



THE STORY OF BERGDALE

My apprenticeship started at Braams' Butcheries in Wynberg in 1962. My Dad, Henk Mol Snr, was the manager at that time. We, like many families from countries in Europe, decided to immigrate to South Africa after World War Two. Work was very scarce and governments in Europe encouraged, and financially assisted families to immigrate. Our ship docked in Table Bay on the 8th August 1957. What an amazing experience, and who would have known what journeys lay ahead for each of us.

Mr. Ben Braam owned retail butcheries in many suburbs of the Southern Peninsula, and with so many Dutch, German and Swiss Master Butchers on staff, it was an excellent training ground for me. In the year I turned eighteen, my mom and dad went to a family reunion in Holland. Mr Braam asked me to manage the store for six weeks until my dad returned. That was truly a hair-raising experience as I was only eighteen, and the youngest there. The rest of the thirty staff members were between twenty five and sixty. Butchers were a rough bunch in those days! This experience earned me my own shop to manage.

In 1966, I accepted a position as manager of Bergdale Meat Market in Dreyerdal Road, Bergvliet. Our neighbour was the second Pick n Pay store in South Africa. At that time there were very few supermarkets around in Cape Town. There was an OK Bazaar in Wynberg, which had a meat counter. Pick n Pay did not sell meat in Bergvliet, so we had a flourishing business. We sold between forty to fifty tons of meat per month.

After managing the butchery for ten years, I made an offer to purchase the business, which the owner accepted. On the first of January, 1976, at the age of thirty, I took over the reins of my own business! I invited my Dad, who was 62 at the time, to join me. He also conveniently managed to acquire a flat right above the shop.

Pick n Pay had already moved to new premises in Tokai a few years earlier and many new shopping centers were in the process of being established. They all sold meat at very keen prices, competing with each other.

Most of the stores were within a two kilometer radius of our butchery, thus effecting our turnover negatively.

As the years slipped by, business became more difficult. One stop shopping became the trend as peoples' lives became busier and busier, so they had less time to shop around.

In 1982 we purchased some basic equipment and started producing a small range of Bergdale Products. Continental Viennas, Hollandse Rookworst, Cooked Ham, Smoked Ham, Rare Roast beef, Dutch style course and fine Liver Polonies, Gekookte Lever, and Smoked Beef. These were the products we started off with. The public were very responsive to our new products. Production increased daily and the success of the products was due to the quality of the ingredients. We used a recipe book published in 1929 for the Utrecht Slagersvak School in Holland, which I had inherited from my dad. There was only one problem. I did not have a facility to smoke any of the products. A good friend of mine offered me an old telephone exchange box, which we transformed into a little smoke chamber. It was very basic, but it worked. After work each night I would bring home what needed to be smoked, and when the products were done, I would take them back to the shop.

The cold meats were selling really well, so we decided to start wholesaling them to other retail outlets. It did not take long before we had built up sufficient business to warrant buying a delivery vehicle. Our client base continued to grow and we were running out of space! We supplied many upmarket deli's and a few Spars. Alphen and Pinelands Kwik Spar, Old Cape Farm Stall, Giovannis, New York Bagels, Carlucci, were some of our best customers then, and most remain so today.

Meanwhile, back at our home, my neighbours were commenting on the "wonderful smoke smell". I took a while to realize what they were actually trying to tell me; "Enough smoke already!". So, I thanked them all for their patience and purchased a reconditioned automatic cooker and smoker which we fitted into our shop.

Sometime in the early part of 1999, a small contingent of Pick n Pay representatives popped into our shop. They enquired why Bergdale Products were available in many outlets in the peninsula, but not in Pick n Pay. They asked if I would like to supply them also. I considered that a great compliment, and gladly accepted their invite. It took almost two years before the first deliveries went out to our newest customer.

We soon outgrew the 150m² space in Bergvliet. We purchased the 496m² site in Prime Park, Mocke Rd, Diepriver. We designed and built a brand new food factory. On the 31st July 2002, after 36 years in Bergvliet, I locked the front door of Bergdale Meat Market for the last time, then drove to Prime Park, Diepriver and started trading from our new factory. My wife, Dawn, suggested that she would be happy to start up a distribution company to distribute our products, thus taking that huge additional responsibility off my shoulders. My Dad decided to retire after 73 years in the trade!

Supplying Pick n Pay Western Cape was a whole new experience for us and an opportunity to learn. Setting up a food safety system that satisfied Pick n Pay was definitely a very testing time for us. Regular supplier visits, in house audits, external product testing and an annual external audits, which sometimes lasted twelve hours. I understood the need to make our products as safe as possible, so there was no question about doing it and wanting to be one of the best at it.

We achieved 90% for our first audit, and that is the lowest it has ever been. The latest audit is 95%, even though the goalposts get moved every year, and will continue to do so. The effort has really been worthwhile because it has created safer products for all our existing customers, and all potential new ones. Our staff are trained from day one, from the cleaners to management. Regular teaching and training are done in-house on a continual basis; often externally for supervisors and management.

In 2008, my stepdaughter Nicky joined me at Bergdale. She is passionate about anything to do with food, and it soon became apparent that what she loved most: was to get her hands into some mixture or other, and

make products. Nicky also wanted to learn to debone a carcass. So we ordered a half a bull. I showed her once how to debone it, after which I had to stop her from ordering bulls because we didn't need any more lean beef.

Nicky stayed with us for seven years, and took over most of the management duties and food safety system. Sadly at the end of 2015 she decided to leave to pursue a different food direction.

This left me in new predicament. I was 69, had a few health issues, and realized that my time of retiring was drawing near. I did not see myself able to run this part of

the business alone. Closing the business and retrenching the staff was a thought for a short while. Some of the staff had served me loyally for 14 years, and others well on their way there. I just didn't have the heart to do it.

Bergdale has grown into a medium sized company. We supply almost all of the customers we started with, 68 Pick n Pay stores, and once a week we deliver a consignment of our products to Namibia. We have four trucks on the road and our premises have grown to a 1000m².

The 50 years with Bergdale have been splendid. Full of wonderful relationships, trials, challenges and all things that make one stronger. At this stage my mind is still willing, but my body is no longer able to function at the required stress levels. Dawn and I realized the only way for a satisfactory exit was to bring our requests before God and ask for His intervention. So by prayer and petition we prayed for a solution.

November 2015, I received a call from a man telling me how much he and his family love our products. He said he was in the vicinity and asked whether he could come to see the factory. We showed him around the factory and he was greatly impressed. He left with a gift of the sausages his girls liked so much. (I do wonder if those sausages ever made it home...) A few weeks later he phoned again, "I am in the area and just want to talk to you again", he said. Five minutes later he was sitting opposite me saying that he, his brother and partners would like to buy my business. I thought he was kidding and responded, "Jaaaaaa".

We discussed the price. He stood up, took my hand, shook it, and said; "Deal, and that was that!

On the 15th April 2016, I handed over my keys to Shaun Sole, Bergdale's new managing director, his brother Grant and partners. Three very likeable Christian men with lots of energy, vision and hope. They understand and value the importance of relationship in business and maintain the attitude of the importance of satisfied customers. Our staff have all kept their employment, and with all the energy and enthusiasm I see before me, I just know the staff compliment will increase. I hope and pray that the legacy may long continue.

A coincidence or a miracle? You decide!

My Dad, Henk Mol snr, died very peacefully in January 2009. He was two months short of reaching 94. I thank him for teaching me independence, to be loyal, hard-working and to endure no matter what.

Success in business depends greatly on the relationship one builds with others. Loving your staff is of the utmost importance; for without them you have no business.

Henk Mol jnr