a park beside the Yarrow River in Melbourne, Australia.

A small history of my grandfather, during his time onboard, including pictures, is included in a book entitled "The Braque Polly Woodside (Rona)" by Vin Darroch, an Australian, who was involved in collecting information on the ship and also involved in its reconstruction.

The more famous Belfast shipyard of Harland & Wolff in 1925 received its first order to build four shallow draft tankers from Lago Shipping Co. These ships and sixteen subsequent orders that were built at that shipyard were originally managed and crews supplied by Andrew Weir of Glasgow. With new ships coming off the slipway, crews were needed and I can only assume that is how my Father went to Venezuela. Bearing in mind at this time certificated captains sailed as AB's and ordinary seamen were unable to get positions on ships.

Islandmagee was also a place where everyone was related to everyone else, and the news would spread rapidly by word of mouth, of the opportunities to be had in the West Indies.

At one time the following people from Islandmagee worked there and were my father's cousins; Capt. Jimmy Kerr, Tom Mann, Capt. Hugh Jackson, Samuel M. Kane. Captain John Kane also from the same place was not a relation.

My parents married in 1932 and soon after, my mother moved to Maracaibo, where I was born in 1935. *[This life at sea may also explain why Bill, too, followed in his father's footsteps and chose seafaring as a career.]*

GOING TO ARUBA

During a vacation home to Ireland in late 1937, my mother again found herself pregnant but remained there until after the birth of my sister in April 1938. I do not know why she remained there until December that year but I now write with certainty, because on December 23rd, 1938 the Shaw Savill & Albion Line twin screw steamer, the *s/s Tamaroa* sailed from Southampton. Amongst those shown in the passenger list are Mrs. A. A. McMaster, Master William McMaster and Miss Pamela McMaster. All were scheduled to disembark at Curacao. This vessel a 12,500 gross ton mail steamer, called at Curacao, and then transited the Panama Canal on its way to New Zealand. What date we arrived at Willemstad, Curaçao and how and when we were transported to Aruba I cannot say, but certainly sometime in early January 1939.

We lived in Bungalow #717 from then until our departure from Aruba late 1944 after my dad was killed following a collision between

his ship, the *Punta Gorda* and the *s/s Ampetco* on September 20th.

I know we left the "Rock" by a KLM flight on 11.10.1944 on aircraft PJ- AKA, with Pilot - te Koller, Co-pilot - unnamed, Engineer – Weststrate, Wireless operator - Welschen, calling at Port au Prince, Camaguey and thence to Miami.

PADDY YOUNG

Another relative - this time of my mothers, though by marriage, was James (Paddy) Young - Norman & Kenneth's father. He was third engineer on one of the "lakers", torpedoed on 14th February. A non-swimmer and a very brave man, he gave his lifejacket to the Chief Engineer, who also a non-swimmer, when they abandoned ship. He managed to survive although badly burnt. He never returned to the fleet, but when recovered from his wounds, worked for the marine department within the harbor. Because of shore based work he was a frequent visitor to our bungalow. He taught my sister and I to swim, gave me extra tutoring in math to try and improve my grades – he probably did not realize how difficult a task he was letting himself in for. He also had the unenviable task of telling me that my Dad had been killed in September 1944.

BACK TO NORTHERN IRELAND

Even after we returned to Northern Ireland, during his vacations home, he took time to take me shooting: ducks in the winter, rabbits and pigeons during summer ones and fishing. He also took me to watch the Ulster Grand Prix motor races and motorcycle TT races whenever possible. My Mother, sister and I owe him a great debt of gratitude for the kindness he showed to our family.

LIFE IN ARUBA

My days in Aruba were some of the happiest of my life: A tropical island paradise, with no winter weather, an ideal place for children with few natural hazards. At first, free from the horrors of war that was beginning to ravage Europe at that time.

It was a time of long summer holidays spent at the beach, complete with swimsuit and towel and the ever essential book of club tickets for drinks and ice cream at the Esso Club, with non-stop swimming, diving from the "T" dock into the warm tropical waters, protected by a lagoon and shark nets. Of finding the body of a shark on the reef: A very sobering moment.

MEMORIES

- However, there were incidents: Fractures to left collar bone, right collar bone and right wrist. All this happened in quick succession causing my mother, anxiously, to ask a doctor at the hospital if I suffered from brittle bones. He replied "No – just unlucky". A little

while later I was almost even more unlucky.

- When in a temporary house, ours being painted, I ran from behind the school bus (I was coming home at lunchtime) and was struck by a passing car. This time, undamaged but obviously in shock, I freed myself from the front of the car, sprinted across the road, up the steps, through the kitchen, past my startled mother, into the bedroom and under the bed. The unknown driver (his quick braking saved my life) rushed after me into the kitchen, breathlessly asking mom "had she seen a little boy run past", a quick explanation then both adults following me into the bedroom, finding me under the bed. Although a good story now, it could have ended more seriously.
- I remember Christmas parties at the Marine Club, with a large decorated tree, a real Santa with gaily-wrapped presents for every child.
- And then in February 1942, of watching the night sky, red with burning oil from tankers that had been torpedoed at the reef, and going to the top of the hill overlooking the church to see the cause. My father's cousin Samuel M. Kane being one of those lost when the *s/s San Nicholas* was torpedoed in the chaos.
- Later after the islands defenses were bolstered by the arrival of American forces, my sister and I, joining other young school friends and going up to the army camp early Saturday and Sunday mornings and inserting our selves, nonchalantly into the chow line for breakfast. And of begging shoulder badges and equipment from the ever patient and congenial friendly soldiers.
- I can remember only one of my teachers: Miss Myrtle Parham being the one who sticks in my memory and strangely enough, the teacher sitting at the back of that classroom photograph of the third grade, taken in 1944.

LIFE AFTER ARUBA

Since our departure, I have been back to the island many times. The first time I returned was in November 1953 during my first year at sea when we called at San Nicholas to load a cargo of oil for Europe. In 1957 I was there many times and again in 1972. The last time being in 1993 when the refinery was being re-commissioned and operated by Coastal.