



Bookstore Caecilia

At the time my grandparents were preparing the opening of their first bookstore, they were also preparing for the birth of their first child. Caecilia arrived first. A beautiful baby girl born on July 19, 1936. My grandmother Maria told me that she didn't chose the name. One day she heard clearly and firmly the word "Caecilia" in her mind and she knew that was the name for the child, not knowing yet if it would be a girl or a boy. She was curious about the name and looked it up in the library. "Latin feminine form of the Roman family name Caecilius, derived from latin caecus meaning blind. Caecilius is also the patron saint of music and musicians".

Sies or Sieske as we called her was blind from birth. She was born without eyeballs. Sies was also born autistic (this condition was not known in that time). Her biorhythm was also completely reversed. She would sleep peacefully all day and be awake at night. This was not easy for my hard working grandparents, who at night were figuring out how to sooth their child.

My father wrote this poem and related this story about Caecilia. Later it became clear that she was a musical savant.

Caecilia likes to hold and play with a little paper box.
She rubs or knocks it rhythmically on the table.
Attentively she listens to music or a lullaby.

One day Maria does not know what to do anymore. Her daughter has a major upset. She instinctively sets the child in front of the piano. She plays a few notes herself and then puts the little hand on the keys. Pushing one little finger on a key, Caecilia becomes calm. Her small hands are feeling the keyboard and are tapping out some notes. To her surprise Maria suddenly hears; sol mi do, sol mi do. The little toddler repeated the sound of the nearby church bell-tower. Bim Bam Bom. Bim Bam Bom. Suddenly, the little girl has found her favorite toy. From this moment on, with the help of the piano, the behavior problems solve themselves.

Sieske could play the piano and many other instruments beautifully. She loved to sing and she loved to teach others how to play the piano. This was always done with joy and laughter. Music made her very happy!

Sies' laughter was strong and vibrant, when she laughed everyone felt her happiness.

Caecilia had amazing gifts and also unusual disabilities. At birth her hipbone was abnormally formed outside of the socket which made her walk wobbly. In the last 20 years of her life she was using a wheelchair. Sies was also born without a thyroid gland and had her first menstruation at age 8!

Mentally she developed only to age 5. But at the same time she learned to speak Dutch, French, German, and 2 Flemish Dialects. She also learned to

read and write in Braille, with her fingers. Sies taught Braille to my dad and me as well.

When Sies was born, the doctors knew something was very wrong and told my grandparents she would not live longer than 5 years. Sieske died at age 70 choking on her food. (I have learned that doctors are not always correct with their diagnosis.)

While adjusting to their blind and disabled child, my grandparents opened their bookstore nine months later on May 1st 1937 and gave it the name Bookstore Caecilia.

Two and a half years later, their second child, my dad Hugo was born. He also was almost blind.



My father loved languages and wanted to become a teacher, but his mom had her own agenda for him. She forced my dad to help out in the store. He never liked it.

My grandmother Maria forced my parents to manage and work in the store but still maintained control. My grandmother was very manipulative and

controlling towards my parents, and gave them a lot of grief. I endured my part of her manipulations as well. Many life lessons learned!

My parents were a very good team, they loved, respected and supported each other. They found a great balance in their home and work life. Because of my dad's blindness he was the one taking care of the children; my 2 year younger brother Jeroen and 3 year younger sister Leen and me. My dad Hugo was taking care of the house hold and my mom Annie was managing the store. She loved every aspect of running the store. She was very focused, driven and worked very hard. With this combination of skills and abilities they formed a genuinely loving and supportive partnership.



Being born and raised in a book store was truly a huge blessing for me! It was a constant source of abundance! In a spiritual, social, mental, financial and physical way!

As kids we spend lots of our youth living, playing and sometimes helping out in the store. We learned to read early and had information on all kinds of subject at the tip of our fingers. It was fun. We had it all.

Our store sold books, comic books, hundreds of different magazines and newspapers, office, school and art supplies, toys, puzzles, postcards, and much more. It was a daily stop for many of our customers.

At a very young age we learned about the retail business and how to provide excellent customer service. My mom ordered the coolest school supplies, which was so exciting to me, I could choose whatever I wanted!

We had a copy machine and could copy the books for our school assignments. In the back stock area we played “bookstore” with our friends and used the antique manual cash registers. As a teenager, I would get my cigarets for free.

The book store was located in the Tolpoortstraat in Deinze, one of the main shopping streets in town. It was in the heart of the community and everyone knew each other. A friend recently told me she still has a few dictionaries, atlases and maps which have Bookstore Caecilia price tags.

Many wonderful memories were created there. It brings me joy knowing that Bookstore Caecilia is living on in the hearts of many.

Picture 1: Second location of Bookstore Caecilia in the Tolpoortstraat, where I spend my youth

Picture 2: My dad Hugo and his sister Caecilia

Picture 3: My parents invited the most favorite Belgian comic book figure Jommeke and his twin sisters Annemieke & Rosemieke to the store as an attraction. They signed comic books. It was a great success and we loved it!

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Mieke's Voice

Week 1 - Introduction

Week 2 - A Rough Start

Week 3 - Vision

Week 4 - History Lesson

Week 5 - Bookstore Caecilia