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# *Chapter 5*

# *The Westes’*



## **Grandma and Grandpa Weste**

After I had been so ill with neuritis, for some reason Mum and I visited Grandma Adèle and Grandpa George Weste, staying with them in their lovely old red brick home. It was a big place on Barr-Smith Avenue, Glen Osmond, with a large garden of roses, trees and lawns in front and quite a big house garden at the back, consisting of fruit trees, some vegetables and strawberries - the memory of picking those strawberries, comes back very vividly when I pick strawberries from the bush - memories from about seventy or so years ago. During this holiday, I became quite fluent with my German.

Grandma made Röte Grutza, a red blanc-mange from mulberries. I didn't like mulberries and said so. Uncle George told me that the blanc-mange was made with red plums "did you like it?" I crumpled my nose and said "Not much". The grown ups laughed.

Uncle George sat opposite to me at the table – he had a crumpled face with twinkling brown eyes. Grandma sat very erect at one end – a black velvet ribbon around her neck with a broach on the front. Drop earrings on the end of her very long ears and her graying hair piled onto her head. A 'distant' woman. She did not like children, especially us. Behind her pinz-nez glasses her little green eyes blinked. They were calculating eyes.



*Grandma Adèle Weste*



We loved Grandpa, he understood children.

When Grandpa visited us in Renmark, he took us on long walks. He told us endless stories from Grimm's Fairy Tales. His erect carriage, goatee beard, little black velvet toque he wore over his bald head and his speech pronunciation using 'ant' for 'and', are features never to be forgotten.

At nine and ten years Betty and I were allowed to journey to Adelaide on Wormald's service car to visit our grandparents. It was a Sunday, so we drove right through, which was safer, being our first time alone.

### ***Grandpa George Weste***

Whilst there we befriended two boys, Billy Done aged 12 and Wallace Hood aged 15 - a big lad - both good looking. They came down to 'play', but unfortunately we played "mothers and fathers" and I was the baby. Grandpa caught Wallace carrying me and both boys were packed off – banished, never to return.

Next day we heard whistling issuing from the wonderful Cootamundra Wattle, in the garden, but we didn't dare acknowledge their presence. (I have grown a miserable specimen of Cootamundra Wattle as a memory). Years later, I recognized Wallace in a store, I was with Mum.

Other things come to mind. Firstly Betty and I pressing the front door bell and running away smartly when we heard Grandmas foot steps and secondly, Betty and I making a shocking din in the bedroom. Grandma flung the door

open and seeing us misbehaving, she threw up her arms in horror “Oh Gott, diese kinder are coming over the fence” translated “Oh God, these children are getting out of control. We were trampolining on the beds.

Grandma produced blocks of ‘Castille’ soap, which she grated for us to shampoo our hair. She told us we must always use this and at Mum’s instruction, rinse it with dried camomile daisy flowers to keep the hair fair in colour. Hot water was poured on the Castille soap to dissolve it and equally hot water onto the daisy flowers to produce their goodness for the rinse. We obeyed Mum’s orders until old enough and lazy enough to buy it in a bottle.

When Valerie Geneste (my one great pal), and I were Girl Guides, we were allowed to visit Adelaide to march past the Duke and Duchess of York (who became King and Queen later). We stayed with Grandma and Grandpa. All I recall is the beautiful pink and white skin of the Duchess, the noise of people and marching past as we saluted Royalty. A great experience. No memory of the Adelaide Show Grounds, or how we arrived, except a vast area and people.

One evening Valerie and I decided to give Grandma and Grandpa a concert. We sat them down near the piano. I played and Valerie sang. Grandma said something in German which I understood “sehr Dumm” - very silly. Grandpa didn’t answer.





*The Weste sisters Else (Mum), Marta, Frieda and Ilma*

## **Mum’s Brothers and Sisters - ‘The Westes’**

Else Haunchen Albertina Weste, my Mother, was the eldest of seven children. She was a wonderful mother, worked hard, intelligent, wonderful sense of humour, inclined to worry unduly like all Europeans, she was emotional and inclined to make “mountains out of mole-hills”.

Frieda (nicknamed Fid) - was next. She married Sid Stack, lived in Melbourne and rarely visited. Ian and me visited on our honeymoon, but I have no memories.

Marta, we all loved. Full of interest, she played the piano, sang, painted, was widely read and artistic. I would like her to be alive now, I could appreciate her. She married Napier McDougall with children Lucie and Dudley and lived nearby in Kulkyne St, Renmark.

Ilma, who married Ernest Snow, was the youngest and also lived in Renmark,

not far from our block, in Tarcoola Street. We passed the property en-route for school each day and visited a lot. Her children, 'Bubbles' and 'Dick' (Snow) were our constant companions.

Oscar Weste, lived in Chowilla Street. He was very German in his outlook, a loving and wonderful father, sympathetic and knowledgeable regarding agriculture. He wrote articles for the Murray Pioneer newspaper under "Nemo" – very serious man. When told something he uttered a slow soft "oh, oh, oh, mm, mm, mm. He was a dear man. He came to visit me a few days before he died. I don't remember why he came.

George Weste, twinkling eyes and a lively sense of humour, cheery crumpled face. I visited George's family for school holidays when at Woodlands. They lived in Stockport where he had a store. His wife, Aunt Millie was serious. Ian and I visited Stockport years later, no sign of shop or house.

Max Weste, we didn't know, but he appealed to me, as he could sit down at the piano and play anything – just a natural – I rather hero worshipped him. I believe he told jokes. He was blinded in one eye from a train cinder which upset me. I was very sad when Max died. Mum talked about him a lot. He was my 'fairytale' uncle, a genius in my belief, because of his ability to play anything on the piano without music. I have 'pencil painted' him in Army uniform – and did a good job!

In 1981, I organized a Weste re-union. Leason (Oscar's son) and wife Leoni Weste were a wonderful help. It was a great success. We encouraged the Weste clan to write their memoirs. Later I put the 'Tree' together as best I could with the information received, which proved quite successful. It was not as comprehensive as I would have liked, but getting information from the Hamburg Historical Society was getting too expensive. I spent about \$1,000 all told, but it was worth it as we managed to go back three generations which was great.

The family originated in Spain but fled to Holland when a King Phillip ousted the Protestants. In Holland they were Van Westen, then moving to Germany they dropped the 'Van' and became Weste (pronounced 'Vesta'). Grandma's family was French Jew, living in a castle on the Rhine. The son fell in love with the tutor, they were banished and the name changed to Timmerman.

## WESTE ANCESTRY

The colorful story of our ancestry is described by Aunt Marta in 1956 in a letter to her nephew Peter Weste, who was the second son of her brother, Oscar Weste. It reads;

103A First Ave,  
Joslin SA  
June 1<sup>st</sup> 1956

Dear Peter,

*At long last I have an opportunity to reply to your letter. Lucie (Marta's daughter) had two illnesses, after which it was my turn.*

*The matter of our ancestry, which you are so anxious to hear about is a long story and would really be more satisfactory when told verbally, but as you so seldom come to the city and your curiosity has been whetted, here is what my parents told me of our mixed blood.*

*In London, a dear old retired General, who took me for a French woman, thought the mixture wonderful and dubbed me "The Little League of Nations".*

*The old Baron Rantzan was my Mother's grandfather and had French blood in his maternal side. He eloped when young with the governess, who was Jewish and very beautiful .... but – the Governess! He was promptly disinherited and forbidden ever to use their crest and motto, so that has been lost in the mist of ages.*

*My mother's father was their only child and I always remember Mummy saying he had the most perfect manners, always entering the room with a slight bow, and never raising his voice. She adored him and inherited much of his charm of manner, if you remember her. They had no money, but I think he was in some sort of a Government job. I'm supposed to resemble him! Arched eyebrows etc and so did my little mother. He was highly artistic and musical and my mother was taken to the Hamburg Operas when very young. (In referring to the "old Baron" I mean of course, his father).*

*The disinheritance didn't seem to worry him at all, as he adored his little Jewess and his son, who really was the hereditary Baron – my Mother's father.*

*So much for the maternal history and that's all I know. But the paternal history is far more exciting and goes back to the days of Philip II of Spain - did you know you were flavored with Spanish blood? Well you are. Daddy didn't tell us a word about it all until*

*we were grown up and when I said “How tremendously interesting, why didn't you tell us years ago”? He shrugged and said “it was so many years ago” (17<sup>th</sup> century).*

*Well - it appears that one of Daddy's ancestors was a Grandee at the Court of Spain and was discovered to be a secret Protestant. On refusing to be converted to Catholicism (no wonder we hate Catholics!), he was exiled and his ancestral home burned and two of his family perished. He fled to Holland, cast of his Spanish titles (wish I knew them!) and because he came from the West, called himself plain 'van Vesten' – (Dutch for “from the West”). The next generation moved to Germany, chopped off the “van”, leaving “Vesten”, which was converted into Westen for the German “W”. The next generation then considered the “N” superfluous for some unknown reason, lopped it off, and there you have the origin of your own name Weste. Now let me tell you something amazing – Lucie was walking down Rundle St when she was a school girl at Woodlands and a man on the kerb made big surprised eyes at her and said “Spanish eh?” Of course she ignored him, but how's that for the power of heredity! I'll send you a p.c. of her at that time, but please be sure to return it Peter, as it's the only one I have.*

*The Westes fell on hard times when my Daddy was young, but his father told him the whole story. Interesting and romantic, isn't it? His father gave him all his knowledge of German and English Classics and I remember him reciting whole Cantos of Scott's “Lay of the Last Minstrel” – but he would only do it if sure of an appreciative audience. Poor dear. And my precious Mummy with her wonderful charm – both gone.*

*Now I hope this will satisfy your wish Peter. Write again when you return the photo will you!*

*I'm sorry you only felt able to send “Best Wishes” in your letter, especially as you're my favorite nephew! (I have eleven!). My affectionate regards to you both, with hopes of seeing you again before too long.*

*Your antique Auntie  
Marta*

*PS Isn't it a pity we don't know more! Oh! I nearly forgot – The name was Timmerman. My parents came out in 1879, were married in Hamburg and spent their honeymoon in England.*

**A copy of the original letter follows ....**

Photo explained on  
bottom of page 3.  
Keep in a safe place  
for returning!

103A First Ave.  
Jordin  
S.A.  
June 10th  
1956

Dear Peter,

At long last - I have an opportunity to reply to your letter. Lucie had two illnesses, after which it was my turn. The matter of our ancestry, which you are so anxious to hear about, is a long story, and would really be more satisfactory when told verbally, but as you so seldom come to the city, and your curiosity has been whetted here is what my parents told me of our mixed blood. In London a dear old retired General, who took me for a French woman, thought the mixture wonderful, & dubbed me "The Little League of Nations". The old Baron von Rantzen was my Mother's grandfather, & had French blood on his maternal side. He eloped, when young, with the Governess, who was Jewish & very beautiful, but - the Governess! He was promptly disinherited, & forbidden ever to use their last names, so

2. That has been lost in the mists of the ages. My mother's father was their only child, & I always remember Mummy saying he had the most perfect manners, always entering the room with a slight bow, & never raising his voice. She adored him, & inherited much of his charm of manner, if you remember her. They had no money, but I think he was in some kind of a Government job. I'm supposed to resemble him! Arched eye brows etc, & so did my little mother. He was highly artistic and musical, & my mother was taken to the Hamburg operas when very young. (In referring to the "old Baron" I mean of course his father.) The disinheritance didn't seem to worry him at all, as he adored his little Jewess, & his son, who really was the hereditary baron - my mother's father. So much for the maternal history, & that's all I know. But the paternal history is much more exciting, & goes back to the days of Philip II of Spain - did you know you were flavoured with Spanish blood? Well, you are. Daddy didn't tell us a word about it all until we were grown-up, & when I said "How tremendously interesting, why didn't you tell us years ago?" He shrugged, & said

P2 of Marta's letter

No wonder we hate Catholics!

it was so many years ago. (17<sup>th</sup> century)  
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 ancestors was a grandee at the Court of  
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 next-generation moved to Germany, &  
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P3 of Marta's letter

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Your antique Auntie  
Marta.

P.S. Don't it a pity we don't know more? Oh! I nearly forgot - The name was Timmerman. My parents came out in 1879, were married in Hamburg, & spent their honeymoon in England.

P4 of Marta's letter

## Auntie Marta and Napier McDougall

Auntie Marta was the family photographer and we must thank her for the record, small as it is, for the early photos. We loved auntie Marta, Mum’s sister. She sang, played the piano, painted very well, full of life, attractive and tinted the photos that she took.

Marta was particularly fond of Audrey Ogilvy who later married Tom Reid, a young Church of England curate stationed at Berri. He later became Archbishop of Adelaide and was an authority on Henry Lawson’s poetry. He subsequently died, but Audrey still lives on - N.B year 2000 she is now over

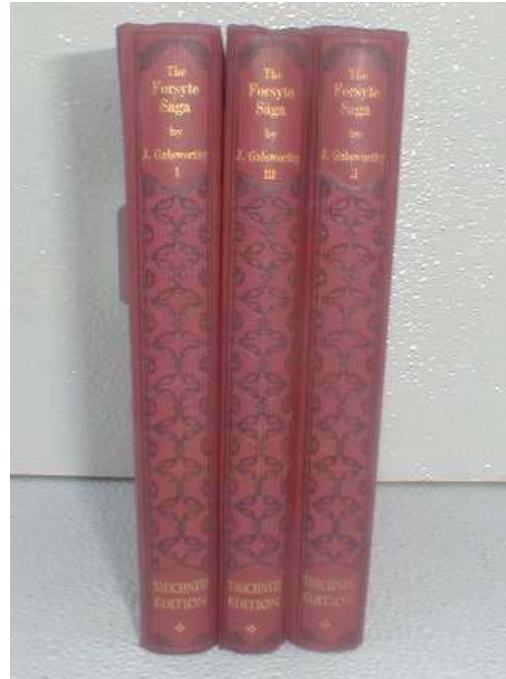


90 yrs. I can remember seeing Audrey sitting cross-legged on the couch smoking a cigarette in deep conversation with Marta. I remember wishing that I was grown up and could sit inside with the grown ups. (I just longed to be grown up, but when the time arrived I did not know that I was grown up.) We were sent outside to play. We used to visit on our way home from school and played with her children Lucie and Dudley. I clearly remember nursing Dudley as a baby, sitting on the wooden front steps leading down from a wooden verandah.

*Fée holding Lucie McDougall at Aunt Marta’s House*

Auntie Marta taught me to read good books when I was fifteen years old. The first one she lent me to read was ‘The Forsyte Saga’ by John Galsworthy - it left a lasting impression on me.

She also taught me how to darn properly. Consequently when Mum went to England in 1937 and left me to cope with Dad, Ivan, Allan, and Ian, I excelled myself with darning and patching their sox. Mum maintained that as I was about to be married - it would be beneficial for me to get some experience in cooking etc. Dad gave me a certain amount for house keeping money and I could keep what was over. There never was any over - I looked after them far too well! But that was my bad management.



*‘The Forsyte Saga’*

Auntie Marta also instructed me in the Art of delicious porridge i.e. rolled oats, or oatmeal, a dab of butter in the center to melt, brown sugar, milk to pour on. She herself made particularly delicious custard and chocolate Blanc Mange with custard powder, eggs and all rich goodies. In late Primary years, Betty and I subscribed to an English children’s magazine edited by ‘Punch’. We entered the competitions and Betty won several prizes. I won a book in one, called “Gullivers Travels”. Betty told me only recently (2002), that Auntie Marta helped her with her entry for which she won a prize.

For my sixteenth birthday Marta painted a charming girl in my autograph book, caption “sweet sixteen” and she was - charming.

For all her attributes she was a self made permanently ill with chronic indigestion, cared for by Uncle Napier, her loving English husband, who never seemed to be quite a man with slow sloppy speech.

I remember Marta calling Napier “Dear.....Dear”! Napier would grunt in reply and come trudging in. He sadly died of Parkinson’s disease on the day Ian and I announced our engagement - both announcements being in the same

“Advertiser” newspaper edition 23.12.1935. (I also remember when “The Advertiser” was a small paper called “The Register,” shaped more like a ‘big-ish’ magazine.)

Marta and Napier’s house had lovely English furniture and knick knacks from the McDougall family. It was a small house with a narrow long room, one end the sitting room and the other end a dining room with a servery (little door in the wall) into the kitchen. There were two steps leading down into the bedroom, and two more steps leading into the kitchen.

## **Josephine’s Memories of Grandmother Else**

My earliest memories of Nanah Else, was sitting on her lap in the sun, having my hair brushed. Hal and I always loved going over to her house. We were allowed to run free most of the time and there was always plenty to do.

Ron Weste was our frequent companion, and the three of us spent happy hours in the red sand hills at the back of the shed. There was a lone Quondong tree which was about as far as we would go from the house. The shed consisted of an iron roof held up by tree trunks, with a dirt floor. It held many interesting bits and pieces, many of which I later inherited when I bought Betty and Bill Brocksopp’s house. There was a large grinding wheel further up towards the house. We enjoyed sharpening things and cutting grass with it.

There was always parsley growing under a dripping tap and chooks and turkeys in a run close by, that could be chased.

The house inside was cool and dark. Close to the back door was the bathroom – painted green with a concrete floor and ‘tin’ claw footed bath. There was a ripple ‘tin’ shower screen and always a cake of ‘Lifebuoy’ soap, with its distinctive smell.

Inside the sitting room, I remember an old-fashioned phone on the wall – the type with a wind up handle and a separate hand piece. There was also a barometer, which I recently recognized at Ivan Cunningham’s and hadn’t seen since I was a child.

Nanah kept sugar lumps in a green painted tin on top of a tall meat safe and these were given out if we were good. Being war time (WW2), there were no sweets. There was a large wooden kitchen table and wood stove, which always held an enamel pot (green I think) of coffee. Percolating coffee is still one of my favourite smells.

The dining room was dark too and had war pictures on the wall, along with a Cunningham painting, which I now have also. Grandpa Frank used to sit and drum his fingers on the table. After lunch, Hal and I were made to have a rest with Nanah in her bedroom. We usually rolled around on the pink, flowery mat on the floor, with Nanah on her bed. She obviously loved rose-pink, as everything seemed to be pink in her bedroom. There was a trap-door in the pink 'lino' (linoleum) floor and Hal was allowed one day to go down into the cellar – I was “too little”, and cellars are something I have had to go into ever since. We loved the dank smell and would press our noses to an outside mosquito wire vent to smell and see inside.

Across the front of the house was an enclosed mosquito verandah with some potted palms in, I think, half drums. I don't remember any sitting room, so we were probably banned from there. (*It was a dining-sitting room – says Fée 2003*)

Nanah Else always seemed tall and straight and always seemed to be dressed in grey, mauve and purple. We felt secure and loved whenever we visited. When I was older, I was fascinated to hear her launch into fluid German when she first met a German migrant that Mum had helping in the house. I didn't know my great grandparents were German. It has been interesting to learn about them from the Weste clan re-union and to learn about part of our background.

I hope my grand-daughter has similar happy memories of me as I have of my grandmother.

*Josephine Leach 2002*

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Correspondence email: [hague@ausbrush.com](mailto:hague@ausbrush.com)