

Table Mountain by Brian Binyamin Meyer

'You can't get lost in Cape Town', Grampa tells me.

'Just look for Table Mountain', he says, 'find a road going that way, and you'll get your bearings soon enough'.

I look at him doubtfully, think for a second and then pronounce, 'but I don't get lost in Johannesburg. And there's no Table Mountain *there*'.

Grampa raises an eyebrow and considers my statement. 'That's because you were born there', he says.

'Even though you're still so young just going on 10. Like I was born in Grodno, and never got lost in all its streets and alleyways and courtyards.

'But here, aah....', he holds up both his hands, getting the attention of everyone sitting around the supper table, '*here* is a different story. Especially coming from Paarl', he says.

'When I had the fish shop and had to get to the early morning market. Forty years ago, in the '30's - can you believe that in a few days' time it will be 1971? - back then, we didn't have the fancy highways with signposts. Table Mountain became my friend';

'Aah yes, the mountain steered me true'.

'You know', he says, 'my first view of the majestic mountain was from the Gaiko, a cargo *boat*', he stresses, less concerned about the cargo than that he'd travelled down the length of Africa in a vessel so much smaller than a ship; '31 days it took us in 1927', he remembers clearly, 'and we stopped off at Walvis Bay. It wasn't very comfortable either', he says, 'not like the Kenilworth Castle your granny arrived on'.

Granny hmpfs, but her intended retort fades under Grampa's chuckle: 'There I was, at the top of the gangway and all the people on the kway och, I always say that wrong: on the key – funny English, writing it Q U A Y and then you say it like KEY ... so there I was, at the top of the gangway with all the people waiting down there and Table Mountain towering up behind the city: oy, I went so *deurmekaar* I could hardly answer the Immigrant Official's questions'.

'So nu', Granny hmpfs again, '*gevoren* a poet you are now; I saw him come down off the gangway and I said to myself, I said: **that** is the man I'm going to marry. And do you know? In all these years of marriage **and** the two before that, your grampa never went up Table Mountain! Not even once!'

'True, true', Grampa says, unapologetically, even proudly: 'I've never been up Table Mountain'.

I look at him incredulously.

'Maybe we'll go up tomorrow', Dad says. 'We've still got a week of holidays, but best not to leave it too late'.

'Talking of late', Mom looks down at her watch, 'it's time for bed.'

'Upstairs, you three', she says to us, 'so there'll be no moaning in the morning to get to Muizenberg early'.

But the weather changes overnight, and we wake the next day to grey skies and pelting rain.

Mom phones an aunt in Sea Point.

'It's pouring here in Claremont', she says, 'what's the weather like there'? She puts the phone down and turns to Dad. 'There's a south-easter blowing; Table Mountain is covered in cloud and anyway the wind's too strong for the cable cars to go up'.

Muizenberg isn't much better, so we head inland and try our luck with Franschhoek, Stellenbosch, maybe Paarl.

Two days later, under a cloudless deep blue sky, Dad parks the car as close as he can to the cable car station. We wait in the long line for tickets, then edge our way up with the crowd to the boarding platform.

'Try and get to the window when we get on', Dad tells us. As the swaying car jerks upwards and begins its climb, a photographer perched on the rocks below clicks his camera and captures our ascent in a neat black and white picture. When we come back down, Dad looks for our photograph and buys a copy.

At supper that evening I sit next to Grampa at the head of the table, hoping Granny won't tell me to move down and sit with the other kids. At a lull in the adult's conversation, I jump in and say: 'Grampa! You **have** to go up Table Mountain! It's fantastic! And it's not even flat', I announce my triumphant discovery: 'you have to jump from rock to rock!'

'Ah yes', Grampa says, 'I must go up one day'.

'Oh', I suddenly think out loud, 'maybe there wasn't a cable car in the old days'?

Granny pauses as she leans over with a plate of chopped liver garnished with grated yellow yolk and the white from hard boiled eggs, and says: 'In the **old** days when we were **young**, there **was** a cable car, but we always climbed up'!

I stare at her, skeptical, and wonder how one climbs the sheer cliff-like rock face of the mountain. As if reading my thoughts, Granny says: 'You can go up the back way. It's really a lovely hike', she explains. 'It was so much fun! We used to do it in a whole group of friends. Except for your grandfather! He would never join us! Not even once!

'And now'?

The plate hovers in the air, a few inches over the table.

'Now, we play bowls on a Sunday; no time for climbing. Will your grampa ever go up? Now that's a good question. Hhmpf. I wonder'.

She places the plate on the table, pauses again as if she's about to add a comment, then turns back to the kitchen, calling to Ellen to bring out the bread.

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A word about me:

I grew up in Johannesburg and have been living in Israel since 1985.

When I was 14, I wrote three novellas. A quarter way through the fourth, I stopped. Although I loved creative writing at school, I never followed through with those previous stories. Over the years, every now and again, I'd pen a few lines of poetry. Any other connection I have to writing, is **reading** those of others; there are so many wonderful books by very talented writers out there in the world!!

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