

OUMA SMUTS
(22.12.1870 — 25.2.1954)

ONE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S GREATEST DAUGHTERS

Ouma Smuts, as Sybella Margaretha Smuts was affectionately known to thousands of South Africans, was a woman who loved her family, and *all* children deeply. She certainly loved her country, and all its people became her "children" without any distinction. "She gladly embraced the ideals of national unity —of a larger South Africanism — which was the main purpose of her husband's work". But *above all* she loved her husband, her beloved Oubaas. He was her very life! Let it be made clear, at the outset of her story that she was no pale shadow dimmed by the stature of a world-famous husband. Her place was *not* behind him, but at his side. It is not generally realised, outside their intimate circle, *how very important* Mrs. Smuts was to her husband.

Once, when Smuts was approached to describe the part his wife played in his life, he answered unhesitatingly, and with obvious pride and affection in his voice, "She is my life blood and my inspiration. She is the steam in my kettle." She was in fact a tower of strength in her own quiet and unassuming way, and her husband's *spiritual* strength at all times! Together they were an indivisible unity for 60 years.

In a long lifetime Mrs. Smuts was the steadfast and self-effacing helpmate of one of the greatest South Africans in our history. Through good times and bad, she remained loyally by his side, giving him the comfort of her presence, and the added strength he needed.

Ouma was a woman of wide culture accompanied by a shrewd grasp of national and world affairs. She possessed a down-to-earth common sense and a keen, sparkling humour expressed in chuckles and laughing blue eyes. These were only a few of the hallmarks of her delightful personality that immediately impressed itself upon all who met her, either in the informal atmosphere of her home at Irene in the Transvaal, or on public occasions.

But let me start her story from the beginning. Sybella Margaretha Krige was born on the 22nd December, 1870. The Kriges lived in a house in Dorp Street, Stellenbosch. They were a large family of nine children, and the second child in the Krige family was Sybella Margaretha. She was a small, pretty girl, full of energy and charm, and she more than pulled her weight in the family by caring for her younger brothers and sisters. She was known in the family circle by the name of "Isie", a name which remained with her for all time.

Isie was particularly bright scholastically, and this showed already in her schooldays. At a time when it was unheard of for girls to matriculate, she made history by being the only girl at the time to achieve this distinction. This milestone in her studies was only the beginning of her education, for she set her sights much higher, and despite family opposition, she was determined to go to college. She just did this one day, and according to her, the professors didn't seem to mind a girl's presence at their lectures.

Isie met her future husband, Jan Christiaan Smuts, in her mid-teens when they were both students at the Victoria College, the forerunner of the University of Stellenbosch. They were both of Dutch and French descent and of an age, as she was only six months younger than he. She and Jan had a lot in common, and according to one of their daughters "they were as one soul all their lives".

Theirs was an intellectual courtship, tempered by young dreams and true deep affection. Isie was musical and played the piano well. She also had a pleasant voice, and she and Jan spent many musical evenings together, singing the German lieder which she knew and liked so well.

On her seventeenth birthday, Isie received her first letter from Jan who was on holiday at his home in Riebeeck West, and there was no doubt from its contents that he was already very much in love with his future wife . . . "People generally have but few chosen friends, so you needn't be surprised when I tell you I have only two on earth, you being one of them; and you are the only one to whom I feel myself drawn by every tie of sentiment and Nature. You are the only one in whose society I feel alone, by myself, as if there is no second one, as if we two are one.. . I love you as my own soul. ."

Soon after Jan's, seventeenth birthday, he became a regular caller at the Krige home every evening. He and Isie soon became inseparable companions, walking to College together in the mornings and home again together in the evenings. She instilled in him a love of German

literature, and he in turn taught her to appreciate Shelley's poems. Together they studied Greek and botany. In later years, when they were both twenty-six, she knew well Jan's translation of Schiller's *Das Ideal und das Leben* — and it was *she* who copied out his seventy-thousand-word book for presentation to the publisher!

After four years spent together in close friendship and study at Stellenbosch, the couple had to part. When Isie was twenty-one her beloved companion set sail from Cape Town to take up his Ebden scholarship at Christ's College, Cambridge in 1891, to study Law. It was the first of many long partings for the two of them, as Jan only returned home in the middle of 1895, after collecting all the top prizes and scholarships in his final year. By this time Isie, who was possessed of a fine intellect, was an extremely well read and educated young woman. Not only was she well versed in the classics and poetry, but she was also a fine linguist being fluent in French, German, Greek and Dutch, besides her home tongues of Afrikaans and English. She was able to quote long passages from the Bible and the classics all her life. She was blessed with an amazing photographic memory which was with her throughout her days.

Poverty dogged both Jan and Isie during their youth. Jan's scholarship at Cambridge was a mere £100 (R200) a year, and it was only largely due to the help of his friend and mentor, Professor I.J. Marais of the Theological College at Stellenbosch, that he could carry on, both financially and morally, for those four long and difficult years. Professor Marais lent him money, which Smuts repaid when he returned home.

Isie had her problems too. Besides having to endure the loneliness of four years without her soul mate, her family's poverty prevented her from studying medicine, as her parents had a large family to educate. They could not afford to indulge their daughter

Isie's whims and she had to leave College. Instead she went to teach in a small country school, where she received a pittance of a salary — £5 (R10) a month! In later years she recalled the abject misery of her dire poverty by recounting "dat as ek onverwags 'n sikkpens gekry het, was dit vir my 'n groot ding" — "It was a great event in my life if by chance I received an extra sixpence".

Jan returned to Cape Town full of plans and high hopes — to make a name for himself, and to make a quick livelihood so that he could marry his sweetheart. But his dreams were soon dashed. He was admitted to the Cape Bar, and Cape Town became his home. The source of his early livelihood was mainly from the numerous articles he wrote for the newspapers. Life certainly wasn't a bed of roses for him, and he struggled to make ends meet on the £10 a week he earned from journalism. When in 1897 his application for a lectureship at the South African College was turned down, plus the fact that he realised there was no place for him in the local political scene, he decided to leave the Cape and try his luck in the Transvaal. He was admitted to practise at the Transvaal Bar. After six months, he felt he had earned sufficient from his briefs, as well as his continued journalism and the evening classes he held in law, to be in a position to marry and support a wife.

After ten long years of courtship Jan arrived one day, unannounced at the Krige's home in Stellenbosch in April 1897, and told Isie's parents that he wished to marry their daughter the next day, as he had to return to the Transvaal immediately. No one in the Krige family was really surprised by his action, and the couple *were* married the following day without any fuss, in the "voorkamer" (drawing room) of the Krige's home by Jan's great friend, Professor Marais. They settled in Johannesburg in a house at the top of Twist Street, on Hospital Hill. Their home was humble, yet rich in love.

There was great personal happiness and sadness in the first few years of their marriage. They were a vital and attractive pair, and their main happiness was in the fact that they were together, as man and wife, at long last. Jan, a brilliant young lawyer, was doing well at the Bar, and he bought Isie a piano. The two of them spent many happy hours or an evening, playing and singing Schubert's songs. They also started to study French together, but unfortunately their idyllic life couldn't last forever, and sadness entered too soon. Within a year of their arrival in Johannesburg twins were born to them, but died within a month.

Soon after this tragedy, in June 1898, Jan at the age of twenty-eight was appointed State Attorney under President Kruger. The excitement of this news helped them over their period of grief, and they moved house too, and set up home in Pretoria. They were both jubilant over Jan's success so early in life, and Isie fussed over him, supervising his attire for the great occasion and finally

persuaded him to exchange his usual neat brown suit for a tail coat, black striped trousers and a stiff white shirt. She also rehearsed with him the part he would have to play in taking the oath of office at the swearing-in-ceremony. When Jan set off on the great day, he was wearing a grey top hat as well, and soon after the ceremony Isie decided that he would probably never have the need to wear his top hat again, so she fixed handles to it and turned it into a useful sewing basket! The Smuts couple soon became good friends with Kruger, and Jan described his relationship with the old President as that "of father and son".

A son, Jacobus Abraham (Koosie), was born to Jan and Isie in April 1899. He was a healthy baby, but their bad luck repeated itself, and he too died when he was only fourteen months old and while his father was away at War, fighting the British.

From the beginning of 1899 Jan Smuts was regarded as *the* leading political figure in the Transvaal after Kruger. This accomplishment of her husband in such a short span of time didn't turn Isie's head. On the contrary, her pride in his achievements soon turned to years of anxiety, bitterness and loneliness. For soon there was War — the Anglo-Boer War — and Jan rode away one June evening in 1900 to fight with the Boers.

If at times this biography appears to gloss over his achievements and tribulations, it is only because the story this time is intended to be more hers, than his, and the object is to highlight her life, even if it seems to fall in the shadow of that of her husband.

Before the British soldiers came to search Isie's house, after her husband's departure, she took the precaution of sewing the 200 gold sovereigns Jan had left her, into a money belt. When she saw the enemy soldiers approaching, "she dropped the belt into the boiling water of the kitchen copper". She also tore up all Jan's letters written to her, except his first, and stuffed the scraps of paper into a cushion. In spite of her anguish and anger when the British men entered her home, she still gave them fresh bread, not yet cold, from her oven.

In the third months of her separation from her husband, their baby son died. Isie had to bear her sorrow, and Jan's, alone. She sent him the news by telegram, but the message never reached him. He in turn wrote to her, but she never received any of his letters in the first twelve months of their separation. Her companions at the time were her eleven year old sister, and her friend Mrs. Ella de Wet. Lord Kitchener ordered that the three women be moved from Pretoria to Pietermaritzburg where they stayed in a small house. Isie passed her time there doing the housework, and making "comforts" such as scarves for the women interned in the camps.

Meantime she was tortured by rumours of her husband's death, and stories that he was wounded or captured. Eventually in June 1901 she received her first letter from him from Standerton. She replied a week later, and her extreme loneliness and deep devotion to him are only too apparent . . . "I have read it and reread it so often that I know almost the whole by heart, and now I shall be able to live on those loving words for the many weary weeks to come . . ."

Isie and Jan were allowed to meet and see each other for twenty-four hours in Standerton during a pause in the fighting. Isie was ill at the time and she had to spend the whole day lying down. Jan was deeply distressed by his wife's physical state, and he asked Lord Kitchener for permission to send her to Stellenbosch where her family could care for her, but his request was refused!

The privations of war, the loss of her infants and the absence of the comforting and solid presence of her husband during, this long, lonely period took their toll of Isie's health. She weighed a mere seven stone (ninety-eight pounds)! Jan was at Vereeniging as a Boer General in May/June 1902, and added to his misery of the Boer War defeat was his extreme anxiety over his wife's health. She was too ill to leave Pietermaritzburg to join him, but she accepted the fact that his duties as a General of the South African Republic had top priority. Stoically she refrained from asking him to come to her as any other wife in her state of despair might well have done!

The Peace of Vereeniging was signed, incidentally in Pretoria *not* Vereeniging, on 31st May 1902, and Jan was on the move again. He had to be in the Cape Colony for the month of June, and he went there as "plain J. C. Smuts", no longer as a Boer General. The object of his journey was to visit his former friend, T. L. Graham, acting Prime Minister, to extract a promise from him of "fair treatment for the colonial rebels".

Understandably, at this stage of her life, Isie was totally anti-British, and for many years to follow she was quite implacable in her hostility towards England and her people. She even went so far as to stick stamps deliberately upside down on her letters, so as to make the English King stand on his head. It was Lord Methuen who later convinced her that the "rooi-neks" (British) were not *all* quite as bad as she believed. He subsequently helped her to overcome her prejudice and support her husband in his lengthy effort to build *one* nation on the foundation of the *unity* of Afrikaans *and*

English-speaking South Africans. Meantime Jan also warned her that she would probably be "punished" for her bitterness, by their children marrying Englishmen. His prediction came true, in that several of their children *did* marry people who were wholly, or half English — but not before the bitterness had gradually melted away!

On his return from Cape Town, Jan stopped briefly in Pietermaritzburg to reassure himself that Isie was making progress. Isie's mind was put at rest when the doctors told him that she would be strong enough to join him in Pretoria in six weeks' time. He went ahead to Pretoria to get their home, which had been occupied by the Imperial Yeomanry throughout the War, in readiness for his wife's return.

Isie returned to Pretoria and Jan in the middle of August. For the next six years they lived happily in the same house in the suburb of Sunnyside, which had been theirs when he became Kruger's State Attorney. Their two daughters, Santa, born in August 1902, and Cato, born in December 1901, soon filled their lives with happiness again. Jan and Isie were both always particularly fond of children, their own and others, and subsequently their grandchildren. The family unit was of prime importance to them both. Their son, Japie, was born in July 1906, and another daughter Sylma was born in July two years later.

Although Jan and Isie would have preferred to have lived on a farm, they had to wait until 1908 before he found his ideal farm, Doornkloof at Irene, which was conveniently situated within easy reach of Pretoria and his work. Isie hated being uprooted and changing homes, and before they moved to Doornkloof she made Jan promise her that they would never move house again, and they never did. The actual move took place in July 1909, and the family moved in without Jan, as he was en route to Britain at the time with the delegation of the National Convention.

Isie was content to make Doornkloof and her family her complete world. She was happy and relaxed, living in the country once again. She enjoyed the fresh air, doing her housework, her laundry and ironing, knitting and sewing and caring for her children and their pets. One of her daily jobs was to fill the hollow stones at the front steps of the house with water for her husband's swarms of bees. These insects lived in hives, between the wood and galvanized-iron sections of the walls of their home, and there was a constant drone of bees in and around the house, day and night.

All the Smuts children grew up at Doornkloof which was a large rambling wood and iron house with a corrugated iron roof. Jan was always a keen farmer and here he had 2000 morgen to satisfy his wish. When they first moved in, the veld around the farm was bare, and they planted trees, thousands of them, blue-gums, pines, oaks and an avenue of planes, until their home was surrounded by beautiful trees. Jan also kept a flock of Merino sheep on the farm, both for their wool and mutton which became the family's staple diet as it was his favourite meat. He also planted maize, and kept a herd of dairy Friesland cows for milk. There was no formal garden as he and his wife preferred the veld at their doorstep so (lint they could be as close to nature as possible. Isie felt that flowers should grow naturally in a garden and not be formally planted. She was against picking the blooms for her home, and the only flowers that found their way into her house were the occasional bunches of long-lasting statice which she bought, or the bouquets which were presented to her in later life.

There were many rooms in the "Big House", as the Smuts family affectionately referred to their home. Jan and Isie had separate bedrooms as he did not like to be disturbed at night by the babies' crying. He had a small bedroom with a door leading onto a stoep, where he slept every night on an iron bedstead with a hard mattress. He had to forego this practise, for security reasons, during World War II. He also had his own study which in the years to come he filled to overflowing with his treasured books, over 5 000 of them, all of which he had read and knew the contents well. This room was his haven and refuge at *all* times, and was taboo to all visitors, friends and family alike unless invited in there by him. This included Isie, and she and her children respected his request.

Doornkloof had a particularly large living room which doubled up as a dining-room as well, with two large dining-room tables so as to seat all the family and their numerous children. Leading off the spacious entrance hall was a large sitting room kept mainly for entertaining V.I.P. visitors, such as the British Royal family and other distinguished guests.

Two more Smuts children were born at Irene — a son Jannie in August 1912, and a daughter Louis, born in November 1914. In the 'twenties another little girl, Kathleen was adopted by the Smuts couple and raised as their own child.

Isie and Jan owned a number of farms in time, including Rooikop, sixty miles north of Pretoria which was their favourite. Here Jan could really relax and unwind far away from all visitors and tensions. In their joint will, Ouma and the Oubaas bequeathed these farms to their children.

Doornkloof radiated peace and Isie made it a home of harmony and tranquillity. As the farm mellowed with age, it always remained a refuge both for Jan and his wife, even though it was always full of people and the noise of children. When Jan became a world figure, he referred to his wife as being "the real cement of the house and without her, house and family would fall to pieces, and then what would happen to me?" he asked. What greater compliment indeed could he pay her?

Isie *was* the pivot of her home and family, and her husband and children knew she was always there when they needed her most. Even when her husband became Prime Minister and an international figure, she didn't change and never sought the lime-light. Although she demanded, and received, a high standard of behaviour from her children, she was tolerant and never known to raise her voice or lose her temper with them. She radiated warmth, kindness, friendliness and gentleness at all times. She sounds like a paragon, but on the contrary she was forthright in her opinions and shrewd in her judgments. She despised ostentation, and her outstanding characteristic was her absolute unconsciousness of self. Mrs. Smuts became great because she remained true to her own self. Above all else, she was intensely loyal to the man of her choice. There were many dark hours when her husband turned to her for counsel and was rewarded with a woman's deep intuition. There were also times when her courage gave him renewed strength to carry on. She sounds like all sugar, and no spice, but she was a perfectly normal and human, being.

Only a woman of this strength and make-up could have survived and coped with the many separations from her husband in their long involved lives together. One of her greatest achievements was to become a personality in her own right, up till the end.

Isie wasn't interested in fashion as such, and she always made her own clothes, and those of her young daughters, usually in dark colours. At home at Doornkloof she usually wore an apron to match her dress, and filled its front pocket with her daily requirements such as string, a pencil, a pair of scissors, and safety pins. She was an exceedingly practical and frugal housewife, and saved every empty box, piece of string and wrapping paper for future use. She was casual but extremely neat and tidy in her attire, and she always wore black stockings and sensible flat, black shoes. Isie never wore a hat not even in the heat of a summer's day, but she kept a white panama for "emergencies", such as a funeral or a wedding, when she knew it was expected of her to wear one. She had a mop of curly short hair which she always washed, and cut herself in front of a mirror.

Neither birthdays nor Christmas were days of importance in her life, nor did she make a fuss of these events in her children's lives. She was a religious woman though not a frequent churchgoer, and both she and her husband were true Christians, practising Christianity in its sincerest form. Neither she nor Jan ever smoked, and they were teetotal all their lives.

After Union in 1910, Botha was Prime Minister and he made Jan Smuts his Minister of Finance and Colonial Secretary. With the advent of World War I, their lives changed drastically and Jan was away from home for long periods at a stretch. He was away from home for three-and-a-half years between 1916 and 1919. First on military service in East Africa, and then when the British Prime Minister offered him the unusual honour of a seat in the British War Cabinet, he accepted and went to London. While he was there, Botha asked him to stay on in Britain as South Africa's representative at an Imperial War Cabinet Conference in London. After armistice he worked out the original plans for the formation of the League of Nations, and then went to Paris where he was a signatory at the Treaty of Versailles.

During this period she did a first class job for soldiers' comforts, and worked in the military hospitals at Roberts Heights, near Pretoria. She bore her loneliness stoically and uncomplainingly. With her resigned philosophy, she turned to her friend Louis Botha and said "altyd vir die beste!" ("Everything is for the best!"). But she didn't waste her spare time in brooding. When not involved in war relief work or household duties, she wrote frequent long letters to her husband, and she studied the Greek and German literature which she still found so enjoyable and stimulating. She also found time to read modern works as well.

One of her other self-appointed and time-consuming jobs, her real labour of love, was one which she referred to as her "plakking" — the cutting out of every single newspaper report,

cartoon or speech referring to her husband wherever he was. These she personally pasted into large "scrap books". When the rest of the family had retired at night, she would bring out her newspaper clippings and the latest album, and work on them frequently until the early hours of the morning. Over the years she accumulated many dozens of such books, and ultimately on the eve of her eightieth birthday she finished the last page of her record of the "Oubaas" which she had faithfully kept over their life time. By this time she had filled *160 albums* of press cuttings, which are preserved today in the State Archives.

Within three weeks of Jan's return home in 1919, his great friend Louis Botha died, and the Oubaas was asked to take over the position of Prime Minister of the country. After Botha's death (August 1919), Jan wrote to Isie from Cape Town... "May I have the strength and courage to do the work. *Your help and belief* in my star will help me greatly on the long travelled road." He faced Parliament for the first time as Prime Minister on 6th September 1919, and he held this top position until 1924. Added to his load was the fact that he also held the portfolios of Minister of Defence and Minister of Native Affairs.

As Premier of the country, from 1919 Smuts felt it was his duty to be in Parliament on *every* day of *every* session. Understandably he was nearly always away from his home and family for those years. At times he became homesick and missed Isie and his children acutely. It was seldom that he could stay at Doornkloof for more than a few days at a time. He thought it "a wonderful thing" when on one unique occasion Isie was able to join him, and stay with him in Cape Town for a period of seven continuous weeks during a Parliamentary session. He reflected then, that in the twenty-four years of their married life "they had scarcely ever had so long a time together". Isie and Jan were both prolific letter-writers, and they eased their longing for one another over their many periods of separation, by writing frequently, and at length, when apart.

Jan travelled abroad frequently as well, and on his own as Isie disliked ship travel. He attended the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, and in the years between 1924 and 1933, when he was "out of power" and no longer Prime Minister, he was still active politically (head of the S.A. Party and the Opposition) and he also went overseas on extensive lecture tours both of Britain and North America.

At the beginning of 1933 the Coalition Government was formed, and Smuts accepted office under General Hertzog as Minister of Justice, ultimately becoming Deputy Prime Minister.

Isie was also involved in politics primarily because she was involved in her husband's life, and she made platform speeches at meetings of the Women's South African Party. She never accompanied the Oubaas on his overseas trips, but with the advent of air travel she ventured beyond the borders of the Union of South Africa. In 1936 she and her husband were the chief guests of an American visitor who chartered a South African Airways plane to take a party to Rhodesia.

In August 1939, Isie was officially appointed president of the Witwatersrand Women's Council of the United Party, which body later proved itself an invaluable backing for the war work in which Ouma was soon to be involved.

When War was declared on 3rd September 1939, the Cabinet met to discuss South Africa's immediate future. Six members voted for Hertzog and neutrality, and seven were for Smuts and active participation in the War. When the final debate took place in the House of Assembly Smuts won by thirteen votes. General Hertzog resigned his leadership of the country, and on the 6th September the Governor-General invited Smuts to form a new government. Once more he was Prime Minister of South Africa, as well as Commander in Chief of the South African forces.

Isie now came into her own, not only as "first lady", but for the wonderful war work she did. She was now known as "Ouma" throughout the land, and became the best loved and best known woman in South Africa, in fact in the Commonwealth! She became the inspiring influence behind the women's war effort on the home front, as well as the beloved patron of the men and women of the U.D.F. (Union Defence Forces). She addressed countless recruiting rallies for men and women all over the Union during the War years, and she lent her name to numerous efforts to raise funds for the welfare of the South African troops.

Life changed now at Doornkloof too. No longer was the farm house the quiet, peaceful home of yesteryear. Important visitors came and went regularly, and there was a police guard around the house. The Oubaas had to have a security guard with him always wherever he went,

The Prime Minister had two official residences, Groote Schuur, the Dutch gabled house in Cape Town, and Libertas in Pretoria. Isie and Jan were the first occupants of Libertas, and it was she who gave it its official name, after her old family farm "Klein Libertas", in Stellenbosch. Isie was adamant in her refusal to move from Doornkloof, except for official occasions. She hated the moves to Cape Town when she accompanied her husband for Parliamentary sessions, and had to take up

residence at Groote Schuur for four to five months at a time. She didn't like living at the Cape, and she made it quite clear that "the mountains close in on me and I cannot breathe. Give me the dear old Transvaal with its wide open spaces every time."

One evening at dinner, General Smuts asked his wife in her seventy-first year if she would undertake the task of organising the "Gifts and Comforts Fund" for South Africa's forces Up North (North Africa). Ouma accepted the position graciously, and was always aware of the honour bestowed upon her to be the Organisation's National President. She was always the spirit and the brain behind it, and she referred to the fund as "my baby".

In many ways Isie now became the link between her husband and his people, for she had the blessed gift of approach to ordinary people. Although she disliked the glare of publicity, her profound sense of loyalty and duty to her husband and country now thrust her into the spotlight of public life, and this she accepted. When she addressed rallies she came across more as a conversationalist than an orator, as she liked plain speech. In a typical address of hers, made in 1942 when she inaugurated a Women's branch of the United Party at Pretoria West, she said . . . "We would like to supply each of the boys and girls white and black, because the non-Europeans are doing excellent work and we must not forget them — with comforts every month. We want 60,000 pairs of socks every month. Gifts and comforts are not a luxury but a necessity. They keep up morale, and our men and girls know that they are not forgotten." All the Smuts children "joined up" at different stages of the War, and eventually they were all in khaki uniform.

During the War years Ouma became revitalised and was one of the most active women in the country. She instigated weekly morning sewing and knitting meetings which were attended by hundreds of women from all walks of life, either at Libertas when she was in residence in the Transvaal, or at Groote Schuur when she was at the Cape. Isie herself was never without her khaki wool and needles, knitting for the troops. She seemed tireless and inspired much younger women to emulate her and collect funds and gifts for S.A. troops. These gifts and comforts included not only knitted garments, but toiletries, sweets, stationery and everyday necessities such as safety pins, string, scissors and needle thread etc., essential items which people at home just took for granted.

To show how very human, natural and lovable she really was, Isie confessed during the war to "being tremendously proud of, and sometimes a little awed by her husband, with his impatience to climb mountains; his contempt for ignorance; his cold, analytical mind, and his occasional but devastating cynicism!"

During these War torn years the Smuts' played host to the beautiful Crown Princess Frederika of Greece, who came out to South Africa with her family to seek refuge here. They stayed with the Smuts family for a few months at Groote Schuur. Ouma who always adored children made no exception of the young Greek children. She was not jealous of the time her husband spent with the young Princess, teaching and showing her his beloved country, and she formed a genuine affection towards Frederika whom she always referred to, or addressed as, "dear little princess".

In May 1941 Ouma was the first civilian to be allowed to make a trip in a captured enemy aeroplane when she and seven of her grandchildren were taken for a flight over Pretoria in a three-engine Caproni bomber.

That was the year too that her husband became a Field-Marshal in His Majesty's Forces. In his own modest way too, he didn't 'phone or rush home to tell Isie and his family about his new honour. Instead, he sat quietly and impassively with them, listening as usual to the six o'clock evening news-service on the radio, so that they could enjoy the surprise when this item of news was announced over the air. Ouma quite naturally was overjoyed, and Smuts just smiled, for he had received the news at lunchtime.

Isie accompanied Jan on a couple of his trips to Egypt to visit the S.A. Forces. They flew to Cairo where Ouma went to visit "her boys and girls" as she referred to the S.A. men and women on active service. By then she was virtually every South African soldier's pin-up grandmother and she was given a tumultuous royal welcome wherever she went. She visited troops in the desert, in the camps and in military hospitals. They all loved her not only for her warmth and naturalness, but also because they all recognised the wonderful work she had done for their benefit on the home front. She became so popular "Up North", that the men referred to their brandy ration as "Ouma's Stuka juice", while the Africa Star Ribbon (issued to S.A. troops prepared to serve anywhere in Africa) became popularly known as "Ouma's Garter" — which delighted her.

In July 1942, for the first time in South African military history, "wings" were presented to air pupils at Waterkloof air station by a woman, Mrs. Smuts, who performed the ceremony and took the salute.

All this physical activity finally caught up with Isie, for she never spared herself, and by this time she really was an old lady of seventy-two. She had a mild stroke towards the end of December 1942, from which she fortunately made a speedy recovery, but nevertheless she remained frail. On the advice of her physician and her family, she agreed to "slow down", and rest and relax more.

At the summer graduation ceremony of the University of the Witwatersrand, in March 1943, Isie Smuts received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws in recognition of her great services to South Africa. Her family and the Oubaas sat proudly in the hall and listened to the citation, in which it said . . . "Both in public and in her home Mrs. Smuts has given the most devoted and unselfish service to the interests of her country . . . Her leadership in the vast and complex undertakings of our war charities has been an inspiration to tens of thousands of war workers. Her keen and personal interest in the welfare of our soldiers has won her the deep and enduring affection of the men and women in our forces.

"Her services to her country, as the Prime Minister's partner are incalculable. Despite the heavy burden of public duties which she has undertaken, she has fulfilled happily and completely the responsibilities of her home and family. Her helpful and understanding companionship has been an important influence in her husband's life and achievements.

"To pay tribute to her own great services to her country and to mark her part in the partnership with her husband, who was the first Honorary Graduate of this University, it is proposed that the degree of Doctor of Laws be conferred upon Mrs. J. C. Smuts."

Field-Marshal Smuts was successful in his next General Election in 1943, and he remained in office as Prime Minister for the following five years.

On Ouma's seventy-fourth birthday in 1944, she was given a unique and exciting "surprise party" in the form of an international radio broadcast. This broadcast took place just before Christmas, and many famous English and American stars in the world of entertainment took part, and paid homage to Ouma as she "listened in" on her radio at Doornkloof. S.A. troops all over the world, particularly in North Africa and Italy, and the nation at home "listened in" to the broadcast too, as stars such as Dame Sybil Thorndike, Noel Coward, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope sent Ouma birthday greetings from Hollywood and paid tribute to her and her war effort. The programme ended with a special surprise message from the "Oubaas". This programme was a wonderful boost for "The Gifts and Comforts Fund", and it was responsible for thousands of listeners contributing to it. In fact this "party" brought in thousands of pounds.

When the war ended in 1945, the Oubaas had been in office continuously for twelve years. Through her own strenuous efforts Isie herself had become a "war casualty", and for a number of years afterwards she was ill and unable to take an active part in her husband's busy public life, or in the many outside interests which she had built up for herself.

In 1947 the British Royal family visited South Africa – the King and Queen, and two princesses, Elizabeth (the present Queen) and Margaret. Ouma wasn't strong enough to go to Cape Town for all the welcoming ceremonies, and when the Queen insisted that she and her family must all visit Mrs. Smuts at her home at Doornkloof, (which they did) Smuts replied: "A Queen, visiting a Queen."

General Smuts lost his seat in his last General Election in May 1948, but he refused to retire from politics, and instead he accepted the offer of Charles Clark's seat in Pretoria East, and three months later he was back in his old seat on the front Opposition bench. It was a black year for Ouma and the Oubaas, for in October their elder son, Japie, died suddenly at the age of forty-two. Ouma was "quiet and calm" in her grief, in fact too much so, and she caused her family great anxiety. In April 1950 the Smuts couple celebrated fifty-three years of marriage, and the Oubaas reflected on their long partnership — "Our life together like the lives of so many other people, has been an interweaving of tragedy and comedy, of good and evil, yet withal well worth living."

A month later South Africa celebrated his eightieth birthday, and honoured him as he received the freedom of the City of Johannesburg, and attended state banquets in Johannesburg and Pretoria. Those were his last public appearances. Five days later he suffered a coronary thrombosis and was confined to bed at Doornkloof for most of the remaining fifteen weeks of his life, where he spent his last days with his wife and family.

During this time of sadness and strain, Ouma still went about her daily household duties in her usual way, knowing full well that her husband's days were numbered. He went for his last drive with her on Monday September 11th, the day he died. After dinner that evening he retired to bed "where he collapsed on his bed and in the presence of Ouma and members of the family, passed quietly on".

On receiving the news by 'phone, his physician, Professor G. A. Elliott, drove out immediately to Doornkloof and found Ouma waiting for him alone, on her own instructions, to meet him at the top of the steps leading to the front door. Professor Elliott said: "She was standing under a single, rather dim electric light, for, she said to me later, she feared she might break down and that was unthinkable, particularly in front of her family, for was she not now the head of the family, and who-

ever heard of the head of the Smuts family breaking down?" She asked Professor Elliott to accompany her to go and say "good bye" to the Oubaas in case she did break down. Smuts lay in his military uniform, and quietly she said: "Dag, Pappa! Slaap gerus. Tot siens."

After a state funeral on 15th September, which Ouma did not attend because of her physical and emotional debility, the Oubaas was laid to rest. Later, however, Isie did attend a private family farewell gathering, when Smuts' ashes were scattered at the memorial monolith on a koppie, behind his beloved Doornkloof.

In the following period of the family's great grief, Ouma, as always, was their pillar of strength. She found the time too, to answer personally most of the mounds of letters of condolence, in her own beautiful handwriting. She spent the rest of her days quietly at Doornkloof, devoting her time to her children and grandchildren.

Ouma died three-and-a-half years later, on Thursday, February 25th, 1954, at the age of 83. On that last evening her daughter, Dr. Louis Smuts (Mrs. McIldowie) and Professor Elliott had planned to have supper with her at Doornkloof. But just before they arrived she had retired to her bedroom as she was feeling ill. When her daughter and physician entered her bedroom they found her in the throes of a heart attack which mercifully was short, and she died in a matter of minutes.

On Monday 1st March 1954, 2 000 mourners stood in the pouring rain at the Braamfontein Crematorium in Johannesburg, to pay their last tribute to Ouma. One thousand ex-service men and women, War Veterans, formed her last Guard of Honour. That morning there had been a funeral service in the Groote Kerk in Pretoria, and the cortege drove through the streets of the Capital, and then carried on by road from Pretoria to Johannesburg.

Her family respected Ouma's dislike of white flowers, and the wreaths were all of brightly coloured blooms. These floral tributes, sent by friends and admirers living all over the world, were laid outside the chapel to form the word "OUMA". One such wreath bore the inscription "From Winston and Clementine Churchill".

Inter Ouma's ashes were also scattered on the monolith at "Koppie Smuts" to mingle with those of her beloved husband.

In time the homestead at Doornkloof, and some twenty-five morgen of adjoining ground was purchased by the War Veterans Association. These ex-servicemen voluntarily maintained the house, which was open to the public, and kept it in good repair.

The big house was proclaimed a National Monument on the 24th May 1970, the Oubaas' birthday, 100 years after he was born!