

FROM THERE TO WHERE. condensed

Women inspired this book.

Those who do nothing else with their lives than complain and say they do not have anything.

Poor things, nobody loves them, their husbands are usually no good in bed, she wondered why.

They sit on their backsides letting life pass them by, while complaining about husbands, kids, friends and family, and not necessarily in that order.

The other type calls them (EMPTY WOMEN).

One night watching TV, the writer saw a program about emigration, that this and the people concerned did not contribute anything towards this country; on the contrary, they were a financial burden, a nuisance and a pest.

They should never have come here, and be given a ticket back to wherever they came from.

A professor in anthropology/sociology said this and a lot more. She was in her late twenties, early thirties. She would have known, and had all the experience and understanding of the needs of this country and its people.

It was obvious she had never heard the outcry of this country.

POPULATE OR PERISH.

This cry for help went around the Western World.

This, and a few other things made the writer wonder if life was really so bad.

This started in anger, showing those women that life is for living, not bitching, not condemnation. It was a long progress, and here are the results.

A warning is given; it is a story about life, of love and death, and everything in between.

Of the great adventure that lay ahead of them and was to last the rest of their lives.

Of the many achievements, and disappointments they had.

Of the sadness which broke their hearts and spirits. The will to carry on, no matter what obstacle blocked their path.

Of the many insults to migrants, the local people dished out on regular bases.

Of sex real and so strong and demanding, it played a big part in their lives. It takes broadminded people to read and understand this story of life.

This is dedicated to MARCO

Who played a major part in her life?

To her children, who gave her a reason to live?

To those who saved their lives a couple of times.

THANK YOU ALL, IT HAS BEEN SOME RIDE

JANNIE BONT

CHAPTER 1

Winter had started early that year; it had been bitterly cold the whole month of December. Saint Nicolas had called like he did every year on the 5th of that month, and as always he had not disappointed the little kids one bit.

Christmas had followed with a beautiful coat of the purest white snow ever and this presented a year never to forget.

There was a lot of hype and a lot of sadness and confusion going on in the family, partly because this was the last white Christmas they would have with their extended family, and partly because they knew that nothing would ever be the same.

Half of the month December, they were packing things and what they could not take was giving away to anyone who needed them or wanted them.

They had started the New Year with saying goodbye to the family, who were scattered all over the country. The weather was so cold, that the travel between the families was almost unbearable. They had to say goodbye to the Grandparents Aunties and Uncles and their many cousins got more unbearable from visit to visit. The last family was the night before their unknown trip to a far away land, of which not many people knew much about those days, mixing comprehension with adventure.

To say goodbye to the last Aunties, Uncles and cousins, was more difficult than of the others, because this meant the final, the very last of all.

That family had come with them to the harbour, and as the whole family that were leaving walked up the gangplank of this enormous ship, the family left behind became smaller and smaller, and finally as they stepped onboard ship, their family had disappeared into the crowd below. They met stewards that accompanied them to their cabin. Lucky they were a big family and assigned a cabin of their own. It was small, and had nothing but double bunks in it; the bottom ones were high enough of the floor that all the suitcases that followed them in could be store. It was so cold and everyone was a little scarred. When the sound of the Horns blew, it cut right through their hearts and souls; it was the time of leaving for good. It was four in the afternoon, and the skies were gray and full of snow, it was already getting a little dark and the movement of leaving was felt by all. They went to the top deck, and stood still with the other passengers, whom felt just as awful as they did.

More tears flowed from the eyes of the people who were standing at the rails of this huge ocean cruiser. Transporting them on their migration trip of their lives from Holland to Australia, than there was salted water in the fast ocean below the bow of this ship, which was snaking its way behind the pilot boats, out of the waters of Rotterdam.

It was late in the afternoon of a very cold January day in 1956. The sky was already grey and the windshear was cutting their faces relentlessly, but nobody would leave their position until the Hook of Holland was totally out of sight. They needed time to swallow their adventurous pride, for if at that moment, that very moment that Holland disappeared from view, they were given the choice to turn back, most people would

have, of this there was no doubt. They were at sea now, and the wind was whipping up waves something terrible, before it was just bobbing along, but now it was bucking like a wild horse, not wanting to jump, but unable to stop. The ship did not like this at all, and the creeping and screeching of the metal was loud prove of this. The stomachs of the passengers were soon revolting as the ship itself. Nearly everyone was seasick. It was chaos, people running for paper bags, some heaving over the railing, simply because they could not make it back to their cabins, and those who thought they were able to escape this obnoxious behaviour, soon found out the sea has no mercy. By the time they got themselves to the dinner table, and faced the first course, soup, it was more than most of them could bear. This coloured liquid was slipping and sliding in the bowls right in front of their very eyes, and believe you me, even the strongest stomach had to revolt.

The first few days were a nightmare, everywhere you went and everyone you saw looked sick, and or, had their faces in brown paper bags. This was not a pretty sight for sure. This lasted until the strait of Gibraltar, and they entered the Mediterranean Sea. The weather became perfect, compared to the Dutch weather they left behind. Thank god, their stomachs fell slowly back in place. This was the time that everybody was getting to know their cabin neighbours, and some or most of their fellow passengers.

Now was the time that she found out Dutch peoples were a friendly lot, that they were arrogant and that they were braggers, not all Dutch people but most of them. She remembers well one family in particular; they also came from the south of Holland, not far from where they used to live. They had ten or eleven children, ranging from about five to twenty years. Their name was De Kikker, meaning the frog. After he listened day after day how well everybody was off, how they all had worked for themselves, had their own businesses, their own homes and cars, etc. He stood up in front of many people, stating that he must be the only worker aboard this ship, and walked away from the crowd. The conversation died down immediately and from that moment on the bragging stopped.

This had made a big impact on her, she was of the age that she was only, too be seen but never heard in an Adult conversation. She secretly admired the man for his pride and courage. She had never forgotten him and his family. It was funny, the things you see and hear when you are together in confined spaces for a period of five to six weeks.

There where offcourse stopovers along the trip, one of them was Port Said, where the ship took water and food aboard, and the passengers had a day onshore. It was breathtaking different to what they were used to, the sand of the dessert was everywhere, on the ground, on your cloth, skin and hair, yuck. The smell of spices, were as strange to them, as were their names, and pRickled their noses. The people in their Middle Eastern clothing made them wonder why they were so rugged up in the smothering heat. We thought it strange, however nice to observe. There were souvenirs for sale from the little boats that had placed themself next to the big ocean cruiser. They looked like little toy boats, bobbing on the small waves that hit our

ship. The merchants would send baskets on ropes which they had strewn up before, to the people interested in their goods. Sometimes it had taken maybe ten attempts, before someone caught the rope, but they were determent that they would go home that night with money in their pockets. Some people would buy anything from anybody, while others bought nothing.

All this was a learning curb for her, she realised early on that it was better to be a small businessperson than a big slave was. This would come up many times in the future.

The trip through the Sues Canal was fantastic, it was a pleasure, as the ship went very slowly, giving the passengers a chance to take in the breathtaking views of the dessert. The men, with their camels in tow walking the hot dessert sands. Most of the men where clad in white and wore turbans. While the women were all dressed in full-length black gowns, their faces covert completely, bar a slit opening for their eyes. This was a spooky sight at first, and it gave her the feeling that those women were the underdogs of that society. However, over the year she learned a lot about the rules and regulations and customs of other countries, and respected every single one of them.

When the ship left Port Said not everyone came back onboard, one-woman passenger did not comeback onboard. Everyone had his or her own theory of where she went, what she was up to or what had happened to her. Most men on the ship thought she was having a good time, whilst most women thought that she was not such a nice person. She the observer was of the age that she started to realise things, understood a whole lot more, and what she did not know she would imagine, and most of the times it worked out exactly as she perceived the stories. This time, she and her sister Annie thought that this woman was quite a slut, whatever that really meant. To them it meant that she was a bad girl, having it off with men. That, off, she was still to find out what it meant at least the first part they were right of. Sister Annie and she had many meaningful discussions about having it off, but this turned out to be a lot of nonsense. Simply because, not in your wildest dreams can you imagine the whole experience of having it off, but they knew enough to giggle about, and somewhere they thought that she was a lucky bitch, staying behind for that reason.

By the time they got to Aden, this woman stood there with a big grin on her face, between two police officers, waiting to come onboard. They took her to sickbay, and she was not seen for the rest of the journey to Australia. The men on the ship thought she could tell them a story or two but they never found out, to bad for them. They soon had forgotten about her, as there was so much to do and see that every moment of every day brought its own excitement.

Aden was one of only two places in the world that ships do not take water or food onboard, the water was so bad there. The other place was Adelaide Australia that was world known for the bad water.

As far as the food was concerned that was not totally the truth, for we saw fruit taken onboard while they lay in the harbour. The passengers were told not to buy stuffed toys or ornaments as they used second hand filling for stuffing. That was of no

interest to the girls at the time. The trip was very pleasant as there were no end of activities on board, films to watch, games to play on the different decks all day long, and the young children were in the nursery taken care of by experts. This was for her one of the nicest parts of the whole trip. This is a service offered to all women, who had children up to the age of twelve.

For women like her Mum, who had eleven children, of which three had died as babies? She had looked after the rest of her breed day and night; she was a good mother. To get a break of her children like that was a godsend. In addition, the women did not have to do any cooking, cleaning, washing or ironing for the whole of the trip. What a holiday for those women on this ship. This for them alone must have been worthwhile migrating to the end of the world for at least that is what they thought, Sister Annie and her.

Father Neptune and his helpers, about half the stewards and staffs, were assigned to the duty of the day christening us all, and most people were convinced that they all had a mean streak in them, they were dunked in all sorts of unmentionables; they were pushed and shoved that day as the crew had many people to christen, oh gosh, what a mesh, what a fun.

The weather was getting warmer as well; it was putting many people in a real holiday mood. The seas were low, and the ship lay steady most of the time. Every now and then, the Captain announced stormy weather on the horizon, and sure enough before long, the ship would wobble and tilt in all direction, and those storms only lasted hours, instead of days like before. It would clean the deck and the air they were breathing, but nothing more than that.

There were a few arguments and fights onboard ship now, mainly amongst the young people, boys between twelve and twenty, they could not spread their wings enough, she had heard adults telling one another. The two sisters did not think that was the reason, for if the boys would participated more in the fun and games the crew were initiating, they would not get so bored and agro. However, the two girls were used to that, as they had five brothers in the family. They were more often than not, a pain. The next day they would be spending a day ashore, the weather was now in the low thirties, and a cool westerly breeze was blowing in the afternoon. It seemed like a strange weather report, in Holland this was well and truly considered a heat wave. How could they survive heat like that? Still to get their feet on dry land, was something to get excited about, and one could feel the buzz in the air.

No one had any idée what to expect of their first sighting, their first day in Australia. The excitement was mixed with uncertainties.

Would there be really Kangaroos running wild in the townships of this strange country they knew nothing about, and the talk of gold, so much gold, that people found nuggets on the street. Just imagine that you are walking by and bingo there is a nugget, and another one. All that sounded very good to the girls. They were going to stick real close together, for another thing they had heard was, that there was a shortage of women there, therefore so many young men went out with aboriginal girls. That shortage bit sounded all right to the girls, they would be able to have their

pick when the time was right.

That was a promising possibility for sure, one to look forward too.

Everybody was up at dawn, as the ship would enter the Port of Fremantle at the break of it. Everybody stood on deck in mass, as they had done a few weeks earlier farewelling their old country, family and friends. Here they stood again, united in the spirit of hope and bewilderment. They knew what they had left behind, but they did not know what lay ahead and maybe for many people that was just as well, because the beginning of their new life would start here in Perth WA. Others would travel on to Melbourne and Sydney. It was amazing how quite everybody was, taken in with their own thoughts of the unknown that was awaiting them all. Shore, there, you can see it on the horizon there; we are heading right for it. People rushed forward to see what the others saw, not much at first, but yes, there it was, see, oh, a sign of relieve, and then again total silence for a long time.

Young and old were there waiting and watching, as Fremantle came slowly in sight. It was low on the skyline. Two story buildings were the highest buildings they saw from where they were standing. Not very big, nothing like the harbours of Rotterdam, but they soon would realise that nothing will ever be the same again, they were so close now that they could see men walk on the Warf, getting busy to tie up this big ship with all those strange people from somewhere.

They could not imagine how far those people onboard that ship had travelled, what anyone from the other side of the world looked like, let alone how funny they talked. They used to call immigrants wogs, dagos and other nasty names, for they were just not like them. Some did not even consider the immigrants had intelligence, for they did not speak English. Yes, right from the beginning there were problems between the British Australian and any other nationality. However, this the immigrants did not know yet for that to find out they had to wait a few more days.

Bang, bang a lot of screeching and screaming metal sounds, a lot of yelling back and forth from the ship, ashore and back again. You could hear the rattling and the rolling of ladders, from the ship to terra firma. The Custom officers came onboard, checked out the captains orders, inspected the ship, sort of, and the first people were let ashore.

Their family stood in line waiting, what seemed like hours, before it was their turn to step ashore, it was a long way down the gangplank, but finally they all stood on terra firma. Still wobble on their legs, they call it sea legs, and now they knew what they meant by it. They looked at each other with great expectations, what and where from here? Hang on, said father, and he hid himself behind a heap of boxes, getting so sick, throwing up as if there was no tomorrow. When he came back to his kin, he expected his whole family to feel sorry for him. Most of them laughed at him, not nice really, but the whole time that they were sea sick, he carried on doing what he wanted to do, never ever feeling sorry for his wife and children. Now it was his turn, and he was not very impressed with any of them. In fact, he was so sick, that he did not want to go from Fremantle to Perth with them. He really thought that he could keep the complete family onboard ship, and spoil their day. That did not work for

him, so he went back onboard ship alone, and they all went to Perth for a good day of sightseeing and fun. It was still rather cool this time of the day, and seeing there were no busses or trains into Perth, hundreds of people walked the distance. It took several hours, especially for those with children in tow, but they did it nevertheless. They were a long way from the ship before they saw the silhouette of the town appear, and once they did, they were amazed.

They saw a lot of tropical scrubs and trees, Palms in real life, that was very special. The houses were mostly bungalow style, only one story high, and they all stood on their own piece of land. They must be very rich here, most of them remarked, to have so much land for themselves. It was amazing how many houses were painted white, pink, yellow, blue and green and all the other pastel colours under the rainbow. The further they walked, the prettier the town of Perth became, there was a river, the Swan river, so called after the Dutch explorers boat (Het Zwaantje) that got into this river way back then, in the beginning when the explorers were exploring. It was recorded when they saw this frightening lonely far away Terra Incognita, they turned around and went home to Holland. Now they were migrating, that is funny.

Apparently, the Dutch made quite a bit of history in this part of Australia, but they did not know enough about this country at the time. What did however surprised many people who were walking further and further into Perth, how little influence the Dutch had left behind. No doubt they would learn all about that, after a while living in this country.

Perth was indeed very pretty, by the time they got to what was the town centre; they all needed something to drink and food. It was obvious not everyone was going to get something, as the towns business people did not cater for large crowds. It became apparent, that the children and older people get food and drinks first. The rest just had to go into every little shop and see what they could get to eat, and then share it with as many as they possible could. What a pity. A warning before they left the ship would have been nice, for they could have taken a sandwich or something with them. One thing for sure, they will do that in Melbourne before they get off the ship. It was around midday when the heat set in and it was very difficult to keep on going, they found out quickly that to walk in the shade of the many trees that lined the streets was the in thing. In Holland when the sun was out, you would be walking talking and sitting in the sunshine, here it was just the opposite. It was strange that they saw hardly any people on the street, here or there someone was in the garden, and most houses seemed to be totally closed, doors and windows included. It was on days like this that the sun and the wind should pass through your house to refresh it, make it smell nice and kill all the germs, her Mum used to say. The sky was clear and blue, with only the odd little white cloud floating aimlessly in it, like a little puff of smoke. It must have been strange, even scary for the local people to see so many folk walking on their streets all of a sudden, they could have guessed, but did not know for sure, that they were newcomers to this country, and no one came forward to ask. The strangers saw many a thing ahead of them. They would talk about it with others, to make sure they got it right, despite the heat the time went quick and by now most

people were dying for a drink and something to eat, so everywhere we saw groups of fellow passengers turn back for the long walk back to Fremantle, and the safety and familiarity of the ship. The walk went slow, and the distance seemed twice as long as it did that morning and everyone was tired from the heat and the excitement they all had that day, on terra firma. It was dark before they stepped back on the gangplank of the ship. Who would have thought that after being four weeks onboard a ship with eleven hundred passengers and eight hundred staff, you could be happy to be back onboard, but they were. The dining rooms were open, and the people were being served until late that night, for the captain and crew knew that they came back starving, and like every other meal they had in the past four weeks, it was compliments to the chefs and staff.

Yes, it was good to be back on familiar grounds, so to speak. That night, very few people participated in the fun and games, and the dance floors were empty instead a lot of them decided to go on deck, enjoy the lovely balmy night and watch the (waterman), the name of their ship, slowly sail out of the first harbour they had entered in Australia. There was total silence as the ship pulled away from land in the darkness of the night. There must have been about a thousand people watching this, and there were just as many different silent thoughts. What were the people thinking about after their first long day in Australia? What were the locals like, where would they end up, and how were they going to live, and how to cope with the extreme heat they had experienced that day. Little did they know that it had been a very pleasant thirty degrees today, wait until the heat really sets in? They had not seen any kangaroos, or picked the famous golden nuggets up from the street, nevertheless, it had been a special day for all of them. The only one who had a bad day was their father, he was angry, that they had left him alone all day, the least they could have done is stay home and keep him company, no, you all had to tramp the streets of a strange country, while your old father lay sick in bed.

The kids looked at each other, and all burst out laughing and the louder they laughed, the madder he got. It did not help the situation at all, and finally one of them asked him what he expected, all the times we were sick, you carried on regardless, we were also ill dear father, it did not seem to worry you too much, now it was your turn to feel neglected. Goodnight Mum, goodnight kids, and they all fell in a well-earned good night's sleep. All there was left was a grumpy old man full of self-pity.

The next day you could hear many groans, from people with sore feet and legs, and others with sunburn. They looked like a right old bunch, Annie and her thought, but the fact of the matter was that they too belonged to that group. After all the time it took to find their sea legs, they had to walk so dramatically different again on solid land, they did question themselves, what would it be like to live here.

The seas were getting very rough at this stage, the captain had warned them about it, and he said that this stretch of the Australian coast was famous for storms and high seas. He had quoted several figures of how many ships had hit the rocks, and was smashed to smithereens, about how many people had died or were washed overboard, during those storms, he just kept on going with information none of us needed to

know, but we did take the warnings serious. Not many people braved going on deck, to see the beautiful rough cliff face of the Australian coastline. Those who did, talked about it, and gave others the strength and curiosity to see it for themselves, once doing so they were amazed at the splendour, the wildness and fastness their eyes were feasting on. The seas did not calm down at all, three long days and nights of this, and once again the chronic seasickness. Each of them felt the dampness and miserable atmosphere. Sometimes you have to wonder what makes one take such a monumental decision. They all had a restless night, although they were going on to Sydney, it became clear to them that the good times were finished, and the unknown was becoming frightening. Many passengers got to the deck as soon as the dawn was breaking.

The people that were going to Melbourne had an early breakfast they were to leave the ship in stages. Their luggage was already near the gangplank, and on the Warf, the Australian customs were waiting for them. The people were worried, and rightly so. The sightseers could get off between all this commotions. The light was slowly getting brighter and the skyline of the city of Melbourne became more visible by the minute. It started to shape up as the buildings slowly appeared and took on shape. The harbour was big, and the surroundings looked dirty as most harbours do. Many activities were already at full speed, as the ship drew deeper and deeper into the arms of this port. The cranes and trucks looked like toys moving back and forth, the people on the Warf were no bigger than ants. There was still the early morning chill in the air, but it was obvious another warm day was awaiting them, the excitement was mounting, and the voices became a hum, that settled in with the early morning air. The sightseers all had a packed lunch, as they were not going to be without food again, as they were on the first day and the first walk on Australians shore. Melbourne suburbs were now totally in sight, the ship had reached its berth, and made ready and secured and the gangplank lowered. The first people left with the luggage they could carry and their last steps were taken reluctantly. They were now at the point of no return. All the farewells had been said, and the promises to one day meet up again were made, a last hug of the friends they had made and it was goodbye, for some forever. When our turn came to get off it was already after ten in the morning. The long walk into Melbourne began. They walked and looked, and turned several times to pick a mark that they would recognised on the trip back. Melbourne was a pretty town, they past lots of trees and parks, before they finally got into the town itself. The buildings were of European influence, this did their hearts tremendously good, maybe they even speak Dutch here, someone said out loud, they wondered, but that was really too much to expect. They saw the railway station, Collin Street and the banks of the Yarra River. It was all so nice, so tropical, and so different to what they expected.

The day had become very hot and humid; thank god, there were places where they could fill their bottles with water. Overall, it was a wonderful day and although tomorrow they are sailing again, she promised herself to come back here and see it properly. The ship seemed half empty, with so many people having left it that day,

and although they wished to see each other again someday, in their hearts they knew this most probable would never happen. The atmosphere felt sad, once again it seemed that all they were doing was saying goodbye again.

It was a lovely trip from Melbourne to Sydney, the weather was great, and the sea was calm, the breeze cool and soft, as it cuddled your body with its pleasures. Like always, there was plenty to eat and drink, and the meal sittings reduced from three to one each setting. It felt like a real holiday this part of the trip, and because of the new dinnertimes, they were meeting a whole lot of new people, which was very nice indeed. The De Kikker family was still onboard, that made the two girls very happy, because they had wished that they, of all people would make it big in this country. The big day had finally arrived, and the coast of NSW was theirs to see everywhere. It looked so beautiful with its mountains and hills to cap its glory. The skies were blue, and the sea was crystal-clear. If this was a sign of what lay ahead of them, they were arriving in paradise. They got to Sydney late that night, and the captain took us right into Sydney harbour. They went back to the mouth of Botany Bay, to give the passengers the pleasure of the views of one of the most beautiful harbours in the world, in daytime as well. This night it was a view to behold, to stand at the rails of this beautiful ship, which has been their home for the last five weeks, to see the full moon in the clear dark sky above, and the stars dancing and shining in the cobalt blue sky above, it felt as if you could see right into heaven itself. This was indeed a magical night, filled with the mystery of the unknown. It was a night of luxury and experience that promised literally the world, which lay ahead of them. The feeling of the people that were still onboard was of comprehension, all this splendour and beauty that they saw in front of them. Around them, and the comforting feeling that surrounded them together with the warm night air, was all too good to be true. They stayed there watching, talking and wondering until deep in the night. Many of them had no plans at all of going to bed at all, as at five they would have to get up anyway. They were packed and ready to go to confront the dreams and plans they had made in what now seems a country and a world far, far away.