

FLEMMER, John 'Jack' Sweet Distin

John 'Jack' FLEMMER | 15 Jan 1905 - 1980

JOHN SWEET DISTIN⁷ FLEMMER (JOHN DISTIN⁶, CHRISTIAN LUDVIG⁵) was born on 15 January 1905 and died 1980. He married MURIEL BENTALL. She was born on 6 May 1902 and died on 15 March 1994 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The J S D Flemmer Branch of the Flemmer Family Tree
By Joan Olive Geysler

A short family history written by Joan Olive Geysler nee Flemmer.....sent to me (Ludvig) shortly after Maurine passed away and Joan requested that I add to this history facts and anecdotes as I saw them.....and pertaining to the John Sweet Distin Flemmer's in particular.

Joan's book reads as follows:- "John Sweet Distin & Muriel Flemmer were born on the 16th January 1905 & the 6th May 1902 respectively... Muriel being the eldest of the couple.

"My grandfather, John Distin Flemmer (Jack)....brother of The Little Dane - Louie, was born in 1872 & had seven brothers & sisters. The children grew up on a large farm in the Cradock district where they all worked very hard. Later in life John Distin (Jack Snr) left to work on the Rand Mines on the Witwatersrand. ERPM in Boksburg....LF thinks... and married Maud Croxford in 1899.

John Distin & Maud Flemmer had seven children:- Madge, Doris, John (Jack Jnr), Ludvig (Lollie), Neville (Nick), Gwenneth (Gwen) & Barbara (Bobby). The twins, Ludvig & John or "Lollie & Jack" were born in Morekwen, Bechuanaland...(Botswana now). The family were sheep farming but this area was too hot and the grass too long for good sheep farming. When Jack contracted Polio at the age of 4, the family returned to the Rand to be near to doctors etc. Later the family bought the farm Schoongezicht ...east of Klipriver and Henley-on-Klip. Jack senior died in 1920 at Schoongezicht. Maud then moved to Johannesburg and lived in Yeoville with her seven children.

In 1928 Ludvig & Neville immigrated to Kenya to join Madge who was staying with Marius & Salvator Flemmer. Both young men did well. Lollie obtained a forest concession to cut timber for the production of charcoal for the East African Railways and later he opened a motor garage. Nick did well with Pyrethrum plants for the manufacture of insecticides. During a hunting expedition Nick was mauled by a lioness and his eldest sister Madge nursed him day and night back to health....he finally succumbed at the age of 76 in Madge's cottage on her daughters farm...near Howick South Africa.

My Dad, John Sweet Distin (Jack junior), married Muriel Bentall in 1926 and they had five children:- Maurine, Joan, Ludvig, John & Joyce. Jack was a farmer at heart and had a farm shop & butchery at Schoongezicht. During hard times Jack found work in Johannesburg and lived with his mother Maud returning week-ends to his family on the farm at Schoongezicht....riding his "free-wheel" bicycle and pressing half-way forward with his stronger leg. When the farm shop burned down...they had an Indian tenant Mohammed...Jack & Muriel moved to Johannesburg. However we eventually returned to a dairy farm at Schoongezicht when World War 2 was declared. Dad kept saying that a city was the most dangerous place to be in during wartime from the point of view of saturation bombing... and on the farm we stood a better chance. As Dad was a polio cripple with both legs badly affected he could not go to war.... but his twin brother Lollie was a Major in the East African Rifles in Kenya and did service in Burma. Dad had a dairy farm at Schoongezicht during the war. As part of his war effort Dad and Mom used to invite young airmen to the farm for a break away as their parents were in England.

Dad had to be up at 2 o'clock in the morning to see to the milking and to get it to the depot in Johannesburg on time. Weekends it was great fun riding the donkeys and feeding the calves, chickens and pigs. Ludvig was put in charge of the vegetable garden and was very proud of the quantity and quality of the produce. All done with Muriel's encouragement and Jack's support. Our visitors would return to their homes with loads of pumpkin, potatoes and greens of all descriptions. On Sunday afternoons Ludvig loved to make a batch of pancakes for the family.

We children were not happy at boarding school so chose to cycle six miles to catch the train to school. What wonderful support Ludvig got from his two sisters whenever he was involved in a fight with school friends. When a stone-throwing match broke out one afternoon after school Ludvig was struck by a stone on the head. Blood cascading down his face he was taken into the railway station waiting room in Meyerton by his two devoted sisters and doctored most anxiously with tears running down their pretty faces. So protective to their little brother, Maurine and Joan have always been quietly in the background giving me their support in all my many battles through life.

In rainy weather the sand roads on the farm were muddy and when the wind blew against us, cycling was tough going for children. We developed massive calves and thighs and Dad was proud that his children had strong muscular legs. Winters were bitterly cold and cycling to school we were smothered in balaclavas, scarves, double socks and thick sheepskin gloves to protect us from "jack frost". Near the Klip River we would stop and make a small fire from bluegum leaves to warm up for the last lap to Daleside railway station. We survived to become a pretty tough group of kids. By this time John Oliver was big enough to join us cycling to school and we used a "riem" from his bicycle to Maurine's to pull him along when he was tired or when the wind blew against us. He soon grew up strong as a horse and did his own pedalling.

Jack was an active man despite his disability, and I (Joan) remember how he taught us to cycle by giving us a push and saying "Pedale" and we finally came to a dead stop against a fence. We were taught to swim the same way. Jack wanted to ensure that his kids were well equipped for the life ahead and he spent a lot of time and petrol teaching us to drive his old Ford car. He succeeded just fine. He also was a man of culture and could recite Shakespeare and play the violin and the banjo. His vamping on the piano was sufficiently expert to enable us to enjoy singsongs and happy hours on the farm, as we did not have radios and TV to entertain ourselves with. Muriel used to see that we kept up with our homework and exercised a firm yet kindly discipline.

Sundays we climbed the hill nearby and at the top Dad always played his banjo and sang our favourite songs until lunchtime. A big roast lunch cooked by mother Muriel awaited us at home. We all still love the area in which we grew up.

I (Joan) remember my first horse ride on a neighbour's horse. The horse decided it was time to go home and bolted. As he rounded the corner at great speed I flung my arms round his neck which made him stop. Dad was on his way in the car to pick up the pieces!!! He was mightily relieved to find me shaken but not hurt. A pet kicking rooster & buffing calf ruled the roost in the farmyard. It was fun dodging them until the calf grew too big. Grandpa Bentall was a sharp shooter with Ludvig's pellet gun as he used to shoot for the pot in Basutoland where Muriel grew up. He loved animals, especially Flash our Alsatian.

Maurine remembers...

Before the war was declared in 1939, we lived in Johannesburg for five years. The Wemmer Pan & Pioneer Park were nearby and our Alsatian dog enjoyed swimming in the Pan. One day Dad took us boating on the Wemmer Pan and Flash swam after us and climbed into the boat, nearly tipping us all out.

We owned a huge oxwagon on the farm...cappy tent and all, which was drawn by eight oxen and one day we all went for a picnic at Klipriver. What fun....slow progress....so we could jump off the wagon and walk alongside picking flowers and playing. At the river while swimming we saw a snake swimming past....rather frightening as Mommy and Daddy had just got out of the water!!! This wagon was used to take us to "Nagmaal" in Heidelberg. Ludvig remembers the 1938 trek to commemorate 100 years of the Groot Trek.

On the farm we entertained our friends and neighbouring farmer's with a gramophone. We had cardboard cartoons which we could place on the turning record and this would give an amusing animation. We had running red indians and dancing skeletons and the farm kids thought this was magic!! Or Dad Jack would play the piano and sing our favourite songs so we had good fun.

Prisoners of war from Zonderwater, near Cullinan, North-east of Pretoria, worked on the farm for a year and they sang beautiful Italian songs. Mother Muriel had to include pasta and wine in their supper daily. They had to report regularly to Klipriver police station.

In Johannesburg while cycling to school the chain slipped off Maurine's bicycle and she sped out of control down a steep hill in Rosebank. Much to our relief a black man rescued her by grabbing hold of her back-satchel. On the farm Maurine also had a bad experience while cycling to school: A car passed too close and her wheels skidded on the slope of the road, landing her face first in the dust. Blood gushed and her face and body was badly grazed & bruised, especially her lips and mouth.

In Johannesburg, 9 year old Ludvig decided to make a boat out of a halved drum and was nearly drowned when it sank in the middle of the Wemmer Pan. Ludvig and 5 year old John were always exploring the Wemmer Pan area, climbing the mine dumps and digging tunnels and generally giving Mother Muriel grey hairs. One day a car in the street ran out of control, heading for our garden gate on which John was swinging. Luckily he swung the gate open when he saw the bakkie coming so he was not hurt!!!!

Ludvig remembers so well how Maurine and Joan used to keep a sharp eye on the two boys with a little of a wild streak in them.

When Ludvig was 8 years old he was very ill in the Johannesburg Children's Hospital with double pneumonia. After 7 months when there was no hope left, he was miraculously healed by the dear Lord. During Ludvig's illness, Joan had a very sore throat and was confined to bed for a time. Months later doctors diagnosed diphtheria as her throat was

scarred and she had a speech defect and had to have therapy at Wits University clinic.

Maurine was 20 when our youngest sister Joyce was born. Maurine and Joan were working in Johannesburg at the time, staying with Aunt Doris in Joubert Park. Ludvig was on the farm with Mom, Dad and John. Ludvig distinctly remembers the night Mother Muriel started getting contractions. This was a grown up experience happening.....a baby coming!!! What excitement and anxiety!!! Dad and I got the old Ford out of the garage and loaded blankets and warm clothing into the car as it was bitterly cold with an early winter starting at the end of May. We set off for Vereeniging to the maternity home and with mother Muriel letting out a cry of agony from time to time Dad could not go any faster for fear of bringing on the birth of the baby.

We got as far as the old power station at Redan, just 5 kms from Vereeniging when the old Ford decided that that was far enough!!! We looked in the engine but could not make the old car go!!! Dad was getting frantic listening to Muriel's cries. So he walked out into the roadway on his crutches and forced a car to stop and take Muriel and himself to the nursing home. I stayed in the freezing car to take care of it and to explain to anybody who wanted to know that a baby was coming!!!

When it was light Dad came back to the car and found me half frozen....but happy, saying I had a baby sister and that we had to think of a good name for her. How proud I felt at having had a hand in the birth of Joyce.

Later Ludvig left the farm to start his apprenticeship as a Telephone & Telegraph Electrician and stayed with Aunt Doris, and cousin Leslie; with Maurine and Joan in the flat in Joubert Park. Jack, Muriel, John at 12 and Joyce at a tender 1 year old left Schoongezicht for Kenya as Lollie suggested they come to Kenya and help him with his business. They returned to Schoongezicht after a year, as there was no future for them in Kenya and they missed the other three children so much.

Soon after Maurine married Frank and went to live in Durban. A year later Joan married Johnny Geysler and as they did not have children until the seventh year, Joan enjoyed sewing, walking and playing with Joyce, who was such a cute little girl.

Through the years we always had family gatherings on birthdays and Christmas, so have always been a closeknit family. Grandpa Oliver Bentall lived with us on the farm and our Uncle Oliver also lived with us for a few years, working on the farm in every way.

Jack died in 1980 aged 75 years and Muriel passed on 14 years later aged 92, leaving five children and their spouses; 12 grandchildren & 7 great grandchildren. With seven Flemmer males to carry on the Flemmer surname.... the John Flemmer surname. May we have many more "Jacks" in the pack!!!

The Ludvig Austin Dean Flemmer side of the story with requests to Peter Dean and Dennis Patrick Flemmer and their children to continue this family history, adding anecdotes & incidents as time goes marching on:-

I (Ludvig....Lu) was determined to be the farm boy who went to theB I G C I T Yand made good!!! Well I was very well equipped with determination and fine physical health....so I had a good start.

I wrote the S A Railways entrance test and succeeded in getting a job as an apprentice Telephone & Telegraph Electrician. This was a tough and lonely time in my life but I was determined that I would make the very best of it and somehow turn this knowledge I was getting into a fine advantage. It is tough growing up to manhood when your family is far away in Kenya...or even if you are at home with everybody. You see, as a young boy I did not know exactly what it was I wanted out of life apart from getting enough money to live on. A year or two later I learnt to let the daily events of work and play take their natural course without forcing things into impossible shapes etc.

Most evenings were spent in doing homework on the technical courses I had to do to qualify as a T & T Electrician. I enjoyed radio technical repairs & finally qualified enough to get a good position in the Automatic Telephone Exchange in Germiston. Apprentices had to spend 4 months of each year doing intensive theoretical training. We attended a college in Kroonstad...O F S. This college was a converted airforce base and is still used as an airstrip.

On the farm we used to have church services on the Kent Farm at Henley-on-Klip. The Anglican Minister was a Reverent Burness with a fine voice with a fascinating way of putting his point of view across. When we arrived in Johannesburg we found that Reverent Burness was the minister at the Bezuidenhout Valley Anglican Church. I lived with Dad and Mom in Troyeville so Sundays we went to Mr Burness's church in Bez Valley. I was put in charge of the church's Boys Brigade... and met every Thursday evening for fun evenings, boxing, musical sing songs and of course Boys Brigade business....drilling planning walks and camping expeditions. We also had to raise funds for the church charity organisation.

One evening I called upon the young people to help me get a dance organised.....& we would charge one pound (sterling) per couple & hold the dance in the church hall. We would hire the services of a 3 piece band and I then

delegated several young folks to do certain jobs.....Estelle was one of them!!!

Estelle has two old friends...Nick & Maureen Els...they were full of fun and always took us dancing with them. It was a regular monthly outing and we all became pretty good dancers. I later was Best Man at Nick & Maureen's wedding. I only just got to the church on time as I was on "stand-by" call-out service as a Telephone Technician and was called out to repair a line fault at Jupiter Station. As a young, unmarried, Technician on the S A R & H; my monthly salary was pretty small, so I decided to try my luck "outside" the "safe" employment of the Railways.

I joined up with a contracting firm doing electrical installations in power stations at a higher salary; but was sent to Vierfontein; in the Klerksdorp/Orkney district...a long distance from my lady-fair. Since love can not span distance very successfully. I decided to give up this job and come back to Johannesburg.

I resumed my Telephone career and felt very much better. I worked for Communication Systems of South Africa (Pty) Ltd. CSSA was a subsidiary of ATE - Automatic Telephone & Electric, Liverpool, England. I stayed 14 years and really enjoyed my career as I was placed in charge of Port Elizabeth Branch and was my own boss. After a year, I proposed to Estelle and we got married on the 21st May 1955. I was 26 years of age and felt INVINCIBLE. Peter was born on the 10th July 1956 and man-o-man I was the proudest of proud Dad's!!!

We stayed in P.E. for 2 years and paid off our furniture, which was on a 2 year Hire Purchase contract. We decided to return to Johannesburg as Estelle missed her family terribly and wept and wept for them.

So we started over again in Pretoria. Dennis Patrick Flemmer was born at the Maryfont Maternity Clinic and as the two boys grew up I enjoyed planning all sorts of things, like radio controlled boats, U - control aeroplanes and long touring holidays to all our wonderful game parks. We managed to get a used caravan from Estelle's Dad and with our Austin-A55 we travelled slowly along. We were frightened by a large bull elephant who came charging with ears flapping!! I released the clutch too quickly at full rev's and we could not get away as the wheels were spinning on the gravel roadway!!! The weight of the caravan behind was holding us back!!!! With all the noise the elephant decided to back off and leave us to recover our breaths. On another occasion the car stalled in the game reserve, so I had to get Estelle to drive while I tried to push the car to start it. It started and Estelle kept on driving and I had to run full-speed after the car, fearing that if I was left behind, I would be eaten up by a Lion!!!

I worked very hard at my job in Pretoria and pretty soon the Company CSSA was making good money. Just as I got everything organised; Plessey UK acquired all the assets of AT & E in Liverpool. This meant that the Pretoria Branch had to close down. I was moved to Johannesburg to become assistant National Sales Manager. I ended up doing all the Public Tendering work. Then I became manager of the Mine & Spares Division and spent weeks away from my family travelling around to all the Gold, Platinum and Coal Mines in South Africa.

An acquaintance, Neville Baldwin, was General Manager for AEI Henley Telecom division; and unknown to me, had intended to resign and start his own business as he had purchased a "Golden Egg" franchise in Durban. The day he left AEI Henley, I was given the opportunity to apply for the now vacant position as GM Telecom. I got the job! After 2 years I left to join STC, now owned by Bill Venter - now Dr. Bill Venter. At last we had a fully South African Telecommunications industry. STC's factory is located in Boksburg; I received a very thorough training in sales technique with important colleagues like Trevor Heunis, David Keemer, Dave Rock, Archie Kirby & Les Vijoen. Our sales target in 1976 was R1million each per annum; somehow we all achieved this enormous amount of money for the Company.

My greatest motivation to achieve this target; was my driving determination to provide my two sons with a University Education as both showed great promise at school. Strange how a man gets motivation; whenever I felt discouraged and depressed, I would give myself a "Pep" talk....."you don't owe it to yourself or your wife...but to your children." So I would pick myself up and get stuck-in and sell, sell, sell. I was very keen and successful and grew very fussy about my general appearance; my shoes had to gleam.....there is only one chance to make a first impression!

Peter was at Wits University for 2 years but decided to pursue a career in the South African army. He did well and received a commission as Lieutenant in the Heavy Artillery. Peter spent hair raising times at the front in Angola; being bombed and shot at and having all manner of close shaves. Still a daredevil, he bails out of aeroplanes and does bungy jumps off the Storms River Bridge and white-water rafting down the Victoria Falls Gorge!

Peter is a very devoted "Dad" and dotes over his daughter Aiden and son Oliver Dean. Both red headed good lookers. This is Peter's greatest motivation...."he owes it to his children" to succeed in business. Peter has his own electrical contracting concern & is now a 40% member of Telephone Installation Management cc; trading as T I M cc.(Ludvig's business). Peter is married to Laurette (nee RODE). Laurette, a highly qualified nursing sister, has done long duty in ICU's and has specialised in baby care & baby problems of a very heart-breaking nature.

Dennis has the tenacity of a Bull Dog!! Once he gets the bit between his teeth it's "goodbye nice guy" - hello strong

Brains!! Dennis also did his bit for "King & Country" and achieved an army commission as Lieutenant.. Den-Den qualified himself by correspondence education through the University of South Africa. Have you tried to study by correspondence!?!.....You have to work like a horse!! Well Dennis Patrick Flemmer is now fondly known as "Dr. D" He gained a degree Bachelor of Arts, majoring in psychology and has an extensive practice in place in Johannesburg North. Dennis has two children; Devon and Natasha, He is married to Yvonne, (nee Jeans) a qualified nursing sister who is also tough as nails in defence of her family but generally of a fine nature. Dennis is a champion archer in his spare time. Represented RSA in New Zealand and has achieved a top status as RSA's number 1 Archer. He is fond of camping and when his two children have school holidays; he closes his practice and takes them all on a camping holiday.

Today is 21st February 2001. I am very fortunate to have come through a major operation to remove a malignant tumour from my colon. Yesterday's catscan and tests proved that my surgeon did a fine job of removing this obstruction and I can continue with a happy, active life in the Telecommunication Industry. Peter Dean Flemmer will take over 100% in December 2001 and T I M cc will become his business. Selling, installing & supporting PABX telephone system to customers. We are Hymax PABX Dealers. I will retire properly at age 71.5 years of age!!

Our 4 grandchildren are doing fine. Two Flemmer Boys and two girls. Estelle and I hope to be with the Herberts over Easter, with Joan. Estelle and I will find accommodation at a nearby B & B. What a wonderful gathering of Flemmer's and relations this will be!!

Regards,
Ludvig Austin Dean Flemmer. 21/02/2001.....