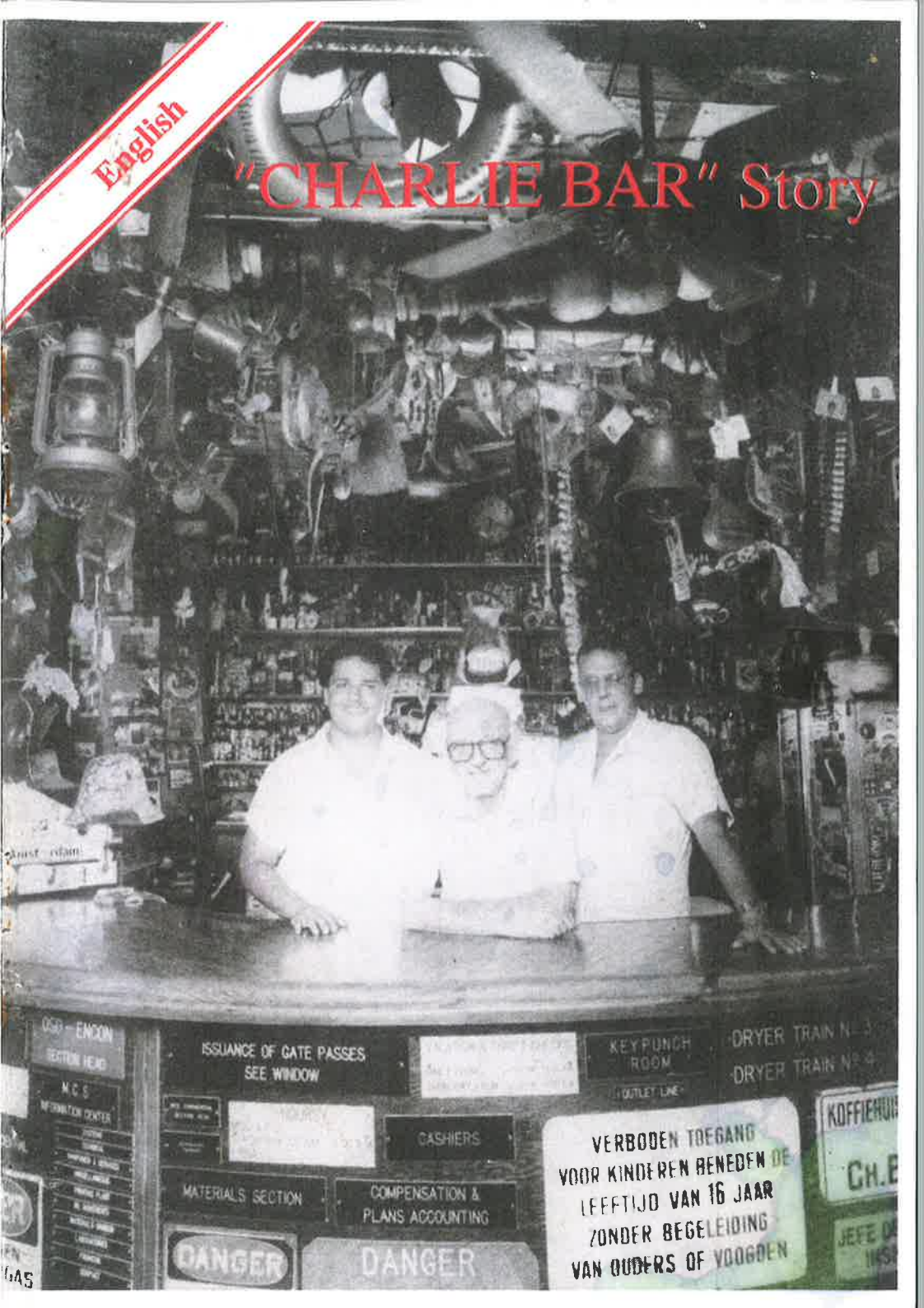


English

"CHARLIE BAR" Story



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TYPICALLY CHARLIE

In Charlie' Bar a lot of drinking took place and a great number of customers came from Oranjestad, which is about 17 kilometers away. Very often a little too much alcohol was consumed which made driving a highly risky business. Charlie became very concerned about his customers, especially if it were friends of his, so he made sure that the rule "no driving when drinking" was literally applied. Charlie would not let anybody drive away who had had too many to drink. And, he could be very strict about it. If it came from his mouth, it was just like an order. Then Charlie would not only call a taxi, but would also pay the fare. That is how Charlie was, concerned for all his customers and friends. He even forgot about it the next day. A first class, very noble gesture, as so many other things that he did.

photo: frontpage

Three generations Brouns: Charlie, Junior, Charlito

INTRODUCTION

At the end of August 1951, a man approached me at the Aruban airport, Dakota. He introduced himself as Charles Brouns from Charlie's Bar in San Nicolas and said he heard that I had been in Holland for a year. He asked me if I could keep an eye on his son, Charles Jr., who was two years younger than I. In those days a trip to Holland was no sinecure. You first had to go to Curacao in order to take the bigger plane, a DC 4. Thereafter to Havana, Montreal, Gander in New Foundland to Shannon in Ireland or Prestwick in Scotland and finally to Amsterdam. Just about 30 hours of flight. Anyhow, little Charlie was picked up in Amsterdam. He went to study at the "Bischoppelijk College" in Weert, the place of birth of Papa Brouns.

I myself returned a few years later to Aruba and was approached by Siro Pieters to write on cultural affairs for the newspaper "La Prensa". When, a few years later, I went to work for Radio Antiliana in San Nicolas, I met Charlie again. At first he did not remember me but as we talked for a while, his memory came back and I became a regular customer of Charlie's Bar. I noticed many things about this bar, for example, it was very clean and no women. Indeed, he was a rough man, but with a heart of gold and very honest. He managed the bar together with his wife Marie, a real sensitive lady and nobody could understand what Marie was doing in a place like this, Charlie such a rough fellow and Marie so civilized.

When the bar celebrated its 35th anniversary I wrote an extensive article in the "Beurs". When Charlie read it he became very excited about it and asked me then already to on occasion write the Charlie's Bar story. I had to dedicate it to all sailors in the world and especially to all Lago-workers and contractors. The official instruction I received years later from his son Junior when Charlie had already died and the business existed for 50 years. All there is left for me to say is to enjoy reading the story.

Donny Laclé

THE FIRST YEARS

It simply could not be any other way. These two people were meant for each other. Charles Brouns, born on December 15, 1915, in Weert and Marie, born on August 8, 1917, in Maasdam, next to Rotterdam. Both came from a large family, of 14 and 12 children respectively.

Poverty made Charles move from his hometown to Rotterdam to see what else life had to offer, which turned out to be not much either. When they met each other he was 18 and she was 16 and they lived just a few blocks from each other.

A friend had told him about the very beautiful girl who came to live just a few streets further. Though, it took a few days before he finally caught a glimpse of her. She lived upstairs and when he saw something beautiful shine through the curtains, he waved. Again a few days later she was getting ready to leave her home to go shopping, when suddenly he was walking beside her. Yes, he was the one who waved a few days earlier and soon they were involved in a conversation. The more he looked at her the more convinced he was that this was the girl with whom he wished to spend his life with and whom he would not give up anymore. To nobody! It seems that she had attended the school of domestic economy and was a confectioner. He was a simple clinker. Slowly the relationship became more serious. They both enjoyed dancing and that how they used their spending money.

Finally they thought about their future together, but there was not any money in order to get married. The whole world was suffering from a depression and it also became clear that in the Netherlands there was not much future for a young and energetic man like Charles Brouns.

In search for a better future

In order to earn more money he left for three months aboard a ship which left from the drydock where he worked. But it turned out to be nothing, at least not what Charles had dreamed of. Also a second boat experience failed.

He was known to be a hard worker and one day a friend told him that he was leaving for Curacao. He had signed a two-year contract with

"Pletterij Nederhorst". Charles went for it. He had to work on trial and was almost immediately contracted. Within 14 days he was on his way to his new destination.

On May 1, 1938 he started working with the Pletterij Nederhorst. It is from that time that two important developments should be remembered, not forgetting the extensive correspondence between the two lovebirds. In the first place the activities of the Pletterij became few and in the second place that Marie's brother Aart, who was in Aruba, was in need of a bartender. Marie told Aart about her fiancée being in Curacao and things started rolling. At first Charlie did not like the idea. He had never been a bartender before, but exactly one year later Charlie Brouns was in Aruba to stay.

Another problem was also the dark clouds which were forming over Europe. Resolute as he was Charlie plucked the courage and got married by proxy after a three year engagement. He had heard about getting married by proxy from a friend who had also done it.

When, in October 1939, Marie arrived in Curacao, Charlie was waiting for her on the dock.

Charles had started working for Veld Stores, who had an adjoining bar. But he really wanted to start his own business. After one year he resigned from Veld. By now the bar was known to the sailors as Charlie's Bar. But according to Charlie they were only allowed to say that when the bar was really his.

In the meantime he had met Debrot from whom he could take over a bar on the mainstreet. Meanwhile Marie arrived and he decided to call his bar Rotterdam Bar. She was a real native of Rotterdam and he through the power of circumstances, because was 'nt it in Rotterdam where he had met his great love to which there seemed to be no end and that was just as fervent as the first day?

That is when he started his daily visits to the Lieutenant Governor Isaac Wagemakers. But his petitions were turned down every time with the argument that there were already too many licenses on the Main Street. In the meantime he had an eye on an empty building on the Main Street and his trips to the Administration building became weekly. These premises used to be the Ritz Cafe owned by Adriaan Lacle. He remembered that this license had belonged to an old aunt of his. Now there was

nothing more that could keep him. From the Lago Heights club he bought some folding chairs and on September 18, 1941, Charlie's Bar was officially opened. The seamen can still remember how the Veld's Bar became first the Rotterdam Bar and then the real Charlie's Bar. A memorable moment.

Business was not going so well during wartime. But after December 1941, with the attack on Pearl Harbour and the participation of America in the war, the situation changed as if by magic.



"Charlie's Bar in far away years"

YEARS OF WAR

In spite of the years of war Golden time had started, not only for Charlie's Bar, but also for everyone else..

Somehow, though, Charlie's Bar continued attracting the seamen, which is not strange because they really felt involved in the war. The spontaneous sympathy in wartime Aruba is characterized by many factors and it is impossible to determine its priorities.

The fact that the oil refinery delivered 1/6 of the oil, that the allies used? Or the fact that an important part of the war effort took place around Charlie's Bar, where the personal administration was kept, including the donations on behalf of the seamen?

Or the attitude of the marsmanship? In short, a lot of those small things. Yes, also the birth of little Charlie in Eagle Hospital on 18th April, 1941. Charlie wanted to close the bar because of this happy occasion, but could only do so after a few rounds were drunk to the health of Junior.

Here follows an anthology of the most important happenings of those days. I just want to portray a man, whom through the years, I have come to admire. Especially his wordly wisdom, which you could easily describe in a few sentences. And the great love he felt for Marie, who would go through fire and water for him.

As mentioned before the years of the war were golden times for Charlie's Bar. One man's meat is another man's poison, so to say. Right after the attack on Pearl Harbour the Americans came to Aruba to guard the refinery. The United States were very much depending on the production of the Aruban refinery, which was necessary for the war efforts of the allied forces.

But also before that time the war did not go by unnoticed in Aruba. After the German's invasion in the Netherlands, the marines who were stationed in Aruba, were sent to England to be incorporated in the Princess Irene Brigade. Charlie was the first who went to Captain Van de Spek and asked to be sent to England to fight the "krauts" from there. Between others a home guard was established in Aruba. Everybody was called in, also Charlie. Once a week he walked with the Dutch Police, and then the bar was closed.

This was also the time of the marksmen, who were trained by sergeant Smedig. A fact is that many Arubans were introduced into the secrets of the artillery.

The urgent need of the presence of military personnel became a necessity when the Germans attacked the refinery and a torpedo landed on the shores of the Eagle Beach. Specialists from Curacao had come over to disarm the torpedo. The operation failed and five people died, one of which was Vogelzang, a very good friend of Charlie. That was in february 1942. Moreover, for years it became a tradition that after every torpedo bombardment, everybody first went to Charlie's Bar to let each other know that they were still alive, which went along with a few drinks.

Relief Action

A fact, dated from the beginning of the war, is that everybody had to hand over their spare tires. Nothing was being imported anymore and they were in desperate need of spare tires. Charlie managed to buy a second hand Nash from the Firm Neme and drove daily to the Coca Cola plant in Oranjestad to buy softdrinks and sodas. The Nash made it through till the end of the war.

Regarding the torpedoes, every time on hit the target, a relief action was organized, and not seldom from Charlie's Bar. The victims had lost all belongings and were literally covered with oil. The relief action consisted of providing the victims with T-shirts, slippers, toothpaste etc. Across from Charlie's Bar there was a store "Esquire" belonging to Jet Engers, who had everything in stock. Name it, she had it. Furthermore, she was a fiery patriot. She was Jewish, whose family had suffered a lot under the German command. Therefore she did not take money from the relief action. It was probably like this during the entire war time. In Savaneta they had set up a first aid post. The severely wounded victims were transported to the San Pedro Hospital.

Besides going to Oranjestad to get its softdrinks, every morning Charlie also visited the hospital. What would a wounded do, especially a wounded seaman, without his bottle of alcohol? It was not just a few bottles that Charlie and Marie had smuggled into the hospital during the

war. In the Union Halls in the United States they could probably tell you how to find Charlie's Bar in Aruba.



This is the old police-station in San Nicolas where Charlie spent two days.



The late captain Rodgers was a great fan of soccer. This picture dates from 1932 and the captain can be seen amidst his team.

Charles and Nolly

Two characters from San Nicolas from the early time of Charlie's Bar may not be forgotten. The first one was a namesake, Charles. Every morning a regular customer, who would bring back a part of the mail which was wrongly delivered to him.

Furthermore there was Nolly, the icemaker, who provided all of Aruba with ice. The tale goes that he had raped a woman. The case was presented before the Judge. Now, the tale also tells that Nolly had a "tool" of enormous measurement and that it was so big that no women would ever have survived a raping by him. Apparently this was sufficient reason for the Judge to find him not guilty. But ever since than Nolly was a synonym for a big "tool"

Charlie's Bar was always spotlessly clean. You could, in figure of speech, eat from the floor. Hence, his astonishment when, one day, he went to the ice-plant and saw someone piddle on the ice. That was the limit and he decided to buy his own icemaker.

It was very difficult to find personnel in those days and thus between the two of them they worked 15 hours a day from 9.00 a.m. to 12 p.m. It often occurred that they also had to drink something with their customers. No problem! For this they had a steady bucket, where most unwanted drinks ended up. Charles and Marie would do anything for the seamen. They had a complete administration set up for them. For example they had a complete collection of stamps for the strangest destinations. His first visit in the morning was to the bank. The handwriting of the seamen, due to the abundance of alcohol, was not always readable or trustworthy, so the bankclerks sometimes remarked on this. Charlie's reaction was that he would be completely responsible for this. Eventually they were his seamen. He was very proud of the fact that everything always ended up coming out straight and that nothing ever went wrong. All this led to Charlie Brouns becoming a synonym for honesty and fidelity. And as always the most credit was given to his wife Marie, who was the main "man" on behalf of the seamen.

Famous people in these days were Boy Debrot, Berta from Tropicana, Emilio Caballero, Papa Cigá Pourier, Bislick from "Las Delicias", Benny Senchi, Frida Anagnos from "Brooklyn Bar", Buchi from the

namesake bar. Mimi Marchena, Yoki of Caracas Bar, Lolita and many more.



"Charlie, Junior and granddaughter Montsy.
Three generations Brouns".

Joy and consternation

An important factor in Charlie's life was the birth of his son Junior in April 18, 1941, in the Eagle Hospital. Dr. Harmsen performed the delivery. Charlie did not have a car in those days and Bruisma, an acquaintance, had offered to take Marie to the hospital, even if it was in the middle of the night. When the time came Bruinsma took Marie in his big "Studebaker" to the hospital.

Much consternation was caused the day that little Charlie suddenly disappeared. One moment he was in the playpen and the next moment he was gone. Because the playpen was upstairs they first searched downstairs in case he had fallen down the stairs. The police was notified of the disappearance. Marie was in great despair. Who could have taken the little boy? Moreso from the playpen. Eventually it seemed that a seaman had done it. He felt sorry for the boy, having to sit in his playpen all day, so he took him for a walk to the seamenshouse. There could not be any objections to that, now could there? One thing led to a definite

adoption of little Junior by the seamen. Especially milk was brought from aboard the ship. In Aruba there were no cows, were there?



"One can already notice the first symptoms if his illness"

Charlie the keyboss

Another episode that people could not forget was when the Germans shot laketankers a few times and everybody was afraid to sleep in their houses, at night especially because there were so many children involved. They decided to spend the night in the "cunucu" (countryside) and return to their homes in the morning. Nevertheless, there was a problem. The police and firemen needed to know where the keys to their houses were in case of fire. Of course, Charlie was the solution. His bar was open till 12 o'clock and so everybody left the keys with him. When Marie was asked to joint the people at night, her answer was definitely that her place was with her husband and son. The three of them and Charlie, the porter of all keys.

LIBERATION

Naturally, the liberation meant a big party. Also in Aruba there was freedom. Still, it was with sadness that people thought of the years of war, because they were years one could learn a lot from. Much rebuilding was not necessary, because there was not much damage. The Netherlands, though, suffered a lot, but in Aruba they did not know to what extend. Nevertheless, the relief actions, which were set up during the war, continued on behalf of the victims in the Netherlands. The aircraft carrier "Karel Doorman" came immediately to the west to pick up, free of charge, expedient resources to take back to the Netherlands. It became a hectic packing up things to send. Coffee, butter, powder milk, soap, bicycle tires, in short, everything. The whole of Aruba was, in figure of speech, sold out. That was at the end of 1945. Even Charlie's Bar had to close for a few days, because everybody was needed to help with the packing.

Half a year later Charlie, Marie and Junior went to the Netherlands themselves to see what was going on. The only way for travel was by tanker and now the fruits of a good relationship with Lago showed its results. There were not any airplanes flying yet. Passenger ships were taken in during the years of war, in order to function as a transportation possibility for the troops and the only possibility left were the tankers for which you had to register at the Marine Office. Because of good relationship Charlie had with the seamen this was not a difficult task. There were two possibilities: Antwerpen or Rotterdam. Eventually the answer was Antwerpen, twelve days at sea. It was a Norwegian tanker "Nordahl Greek" with a dangerous cargo of octane which was loaded in Aruba. With a red flag, because of the dangerous cargo, they set sail for Europe. They took the train from Antwerpen to Rotterdam. It was a long roistertrip with one stop after the other which even frustrated the little five-year-old Junior who screamed that he had enough of all that travelling by train, that he did not need to see his grandmother anymore and that they had to return as soon as possible to Aruba. The trip from Antwerpen to Rotterdam took so long. But, finally they reached their destination.

In May/June they reached Rotterdam. When seeing all the destruction there, Charlie could only, like so many did, curse all the Germans. He had never been in Germany. Essential!

Marie remembered how they walked together crying. The inner town did not exist anymore. Only the tramrails were still there, which recalled only sad memories. It was in one word terrible! Everything was gone.

Only the Townhall was still there and an old heavily ruined St. Laurenskerk.

Of course they visited their acquaintances and friends, among others those people to whom a half year earlier, they had sent so many things by the "Karel Doorman".

The bar remained closed during this so called "vacation". With another tanker, the "Pan Aruba", they returned to Aruba. The scene of all the destruction has made Charlie more certain of his decision not to leave Aruba again. This case was closed. He wanted to die in Aruba, but there was still a lot to come before this would happen. A wish which he had cherished for a long time still had to become reality. In San Nicolas, the ever booming town, there was still a nightclub missing and this was Charlie's next project, which he worked at with a carefulness known to be his.

Eventhough the martyrdom was much less than in those days the case with Charlie's Bar, the Lieutenant Governor Kwartz only give him permission to be opened till 2:00 A.M. at first and then till 3:00 A.M.

LIDO

In 1949 they opened the restaurant-nightclub "LIDO" on the Grensweg in San Nicolas. The real first nightclub. It was a first class place where you needed jacket and tie in order to get in. The restaurant also gained a good reputation.

The bar in the mainstreet closed at 10.00 pm. after which "Lido" would open. Charlie was the valet and Marie handled the money. During the week days they would play the jukebox and on the week ends the six-man band Lido's "Blue Room Combo" would provide the music. One of the regular customers was Padu del Caribe.

The guests were among others Lago workers, doctors, important people of the town, the so called "upper class", and not few reminisce with sadness the hours spent dancing in the Lido.

Many of the guests left tips while they were going in and out of the nightclub. With this Charlie and Marie would have a drink. The "Lido" lasted exactly ten years, because then the Aruba Caribbean Hotel opened its doors and nightlife shifted to the hotel. The "Lido" had served a purpose in the time of need for the people when they needed a distraction.

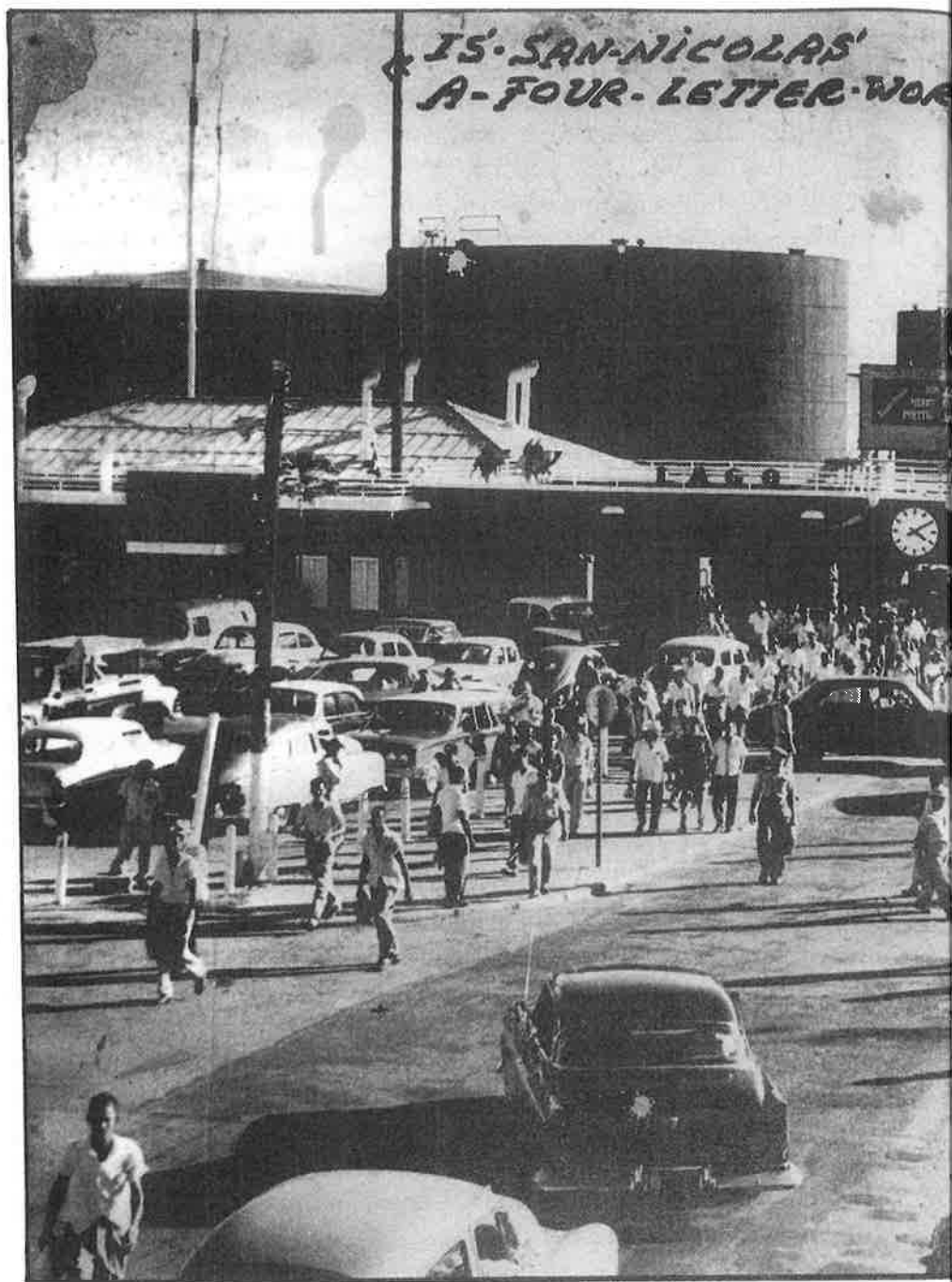
In those days many other things occurred e.g. the arrival of the whalers in the 50's, whereby the businesses could remain open until 12.00 p.m. and you would see some 1000 people on the street. People must not forget that Aruba was the last stop before the whalers set out to sea for the whaling, after which they would return to Norway.

HABITUÉ DOLF DE VRIES

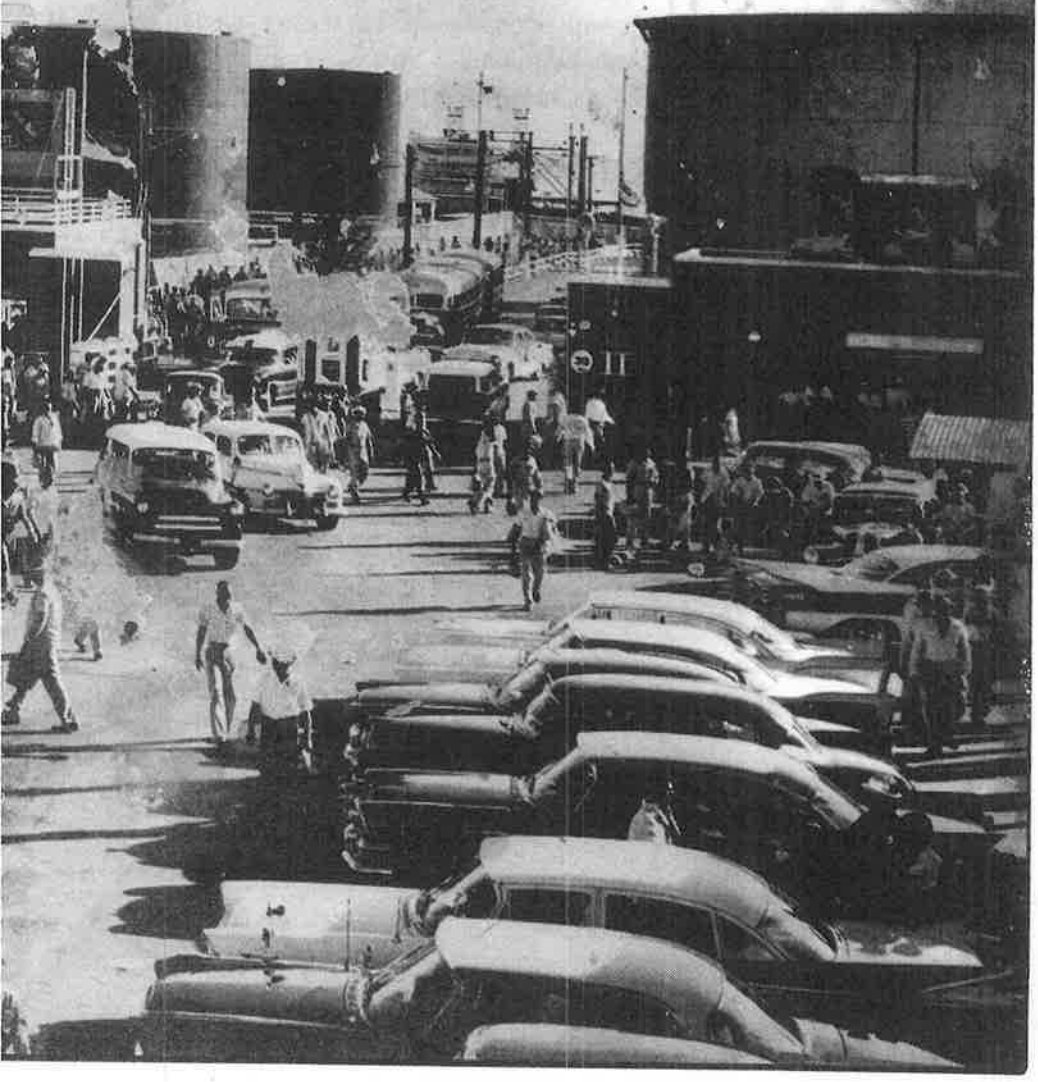
The writer Dolf de Vries wrote his novel "Knopen tellen" inside of Charlie's Bar. So, there are few people who knew Charlie as well as Dolf de Vries did. It initiated a tie of friendship which started as follows. Dolf would sit in a room which did not have airconditioning and he had to keep the shutters closed otherwise the papers would blow away. He started at 8.30 in the morning and at 10.30 he could take off his shirt and wring the water out. There was one more Dutch fellow, Jan Nijenhuis. He once said they should have a cup of coffee in Charlie's Bar. When they walked in and asked for a cup of coffee, Charlie almost exploded and said: "In my life I have served everything but coffee and I am not about to start now." Then he asked Dolf what he was doing there and Dolf answered: "I am writing a book." Charlie reacted and said that he would not mind making coffee for him this once.

The next day Dolf returned at ten thirty and Charlie said: "Here is the man who wants coffee again." From that moment on Dolf went to have his cup of coffee every day from 10,30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. for two years in a row and when the novel was finished he would not admit that he had actually finished the novel and he acted as if he was still doing some writing in order to spend three to four hours in the bar. It is then that Dolf really got to know who Charlie was. A very warmhearted man full of humor full of stories to tell, and what was very noticeable was the combination between him and Marie. He could be rough and tough while Marie would remain peaceful and harmless. He would use foul language while she would maintain her high class Dutch language which she used to calm him down with. And, of course, the love she felt for him was greater than anything else.

It intrigued Charlie what Dolf was doing there, because writing a book was a complete different subject compared to the type of restless people from the Lago. Dolf de Vries was a really strange fellow, but because of that there came a special friendship, which Dolf thought would end when he returned to Holland. When he got his first letter from Charlie, he could not believe it, and they stayed in contact with each other throughout the years.



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Dolf said about Charlie: "In life you will very seldom come across people who by all means can be themselves under any circumstances, a real citizen of Rotterdam, with a heart of gold and a lot of friends. This was evident on the day of his funeral, when people from all over the world came to pay their last respect. The many things that were dedicated to him indicated that he was a figure, who had more influence in San Nicolas than you could possibly imagine."

Dolf furthermore relates: "You could have a few laughs with him. His knowledge and wisdom did not come out of books, but were experienced through life itself. For Dolf it was a "must" to go to Charlie, where he could meet the real Aruba, as he once told Paul van Vliet."

STEAK A LA CHARLIE

Years ago, in the beginning of the 50's, there was a Dutch vendor, who had a lot to do with Charlie's Bar. He admired Charlie who had already made a name as a bar owner and if necessary would act as a bouncer, which occurred when he had had a few drinks himself. This was now the case.

The young Dutch vendor told the "big" Charlie that he had eaten a steak the night before which made his mouth water. Charlie butted in scornfully and remarked that nobody could make a better steak than his wife Marie. If he came the next day Charlie himself would make sure that Marie would have a steak ready for him at 12 o'clock noon, like he never had before. The date was set for the next day noon.

For a starting vendor it was, of course, a great honor to be invited upstairs by Charlie to come and eat steak. This was something special, and he dressed himself for this occasion. Jacket and tie and exactly around noon he arrived at Charlie's Bar. He met Guus there who asked if he had come to collect money. When our man told him no and that he had come for Charlie himself Guus sent him upstairs. When he, shyly, walked in, Charlie asked him what his business was. It was not a day of collection? Immediately after that Charlie said he had better things to do and if he could go away. Our friend did not know how fast to run away. Charlie just had had too much to drink and had forgotten their date of the day before. Gone was the delicious steak, gone was everything!

"LES EXTREMES SE TOUCHEN"

About Marie, Dolf de Vries, always said that he did not understand what she was doing in this bar. Because if you closed your eyes and let her speak you would think that she was married to some professor from Leiden. So proper she spoke Dutch. Her good education was noticeable, when Charlie had had a few drinks and acted foolheartedly. Then she could say inconspicuously: "Charles I think, you are going to far. Why don't you go and sit down a while?" And she did it with such love that Dolf wondered surprisingly, how these two had actually met each other. A typical example of "les extrêmes se touchen.."

This marriage was a perfect example. Dolf de Vries was assured that without her, Charlie probably would not have made it, which in Aruba was not difficult to do. She was probably his guardian angel.



"Charlie, Marie, Rudy Poterson and Guus on the day Charlie was condecorated by the queen. It was one of those glorious moments in the history of Charlie's Bar".

MONEY AFFAIRS

When it came to money Charlie Brouns was very much organized. As a Dutchman he knew exactly how many rounds he could give free of charge. If he had been in the stockbrokerage, he would have been a millionaire by now, that is how good he was. He kept a close eye on his "shares", because that is all he had and not a few. The Beurs was his favorite newspaper when it came to his shares. If one day he would not receive the paper he would immediately make a call to inquire how the situation was with particular shares, by which I also got the chance to get to know his preferences. But before anything else, he was the cheap Dutchman, which made it difficult to really understand him. Many times I had tried to penetrate into his money business, but apparently I did not do so diplomatically enough, because he just laughed at me, eventhough people thought of me as someone who knew a lot about it, judging by his many telephone calls when the Beurs did not come in. If I am not mistaken he has asked me for some advice which took away his confidence in me at once.

Considering his economical ways and, especially during the good years, the big income of the bar, he did not die a poor man.



"A moment from years ago at the bar. It gives also an idea how young Charlie looked in those years."

GUUS

Guus is one of those characters about whom we could write a lot, but also someone who we could describe in a few words. A real second in command man, who admired the one who would jump from a rock, but would give him a parachute, just in case. Thus, with the loyalty of a second man in command, someone you could trust unconditionally. A typical work relationship, flexible but never close.

He came to Aruba with the last levy of the army. He actually had to go to Indonesia, but remained in Aruba and started working for the Lago Police. Because of his army training, he was promoted at once to sergeant, which he was for one and a half year, after which he started working for Charlie. This was in 1953, almost 38 years ago. He married a black beauty who gave him 5 children, beautiful children and intelligent.

He was the left and right hand of Charlie, however, he was lefthanded. He was considered the man of the Lago Sport Park and a fervent gambler, inventor of all possible gambling systems in the world, but who never won. His unofficial name was "Gus the gambler", but he was also the unofficial chairman of San Nicolas. He did not wish to be chairman of anything so he would not have to carry any responsibilities, but he was a great motivator. People would listen to him and he fitted exactly in the image of Charlie's Bar.

JUNIOR

Junior, as Dolf tells, who knew him well, is a man who had the talent to enjoy life, combine the pleasant and the necessary, who worked unbelievable hard, has a vision of San Nicolas, which is an obsession of his. He is very loyal to his friends and it is actually a pity that his artistic talents suffered under his hard work. Intellectually and artistically it would be better if he had more time to himself. Then he could probably shine more in his field.

Dolf de Vries thinks that he has calmed down a lot and has lost his wild oats. He lived in a continent where there were all kinds of possibilities, where if you had a little money and was a little handy, you could permit yourself to do a lot, which you would not even consider doing in the Netherlands.

Indeed, Pa Brouns had asked Dolf to go to Bogota and to talk to them, because Pa Brouns was concerned for him. This is the Charlie Brouns who had asked me to keep an eye on his son on his trip to Holland. He was still worried about this son, who luckily did end up to be a good man, and is following his father's footsteps with dignity, which this story had clearly proven.

ORDER OF KNIGHTHOOD

A fruitful life like that of Charlie and Marie, of course, would not pass by unnoticed, which is the case with them. Suddenly, one day, the secretary of the Lieutenant Governor called to ask Charlie if he could pass by the next day at the office with his jacket and tie and should also bring along Mrs. Brouns. It seemed that Charlie, especially due to the activities during the war achieved the Order of Knighthood. The golden honorary medal, which Charlie wanted to pass over one time to Marie. Because without her there would not be a Charlie's Bar. In those days Jossy Tromp was the Lieutenant Governor and he could very well remember the time he spent talking to Charlie when he used to work at the Hollandse Bank in San Nicolas.

But the party did not finish as yet, because in the Hong Kong Restaurant Charlie was received with a hip hip hurrah, and when he returned to Charlie's Bar, a few hours later, it seemed the Dutch Marines had decorated the whole bar. This was the third time that day that he had tears in his eyes. The small heart of Charlie was exposed. For no reason the tears would come out. He actually remained a small child at heart all his life until he reached a very old age and this is probably the reason why he had so many friends. He was just made for this kind of work and therefore did it with pleasure. An admirable man!



"A historic moment. Charlie receives his royal condecoration from Lt. Governor Jossy Tromp"

PRISON

While talking to Marie, I asked her, if Charlie has ever been in prison. And indeed, once, in a police cell in San Nicolas. This must have been in 1956. Then he spent two days in this cell. Marie's brother, Aart, made sure that Charlie had mattress and bed.

It happened this way. One Saturday night Charlie set out to "see how the competition was doing" which he occasionally did when he had a few drinks. He was talking to Yoki of the Caracas Bar, when suddenly a Norwegian turned around and unexpectedly gave Charlie a blow to the nose. When Charlie saw the blood running from his nose, he became very angry and he took the man outside, beat him up and left him lying on the ground. There were two men from Aruba who offered to help Charlie, but Charlie thought that he had beaten the Norwegian man enough already, but apparently they did not think so, so they beat him up some more.

The police called Sunday morning very early. Charlie had to go to the police station. He told Marie that he had had some problems with a Norwegian, and that he had beaten him up, but other than that he did nothing wrong. Charlie was arrested right away. The blows had landed obviously harder than he thought and the Norwegian had to be transported to the hospital. There they had told the police that the man would probably remain blind. Poor Charlie felt helpless, because he did not think he had beaten the fellow all that hard.

After all the case seemed to exceed anyone's expectations. It was presented in front of the court and Charlie only had to pay a fine of Fls. 25,00 for fighting in public. His lawyer was Mr. Papier charged him Fls. 1.000,00 for this little trifle, But, had it been Fls. 2,000,00 still Charlie would have paid it with pleasure.

The only thing that Charlie remembered was the red hair of the Norwegian fellow. Charlie decided to go and visit him anyway in the hospital and had customarily taken a fruitbasket and some reading material. The Norwegian fellow did not even remember Charlie's face nor having received those blows from him.

A well-known taxi-driver in those days, Jokie Hirschfeld, who had seen everything declared that it had not been Charlie's fault. There were two

Arubans who had wanted to help Charlie. They had given the fellow some more blows while he was lying on the floor. This is why at the police station they thought that the man would lose his sight for good. Charlie had spent two days in the police cell.



"Charlie and a very good friend Frans Scholl"



"Charlie, Mary, Harry Holman and one of the first tourists who visited the island".

GREAT AT HEART

Setting forth tradition meant going all the way. Helping the minorities, of course with the necessary discretion and as things got better help in other things like sponsoring sportteams. Every year a team would be selected to receive special sponsorship, most of all soccerteams and old Charlie insisted on performing the first kick of a game in front of all the press and spectators. This later grew into a complete sponsoring of the Jong San Nicolas by Charlie's Bar with their own site and a complete youth division. The main goal was to regain San Nicolas in the major league, which was accomplished two years ago. Furthermore a veterans' team carrying the name of Charlie's Bar Boozers, followed by a bowling team. The end of this is not yet in sight.

Another activity to which Charlie Jr. has dedicated himself completely is the diving sport, in which he has put a lot of money. He bought a yacht in the United States which he brought down himself with the help of a complete new crew. He bought an old "koeoekoe" house in Savaneta and converted it into a Diveshop. They are almost ready with the construction of a pier, after which they intend to bring over the yacht and start organizing diving trips, whereby Charlie Jr. himself will show his customers the undersea beauty of Aruba. He opened a second diveshop at Baby Beach and at this moment the "Sea Scuba" is running smoothly. We can note that the word SEA stands for South East Aruba.

APPROACHING FAREWELL

In the meantime Charlie turned 62 and Marie 60 and all those years spent working hard and again working hard. Now they really wanted to start enjoying life. Charlie wrote to Junior in Colombia, but mentioned specifically that if his future was in Colombia he had to stay there. It was actually his life. Though, if he wanted to return to Aruba, he was more than welcome. It was indeed his place of birth.

Junior's answer came at once. Pa, I am coming back to continue with the tradition. First the paintings arrived and in August Junior himself. This was in August 1977 and after a short training period Junior was ready to take over the bar. Pa and Ma Brouns moved to Lago Heights, where they had bought a nice, spacious home and had furnished it to their liking. Here the couple Brouns would spend the rest of their well earned retirement.

He did not want to be in the bar business any more. This was left to the new generation, as he called Junior. He had to continue with the tradition and the business continued booming and became a forever growing center of activity, a restaurant, a souvenirshop, etc.

The reconstruction of San Nicolas was not an easy task and what Charlie Jr. has done since is unbelievable. A complete metamorphosis, a difference like day and night. The restaurant grew to be one of the best on that side of the bridge, if not the best. Something which made Charlie Jr. very proud is that over the past years the prices have never changed, but the quality still gets better.

And the secret went from father to son: "Treat your customers like human beings and like kings."

From the book "Kouwe Kak in Tropenland" by the film producer/writer Rene van Nie the following episode is taken, that carries the title "Charlie", to the namesake bar in San Nicolas.

"I met Charlie Senior during the filming of "Sabine", a movie that I made years ago in Aruba. Together with a famous actor Rijk de Gooijer I entered the bar and sat down at a table to eat something. Senior saw us and came towards us. He put out his hand and said: "Rijk, boy, I enjoy

your acting so much, I am really happy to meet you in person." I thanked him very much, but made a remark that I was not Rijk, but the fellow in front of me was. It did not help because he swept away my words and said: "Smart, and that at your age." He sat down next to Rijk, but asked me: "Rijk, tell me honestly, can you really earn your bread with this? It is good what you are doing, no problem, but what do you really do to earn your money?"

Again I made a motion to Rijk and tried: "But he is ..." Senior shook his head. He got up, gave me again a handshake and replied: "You do not have to be ashamed..... it is not that bad." He turned around and called out to the bar: "Guus give my friend Rijk here a drink on me". Then he pointed the real Rijk and finalized. "Give his father one too."



"The type of car clearly shows how old this picture must be"

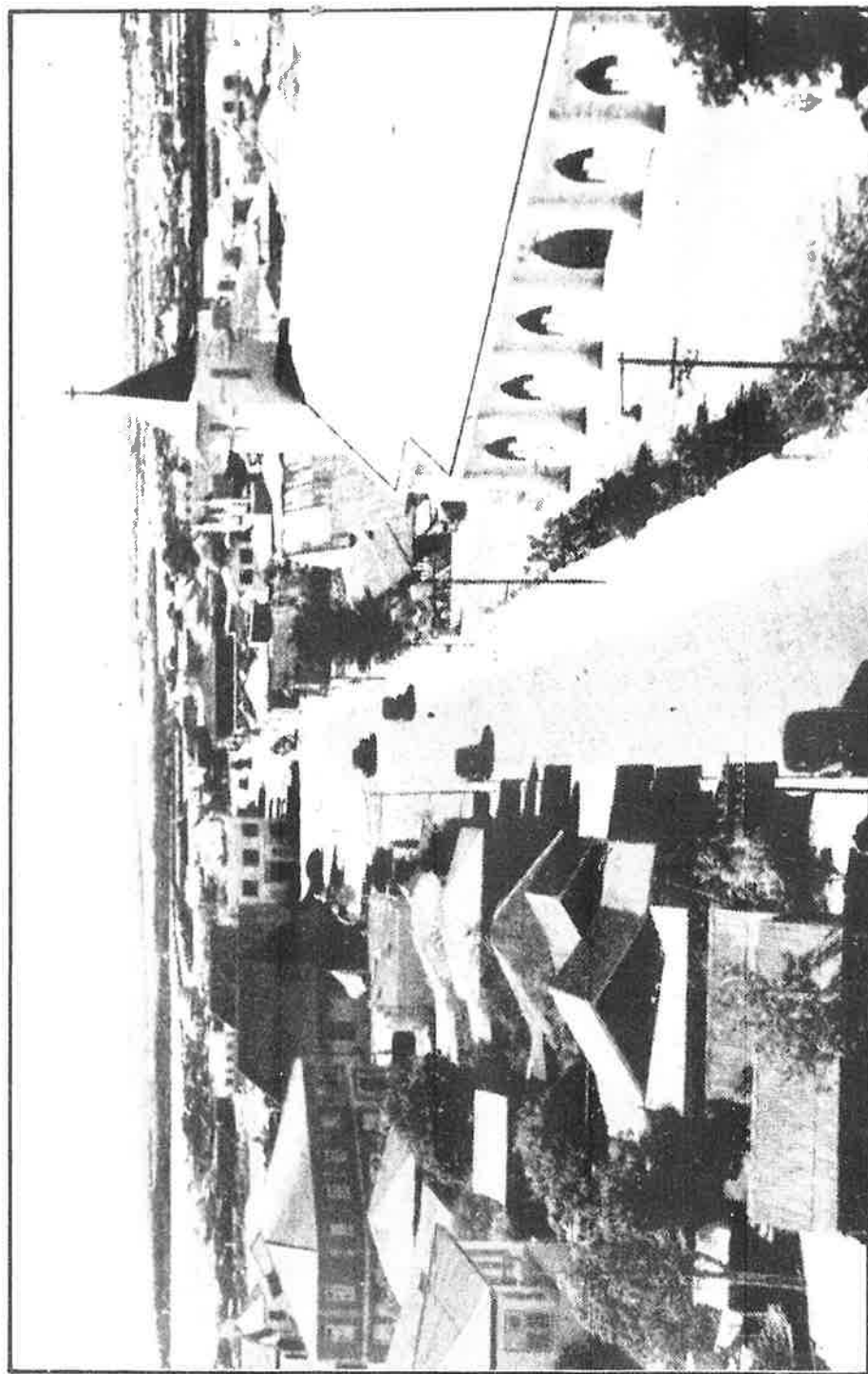
LAST DAYS

Charlie was very proud of his son Junior. When Charlie's Bar celebrated its 45th Anniversary they took a picture of Charlie Sr., Junior and his son, Charlito. Charlie Sr. could not hide his joy. This was such a big moment, three generations of Brouns. The eldest, he was just a simple innkeeper, his son was also an artist and the grandson will reach even further. That was one of the biggest moments in his life. The new generation, as he liked to call it, took over the watch and he did not want to have anything to do with it. He had worked long enough and his time to enjoy life had arrived. Together with his Marie, who he still loved dearly and who still meant everything to him. It was not for nothing that he had said many times that without Marie Charlie's Bar would be nowhere.

The reconstruction of San Nicolas, after the closing of the Lago, may have appeared to be difficult to realize, but not for Junior, who followed in his father's footsteps with an unbelievable amount of energy, accompanied by an immense love for San Nicolas. In 1981 Charlie and Marie went to Europe, in 1983 to Mexico, both a real, relaxing vacation for two people who still intimately loved each other. But the "troubles", like he called it, started. He did not even go to the graduation of his grandson in Texas, because he did not want to be a bother there. In 1987 the seriousness of the situation really showed. He had a incurable illness. According to his wish he returned to Aruba where he wanted to be buried and in February 1989 he died at the age of 73. Thousands of people mourned him because he had done many good things for many of them. Wherever he could possibly help, he would, preferably unnoticeable. This was the way he had been all his life, which the Lieutenant Governor Jossy Tromp also mentioned, when he handed Charlie the well-earned Order of Knighthood in 1977. San Nicolas would remember him for all the good things he had done silently in the time of need of his people; his San Nicolas and he declared that Marie should have the medal, because without her he would be nowhere. A great man, a remarkable and unique personality had gone. But there was Junior, the new generation, to take it over. There simply was not any time to mourn. Mourning was not part of the Brouns' life style.



"The glorious Charlie Brouns, as he wanted
to be remembered"



"This is the St. Theresia Church of San Nicolas. Also can be seen the building the location of the International Seaman's Club"



The author Donny Laclé is the Aruban editor of the Dutch newspaper Beurs- en Nieuwsberichten. He was born in Aruba and has formed for many years part of journalism. He is gifted with good writing skills, an analytical mind and follows the daily happening very carefully and critically. Because of some problems with the circulation of his blood he went to Houston where the result was that the legs had to be amputated.

The surgeons in Aruba, Frans Hage and John Leo, said no. They had discovered a small vein through which enough oxygen could pass to safe one leg. He operated after the amputation of the right leg, which made it possible for him to maintain the other leg. He accepted his destiny and thought many people go through life with a prothese and you don't even know it. But afterwards there came several brainstrokes, five of them to be exact and not light ones. This caused him to be more or less half paralyzed and also caused him to lose his coordination ability partially. Still, he did not give up and with the aid of a wheelchair and a walker he still goes through life like a normal human being who types with his left hand. We should also mention that he quit smoking and drinking, which he used to do abundantly.

After Charlie Brouns' death his son approached him to remind him of the promise he had once made to Charlie, about writing the history of Charlie's Bar. Well, the golden anniversary seemed like a good time for it., while it could also show that a handicap is not the end of the world. In spite of his partial paralyzation and the poor coordination, he was still full of high spirits. Donny Laclé took on the challenge and this is the result.

Charlie Jr.