

ROUS, Graham Cole

Graham ROUS | 30 October 1905 - 24 January 1981

GRAHAM COLE³ ROUS (JAMES COLE², JAMES COOPER¹) was born on 30 October 1905 in Riverside, Transvaal, South Africa and died on 24 January 1981 in Stradbroke Farm, Middelburg, South Africa. He married JOAN BEDFORD VISSER. She was born on 29 March 1910 in Middelburg, South Africa and died on 21 August 1997 in Middelburg, South Africa.

Graham was the son of ANNA LOUISE⁶ FLEMMER (CHRISTIAN LUDVIG⁵) and was born on 28 January 1874 in Cradock, South Africa and died on 22 February 1941 in Frances Street, Observatory, Johannesburg, South Africa. Anna Louise married JAMES COLE ROUS on 26 March 1902 in the DRC, Cradock, South Africa, son of JAMES ROUS and ALIXA COLE. He was born on 25 April 1874 in Pretoria, South Africa and died on 9 May 1931 in Middelburg, South Africa.

Graham Rous was born one of a twin (Leslie) on 30 October 1905 in the Transvaal, on a farm called Riverside, Witbank, to Anna Louise Flemmer and James Cole Rous (Jim). Graham failed matric and went to farm on Stradbroke, while Leslie went to Grootfontein Agricultural College to study farming. Graham often said he grew up with curses, cuffs and kicks and that though he had great respect for his father there was no real sense of love. His father was known to be quick tempered and irritable but was a self made man with a great sense of integrity.

Graham met Joan Bedford Visser (born 29 March 1910), whose father was Chairman of the United Party, during the 1929 General Elections. Joan was the daughter of Elizabeth Gertbrechter Christina Bedford (born 25 August 1877, married 1897, died 1969) and Johnny Visser (born 17 July 1873, died 1947) who farmed at Middlewater. Later that year she sailed for England to study Physical Education at Dartford. During that time she recalls getting two to three letters a year from Graham as well as a telegram she received on her return to South Africa welcoming her home. Three weeks after her return on the 30th of August 1932 Graham proposed to her at the top of number eight camp on Stradbroke farm. Joan had never considered herself "marriage material" as she was deaf. When he proposed she reminded him that her deafness would only get worse. He said he would help her with her deafness if she would help him with his irritability and quick temper! Joan says they stuck to their bargain throughout their married life and he never got irritated with her and her inability to hear. She said that he became particularly irritable after he developed heart problems in 1951 but after he gave his life to Christ in 1975 he was no longer as quick tempered and seemed to soften visibly.

In the same year the national road was built through Witkraansnek (1939) requiring 900 workers, it was also the year Graham signed up and joined the war and Hannah came to the farm to help Joan. Joan ran the farm spending most of her time on horseback with Jolyon on the front of her saddle. She recalls how they made their own soap using burnt asboss as lye, mixing this with fat and pouring it into cups to form cakes of soap. She also made their own coffee, eiderdowns, raisins and dried fruit, vinegar and candles. She would slaughter a pig and smoke it up near the fountain thus ensuring they had bacon, hams and sausages. Hanneport and Walton cross grapes were grown, harvested, dipped in caustic soda to crack the skins and then placed on wire racks to dry. Once dry they were washed before being packed away as raisins.

Graham fought with the DMR and obtained the rank of Sergeant. He was involved in the Battle of El Alamein and loved to tell of the many incidents up North. One legacy he did leave was that of storytelling. To this day his Grandchildren and Great-Grandchildren have copies of the letters and stories he wrote while in the desert, the most loved of all being "Squat John". Joan had written to Senator Conroy and asked for Graham to be returned to South Africa as he had a family of 3 and an enormous farm to run. One afternoon while reading to the story of Professor Flusterwuffel to Jolyon, he asked, "Mommy, you say Jesus looks after us and can do anything". "Yes", answered Joan. "Then can't he send my daddy home?" He jumped off the bed, put his hands together and prayed "Please God send my daddy home". Three weeks later Joan got a letter to say Graham's discharge papers had gone through. He returned on New Years Day 1943 and was met by Joan and the children at Tafelberg Station.

The staff all dressed up and stood to shake Graham's hand when he arrived on the farm. He greeted them and simply started handing out one pound. Joan says she was so shocked and wanted to join the end of the queue with hands open wide. Joan recalls that Graham was very irresponsible with money during the first few months; he could not apply himself and would go up to the fountain with quarts of beer and drink with the staff and talk about the war while she continued to run the farm. (Today we would say he had severe post traumatic stress syndrome). He gradually settled down and became involved with the staff and the farm and also helped other farmer's wives with their farming. Of the men that went North Graham and Charles Trollop were the only ones to come back early, the other 61 that survived the war were all Prisoners of War.

In 1951 while in Port Elizabeth selling wool Graham complained of indigestion nausea and vomiting and went to see

Dr Finnermore. He was admitted immediately to St. Joseph's Hospital for a heart condition and was hospitalised for two months, not even being allowed to turn the pages of a book! His dear pipe was also taken away: "He must never even see one of these again," he was told by the doctor. Joan had to go back to Stradbroke alone and Don, who was then 18, came back to farm. After that Graham's health was never the same. Every two years he seems to suffer a coronary and had one major heart attack and 8 minor ones in varying degrees of severity between 1951 and 1968 when Joan began feeding him raw onion and apricot kernels (that us grandchildren spend many a holiday picking up and shelling I might add!)

Graham was also a successful sheep farmer and took part in many shows. His most successful ram was Ben who won many a prize. He was also passionate about sheepdogs and had sheepdogs all his life. His favourite was Molly whom he had when he farmed Bonnevale, an 8000 morgen farm. It was so large that he had to ride everywhere and so trained Molly to stand on the horses back braced against his back, and this is how the two of them farmed. This ensured that she was fresh and her feet were not sore and tired when he needed her to round up the sheep.

In 1961 Graham, Billy Kingwill, Con and Chippa Kingwill set up the Sheepdog Association of South Africa. They hosted the first trials in 1963 and Mr. McIntyre from Australia judged these. Graham judged with him but when McIntyre took ill Graham had to finish the judging alone. After this was considered a senior judge and judged many trials. Joan also got her judges ticket and judged with him on many occasions, later judging the Provinces of the Eastern and Western Cape and various clubs on her own, since he was often ill.

Graham dreaded dying and prayed that God would take him quickly and quietly. On 24 January 1981 Graham got up as usual at 5 a.m. Just as the sun would touch the kranses of Tafelberg Mountain he would go up to the milking shed to meet the staff and see that they were organised, then would come home for a cup of coffee and breakfast with Joan. That particular morning Joan fell asleep after he had gone and woke up with him crawling into bed with her.

"We are always in a hurry" he said. "We must make more time to be together." They got up and went to have coffee and their quiet time and Bible reading in the sunroom. He prayed "Lord you've left us with so many mysteries, so much I want to know that you haven't told us". As he pulled Joan up out of the chair she said to him "If we knew everything there would be no need for faith" and they both laughed.

They looked at each other through their bifocals and Graham said "Isn't it bloody to get old. I think you are the most dependable person I have ever known". He then walked up to check the separator at the milking sheds. The staff say he came in and said "Wie is dit? Dit is nie een van osn volk nie. Help my Piet" and fell back into Piet's arms. Stuurman then sent for Joan and held him. When Joan got there he was unconscious and she started to massage his heart when she suddenly remembered his prayer to be taken quickly and quietly. She stopped and simply held him in her arms until he had died.

Graham once said, "When I die one day I don't want to be exalted from the pulpit. Give God the glory". At the funeral Adrian Green, the minister, recalled him as being a man of integrity who showed the same face to everybody.

In his will he stated "Regarding my burial place, I want to stay on Stradbroke and choose Meerkatvlak Camp. The site at the foot of the koppies overlooking the Red Land. I have shown some of the place. No high class tombstone, just an upright 'Ysterklip' please".

He was buried on Stradbroke on Meerkatvlaktes overlooking the expanse of rooigrass with a large ysterklip as a headstone, just as he had requested.

Joan left the farm later that year and lived in Middelberg until her death on 21 August 1997. She is buried alongside him amongst the Karoo bushes, rooigras and ysterklip that they both loved so much.