

JOHANNES FREDERIKUS ANTONIUS

Born *Wednesday, May 3rd, 1916*
Deceased *Tuesday, April 7th, 1981*



John was prematurely born (7 months) in hospital in Enschede. So his first few weeks/months were spent in an incubator, but after gaining enough strength he was allowed to go home, the family home standing on the corner of Grotestraat and Ennekerdijk in Borne.

As a toddler, his brother Bernhard often walked with him in the stroller. At one stage Bernhard had to play horse and cart and pull the stroller along. Obviously it went much too fast and at a certain stage, the stroller tipped over and John ended up underneath it. Naturally baby John was completely beside himself and mother of course, very angry.

Given that John was rather a bit afraid of the dark, his brother always had to go to bed with him. This resulted many a time in “fun and games”. Once while they were playing he was accidentally kicked out of bed. When peace and quiet finally returned, mother came upstairs and turned the lights out.

A peaceful nights rest was not always possible in the Nijhuis family home. On one occasion, in the middle of the night, John was awakened by the family cat, in a not too pleasant way. In those days people used to sleep in a bedstead. For some strange reason the cat climbed onto the loft above the bedstead and decided it would be a good idea to have a pee. Unfortunately, John slept precisely under the beast and got drenched in urine!! At another stage John was awoken by mice, which were playing in his straw-filled pillow.

When John was eleven his mother passed away, where after his sister Johanna (Jo) took over and looked after the family.

He left school at the age of thirteen, and despite the fact that he was a very good scholar, he went to work in the butcher shop with his father and brother. He didn't stick it out all that long because the brothers didn't along all that well. When he was fourteen he got a job as an errand boy at grocery Hulshoff in Borne. He worked there for many a year.

During those early years he also followed dancing lessons at Rottinck in Borne. He didn't have to go into the military as his older brother had "been there and done that". John was nothing like his brother, had a completely different character. John liked to spend time at home, he was very creative and also liked to read. In his spare time he spent many an hour drawing.

When John was working at Hulshoff, he went to evening school and managed to acquire his diploma that would allow him to start his own business and register with The Chamber of Commerce. When there was a vacancy at EPA (Eenheids Prijzen Almelo) in Hengelo for a manager of the grocery department, John applied and he managed to get the job. During his service with EPA, the window dresser taught John the ropes and given his creative aptitude, he took to it like a fish in water!

After a while John was transferred from the Hengelo branch to the Almelo branch of the EPA. It was here that he met his future wife, Wilhelmina Maria Dik.

After a few years of courtship they married in Almelo on Friday June 25th, 1943.



They resided at Wilhelmina (Mien) parents' place in Irisstraat 40/42 until the end of the war in May 1945. It was here in the Irisstraat that their first child, *Johanna Angela Maria (Joan)* was born. Not long thereafter they had the opportunity to rent an upstairs apartment above a shop (Ossenkoppele) in the Bornsestraat near the Weth. Dronkelaarplein.

It was here that their second child was born in April 1947, *Angela Johanna Maria*. Not long after that they were told that a grocery shop was up for sale in the Bornsestraat 249 near the intersection with Christoffelstraat. The shop was owned by Fikkert (Wilhelmina's sister Lies' in laws). After long deliberation they decided to buy the shop for approx. 4000 guilders. It was here that their third child was born in April 1949 *Bernardus Wilhelmus Hendrikus (Bill)*. They had the shop for approx. three years. When it appeared that there were was little future in the business they decided to sell it again. It was in November 1952.

Back then, just after the war, the economic situation in the Netherlands was not too rosy. The government promoted emigration, and many therefore decided to try and build a new future abroad. Similarly, John and Mien decided to leave as well. They left in November 1952 to sail to Australia. After a long boat trip of four weeks on the ms. Johan van Oldenbarneveldt they arrived in Melbourne on Friday, December 13th 1952 at Station Pier, Port Melbourne. Melbourne being the capital of the state of Victoria, located on the south coast of Australia.



Here it was that Joan, Angela & Bill ended up in hospital with a severe case of whooping cough. At one stage Angela was thirsty and wanted some water but because she couldn't speak English, Joan managed to make the nurses understand. Jan and Wilhelmina were allowed to visit the kids for an hour every Sunday. (See exert from a Dutch letter from Wilhelmina):

gegaan, maar even 'tuo, We moesten twee jaar blijven
anyway. Het ergste was dat fullie alle drie de kinbrust
kregen, jy had het op de boot al opgelopen, wat we
toen nog niet wisten, 'tuo jy was de eerste die het
hospitaal inging. toen Yoke, en nog ^{later} Angela.
We mochten fullie hier op zondag voor een uur
nou je kunt je voorstellen wat dat was.
Fullie lagen op de veranda, dat was afgesloten met
vliegen gaas, en 's avonds hadden we van die rol
gordijnen er voor. Ik ging iedere avond naar dat
rotte hospitaal, en dan kon ik door de kierdjes fullie
hier liggen. Ik moet voorzichtig zijn want dat maakt
niet, en ik wau ook niet dat fullie mij konden zien.
Endan ging ik maar weer fankeend naar die rot tent.
dat was niet de beste tyd.

He managed to get a job in Olinda, a village in the Dandenongs (a set of low mountain ranges, that rise to 633 metres at Mount Dandenong). Oddly enough this company was owned by a countryman who operated a small business in leather goods. Seeing as his salary wasn't too good he had to find another job because he wanted the family to be reunited a.s.a.p. Eventually he found a job in a factory, doing the night shift, earning a good salary. After three lonely months in Melbourne he was at last able to send for his family. In April 1953 they found accommodation in a migrant hostel which was on the north side of Power Ave and was established in the late 1940's to accommodate mainly English migrants before they were assimilated into the community.

In response to an advertisement in a newspaper, three months later, on a Sunday afternoon, they went looking for a house in Moorabbin that was up for rent at 5 Small Road. This accommodation concerned half of the house which was inhabited

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by Jewish immigrants from Hungary. They had two rooms available; a living room and a normal bedroom. The house suited their needs perfectly and so they decided to rent it. Meanwhile John had managed to find another job in a factory (J.J. Davies & Sons Pty. Ltd) where Daynide was fabricated. Joan and Angela started school at St. Paul's in Bentlyigh.

During their stay in Moorabbin John had an accident at work, leaving his back severely injured. Later on it appeared he had suffered a hernia. He had to wait three months before his workers compensation was approved. Naturally he had no way to pay the rent, but when John finally received his benefit, his landlord refused rent arrears.



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After a rehabilitation period, the family moved to East Oakleigh in 1954, a small town about 14km southeast of Melbourne. Here they were able to rent an old house (100 years old) from an old bachelor, Percy Anderson, in Oakleigh Street. They were able to hire this through friends they had made, Mr. & Mrs. Fitzsimmons. Mr. Fitz was a hairdresser in Oakleigh where Bill had to have a badly needed haircut. The Fitzs's were true blue Aussies more than willing to help immigrants! They remained friends of the Nijhuis family up into the sixties!



During this period, John went to work at a large lemonade manufacturer, Cottee's. He had to supply the Milk Bars that sold Cottee's lemonade with all kinds of advertising posters etc. Sometimes he also had to design posters himself so his experience from his job in Holland as a window dresser came in very handy. Bill started school at St. Anthony's Primary School in Oakleigh at the corner of Castlebar Road & Dandenong Road, nowadays in Chadstone. Bill and his sisters went by bus which stopped at the state school (State Street) in East Oakleigh. In 1956 the family went on an outing with the Fitzs family to go and see Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip who were in town for the opening of the 1956 Summer Olympics.

In the fifties John started manufacturing all sorts of small goods from Daynide (a vinyl product). From photo albums to table cloths etc. He used to go from door to door trying to sell them, money was tight seeing as he was on a workers compensation.

In 1958, not long after the birth of his fourth child, *Hendrikus Bernardus Johannes*, the family moved again, this time to Clayton, 55 Centre Road. They decided to move after their landlord started causing problems about, according to him, unpaid rent. This was not the first time the family had had problems with him. He also lived on the property, a two or three roomed attachment at the front of the house. He was an alcoholic and many a time came home in a foul mood and started causing problems. At one stage he even put his fist through the front window which naturally provoked John to give him a good hiding! So after that final episode John thought it was high time for some peace and quiet.

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In Clayton John decided to definitely start his own company, manufacturing small goods from Daynide. In 1955 his sister in law after immigrated to Australia. She sailed via Egypt where she bought a few souvenirs, one of which being a pouffe. John found this rather a nifty article at the time and so also started manufacturing them. Given the relationships he had kept during his time at Davies Pty. Ltd., he was able to purchase Daynide at a discount. He would cut the material from templates he'd made himself and his wife (Wilhelmina) Mien, would sew it all together. He was his own salesman and representative and spent many an hour travelling the streets of Melbourne to interest potential buyers.



Business was excellent and it was not long before he had saved enough money to purchase a block of land in Mooroolbark and build his own home.



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And so it was that in June 1960 the family moved to 4 Cameron Road Mooroolbark.

The business flourished as never before, now John had invented a name for his company: - “Hackelis Plastic Products”. Naturally, the name was hardly pronounceable for the real Australian, but that didn’t worry John at all.



The following years were the so called golden years for John and his family. His business expanded, his goods now included different model pouffe’s, stools, chairs etc. etc. But as so often happens companies run by a single person, the workload turns out to be too heavy. It wasn’t long before John suffered a nervous breakdown.

After a long recovery period he continued with his business, this time assisted by a companion. Unfortunately John’s solution for his company wasn’t the best choice and finally in 1968 he had to sell his company.

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Meanwhile, John's eldest daughter (Joan) married Frank Pitt and he became a grandfather. In November of that year, his eldest son, Bill and his daughter, Angela left for the Netherlands. They were planning to go on a working holiday for approximately a year.

Life is full of surprises, and so it was that Angela met her future husband there in Holland. As happened quite a lot in those years the (Dutch) family didn't approve of her choice and this caused quite a few problems. John was worried stiff, he hated seeing the family in turmoil and so decided to return to his homeland. He sold his house in Mooroolbark and in April 1969 sailed for The Netherlands on board the m.s. Ellinis. His mother in law (Angela Pragt), at the age of 79 also came along.



They arrived in Rotterdam on 17th May 1969, and after staying at his sisters' place for the first few weeks he moved back to his home town, Almelo. They were able to rent a house in the Gagelstraat, number 39. John managed to find a job as a janitor at Soweco. Given his training and experience in Australia this was a bitter pill for him. Yet it was fantastic to be home again in the Netherlands, being able to see his brother, sister and the rest of his family. He couldn't have been more content!

But great was the dilemma when his daughter Angela got married in 1970 and decided to return to Australia again the following year. What to do? His wife was

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now very unhappy and couldn't really settle again in Holland. She'd outgrown the country.

Meanwhile it was already 1972. His son Bill got married in September and went to live in the Schoolstraat. After much hesitation and deliberation he finally gave into his wife's wishes and decided to return to Australia.

On Saturday December 23, 1972 he sailed from Rotterdam aboard, once again, m.s. Ellinis, and once again taking his mother in law with him! She was now 82!

Once in Australia, the family went to live in Mooroolbark again. John once again was able to find work, this time with his son in law, Benny Lubbers, Angela's husband. He's remained working in the factory for a while but he soon developed problems with his hernia again and was compelled to stop. Seeing that the family was still living with their daughter Angela at the time, it soon became apparent that they would have to move.



John was able to purchase a property at 10 Felix Grove Mooroolbark from his son in laws' brother, Roy Pitt.

John was able to enjoy a few more years of his retirement before his sudden death, a month before his sixty-fifth birthday. It was April 7, 1981. The cause of death was never really found, but it is believed to have been either a heart attack, or a brain haemorrhage.

John was buried at the public cemetery in Templestowe, a quiet village about half an hour's drive from Mooroolbark. His grave is on a hill near the entrance, in the so called "lawn" area, grave number H10.

After his death John's wife Wilhelmina, continued to live in the house on Felix Grove. Meanwhile, the house was purchased by Hendrikus Bernardus Johannes (Harry). Wilhelmina awarded Harry his own privacy, so she decided to place a so-called "Granny Flat" (a fully equipped self-contained residential unit) in the backyard of 10 Felix Grove. They both had their own home and yet Harry could help his mother where necessary in her old age.

During the years 1981-1990 Wilhelmina visited Holland three times, she stayed with her son Bernardus (Bill) in the Schoolstraat Almelo. She usually stayed for a period of about six weeks. These were happy times for her, visiting her son.

Harry was married in 1989 and moved to Lilydale. The house on Felix Grove was now empty and purchased by Benardus Lubbers, her son in law. Thus her Granny Flat could remain there, at first. Unfortunately, Angela and Benny were divorced in 1991 and Angela went to live temporarily in the house on Felix Grove until she could find a suitable home for her and her two sons, Benjamin and Daniel. After a very difficult period for Angela, she could finally find a home in Montrose. Soon thereafter Benardus Lubbers wanted to sell the house on Felix Grove so Wilhemina had to move again. The Granny Flat was moved to 4 Greenslopes Drive where her eldest daughter Johanna (Joan) lived with her husband Frank and son Tim.

It was there that she continued to live in reasonable health until she was diagnosed with pancreas cancer. It was May 1994. She underwent surgery but to no avail. She died in February 1995 at the age of 79. According to her wishes she was cremated. Her ashes are buried on Churchill Island (adjacent to Philip Island), under a tea tree overlooking the sea that she so loved so well!

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