

# The Path to Caliço

*The path to Caliço was rocky and bumpy  
The way to the hillside  
Exciting but steep....*

From: "The Caliço-ballad" by Balt Heldring.

This is the story of the twenty most important years of my life, which I spent in the Algarve, the southernmost province of Portugal.

I dedicate it to my daughters, Meinke and Pauline and to my granddaughter Sancha, so it may become part of their history.

Maastricht, Holland  
2006

Life in Holland was oppressive, controlled and predictable.

We were young, in our mid-twenties.

In twenty years' time Eric might be the managing-director of a mid-sized company. That was what his business school, Nijenrode, had predicted when he graduated. At the time they were still preparing their pupils for jobs abroad. I might have become a teacher of French Literature, which I studied at University, but would rather not continue in that field. I am an artist at heart. We did not want set paths, we wanted to do our own thing and preferably abroad...Eric had spent a year in the States, as a 'Fullbright' scholar and I had lived in France for some time, during my primary and secondary school years. We felt more like citizens of the world than of Holland. To us career-building sounded spooky. Holland being as it was at the time, we decided to emigrate. But where to? Australia and New Zealand were only interested in sheep-farmers and the US had an immigration quota system, but in Canada, we were more than welcome. Eric could get a job in Calgary, Alberta and housing and paperwork would all be taken care of.

We decided to say farewell to Europe by visiting the one country that neither of us had ever visited before.... Portugal.

We booked a flight to Faro for two weeks. Faro is the capital of the Algarve, the southernmost province of Portugal. It was March. Our first impression was that the Portuguese language sounded like Russian, and

that there were an incredible amount of lovely little stray dogs roaming the streets. Faro was a busy little town with shops that sell everything from wine, lentils, thread, candles, to underwear. Canaries sing in cages, cats are chasing mice, and dogs are lying flat-out on the bean bags.

The houses are white-washed or painted blue, or tiled with lovely patterns and have many unusual and beautiful chimneys.

There were very few tarmaced roads and there was a lot of dust and at that time of year, a lot of mud. The air was very pure and the wind blew steadily from the southeast where the Atlantic Ocean separates the Algarve from Brazil.

After having explored Faro from North to South and East to West, we found an estate agent and walked into their shop, just out of curiosity. The young couple that owned the agency were most welcoming and spoke perfect English. They offered to show us everything we might possibly be interested in. After having visited various houses and plots of land they kindly let us have their own car as they were off to England for a week. They said that we should visit the whole of the Algarve but were quite sure that we wouldn't find anything better than what they had already shown us. This was an offer we could not refuse. We took them to the airport and immediately started our journey of discovery. There was something intriguing about the fact that the Eastern Algarve was never mentioned. The tourist maps didn't even show roads in that part of the country. We could not believe that there was nothing

between Faro and the Spanish border and became very curious indeed...

We started our tour in the borrowed car and after a rather rough ride, as there were few stretches of tarmac road, we ended up in Tavira. A dreamy little town built along a river running into the sea. The main square lined with orange trees, was laden with fruit but nobody helped themselves as that would have involved a hefty fine. Over the river there was a wide roman bridge and where ever you looked you saw church towers. There was once a street-war in town and the people from one street would not sit next to somebody from the other street, in church. So they decided they would each build a church in their own street. Fascinated by the sky-line I settled down on the bridge to draw the scene, while Eric went to the market and the fish auction to take pictures.

Suddenly I felt the presence of somebody behind me, looking over my shoulder and a loud voice said "quite nice, not bad at all!" The owner of the voice was an elderly English lady who introduced herself as Françoise Clark Fort, painter. She enquired what made us come to Tavira and invited us for lunch at her home. She said she would come and collect us in an hour's time. First she had to go to the market and do some shopping for the occasion. Whilst she was there she happened to run into Eric with his camera and informed him of the invitation. She treated us to a wonderful lunch of fresh lobster with many other delicacies served by her maid and the Portuguese champagne flowed freely. We admired her studio with

a beautiful view over the towers of the town, which she had painted many times. Françoise told us of the beauty of the back-land, and offered to be our guide. After a lovely trip in the hills behind Tavira, full of wild flowers and many trees that were unknown to us, we fell in love with the countryside. Eric had had a bad car accident in Holland many years ago and did not like to be driven by anyone but this time he complimented her on her driving. She laughed and said that she had been a rally driver and regularly participated in the Monte Carlo rally with her friend Rita Van Dam, the owner of the London nightclub the famous Windmill Theatre. What a great encounter and such warm hospitality.

We were now seriously wondering if Calgary was such a good idea, after all.

The Portuguese real estate couple and Françoise both told us that you hardly needed permits for anything and that you could start almost any business without too much trouble. Quite a change from Holland where the only businesses you could start without papers were fish and chip shops or antiques. Françoise felt our enthusiasm and told us to come back the next day so she could introduce us to Rita Windsor, a friend of hers that lived 15 km. away, and who had been in Portugal for many years and spoke the language and knew more people who might be of interest to us. Next day we had tea with Rita. She lived in a nice villa in Manta Rota, a village consisting of just a few houses along a twenty km. stretch of sandy beach. She had settled there in semi-retirement, after a very adventurous life with

MI 6 and all sorts of sensitive operations during WW II between Switzerland and Bordeaux, France. She regaled us with the most fascinating stories and her sense of humour was incredible. You started to laugh just looking at her and when we finally left, my jaws were aching from so much laughter. After WW II Rita had started her own travel agency in London, specializing in tailor-made trips for the very demanding happy few. In order to deliver what she promised, she first made the journey herself, to be 100% prepared. Rita knew a lot of famous and influential people personally and thoroughly enjoyed telling some very funny anecdotes about their private lives. Dona Rita, her Portuguese name, was quick to understand our new dilemma, whether we should emigrate to Canada or Portugal and called her good friend Emilio Costa, the pro-consul of Great Britain, who lived nearby and an appointment was made for the next day. He showed us some plots of land that he owned. One of his hobbies was dealing in property. Rita knew Emilio from WW. II. He used to help many Jews to escape to the U.S. There was a secret route via the Pyrenees and Portugal to Gibraltar and America. All very hush hush and he could not give names or details. This escape route still exists today and has to remain secret.

Emilio proved to be a real gentleman. He showed us a piece of land with an old derelict farmhouse on it which we fell in love with and when we enquired the price he said, "tell me what it is worth to you!" We remembered the prices from the western Algarve and so we made some calculations, taking into considera-

tion that this plot had a ruin on it that we could easily convert into a house. After naming our price he laughed and said, “halve it! If you want to buy this you’ll have a lot of expenses getting rid of the old ruin!” This was a crucial moment. We realized that we now had a really good deal. What we planned to do with the piece of land was vague. If we would ever live there was a question we had not yet considered but that it was a good investment was a sure thing. The only problem was that we hadn’t brought any money, having travelled to the Algarve on a pre-paid holiday. Normal banking business didn’t exist in Portugal at that time. However Emílio suggested a ‘gentleman’s agreement’.

The plot of land with the beautiful name Calião (pronounced Caléésoo) consisted of two hectares of rolling hills and had great views. According to Emilio there was a wide sea view on normal days, but on that special day it was cloudy and rainy and we only saw a greyish horizon. The land was covered with almond, fig and carob trees and of course, the old ruin with only part of a roof. There was no road access, just a donkey-track. Moving some stones we were able to get there by car, but actually it was better suited to a mule or a tractor. There was no electricity and no water. So in fact, there was nothing to recommend it and as it was raining that day, there was not even a view. The land was covered with some kind of long grass. It was very quiet out there and everything smelled of thyme and

orange blossom. The ruin itself proved decisive, a romantic old farmhouse which according to Emilio, had to be demolished immediately.

In two weeks' time we had made a lot of friends and we were now the proud owners of a plot of land. We went to the airport to collect the young real estate couple and return their car, thanking them profusely for lending it to us, but they never quite understood why we were looking in that "underdeveloped area".

Back in Holland we went to work, organising the financial side and cancelling the Canadian project, and finding a good home for our Husky, who would never have survived the climate. There was a lot of work to do. A friend of Eric's parents was the Head Huntsman to the Queen and would love to have our Husky, one of the first in Holland. A royal solution to that problem....

On a sun-drenched 5th of May 1969, (Liberation day!) we left Holland. We rented a caravan and packed 4 plates, 4 beakers, 4 glasses and 4 sets of cutlery, 2 camping-beds for the babies and pulled our front door shut. Breakfast still on the table, the beds unmade. We sent the key to Eric's brother, asking him to have the place cleaned by a professional team.

Our journey started out well. A radiant day, hot with a festive feeling, thanks to all the 5th of May liberation flags. Our first stop was in Paris where we visited friends who had just settled there. We parked the car and caravan on their doorstep and slept in it for the night. When we drove off next morning, the electricity



cable was cut in half by the kerbstone. It took a garage two full days to knit the bits and pieces together. During the following days it rained non-stop and our caravan proved not to be waterproof. On a campsite in southern France the river overflowed and carried many caravans away. We were lucky to have put ours on high ground, so we escaped this disaster. Arriving in Madrid, the roads lost their names and became marked with numbers and letters only. We could not find this system on our maps and got completely lost in the derelict outskirts of Madrid. It took us at least half a day to get back on the right track and in order not to lose more time, we decided to take a short-cut from the seemingly longer highway. After 60 km. the tarmac road stopped and a rough path lay ahead of us. We carried on regardless, but after another 100 km., when it was too late to turn back, our caravan got a flat tyre. Being totally in-experienced campers, we never thought to bring a spare tyre. Here we were in the middle of nowhere on a dirt track on the high plains between Madrid and Seville in scorching heat at 12 noon. Eric remembered having seen a kind of work shed some miles back and decided to walk and see if there was a human being around. The babies and I waited patiently for him and indeed, after an hour, we heard the sound of a motorbike and Eric appeared, sitting on the back of the bike. The shed was a place where agricultural machinery was repaired and an hour later the man came back with our tyre fixed. Late that evening we arrived near the Portuguese border, and the next morning another flat tyre! But this

time we were staying on a campsite with a shop where they sold a product which you could spray into your tyre which then hardens. Good for emergencies.

After having travelled for eleven days, we finally arrived in Portugal. The last phase was to cross the River by ferry between Ayamonte and Vila Real do Santo António. This was an adventure in itself, because the caravan had to be pushed onto the small ferry-boat. The car came later. On the Spanish side it was a bureaucratic nightmare, stamps and seals in the passports, endless investigations and in the end we were actually a bit surprised when we were allowed to cross to the other side. But once there, the same bureaucracy. Everything was thoroughly searched, not a smile anywhere, a complicated situation. Well, we had been warned! Salazar, an old-fashioned dictator was still ruling Portugal. Although he was demented, his second in command, Caetano, was made of the same stuff.

Once on Algarve soil we decided we would not go immediately to our piece of land. In the first place, we would never have been able to find it without proper directions and secondly we remembered the bad access road, a donkey track, and we decided to go and find a campsite in the neighbourhood. Luckily there was a campsite nearby, one of only three in the Algarve.

The municipal campsite of Vila Real was well situated in a pine wood near the beach of Monte Gordo. It looked a bit like a prison, with high fences all around it

and mean-looking security officers in uniform. We installed ourselves and even put up the awning, unused until now. We actually looked like a bunch of vagabonds with our old caravan and the flapping awning that we could not get installed right. The big campsite was half empty. It was May, still the low season. A few days later, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May it was Pauline's second birthday and to our great surprise Emilio, the pro-consul who sold us our plot of land, arrived bringing a package of Bastogne cookies for the little one. We had told him that we were arriving one of these days, but this gentleman kept a real birthday calendar. Our primitive accommodation must have made quite an impression on him, but he behaved as though it was his daily business to visit campsites.

With Emílio as our guide we returned to our piece of land. It was a beautiful day and the long "grass" had turned into ripe yellow corn and the horizon was an endless blue ocean. The perfume of orange blossom was heavy but we also smelled a lovely mixture of thyme, oregano, rosemary and lavender. We started preparing the donkey track for the arrival of our car and caravan. This took several days, because we had to clear a stretch of 1 km.

The cottage had 50 cm. thick walls of red earth and sandstone and we decided to stop living in the caravan and settle under the derelict roof. In the Algarve it normally doesn't rain from May to October/November, so we shouldn't worry too much until then. We put the mattresses from the caravan on the cottage floor, after

having swept it thoroughly, discarding some dead rats. Spiders were walking around as if they owned the place and big ants, carrying many times their own weight, were in heaven. What a perfectly organised community. There were no glass windows in our cottage, just openings with wooden shutters, and the swallows had long ago built lovely clay nests inside the house against the wooden beams. We left it like that for a while, but it was getting quite unhygienic with all the bird droppings on our beds, so we put some glass windows in the openings, but only after the baby swallows had learned to fly away on their own.

Life without electricity was quite exciting. You had to improvise and learn things the hard way. In Holland one opens a tap and out comes the water. Nobody so much as thinks about it. In Portugal we had to go to the municipal well, down to the village, where the women arrived on their donkeys and turned the big wheel to pump up the water to fill their earthenware jars. We were lucky to have a car, but still it was quite a job to get enough water for our daily needs. We quickly realized how thrifty we had to be with water and how important it was and even today I can't stand seeing a leaking or badly closed tap. The electricity problem was easier to solve: we used candles or oil lamps or a Petromax, a sort of pressure lamp with a bright light, which made a lot of noise, so we only used it in emergencies. Cooling was provided by a gas fridge and the toilet problem solved by a chemical camping toilet. Our iron was a heavy metal container for charcoal with a little Portuguese rooster on top.

One had to use a fan to get the coals glowing and to produce the necessary heat. This took more or less half an hour, but what was time....

Our washbasin consisted of a wrought-iron construction with a small mirror on top, an earthenware dish and jug. The shower was a metal bucket with a shower head underneath, which we filled with hot water after which we opened the little tap. We bought a "tanque", a 1 m.3 container, which was regularly filled by a man with a donkey cart and a water drum, who made his living selling water from his own well. We used buckets to get the water out of the tank. The laundry was taken care of by Fatima, a friendly neighbour, who carried it to the river resting it on her head on a twisted towel. Meinke and Pauline loved helping her. The river was 15 min. walk away and she spent many hours rubbing the laundry with big pieces of hard blue soap, hitting it on the flat stones and rinsing it in the clear running water. After many hours everything was clean and wrung out and she carried it up hill to hang the laundry in the cactus hedge to prevent it from flying away. The sharp thorns made sure this did not happen and although the sheets were full of little cactus-holes, they survived for quite a while.

Fatima was our first maid. She lived next-door with her sister who had four children aged from two to nine. Her husband had just gone off to France, leaving his family penniless until he found a job and was able to send some money home through people who came and went to the Algarve. We offered to help them to bridge

this difficult time and gave them a weekly allowance. Right after the first "payment" we woke up early to the noise of a motorbike just outside our window, a very unusual sound. Next, we heard the excited voices of our neighbours and opened the shutters to see what was going on.

There we saw a man with a showcase on his motorbike, lined with dark blue velvet, selling all kinds of gold jewellery. Our nine year old neighbour girl was allowed to pick one. She chose a long gold chain.... So this was the way our emergency help was being spent! The first stone for her dowry...

Besides our direct neighbours, lots of other people came to visit us and make our acquaintance, bringing baskets full of oranges, lemons, onions, melons and anything growing at that moment.

One day an old neighbour brought us a lovely pigeon: "for the little ones!" she said. Meinke and Pauline were enchanted with their new "friend", but the old woman suddenly twisted the little beak and we were stuck with a dead pigeon. She explained that we must now clean it and cook it. We regularly had gifts of live chickens and rabbits that awaited the same fate.

The rabbits were held by the ears and given a hard slap against their necks, which killed them outright. All very basic, indeed, but the Portuguese are not really cruel to their animals.

Communicating with our neighbours was a matter of hands-and-feet. We didn't speak one word of Portu-

guese. Our neighbours were all illiterate, making it impossible to ask how to write a word so that we could look it up in the dictionary. We managed to learn the language as children do, mainly phonetically. I had brought along a booklet with the Assimil-system, French- Portuguese and that proved very handy indeed. My French is not bad and many words are similar and have the same Latin base. I made good progress and practised the language with Fatima and all the other neighbours. Eric joined the well-diggers and Tomàs patiently helped him to find the right words for the sentences. Tomàs was illiterate, but very intelligent. Eric had a good feeling for languages, but learnt by ear rather than by books. Meinke and Pauline learnt the language easily. Eric's progression ran parallel to our water supply. We decided that priority number one was to have our own well. The well was dug by Tomàs and three helpers. Tomàs was one of our neighbours; we could see his little farmhouse on the next hill, looking down to the sea. While the men dug and dug in the scorching heat, tension grew. "When will there be a trace of water or humidity at least?" After digging 9 meters the soil became a little humid and finally the well would reach 15 metres deep and 3 metres wide. We found enough water for our household and for the land and by the time it was finished, Eric had a great vocabulary. In the beginning learning went fast, but when, more or less half a year later, verbs became more important, things tended to stagnate. That phase

lasted another 3 months, but from then on we managed quite well. Many words in The Eastern Algarve differ from the ones in the Western part and are totally different again from the ones in Lisbon. There must be six different ways to say the word 'pea' in Portugal. One of the problems with the Portuguese language is that so many parts of words are swallowed. The women often point to the children and ask something that sounds like shkoalah. It turns out to be the word for school, which is written "escola". Thus the "es" at the beginning of a word is always pronounced "sh". These rules make it difficult to look words up.

Tomàs, the well digger, proved to be a man with great social intelligence and in spite of being illiterate and not knowing how to write his own name, he was an excellent communicator and an expert problem solver. He lived on the next hill with his wife Julita, his daughter Leonor, his mother in law 'tia Julia' and his father in law 'tio Barreira'. His parents in law were great characters with wrinkled faces and sparkling eyes and a great sense of humour. Besides being neighbours they became friends and we spent many years sharing good and bad times.

As we had decided to stay in the Algarve, it was high time to take our rented caravan back to Holland. Eric went alone and used the opportunity to sublet our rented house through a real estate agent. The market for fully furnished homes was good at that time. We had left the house just as it was when we lived in it our-



selves, and had only locked the front door when we set off for Portugal. The monthly rent enabled us to live very pleasantly indeed in the Algarve and we were even able to save some money in the bank. As we didn't have any income this seemed like a good solution for the time being and enabled us to improve the cottage step by step.

The roof came first. We did it in the traditional way, with round beams and bamboo. Next, we created two bathrooms. One for us and one for the kids. In Portugal you are obliged to have two full bathrooms when you have three bedrooms. We put the 'tanque' on the roof to create water pressure for the geyser. We pumped the water up from the well with a 'Lister' aggregate, via a thick rubber hose. We built a septic tank for sewage and we started the system by throwing in a rotting chicken to initiate the biological breakdown that is necessary for this system. All these activities made our neighbours very nosy and curious and they came and went all day long, following these activities. They had never seen houses with electricity or running water before....

Old 'tio Barreira', who had been taking the path to our house all his life night and day, even when drunk, came to visit us one evening, but he had forgotten that we had just dug the septic tank right on the spot where the path had run until then. He stumbled down the hole and broke his arm. Tia Julia couldn't control herself and was in fits of laughter. A macabre humour that we encountered many times. A strange sort of compassion

(or is it to counter evil?). Only when people die are they really sad and they don't laugh anymore. Then the official 'mourning ladies' take over with their loud lamentations.

Although we already had a car, we thought a donkey would be a lovely idea, not just for practical purposes but for the kids to ride. We asked Tomàs to look around for a suitable animal and he promised to talk to the local gypsy. In Portugal only gypsies trade in donkeys and mules. 'José Zigano' soon arrived with a young black donkey and assured us he was sweet tempered and suitable for children. We agreed on the price and we were all very happy with our new friend, until next morning, when the animal unveils his true nature and kicks and bites and won't let the kids sit on his back. It is an old gypsy trick. Fill him up with wine so that he'll look sweet... Not much one can do about that... Tomàs went back to José Zigano to tell him off and next day he arrived with a very docile white donkey that actually did look friendly and sweet. He told us she was 12 years old and that we'll have many happy years with her, but that of course – we'll have to pay more....! Hoping he has made the money he intended to make, we embraced our new donkey and baptize her 'Caliça', feminising the name of our place. She proved to be everything the gypsy told us, except for being 12 years old. After a good look at her teeth by experts in the field, she turned out to be 25 years old, a very respectable donkey age. We decided to give her a good old age pension, nice stables and the company of a lovely goat and her two babies that were born shortly

afterwards. (Donkeys and goats make great company). Caliça walked around the place with the children on her back, slowly, and never tried to run away. Sometimes she walked under trees and left the kids suspended in the branches where they had to be rescued from their awkward positions.

In the meantime we had acquired a dog from Dona Rita Windsor. She had to go to England for a while and tried to find a good home for her Labrador 'Mosca'. Mosca means 'fly' in Portuguese and he was so named because he always tried to catch flies. He was a beautiful, big black dog, very sweet with the children and great fun.

Soon Mosca, Caliça and the goats were joined by many more animals: cats, chickens, Kloris the Rooster, a natural leader, rabbits and chameleons as fly catchers. Between the beams in the kitchen we hung some leafy branches, on which we put some chameleons, who surveyed their surroundings and flashed their rolled tongues whenever a fly came near. No better fly catchers. Kloris always sat on my shoulder and helped me to stop smoking. He hated the smoke and snatched the cigarette out of my mouth. He won the battle.....

The swallows kept coming, but since we put glass in the windows, they made their beautiful clay nests outside, just under the roof tiles, much more hygienic.

There were not many songbirds around. They are

caught in nets or with glue and with all sorts of instruments and are then cooked and eaten. One of the birds that is never bothered, is the hoopoe. The reason is that its meat is not tasty. This beautiful bird is therefore very tame and walks around lazily until you approach and then it flies away. Another peculiar 'domestic' animal is the wall lizard, which climbs the walls at great speed and disappears behind paintings or in dark corners. The Portuguese are quite scared of this little houseguest: 'they are very venomous when they fall in the soup'. We preferred not to believe this and they never landed in our soup.

One creature that you never see but always hear is the cricket, especially at night. They make a very loud noise. At night it seems as though the stars are talking. A friend of us told Meinke and Pauline this and we thought it a lovely story..

The night sky is so clear and close, it seems almost tangible. With a star chart in hand you can recognize the signs easily. We saw thousands of falling stars and made many wishes. With the new moon they are at their prettiest, but with the full moon it is another story altogether. The moon is so bright that you can almost read in its light. The whole country is illuminated and the moon reflects itself in the sea like a whitish yellow sun.

The moon is very important for the locals. Plant with the new moon and the plants will grow better. With the full moon people tend to become moon struck, they

cannot sleep and go roaming about. Occasionally there are suicides, people swallowing poison or drowning in a well.

We, ourselves, are very much aware of the moon when it comes to dreaming: With the new moon the dreams are strange, difficult to explain and more symbolic, but with the full moon we tend to have a light sort of sleep and are able to tell everything that happened in the dream. The animals, too, are restless and you hear dogs barking everywhere (maybe because so many people are wandering around).

There was only one shop in our village: a "hole in the wall" with a rough wooden counter. A dusty couple sold everything that one needed at the time. They were also the only people who could read and write and it was their task to write letters and to read letters received by the local population. They took care of sending packages to dear ones who were on military duty in Angola and Mozambique. They also wrote the letters to the many husbands working in France (many of them escaping military service). This couple was the heart of the community. They were very good with numbers and always checked their results by adding-up to the 'proof of nine', a completely unknown phenomenon to us. (By adding the digits of all the numbers and negate the nines, one obtains the same number above and below the line...). They also used an abacus, a Chinese counting device, with little balls. The list of things that were unavailable in that mini-market

were, among other things, toilet paper, sanitary towels, diapers, toothpaste and many other products that we would consider essential. The Portuguese had no bathrooms but did whatever they had to do behind a certain tree or bush and cleaned-up with grass or leaves. The hot sun then took care of drying the stuff and the wind took care of the rest. The women didn't have paper sanitary towels and they used cotton towels that they washed in the river and hung to dry on the clothes-line. This way one was able to see what time of the month it was and see the months pass by.

Toothpaste was a real problem: we had to cross the river with the ferry-boat, to Ayamonte in Spain in order to get it. Nobody brushed their teeth...When children get married a standard wedding present from their parents is a denture. Dental technicians galore, but no dentists. In order to have our teeth checked we had to travel a full day to Lagos, at the other end of the Algarve, where an English dentist lived. He was able to check and treat our teeth and make fillings when necessary.

Medically, things were still very primitive: Pauline had to be hospitalised with pneumonia and I had to bring our own sheets and towels and to stay with her in the same room. I also had to set the alarm in order to fetch the nurse at the given time for her injections. One was supposed to feed and wash the patient oneself.

Taking care of the elderly was quite a different matter. When granddad gets old, senile and incontinent, he'll

still be living with his children, but in the morning he is put next to the pigsty, in winter time in the sun, in summer in the shade. As the pigs have to be fed every day, granddad will not be forgotten. The grandchildren, the dogs and cats quite like being with the old man near the pigsty and granddad thus has quite a contented old age, because there is never a dull moment. When granddad finally dies, a jungle-call sounds over the mountains, far away. The sound, produced by the Algarvian women's voice carries a very long way and rolls over the hills and increases and everybody seems to get the message. The funeral has to take place within 24 hours, as there is no possibility of cooling available. After being dressed in his best suit, grandfather lies in state and the wailing can begin. The widow tells everybody what a fine husband he was, what a saint-like person and how she would rather die together with him than carrying on alone, and the professional wailers add a choir of distress. When all have assembled there follows a long walk to the cemetery. All this may take up to a full day, because after the burial, or placement in a burial-wall, everybody goes to the café and raises many glasses to his memory. The men drink heavily and the women drink mineral water.

Churches are something else again: there is a strong Moorish bloodline in the Algarvian. The word Algarve comes from the Moorish word Al Garb al Andaluz, meaning the sunset land west of Andalusia. In these

western parts the church has been absent for quite a while. Until recently, the Algarve was considered a third-rate, backward area by the people of Lisbon and the north. When a priest misbehaved, he was sent to the Algarve as a kind of punishment. One can imagine they were not a particularly inspiring lot. The locals have a long tradition of superstition and, due to their isolation, also a great amount of freedom and independence. Add a vast amount of sunshine and an eternally wide view of the endless ocean and the endless firmament and father priest gets the second rate role which his bosses had in mind for him in the first place.

One of our neighbours invited me to become godmother to her child and I made an appointment with the local priest. He took note of my name, etc. but when he got to the 'catholic'-or not- section he told me I couldn't become a godmother, as I was not a catholic myself. I hadn't considered this in advance and told him that I understood the problem. A pity, but they would have to find somebody else. He then proceeded, in a low voice, to tell me that he could put 'catholic' in the baptism book if I paid a certain amount of money....I refused and told him that I would act as a godmother, even if I was not officially one.

In church, only black-clad elderly women are seen. Black is the colour of mourning. Once you are a widow, your future is almost always black. For cousins, nephews, nieces one has to wear black for several weeks or months, but if it happened to be your



own husband it takes the rest of your life, unless you remarry. Men only have to wear a black band around their upper arm. Black clothes absorb a lot of heat and with the new synthetic materials, summer turns into a very sweaty time.

In the grocery-shop, where self-service doesn't exist, you never have to wait even if there are many people ahead of you. They are much too curious to know what you are going to ask for and time is not an issue in these parts of the world.

There was a lot of gossiping and one of the hottest subjects was the way I looked. Women weren't used to seeing a woman wearing jeans and to make things worse, a woman without earrings, let alone pierced ears, and on top of it all, a short haircut. This gossip gathered such momentum at a certain stage, that it was rumoured that all women wearing pants were going to be jailed. But they became used to things and when I was still walking around as a free person after a few months, the story vanished into thin air.

In our local chemist's shop one can buy everything without a prescription. There was a vast display of birth control pills in the window, but due to the fact that nobody could read what they were meant for, they were not in great demand. One of our neighbours became pregnant once more and was quite upset about it. I told her, and her breathlessly listening friends about the workings of the pill and how to use it. Next day she came back and told me her husband explicitly forbade her to use it. He is jealous and thinks she'll

then jump into bed with anybody she wants. At the chemist one can also get all kind of injections. They administer them very professionally. They once saved my life when I was stung by a wasp and I turned out to be allergic to wasp and bee stings. Since then I have not been allowed to wear bright coloured clothes and my habit of wearing trousers comes in handy. In order to trace the wasp nests, we prepared tiny slices of liver and attached a thin sliver of white paper with needle and thread. The wasp then picked up the meat and carried it, flying to its nest. This way we were able to follow him, thanks to the tiny piece of paper. We then proceeded in smoking out the nest. (Most of them have underground nests).

Telephone-traffic was another story altogether. There were only very few people around with a connection. Some of them are the hole-in-the wall shops where one can buy bread, eggs and live chickens and where little dogs sleep on bean bags.

All telephone calls had to be requested in advance. The connection might take a long time to establish. In order to make a call to our family back home, we had to request the call at least one day in advance. In the local post office women worked with switchboards and stuck small pegs in little holes to make the connection. The local post-office was a dull and depressing place, with employees aware of their superior status (being able to read and write), we would rather wait for our call in one of the “hole-in-the-wall” shops, where one could have a glass of wine and socialize with the locals.

Eric and I often took turns waiting for the call to come through.

Meinke and Pauline, now 3 and 2 years old, are having a wonderful time. It's all like one big playground. Next to our house there is a gigantic locust bean tree, which they can use for climbing up and down. We hang an old tyre on a rope in it, serving as a swing. Carob beans are typical of the Mediterranean. They are evergreen and produce fruits that, when ripe, look like long black runner beans. They taste like sweet-wood and when you open them they contain lots of black seeds that all have exactly the same weight. In Greek, Roman and Egyptian times these seeds were used to weigh precious metals. The word carat for a diamond is derived from the Greek word for the seeds of the carob tree. To us this wonderful tree becomes the 'fairy-tale' tree. Thanks to its wonderful shade, a great part of our life in summertime takes place under this tree. The branches grow down and up again and a natural playing device is created in this way and it provides natural shade. The kids, by the way, have no toys at all. There are no toys for sale, anyway. Everything is improvised by natural means.

One day, we get a visit from an elderly Norwegian, Mr. Sidselerud, uncle Sid to the children, who would like to rent a room and board for a few months. His wife died a short while ago and he hopes to be able to recover from it all in this wonderful climate. We offer

him Pauline's bedroom, an oil lamp, breakfast, dinner and a packed lunch, as he walks from early morning to late at night. A typical Norwegian pastime. He is a very private person but not unfriendly and he stays with us for many months. His small contribution to our household is very welcome. We also organize dinner parties at our home: Dona Rita and Françoise often invite people and then ask us to do the catering. I leaf through my cookery books and try to produce something interesting. These dinner parties take place in our own home, at our dining room table. Old Sid helps me with good advice, as he once owned a restaurant long ago. When the guests arrive, he retreats to his small room. This way we make a little bit of money. It doesn't amount to much, but it covers the cost.

We have been in the Algarve for several months now and we are constantly thinking of what to do next. We arrived with an open mind and no specific plans, but now that we have made our base, time has come to think about the future.

On our daily trips to Vila Real and Tavira (both 14 km. away), we always meet foreigners, who somehow landed in this area on holiday. They are mostly English or Americans on a Sabbatical leave. When we like them and we 'click', we invite them up to Caliço and we proceed to brainstorm about all the possibilities for our piece of land. Some suggest we create a "Summer-festival" for music with simple accommodation and make use of the slope for the acoustics, let orchestra

rehearse, etc.etc.. We love it, but we have no real affinity with the idea, at the moment. Eric decides to go on an expedition tour of the Algarve, a thorough one.

In the meantime I stay at home with the kids who go to school in the barn of the shoe-maker. His wife runs the class in a dark barn, shoes all over the place, and the kids have to bring their own little wicker chairs. This is where Meinke and Pauline learn to read and write.

Now that Eric has gone I don't have a car but our new donkey comes in handy and I ride it to the daily market to do the shopping. It takes a long time though... In the market one can buy everything that is fresh and seasonal: thus no apples in spring and no tomatoes in winter. Pigs, goats and, with a little bit of luck, cows are hanging from big hooks with swarms of flies around them and one has to point to a certain part of the animal, which the butcher will then cut off. No hamburgers or nicely prepared single portions. We quickly find out that the beef is tough, the goat meat tender and the pork meat always fine. In the fish department there are always sardines, mackerel and some local breams. We often go to the beach at low tide to catch Venus cockles, stirring them up by moving our ankles in the wet sand. We then wash the sand off and bake them in a little bit of olive oil and some garlic. When the cockles open due to the heat, one adds white wine and fresh coriander. This makes for a marvellous lunch: eating the cockles with our hands and soaking fresh bread in the sauce. The cost of living is very, very low indeed.

Eric comes back from his expedition and tells me that there are very few hotels and hardly any camping sites in the Algarve. We had already been thinking of a small hotel but we don't have the money to build one. There are no credit facilities at this time in Portugal. A campsite, though, could be a possibility. We do have a big enough plot of land, the donkey barn could serve as toilet space and we could create a reception and bar on our own terrace and make our living-room into a camping shop. We hardly use it anyway, as the climate is so good that you can always live outside. After many drawings and calculations, that is what we decide to do. We divide the barn in two: one for the men, one for the women. In the men's I paint green fig leaves all over and in the ladies' the walls are covered with pink roses and all the pipes are painted pink as well. We make divisions and shower curtains, so everybody can wash in private. It is all very simple but tasteful. On our terrace we construct a bar with a long wooden surface and shelves against the wall to hold all the bottles. I paint the outside walls with grapevines and we make an awning of canes for the shade. Along the main road, down in the village, we put some hand painted wooden planks with "CAMPING" and it doesn't take long before the first guests arrive. Our first guests are an elderly couple from Sweden, who have travelled all over Europe before landing in this remote place. After installing themselves, they ask us if we have a safe deposit. We say that 'of course' we do, and they give us their jewellery and a mink coat. We put the jewels in the pocket of the coat and hang the coat in

our wardrobe. The Algarve is still a very safe place and you never have to lock up things. The Swedes stay a few months and keep coming back during the next years. Most of our guests are English or rather, British. They are the ones that discovered the Algarve in the first place. The English and the Portuguese form the oldest alliance in Europe. As campers abroad talk a lot amongst each other and exchange a lot of information, our camping gets more and more guests. People who stay for a longer time ask us if we couldn't make some hot meals and thus my cooking career is born. In the beginning we only serve spaghetti Bolognese with salad, but the guests want more variety, so we start serving tomato soup, onion soup, melon with ham or red port, chicken with French fries and grilled sardines. All this is prepared in our small kitchen without any modern appliances.

We employ Tomàs full time, because he is the ideal person to help us out on all fronts. We start planting hundreds of trees for shade, mainly acacias (mimosa trees). They are the fastest growing ones and are very beautiful when flowering in early spring. Instead of making a fence we plant hundreds of "Macrocarpa horizontalis", a sort of fir tree that grows quickly as well and makes a nice hedge. The natural vegetation consists of carob trees, olives, almonds and figs, but they all take a long time to grow. And we need more shade NOW. In order to keep the campsite as natural as possible, we do not make tarmac roads but cover the paths with seashells.

We could have continued running the place this way, but we got a letter telling us that we have to apply for an official licence. Portugal is, at this time, still a dictatorship and camping sites are suspected places because they might be a meeting place for communist underground rebellion or a breeding ground for unwanted children. The result is that it is very difficult indeed to get a licence to build a campsite, unless it is a five-star one, on a minimum of four hectares and at least four km. from the sea. We start the official procedure but it is going to be a very hard job. After talking to people at the Ministry of Tourism in Lisbon and a visit from the general inspector-architect to Calião, they assign a local architect from Faro to our case. A friend of the Lisbon architect, of course. I cannot recount how many hours I spent on his doorstep, literally, to get hold of the man and beg him to produce some drawings. No drawings, no license. After waiting for more than a year, and becoming quite desperate, we meet a nice Portuguese couple on the beach and tell them our story. They come and visit us at Calião and are totally charmed with the place and very happy to help us solve our problems. They offer their help to get the licence. Her cousin happens to be the Minister for Foreign Affairs for Portugal, Ruí Patrício. One month later all problems are solved. (Talk about net-working ...). Now that we have the licence, the local architect finally gets moving. Probably he thought we would never get the licence in the first place..... In the end he produces the raw sketches for the restaurant, the toilet blocks, the



washing-up and laundry places, the playground, the swimming pool, the water tower and the reception building.

Eric goes up to Lisbon again with the whole stack of drawings, to present it to the Ministry of Tourism. After waiting another few months, we get a message that some alterations will have to be made, before final approval. One of them is that besides the ladies' bathroom bidets, we also have to create bidets in the men's. When we show our surprise, the inspector says: "But men suffer from haemorrhoids too!"

In the end the whole building, the architect and the infrastructure are going to cost so much, that we could actually have built a small hotel. But how to get the money? Bank loans are not available. The only issue may be a financial partnership. But how and with whom?

Just around that time we get a letter from Holland from a couple with three young children who, through her brother-in-law who is very wealthy, have a lot of disposable income. They would love to join us in our venture. They heard about us in a service club and mention the name of Eric's oldest friend as a reference. This letter seems to come as a gift from heaven. We invite them to come and stay with us and to see if we can work things out and during that week we agree in principle about the new set-up. We, from our side, will bring in our expertise, the land and the licences and they will supply the money for the further development. As they are our age and their kids are the

same age as ours as well, it all sounds like a good idea. Everybody is full of enthusiasm and ready to go!!! But what a disastrous outcome! They made this move as a last resort to save their marriage. Her brother-in-law (the big-money man) decides not to lend it to them, and we are stuck with a 50-50 partnership with no money. When we belatedly inform Eric's oldest friend about our predicament he tells us that he would never ever have recommended this alliance. We had been too naïve. Still we had to work together in the beginning. We are more or less tied to each other. We built the restaurant and employed a cook from the Alentejo, the province north of the Algarve. He also owned a restaurant on the beach of Manta Rota 'The Stable'. He was a very good cook. However our lady-partner falls in love with his deep brown eyes, and her husband gets more and more depressed. It looks as if there is no way out of our financial situation. We cannot possibly work together and we decide to run the restaurant with each couple working on alternate days. This proved to be a strange and unworkable solution.

Around this time we received a letter from Holland, from the K.N.S.M. (The Royal Dutch Shipping Company). They intended to diversify and were thinking of starting some Portuguese tourist ventures. Eric produces a good feasibility study and on that basis they

want to do business with us, but not with our "partners". This seemed like the perfect solution. We dissolved the partnership and got new partners: The KNSM and their Portuguese shipping agent in Lisbon,

where Luis is the boss. Luis is half Norwegian and half Portuguese, he is our age and we became very close friends. From then on everything started to run smoothly. We managed to finish the building according to plan, the restaurant with terraces, the reception building which we never used, because it was much more sensible to meet the new guests at our bar in the restaurant, and a big swimming pool of 20 x 20 meters, spacious toilet facilities and a playground.

Eric set off to look for land between Lisbon and the Algarve which would eventually be turned into first class camping sites.

We were still subletting our house in Holland through a real estate agent. One day we got a letter from Eric's brother which contained a tiny little advertisement that read as follows:

SEX AND RELAX BETWEEN UTRECHT AND AMSTERDAM! FOAM BATHS, MASSAGE, ETC, ETC,
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With our telephone number beneath it! Our house had been turned into a brothel.....I could not help laughing, imagining an adult man sitting in our tiny sitzbath, which we had put in with difficulty, a normal bath being too big for the bathroom, and being erotically massaged half submerged in foam. The less humorous part was that all this was happening between our sheets and on our mattresses..... Eric decided to go back to Holland to sort this out and when he arrived at our

house he got a shock at seeing his name plate ERIC FLESSEMAN still in place next to the doorbell! Due to the neighbours, who were fed-up with all the extra traffic (it was a very successful brothel) and had taken note of the car licence numbers, the "clients" were later contacted by the police, at their private homes or at their jobs, to testify that they had paid for services rendered. Two testimonies were enough for the police to shut the place down, but when they knocked at the door and confronted the Madam, she considered it an affront: Only TWO testimonies!! We were actually quite shocked by the denunciation of the neighbours, writing down car numbers, looking behind their curtains and later on confronting people in their private lives or at their work with their extra-marital affairs. The house, though, had never looked so clean and tidy. Everything was well painted and neat. Still we decided to rescind the rental agreement as our life was now in Portugal and we didn't want the worry and hassle anymore.

One day we heard that Princess Irene of the Netherlands, the sister of queen Beatrix, and her Spanish husband Carlos Hugo, were staying in a hotel, nearby, in Monte Gordo. They were busy campaigning for their Carlist Party and were not allowed to do so in Spain, under the dictator Franco. So they moved to the border area in order to facilitate their faction to come and listen. We have a special affinity to our Royals, our Husky having found a home at their palace. I wouldn't

be surprised if this was the reason that Princess Margriet , the younger sister of Irene, later became a Husky lover. The Dutch abroad always love meeting one of the Royals and that is why we invited Irene and Carlos to come and visit our campsite. They loved the idea and Irene, especially, was looking forward to being able to have a simple luncheon, the Dutch way, instead of the six-course meals she always had to eat in the hotel under the watchful eyes of bodyguards. Princess Irene asked in advance if she might see the inside of a tent or caravan. We told all our guests about the upcoming event, and next morning we were woken up early to great activity on the campsite. We got up to see what the reason was and there they were, cleaning their tents, their caravans, their cars, themselves....because, “ you never know....they might come and visit **our** place...” Caliço never looked so clean and tidy.

Next day they arrived in a small rented mini, having fled their body-guards. We had a Dutch family of emigrants from Canada staying at the time, on the site. This was their first trip back to Europe. Their children had never been to Europe before and this first acquaintance with a real Princess was like a fairy tale come true for them. They had made all kinds of small presents, bouquets of flowers and nicely-wrapped ‘smarties’. Princess Irene and her husband stayed with us the whole afternoon and we talked about many things. Carlos Hugo was very intense but Irene was lovely and showed great interest in everything and when we showed her our small cottage, she said, from

the bottom of her heart, “O, if only someday I could live like this !”.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1974 Eric was in Lisbon signing another contract to buy a piece of land, when the revolution took place. He was in the very middle of it. The office of Luis, the shipping agent/partner was situated next to the square where the Guarda Republicana and the army were confronting each other with arms at the ready. Eric fled the scene over rooftops to a nearby alley and, waving his Dutch passport made it safely to his hotel, where he paid his bill, took his car and rushed back to the Algarve. He was probably the only car driving on the road that day, because the radio told everybody to stay inside their homes and not to move! As everybody obeyed and was glued to the radio, Eric made it home safely without once being checked or stopped. This so-called carnation revolution took place in quite a friendly way, suited to the Portuguese soul, and luckily didn't involve any direct deaths, though one or two died of a heart attack. The revolution was organised by young, intelligent officers who were fed-up with being sent to the colonies Angola and Mozambique to fight an endless bush-war. These youngsters, in their prime, were unable to go to University, couldn't marry and, out of frustration, rebelled and plotted the revolution. Immediately, the underground communist party grabbed the opportunity to make it 'their revolution'. What began as a carnation revolution (soldiers with

carnations in their guns as a sign of non-aggression) ended up as a mean political war where Marxists tried to take over the country. All sorts of anarchistic extremists tried to take advantage of the total ignorance of the people. We too, were constantly living between hope and fear.

Many Englishmen were selling their properties for next to nothing in order to get out and 'back home'. But we stayed, not leaving the place for a day or an hour...If one went away, others could just come and confiscate the property.

During the months following the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1974 quite a few young Portuguese came to our place to have a cup of coffee at the bar and ask all sorts of questions regarding politics. Such as 'What is the difference between fascism and communism, what is socialism?' Even university students had no idea about the meaning of all those words. If one has lived under a dictatorship and censure-ship for many generations, one has no idea about what is going on in the democratic world. A little joke to illustrate the confusion: The communist party goes to Joaquim, an agricultural worker on a big farm in the province of Alentejo, a communist fortress, and asks him if he would kindly give all the cattle to the party, for the communist ideal. "Certainly! ", he replied. When they get to the chickens, Joaquim gets very angry and says: " Keep your hands off the chickens, because they are mine!!"

When, many years later, the revolution took place in Romania, we saw the same story all over again, it was 'déjà-vu'. People don't change overnight.

The KNSM backed out after the revolution, but Luís stayed on as our partner and he always helped us out financially, so even if worst came to the worst, we were able to pay the staff.

After the revolution, the people got the right to have a holiday. What sort of holiday does one plan when one has no money? A camping holiday of course! The English, who had been our best clients until now, didn't come anymore, scared of the revolution, but the Portuguese, on the contrary, arrived "en masse". Granddad and Grandma hidden under a blanket on the backseat so as to reduce the amount of people checking in. The camping fees are calculated per person, per tent/caravan/car. We were obliged to become policemen. Moreover many of these guests had no idea how toilets, showers and bidets work, and in our now up-to-date, nicely organised campsite, things went through a revolutionary phase as well.

We did our utmost to keep things running in an orderly way. Since the lover-boy cook left the premises, I became the cook and although cooking never was number one on my list of activities, I quite liked the challenge of learning this new skill. Using the big "bible", the French "Larousse Culinaire", I tried to produce all sorts of special dishes. It developed into a new hobby. One of our most successful dishes, not from Larousse, was a small Indonesian rice-table, which I made with only local herbs and ingredients.



People came from far away to taste it and the Portuguese seemed to love it. Another hit was our steak. At last not one of those beaten-flat, bloodless and tough pieces of meat, but a nice, honest chateaubriand with a true béarnaise sauce, thanks to Larousse. Our restaurant became well-known amongst the Portuguese living in nearby towns and on Sundays many big families came and had a meal in the restaurant, a dip in the pool and the kids used the play ground. They were good customers and bought sandwiches, ice creams, chocolate mousse and fresh sausages to fry on mini- barbecues of brown earthenware, pouring a bit of Medronho, the local fire-water, over it. It was a lovely and lively atmosphere.

We could not get a good steak locally, so we had to get it at a market in Beja, 200 km. to the North, in the Alentejo. Once a week our little Renault 4 went all the way up and came back with half a cow (a whole one wouldn't fit). Once the meat arrived I started to dissect it, to bone it, to cut it in portions and to lay it on ice. We did not have enough electricity power for a freezer so we had to go to Vila Real two to three times a week to buy big blocks of ice that we transported to the campsite. We then put them in an insulated freezer chest, needing no electricity. We never served frozen food....It was all very primitive indeed when you think how things worked elsewhere. We had to discover the wheel over and over again. Cooking was an adventure, because you were so dependent on what was available in the market. One had to keep improvising. Sometimes there was no butter available or no flour, no

sugar, no milk, no oil. All vegetables and fruit were only seasonal, so no tomatoes in winter and no apples in summer. From November onwards it is orange-time. They are the juiciest, sweetest oranges you can imagine. Just one squeezed orange provides a big glass of juice. All other fruits and vegetables have a wonderful natural flavour because they have been fully sun-ripened and not just ‘‘sun-kissed’’.

As we needed lots of lemons to garnish the fish and other dishes, we ‘rented’ a huge lemon tree in a small village, fifteen minutes’ drive away. In order to get there, we had to cross the river with our car as there was no bridge. It is a totally secluded village with very friendly inhabitants that always helped us pick the lemons and always asked us to stay for a meal. One day we brought some friends along on our lemon-trip. Our friend is a general practitioner and he was very interested in the physical state of the locals and particularly in their roots. At a certain moment he asked everybody present to take off their shoes and put their bare feet on the table. He proceeded to inspect all our feet and his conclusion was that they were in perfect order, especially the feet of the locals and their habit of always wearing strong leather shoes certainly lies at the base of this.

Our little Renault-4 never broke down, until it became so old and rusty that you could touch the ground with your feet and use them as brakes. We used it to carry the building materials and to go to the daily market.

Just after the revolution, we had one hundred German 'Jugend Sozialisten' as guests, who stayed for a whole month, and we used the old car to collect their garbage and to bring them their food on the way back to their tent camp. We cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner for them, but this time I got help from two professional cooks, who helped in the transporting of the huge containers of food to the big tents. This group sang the 'Internationale', the socialist song, every single morning at 7.30 a.m. when they got up. This was a strange experience in this idyllic spot, where you would normally just hear crickets or roosters. They behaved very well generally speaking, but there is one incident that had far reaching consequences. They went on a boat on the river Guadiana, the natural border between Spain and Portugal, and unrolled a huge poster in the direction of Spain with the words DEATH TO FRANCO written on it. (Spain was still a dictatorship). The Spaniards closed the border immediately and it took almost a week before they opened it again. This meant that we didn't get any new campers coming from the Spanish direction. All our guests who wanted to leave to go back home, had to make a huge detour to the North.

This German group was actually very good for our cash-flow, because they paid in D-Marks while the Portuguese Escudo was devaluing by the day. The marks were of great help in these post-revolutionary times.

At the end of that year we went to Holland. It was forbidden to export Escudos and to have foreign currency. It had to be deposited in the bank immediately. But, due to the gigantic devaluation of the money, we ignored this rule and decided to smuggle the money out of the country. As it was almost Christmas time, I turned it into a Christmas present. I ironed the paper money so it became as flat as possible, rolled it tightly around a pencil, and wrapped it in plastic. Then I wound a lot of adhesive tape around it and made it the base for a small statue. With self-hardening modelling clay I created a Maria-with-child around it. Once dry, I carved "made in Portugal, 1973" (one year before the revolution) at the bottom, painted it and varnished it. It looked very professional and authentic. Nicely wrapped in Christmas paper, with a little card "for Mother" attached, it was ready to go...

Before leaving for Holland we asked a Portuguese travel agency to book us a hotel in Paris, not too expensive, but one with a garage, because of our car and all the luggage. But they booked us into the Hotel Castiglione, a super expensive place! The next morning we were unable to pay our bill and I had to slaughter the Virgin with child.

In order to counteract the devaluation of the money and to celebrate my birthday, we made a trip to Lisbon, after the revolution, to buy some gold and silver. We stayed the night in the Hotel Sheraton. It was the game

season. We still had fond memories of eating game in Holland, many years ago, but the meat we were served in the Sheraton restaurant tasted awful. We inquired after its origin and apparently it came from somewhere in Eastern Europe. The restaurant service was incredibly bad, a bit Eastern European as well. To make the most of our little outing and forget about the bad dinner experience, we went to our favourite Fado restaurant, but it was closed and we settled for another one nearby, a rather touristy place where we were the only guests that evening....The Fado singers performed privately for us and we offered them some whiskey, a real extravagance at that time and then we got involved in long conversations about their lives and politics. Fado singing was “out” at that time as it was associated with the old regime. Around one o’clock we decided to go back to our hotel, but when we went to pay the bill, Eric found that he had left his wallet in the hotel room, in another jacket. Suddenly the atmosphere turned grim. The only thing we could do was to leave our passports and watches and come back the next day to settle our bill and retrieve our belongings. Later that night, at around 3 a.m. we both had terrible food poisoning and we kept running to the bathroom all night long. Next day we went to do our shopping with very wobbly legs and to retrieve our things from the Fado restaurant. To complete this nightmarish outing, Eric was robbed of his wallet in the underground.

Fado is a wonderful way of singing. It's all about longing, sadness, men who go off to the sea and never come back, impossible love affairs and every day life. One needs a special voice to sing it with heart and soul. Some 'fadistas' have trained voices and sing like prize winning canaries, but others have voices that sound rough and whisky-soaked. Every time we had something special to celebrate, we went to the Fado restaurant A Severa, where the star-fadista was Ada de Castro, the rough type....She always asked us what special occasion it was, this time, and then dedicated a song to us. When Eric turned 40, she happened to be performing in the Algarve and I went to ask her if she would be willing to sing for Eric's birthday, in our restaurant. She was delighted and promised to come with her two guitarists, one with the twelve-string Portuguese guitar. I organised the evening as a surprise party, so Eric knew nothing about it and I invited everybody we knew. It turned out to be a fantastic evening. Ada and her company sang and played all night and there was plenty of food for everyone and at the end she would not let me pay her a penny... The atmosphere was so good, the restaurant so very suited to this kind of thing and the acoustics so perfect, that we decided to make it a tradition and organise a Fado evening once a week. There was quite a lot of local talent as well. They sang folksongs and were very good at improvising and were very creative. There are some very nice songs where one starts with a few sentences and then passes it on to the next person. Thus lovely ballads are created. Our camping guests of course

loved it all and many joined in, in their own way. We had quite a few young people with their own guitars and then we started singing American folk songs, and English and Irish ones. Our own friends, who came to stay with us or stayed in one of the villas of Dona Rita, made wonderful ballads about Calção as well. The Dutch radio also paid us a visit and we had some good interviews which made for more Dutch visitors in the future. The interviewers and technicians were a nice lot and we had a good time with them and were kept informed of the latest news back home that way.

One of our regulars at the bar was Fred. He lived with Diana Hamilton (Di, for short). Di is a banned member of the Royal Family and a Bowes-Lion by birth, a relative of the Queen Mother of England. But Di used to be a wild woman when she was young and apparently misbehaved in Paris and on the Riviera...She was intelligent, a Sunday Telegraph crossword addict (not easy!), and was addicted to alcohol. Fred was an alcoholic too, but kept strictly to English Pub-hours. They used to have a Pub in Monte Gordo, nearby, but sold it to camping guests of ours. Since then Fred was one of our regulars. They lived in our village and had a small plot of land where Fred grew broad beans and potatoes. He constantly hoped his way of planting would go down in Portuguese history, but it turned out to be a total failure. Fred had an unsurpassable sense of humour and invented jokes there and then on any subject, sitting at our bar, during Pub hours, and talking to everyone. Being an ex-pilot

and officer, who was present at the droppings over Berlin, and had flown under bridges and been involved in many brave enterprises, he was the darling of all of our guests. He was on talking terms with Wing Commanders and his historical knowledge was phenomenal. Apart from Fred and Di, who we saw daily, we regularly saw Alan and Peggy, who often came to camp and finally decided to buy a small cottage near us (next to Tomàs) with our help. They re-did it with such good taste. Alan was a travel writer by profession, specialising in English camping guides. That was how they came to visit us in the first place and thanks to his very positive articles about our camping, more and more English guests came to Calico.

Peggy was Headmistress of a school in London and was a very practical person and she immediately tried to tackle the Portuguese language and got on quite well communicating with Tomàs and family. Being direct neighbours, Tomàs was able to help them out with all sorts of things.

Due to the revolution, schools were changing too. Teachers were not allowed to teach, because of their so-called 'fascist' background. Drug pushers were active in the school yards and the elder classes taught the younger ones. Often, the kids just hung around the school yard with no classes for many hours.

Luckily, there was a very good school in Faro, which Meinke and Pauline were able to attend, due to the fact that the daughters of the director of Hotel da Balaia were leaving that school to go back to Holland,



creating two new places. As the school was an hour's drive away, it meant that we had to drive for at least four hours a day, taking them, driving back and collecting them and driving back. There was also a boarding facility and we chose to send them as weekly boarders. They would come home at week-ends. It was a convent and the rules were very strict and some nuns were actually quite mean. We had very mixed feelings about it when we delivered the girls on Monday morning. Alas, there was no alternative at that moment.

In summertime we had our hands full caring for our guests, but in winter time we were busy whitewashing the buildings with lime. We put the lime stones in big drums and added water carefully, as it develops a great heat, and stirred until it became smooth. Acrylic paints were not yet available. We also planted hundreds of trees for shade and planted geraniums everywhere, just by taking cuttings from the old ones and sticking them in the ground. A few months later they turned into a lavish flower bed. As long as you stick to the local flowers and plants, you can't go wrong. During the week-ends we still had some guests for the restaurant but during the week things were very quiet and I had the opportunity to be creative, painting landscapes or portraits. I hung them in our restaurant and in a beach restaurant. I sold them quite well and got more commissions for portraits from Portuguese from the Alentejo, Lisbon and the North who wanted their own portraits painted or the ones of their children. Some

hotels also asked me to come and paint or draw their guests and hold exhibitions.

During the summer the children had long holidays, lasting at least two and a half months. As this was our busiest time of the year, when we had to work 16 hours a day, 7 days a week, we got some au-pairs from Holland, carefully selected by a good friend of ours. Some girls stayed for a few months, others for half a year. They kept Meinke and Pauline very busy, teaching them all sorts of crafts and games and taking them to the beach, teaching them how to swim, giving them the sort of family life that we were unable to provide at the time. It was a great relief to us to know that they were being taken good care of.

Many of our friends also came to stay with us, often with their children, and many camping guests came back to Caliço, because their children had such a good time playing with ours. Meinke and Pauline also learnt to speak and understand many languages from them.

One day an English friend of ours arrived at the camp site in his Deux-Chevaux, bringing two nice Californian 23-year-old girls with him. He had given them a lift when they were hitch-hiking. They had been travelling through Europe for half a year. Every time they had money problems, they looked for another job, like washing dishes in Italy or helping out in a bakery in Greece. They didn't have a tent but they said that they wanted to sleep in the open, under a tree and the starry night. We didn't think this was a good idea as

half the male population of the village had followed the car containing the two beauties. The local boys saw a likely prey with these blue-eyed, blond girls.

We had an empty caravan where Sue and Kate could spend the night safely. When we got up next morning and went to the restaurant, we found the two girls peeling potatoes and they had already done a great job of cleaning the kitchen. They told us they would love to stay with us for a while and they stayed for many months, helping us out with everything: cooking, cleaning, entertaining, taking the kids to the beach and functioning like four extra hands and legs for us. The atmosphere was extremely good. Due to their friendly and efficient Californian ways, the bar was crowded every night...

They became real friends and called us their European Mom and Dad. Over the next few years they helped us out again and Kate even came to Europe with her mother to make our acquaintance. When Kate tried to get a job in the U.S.A., Eric produced a very good letter of reference and she got the job. She became an entertainment-officer on board a cruise ship and there she met her future husband, who was the captain.

In spring time or in the autumn, when things were a bit less hectic and we had more time for our individual guests, we sometimes took them along to Tomàs and Julita, to show them how the 'real Portuguese' live. They were very hospitable and their home-grown wine flowed easily (a Château-Migraine) and their home baked bread and home produced

sausages were delicious. But often our guests showed signs of unrest and murmured something in my ear. Then we had to explain that the local people don't have bathrooms, but that you just have to go around the corner and do whatever you need to do behind a tree, and the problem is solved. But Tomàs, being a proud and perfect host, decided that he had to solve this problem once and for all, and dug a hole and put a toilet on top. He built a wall around it and a door with a lock, a pail of water, a wash-stand with a mirror, and so the first private toilet of the area was born!

Once a year, the pigs are killed, mostly in November and with the new moon. Early in the morning, at daybreak, the 'butcher' arrives, who is often a good friend with a licence to kill. He sticks the knife in the right spot, in the throat. Pigs are very sensitive creatures and anticipate all this way in advance, and behave very nervously and scream in an almost human manner. The butcher efficiently makes a cut in the aorta and subsequently the pig slowly bleeds to death. The blood is collected in a big cooking pan and is then made into blood soup. The dead pig is put on a bed of twigs and branches that are put on fire, and all the hair is burned off. In the meantime the sun rises and the glow of the fire mingles with the glow of the morning sun. The hair is scraped off with broken roof tiles and the cadaver is washed with water until it becomes white and shiny. Now the time has come for the dissection. All the neighbours help. The women go to the river to wash the intestines and part of the meat

is chopped finely, mixed with herbs and stuffed in the clean intestines. These sausages are then hung in the kitchen to dry. Another part of the pig is salted and kept underground. Every part of the animal undergoes special treatment. The fillet and the cutlets are prepared the same day for lunch, for all family and friends present. They are grilled on a charcoal fire and sprinkled with fresh lemon from the ever present lemon tree. This is a culinary moment. Freshly grilled pork-meat is unforgettably delicious. In the afternoon everybody goes on preparing the meat until all parts have been treated and the meat is ready to be kept for a year, without the use of freezers or other modern ways that involve electricity. In the evening, when all is done and well, it is party time. Blood soup again, with soaked bread, kidneys, heart and liver and the guest of honour gets the testicles. Eric kindly passed the testicles on to our host, who never said no.....The men sit at the table and the women serve the food and fill the glasses with wine. When the moment comes that I need to make a pit stop,' in Tomàs' pre-toilet period, all the other women decide to go as well, and there we are, all giggling in the dark starry night, the ladies lifting their skirts and sounding like a whispering stream.

Traditionally the houses are built with 50 cm. thick stone, lime and earthen walls. Windows are small, to keep the sun out, and many floors are made of beaten earth. More luxurious are the tiled floors with their beautiful Moorish patterns. All tiles are hand made and

left to dry in the sun. In summer the houses stay lovely and cool, but in winter they are very humid and all our clothes and shoes were covered with mould. As soon as the sun shone, we hung them outside in the almond or fig trees to air. The only heating we had was produced by gas heaters with bottles of butane, no dry heat!

The winter climate is very unpredictable. Sometimes there is no rain at all for a few years and sometimes it rains non-stop. In summer time there is often a water shortage. Our well did not provide enough water for the campsite and we had to try and find water at a greater depth. We contacted a 'water-diviner'. It seems that men are better at this than women: it may have something to do with the body-water-balance of the sexes. Moreover, sturdy types are better at it than thinner ones.

Indeed: Eric, who has no affinity whatsoever with alternative practices, turned out to be a perfect water diviner and later even located the right spot for friends on their land.. You need a Y shaped branch, push your elbows into your sides and hold the branch loosely. The end will move upwards when there is water underneath and it is quite hard to push back the upward movement. Our borehole was 260 metres deep, before we finally reached water. But we needed the water badly for 400 campers and a swimming pool of 20 x 20 metres.

Once a month there is a monthly market in our village where one can buy beautifully hand painted earthen-

ware dishes. It is also a good place to buy shoes and straw hats, agricultural utensils and clothes. Everything smells of roast cuttlefish. Gypsies sell tablecloths and their husbands sell donkeys and mules. The whole village comes to this event and the people living in the mountains come down on their donkeys. The cafés do good business and in the evening the monthly ball takes place behind the bread factory. Here the local boys and nubile girls have a chance to meet each other: the boys standing on one side and the girls on the other. The girls always have a 'chaperone', often an aunt. Whenever a boy and a girl have danced together consecutively three times, it's a deal and everybody starts talking about an engagement. When the marriage takes place eventually, the partying goes on for three full days. After church they go home to their own village and celebrate with their own friends and family. There are two wedding cakes, one at the bride's parents' home and one at the groom's. It is a custom to give money as a wedding present and to stick the note in the wedding cake with a toothpick. Other coveted presents are the scales and the pressure cooker that are indispensable for any household. After three days of partying and eating, the bridal treasure is counted and they are allowed to sleep together. Beforehand the girlfriends of the bride have sewn the sheets together, pepper has been sprinkled all over the cushions and many other funny but predictable things have taken place.

Girls start to save for their trousseau from a very early age.. (Remember the gold chain). A big wooden chest

should be filled with lovely embroidered sheets and tablecloths by the time they get married. Almost all girls have had a very good training as a seamstress, following their obligatory school years, ending with the 4<sup>th</sup> year of primary school.

The 4<sup>th</sup> year of primary school is an official test and allows a child to go on to secondary school and eventually to get a driver's licence (it is a proof of being able to read and write). The level is quite high, higher than in our countries, especially when it comes to arithmetic. It is quite normal for kids not to pass the year and some of them are 14 years old when they finally pass the exam. Until they get married, the girls in general are trained as seamstresses and learn the trade with a "master-seamstress". Looking through dark holes in the wall one can often see ten to twenty young girls sitting on tiny wooden chairs with needlework in their hands. Most of the boys become helping hands in the bricklayers' trade or in the agricultural sector. Higher education is not encouraged by the government. If you keep them dumb, they'll be submissive. But after the revolution it was quite normal for all kids to go to secondary schools and many children of illiterate parents even went on to university. Similarly, the parents ride a donkey, while their kids drive a car. As the children have never been used to cars, they have very little insight into the dangers of traffic. The level of driving schools was and still is abominable and it is quite widespread for people to get a licence by paying money 'under the table.'



When you stop a donkey, it will stop on the spot, but when you are driving a car it needs longer to stop and they don't take this into consideration. They overtake before a bend in the road or against a slope, thinking, if I can't see anyone, no-one is there. The number N 125 road, running along the Algarve coast from east to west has the highest death rate in all of Europe. Luckily, a few years ago, a beautiful parallel highway was built with EU money, which somehow alleviates the madness and chaos of the coastal road.

Following the revolution, Casino's were allowed to operate in Portugal and even in our backward and remote area one of these capitalistic institutions was built. They offered grand shows of a high standard, à la Moulin Rouge, fantastic illusionists and a real Dutch porn star! One could dine during the show and we invited nine friends to celebrate my birthday with lobster and champagne. Afterwards Eric and I went and played the roulette table and we won enough to pay the whole bill.

Sometime later we parked our car near the casino and an old woman, all clad in black, parked her donkey next to our car and asked us for help. She had a dream that she must come to this place. She came from far away over the mountains, but hadn't a clue what to do, so asked us to help her enter the casino and show her what it was all about..... We obliged, and showed her how to work the one-armed-bandit. Once she under-

stood, she put in a five-escudo coin and pulled the handle.....Jackpot!!!! She cashed the money and wrapped it in her scarf and set off for the mountains again on her donkey, in the deep starry night.

One day, Eric could not get out of bed in the morning. The heavy physical life he had been leading was taking its toll; he had a hernia. After many months of walking and no sitting, he was not able to bend over or dress himself. We went to Holland where he underwent a kind of emergency seaman's treatment in the private clinic of a doctor friend, who was a back specialist. Two weeks later he was back to normal. But he learnt a lesson not to carry anything heavy ever again. From now on when we travelled, I carried the suitcase and Eric followed with my beauty case!

Back at Caliço, things had to be adapted, of course, because our life consisted of lifting heavy weights most of the time. We solved this problem by having Fred do our shopping, and paying him a small fee. This came in very handy as he was almost broke. He also met more people and he greatly enjoyed this very important and responsible job.

Sometime later, around Christmas time, Fred collapsed and Di called the ambulance who took him to the hospital in Faro. Next morning she called us and asked Eric to drive her to Faro to bring Fred his Sunday Telegraph, his passport and pyjamas. When they arrived at the hospital which was an old convent, Eric

went to the emergency desk to ask where Fred was. The medical assistant had no idea and said there was nobody with that name on their files. After consulting a cleaning lady, the man picked up a big bunch of keys and asked them to follow him. He opened a heavy metal door, pointed to a stretcher with a corpse on it and a little card attached to his big toe saying “foreigner”. He asked “ is that him?”

Nobody could tell us what had happened. Probably it was a heart attack, but on Christmas Eve, there were no doctors available and Fred sadly died.

In the corridor the ‘vultures’ were waiting eagerly: undertakers who were eager to transport the corpse to England, a lucrative business. But Di and Eric thought otherwise and decided to have him buried in our village. Fred was put in a leaden coffin to be transported to Cacela. Crossing the border of the Faro community, the coffin had to be opened and limestone is added and water poured over it. The lid is quickly shut and the widow is handed the key. Once the limestone and the water are mixed, nothing is left of the contents. Consider it a kind of cremation.

Fred was buried the next day. The law demands that the body must be buried within 24 hours, due to the fact that there are no cooling facilities. The cemetery of Cacela Velha , Old Cacela, is located on top of the rocks, on the seashore with a breathtaking view. Very few people were present at the funeral: Fred’s brother was able to make it, after we managed to

trace him in England, and an English lady friend arrived, dramatically clad in black veils. The grave digger was drunk, as usual, and complained that he had not been informed of the fact that it was a foreigner, so he had to hammer the coffin into the ground as the hole was not big enough. It was all very spooky and looked like a scene out of a movie by Irmgar Bergman. It was rainy, stormy, miserable and cold.

Fred's brother told us that Fred had never flown in an aeroplane in his life because he had a fear of flying. All those wonderful stories about the Berlin droppings and flying under bridges had been invented by his creative fantasy. Poor Di was a 'total wreck' and everything seemed to happen without her being present. We invited her to stay with us in our house and put a crate of beer next to her. Eric took care of all the debts they had in the village. After a few weeks we had a meeting with Emílio, the British pro-consul, who said she could only be repatriated to England by the cheapest means of transport, the train. As she was old and distressed we decided to buy her a plane ticket to London, making sure Fred's brother picked her up. This was the end of her Algarve adventure. Fred's brother found a good old people's home for her, and a few years later we paid her a visit and she made a rendez-vous at her local pub, so things hadn't changed much...

We had been running the campsite for nine years. Although things were going more or less smoothly and we had overcome the post-revolutionary trauma, Eric was more than ever ready for a change. His bad back was one of the reasons but he also enjoyed setting up new ventures.

Change came sooner than we expected. One day the managing director of Quinta do Paraíso, a luxurious urbanisation 100 km further down the coast, contacted us and asked Eric if he would like to take over his job, as he had received an offer to manage a big building project in Sana, North Yemen, with a large American salary. It would mean a breach of contract with Pakhoed (the Dutch company which owned Quinta do Paraíso), unless he could find a suitable replacement.

The Dutch director from Rotterdam came to the Algarve to meet us for dinner in a restaurant in Portimão and we spent the night in one of the villas on the Quinta. I'll never forget that feeling of luxury, the large bedroom with heating and a dry wardrobe with a heating device and inside lighting. The bathrooms were marble with mirrors covering a whole wall. The house had lovely tiled floors shining with wax, and manicured gardens with palm trees, bougainvillea and hibiscus, an automatic sprinkler installation and a crystal-clear swimming pool.

Only a few villas had been built up till then and there was a communal swimming pool and two tennis courts. Hundreds of villas were planned and a much bigger pool, another tennis court, a reception building and a restaurant.

Not much time was needed to consider this new job, although I wondered what would happen to the campsite and whether I would miss the beautiful place that we had created with so much love. In the beginning Eric went back to Caliço once a week and a former au pair came to run it during the summer months together with some friends of ours. Luís made sure we had a professional cook and a receptionist and Tomàs stayed on for all the odd jobs and the pool.

Later, Luís got into a fight with his brother and the rest of the family, and as the shipping agency was a family affair, Luís got side-tracked. His brother, Salvador, became the new boss and as a consequence, also our new partner. We never communicated with him except through lawyers and we have never met him to this day.

Due to the purchase of all the plots of land, before the revolution, we had become minority shareholders in the long run and we had no more say in the way things were run, especially as we were no longer living there.

Eric greatly enjoyed his new job. He was made for it, building a close team of good and capable people: Vasco, the engineer, made all the calculations and started work at 7 a.m. (very un-Portuguese!), but stopped at 12 o' clock, to go to the restaurant to eat a big lunch with lots of red wine and brandy and after that was a total loss. The two architects were Clive, a flamboyant Scot and Claes, a quiet Dane. Tomàs Santos was the bright young accountant. Jaime, the

young foreman, who did a better job than his boss, was promoted by Eric to head-builder. Then there was Belmiro, the electrician and handy man, who knew a solution to every problem. Last but not least Isabel, Eric's Portuguese secretary who had lived in South Africa and spoke fluent English.

The company in Rotterdam were also very pleased with their new local man. My life became very different too. Suddenly I had a daily maid, a huge house with private pool and finally I could paint all day. It was a bit strange at the beginning, for instance getting used to buying a kilo of potatoes instead of a sack, just 2 fishes instead of 10 kilos and 1 lemon, instead of a crate...

We still took the children to their Convent school in Faro, every Monday morning, the distance being more or less the same, but not for long. One day I went into their bathroom and saw that they were washing themselves with their pyjama trousers pulled over their little breasts and they told me that they had to do so at school and that they had to wear a special dress when taking a shower! We took them out immediately and sent them to the International School, which was nearby. Of course it was quite a change suddenly getting lessons in English, but they learnt very quickly and never had to repeat a year. The extra language, the more flexible system and the fact that they could live at home again, made for a welcome change.

Besides painting, I was also involved in decorating the new restaurant. I designed tile panels that would serve as table tops: birds of paradise sitting on flowering branches. We had them made in Lisbon at the Fabrica de Sant'Ana, where they baked the tiles in a wood fire, which gives the colours a beautiful warm glow. We had to go to Lisbon quite often to talk about the results and to urge them on, because it was taking so long. But the result was lovely. I also made textile wall hangings and oil paintings to decorate the walls and thus we created a little of the atmosphere that we used to have at Calião.

I regularly had exhibitions of my work and one of them was a big solo show in the Palacio Fòz in Lisbon, a building housing the Ministry of Tourism, a wonderful location, right in the centre of town, near the Rossío. I also had a lot of portrait commissions and was invited to represent Portugal at the Exhibition "Europe 2000" in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Four days in a hotel with full board and many new contacts.

We often had lunch or dinner with owners or prospective owners and we organised receptions for the Dutch Ambassador in Lisbon, when he came to visit the Algarve.

We celebrated the Coronation of Queen Beatrix in Quinta do Paraíso, with a big reception for the whole Dutch community. Fresh herrings and Dutch jenever was flown in. Hundreds of Dutch residents came to meet the Ambassador and watch the coronation on TV.



A few years ago there were only 25 Dutchmen living in the Algarve.

In summer there was a great demand for children's entertainment and so we organised tennis tournaments. As this involved a lot of work, we decided to ask Sue and Kate, the two Californian girls that used to help us out so well on the campsite, to come and assist us for the summer.

It only needed one phone call, and they were there! They organised swimming competitions, drawing competitions, tennis tournaments and the guests were very pleased with everything. When the children thought of something to draw, their subject was nearly always our two dogs, a longhaired Labrador and a black Dachshund. The two were inseparable, and the Dachshund always walked under the Labrador, using him as a shield against the sun. At Easter we painted eggs and hid them for all the children and at Christmas time there was a big tree with fake snow and lots of small presents for the guests. This felt strange, as we often walked around in swimsuits on Christmas day and had our lunch outside, it was not easy to create the true Christmas-feeling. Portuguese give each other very big presents. It is not for nothing that they are paid a 13<sup>th</sup> month wage in December, because all the money is spent on presents for the kids, the nieces and nephews. Many months ahead there are ads for bottles of whisky and perfumes and all kinds of other post-revolution goodies.

The newly built houses on Quinta do Paraiso sold extremely well. We even had to employ a full time salesman, Paul, who could even sell his mother-in-law. Eric kept working with him for many years for the sale of many more projects. The clients, Dutch, English, German and American, bought houses and then came to stay for their holidays, once or twice a year. During the other months we let their properties for them.

On the restaurant terrace there was a huge table with a big umbrella above it and room to sit twelve easily, and Eric could always be found there after office-hours. House owners came and sat down for a chat and prospective buyers got into the right mood. I wouldn't be surprised if that table positively influenced the sales of the villas.

Although everything went well at the International school, Meinke often complained that she had no after-school life or contacts. All kids were taken to and from school by car by their parents, who often lived quite far away. There was only one girl, Meinke's age, who lived nearby, but this was definitely not enough for her at her age. She wanted to belong to a group of friends. Many kids went back to England, to boarding schools, at this age, and Meinke longed to go away as well. As the International school only went up to O-levels, the kids would have to leave sometime later anyway and after much deliberation we decided to send them to Holland, to stay with a guest family. We thought it better that they both leave at the same time, as we imagined that Pauline would have the same urge to

leave in a year's time and they could support each other while far away from home. It turned out to be extremely difficult to find a family willing to take our kids in as boarders. We travelled up-and-down and finally succeeded. The girls came home every single holiday and always brought along some new friends. These were memorable times when we were all gathered around the long table on the terrace to eat and drink and philosophize till deep into the night. When they left again for Faro airport and the journey back to Holland, we all had tears in our eyes.

Now that Quinta do Paraíso was almost finished, there was a general economic crisis and the mother company in Rotterdam had hundreds of unsold houses elsewhere in Europe, and suddenly decided to pull out of Portugal. The whole management of the real estate division was fired and Eric's contract was not renewed either. The Quinta was sold to a German and it all happened so quickly that we could not do anything about it. We had just built our first home, having financed it on the basis of a ten-year employment, but now we were forced to sell the house. Luckily we found a buyer within a few months, having offered it at a very attractive price. We were now able to buy a smaller house on the Quinta.

Eric decided to become self-employed, as a project manager, first for an English urbanization in Albufeira and then for a Hong Kong Chinese group. Finally he worked for our 'neighbours', a German couple who owned a super luxurious five star urbanisation next to

Quinta do Paraíso and were in need of a general manager. The houses in Carvoeiro Club were all around one million D-Mark, but some were one and a half million.(€ 800.000,--). All houses had their own maid service and a big swimming pool and there were plenty of gardeners and pool maintenance men. There were ten tennis courts, several restaurants and shops and plans were made for two golf courses. It became bigger and bigger and more luxurious by the day.

More staff was needed for the reception and the owner asked if I would be willing to help out. I started working half days and drove a small bus for eight new guests, almost daily. I showed them the neighbourhood and all the places of interest, greatly recommending our “own” restaurants, of course. I also took them to the best beaches and told them about the flora and fauna and where they could do their shopping or find entertainment at night. These were multilingual tours, with Germans, Americans, Spaniards and sometimes Dutch. Many celebrities came to stay at the Carvoeiro Club, among them politicians, film stars, golf and tennis pros. They enjoyed having their privacy.

At one time Eric had a staff of almost three hundred people. What a difference from the days of the campsite! We had now been in Portugal for twenty years and Eric had become what he had tried to avoid, director of a mid-sized company. This was not why we came to the Algarve in the first place, and the country had changed a lot in those years. It had lost a lot of its original charm. After seriously considering yet another

move, Brazil maybe, we decided to go back to Holland. We were ready for a more normal social life, not the comings and goings of tourists who we only met superficially. Eric wanted to be involved with politics and church, which had not been possible in the Algarve, and I was looking forward to more culture. There was only one good gallery in the Algarve and one had to travel to Lisbon to be able to hear a classical concert, which involved a long and tiring trip with an overnight stay.

After our house was robbed three times in a row in bright daylight, our removal was a small one... We sold our house and once more headed for an uncertain future. After trying out Amsterdam for a few months, we finally settled in Maastricht. There is no better place to live!

Sometimes people ask me if I don't miss the climate, but I quite like the changing seasons, the lovely autumn colours, the fresh spring and the deep green summer. And the winters are not that bad! When it snows it is like a fairy tale and when it is raining and stormy and sombre and dark outside, the house is warm and cosy and I deeply enjoy having central heating and no more mould in my wardrobe....

## Epilogue

*Eric died suddenly of a heart attack in 1996, aged 60. He had never been to see a doctor, except for his driver's licence. He had never complained about anything.*

*Meinke spent some years in school in Holland and then went to England to attend a finishing school with emphasis on cooking; next she was trained as a hairdresser in London and after that she went back-packing in the far east, where she stayed for two years, travelling and working her way around. Next she spent a year in Florence at the Academy of fine arts where she learnt portrait painting and was trained as a silversmith. She married a Portuguese and they spent many years in Moscow where Meinke attended the fine-arts academy. After having finished her Academic training in Amsterdam, and having given birth to Sancha, she and her husband moved back to Portugal. Meinke got divorced and now lives in the Algarve near the place where we used to live and is a successful painter. Sancha is nine years old at this moment and is totally bilingual (English-Portuguese) and attends the same International School as her mother did when she was young.*

*Pauline finished her secondary school in Holland and spent a few months at University, studying law. She discovered this was not the right decision and she moved back to Portugal where she started teaching Portuguese to foreigners and had lots of other jobs. She has been living with Richard for many years now; he grew up in the Algarve as well, with a Brazilian mother and a German father. His mother runs a lovely small hotel and the children help her running it. Pauline has become a Yoga teacher and is artistically gifted as well. She is an accomplished photographer and likes being involved with ecological projects.*

*Camping Caliço still exists. A plot of land next to it, which we had bought to one day build our dream house on, was expropriated and the big new highway runs through it. The restaurant seems to have lost all of its charm since they put in a lowered ceiling, TL tubes for lighting and bathroom tiles against the walls. Pauline warns me not to go there any more as it will hurt too much.*

*Tomàs is still healthy and well and in his eighties and every time I'm in the Algarve, we go and visit him and it seems that time has stopped....*

