

‘It was the very first time I saw the sun shine through them ...’



He was over from Australia and every time he just had to have a look at the stained glass. Wim Bergen is always very welcome at De Maagd to come and see the windows made by his father: Karel Mijsbergen. When this man from Bergen op Zoom emigrated the family name changed into Bergen, “easier to pronounce for the Australians”, but the art tradition of stained glass never changed and continued over there. In the last week of 2014 Wim saw the sun shine through the windows for the very first time and it was then that he could show them in full glory to his son and daughter-in-law, who were on their honeymoon. Wim is touched by the view of his father’s name among the stained glass and with sparkling eyes he starts his family story.

“My father, Karel Mijsbergen, has made the stained glass of De Maagd in three periods, around 1936. De Maagd then was a church in which I was christened by the way. I believe it took him two months for each window. He was 30 years old and had a painting company in the Rijkebuurtstraat, where I was born. Also grandfather Mijsbergen was a painter and much later I took over my father’s painting company in Perth. Knowing that my nephew Kim had also entered the trade we can talk about four generations of painters! Unfortunately I never inherited enough of the art genes to create the stained glass as my father could, but Kim successfully continued that tradition and now has international exhibitions. I would be fantastic to give him the opportunity to see the Maagd windows, I must bring him next time!

Shortly after the stained glass windows were placed in De Maagd, World War II started. In our family it is told that my father replaced broken windows where ever he could in exchange of cheese and bread. Five years after the war he left Holland for Australia with a prefab house that he was to set up over there. One year later (I was 3 then) the rest of our family emigrated too. On my mother’s lap I

heard all those stories about my Dutch family as she read the air mail letters over and over again. In 1970 when I saw the stained glass windows in De Maagd for the first time for real I woke up in tears during the following night: the family stories had become reality. At that time I had already taken over my father's company in Australia. Karel had to take a step back due to a heart attack and now he had all the time to pick up his hobby: stained glass. Soon his work was also appreciated in Australia. When his grandson Kim Fitzpatrick came over from Canada to work in our painting company, Karel passed his skills over to him in the evenings. Kim has the feel for it and makes stained glass for various purposes: churches, lamps and so on. He also creates other forms of glass art and at this moment he has a great exhibition in Perth.

About ten years ago, shortly after his grandfather had died, Kim sent De Maagd an email from Australia. We were then connected to daily BN De Stem and I also read the interview with a photo of Kim and my father. This year it was my turn to be in that newspaper (haha) as I was spotted during the party 'Bal van Bergen'. I was there with my cousin Diny de Kok, widow of Leo de Kok whose company transformed De Maagd from church to theatre 25 years ago. Who knows, perhaps our family tie was any part of the decision to maintain the marvellous stained glass windows. Two windows had to be removed to enable the stage tower and they were placed in the Gertrudis church. Those two I never forget to visit either when I'm in Holland. My father's work makes me very proud and I'm deeply touched by his name on each window. Every time I bring other members of our family to show them and we all have an original Karel Mijnsbergen sketch in the house. Mine has Mary in the centre, it's the window in the main foyer on the right. This is why Bergen op Zoom is so special to me."

Karel Mijnsbergen passed on his skills in Australia

"Hello, my name is Kim Fitzpatrick and I am the grandson of Karel Mijnsbergen". This was the start of an email that was found in the newsletter box of De Maagd theatre more than ten years ago. Within

a month a two page article with an interview was published in BN De Stem about how the stained glass art tradition had moved from Bergen op Zoom to Perth with Karel Mijnsbergen and how he had passed on his skills to his grandson. The daily also placed a photo (the only one ever made) of Karel and his grandson Kim working together in their glass workshop. Kim has never actually seen his grandfather's windows in De Maagd himself, but he is in regular contact with his uncle Wim and is happy to add some words and nice photos to this story.

"The photo of my grandfather and me is really special, because it's the only one made of us together. It was taken in Perth, where in 1982 I became his apprentice. I was 17 then and had just arrived from Vancouver, Canada. Searching for some photos I also found a few original ones of his workshop in Bergen op Zoom where he made De Maagd windows! I had the chance to take over the stained glass tradition and with seven craftsmen we now are leaders in the stained glass market in the whole of Australia. We still use the same 'freemachine' that my grandfather brought from Holland in 1952. With love and passion I exercise my course and I'm very grateful my grandfather Karel and my uncle Wim gave me the opportunity to take over the family company. And I'm also proud of my family history and the talents that were passed on to me. I cannot wait to come (hopefully very soon) to Bergen op Zoom, meet my Dutch family and be able to admire the stained glass windows of De Maagd for the very first time with my own eyes."