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DORETTE COOKE

includes pen picture of Hastings Beck

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Dear Michael,

I wrote, very briefly, acknowledging your letter of mid-May and saying that I would reply more fully on our return from Nova Scotia.

The National Royal Commonwealth Society meeting went well and I know that Basil was pleased with the discussions that took place with Stuart Mole, the "new man" in London. He appeared to grasp the "alienation" that seems to have arisen in a them/us situation with members from the "Colonies" making small monetary contributions to the Club and the local members paying high membership dues. They forget that "Colonials" contributed - for instance wood for the panelling, pictures contributed from overseas Branches, such as our British Columbia one, have no place in the present dining room which is very "stark" and has no pictures at all if I remember correctly. However, I should add that the food served was excellent though very costly - even by London standards.

Now to return to the object of my letter. I found so much in the "Bohemian Reminiscences" that was entirely new to me - even the number of children that my Grandmother had came as a surprise, though probably not so unusual in that period when one in three or four children did not survive beyond the age of 3 years.

My Mother was born in 1890 at the Cape and married my Father in 1917. He was born in 1867 and had then been a widower for 19 years. I imagine that my Mother had the photograph, in her nurses uniform, taken at that time when he was posted to France. This photograph appears to me to bear a strong resemblance to the figure in the photograph looking pensive and with a braid hanging down over her left shoulder to the left of Joyce - I am sure you are right about Hastings and Joyce.

As a child I remember being embarrassed by the fact that Aunt Shyllie always wore gloves when we went to the beach to bathe! These and her hat were an ever present part of her garb, so I agree with your assessment that she was the figure in the middle. Uncle Arthur, shown in our wedding photograph as he gave me away, appears to be very like the man, in a white shirt, at the back of the pack. I remember him as a charming man who had learnt to take a back seat to a social-climbing wife. The lass on the extreme right is, as you surmise almost certainly Ina and it is thus likely that the man behind her, with a hand on her shoulder, was George Moore, she would not have allowed any other male to take such liberties! The enclosed photograph of Win in uniform was taken after she joined up for the Second World War. You probably know that on her first attempt she was turned down as the Matron who interviewed her, said "Woolley, when we nursed together in France we were the same age - I am about to retire and so

should you!" Win did not follow this advice, but waited until the Matron retired and tried again after reducing her age by 10 years!. I do not think that Winifred is the member on the right; her features were, I think, sharper. The only Bellew story I remember is that when Maud told her Father of her marriage proposal and asked for his advice, he told her to pray to the Lord. Win quoted that source as saying "Take him, it may be your only chance"!! Anyway Maud she did marry Harry Weatherilt and they had a magnificent ranch in Bechuanaland. All four children have died. Mary married Nico Curtoys and Basil and I visited them frequently on their farm - their two daughters are much of an age with our two sons and we keep in touch with them.

My knowledge of my Mother's family is very sketchy. I do remember being left with Aunt Shyllie once and told to be good and hearing my Mother, Win and Ina assuring each other that it was the first time Shyllie had had contact with a small girl since Joyce's accident. Shyllie had been devastated as Joyce was in her care when she was killed.

When I was seven years of age my Father had a very severe stroke and lost all powers of speech, and the use of his right side. My Mother insisted that he should not be hospitilized and was equally emphatic that I not be sent to boarding school. I was taught by the family Doctor how to move him and he and I built a means of communication by a form of "20 Questions". Perhaps, understandably, my knowledge of the Cape family only really came about after his death when the Woolley sisters got together and talked amongst themselves. May had married at a very early age and with her family of small daughters seems not to have been "one of the girls" to the same extent, as Shyllie, Win, Ina and my Mother (known to her family as Daw).

I realize that I have rambled, but I hope some bits and the photographs make sense. I am now "President" of White Rock Meals on Wheels; the difference is that we have a "paid" volunteer coordinator responsible for the 90 or so meal deliveries on three days each week and I am really only responsible for handling the Government Agencies. This in itself is a daunting task which I apparently do well though on our last contract my objection to the word "must" and its replacement by the word "should" met with no success!

Basil joins me in sending love to Dorothy - I do hope that she saw some of the Wimbledon tennis; I well remember how she enjoyed her viewing there.

With renewed thanks to you for the enormous task you undertook and much love,



POSTSCRIPT

As I was putting the photographs, of which Basil had made copies, into the envelope to send off to you I looked again at Hastings and wondered how much you knew about him. He had lied about his age when he joined up in the First World War and, when it ended, went up to Oxford. He and my Mother had had a very happy relationship so, on my arrival, he asked to be my Godfather while Win was one of my Godmothers. Hastings sent me a rag doll, then dressed as an undergraduate and called Joe, who has suffered through the years but remains relatively intact.

After Oxford, on returning to Cape Town, Hastings joined a group of similarly briefless barristers and married a nurse who had been nursing his Father. Shortly afterwards the Cape was shocked by a tragedy on Rondebosch Common. A young couple, taking a short cut across the Common, were attacked by a band of Africans. The young man was severely beaten as he tried to protect the lass from being raped and, indeed, died of his injuries just under 12 months later. Thus the attackers faced the death penalty and the Crown had to provide legal counsel. Hastings was approached and declined. However, the Chief Justice said it would end his law career if he did not accept the brief and he ultimately complied. The case was a long and trying one in which Hastings ultimately got his man off. The court ruling decided Hastings' future as he then left the law. The marriage also ended and he moved to Port Elizabeth to work on a newspaper. There he met the sister of a friend, Ralph Baker. Hope was a most beautiful woman, and initially the marriage was a good one and they had two children, Robin and Hilary. Financially things did not go well and after this second divorce, for Hastings, Hope pleased her Father and married a millionaire!

During his work in Intelligence, Hastings had met Jackie de Villiers, a bright not so young lawyer and they saw a lot of each other and were married. The marriage was a very good one as, for the first time, Hastings found he could talk the same language as his wife! Jackie was the legal adviser to Helen Susman, the Leader of the Progressive party in South Africa. Once I travelled on the electric suburban train from Muizenberg to Cape Town with the two of them. I had observed that two copies of the Cape Times had been delivered to their doorstep that morning and now found that Jackie and Hastings scanned the headlines in their respective newspapers and then turned to the crossword. Whichever one finished first said not a word but just folded her\his paper and observed the view from the train window - quiet one-up-man-ship.

Jackie is now in a retirement home in Kalk Bay and a couple of years ago when Basil and I were at the Cape we gave a luncheon party at Pecks Valley to which she came. The widows of John and Mick Moore, with Elizabeth and Jo Topping, made up the party. (I need hardly say that Basil handled his harem with great skill). Jackie's nephew is a retired Judge in British Columbia whom we see infrequently.

By now you will understand that I am able to say quite truthfully that I knew "Hastings and his three wives". He was a charming feckless person and I say this advisedly. In 1971 we were in Johannesburg and Basil had a terrific fall at Sterkfontein and had his right leg from the groin to the tip of his toe in plaster. Understandably we had to extend our stay in Johannesburg. Hastings heard the news and promptly decided to give a dinner party for us at the Rand Club. Obviously this involved him coming up from the Cape by train in addition to the cost of the superb dinner but it was a magnificent gesture!!

