



## Onderstepoort: the Ladies of Old Res

*Written by Annette Boshoff and Heloise Heyne of the Veterinary History Society of South Africa*

**Old Res was inaugurated by Sir Arnold Theiler on 14 April 1924. For a short spell in the 1950s, a portion of the southern end of the ground floor was partitioned (maybe the original spermskerm - Ed.) to house female students.**

### The story unfolds...

It is not known where the first four female graduates stayed whilst they studied at Onderstepoort. They were Joan Morice (BVSc 1927), Maud Bales (BVSvc 1946), Mavis McLoughlin (BVSc 1948) and Joan Verdurmen (BVSc 1953). However, Margaret Rose, the fifth graduate who qualified early in 1953, lodged with the Onderstepoort station master's family. Malie Smuts (BVSc 1955), the sixth female graduate had a room in the house of Prof SWJ van Rensburg and his family.

Albré de Jager (BVSc 1957), the seventh female graduate stayed in the matron's flat (south of the dining hall) for the duration of her studies. The eighth graduate was Lente Hansen (née van der Merwe) who also graduated in 1957 and lodged with Prof JD (Daan) Smit and his family in one of the staff houses on the Onderstepoort grounds to the east of Old Res.

**Lente Hansen's reminiscence of her time at Onderstepoort was told in the VetNews of June 2018.**

When Ingrid Wolleschak, arrived at Onderstepoort for her second year (the first year has always been presented at the main campus or at any of a selected few South African Universities), she and Albré stayed in the matron's flat in 1955 and 1956. Albré stayed in the bedroom with an *en suite* bathroom and Ingrid in the adjacent sitting room. This meant that Ingrid had to go through Albré's bedroom to get to the bathroom and Albré had to walk through Ingrid's 'bedroom' to exit the flat. The matron's flat was not needed at that time, because Prof Tom Adelaar was the housefather and his wife, Cornelia, was the matron. The Adelaars stayed in the houseparents' house. Then a novel plan was born. A portion of Old Res was partitioned off to accommodate some of the female students. Thus, three or four rooms and the closest bathroom at the southern end of the ground floor were freed up for the ladies to stay in Old Res. They entered their part of the residence through the door at the southern end of the building. In 1957, Ingrid (BVSc IV), Anne Lize Pienaar (then BVSc II) and Rosemarie Müller (also BVSc II) stayed in these rooms. At the end of the year, Rosemarie discontinued her studies and Anne Lize's parents moved to Pretoria North.

Anne Lize stayed with them from her third year onward. In 1958, when Ingrid was in her final year, she was joined by Ada Schmidt-Dumont and Truuske Gerdes (both BVSc II).

### ... but there is still missing information

How long were female students accommodated in Old Res? Did Ada and Truuske stay there until they qualified and if so, who joined them in the other room(s)? Could it have been Georgina Crewe, Adele Faul or Marianna Thomson who arrived at Onderstepoort in 1960? All three ladies qualified in 1963. How many rooms were set aside for female students?

When did this arrangement come to an end and the new female students of Onderstepoort had to find lodgings with staff members or the tannies of Pretoria North like Maryke Henton did?

**Maryke Henton's story was told in the VetNews issue of March this year.**

The number of female graduates remained very low until 1978. The intake increased from three in 1978 to 16 in 1979. Can one assume that the rise in female admissions in 1976 was when the '*spermskerm*' was devised in the New Res and females were again accommodated in the Onderstepoort residences?

### Ingrid Roos (née Wolleschak) BVSc 1958

Ingrid qualified at the end of 1958 as the ninth female graduate of Onderstepoort. She married her classmate, Neels Roos, the following year on 31 October. After qualifying, Ingrid joined a practice in Pietermaritzburg. When she married Neels Roos, she worked as a locum in Johannesburg and for the SPCA and later as a state veterinarian at the Allerton Laboratories until early 1962, when she and Neels returned to Pretoria. Ingrid then had the joy of being a stay-at-home mother for 17 years after the birth of their three daughters. In January 1979, the then Dean of the Onderstepoort Faculty requested Ingrid to head up the veterinary nursing course (established in 1977). In this capacity, Ingrid had a most fulfilling professional career for 15 years until her retirement.

**Dr IJ Wolleschak's article on the history of veterinary nursing in South Africa was published in the Journal of the South African Veterinary Association (2012)**

**Vol. 81, pp 71-74 available at:**

**<https://journals.jsava.aosis.co.za/index.php/jsava/article/view/107>**

Prof Neels Roos, Ingrid's husband of 65 years, was a classmate and also stayed in Old Res, from 1955 to 1958. After a short stint in private practice, he was appointed a lecturer in surgery at the Onderstepoort Faculty, where he remained until his retirement in 1995. Neels became a keen amateur ornithologist and Ingrid a proficient dendrologist.

### **Some of Ingrid's memories of the Old Res lifestyle during the 1950s**

*The path from Old Res to the Faculty was not paved yet. When it rained the turf soil became a black, sticky mass. Our mode of transport was either by bicycle or by foot. Some of us wore gumboots to class while others removed the mudguards from their bicycles and cycled at high speed. The white laboratory coats we had to wear to classes were spattered black!*

*Only a few students possessed cars in the 1950's. Whenever we wanted to attend a show in Pretoria, we had to cycle to the filling station which was situated just North of the subway leading to Pretoria North. There we could leave our bicycles and take the Pretoria North Bus to town. Homecoming was critical as the last bus out was not to be missed! Once a shower of rain caught us on our way into town. We were dressed up to attend a smart classical music concert and arrived at the venue with soggy clothes and wet hair.*

*Quite a few students enjoyed classical music. They met on a regular basis to listen to a programme on records that had been selected by one of them.*

*Each class had to organise one dance during the year and decorate the dining room for the occasion. The girlfriends came to watch rugby in the afternoon and then stayed for the dance. Some came to shower and to change into their party dress in our portioned-off part of Old Res. Some students did not have a girlfriend and had to attend dances with blind dates. Very few could dance well. To help these students a few senior students attended a Ballroom Dancing Course at Arthur Murray Studio. I was asked to go along as well so that the learners could practice the steps with me. We then taught the steps to more students at the Old Res. Most now had more confidence to go to the next dance!*

*One of the final year students, Max Bachman could play the accordion well and used to sit on the lawn in front of Old Res playing melodies that were well-known and many students joined in the singing. As I could also play the accordion I joined in the playing. One evening some students decided to serenade the Fant and Asterhof hostels at main campus. There was some surprise when a female serenader was seen amongst the men.*

*Once Lente van der Merwe (she was in the class just ahead of me and resided with Prof Smit and family) thought of entering the Ladies' relay race in the Hillcrest swimming bath. We were however only 3 ladies in Huis Onderstepoort at the time and one of them could not swim! Lente*

*invited the girlfriend of one of her classmates to join us. We were very proud to obtain second place!*

*During our 4th and final years of study, I happened to sit next to a classmate with whom it was easy to chat. In time, a fond but discreet relationship developed between us. After exams, when everybody was packing up to leave finally, he came to my room in Old Res to tell me that he had just been appointed state veterinarian in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). I suddenly became very sad and shed a few tears. He asked me what was wrong. I said I would then never see him again as I was to work in a practice in Natal. He suddenly said, "Then marry me". I did not know what to think.*

*However, in that split second, I knew I could not refuse so I said, "Yes". What a surprise we both got! We were married the following year and now look forward to celebrating our 65th wedding anniversary in October.*

*Ingrid Wolleschak, July 2024*

**Ingrid's biography, compiled by Prof. Gareth Bath and the late Dr Rudolph Bigalke, was published in the VetNews of September 2020.**

### **Rosemarie Barnard (née Müller)**

Rosemarie was born in Stettin Germany on 2 November 1936. She discontinued her studies at Onderstepoort and became a technical assistant. She married a classmate, Banie Barnard (BVSc 1958) on 21 March 1959. Banie worked as a veterinarian at the Farmers Co-op in Queenstown in 1959. He later went into private practice in Delmas and then took up an appointment at the Bacteriology Section of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute. The couple lived on a small holding in Pumulani, northern Tshwane district and raised six children.

### **Anne Lize Mordant (née Pienaar) BVSc 1961**

After graduation, Anne Lize worked as a locum in Johannesburg for a short while and then joined the Division of Veterinary Field Services as a state veterinarian in Pietermaritzburg. She was transferred to the Stellenbosch Veterinary Investigation Centre before she joined the Bacteriology Section at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute, where she established and managed the diagnostic laboratory.

In 1967, Anne Lize married David Mordant, also a veterinarian and resigned from the Institute when the couple moved to Johannesburg. They had two daughters and for several years Anne Lize concentrated on providing a loving home for them. In 1989, Anne Lize, David and a partner established an agricultural commodities business. They retired in 1998 and now live in Canada.

### **Some of Anne Lize's memories of her stay at Old Res**

*Professor Adelaar and the Dean decided to open the left wing of the old men's hostel to six ladies. Professor Adelaar was housemaster at this time and his wife was in charge of the kitchen so that we were provided with excellent food. There was one door on the left that opened outside*

facing the Adelaars' house. A security iron gate was installed and we were locked in at 10 pm every night. The other end of the passage was the bathroom and I think there was only one bath but a couple of showers and toilets.

A hardboard wall separated us from the male students. We were not allowed to go to the men's hostel but could use the telephone on the ground floor at the back of the hostel. We often used the long tiekie as it was called if we had no coins for the phone. That was a piece of wire we used to scratch the connecting end. We could also contact male students, to borrow their books if we missed lectures.

At the time Lente van der Merwe, Ingrid Wolleschak, Rosemary Muller and myself occupied the rooms. Another student, I think Doreen Labuschagne arrived later and also stayed there but she was only there for a couple of months. We were the largest class in the second year yet, namely 30 students but only 11 qualified in 1960. I qualified mid-year 1961 because I contracted Brucellosis during my final year and missed 2 months of classes. The girls ate at a separate table right at the top of the dining room. My parents moved to Pretoria North in 1957 and I left the hostel but Ada Schmidt-Dumont and Truuske Gerdes moved in and there were girls until 1963.

Anne Lize Mordant, March 2024

### **David adds the following about Anne Lize:**

Anne Lize unveiled the bronze bust of Sir Arnold Theiler (made by Coert Steynberg) in c.1960 when she was in her final year. She made her own wedding dress, and wedding hat and covered a handbag to match. A girl of many talents, then and still now.

David Mordant, July 2024

**Anne Lize's biography, compiled by Prof. Gareth Bath and the late Dr Rudolph Bigalke, was published in VetNews in September 2020.**

### **Ada Manon Alexandra Schmidt-Dumont BVSc 1961**

Ada graduated from Onderstepoort in 1961. She also obtained a BVSc Honours degree from Onderstepoort in 1981. Ada was a state veterinarian in Namibia and passed away on 27 January 2017. Dr Anna Marais, the Associate Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Namibia remembers Ada as follows:

*I knew Ada as a friend and colleague from 2004 until she died. Ada was retired by that time but worked part-time in the Namibian Veterinary Council office assisting with admin, and she and I worked there together for 11 years. Ada was passionate about the veterinary profession and her most beloved recollections were about training farmers and vets to do AI in the many short courses she offered at Neudamm Agriculture College during her time as State Vet for central Namibia. "Dis 'n groot wit bulkalfie, Dokter" from a colleague doing a PD was one of her favourite sayings. She had a great sense of humour and brought treats to the entire office every Friday 13th.*

*Ada never missed a chance to do a CPD course, never missed a veterinary association congress and was a proud member of our profession until the end. She took young colleagues under her wing and especially offered coaching and assistance to colleagues preparing for the Veterinary Council examinations. Ada was an enthusiastic member of the Windhoek Dog Club, organizer of many shows, provided vet checks for dogs travelling to shows in other countries and was a breeder of Corgis. Her dog Orcha sometimes came to the office with her.*

- Ada's dog, Highleigh Chatterbox of Vonwindecke, a Pembroke Welsh Corgi, won the first prize in the veteran category at the dog show in Windhoek in 2016.

### **Truuske Gerdes BVSc 1962**

Truuske was born on 4 December 1939 and passed away on 21 October 2022. Her parents were from The Netherlands. She graduated in 1962 and spent 18 years in a small animal private practice in Cape Town. In 1983 she joined the Virology Section of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute. She became an internationally renowned virologist based on her superior diagnostic skills on the viruses of many species. Although Truuske was a shy person she was friendly, kind and always stylishly dressed. She is fondly remembered by many an old OVI colleague for her denim jacket that was bought with her first paycheck and that she still wore when she retired in 2010.

**Truuske's obituary – VetNews (page 28).**

It seems that the Ladies of Old Res, were quite an international group, hailing from The Netherlands, Germany, Namibia and South Africa and have contributed to veterinary science in their unique ways.

**This story was sparked by an email from Dr Ingrid Wolleschak who alerted the authors to the fact that female students were housed in a portion of Old Res in 1957 and 1958.**

**If any of the readers of VetNews has information on the residences of Onderstepoort that they would like to share, please send an email to [oldres100years@gmail.com](mailto:oldres100years@gmail.com)**



Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, Onderstepoort c. 1955



The southern end of Old Res where the 'Ladies' resided



The entrance at the southern wing of Old Res



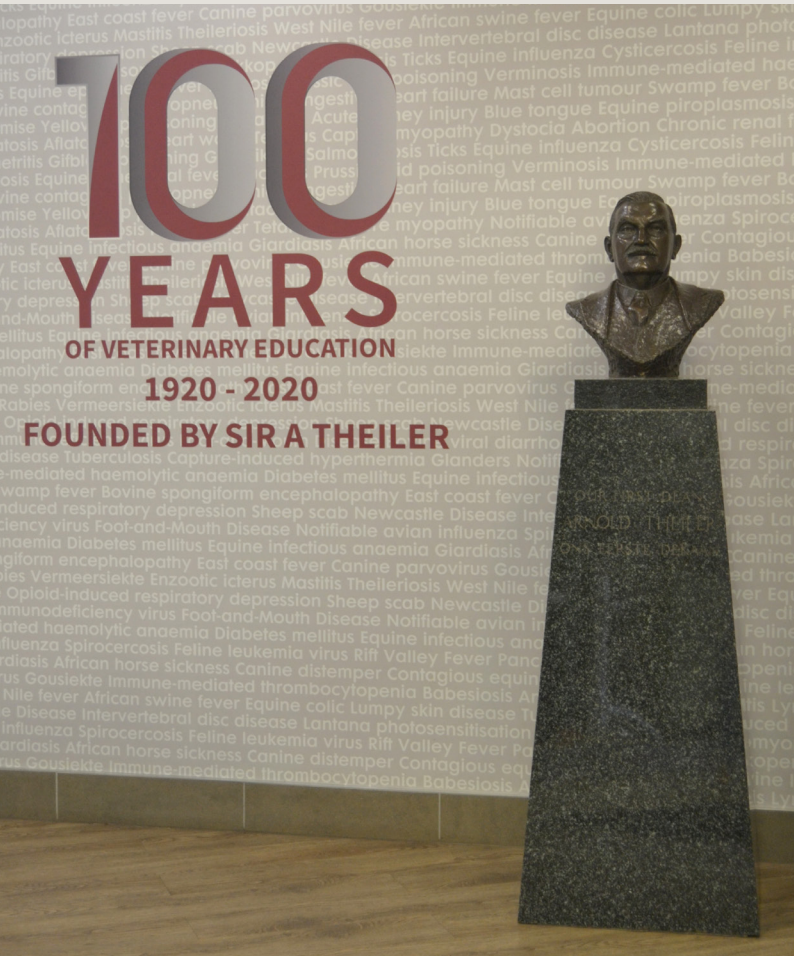
Ingrid Wolleschak and Neels Roos on their wedding day, 1959



1958 BVSc Graduandi. Ingrid Wolleschak, front centre and Neels Roos her future husband in the 2nd row, 4th from the left



1960 BVSc Graduandi. Anne Lize Pienaar, front centre



**Anne Lize Pienaar and David Mordant on their wedding day, 1967 – a la Jackie Kennedy**

**Bust of Sir Arnold Theiler donated by Coert Steynburg to the Faculty of Veterinary Science, c.1960. The bust now stands at the entrance of the Sir Arnold Building**



**« Coert Steynburg handing over the bust of Sir Arnold Theiler to Prof H O Mönning. On the right, holding a bouquet, Anne Lize Pienaar.**



**1961 BSc Graduandi. Ada Schmidt Dumont, front centre, became a State Vet in Namibia after graduation**



**1962 BSc Graduandi. Truuske Gerdes, front centre, was a renowned virologist who worked at the ARC-OVI for nearly thirty years**