NATALIE KNOWN

It was a warm and sunny day in Johannesburg. Church bells were pealing. It was Christmas day. Matron Maria opened the door of the Orphanage, and saw a beautiful baby girl dressed in pink lying in a carrycot. “Welcome, my pretty baby. I’ll call you Natalie because you were born on Christmas morning.” She picked up the carrycot and went inside. All the carers exclaimed and said, “God bless her!” Soon Natalie was sucking a bottle of milk before she fell asleep in a nursery of twenty babies. These tiny tots had all been left at the front door, some even in rain and a bitter winter. The Orphanage was funded by a wealthy couple whose son had died when he was 6. It was called, quite simply, The Orphanage, and Natalie was the last baby taken in.

Natalie was a happy baby, secure in the love of a Christian staff. When she was crawling, she moved around the nursery playroom as if she owned it. She was a sociable tiny tot, and soon made many friends. Lily became her best friend and remained so throughout their long lives. Unlike Natalie, she was rather plain, and not as outgoing or clever as Natalie who did her best to encourage and support her friend. When they were able to sit in highchairs and eat, they were taught to fold their hands, and say, “Thank you, Jesus, for our food.” Of course, none of them could say it, but they seemed to understand. The couple who funded The Orphanage visited them every day, and they called them Dad and Mum. They cuddled the tiny tots, played peek-a-boo with them, and made them laugh. There was a beautiful garden surrounding the building, and the tiny tots loved crawling on the lawn and picking up fallen leaves and flowers. When they were five years old, and about to start school, Dad and Mum gathered them into the large dining room. Dad asked, “You all have two names, don’t you?” “Yes!” answered Natalie. She was always the first to talk. “I am Natalie Known”. “Has everybody here got two names?” “Yes!” they all shouted. “What is the last one?” Mum

asked. “Known!” they shouted. “That’s because we are a family, and you are all brothers and sisters,” said Mum. Bertie Known yelled, “That’s why we play and have fun, and we often fight. I fought Archie because he took my book! And he still hasn’t given it back! I’m going to tell Matron!”

The carers came in with trays of cold ginger pop, and large plates of iced chocolate cake. After wiping their chocolaty faces and hands, Dad began to talk. “When you go to school next week in your new uniforms and backpacks, you will meet new children and make new friends. You will be invited to their houses, and you will find they all have different surnames. That’s because they all have different dads and mums. When they were born in hospitals, their dads came to visit their mums, and to look at their newborn baby.” “Were we born in hospitals too?” queried Jenny. “We don’t know,” said Mum, “we found you all on our doorstep, and you became our family. And we love you so very, very much!”

The next day the children started school at the Rosebank Government School. It was for boys and girls, and they spent five very happy years there. Because it was near the Orphanage, they walked there with their carers.

Opposite the Orphanage was an Anglican Church. It was very beautiful with high beamed ceilings, stained glass windows, an altar with choir stalls beyond. The church had a fine pipe organ. The organist was pretty Mrs Pringle. The church had a bell tower, and the bell ringers rang it on Sundays to call people to worship. The Rector was Father Benedict. He was a friendly rather plump little man with a wife who was much taller than him. When the Known family children were three years old, they went to Sunday School. They simply loved it. There were other children there, and they made many friends. “I love singing best of all,” said Natalie “I love ‘Do you know God loves you?’ and ‘Build on the rock!’” “I like all the actions we do when we sing.” said Bertie who could not sit

still for long. But best of all was Bible story time when the children were divided into small groups. Natalie and Lily were in Merle's group. She told such exciting stories and showed them Bible pictures. They thought she was very grown-up because she also played the piano for their songs – but she was only twelve.

Christmas was coming and the children were very excited because they were practising their annual Christmas play. Everyone had a part. Everyone could dress up. Everyone could sing. The four-year-olds were learning 'Welcome little Lord Jesus' and the five-year-olds 'Oh! Happy Birthday Jesus Christ!' They were all learning the 'Amen! Hallelujah!' at the end. The Sunday School had a lot of costumes from previous Christmas shows. The girls all wanted to be beautiful angels with golden crowns on their heads and large organza silver wings. The older boys, who were not from the Orphanage, were shepherds, and had to learn what they said. Three lucky boys were the three kings in bright, rich brocade gowns and crowns, and carrying their gifts. But the most important parts were Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. He was a doll, wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. Oh! There was such excitement in the Sunday School as they rehearsed their words and songs. At last, the great day arrived. The church hall was packed. Mum and Dad were there. So were the carers, cooks, and all the Orphanage staff. They wouldn't have missed it for anything! Merle played Christmas Carols, and the packed hall sang along while waiting for the curtains to rise.

What a show it was! There were background scenes, and Farmer Brown had even brought 2 sheep, a donkey, a cow and some hens that ran over the hay on the floor!

As the Known children grew older, they were taken on visits to different places, and to experience different things. They loved walking at The Wilds, a huge park filled with plants that would have originally grown there, and little streams that ran over rocks

into a lake. When they were six, they went to see the ballet, Swan Lake. “It was wonderful!” exclaimed Natalie. “Mum?” she asked, “Can I have ballet lessons please?” “Yes,” replied Mum, “you can. Some other girls go to Miss Fetonby’s Ballet School. It is near our house. I will buy you some ballet shoes and a leotard.” Natalie was a natural dancer, very musical and expressive, and she loved it. There was a piano at the Orphanage, and Natalie sat at it, and played some notes. “This is lovely!” she said, “I am going to ask Dad if I can have lessons.” And, of course, he replied, “Yes!” One day they visited the National Art Gallery in the city. Lily was enthralled. “Look at this one, Natalie!” she exclaimed. “The colours are amazing! Proteas in bloom, clivias and agapanthus!” “Dad,” she said, “please will you buy me a large drawing book and a paintbox? I want to try painting too.”

But what the children loved most was their holiday in June at the seaside in Amanzimtoti. All the children went with Dad and Mum and their carers. Such excitement! Going to the Johannesburg Main Station, getting into four bunks compartments, having a delicious meal in the dining compartment and seeing the compartments being unhooked from the main train and put onto the Amanzimtoti line. They always stayed at the same hotel. It was right on the seafront. There was a tidal pool built into the rocks. No one swam in the sea, but paddled in it, and built sand-castles on the beach. “Look!” shrieked Bertie, “there are two sharks!” And, sure enough, the children saw their fins above the sea.

Every year a young preacher called Bamboo walked along the beach carrying a large flag with a cross on it. “Come and hear an exciting story,” he shouted. Natalie and Lily and all the Orphanage children left their buckets and spades and ran after him. Other children on the beach also joined the crowd. Bamboo was a missionary of the Children’s Special Service Mission. He planted

the flag in the sand. “Let’s sing,” he said to the children sitting on the sand in front of him. “What about Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so?” “Yes!” they shouted. Bamboo could sing very loudly and even the waves couldn’t drown all their voices. “Story time!” said Bamboo. “But this isn’t a story like Cinderella or Red Riding Hood. It’s a true story, it really happened, and we can read it in the Bible.” And he told them a story that they had heard in Sunday school and even acted, the story of Jesus’ birth.

“You can’t have Christmas without Easter,” he said. “Why was Jesus born?” The children were silent. “He was born to die!” said Bamboo. “And how was this done?” More silence. “John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who was his special friend, tells us in the book he wrote in the Bible that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him shall have eternal life.’ “So, if you believe this, you will go to Heaven when you die and live forever with him. Do any of you believe this? If you do, come and stand with me and I will pray for you.” “Let’s go,” said Natalie to Lily, and they joined another 10 children with Bamboo. “Dear Lord Jesus,” prayed Bamboo, “these children are now your children and in your care. Help them to be faithful to you and help them to tell their friends about you. We ask this in your name, Amen.”

All the Known girls went to Parktown Girls’ High School in Parkview. The boys went to Parktown Boys’ High School in Parktown some distance away. It was the day before the start of the new term in January. Ten of the new girls were driving in Mum’s and Dad’s cars in response to the Headmistresses invitation. Miss Macgregor was going to tell them about the school, its history, activities and ethos. “I am so excited!” exclaimed Natalie in Mum’s car. “Yes, so am I,” said Lily. And there was the school! The entrance had ornate wooden gates which were wide open. They

drove along a wide stretch of tarmac lined with jacaranda trees before Mum stopped opposite the entrance, and the girls tumbled out excitedly to join the others in Dad's car.

"What a beautiful building!" exclaimed Susan staring at the double storied building. It was built with two shades of red brick in different patterns and had a pitched tiled black slate roof. The entrance was imposing – a white pitched pediment was above it, centred by a blue ring and a five-pointed star. An ornamental balcony jutted out above the entrance, and on either side were very large fancy circles in white with black centres. "Now," said Dad, "Let's go like little ladies!" They walked through the entrance with many other parents and daughters, and into a very large hall, set with rows of chairs in front before a large stage. Behind the chairs were tables and chairs, with delicious cakes on the tables, cold drinks and teacups and sugar bowls. Miss Macgregor climbed the steps onto the stage. She looked about fifty years old, was short and dumpy, wore glasses and her hair was in a bun. She was wearing in a grey dress covered by a black academic gown.

"Good morning, Dads and Mums and Daughters," she said. "Welcome to Parktown Girls High School. I have met many of the mums and dads before when they brought other daughters. So, forgive me," she said. "You will hear the same speech again. In 1927 Parktown High School was founded. It was a co-ed school. Before many years had passed, Parktown Boys High School was established in Parktown. Now here is the challenge. Our academic standards are very high, resulting in 97% of our girls going on to universities, mainly Wits, and receiving bachelor degrees. Some of our girls even went on to achieve doctoral degrees, and ended up as lecturers at Wits. Our school motto, Scientia et Veritas – Knowledge and Truth, is on our badge on the school blazer. The school day starts with girls filing in in order. We sing a Christian hymn, repeat the Lord's Prayer, and I read the

notices for the day. All the teachers sit on the side. Miss Green, our singing mistress who trains the choir, plays the piano for the hymn. Any girl who wants to fill a choir vacancy must audition for the post. I will now call on our Head Girl, Janet Smith, to speak to you." As she left the stage, everyone clapped, and Dad shouted, "Thank you, Miss Macgregor!"

"Good morning, everyone." said Janet with a smile. She was a tall girl with short black curls. "I and the Prefects meet in the Prefects' Room which is in the quadrangle at the back of the hall. We have many duties. When class ends, we stand in the corridors to see no one is causing a disturbance. Girls who do this, and other bad things will be given an Order Mark. Five Prefect Order Marks result in detention. So, beware!" She laughed. "We also check girls' nails every week. They must be short and unpainted. Dresses must be 4 inches above knees. School hats to have good elastic and worn when in uniform outside of the school. We have six societies – Christian, Music, Debating, Drama, Photography and Public Speaking. Our beautiful, panelled library on the second floor, is run by fifth form students. I have had an unforgettable time here, and I hope you will all have one too. I call on our Sports Coach Miss Stumped to speak now. Thank you!"

Miss Stumped bounded on to the stage. She was well built with a broad and brilliant smile. "Hello everybody!" she said loudly. "All the girls must attend gym each week. They all have to do exercises and use the gym equipment. A refusal to do anything will not be tolerated. Also, until form four, sport and gym are compulsory. Our gym, to the left of the school, is reached through a sloping glade. It is new, as is the large swimming pool and changing rooms. Every year we compete against other schools at Elis Park's Olympic sized pool. At present, we are top of the league having some great swimmers. The girls can choose what sports they want to participate in. The four tennis courts are next

to the entrance of the school, and the hockey and netball fields are on the left at the bottom of the property. Thank you!" With that she jumped off the stage and ran out as the girls laughed and cheered.

The final speaker was Miss Phips, and there could not have been a greater contrast – about sixty, dressed in a delicate floral dress, ladylike and quietly spoken, she said, "Good morning, Ladies, Gentlemen and Scholars, I am Miss Phips. My great love is gardening. If you go out of these side doors on the left, you will come into a very large brick amphitheatre where many girls eat their lunch from boxes. I would advise healthy lunches, nothing quick and easy like jam sandwiches or cakes! Beyond the amphitheatre is a path winding up to a small gate and lined by grass lawns. This is a bus terminus that goes into the city for girls who live enroute or who go for piano or ballet lessons. About fifteen years ago when I became a maths teacher here, I started the gardens, The line of jacaranda trees on the right of the drive are a joy to behold when in bloom, as are the wisteria cascading with their perfumed bunches of lavender flowers into the courtyard. In planting, a lot can happen in fifteen years. A staff of three gardeners keeps it all in trim. The garden slopes down until the end to the hockey field where we planted a line of fir trees. Broad steps lead down the slope and are planted with seasonal flowers. Another delight was the planting of shrubs, trees, flowers - like clivias and agapanthus- scattered here and there. Please take a walk in the garden and, dear girls, enjoy it as often as you can. We invite you now to have tea and cake, and to chat to any teachers who will answer your questions. Thank you." And she tripped delicately off the platform.

They got back to the Orphanage in time for lunch, talking excitedly, and longing for tomorrow when they would start school.

The next day the excited new girls were up early, packing their cases, eating breakfast, and taking their lunch boxes as they waited for the Orphanage bus to take them to school. Girls were streaming through the opened gate and would all be at Parktown Girls' for five years. "I wonder what form we will be in?" asked Lily. "Well, I expect it all depends on those intelligence tests we did last year," answered Natalie. They walked into the hall and sat in the front row, reserved for the new girls. Morning Assembly consisted of a hymn, prayer, notices, and then Miss Macgregor dismissed the school, except for the new girls. "Your form teachers will come," she said, "and read the names of the girls in her class." Mrs Brown was the first to speak. "These are the girls in the A group. Please follow me to your classroom. This is where you will go when you arrive at school, and where you will be given a desk for courses you have in this room. The A girls are Natalie, Lily, Susan, and Jane, and she then named the other girls. Mrs Brown led them out of the auditorium, and up a flight of stairs to a large classroom. "Choose your desk, girls," she said. "I hope you will do me proud!" Natalie and Lily quickly choose desks next to the window from where they could stare out at the driveway, jacaranda trees, and gardens. "Here are your class timetables, and subjects. They will be in different classrooms, except for English. I am your English teacher. There is only one choice of subject, Latin or French. Now sit here, and don't talk or disturb the classes next door." "I will do French as I mean to study art at Wits" said Lily, "and I will do Latin," said Natalie, "because I may want to study Law. I really want to find my birth mother and ask her why she left me at the Orphanage." "It doesn't matter to me," said Lily. "Mum is my Mum, and always will be!" "It's already nine o'clock, and I suppose it will be quite a time before all form four girls will be in their classrooms. They studied the week's classes. "I have Latin, after lunch, "Natalie continued, and then there is gym! That'll be fun!" for by now Natalie was an experienced ballet

dancer, and her muscles were in good shape. “Can’t say I will enjoy it much,” said Lily, “I’m a bit scared of climbing up walls and jumping over horses!” In the afternoons, they had sport. Lily had chosen swimming, and Natalie tennis. They had been informed of this yesterday, and Lily had brought her school swimming costume, cap and towel, and Natalie her tennis racquet. And that was the end of a very enjoyable first day at Parktown Girls.

For the first three years the Known girls retained their position in the A class. Both Natalie and Lily excelled in the sports they had chosen. Natalie was in the under sixteen girls’ hockey team, playing inner and enjoying running up and down the field. It was a winter sport, and Parktown Girls’ was top of the interschools league. In summer, she played tennis and was chosen as the under sixteen team captain. She was an enormously popular girl. Lily became a very good swimmer, excelling in crawl and breaststroke and in relays. An exciting day was the annual competition at Ellis Park against other schools when all the Known girls caught two buses to reach Ellis Park, sat in a group, and shouted themselves hoarse as they cheered their teams on. For three years they had been the winning school, and when the results were announced, they stood and shouted Parktown’s war-cry.

When form three finished the year, and they had to choose the subjects for matric, Dad knocked on Miss Macgregor’s door. He knew her well. “Good morning, Miss Macgregor,” he said jovially. “I have come to see you about Natalie. She wants to take music instead of maths because she intends to study Law. Although she was top in maths last year, I asked her to define PI, and she replied, “Cherry or apple!” Miss MacGregor laughed. “However,” she continued, “Music is problematic. No girl has ever taken it. The syllabus is advanced and quite frankly, vast in comparison with other subjects. To begin with, there are three exams, History

of Music, Harmony, and Performance - with 16 scores in it! On top of that Natalie will certainly be elected as Head Girl – an onerous position." Dad replied, "Natalie told me that she passed the Royal Schools of Music Harmony Paper with 97%, that she knows a lot about the History of Music, and will study it in the library, and that she has already passed three scores of Grade 8 in Performance with Distinction of the Royal Schools of Music. Natalie's piano teacher is Mr Barclay Don. A friend of mine, Dr Fielden of the Royal Academy of London, recommended him." "Thank you very much, Mr Known," said Miss Macgregor, "Natalie has my blessing!"

Natalie and Lily were now nearly 19 and shared a flat in one of Wit's hostels in Braamfontein. Dad had given them a car, and Mum had added some luxury items to the rather spartan flat, including pretty, floral curtains, and matching bedspreads. Dad gave them a generous allowance every month. Today it was Natalie's nineteenth birthday. "What should I wear tonight?" Lily asked Natalie. "I think you should wear your blue satin skirt with the black satin top. You look gorgeous in it!" she answered. "I am wearing my gold satin strapless dress with the pink cumber-band, and bow at the back. It's my favourite, and I hardly ever get a chance to wear it." said Natalie. "Oh! Here's Dad come to fetch me. See you tonight, Lily!"

When they reached the Known's home, Natalie was surprised to see another man in the lounge. "Hello, Natalie" he said, "I was your mother and father's best friend. Your mother and father were unmarried law students when they left you at the Orphanage. They came to me because they said that when they were praying, they felt God wanted them to do this. We had all just graduated, and they were now able to care for their darling daughter. I drew up a will for them to be given to you on your nineteenth birthday. They drove off happily and excited, only to die when a drunk driver

came round a corner on the wrong side of the road. Their families were devastated. Your parents had included in their will that your grandparents on both sides of the family, the Williamsons, and the James, and your great grandmother, who is now 86, be told of this today. So, Natalie, they will be at your party tonight, and so will your five cousins, the three Barbour girls Merle, Jeannette and Susan, and the James' son Alan, and daughter Penelope. Goodbye!" And he left.

Natalie was stunned. "I am overwhelmed," she sobbed, "I am sad but happy." Mum and Dad put their arms around her. "I am grateful that I have found my father as well as my mother, and that they loved me, and ensured that you brought me up with all the advantages of a Christian home. But to me, Dad and Mum, you will always be my true parents who I love very, very much!"