

Praise for *Verwoerd: My Journey through Family Betrayals*

"It would be easy to dismiss a book written by the grandson of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd as one of those revisionist texts that seek to minimise the impact of apartheid and the transgenerational consequences of the immeasurable suffering that it created. Wilhelm Verwoerd's book explodes this perspective and challenges us to witness what it means to hold at once the love that one has for one's family and a deep sense of responsibility to engage in action for social justice. His story offers us a powerful example of the internal journey involved in facing history and staying with the complexity thrown up by the matrix of its sometimes-bewildering interacting factors.

"With the name of his great-grandfather Wilhelm Johannes Verwoerd, who uprooted his young Dutch family (including a three-year-old Hendrik) to join the course of the Boers and their fight against the British to claim dominion over South Africa, perhaps it was up to him—up to his generation—to transform the bonds that so often lead to destruction. The more destruction there is, he cautions in this book, 'the higher the walls become'. It is an insight he draws from his work for social justice and change in Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine and in South Africa."

– Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

Praise for *Bloedbande* (Afrikaans edition of this book)

"Unique material, insightful and gripping – an important book."

– Annemarie Mischke

"An overarching asset is the author's ability to break through the crust of superficial truths, to be painfully honest and to think clearly about what he finds under the surface – and to write with clarity about it. In addition, he has a fine feeling for symbolism and the visual."

– Tobie Wiese

"As a testimony to a life journey, the book is quite awe-inspiring – very few people would be prepared to be open about the kind of struggling self-examination which Verwoerd puts into writing."

– Jaco Barnard-Naudé, *Rapport*



WILHELM VERWOERD

Verwoerd:

*My Journey
through Family Betrayals*

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For my family

"Family is a bond of blood that cannot be broken." –
Tannie Annatjie Boshoff

*"It is important that people should know. If the pain from
the past is not let out, then it comes out in destructive
ways."* – Naledi Mabeba

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First letter

Blaas 'n Bietjie, Bettiesbaai

25 January 2014

Dear Oupa Hendrik

Nearly 50 years ago, I was drinking milk in your lap. It's been almost 50 years since your bloody death. Still, it feels strangely right to write this letter to you now. Where do I begin? Perhaps with why I am sitting here today, in the spacious living-dining room of your holiday home, Blaas 'n Bietjie (Take a Breather).

I recently came back to South Africa after twelve years of overseas peace work. During my time in Ireland and Northern Ireland, I helped to facilitate dialogue between former enemies. We encouraged former combatants to listen deeply to one other's life stories – despite the bloody past between them, and in the midst of serious ongoing political divisions – and, by doing that, to accept one another as fellow human beings.

Increasingly I wondered whether I would be able to do the same with you. Could I humanise you? Could I try to understand you better without rubbing salt in the wounds of those who suffered and continue to suffer under Dr Verwoerd's policies? Would it be possible to include you in the humanisation task, considering the raw connection between my family name and most South Africans' historical dehumanisation?

I am surrounded by you here at your oval dining table. On the wall

behind me, in one corner, is a large painting of you fishing in the Vaal River. Next to it, on my right, a small, side-view bust in white marble. On the chest of drawers against the opposite wall, a framed picture of you and Ouma, smiling on the lawn outside on the mountain side of this house. In another corner, you next to a huge seven-foot tuna, the proud fisherman. Above the photo hang the dried tuna tail and the sturdy line and hook you used to catch this fish all by yourself. And there's this framed photo from the *Huisgenoot*:



*"Oupa and Ouma Verwoerd with their grandchildren, Libertas¹,
Pretoria, 8 September 1964".*

I've looked at this picture often. I can't remember a thing about that day, nor do I have any later, personal memories of you. I was only two and a half when you were murdered. But I grew up with only positive images of the kind of man you were, Oupa. It was only about 30 years ago that I truly came face-to-face with the unrecognisable image of "Verwoerd – the architect of apartheid".

1 Name of the prime minister's official residence at that time.

This confrontation resulted, Oupa, in a time of intense, inner grappling, a protracted crisis of faith and, eventually, a political distancing from *that* Verwoerd, though I tried my best to stay loyal to you. But by the early 1990s, I really couldn't reconcile your policy of separate development with the apartheid experiences of so many fellow South Africans – most of whom who were also fellow Christians.

It became very difficult to be your grandson. Some members of our family, Pa especially, were convinced that I had shamed the Verwoerd family. They experienced my public criticism of your political policies and actions as a betrayal.

I spoke to Ouma at the time. She wanted to know whether I was motivated by my values and my faith. I was able to answer "yes", sincerely. As far as I could tell, this was enough for her. At least she subsequently never questioned my membership of this family.

Oupa, so many times I have longed to really get to know you. There is an unbridgeable gulf between us. It is difficult to get a reliable sense of who you truly were. If only you'd also kept a diary like Ouma, or written more personal letters, to help me understand your inner life: the questions, the fears, the feelings you grappled with; the joys and dreams you cherished; your faith journey...

I'm cautious to be this honest with you. I am not even sure how to address you. In Afrikaans, out of respect, we address our elders in the third person. "Oupa" comes naturally, and I am reluctant to use the informal "you". I am your *kleinkind*², but I am also old enough to write to you as one adult to another, with an open-hearted directness that you would hopefully not immediately reject as disrespect towards an elder, an ancestor.

I am not sure how to sign off. "Kind regards" sounds too cold. "Love" feels inappropriate, especially since I am often uncertain of my real feelings towards you. So, let me conclude for now with:

Your *kleinkind*
Wilhelm

2 Grandchild in Afrikaans is, literally, "small child"

Chapter 1

Blood bath

[The] journey of getting to know someone who was your enemy as a full human being... has been more difficult and more painful because it allows me to see darkness in myself that's not comfortable to sit with. Everything about me wants to run away from [this] deeper journey.

– Alistair Little, Northern Ireland, May 2014

OUMA BETSIE SPENT the last years of her long life in her birth region, the Great Karoo. Her house on a far-off, southern bank of the Orange River was simple: a small living room and kitchen, a dining room, bathroom and a few bedrooms. This building, in the white Afrikaner settlement of Orania, is now the home of the Dr HF Verwoerd Memorial Collection. One room is filled with gifts from traditional “Bantu” leaders to Oupa Hendrik during his term as minister of so-called native affairs (1950-1958). Display cupboards in the corridors and other rooms are filled with other types of gifts and memorabilia.

I was walking through these rooms, past walls hung with photos and paintings, with Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, professor in psychology, who specialises in historical political trauma. Some of the things there brought up childhood memories I shared with her, but mostly we were silent.

Then we find ourselves in front of a display cupboard with the clothes my grandfather had been wearing on the day of his murder.

Besides the old-fashioned, formal work outfit there are familiar pictures of him as prime minister. There are a few walking sticks in the left corner and, at the bottom, his watch, his wallet, a few writing



utensils and a copy of the official programme of his state funeral. His shoes are placed next to his neatly folded trousers. The jacket is marked with four red flags where the knife struck. The white shirt doesn't need any pointers. The blood stains are diluted, but clearly visible.

In the right corner is a line from a speech he gave on the Day of the Covenant in 1958, the year he took up the highest political office: "We are not fighting for money or possessions, we are fighting for the life of a nation." There's a newspaper clipping between the jacket and the shirt, including an extract from the official postmortem.



“On 6th September 1966 at 14:14 the dagger of the assassin, Demitrio Tsafendas, stabbed Dr Verwoerd in his parliamentary bench. The blade was 9 cm long. The first stab was in the chest, just left of centre and a bit beneath the throat. The stab was aimed at the heart and reached its target.”³

I was caught off guard by the naked facts. Pictures of the knife and the face of Tsafendas illustrate the article. I was unable to look into the murderer’s eyes, so I looked at the bloodstained shirt again, and shuddered.

I have been aware of a famous grandfather’s premature, violent death from a young age. Even now, Afrikaners from older generations tend to respond to my surname with stories of where they were and how horrified and overwhelmed by grief they were when they heard the news over the radio in the early afternoon on 6 September 1966.

I can’t remember that the details of what happened that afternoon in Parliament were ever discussed in our family. I would’ve been too hesitant to ask.

In my early teens, I discovered a book one afternoon in my dad’s large collection of books about his father: *The Assassination of Dr Verwoerd*.⁴ I remember my heart beating faster as I impatiently turned the pages to get to the chapter describing the actual assassination. My imaginings of Oupa Hendrik’s bloodstained final moments were formed, then, by a witness report and the memories of his fervent supporters.

“Having found a firm footing, Tsafendas stabbed the Prime Minister three more times – one in the left shoulder, one in the upper right arm

3 To elaborate: Dimitri Tsafendas, then 48 years old and a messenger for parliament, managed to stab Dr Verwoerd and was then wrestled away by bystanders. He first gave political motivations for the murder, then later claimed that a giant tapeworm instructed him to do it. After his trial he was found innocent on the grounds of mental instability and he was declared a patient of the state. He died in 1999 at the age of 81 in the Sterkfontein psychiatric hospital due to pneumonia. For the first full biography and a convincing portrayal of the political nature of Tsafendas’s actions as well as the strong likelihood of extensive state cover-up, see *The Man Who Killed Apartheid* by Harris Dousemetzis.

4 JJJ Scholtz, *Die moord op Dr. Verwoerd*, 1967.

and another in the left side of his chest, where he had inflicted the first stab-wound on Dr Verwoerd. One penetrated the left ventricle of the heart, others the lungs. There was also a cut in the colon. The wounds were inflicted so quickly that it was difficult to distinguish between one stab and the next," the report in the cabinet reads.

My parents kept the dark suit and white shirt for many years, I recently discovered. The thought made me very uncomfortable. Why? An ingrained, human aversion to spilled blood? Did I inherit my mother's blood phobia?

Standing together in front of that display cupboard, I recalled to Pumla a conversation I'd recently had with my mother. I'd asked her what had happened to the clothes my grandfather had worn on the day of his murder. My mother was sitting at my parents' dining table, with an unobstructed view of Stellenbosch Mountain.

"Well, Oupa was buried on the 10th of September, a Saturday. On Tuesday, the 13th, two policemen arrived at our front door with a suitcase. They said they'd brought something for Pa which they expected would be important to him. One of them opened the suitcase. It contained a crinkled suit, covered in bloodstains. I turned away immediately – I couldn't face it..."

My mother, in her late eighties, glanced with a heavy sigh at her beloved mountain and shook her head.

Everything was in the suitcase, even the underwear and shoes he'd worn. But what was to be done with the bloodstained clothes? The advice from Kotie Roodt, then head of the Pretoria Museum for Cultural History, was to use cold water, no soap, immediately, to get rid of the blood. This would keep fish moths at bay.

"Cold water, cold water, cold water... until you're sure there's no more blood in the fibres of the suit. Pa asked me to do the washing, because he was not up to it. I had no choice. I gave you three boys your bath and put you to bed, then I filled the bath, pushed the clothes under the water and left them to soak overnight. The next morning, when everyone was off to work and school... though only Hendrik was at school at that time..."

“So, Dirk and I were there? I was in the house?”

“Well, you were only two years old, so of course you weren’t aware of anything. Neither was Dirk. I stuck my hands in the water, pulled out the plug, and filled the bath again...pressed and pressed and pressed...no rubbing, only pressing was allowed.”

The water continued to turn red no matter how often she repeated the process. She was only satisfied after a few days and many more cold-water baths.

“I called your father to come and make sure the clothes are actually clean. He checked after work and said, ‘Yes, it looks like you managed to get rid of all the blood.’”

The clothes had to be hung out to dry dripping wet, in the shade of a tree (“the advice was no sun”) and straightened by hand. My father’s help was needed to carry the heavy basin outside. Once dry, they were carefully folded and, protected against fish moths, stored in a suitcase in their bedroom cupboard. Every few years, they would open the suitcase to make sure the clothes were alright, and to replace the poison.

My mother told me it was a terrible job. “That smell of blood. I will never forget it.”

I suspect I received my fear of blood through my mother’s milk. As a parent I even struggled to handle my children’s bloody cuts and bruises.

“And your hands...your hands...” my mother said. “Soap and soap and soap and soap and more soap...”

“But the smell remained?”

“Yes, it lingered. Working all that time with the bloody water, the smell soaked into my skin.”

My parents never told anyone, not my father’s siblings, nor his mother, about the clothes.

When I told Pumla this story, she said: “I feel for your mother.”

I could taste the sincerity of her compassion. I was profoundly moved by her purified ubuntu, on this cold winter’s afternoon in

Orania, in the Verwoerd Memorial House. The warm, unearned empathy of this black South African woman towards a member of my Verwoerd family felt like big drops of cool water on hidden, parched bits of my soul. Pumla's compassion, coupled with my mother's vivid memories, lit a humanising candle in my deep-self. The two of them became midwives of a more thorough acceptance that the man of granite, as he was known, had also been a real human being – a fragile person with skin, lungs, a colon and a heart; a mere mortal with vulnerable flesh and lots of blood.

A few years after visiting Orania together, I asked Pumla what she'd felt standing in front of the display cabinet.

"I was *deeply* affected by the story of your mother...even now, in fact, I am holding back tears. What she had to go through. What struck me the most was the repetition – the clothes had to be washed again and again. And at the same time she had to hide it from you and your brothers as young children."



Pumla

Twenty years ago, I became familiar with Pumla's generosity of spirit within the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). She was a member of the Human Rights Violations Committee and I served in the Research Department.⁵ We share a faith commitment to help heal, rather than pass on, collective, historical trauma.

5 Pumla is also known as the author of *A Human Being Died That Night*, which was based on her interviews with the infamous Vlakplaas policeman Eugene de Kock. The TRC was initiated in 1995 to bring to light the truth about various human rights violations during the apartheid struggle, to give the guilty the opportunity to tell the truth in exchange for amnesty, to help the victims of apartheid get reparation and to further reconciliation.

As we reflected on our Orania visit, she remembered something from her 1960s childhood in Langa, a black township outside Cape Town. It gave me an unsettling glimpse of just how far apart we grew up.

“It was right after the assassination. As I remember, we were ten or eleven years old; young girls with short dresses, singing and dancing in the street. I only remember the joyful, taunting way we sang the refrain... ‘ndisuka tsafenda, nduke tsafende... ndisuka tsafenda, nduke tsafende’ ...and you make an action,” she demonstrated with a moving arm, “like you are stabbing with a knife. It means: ‘I will stab you like Tsafendas’.”

I will “tsafendas” you.

It’s a striking image. It’s difficult to hear. I struggle to articulate how it makes me feel.

It’s the second time I’ve heard that “tsafendas” became a verb for fellow South Africans.

Dudley Adolph grew up in a mixed township on the East Rand of Johannesburg, far from Pumlá’s Langa. He’d told me: “Verwoerd... in our township was like a... like a swear name. We would refer to him as a ‘dog’ ... ‘because of Verwoerd, look at these conditions, because of Verwoerd...’ But you didn’t dare say anything against him because you were fearful of the security police. Everybody knew who had killed him. I remember when he was stabbed. It was like a big party. From then on, ‘tsafenda’ [or ‘tsafendas’] became slang for stabbing someone.”

For many, many fellow South Africans, across our country, 6 September 1966 was a day to dance and celebrate. While I was working with in the TRC, a piece of protest art from the early 1960s unexpectedly deepened my understanding.

I had become disillusioned with the white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in the mid-Eighties and, since the TRC offices in Cape Town were just around the corner from St George’s Anglican Cathedral, that had become my place of worship.

In my diary of that time, I reflected on my attendance of a votive mass for reconciliation and healing.

17 November 1997

Glenda Wildschut (TRC Commissioner, who under apartheid would've been classified "coloured") unexpectedly came and sat next to me; on my left two "African" Africans; behind me a family with Indian features. Together we pray for truth and reconciliation and accountability before God: a God – our Father and Mother – of justice and love. The coloured Canon tells us about a white priest in France who asked him for forgiveness for everything Europe did to Africa, while making the sign of the cross in the Canon's hand. During the service the Canon invites all of us to make a similar sign in the hands of those around us. But I couldn't do it.

Why not? The invitation caught me by surprise; my shyness; the legacy of a different DRC spirituality, etc. But I was also afraid that this would make my asking of forgiveness too easy, cheap – there is too much for which I should ask forgiveness. Or am I too proud? Perhaps I don't trust a fellow human being to forgive me – as PW Botha was quoted in yesterday's *Rapport*: "I confess only to God, I apologise to my neighbour".

Then I walk back from the steps where I received Holy Communion in the front of the church and my eye is caught by the large *Black Christ* painting – with Oupa Hendrik stabbing Albert Luthuli in the side with a spear.

Suddenly I have a strong feeling that there is indeed too much for me to ask forgiveness for – the faceless system of apartheid all at once feels very near.

On my way home I notice the front-page interview with PW Botha in the *Rapport*. Under the heading "Take me to court!" he describes the TRC as the "Revenge and Retribution Commission", which is "scattering Afrikaners". According to him it is time for "we Afrikaners" to stop "our constant apologising... we need to recover our self-respect... to honour our Blood River covenant with God" as "a chosen *volk*".

Twenty years later I am still haunted by this stark contrast between the *Black Christ* and Botha's Afrikaner world. I continue to find it



strange to see a black person on the cross, rather than the typical Westernised “whitey in a nightie”, as the painter, Ronald Harrison, later referred to it in his autobiography *The Black Christ*. And I struggle with renewed intensity to face the Roman soldier with the sharp spear and the all too familiar face – my grandfather’s.

Black Christ is a disturbing painting. Harrison expected the apartheid government to react to his artistic contribution to the liberation struggle, but he probably underestimated the intensity of condemnation by Christian Nationalist Afrikaners. The painting was immediately branded as blasphemous in *Die Kerkbode*, the mouthpiece of the white Dutch Reformed Church. The mainstream Afrikaner Nationalist newspaper *Die Burger* called for its banning and there were plenty of people

in power eager to respond to this indignant appeal. The Security Police were furious but were unable to prevent the *Black Christ* being smuggled out and used to raise funds overseas for the anti-apartheid movement. The 22-year-old Harrison was repeatedly interrogated and tortured for information, which permanently damaged his health.

Harrison was wary of blasphemy. His intention was not to deify Luthuli but to highlight the undeniable connection between the agony of Jesus and the suffering of people of colour in his country. The young artist was protesting in particular against the ideological use of a blond, blue-eyed Jesus – the domesticated Jesus I grew up with. Representing the suppression of “non-Whites” as a crucifixion enabled Harrison’s sharp visual critique to combine political and moral denunciation with a profound condemnation of the DRC’s religious justification of separate development. His *Black Christ* presents a radical questioning of *Christian Afrikaner Nationalism*: what Verwoerd and his supporters did to Luthuli and his people, we also did to Christ. Even though I had been sincere in my Christian nationalist following of (a white) Jesus, I had remained complicit in the re-crucifixion of the Christ I love.

I am increasingly convinced that Harrison’s highly unsettling paint brush is biblically sound – “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you? Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” (Matt. 25:44-45). But during my current attempt to face my historical complicity more thoroughly, I felt a sense of betrayal, rising, again, like heartburn. Something deep inside me was resisting. A shadowy part of me was protesting against a whole-hearted acceptance of the idea that Oupa Hendrik was indeed also that soldier in the *Black Christ*. Had the milk from Oupa’s hand and Pa’s love for *his* father soaked more fully into the marrow of my bones than I wanted to acknowledge?

Oupa Hendrik could not be escaped in my family home. At the entrance to the large living-dining room a large portrait painting of

Prime Minister Verwoerd is still on prominent display. The Verwoerd family crest, carefully designed by my father, hangs around the corner. The motto is my grandfather's well-known political slogan: "Create your own future". In my father's spacious study, every available book about Dr HF Verwoerd is shelved next to the large wooden writing desk, at which his father used to work until the early hours of the morning during his eight years in office from 1958 to 1966.

My father is a scientist, a retired geology professor. He is a man of few words and he shows little emotion, as is the case with most Afrikaner men from his generation. As long as I can remember I was, however, quite aware of his deep admiration for his father as political leader. He is now in his late eighties and still has a resolute determination to defend his father against critics. He still has most of his hair, turned white-grey like his father's, and many older people have remarked to me how much his face reminds them of Dr Verwoerd's.

From my childhood, we only gathered as an extended Verwoerd family for Ouma Betsie's significant birthdays. I vaguely recollect such a gathering at Stokkiesdraai (my grandparents' house near Vereeniging, on the bank of the Vaal River). It must have been in 1976, because it was Ouma's 75th anniversary. I was twelve years old. We all sat together and watched a few black-and-white 35 mm films of key moments in Oupa Hendrik's political career. The tens of thousands of people at Jan Smuts Airport (Johannesburg), enthusiastically welcoming the prime minister and his wife back from London in 1960, after South Africa withdrew from the British Commonwealth, left a strong impression. Ouma and his seven children also shared some warm memories – his principled, fully devoted life as a statesman, his love for his family and especially grandchildren, his concern about the well-being of those who worked for him.

Ouma Betsie always gave her grandchildren Afrikaans storybooks as birthday presents. When Prof GD Scholtz published his two-volume Afrikaner Nationalist biography of Dr Verwoerd, every grandchild received a copy. On the front page of Volume 1, Ouma wrote, next

to each offspring's name: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn." (Isaiah 51:1)

Criticising the rock from which one is hewn feels like a fundamental betrayal.

But I also suspected that my discomfort with Oupa Hendrik as the Soldier with the Spear had a different source: the bloody nature of his death. After all, Dr Verwoerd "sacrificed his life for his *volk*". This inherited, inner-circle meaning given to the spilled lifeblood of a beloved leader is probably the main source of my persistent reluctance to name the political blood on his hands.

Blood.

Oupa Hendrik's blood in my veins.

Dr Verwoerd's sanctified, sacrificial lifeblood.

Apartheid blood on the hands of Verwoerd.

A decade's worth of peace work in other countries has prepared me to face these facts full-on now. As has my friendship with Alistair.

I met Alistair Little, a working-class ex-prisoner and former member of the militant Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF),⁶ shortly after my arrival in Ireland, at the Summer School of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. I was immediately drawn to his intense, self-critical participation at this event in the Wicklow Hills, a beautiful place, but for him still unsafe enemy territory.

One evening, we all ended up in a nearby pub. He told me how he had become involved in violent opposition to the IRA⁷ as a twelve-year-old. His home town had been rocked by a number of IRA bombings. Family friends had been killed. The British Army and the local police appeared ineffective. He joined the UVF when he was fourteen. Three

6 A Protestant, Loyalist, pro-British paramilitary group, committed to protecting Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.

7 Irish Republican Army, the main anti-British, "Republican" armed organisation committed to the unification of the Republic of Ireland and "the North of Ireland" (Northern Ireland).

years later he shot a Catholic man in a retaliation attack, for which he, as a minor, received an undetermined prison sentence.

After five to six years in prison he started to ask himself difficult questions. Like whether "our violence [was] achieving anything, apart from leading to an ongoing cycle of attacks and counter-attacks?" He encountered the enemy in prison and started to see their faces. After a lot of soul-searching and intense political discussions, he committed himself to addressing the human cost of his and others' violent actions. When he was released, conditionally, after thirteen years in prison, he trained as a counsellor. His life mission increasingly became to facilitate storytelling and dialogue across apparently unbridgeable conflict divides.

I have been deeply affected and encouraged by Alistair, by his relentless, often brutally honest, battle with the blood on his hands. My peace work has been decisively shaped by his personal experience of the transformative potential of the inclusive sharing of life experiences and risky, deep dialogue. He became a key mentor in my role as a co-ordinator of the Glencree Survivors and Former Combatants Programme. After a few years, Alistair and I worked increasingly closer together as co-facilitators and developers of a process we entitled *Journey through Conflict*.⁸

Though my life path has been very different to Alistair's, we share a strong, conservative Protestant family background. We are both, ultimately, on a faith journey, trying hard not to avoid responsibility for our pasts; committed to open-ended, humble attempts to help address the ongoing human consequences of violent conflict.

Alistair described the challenging nature of this kind of inner and outer journeying, in the following statement in which he refers to Gerry Foster, a former enemy, who was an active member of the Irish National Liberation Army.⁹

8 See Alistair's *Give a Boy a Gun: From Killing to Peacemaking* and our *Journey through Conflict Trail Guide*.

9 A more violent splinter group of the IRA.

“My experience has been of two different journeys. It’s the journey of having contact with your enemy but having a relationship that’s practical, and maybe political, about change and getting things done. And then for me there is a journey that’s not better, but deeper, in terms of getting to know someone who was your enemy as a full human being – their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations. [This journey] has been more difficult and more painful because it allows me to see darkness in myself that’s not comfortable to sit with.

“When I first met with Gerry, it was a superficial, practical sort of encounter. And quite easy, in some senses, because I didn’t really have to give too much of myself. But, for me, as that relationship has deepened – trying to understand why Gerry made the choices that he made, what he thinks about people like me and people from the loyalist [Protestant, British] community, why he thinks about them in the way that he does, why he gets angry, his relationship with his daughter – it has become more difficult.

“The personal relationships that I have developed with a number of different republican combatants have allowed me to take more responsibility and to be more aware of what my actions actually did to other human beings, what it left families with. Everything about me wants to run away from that, because it’s much more emotionally and psychologically painful to do that.”

Alistair and Gerry’s friendship, growing over a span of more than fifteen years despite unresolved political differences, continues to inspire me. I strongly resonate with Alistair’s articulation of his deeper journey: the unavoidable inner pain when one vulnerably opens oneself to the suffering of (former) enemies, begins to acknowledge their full, equal humanity. I identify with the darkness of facing one’s capacity to dehumanise, the heaviness of truly accepting personal responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions. Everything about me also wants to run away from this kind of deep, dark journeying.

I resisted the temptation to turn away. I continue to strive to *not* run away from following Alistair’s example in my South African context.



In the Scottish Highlands with Alistair.

I am also vitalised by many other people involved in the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, and in other bloody political conflicts, who are journeying through rather than away from their conflicts. These include, in particular, members of Combatants for Peace and The Parents' Circle Family Forum.¹⁰ A personal and professional highlight has been to work with these truly remarkable people, who in the midst of a heated, escalating Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are working together for a sustainable, just peace.

Towards the end of my time in Ireland, Alistair, Brandon Hamber and I embarked on an international Beyond Dehumanisation project.¹¹ From 2012 to 2014 we brought together small, diverse groups of experienced peacemakers from the conflict in and about Northern

¹⁰ See www.cfpeace.org; www.theparentscircle.com.

¹¹ Brandon Hamber is a fellow South African and professor of peace studies at Ulster University. Funding was provided by The Fetzer Institute.

Ireland, from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and from South Africa, to reflect on the challenging journeys of humanisation between (former) political enemies.

Insights from this project, coupled with the embodied, practical wisdom of Alistair, helped me to stay on course during my current deep, dark trek to come more fully home in my skin and my kin. But to understand this present-day journeying through being a white, Afrikaner, Christian Verwoerd, it is important to go back to the mid-1980s. I need to revisit a watershed period in the country where Oupa Hendrik was born, a pivotal phase of disentanglement, of beginning the reformation of my Verwoerd identity.

PART 1

Reformation

"Look to the rock from which you were hewn."

– Isaiah 51:1

Chapter 2

Shaken awake in ancestor country

“Blessed are those who are pure of heart...” – Matt. 5:8

I WAS WELL PREPARED for my first foray on foreign soil. Apart from the clothes to cope with the unfamiliar European weather, I had sports drink sachets, my preferred breakfast cereal, home-baked rusks, biltong, and medicines for every kind of ache and pain. I had Afrikaans books and safe Dutch Reformed theology books. I also had a day pack, with water, snacks and a Bible. It was July 1986, more than three decades ago, and I can still feel those two bulky suitcases weighing heavily in my hands, and the overladen backpack pulling down on my shoulders.

In the early 1980s, as an undergraduate Theology, Philosophy and Psychology student at the lily-white University of Stellenbosch, it was fashionable to be against apartheid. The majority of students and faculty, including myself, supported the governing National Party's superficial reforms of Verwoerdian separate development. This breeze of change within Afrikaner circles was strong enough to blow my parents and most of my Verwoerd family into the new, pro-Verwoerd Conservative Party. They staunchly held on to apartheid as the only long-term policy to “guarantee the (white) Afrikaners' survival”. But I went with the white mainstream's reluctant acceptance that this full policy was no longer realistic; I agreed that separate development was not working in practice.

The bags I took to the Netherlands wasn't the only baggage I was

carrying. The invisible baggage of my childhood and schooling as a white, Christian Nationalist Afrikaner, a Stellenbosch Verwoerd, is clearly revealed in a diary entry of that period:

Betty's Bay

28 December 1984, 10:15 pm

Well, finally, after much weighing of the pros and cons, I came to pen my feelings, thoughts and memories. The conditions are very favourable to do so: Dvořák's "New World" Symphony in the background, mixed with the peaceful, familiar hissing of the gas lamps, with Ouma Betsie sitting next to me at the table, reading. In my heart there is a nice, warm feeling because she and I had such a meaningful conversation this evening. For a long time I have wanted to chat with her about all the turmoil in our politics currently and how she sees the future. Particularly I want to know more about her past with Oupa and the origin of the policy of separate development – seen from a *personal* point of view.

It was particularly heartening to see she was trying to understand my situation and also the complexity of the current situation in our country. It is striking that she speaks from a fear of the dominant numbers of blacks that threaten our small group of whites' right to self-determination. She strongly believes the only solution is to provide every people – Black, White, Coloured and Indian – with an area in which they can govern themselves. It is the only way for a people to maintain their own nationality (culture) and to preserve it for their descendants. She also strongly emphasises things would have looked differently today had Oupa not been taken away from us when his policy was only beginning to be implemented.

I can disagree with her about many of the things we chatted about, but what I highly appreciate about her is a feeling of self-respect, respect for your own people and for your country that radiates from her – a feeling of pride and being anchored, which I sense such a little of in Stellenbosch. I admit that this pride can be taken too far, but particularly among the young people of today more often the lack of

pride in being an Afrikaner is taken too far. Then I get this feeling of being spineless, anchorless, directionless.

It is nice for a change to say, to write, to feel and even to believe such patriotic things. After all, one should have self-respect, from where you can have understanding and respect for other people and peoples.

Eighteen months after this entry, I arrived in Utrecht. With all my baggage. I planned to spend my first overseas summer doing some research for a master's thesis in philosophy. It was supposed to be a quiet, acclimatising detour before starting, as a Rhodes Scholar, a three-year degree in theology and philosophy at the University of Oxford. The idea was to return to Stellenbosch afterwards to complete my theological training. I had a strong vocation to become a minister within the Dutch Reformed Church.

In the summer of 1986, I was in a serious relationship with Melanie van Niekerk. She was one of the few female theology and philosophy students. Women were not yet allowed to become ministers within the DRC. Twenty years later, our marriage came to a sad end. But at that stage she was one of the few people I could talk to openly. It was still the era of long-distance communication by handwritten letters. From my cramped little room in north Utrecht, I wrote many letters, often late at night.

I cringe now at my narrow piety and feel ashamed of my ethnic politics of that time. I am sorely tempted to censor some of the language, but I am also grateful for these naked, confused scribblings because they shine a strong, if uncomfortable, light on my delayed awakening, and provide a reliable record of my hard landing, near Wilhelmina Park.

76 Maurits Street

Tuesday, 3 July 1986

Dear Melanie

This is the first chance I've had to sit down and write since arriving here yesterday. My room is on the first of three floors, at the back of

the house and just above the kitchen, looking out on a little courtyard. Seems like a real chaotic student house. Luckily it has a fridge, stove, cutlery and crockery.

I've met the other tenants: Johan Bouwer (doing a PhD in theology), his wife Amor, and their two-year-old son. (They are friendly, but I sense a lack of spirituality and warmth in them – small things, such as the way they treat the child, Amor's unladylike language. I'm probably too quick to judge – I'll need a positive approach to get along with them since they are in charge of the house.)

The other people are Rudolf Serfontein, a refined, slender chap studying piano teaching. He has odd ways, but I like him. The other chap is Steward van Wyk. He is a Coloured from Swellendam. He helped me a lot this morning and then went to Amsterdam for the day.

It is strange to see news about South Africa. Tonight there was an item on the twelfth bomb since the state of emergency and the fact that people are still dying despite the state of emergency.

A few hundred metres away there is a beautiful park (named after queen Wilhelmina!) with giant, lovely trees, ponds with leaping fountains, walking and cycling tracks and lots of geese, muscovy ducks and swans. There are even some goslings – so cute and fluffy, I just want to pick them up.

This idyllic picture of Wilhelmina Park, and my relationship with my digs mates, was soon disrupted. Over the next few months the "pure", combative faith of my youth was fundamentally questioned by especially Amor and Rudolf.

However, to appreciate the profound impact of their insider critique – as white, Afrikaans speaking, former Dutch Reformed Church South Africans – I must first return briefly to my schooling in seductively beautiful, lily-white Stellenbosch.

As a primary school child in Stellenbosch I joined my neatly dressed parents and brothers every Sunday morning at church, where we sat in the hard wooden pews of the large Dutch Reformed Student Church next to other white Afrikaners. Later the Congregation Centre in

Uniepark became the focus of my more enthusiastic church activities: two church services every Sunday, with Sunday school for the children during the morning worship, Sunday evening Church Youth Action gatherings in high school, and week-long Pentecostal services during Easter.

In this Uniepark church building, literally around the corner from my parental home, I became a born-again Christian at the age of thirteen. Five friends and I formed a small Christian group and decided to baptise ourselves "Warriors for Jesus". Through most of my high school years we regularly studied the Bible, earnestly prayed together, and enthusiastically offered Sunday school classes for coloured children on nearby farms.

Within my ardent Dutch Reformed, nationalist Christianity I did not question official racial classification between "Europeans" and "non-Europeans", between "whites", "coloureds", "Indians" and "Africans". My consciousness was strongly shaped by the DRC's puritanical culture. As a dedicated Warrior for Jesus I didn't smoke or drink alcohol. I tried hard not to swear or to use God's name in vain. I did not dance, nor did I play in a rock band like my brothers. I didn't even listen to this unholy music. My anti-dance and anti-rock music sentiments were so pure that I had taken the lead in arranging an alternative to the matric year-end dance: a bus to Cape Town for high tea at the Mount Nelson Hotel.

Above all, I diligently refrained from "inappropriate sexual activities". "Dirty thoughts" was high on my confession list during my daily Bible study and prayers. Good Christians strove to be "pure of heart". Not having sex before marriage was far more important to me, clearly, than loving my enemies was.

My purity as a warrior for (white) Jesus was also shaped by my ethnic "family", the Afrikaners. I joined the Voortrekkers (Afrikaner nationalist Boy Scouts) at the beginning of high school.¹² My team, the Renosters (Rhinos), consisted of the six Warriors for Jesus.

12 For more on the history of the original Voortrekkers and their trek away from the Cape Colony in the nineteenth century, see Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: A Biography*.



The Stellenbosch Voortrekkers met at a place called the Laager, next to the Uniepark DRC. Every Friday afternoon at five we gathered in neat rows for a flag-raising ceremony on the parade ground, followed by a range of cultural, religious and outdoor activities, often in intense competition with other teams.

My (white) Afrikaans family, my (white) Afrikaans suburb, my (white) Afrikaans school, my (white) Afrikaans church, my (white) Afrikaans friends and my (white) Voortrekkership became an ox-wagon circle around my group identity. This laager turned my political relationships with South Africans of colour into a zero-sum battle between white Afrikaner nationalism and domestic black nationalism. Over time, aided by the Cold War, the struggle for liberation from apartheid was increasingly demonised as inspired by foreign, atheistic Communism.

My high school English teacher encouraged us to keep a diary. Some of the entries remind me how effective the Total Onslaught, anti-Communism ideology of the day was:

11-18 August 1978

Friday – and at one o'clock a few of us left in Bedford trucks from the school to Radio East Cape where our Cadets would spend the weekend under the Army's leadership...In the evening we got two lectures on Communism and radios.

Friday 29 June 1979

We were asked today in class to write down our opinions about war... I don't think there are [sic] very much to say in favour of wars because it mostly destroy [sic] people's lives and their belongings ...

One day we will all have to defend our border against the numerous attacks from the terrorists, who are getting better and better trained, especially in the last few months, by the East Germans.

Every week, for almost an hour, I was one of the 600 Paul Roos Gimnasium boys who marched together on the school's parade ground, in specially provided military uniforms. There were regular lectures by senior Defence Force officers in the school hall. And there were weekly youth preparedness classes to equip us to fight the communists. From Grade 10, every schoolboy received his Defence Force call-up, informing him in which unit he would start his two years of national service (conscription) after school.

I was particularly proud of one of my brothers who became a parabat, a member of the exclusive parachute battalion. I wanted to follow his example, but a sports injury in matric forced me to ask for postponement of my national service. My hope was that I would be fit enough after university to be able to be a proper soldier, like my brother.

I have limited memories of interactions with South Africans of colour during the 1970s. My contact was mostly confined to missionary activities as a young Warrior for Jesus, and, of course, there were dark-skinned people working in our garden and kitchen, who were given thick slices of bread and jam and milky coffee with heaps of sugar in separate, tin mugs and plates.

No-one who came asking for food was ever sent away empty-handed. In personal relationships, in one-to-one contact, my parents were quite humane. Part of the mission-conscious, paternalistic Christian culture in which they and I were educated was that the values of concern, friendliness and charity towards the underprivileged and the poor were emphasised. Ma also taught us from a young age that we were not allowed to call adult black people by their first names – “outa” (old father) or “ousie” (old sister) were considered the polite alternatives to uncle and auntie at that time. We did, however, refer to adult gardeners as “the garden boy”.

In such a way a strong consciousness was cultivated in me of how different “we whites” were from “the blacks”. And that “we Afrikaners, as a minority people, will only be free and independent if separate development occurs”. Even now, my parents (and most of their surviving brothers and sisters) insist there is a big difference between “apartheid” and “separate development”. For them, apartheid means a system of oppression and domination. Separate development is Oupa Hendrik’s policy of “separate freedoms for the different nations or ethnic groups, each with their own homeland”. From an early age I heard this refrain: “We are race conscious but we are not *racists!* We as Afrikaners have never wished to govern over others...apartheid in its ugly form stems directly from British imperialism. The British have messed up in their colonies much more than we have.”

Raw anti-British sentiment, blended with Christian paternalism, reinforced by comprehensive, sanctified anti-communism, shaped the black-and-white world view with which I grew up as a young Boer in Stellenbosch.

By the end of high school and as an undergraduate at Stellenbosch University a few cautious political questions began to arise in me. Yet, I remained at home in mainstream Stellenbosch Afrikanerdom. I was a member of the Ruiterswag, the secretive youth wing of the Broederbond.¹³ I was a National Party (NP) supporter and in 1983 I voted YES in the (white) referendum in favour of the Tricameral Parliament, with

13 See Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom’s *The Super-Afrikaners*.

separate houses for whites, coloureds and Indians. I could not understand why the newly established United Democratic Front (UDF) had revolted so heavily against this "step in the right direction". I also had no time for the "communist ANC". As late as 1985, I joined in the applause when, while some 150 men were having lunch in the dining hall of the white Wilgenhof residence, there was a radio report of another "highly successful" air attack on "the bases of ANC terrorists", this time in Botswana.

Little wonder that a few months later Maurits Street's people had to shake so hard to wake me up properly.

76 Maurits Street

Friday, 4 July 1986, 8:25 pm

Dear Melanie

I am sitting in my room with a cup of black coffee and I need to chat to you. This afternoon I went jogging on foreign soil for the first time and liked it a lot. I must say that after hearing Johan telling me about some of the things happening in Wilhelmina Park, I won't be able to feel this comfortable everywhere. It seems there was a homosexual rally of people all over Europe and Britain – more than 6 000 in all! Apparently they showed their love for each other openly and unashamedly, some of the women were topless...Wow!

Amor and I might cross swords soon (she's doing a PhD in sociology) because she is rather left – she supports the ANC, economic boycotts etc. She is quite outspoken about people in SA who don't really know what's happening. I suppose she does (definitely) know more about it than me. What really gets me is the way she remarked this morning that she supports equality between the sexes.

There are many interesting and shocking publications on South Africa which are naturally banned down there. I will try to read them.

11:55 pm

I would rather chat to you than listen to Amor and Johan outside my window (in the courtyard) arguing about whether Johan is really an

apartheid theologian, whether he acts out his choices vis à vis apartheid ("I had to kiss your arse to get you to resign from the Dutch Reformed Church!").

I don't know how to convey all this to you, how they accuse each other, whether she is really acting out her hatred for apartheid in the field of sociology. How can she ever be the wife of a minister and how could they serve a parish (of whatever church)? (Am I gossiping?)

The argument started when Johan and Rudolf began discussing Satanism. Then Amor said that Johan and his church (which justified apartheid ideology theologically) were just as mistaken and benighted, that Christians were ignorant, and that Johan actually just felt guilty about what his church was doing.

Perhaps I am overreacting to what happened tonight, but it hurt me so deeply and set me to thinking about so many things. Perhaps this is why Christ said: "First remove the beam from your own eye..."

9 July 1986, 8 pm

This afternoon I visited the university library but spent most of the time talking to Johan. He told me about the crisis facing those relying on scripture here in Europe, how there are hardly any constants anymore, that our interpretation of the scriptures has become so relativised and contextualised. This made me wonder what had happened to simple childlike faith. Also the whole issue of "anonymous Christianity", namely that we should not arrogantly assume the right to proclaim Christ's final judgement.

Another subject we discussed was homosexuality and its scriptural justification (for instance where Christ says that "some were created not to be married".) What really disturbs me is that Rudolf himself is gay. But that's not the real problem - I like him a lot. The point is he cannot believe in a God who rejects his sexual disposition. (Over here they don't talk of normal and homosexual people, but of homos and heteros). How does one reject homosexuality in principle, while still making these people welcome in the church?

Another tricky issue was whether women in a lesbian marriage (the feminine partner) should be artificially or even naturally inseminated.

Another issue (how many more?) was pre-marital sex, which is not taboo to Christians over here.

Seems as if today is a day for exhausting discussion. While preparing supper Amor and I started chatting about politics. At the start, it felt as if she did not want to allow me to say what I wanted, or that she attacked and criticised me on every point for not being good enough and not showing enough solidarity with the suppressed blacks. I consequently tried to defend myself by criticising her views and gross generalisations about the Afrikaner and the Dutch Reformed Church. You must know that wound-up, tense, knot-in-the-guts feeling that comes from getting emotionally involved in an argument.

Well, after a lot of "chatting", about an hour later, things cooled down. I formed a better idea of her experiential background and past, and decided she was really an honest sort of person, expressive, and not one to think calmly about things (like me?). I judged her for the overheard fight of the other evening. I hope that letter didn't upset you too much – just goes to show how wrongly you can judge people if you don't know them well ...

What I really wanted to say was that I discovered in the course of the discussion that that was her way of showing how strongly she felt about something, not that she was attacking me personally, and that I could learn a lot from her. I must admit that she was talking much more calmly towards the end. She has had a lot of contact with ANC members, with people of the Confessional Circle and Kairos (I know little about them) and many blacks (members of the UDF) who felt oppressed in the SA context, especially by the Afrikaner government. In the process, she developed an enormous antipathy towards the Afrikaner and the DRC. She has no desire for nuanced thinking but will admit that things are not that simple.

It is terribly important to her that we as whites must be critical of the injustices emanating from the apartheid regime and the theological justification of this ideology. We cannot sit in our grand houses with huge salaries and mouth paternalistic criticism but should *prove* our solidarity. This is what blacks are also asking. For instance, resign

from the DRC, take part in the consumer boycott. These are the sort of things she was confronting me with.

I explained that I was countering apartheid and its effects within the structure (unacceptable to her, but we agree to differ on this) in a non-political way, inside the church, at a practical, inter-personal level (dialogue, UDF study tour last year, church youth outreach activities, in daily life). I also referred to "apartheid" inside marriages and between family members. She attaches more value to being involved in the struggle against unjust structures. In the end, I realised that I was trying to exculpate myself and I wondered whether I was really prepared to sacrifice my privileged, peaceful, comfortable lifestyle to assist the suffering and oppressed? Were we not trying to soothe ourselves with arguments, charity, not realising that for most blacks this was not enough? I finally realised that I needed to ask the Lord for forgiveness.

The situation is so unbelievably complicated. There are so many factions in black ranks – with whom must I show solidarity? How do I show solidarity with the oppressed without being alienated from my own people? Or does it mean here that the true imitation of Christ must cause a division between husbands and wives, parents and children? (You know that section of the scriptures, don't you?) In other words, how far must one pursue reconciliation and when does it become self-protection and fear of really standing up for the truth?

I suppose you don't have any answers, but it is so difficult to be truthful with oneself and not to overreact.

10 July 1986

Dear Melanie

What a disturbing climax to a disturbing day! I wish you could have been here to hear everything and to decide with me what is true or not.

Amor and Johan started telling me about all the information they have picked up from banned publications, magazines and from discussions with exiles, ANC supporters. It is simply SHOCKING! It deals with the diabolical role of the Security Police, in fact with all security organisations such as the KGB, CIA etc.

(During the conversation, a friend of Rudolf's came round. Seems to me they intend to spend the night together! Perhaps they are only friends. His excitement about the visit of his friend is a curious experience...)

I don't know what to believe of everything they tell me, but it seems quite certain that the phone here is tapped. According to Amor's uncle in the Security Police, files are kept on everyone going overseas (especially to the Netherlands).

They also talked about visiting a woman in the Netherlands. She is an ANC member as well as a devoted Catholic and opposes violence. This woman told and *showed* them how the Security Police tortured her – for instance, they stuck wires under her nails, into her ears (she is still hard of hearing), and into her vagina to shock her and obtain information. (I hope I'm not telling you too much – perhaps you should keep this to yourself.)

I found a book here written by a friend of Steve Biko's – a white guy, Donald Woods, who fled SA. Woods tells who Biko was – seems to me he was a wonderful leader and person – and how he was murdered. There are photographs of what his body looked like and where he had been hit. According to the police he died of a heart attack. There is also a long list of people who died in detention – according to the Security Police most of them hanged themselves or had accidents, such as “slipping on a cake of soap”.

These are only some of the things we discussed. This book is naturally banned in SA. Woods smuggled the manuscript out. I really don't know what to think. I don't know how I'm going to feel after reading it.

Amor and Johan say that eventually they didn't know who to believe – perhaps just God! – and that they have lost all their naïveté about the NP government and all its claims about good intentions. According to reliable information the Security Police even have their own “hit squad” (ex-recces) who are paid to liquidate opponents of the NP. They mentioned some examples of murders which remained unsolved or were never even investigated. I can't tell how true that is.

So, what is one to say of all this? As Johan remarked: “Cry, the

beloved country!" If you take all these things seriously you will go mad or become paranoid. It is such a strange feeling, as if everything cannot be true. Still, some parts are surely true: the doctors who examined Biko were found guilty after all, there are some eyewitness accounts etc. I don't know whether I should use all the opportunities to gain this sort of information. Perhaps I should write to Professor Willie Esterhuysen for advice. Apparently the government is also involved in several secret projects of which the public know nothing.

How does one keep a cool head through all this? How does one digest this sort of information? Is it digestible at all? How does one keep being honest to oneself and investigate everything in search of the truth? One thing – maybe two – I hold on to: all this rubbish will not come between you and me. This South Africa I'm learning about is just so different to the one I know.

Secondly, it must not come between me and the Lord and a naïve, childlike faith in His victory over Evil. It simply shows me the immense power and influence of Evil over the world. Perhaps we have not taken it seriously enough, what do you think? Let me put it like this: the violence from the side of the government helps me to better understand Amor's radicalness (and that of the ANC). Johan admires the ANC's patience for waiting so long before resorting to violence. We must never become like that!

1:30 am

While lying in bed and trying to pray, many things came into my mind. I started wondering if I wasn't being silly to write all those things to you, whether I wasn't overreacting. Maybe it is simply the shock of meeting another world inside SA.

I thought again about what Gerrit Viljoen said: "There can be no reform without order, reform goes hand-in-hand with stability." Furthermore, neither the ANC nor the Security Police are angels. The tragedy of apartheid is that lofty good intentions are sunk by civil servants down below. How is a state to guarantee its safety? Where does one draw the line? Are all the government's reforms really

pointless, cosmetic or irrelevant? Is there so much evil in everything the government and Christians in the government are doing? (Am I being naïve?) What about black people like Fano Sibisi of Kwasisa Bantu, whom we visited last year and who is not as critical of the government?

Yet the tragedy of innocent people being tortured in the most gruesome fashion by the Security Police remains. Do the people in top government, Gerrit Viljoen or Dawie de Villiers, know about it?¹⁴

On the other hand: Amor and co. may not be that innocent either. What responsibility does the state for instance have to protect its security against subversive literature? And who determines what is subversive?

But then again what gives this government the right to restore citizenship to blacks without ever having had the right to take it away? Why did the DRC not listen earlier to critics of Apartheid?

What about many people of conservative political views, who are also committed Christians, such as my uncle Carel Boshoff, my mother, Ouma Smit? Did my grandfather not know about all these things? According to my father he was a well-loved minister of native affairs. Or is my and their image of him the result of one-sided indoctrination? Does each of us (all the whites) bear a collective responsibility for everything the Security Police have done or are doing? Then surely we are guilty of all the wrongs done by everyone.

Am I rationalising? How does one reconcile the different worlds in South Africa? Especially where the government acts and thinks from one world – a First World in conflict with the Third World? Everything is getting theoretical again.

Sorry if I'm tiring you out! Maybe I should really try to get some sleep.

14 The family of my best university friend were close friends with Oom Dawie (De Villiers) and Oom Gerrit (Viljoen), prominent NP cabinet ministers at that time.

12 July 1986, 3:20 pm

I wanted to respond to all you wrote about the bombs and Nelson Mandela and the hungry children. It is unbelievably difficult to know what to do in practice about all this destruction. The other day (night rather) I tried to explain to you and afterwards thought about it again. I am happy to be confronted with all this "banned" information, although I am hesitant to read the Biko book. When you've read or heard about something like this, you want to ask whether there is anything left that's nice, can one really laugh and joke and enjoy life when so many people are suffering? The other day I told Amor about how beautiful the snow on the Jonkershoek mountains was, then she wondered aloud whether the people in Crossroads in their tin shacks and without warm clothes would find it beautiful.

I know she isn't right, but I also realise that I don't have the answer. It's almost as if it's easier not to hear about all the suffering on earth. But then I think about how Christ mingled with the whores and sinners, how they turned to Him. That Christ lived out his message of hope in a time of poverty, political injustice, religious hypocrisy, moral decay. The trouble is, I don't always know how to follow Him! He was often so radical: what are the implications of some of His advice... "sell what you own... who does not hate his father or family or wife..." etc. Then I wonder whether we ever shouldered our responsibility and involvement (not only money!) in Stellenbosch as we should have. What more could we have done? Where do you draw the line?

Wow, it is exhausting but also liberating to talk openly with you about these political issues. These are the things that upset me most (even subconsciously). Perhaps because Amor confronted me so harshly/bluntly/unusually with them? (I've actually come to like her, we now get along fine.)

The other thing that upsets me a lot is Rudolf's homosexuality, which he proclaims so freely (as do so many others here). I wonder whether these people wouldn't also feel drawn to Christ (like the whores - in fact I'm sure of it). But what about our Church's loveless condemnation? Can I feel free to invite him to become a Christian? What about

all the condemnation? What if he was born like that – which is what I suspect?

My growing friendship with Amor did not mean that she stopped confronting me – quite the opposite. She'd also studied philosophy at Stellenbosch and had had the same lecturers I had. Like Socrates – gadfly of the Greeks – she poked holes into the dykes surrounding this Stellenbosch “warrior” and student. This time the questions weren't being raised around prominent authority figures in the DRC, the government or the Security Police, but mentors whose political acumen I valued highly.

16 July 1986, 1 am

Dear Melanie

Seems as if it's going to be one of our late night (early morning) chats. Now the problem is conscientious objection. Perhaps I should explain how we got there. I don't agree with everything she says, but I have heard some strong arguments. I don't want to sound too clinically rational about the matter, but this may make it easier to sort out the emotions. It is a strange feeling: I do not have the answers to their questions and what I hear is disturbing – I could quite easily agree with her. But it is as if I know, in my heart, that this is not the only interpretation, that I can't go along with everything. I wish I had more facts at my disposal – perhaps I should, no wait, I think I must write to Gawie [de la Bat] or Prof Willie or Fano (or all of them). Prof Willie may be the best bet?

Amor and co. are not impressed with him – she calls him two-faced for belonging to the Broederbond while making all those enlightened pronouncements. She can't stand him. She also dislikes Prof Hennie [Rossouw] for “his part in maintaining the White Afrikaner identity of Stellenbosch”.

This is where the discussion started: she said she had no respect for Prof Hennie due to all these things (although she respects his philosophical abilities). I then tried to explain that while I did not agree

with everything he said or did, I still respected him as a person and that this respect had a bearing on the way in which I disagreed with him. She then wanted to know how far I would be prepared to defy his authority. What it was really all about was to what extent I would stand up for the values I believed in.

I realise that I haven't really thought through the consequences of my political convictions. I have concentrated so much more on Christian values and convictions. Then again, there are *many* non-political problems that need specialised attention and for which I must train myself. Many blacks, "radical" whites in SA and overseas, concentrate too much on the political problems and the dehumanising effects of a repressive society, separated families, torture of women, even children. (By the way, apparently many children under eleven are being held in SA. Last year a two-year-old and three-year-old died in detention! That Mrs Mabata's child starved to death with her... "She was a Commie, wasn't she?" is what the policeman apparently said. Amor says information about this is available at the British Council in London.) The problem in SA (like elsewhere) is who to believe. Sometimes, no, often, it seems as if the world outside South Africa is not that wrong.

In the end, we agreed that you could become a heart surgeon, but that you still had to live according to your convictions. We are trying, aren't we? We just have so much to learn. Or perhaps we should keep right out of the "struggle"? What would Christ have done? His disciples included a Zealot and a publican.

Then we got to conscription and the whole question of who does one fight against? Is the communist onslaught really that bad, or is it mostly propaganda? All the countries around SA (except South West Africa) [Namibia] support the ANC, in other words, if they should come into power, we won't really need a defence force. (I'm oversimplifying the discussion.) The SA government's incursions into neighbouring countries, even as far as Tanzania, are destabilising. We also talked about the whole question of whether the ANC had any alternative to violence - my question is whether violence has to include bombing soft targets.

What is one to say of all these things? I am worried that one could say, "They don't know the facts, they are overreacting, they are one-sided" and then it turns out that they were correct after all.

In the final analysis I just feel, "Fine! Fine! Let's stop talking and get involved in all the suffering around us, let us seek the Lord with all our hearts." Isn't that the secret of Fano and his people? Or are they again not politically involved enough?

It's almost half-past three. Maybe I should go to sleep. Thing is, I'm wide awake.

All this lack of sleep naturally meant that my MA thesis, the ostensible reason for my visit, did not progress much. I never regretted this, because I learnt much more from the people at 76 Maurits Street. The following letters may seem like a deviation. Looking back, I now realise not only how important it was for me to be shocked by Amor's politics, but at the same time, from my relationship with Rudolf, to have radical doubts about what it meant to be a "Warrior for Jesus". Given my ideal at the time to become a minister in the DRC, it shook me to my foundations to discover that my confident black-and-white, warrior-for-Jesus, DRC revulsion for "filthy" homosexuality was in contradiction to the heart of the Christian Gospel. It was as if walls around my unconditional love for my neighbour had to be flattened. This traumatic experience furthermore reinforced the arguments of Amor and co. about my political home also being built on sand.

However, it would still need a lot of demolition work and reconstruction before I would join in and help build Albert Luthuli's ideal of a home for all in South Africa.

17 July 1986, 3 pm

Dear Melanie

After the political discussion the other day, which kept me up so late, writing letters and disturbing my sleep, I went through a strangely "depressive", introspective period where I did not want anything to do with them and where they irritated me immensely. I know I am

overreacting, that I am criticising them unfairly, that I should not judge them, but I simply don't want to stop. All these strange thoughts go whirling through my head. "You can go to hell!" Last night (11 pm) I went cycling just to get out. It helped but when I came back and wanted to sleep, they were still sitting outside my window, discussing politics and feminism. I switched on my radio, but I could still hear them. It was immensely irritating. Such a trapped feeling, because I had nowhere else to go. I started reading and praying, but it did not help, I kept feeling more frustrated. Well, when they finally went to bed I was wide awake and rolled around in bed for a long time. On top of it the weather was hot and muggy, I really missed you ...

I wanted to tell you about all the things we talked about: Rudolf said something about being "homophile" and I asked him how it differed from being "homosexual". Then we started talking about those things in general and the influence AIDS has had on the movement against homophobia.

31 July 1986, 9:30 pm

I have so many things and experiences inside me that I simply have to talk to you, but I don't know where to start.

Maybe it has something to do with my circumstances here in this house, with Amor and Rudolf. Also the environment – criticism of South Africa, strange, unsettling experiences, hearing and seeing things from a different world, another perspective, all this openness about sexuality, feminism, the female (and male) body and in particular homosexuality ...

This evening I went to town at about 7:30, it being "koopavond" (late night shopping) again. I went to a bookshop to look at a few theological and philosophical books. They also had a section on sexual issues. I looked for books on homosexuality. I found a book on the confessions and struggles of some 50 Catholic lesbian nuns, which was rather disturbing. This set me to thinking about Rudolf and Pieter (his friend). They bathed together at 3 am. This showed me again how little I understand of this world. Regarding politics, I think I must first send

you some of the articles I have read. I realise everything is not really so simple, although I don't always have answers. Then I wonder whether Fano and other positive blacks really know what is happening, for instance in Soweto and other cities where the real and relevant unrest is taking place?

11:55 pm

Now I feel a LOT better. I saw Rudolf coming up the stairs as I was fetching some tea and it suddenly occurred to me that I could ask him to recommend some of his reading matter to me, as I wanted to learn more about homophilia. He gave me a few magazines on homosexual subjects.

I feel liberated after talking to him. We chatted about politics too and agreed that it is easy to criticise SA, but that few people are really prepared to get involved. The Netherlands and Britain in particular have a rather sordid colonial past and are now saddled with guilt complexes.

Nicest of all was that I could talk to him and question him on homosexuality, that I stopped wondering and being cautious...I am starting to believe that one should try to bring the Gospel to these people somehow without telling them to change, without condemning them for their sins.

This is a bit different to what I use to think, because then it is no longer a matter of being "normal" to be heterosexual and "abnormal" to be homosexual. I don't know how you are going to get around some parts of Scripture, but there are so many thousands of people with this sexual orientation who don't want to be or can't be any different. Is it not in the final analysis all about the quality of love, for instance in a homosexual marriage. In 1 Cor. 13 it is not just about heterosexual love. Do those parts of Scripture condemning sodomy not refer to sinful lust, immorality etc. and not necessarily to a solemn, faithful homosexual relationship? What about a fine, pure homosexual relationship against a faithless heterosexual one? Is the criterion not something more than mere sexual orientation?

Imagine the plight of homosexual people in a community (church) which is prejudiced and uncharitable and unwilling to understand ...

6 August 1986, 10:30 pm

Amor wanted to talk politics again tonight. Unfortunately I told her about a chat I had this afternoon with someone from Chicago who is connected to a Catholic university with the responsibility for foreign investments (\$400 million!). He is in favour of sanctions and was sounding off about all the big corporations who pay their workers so little and exploit them. I did not feel so good after the chat.

I am almost inclined to agree with him, because sanctions are the only non-violent means of applying pressure to the government. Some blacks like Tutu have also asked for sanctions. On the other hand I still agree with what Fano said about double standards of people like Boesak and Tutu, the dependence of families in the countryside, like KwaZulu, on jobs for their men in the cities and the effect of sanctions on these people.

The point is, the talk about sanctions here is serious and it's not that easy to counter, especially since so many white people happily carry on living their luxurious lives without any concerns for the plight of blacks.

I wonder how it would have been if I hadn't shared a house with these people and hadn't been confronted with their points of view. Radicalism is just so exhausting, especially in someone with a personality as strong as Amor's. It is much harder than I imagined it would be to interact with radicals. And she isn't even black! ...

7 August 1986, 5:30 pm

A quick hello before I start working. Today is/was one of those days – I feel listless and up to nothing at all. Do you feel like this sometimes? Perhaps this is one of the things I simply have to learn to deal with, as part of all these new experiences, but mostly being alone ...

After reading the Bible this morning, I got straight back into bed. Amor noticed that I was out of sorts and brought me some tea in bed

a little later. We had a long chat, and I felt a lot better. This is something one could learn from her, the trouble she goes to when she notices something is not what it should be. I felt bad about how critical I had been of her. We talked for long about emotional support, how we as Christians owed it to one another, but that we so seldom succeed, because when we don't agree about politics, we cut each other off so easily and are not prepared to love our "enemies".

14 August 1986, 5:30 pm

When we were sitting eating outside earlier, Rudolf and Johan again began berating the Afrikaner with his laager mentality, his inability to learn from other cultures, his immorality regarding politics. I became angry and tried to put the other side of the matter. But it was as if I couldn't really express myself in words.

Apparently a lot of our soldiers have died in Angola? What happened at the NP congress? Johan also tells of studies that have shown that the history we have learned at school – the black people who came from the north and the white people from the south – isn't completely true. Please will you check this up?

An interesting, upsetting thought is that the Boers in the Freedom Wars were also terrorists. That General De Wet developed/discovered guerrilla warfare and that we are now judging the black people when we did exactly the same. And this while they only resorted to violence in 1960 (after 50 years of peaceful protest).

I know it isn't that simple, but all the talking is upsetting every time. With a little voice that says to me: "What if he (they) are right and I am wrong?" (Perhaps we're all wrong.) Maybe all we can do is pray for our country.

Sometimes I get so depressed when I think of the future and there's no solution in sight. Sometimes it feels as if my head wants to burst when I try to understand everything. Perhaps I think too much. What does Prof Willie say?

Shortly before I'd left for the Netherlands, I'd met a former British ambassador, Archie McKenzie and his wife Ruth, in Stellenbosch. I was deeply impressed by their combination of political involvement and dedicated Christian faith. They had invited me to a Moral Rearmament (MRA) conference in Switzerland. After two harrowing months in Maurits Street, it was refreshing to spend five days in a beautifully renovated hotel a thousand metres above Lake Geneva and take part in a Dialogue between Continents. A few more of my prejudices were challenged there, including regarding Muslims. It was also my first encounter with a black South African professor. My letters also tell the embarrassing story of visitors from the Cape who affirmed my (white, Afrikaner) prejudices.

Caux

20 August 1986, 11:30 pm

Dear Melanie

It's really a wonderful experience to meet so many people from so many different countries – last weekend there were people from some 53 countries. Apart from those I met yesterday there was a minister from Tanzania, a businessman from Pakistan, someone from Fiji. This morning there were people from Uruguay, Puerto Rico, Cyprus and Kenya, sharing their experiences about "From Fear to Victory". Tonight I am dining with a man from the Philippines. He is involved in resettling Indo-Chinese refugees – a wonderful Christian who has seen difficult times and who has been actively involved in the anti-Marcos resistance movement. I'm looking forward to that.

Places previously only heard of suddenly stopped being just a dot on a lifeless map and became countries with problems, people, natural beauty. In bed last night I saw the world atlas in front of me – suddenly all the countries came alive: lights came on, swarms of people, cars. I realised how small and insignificant we all are, how each person's world can so easily become THE world – as if you/I sometimes want to claim God as our own, the feeling of being God's favourite ...

21 August 1986, 14:40 pm

As you might have guessed, things are going well with me. I am really surprised to feel so comfortable that I have the confidence to speak to so many people.

This afternoon I was talking to the McKenzies about South Africa and the future, and I thought how dark one can let things seem. How gloomy it really is, how unbelievably complex everything is, especially in politics.

Then Mrs McKenzie repeated something said by Frank Buchman (founder of Moral Rearmament and devoted Lutheran minister), namely that if you are in a crisis (especially a political one) that is the time to influence people around you, to draw them closer to Christ, even if it happens one-by-one. That is how Christ worked: the woman at the well, Zaccheus. That was when He was being truly revolutionary. He then expected a change of heart in that person, complete abnegation of the self and absolute dedication to the service of God and his or her neighbour.

I can't tell you now what MRA is and what I think about it all... I am not quite clear about how everything works, especially because Muslims too are confessing about how it works in their lives. But if you listen to the testimony of Christians in particular, it really sets you to thinking. I was surprised about how critical and suspicious I am (and our church is?) and wonder whether one shouldn't say instead "who is not with Me is against Me"?

22 August 1986, 10:55 pm

I am so excited now that I can't wait to talk to you. Tonight I spent a wonderful evening with Mr and Mrs Garth Lean and their daughter Mary from Oxford. All three are with MRA full-time and are fine Christians... we started talking about what MRA really is. Mary says much the same as Prof Marivati yesterday at a meeting of representatives from Africa and Asia: the three basic problems in South Africa are selfishness, fear amongst whites, and bitterness amongst blacks, and that even if apartheid were abolished structurally, people's hearts would have to be changed before peace would truly dawn ...

Tonight we watched a film on the life of Frank Buchman and his immense love also for the people of Asia and Japan, and his respect for and understanding of their religions, although he lives his Christianity openly and honestly. At one stage I realise with a jolt that I do not really love people of other religions, that their beliefs frighten me or create distance between us: because they don't believe in Christ. I wondered whether God isn't infinitely bigger than our thinking and theology. I am still working on this problem, but it is as though I am seeing more light – the realisation that we may have much to learn from them, that we shouldn't be so proud. What do you think?

The other wonderful experience tonight was meeting Mr Bezuidenhout from South Africa (regional director of Constitutional Development in the Western Cape). He knows my brother Hendrik from the SABC and he is a friendly, open Christian. He is here for next week's industrial section of the Congress... to put forward SA's case, speak against disinvestment and raise money for a low-cost housing project – R500 million!

It came as a gift from heaven to hear from the horse's mouth that the State of Emergency has been quite effective, that black leaders (this I found most important) approached him for help against the violence/intimidation of the ANC. In fact, just seeing that he still has hope, that he knows that we (church, government) have made mistakes we need to correct, was enough.

25 August 1986, 9:17 am

I'm sitting in quite a strange place, on a green bench at Montreux station, waiting for the train to Lausanne, Basel, Utrecht. Heavy snowfalls predicted for tomorrow. To think I'll be back then in my little room in Utrecht with all my housemates. I know it's going to be difficult to return and to explain to them all that this week has meant to me. I have realised and seen it all over again that "it is more revolutionary to change people than to liquidate them". William Nkomo, a founder of the ANC Youth League, said this after meeting MRA – four young whites, after being to Caux, went to him to apologise for treating

him (and other blacks) as inferior. This persuaded him to accept an invitation to Caux, where he changed radically and was eventually kicked out of the ANC.

I also saw that what the world, and especially SA, needs is people who, in humble submission to God and in a spirit of forgiveness, devote their lives to combat bitterness, hatred, suspicion between people and nations.

I have the feeling that I learnt some things this week which are going to make a big difference to the rest of my life. It's an exciting feeling, but also a bit daunting ...

An immediate "big difference" was the decision to try and change the direction of my studies at Oxford. This drastic move from Philosophy and Theology to Politics, Economics and Sociology wasn't just because of inspiration at Caux. By September, more fundamental criticism of apartheid was maturing. Hesitantly.

76 Maurits Street

4 September 1986

Dear Melanie

Why am I so scared of doing something much bigger than anything I've done before? Perhaps because I'm scared of being misunderstood or simply scared of defending a particular point of view in public? What do you think? I have really wondered what to do: one moment I'm so sure, the next many uncertainties pop up. Maybe I should do the best I can and leave the rest to the Lord?

8 September 1986, 7:40 pm

I have just come from jogging and had a quick bath, ate some sweet grapes from Greece, put on a tape (*Fiddler on the Roof*) and now I'm chatting to you. Today was a day of variable moods: one minute I was full of life and felt positive, the next, I wanted to lie down and die, feeling we're never going to make it.

This afternoon I started reading the stack of ANC books, magazines

and poems left here by Amor and the others. As you can imagine it was deeply disturbing...looking at the new world of Soweto and freedom fighters, who we so easily call terrorists – before we've really listened. While I was running, I worried that we might be driven apart by all the things I've been exposed to and that you won't understand me anymore. Then I remembered what I'd been thinking during this afternoon's difficult reading. If I truly believe the Lord to be in control of my life, I must believe it to be His will to come into contact with Amor and Rudolf, but also with Fano and Prof Marevati. Then I must accept that my surname is and always will be Verwoerd. And that in SA, especially in some circles, this surname bears a negative connotation (but it could become positive, Prof Marevati suggested).

I get the feeling that my life may take a different direction to the one I planned...After hearing everything (this seems to be merely the tip of the iceberg) that has happened recently to blacks in particular, especially the political system in which my grandfather played such a large role, as well as my church, that I can't just carry on as usual and forget about everything, reason it away, but that I must give my all under the Lord's guidance to help heal the wounds.

Yesterday another guy moved in – Attie, a sociology lecturer at UNISA. He tells me WP rugby has been doing so well. The rugby-mad SA is really a long way from here. He is involved in a new institute, the SA Institute for Conflict Resolution. He offered some useful perspectives when we started talking politics.

He is radically opposed to apartheid and believes it should change, but that too much attention is given to political change while people naïvely think that a new government will solve all problems. The point is that our country, apart from all the political problems, has a multitude of sociological and economic problems which need attention. He also says that we should stop being ashamed of being Afrikaners; that is simply what we are, and we should rather focus on starting to work towards solutions and save what we can. It is a pleasure to hear someone say: "Stop maligning the Afrikaner – rather help find solutions."

It's almost 2 am. Attie gave me new courage for the future, given my tendency to overcomplicate things.

15 September 1986, 1:05 am

All I can really do is laugh about the house I'm in, especially with the new lodgers.

When you look at all the sexual orientations which I have to deal with/confront here gathered under one roof, my prissy little soul freaks out: a homosexual quite actively engaged in his love affair with a "lief-jonge" (who is bisexual and has a girlfriend), two lesbians (Karin and Mandy), and a young man sleeping with his girlfriend. Amazing. And that after two months with a fiery ANC supporter and her equally critical husband.

It's funny how I, as an innocent, protected, Afrikaner, DRC theology student ended up in this hornet's nest. I think I am able to laugh – especially with Rudolf – because, although I can't agree with what they do, I cannot condemn them *emotionally*: I am able to look beyond his/her/their sexual orientation and that is so liberating. I was able to tell Rudolf this tonight and he said he did not find me judgmental at all.

This is a wonderful feeling – I may not have progressed much with my MA thesis during these three months, but the Lord has taught me an immense amount about people, about my own blindness and prejudices and emotional inabilities, my lack of true love in spite of who or what my neighbour is.

It is not as if I am making a great success of it: it's simply that I am much clearer about what we should strive towards. It is so liberating. As if all this light reveals the darkness in me, our church, our people. As if I can so clearly see how I have grown in terms of thinking about sexuality but also politically. How different it would have been if I had not been living in this house with these South Africans. It was incredibly tough at the beginning, and still is, but it is as if the shackles of prejudice are falling off. I know that these changes will make an unbelievably big difference to my life; they will create more problems and hardship and conflict (especially in SA) but there is so much certainty

that this is the right direction. I hope it doesn't sound arrogant. Do you understand?

It really felt tonight as if Rudolf was opening up and that I saw for the first time how he thought and felt: how he had suffered even as a child by having a father who would not accept or understand him; a father Rudolf has hated for as long as he can remember, and how this hate grew to include all fathers in the family, in the nation, especially the church (my, our church!) because they also rejected him. How, since coming to Holland he had to learn to deal with his new rights and freedoms as well as his new, strange relationship with Pieter. How he often doesn't really know where he is heading, that he often feels his life is without meaning.

It is incredibly difficult talking to him about Christ, because to him the church where he met this Christ is the church which murdered Christ for him. His emotions are blunted for any Christian message as a result of all his strong negative associations with the Afrikaner DRC.

I need to get to know Karin and Mandy (much) better, though my traumatic experience with Rudolf has opened me up ...

Two days later I was sitting on a bank of the Kromme Rhijn, a small river near Utrecht. Ducklings were foraging between the tables of Rhijnauwen Tea Garden. Through large white clouds the sun was shining brightly. I looked out over green fields where cows and sheep grazed. And I dared to articulate life-changing feelings, a mere two months since I'd left home:

17 September 1986, 2:05 pm

Dear Melanie

A few thoughts have become clearer to me lately. Last night Attie came to my room, asking what I was going to study at Oxford and whether I shouldn't do some or other third-world development study of urbanisation, poverty, sub-economic housing. He believes that there was and is going to be an increasing need in these areas. I laughed when he said that, but it did set me thinking, since it touched on all sorts of things happening inside me.

The clearest of these has been my growing doubt whether I would ever be a minister in the white DRC. I have a strong feeling that there is greater need in other areas, or let's rather say, a need for which I started feeling more responsible and which would be more of a vocation.

This relates to a lot of things: the fact that I am increasingly realising that apartheid is wrong, and worse, always has been; that our people (my grandfather and co.) were deaf/blind to those people (the majority) who did not agree with their ideological/theological framework; that our people have acted wrongly in the past, vis à vis blacks for instance. I know we have done fine things, more than most whites can say... but what I'm really trying to say is that I would like to contribute to addressing the terrible effects of apartheid – perhaps also because my name is Verwoerd, as Prof Marevati noted at Caux.

It doesn't matter so much where I land up, the point is that there are millions of people in our country living below the poverty line, who are homeless. These people need food, clothes, jobs before they can go to church. Naturally this does not exclude spiritual work, but I think that we as a church must be much more involved in poverty which most likely results from (amongst other things) unjust structures.

Do you understand the line of my thinking and feelings? The thing which occupies me now, which struck me so suddenly this morning – just like that feeling I had at Betty's Bay that night, when I had the idea to apply for a Rhodes Scholarship – is what I should be studying for the next three years. It was as if all the philosophising and rationalising about the existence of God had started looking like a luxury, given the need in our country ...

76 Maurits Street

18 September 1986, 1:15 pm

It is such a shocking feeling that in the country from which we have almost always experienced the most beautiful things, there are so many people from whom the privileges have been taken which they wanted as much as we did, whether deliberately or through circumstances.

And when they tried for years to bring about changes, they were confronted by violence and a lack of understanding and white capitalism/self-preservation.

This must be one of the experiences which shocked and disillusioned me most lately: that the world in which most of the inhabitants of our country have been living, especially during the past century, is so different to our world – so full of pain and rage and frustration.

Last night, I finally summoned the courage to finish the book about the police murdering Steve Biko – an incredible leader and wonderful human being we don't even know about, even though it all happened in our country and he lives in the hearts of so many. For the first time too, the ANC's policy and their violence start making sense to me. I cannot condone it, but I realised I would likely have done the same if I had been them (what does this do to military service?).

I'm sending you Mandela's speech before the judges during his trial (hope it doesn't get intercepted!). One can criticise it from our little world, but I try to put myself in his shoes, as Jörg Zink quotes an Indian prayer: "Great Spirit, help me never to judge anyone before walking in his moccasins for a month." Quite a shock, and it hurts. There is so much reconciliation and healing work ahead.

Last night reading the parable of the Good Samaritan it struck me like a blow: I often act, due to my own moral schemes and my Christian sense of right and wrong, just like the Pharisee and the Levite! It is not easy to admit this to myself, but that in effect is what is happening. This is how other people standing outside my view of what is right see it. But this is NOT what Christ did! He taught me not to judge, which does not mean a laissez-faire acceptance and approval of all that is wrong. It requires of me to see my brothers and sisters in all the gluttons, boozers, whores, homosexuals and Pharisees (theological students?).

The mystery (heart) of Christianity seems to me that Christ identified with sinful humanity to such an extent that He could say: "Insofar as you have done it to the least, you have done it to *Me*." The essence is surely "that God so loved the world" and that is what I

must convey. I know this love is associated with holiness, with punishment for sin and that God demands perfect honesty, purity, love. The problem is that I am so principled, that I enjoy it so much being a chosen one, morally superior, educated, civilised that I no longer have compassion. This is hypocrisy. Perhaps Christ will say one day: "I was a prostitute, I cohabited, I was a homosexual and *you* did not visit Me." Wow!

These disillusioning realisations obviously led to the gathering of larger thunder clouds above my birth family and me. The pressure was increasing between my Dutch exposure and a certain ancestor whom Pa and Ma loved dearly. It was high time for a candid political letter to my parents, a letter which also demonstrated that more reforming of this young Verwoerd Boer from Stellenbosch was needed.

76 Maurits Street

22 September 1986, 12:30 pm

Hello my dear parents!

This morning I came across a few more very good political, church related ideas – from my perspective! So I felt like writing the promised political letter.

As you know, politics and the church, and the church and politics, are probably areas where we have had the most misunderstandings. On the one hand, our worlds here are close to one another because I see myself also as an Afrikaner and am proud of it – I think it is an important part of the commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself".

My love of myself as Afrikaner, however, also brings me to the other side of the matter. Here I think our worlds are far apart, given our different experiences in South Africa, but especially due to my experiences here and also in Switzerland in the past two months.

Caux probably made the biggest impression thanks to the open, loving way in which I gained insight into especially the lives of fellow South Africans. Black people and coloureds who are people *just like*

me. People who also love their language, culture and *their* country. People who also fall in love and have families. People who have feelings like us Europeans. BUT who have been at the receiving end of apartheid for all these years.

Apartheid with its pass laws, group areas, forced relocations, limited facilities, theatres, beaches – even when you are a well-educated, civilised black man. The homeland policy with all the homelands making up 13 per cent of the country, with no property rights outside the homelands – even though your family have been living for generations in, for example, Soweto, and see this place as part of your own country. No right to vote – no say in the political policies that control your life. These people at the receiving end of apartheid also have another view of history, for example white exploitation of cheap black labour since the colonial period – and even now in the mines. And then there are the Whites Only and Non-Whites Only signs everywhere. With “Non-White” that implies I am not a black person in my own right, but a NON-White – white is the measure of being human.

These are just a few of the thoughts in the minds of the people whom I have met. I wish you could also have contact, real contact – on a friendship level and not a master-servant level – with a black man or woman!

Of course one can reply to many of these thoughts with all kinds of arguments: “But this is not what we meant.” “Look what it’s like in the rest of Africa.” “Look at how much we have already done for the black people throughout the years (and then they burn down the schools again!).” “The country was built with white money and expertise.” “We must fight against the stokers of unrest and the communist agitators.”

Naturally many of these arguments are true, from our world of experience anyway. There are understandable reasons for whites – especially us Afrikaners – to emphasise self-determination and the retention of self-governance, as well as our fears about black domination and the communist “total onslaught”. Criticism of apartheid becomes even more problematic when it comes to what the alterna-

tives for Separate Development were or what type of political dispensation can handle our unique mix of peoples and our economy.

I do not have a good answer. However, what is becoming clearer to me, is that apartheid, or any political dispensation worked out by white politicians *only*, will *never* work. Even if Separate Development, according to their opinion, and based on Christian considerations and superior experience (paternalism?), is the best solution. Such a dispensation is also wrong and dehumanising for the *majority* of fellow South Africans anyway.

It is becoming clearer to me that we must move away from a political policy (and thinking) which is based on people's skin colour. I admit that unfortunately in South Africa skin colour corresponds to a large – although diminishing – extent with education level, and social and economic standards. That whites might have fewer advantages and beaches during this process of moving away. But I believe at the same time we will win much more: on human relations, on cultural interaction, on Christian neighbourly love (not just non-hate), and in terms of a more peaceful, just and humane future for the majority of people in our beloved country. A country for which our ancestors – just like the black people now! – fought against the blacks and particularly the English. And used violence against the oppressors.

All these things made me think I should philosophise less and become involved more practically, given the need in our country. This need is strongest amongst black people, but also in relations between white and black. I will try and sort out the implications of this for my studies at Oxford and my future when I get there. I will not rush into decisions! Don't worry!

Before this "sorting out" in Oxford there was still about a week in 76 Maurits Street. Just enough time for a last few letters. And a lot of worries about the fruits of being woken up over the previous three months.

24 September 1986, 11:20 am

Dear Melanie

Thanks for trying to explain to my parents that they needn't be so worried...I just hope my parents understand a bit better after the exhausting letter I wrote them. It was the first time that I really wrote honestly about all those things. It was a load falling from my shoulders and hopefully I can be more frank with them in future. I hope it doesn't hurt them or sound too much like a condemnation. Once parents have reached their age and built up such a clear frame of reference, it must be tough when you suddenly hear such strange noises coming from your own child.

Yesterday afternoon, I worked through the government's publication "Talking with the ANC", which my parents sent me. For the first time I saw/realised how crass and one-sided the propoganda is ...

29 September 1986, 11:50 pm

I didn't feel so well today. Even running didn't help, except towards the end when I tried to run and shout all the nonsense and fears about Oxford and my future out of my system.

Lately, I have started wondering whether I should try to change my study direction. Almost as if I were afraid to go working one day among/with blacks (all the danger, conflict, suffering), because how does the Lord protect one? He does not prevent your or my sickness, suffering and dying (or that of our children and families). Sigh. These horrible images and thoughts keep whirling through my head, and I can't get rid of them.

But I don't feel like talking politics now. Some days I wish I knew how and where you and I will be able to play our roles in this unbelievably complex situation. Then I get so despondent when I look at the scope of the problems and how small and insignificant we are. It really scares me! Especially when I think of how big the responsibility is that goes hand-in-hand with the incredible privilege of gaining all the knowledge/insights here in the next few years. What will

God use it for? Does He have a purpose with it after all? Then I get scared and wish sometimes I hadn't seen and heard all these things.

With the passage of time my appreciation has grown for the purifying watershed summer of 1986 in the land of my Verwoerd ancestors. Thirty years later, I am still grappling with what it really means to be a Verwoerd and to be committed to reconciliation in South Africa. Along the way I've found new spiritual guides on my ongoing reformation journey, including Thomas Keating, Anthony de Mello and Richard Rohr. In a recent daily meditation Rohr quotes the poet Christian Wiman: "Faith itself sometimes needs to be stripped of its social and historical encrustations and returned to its first, churchless incarnation in the human heart."¹⁵

15 Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss*, pp. 92-93, in Richard Rohr's "Daily Meditation", 17 January 2017. See the website of the Center for Action and Contemplation - www.cac.org.

Chapter 3

Re-education in enemy territory

Why do you Afrikaners try so hard to separate yourselves from us Africans? – Paul Moyo, Lusaka, 1988

WHEN I WAS AWARDED a prestigious Rhodes scholarship at the end of 1985, my father wasn't very impressed. The roots of his Afrikaner resentment for "the English" lie deep. He was particularly concerned that his idealistic third son, who carried his name, would be misled by "liberalist influences" in Oxford. My first visit to Rhodes House made me wonder whether Pa hadn't been right.

At the grand, domed main entrance to the Rhodes House Library, I was unexpectedly greeted by rows and rows of names of people – English people – who had died in various wars. This veneration of fallen British soldiers included those of the "Boer War". The hairs on my neck stood on end. I was even more aghast at a large, white statue just around the first corner: Lord Milner – the hated architect of the scorched earth policy and fatal concentration camps at the end of the Anglo-Boer War.

These traumatic events occurred more than 60 years before I was born. Despite that, the years of my youth were still encircled by the long arms of what I came to know as the Second Freedom War (generally known as the Anglo-Boer War, and more inclusively as the South African War, 1899-1902). I received my childhood feelings against "the English", the "Rednecks", "the Khakis" with my mother's milk. My parents and my birth family wholeheartedly identified with the "freedom struggle of the Afrikaner" – first against "British impe-

rialism” and after that against “white poverty” and the “liberalist English money power” in the cities.

In truth, without the Anglo-Boer War, my great-grandfather, Wilhelm Johannes Verwoerd, probably would never have set foot in the Cape. A combination of empathy, missionary zeal and a vague promise of work had made him and his young family pack their bags, leave their home in Amsterdam to tackle the long voyage to Cape Town. From early 1904, he and his young family – including the three-year-old Hendrik – had cast their fate with those of the post-war Afrikaners.

In addition to the influence of my direct family background, many Afrikaans historical tales and storybooks grabbed my imagination as child. Graphic depictions of the suffering of women and children in the British concentration camps, and the figure of 26 000 deaths, were deeply ingrained in me. I strongly identified with the heroic but futile struggle of a handful freedom fighters against the overwhelming force of the Khakis. And here, on a roll of honour in Rhodes House, were the names of those English soldiers who had died in South Africa.

I do not remember any of the names that were on that list. In early October 1986, I didn't have much energy to immerse myself in the experiences of these “Rednecks” and their families. I was too busy trying to make sense of the painful truths I had been exposed to in the three months in Holland. Thanks to the extensive collection of books about South African history and politics, I became a regular visitor to Rhodes House Library. Amid continuing mixed feelings and many overcast days, Rhodes House became an important, if ironic, place in this phase of my re-education.

It was a rather disarmed “Warrior for Jesus” who first walked into the sparsely furnished student room at Corpus Christi College in Oxford. My stay in Oxford felt like a never-ending winter, but I am grateful for having had so much time to wrestle with the large questions raised in 76 Maurits Street. Far away from family, friends, “my people”, Voortrekkers and fatherland, I could begin to work through my Dutch experiences, even though it was at a humbling snail's pace.

Within a few days of my arrival, I was provisionally allowed to register for the versatile PPE (BA Honours in Politics, Philosophy and Economics). While trying to find my feet in the course and struggling with the language, I received a letter from my father, in response to the one I'd sent from the Netherlands a month earlier: "Wilhelm, I am very concerned about the direction you are taking... Do you remember my warning before your departure from SA, that you must be on your guard not to be led astray by foreign liberalists? Be careful! In our history there are other examples, like Colin Steyn and Bram Fischer,¹⁶ of grandchildren of famous grandfathers who landed up on the wrong side... I really hope it doesn't happen to you too!"

It was, however, too late for me to return to the fold.

Corpus Christi College

12 February 1987, 9:30 pm

Dear Melanie

In the last two days, I've been to two interesting meetings on SA, and have seen another movie. Yesterday evening, I went to that anti-apartheid seminar again. It dealt with resistance. Apparently the speaker was involved in the 1976 riots and had had to flee. Now he is studying philosophy and theology and he is a devoted Christian. Just shows you how wrong we were to see all those against apartheid as communistic atheists! In any case, he gave a bit too much attention to the ANC, but it was good to hear that history again and to realise how they were virtually driven to violence by the regime.

This evening, I went to a meeting of the anti-apartheid student

16 Colin Steyn was the son of the Free State president MT Steyn. He later joined Jan Smuts's United Party and represented it in parliament until his death. In Afrikaner circles at the time, this was considered a betrayal.

Abram "Bram" Fischer was a member of an old, prominent Bloemfontein family. He joined the South African Communist Party and was also a famous advocate who defended activists like Nelson Mandela during the Rivonia Trial. He was sentenced to life imprisonment for conspiracy to commit sabotage and furthering the aims of communism.

association. Initially I didn't want to go, but they were showing a video on the origins of the Freedom Charter, on 26 June 1955. Do you know what it is? I always wanted to learn more about it, so I went. I am glad I did, because it was an excellent video with interviews, including with Oliver Tambo and other ANC members (white and black), which fitted in well with the previous evening's discussions.

Now I know that the government's publication *Talking with the ANC* on the Freedom Charter contains a blatant lie (for instance, they maintain that the document was drawn up by Joe Slovo, a communist).

It is shocking and disturbing to think about: so much sick propaganda which only worsens the conflict and misunderstandings between our people. I wish I could show this video to many, many of our people at home. I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears how people came together from all over the country to express their ideals of a free and non-racial SA. That was 30 years ago – how much has happened since then! And at school we learn nothing about all this history! No wonder blacks need “people's education” – the right to hear about their own history in their own schools. A pity this history goes to the other extreme of rejecting Afrikaner history.

It is nice to be able to write these things to you without worrying that you might think I'm mad or misguided. But I feel apprehensive about returning to SA. Can you understand that? On the other hand, there is such a determination growing in me to get involved and to help where I can and where the Lord leads me!

On a spiritual level, my disillusionment with the DRC contributed to me no longer getting involved with a particular church or congregation. Also, a growing sceptical consciousness of the church as institution was reinforced by my academic exposure to Economics, and particularly Developmental Economics. These studies brought my thinking to an important crossroads. I became more frustrated with the poor understanding and inadequate action of the church regarding the large-scale, structural problems of poverty, hunger and inequality between the “First” and “Two-Thirds” worlds. The distinction between

charity/aid and justice/development became more important to me: the difference between the well-meant handing out of blankets and soup, which only brings symptomatic relief, and the development of a politics and spirituality which seeks radical, long-term ways of empowering wronged communities.

Amid this alienation from organised Christianity I was still a regular visitor to Christ Church Cathedral, mainly on weeknights. The beautiful organ music and singing in the large open space during Evensong was a refreshment; the fixed liturgy of a high church Anglican service – with the focus on sacraments instead of preaching – was a space wherein I, occasionally, rediscovered the mystery of God.

After four terms, at the end of 1987, I needed a break from Oxford.

Melanie and I were married in Stellenbosch at the end of 1987 and Corpus Christi College granted me leave of absence for 1988. There were the familiar mountains and a proper blue sky, but I did not feel at home either in Stellenbosch, or in my family.

In December 1987 my parents invited me to accompany them to a “proper Day of the Vow Festival” held by “true Afrikaners”.¹⁷

16 December 1987, 1:26 am

Lord, I’m in turmoil about the Day of the Vow again. What about my relationship with the family and with the *volk*, to whom the Day of the Vow is such a precious day, integral to what it means to be an Afrikaner? Should I go to Goodwood with my parents later today?

17 At school I uncritically accepted our Afrikaner descendants’ solemn responsibility to stay true to the vow that our beleaguered ancestors took on 16 December 1838, just before the Battle of Blood River. During this battle, 475 Voortrekkers led by Andries Pretorius went up against Zulu king Dingane and his army of 10 000. The story goes that the water of the Ncome River ran red with the blood of the Zulu warriors, thus leading to the appellation “Blood River”. Before the battle the Voortrekkers had sworn to God that the day of the battle would be honoured by them and their descendants as equivalent to a Sunday, if “the Lord let them defeat the Zulus”.

It doesn't feel like the right thing to do. Isn't it too great a compromise? Is it right to go out of curiosity?

I don't understand Your involvement in the history of the Afrikaners, and the Zulus, and in South Africa's past? I don't know what my role is in this country. I don't know how to handle the relationships with my family. I DON'T KNOW!

Wrestling with my Heavenly Father, ancestral spirits and family wasn't limited to misgivings about the Day of the Vow. A deeper questioning of particularly my Afrikanership was enhanced by a first visit to the "rest of Africa", a few steps into "dark Africa".

In 1988, I had the opportunity to visit neighbouring countries for the first time with a few senior students and lecturers of the University of Stellenbosch. Our unofficial goal was to have talks with ANC leaders in Lusaka. Along the way I was confronted with this question posed by Paul Moyo, a minister of the Reformed Church of Zambia: "Why do you Afrikaners try so hard to separate yourselves from us Africans?"

In my diary I reflected on the "irony of my *volk* and my language: we are Afrikaners, which means we are of Africa, and our language is called Afrikaans, an African language. Yet we have so little understanding of/love for Africa and its people. We share the love of the soil, spiritual sensitivity. And yet there is so much misunderstanding, fear, hate in South *Africa*."

And my tour report bears witness to the gradual redesign of a traditional, highly exclusive group identity to a more inclusive understanding of Afrikanerhood: "...As an Afrikaner I regard myself as an African; my roots and my mother tongue are firmly embedded in Africa, this is where I see my future. This conviction was strengthened by the moving way in which we as Afrikaners were welcomed by fellow Africans in the countries we visited ...

"Afrikaners are not 'chosen' to separate themselves, but are in a unique position to bridge the differences between African and Western values/cultures, between traditional and modern Africa."

My criticism of Separate Development sharpened after this trip, but I remained wary of bold anti-apartheid political involvement. Since meeting with members of the banned ANC wasn't part of our official programme, I couldn't openly write about this. My diary, however, contains several critical impressions of the ANC, based on long discussions in the Pamodzi Hotel, Lusaka.

We were met at the airport by Steve Tshwete, greeted in Afrikaans and quizzed about the state of Western Province rugby. Not what I expected from a "terrorist leader" at all. The ANC's National Executive Committee happened to be having a meeting at the time. This gave us the chance to shake the hands of quite a few notorious people, even "arch-enemy" Joe Slovo. I felt like a traitor. "Of course I have to talk to the ANC," I thought, "but to shake their hands as if we are all big buddies...I don't feel so good about this...Here I am shaking the hands of an MK leader and a communist when a few months ago my brother risked his life to go and fight somewhere in Angola...What about all the guys who lost their lives in the struggle against the ANC?"

We spent a Friday afternoon and a Saturday listening to some of the younger comrades giving their interpretation of our country and the ANC's history, the justification for the armed struggle, the road ahead. Thabo Mbeki joined us on the Saturday afternoon to listen to our side of the argument and to answer questions.

Lusaka

1 July 1988, Friday night

This afternoon in the Pamodzi – mixed feelings! To me there's a big difference being pro-ANC and pro-South Africa. The ANC is certainly an important part of the solution, but it isn't THE solution. To me certain individuals within the organisation are quite acceptable.

I am amazed that they have so little information about what is going on in right-wing Afrikaans organisations at the moment.

I feel comfortable about the ideal of a democratic South Africa. It means that these people must also be part of it.

I believe the middle ground is important, but this underlines the

difficult position/dilemma of a bridge builder. Now this experience is more on a personal level, but later in my life it may be important when I start building a new South Africa, etc.

Rev Paul Moyo yesterday: the irony of South Africa's struggle against communism in the name of God – it turns black people both inside and outside South Africa into communists, whereas black people are generally opposed to an atheistic communism. They are definitely in favour of African socialism, though.

Lusaka

3 July 1988, Sunday

“Transference of power to the people” is important, but who are these “people”? Sometimes it's everyone who stands for a non-racial democracy. At its deepest, however, the mass revolutionary base is black. In other words, when it comes to strategy, the black power base within South Africa is the controlling factor.

NP/ANC: Basically they have the same nationalism, megalomania, origins... they make decisions on behalf of others and so are characterised by limited democracy. I agree with the group member who said: “The sooner we get rid of both the NP and the ANC, the better.”

Black liberators certainly have a constituency, they are heroes in the community, etc. Even people like Beyers Naudé¹⁸ owe loyalty to one group. In a certain sense it's easier than anti-apartheid Afrikaners trying to bring about reconciliation: we are identified with our people, but are critical of their solutions; we do not share the ideals of many Afrikaners, yet our membership of this community places limitations on the strategy we're following – that's why we oppose the armed struggle.

18 A prominent Afrikaner Nationalist church leader for twenty years. Against all expectations, in the early 1960s he began to criticise his own people's politics and his beloved DRC's justification of apartheid, until resigning from the church in 1963 and joining the anti-apartheid movement. He was ostracised by the Afrikaner community. See *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith* by Colleen Ryan.

The ANC is certainly a liberation movement, but it doesn't seem as if they have much clarity about what must happen after liberation. Their support for socialism is a big problem, but it can't be glossed over – quite the opposite!

In addition to my misgivings about the ANC, family ties also contributed to my political tardiness. The conflict with particularly my father had intensified since my stay in the Netherlands. He seemed to have been hoping that my questions and letters were simply youthful rebellion.

Stellenbosch

12 November 1988

I've recently started to realise that keeping quiet and compromising doesn't necessarily bring reconciliation. In fact, it builds emotional walls. In other words, on the one hand I'm trying to place less emphasis on politics with my parents, but on the other hand, it's not really working out as far as our relationships are concerned – politics cannot be divorced from other things. Love "in spite of", an ideal of reconciliation, easily becomes an excuse not to stand up and live out my religious convictions in honesty and humility.

Stellenbosch

18 November 1988

Lord, I get so angry about the racism that some people try to disguise by saying: "We are not racist, we're just race-conscious." I get angry with my family with their conservative, moral, Christian pretensions. The theory of Grand Apartheid/Separate Development is/was only accessible to a small group of people, so it would never succeed ...

Stellenbosch

21 November 1988

What a lovely weekend. It was fantastic to be in the unspoilt surroundings of Betty's Bay, to sit and read with the sound of the sea in the

background and the gulls cawing. It was a tonic for my soul: running along the beach, swimming in the lagoon, light-heartedness mixed with serious philosophising and sharing the frustrations I'm experiencing with my family.

Love, love, but also honesty. My frustrations and paralysis at my parents' home are not the result of politics. They are caused by my lack of honesty, by the fact that I keep quiet too much ...

My disillusioning exposure in Holland to Verwoerd as the hated "man of granite" and the subsequent re-education in Oxford also kept me from a closer examination of Dr Verwoerd as politician *and* as grandfather. The contrast between Verwoerdian apartheid and the continuous adoration of Oupa in my parental home and conservative Afrikaner circles was too astounding. In the 1980s, the public legacy of this adoration was still highly visible.

Right next to parliament was the HF Verwoerd building. In Stellenbosch, I regularly walked past the university's Accountancy building named after my grandfather. In Port Elizabeth, aeroplanes landed at HF Verwoerd Airport. If you drove from Cape Town to Pretoria on the N1, then you drove past the gigantic HF Verwoerd Dam. If you happened to get a stomach ache along the way, you could stop off at the HF Verwoerd Hospital in Bloemfontein. Just before Pretoria you could fill up with fuel in Verwoerdburg. And once in Pretoria, not far from Verwoerdburg, was the HF Verwoerd High School in Pretoria. And a fellow Afrikaner could honour Oupa Hendrik at his grave in the Heroes' Acre.

As student at Stellenbosch I initially tried moving away from this solemn Oupa who became increasingly controversial, but at the end of 1984, after that conversation with Ouma Betsie in Blaas 'n Bietjie, I really wanted to try and understand him. Four years later I finally began with a bit of reading work – in Pa's "Verwoerdiana" archive and back in Betty's Bay:

Stellenbosch

5 December 1988

Yesterday was a difficult Sunday: strange emotions after reading the booklet about great-grandfather Wilhelm Johannes Verwoerd. Pa says the book isn't really to be taken seriously. Still, I was struck by the picture of a simple, dedicated, loving man. According to one minister, my great-grandfather didn't discriminate against people on the grounds of race, language or group.

[The other books in] Pa's study...are written from either an over-critical English perspective, or from an uncritical Afrikaner perspective. There is a 600-page doctorate on just the Johannesburg period in Dr Verwoerd's career, without a single interview with a black person, or a single critical reference in the bibliography. This makes me excited about a gap that might be filled – I pray for Your wisdom and love.

Betty's Bay

17 December 1988

It's wonderful to be here, all by myself on a Saturday night, with the wind blowing a gale.

After the many conversations I've had, and all the thinking I've done recently about Africa and being an "African/Afrikaner", and about a possible book on my grandfather and apartheid ideology, it feels strange sitting here in his house, with Transvaal holidaymakers admiringly taking photos of Dr Verwoerd's holiday home. Especially after the Great Trek celebrations on the Day of the Vow yesterday, it is painful to read Davenport's *Modern History of South Africa* and to realise again what a one-sided Christian National education I had. I got a distinction for history in matric – for studying half of my country's history!

A few weeks later I was back in the cold, wet darkness of Oxford. From January 1989 to the middle of 1990 the most important phase of my enemy country re-education took place.

Rhodes House Library, Oxford**12 January 1989**

Lord, sometimes it hurts to read about the Afrikaner and his nationalism – similar to “seek ye the political kingdom first” (Nkrumah).¹⁹ It’s heart-breaking to see what the consequences of my grandfather’s policy were. On the one hand this policy is understandable, given the intellectual climate at the time, the Afrikaner’s history of conflict with the British empire. On the other hand, he and fellow Afrikaners were deaf to the cries of help from the ANC and others. Please bless my studies of this complicated, sad history.

Summertown House, Oxford**19 January 1989**

Lord, it’s late at night and I should have gone to bed a long time ago. But after last night’s Bram Fischer memorial lecture by Beyers Naudé, I just want to bow down before You and confess that it’s all too big and too much for me. I feel overwhelmed by my recent struggles with my own country’s history – with my grandfather’s role, with myself, with what I want to/must do with all this knowledge. And my struggle with You – I find it hard to believe that You have a plan for my life, for the world.

Then again, tonight’s chat with Melanie made me realise all over again that I don’t have to live in the shadow of my family. Feelings of moral guilt shouldn’t get me down. I don’t have to be a Beyers Naudé or a Bram Fischer ...

Oxford**23 January 1989, 12:30 am**

It feels as if we have reached calmer waters. Important thoughts: Part of my uncertainty is caused by legitimate, complex, important choices. Also, I am studying SA politics/history as though for the first time,

19 Statement by Kwame Nkrumah, first prime minister and president of independent Ghana (1960-1966).

so it feels as if I know nothing, and I am so unsure of myself. Even more important: I feel involved with this history, it makes a strong moral appeal to me. It produces a feeling that I must react, I must do something about it. At the same time I'm frightened and confused about my judgement/criticism of what happened, and also about my future direction...

Shortly afterwards I received an unexpected invitation from South Africa to write a popular article about the contrast between Verwoerd's politics and my newfound convictions. To make time for this article, I decide to write a mini-thesis on a subject of my own choice as part of the PPE course.

Oxford

7 February 1989

Perhaps it's the incentive I need to really start reading about that period, about Dr Verwoerd's personality (in spite of the limited perspective here in England), to use all the hours of brooding and struggling with the subject to make a cautious contribution to breaking down Afrikaner stereotypes, to start building bridges.

Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of being here so I can get the necessary distance, to learn about my country from another perspective. Thank you, Lord, that I don't have to be ashamed of who and what I am – Afrikaans, Verwoerd, white, your child, in spite of my incomplete insight, etc. With the necessary realism about fellow South Africans I shouldn't have to avoid them, like yesterday at the seminar on people's courts.

Afrikaner-bashing is also not a solution. If I don't participate wholeheartedly in the struggle, if I'm not ready to spend six years in jail for refusing to do military service etc. this doesn't mean that I'm not looking honestly for a solution. And if that makes me naïve, it doesn't mean I can't contribute ...

Oxford

8 February 1989

Lord, thank you for the opportunity to finally (after 25 years!) put my thoughts about HFV, apartheid and being an Afrikaner into writing. I feel like a sponge that has absorbed as much water as it can.

Thank you for enabling me to write in a searching way, without evading my commitment any longer, or knowing precisely what the implications will be for the future. This decision gives me new self-respect. I pray for wisdom and the necessary powers of discretion.

Little Rodd, Wales

13 May 1989

[After a lovely walk in the Welsh hills] it was quite a revelation to me when I started reading in GD Scholtz about HFV's youth last night (in between the irritating interjections of a terribly biased biographer). To see how he also experienced painful disillusionment, but in a completely different context; how his exposure during his time at university to the terrible living conditions of poor whites in the Cape Town suburbs shook him and encouraged him to engage in "practical patriotism". Ironic parallels with my experiences in Holland?

Lord, it's disturbing to read how firmly principled he was – Christian National principles, which were "based on the truth". I turned back to Ouma Betsie's hand-written note on the front page. Is this why she chose the prophet Isaiah's words: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn"? And I remembered the coloured man at Caux who told of his painful confrontations with the "man of granite"? Or my ex-South African tutor, Gavin Williams, who says his picture of HFV was always the cartoon with the telephone line in Dr Verwoerd's office that ran up the wall and disappeared into the roof, providing a direct line to God?

It is so difficult to criticise a principled person because then you can easily find yourself accused of being without principle yourself. But his firmness of principle, sense of vocation and self-assurance is not love as I understand it.

When does integrity, honesty, pride, become a form of stubbornness? What about Your will, which is only revealed to us in part – through a glass, darkly?

People (of all colours) who are more important than principles/ ideologies?

Oxford

3 July 1989

Thank you for the tremendous wisdom from Laurens van der Post's *Jung and the Story of Our Time*. Thank you for their resistance to narrow vision, their emphasis on the positive potential of the unconscious, of the painful challenge of becoming an individual within the space of the "collective unconscious".

I still don't understand everything, but it feels as if a window has opened up in my spirit which is letting a cool breeze blow over my furrowed brow ...

Last night I thought about that dream I once had about my grandfather: how frightened I was of him and how liberating it felt to start talking to him, to feel that people had misunderstood him, that he also didn't understand me!

I finished the article, but it was never published. I no longer have a copy of it, but I suspect it was too academic and I was too tempered in my criticism of Verwoerd.

My first exposure to African-American social and political thought was at the Summer School of the Oxford Centre for African Studies (OCAS) that year.

The opening lecture was about the philosophy of WEB Du Bois and the lecturer was Kwame Anthony Appiah. Afterwards, as I stood quietly dipping a biscuit in my tea, a bearded black professor, whose name I have since forgotten, came over to me. In light of the academic boycott of South Africa, my presence was a problem for the African-American students. The man said he'd heard I was related to Hendrik Verwoerd and I confirmed that I was.

"Tell me, was your grandfather a Nazi?"

I almost choked. I didn't really know where to begin. My hesitation was received with a frosty silence.

The next day, several Americans made it clear to me that I was not welcome, and the head of the centre politely asked me to leave because he would have a boycott on his hands if I didn't. My bona fides first had to be confirmed by the ANC.

A phone call or two, specifically with Dr Frene Ginwala in London, and mediation from people such as Dr Blade Nzimande (one of the course leaders), defused the situation. It probably helped that I'd been part of the group that had held talks with ANC leaders in Lusaka the previous year. Still, it meant a lot to me that black South Africans defended the principle of non-racialism in the struggle against apartheid in my favour.

I was also encouraged by a conversation with a black South African student who told me he'd been filled with distrust and even disgust when he'd heard who I was. "Now I see that you are not like your grandfather. You have helped me to break down the wall between us."

The abovementioned article about Dr Verwoerd ended up forming the basis for the mini-thesis I handed in in April 1990. This intensely personal academic work made me better understand how my grandfather had become the personification of grand apartheid and why he would likely always remain the symbol of that political system.

Chief Albert Luthuli's book *Let My People Go* had a great influence on me in this regard. Luthuli's account of his frustrated experiences as elected traditional leader deepened my insight into the realities on the receiving end of separate development. His sincere, committed Christianity as church and political leader touched me most, and his sharp critique of HF Verwoerd spoke to me: "Of the men who have ruled South Africa... no one has been the guiding mind behind so much negative and oppressive legislation. If any one man is remembered as the author of our calamity, it will be [Verwoerd]." (p. 176)

In the mini-thesis, I tried to summarise the background to this dominant, justifiable political image of Verwoerd as follows:

“This depiction of Dr Verwoerd is summarised by Davenport’s statement:

A man of benign appearance, he both mesmerized and dominated his political followers to an extent not achieved by any of his Nationalist predecessors. Intellectually, he stood head and shoulders above most of his contemporaries in Parliament, while his self-assurance and didactic manner led many to believe that he could conjure into being the political objectives of his fertile imagination.²⁰

“Given Verwoerd’s political style and personality; the highly successful consolidation of power and support by Afrikaner Nationalists between 1948 and 1966; the intransigent nature and relentless enactment of prominent features of apartheid – such as the policies of residential segregation, the prohibition of interracial sex and marriage, the creation of a system of ‘Bantu Education’ – and the already high and increasing visibility of ideology in government policy and rhetoric, it is indeed tempting to take what Posel terms a ‘grand plan’ approach to the development of apartheid, with Verwoerd being the architect of this plan.”

On the other hand, the deepening of my historical consciousness brought a better understanding of the political, social and economic limitations within which he had functioned as a politician. This made my moral opinions humbler.

In the process it became easier to live with this careful distinction: I am committed to fundamental moral, as well as a practical, criticism of the political policy which Verwoerd had defended so effectively, but this doesn’t allow me to either demonise him or reject him as my grandfather.

20 Davenport, *A Modern History of South Africa*, p. 389.

I often asked myself as I was working on this thesis whether it was possible for me to make sense of Verwoerdian apartheid without, even subliminally, defending Oupa. I still wonder. But facing Prime Minister Verwoerd during my time in England also kickstarted the process of transforming overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame into a creative acceptance of shared responsibility. It would be a long process though, given the sharp contrasts between my reflections about South African history and my experiences in 1989 and 1990.

For example, during the tense OCAS Summer School, my father paid me a short visit on his way to a conference in America.

Oxford

1 August 1989

I am thankful that the Summer School episode turned out well, even though it was more tense than I would have liked to admit, with all the phone calls and the feeling of personal injustice. Perhaps I just don't like conflict and rather unrealistically want everyone to accept me ...

Thank You also for a blessed day on Saturday with my father. It felt funny meeting him here in England, to go for a pub lunch together and walk round Kew Gardens. It was great to talk to him, particularly to hear more about his life before and during his time as geology professor. But it was upsetting to hear his ideas on the past and future – Luthuli a communist?

What a contrast between the Summer School and his world! But I was born somewhere in between these two worlds and I want to live out my life in Your service there ...

Then, in February 1990, while I was still immersing myself in South African history, I one day found myself sitting expectantly in front of a television, drinking champagne with friends and applauding. Fist in the air, through the gates of Victor Verster Prison, Nelson Mandela walked to freedom after 27 years of imprisonment. That evening, we watched painful documentary material from the past on TV and cried together. And the next morning, I was back at my desk trying to make sense of HFV's political life.

Oxford***12 February 1990***

What an exciting day it was yesterday, and I felt so close to South Africa and its people (and problems). Nelson Mandela really was freed and the whole world rejoiced – except of course for the AWB and co., and the white people who looked on apprehensively as thousands of people sang and danced, certain that this was at last the beginning of the end of apartheid.

Thank you, Lord, for this great moment. Perhaps for now it's enough to just be happy, for Mandela and his people. But it's not so easy. This is just the beginning of the long and difficult negotiation process that lies ahead. Perhaps it's hard for me to stare reality in the face, to realise that the future is no longer in the hands of the whites (perhaps it never was?), and that not only these whites are "my" people.

Lord, it feels petty to talk like this, but it is part of the way I'm feeling, particularly after being reminded constantly of the history of the last 27 years yesterday; of a grandfather who ignored Mandela's letter; who as prime minister, played such a great part in these tragic events. I have already confessed to my collective guilt in the past, but yesterday made it so much harder to write about HFV and to try to contextualise him.

And I also feel sad that I never took the trouble to try and visit Mandela in jail. Perhaps my motives are not purely unselfish, but maybe it's not yet too late.

Last night, while we were still marvelling over the day's events, I clearly felt the baby kicking in Melanie's stomach!

Oxford***17 March 1990***

This morning I had another clear dream in which I asked Nelson Mandela's forgiveness for my grandfather's share in his suffering, and that of so many other South Africans. I want to write and tell him about it. He's presently visiting Sweden. I pray for him, and I pray for our country and all its people.

18 March 1990

Dear Mr Mandela

This is a personal letter that I have not only wanted to write for a long time, but feel compelled to write. For ages I have wanted to express my thankfulness to you for your inspiring example as a true statesman, and I want to underline my support for your dearly bought ideal of a non-racial democracy in South Africa. In a sense, that is the easy part of this letter.

Since your release the difficult part has become even more difficult. The more I see and read of you, the more I study our country's tragic history, the deeper my realisation of how different everything could have been, of my own people's guilt. And the more painfully I feel the responsibility and guilt of "the one man who would be remembered as the author of our calamity" (Chief Luthuli), namely Dr HF Verwoerd.

Naturally, history – a long, unjust 27-year-long incarceration and the part my grandfather played in that – can't be changed with a few words. But as an Afrikaner who benefitted from apartheid at the expense of other South Africans, as the grandson of the architect of Separate Development – the man who above all others was responsible for your suffering and the suffering of so many other people – I want to say to you: I am very, very sorry about what happened.

I can't ask for forgiveness on his behalf. In any case, such a request would easily sound meaningless because I understand so little of what you endured during the past few decades. What I can do is to assure you that my wife and I want to spend our lives trying to convert words of apology into deeds. To make South Africa a country of shared, humane freedoms, in place of Verwoerdian separate freedoms (for some). I sincerely hope that I will have the opportunity to talk to you personally about this. In the meantime, I pray for God's blessings on you, your family and Africa.

The letter to Mr Mandela was an important step on the way "to convert words of apology into deeds". Still, I continued to doubt my motives with this letter and about getting politically involved in South

Africa. The letter did help, but still I often felt guilty. Even though it was spring in Oxford, I woke every morning with a feeling of paralysis, struggled to get up and to complete the mini-thesis. There were days I was too scared to read the newspapers to find out what was happening in South Africa. And I avoided black South Africans at Oxford.

The consolidation of my anti-apartheid convictions was encouraged by a sobering pilgrimage to the Holy Land in August 1989. Visiting Israel and Palestine deepened my doubts about the holiness of my heart and how clean my hands were. Afterwards, I wanted even less to do with the Jesus I mostly met in church services – in white, middle-class Stellenbosch or white, middle-class Oxford.

Ramat Rachel camping area, Jerusalem

27 August 1989

Jerusalem! What a relativising place, with its many overwhelming traditions, faiths, cultures, fragrances, colours, foods. Footsore old city. Never again will someone tell me that Christianity should be lived in “cleanliness” and (Western) “civility”. Walking through the old city – especially the Muslim quarter with its dark, dirty, overpopulated alleys – it is incredibly striking, faith-inspiring, to understand how radical the Christian message is: love for the outcasts of society in this dusty, dirty world; blood – literally – on the hands of the Good Samaritan!

Chapter 4

A home for all?

*The task is not finished. South Africa is not yet
a home for all her sons and daughters. – Albert Luthuli*

“I SINCERELY HOPE that I will have the opportunity to talk to you personally about this”, I had written to Nelson Mandela. A year and a half later, I had the opportunity to look into his eyes.

Initially it was just a glance. On 28 September 1991, I was one of a handful of possible ANC supporters from the white, Afrikaans Stellenbosch establishment. We gathered in a spacious house in Brandwacht at the foot of the Stellenbosch mountain.

I waited excitedly as he moved from one person to the next. When he finally greeted me, he was friendly, but my surname didn't have the impact I expected, and he was already moving on to the next person. The host came to the aid of my faltering courage.

“Come, we mustn't let such a historical chance slip away...Mr. Mandela, I would like to introduce you to Wilhelm Verwoerd, he is a grandson of Dr Verwoerd.”

I jumped right in, quite discourteously.

“Mr Mandela, it is very good to meet you. I hope you received the letter I wrote shortly after your release last year?”

“No, I didn't. But before we continue, may I ask *you* something?”

I wasn't sure what to expect. “Of course ...”

In a warm voice, looking directly at me, he said: “Tell me, how is your grandmother?”

I was caught completely off-guard.

“She is quite old now, she just turned 90. She lives in Orania and is quite happy there ...”

“If she wouldn’t mind, would you please convey my greetings to her?” It felt genuine.

Then he listened carefully while I tried briefly to convey the contents of my letter to him. His reaction was without bitterness and full of encouragement.

“Let us not worry too much about the past...let us work together for a better future.”

He paused.

“As a Verwoerd you have a great advantage – people will pay more attention to what you say.”

The next morning, a young Afrikaans student, Dirk van Eeden, who had been at the meeting came to me to thank me. He was from a conservative rural family and my meeting with Mr Mandela had an impact on him. I hadn’t seen my encounter with Mr Mandela as an example for other Afrikaners.

Questions haunted me. What would be the consequences of this



28 September 1991, Stellenbosch - at last I got the chance personally to convey my deep sense of sorrow about the injustices of Apartheid to Mr Mandela.

“advantage” of being a Verwoerd? What would the ANC and the media do with me? My ego frowned: what if I lost my own identity in the process? After all, I was more than just a Verwoerd.

And I was still concerned about the purity of my motives. I was careful of the selfish temptation to want to get rid of grave feelings of guilt. And I wondered whether, when I took a public stance, it would really be about criticism of Verwoerdian apartheid, or whether I would be using my family relation to bring attention to myself.

Still, Mr Mandela’s handshake, and the meeting with the student, made me realise with greater clarity that my family membership, especially at that stage of our country’s broken history, would be an advantage. My conduct, especially as a descendant of a prominent political leader, could possibly encourage more people like Dirk. In that case, would it not be less selfish to stand up in public for what I believed in than to carry on keeping quiet any longer? I would have to learn to live with the dangers of abuse of my name – by others and myself.

The choice was easier thought and felt than done.

Dirk’s cup of tea was barely cold when my beloved mother came to visit, and this time it wasn’t to see her grandchild. She’d read a small report in *Die Burger* about the previous evening’s events in which there’d been speculation about my support for the ANC.

She didn’t want tea. She was too upset and worried. She wanted to know whether I was really planning to join the ANC and I said I was seriously considering it.

“You know how important our family is to me, Wilhelm. Your father was very unhappy about your criticism of Oupa on TV a few weeks ago. If you joined the ANC, I believe it will bring a rift between you. I don’t want to, I cannot, choose between the two of you.”

She had tears in her eyes. “Please, Wilhelm...please express your convictions in another way than in the ANC. For the sake of our family!”

About six months later, in the same sitting room, I completed an ANC membership application form, despite my mother’s tears.

By the end of 1990, I was back in Stellenbosch. I had been appointed a lecturer in philosophy and we had a month-old baby daughter. Melanie and I were determined not to become entangled again in the comfortable tranquility of a white, Afrikaans, middle-class, academic existence. However, we also didn't want to act hastily. In the midst of this attempt to find ways to enact my reformed spiritual and political beliefs, I tried to keep hold of simple faith.

The challenge of maintaining this faith comes across in one of my few diary entries for that first year that I was back in Stellenbosch. It is dated 24 October 1990: "H[enry] Nouwen looked back over his recent life and found how disjointed it was, how it lacked any sort of unity, how the lecturing and the travelling... were all separate and how this encouraged fatigue and exhaustion. This is the problem of the 'divided heart' of (spiritual) stability as most of us experience it today!"

My divided heart had to be addressed before I could find direction in terms of social and political involvement.

"Don't be so concerned about joining the ANC or not, first make sure who 'God' is for you," was Barry Grey's valuable advice. He was the spiritual guide on my first silent retreat, facilitated by the ecumenical Centre for Christian Spirituality in Cape Town.

A few months later, I attended a conference about reconciliation in Potchefstroom. One of the speakers, Dr Stuart Fowler, provided an answer to a key question I had grappled with in my Maurits Street letters: "How far should one strive for reconciliation? How does solidarity with the oppressed prevent an alienation from my own people ...?"

He reminded me that reconciliation could only occur "when people act to bring reconciliation. If we wait for ideal conditions before acting, we will never act in this world." In his paper *Reconciliation in a Heterogeneous Society* he discussed various requirements for effective reconciliatory acts.

In the first place, critical involvement.

"We cannot act for reconciliation by standing cheering on the sidelines... For some the focus of involvement may be a political party ..."

Secondly, reconciliation meant an overriding commitment to justice. This implies that in situations where the interests of your own community harm the interests of other communities, "we must take a stand against the perceived interests of our community".

The third requirement was "Open dialogue, which breaks down the alienating barriers of communal isolation". This dialogue "requires of us an eagerness to know our neighbours as fellow humans...a passionate desire to know our neighbour as a real flesh and blood person."

His fourth precondition for reconciliatory action – empowering action – hit me between the eyes: "...without economic empowering there can be no reconciliation. Yet, any effective programme will meet resistance from some of those who stand to lose surplus power. They may become our enemies. Yet the overriding commitment to justice will not allow us to turn back.

"In this context we remember Jesus's words: 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but the sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household' (Matt. 10:34-36).

"Here we face both the cost and the limit of reconciliation."

My reluctant acceptance of this intimate cutting edge of reconciliation-with-justice was also aided by a prior intellectual reform of my relationship with my ethnic "family".

As part of my re-education in Oxford, I had been confronted with the debates between primordialists and constructivists in the recent research into ethnicity and nationalism – between those with a given, created, relatively unchangeable understanding of ethnicity, and those who emphasised the process of deliberate cultivation of political group identities. For example, the study of the complex history of social and political construction of Yoruba and Igbo identities in Nigeria made me think and speak much more carefully about "the Afrikaner". Thanks to my exposure in Holland, I already had a stronger sense of the

blinkers of my Christian National history education at school and in the Voortrekkers. My studies in England consolidated my intellectual rejection of the “primordial”, ahistorical existence of any ethnic group or nation.

I could no longer accept that Afrikaners were created by God – a belief that underpinned Verwoerdian apartheid. Nor could I uphold the rock-solid definitions of other political groups. The official, clinical divisions between a minority of “Europeans” and a large majority “non-Europeans”, between “coloureds”, “Indians”, and about twelve ethnic groups among “Africans”, between a white “West” and a black “Africa”, could no longer serve as starting point for interpreting the past or the present. Or to build the future.

I would not try anymore to search for my Afrikaner identity in one or another combination of unique characteristics – language, cultural customs, view of history, and so on. Being an Afrika-ner shouldn't point to a noun, but to a verb: to a process of identifying with all the people, especially in this southern part of the continent of Africa. Becoming this kind of Afrika-ner could still include a love of fynbos and clean, cold mountain streams in the Boland mountains, wood fires and strong coffee in the bushveld, a deep blue sky, bright light and warm sunshine, singing, praying and discussing matters of the heart in Afrikaans. But I could no longer enjoy all these things far apart from the pain of fellow South Africans of colour.

My visible solidarity, however, was delayed by many questions. What did becoming an Afrika-ner mean in the political practice, especially in relation to black South Africans for whom “African” was still a noun? More specifically, what did the ANC really stand for? Was the ANC actually an organisation for black Africans? Was there really space for someone like me?

Many more exploratory conversations followed, amongst others with true Afrika-ners like Beyers Naudé. The straw that broke the camel's back was a book by the Ghanaian-English philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. His non-racial articulation of “Africanity” in terms of a “willy-

nilly” “engagement with African suffering” resonated strongly with me.

Weighing up the political organisations of the early 1990s in terms of their history, leadership, principles and policies, it was clear to me that becoming an Afrika-ner could, in the political arena, best be expressed through the African National Congress. That was an important reason why I became a member of the ANC.

My father’s response was simply: “You are *a traitor* to the Afrikaner people. And to your grandfather.”

To avoid conflict, I tried to keep my decision quiet for my family. The political context had also become more turbulent due to the failure of Codesa II and the Boipatong massacre, amongst other things.

The *Sunday Times*, however, had heard that Melanie had been elected to the ANC committee in Stellenbosch. We’d wanted to avoid this kind of publicity but realised that co-operation with the journalist would paint a fuller picture. On a Saturday in August 1992, before “Verwoerds join the ANC” hit the newsstands, we went to my parents’ house.

We sat around their dining room table. It was already dark and Stellenbosch Mountain was no longer visible. I sat across from my father, Ma on my left. I think they sensed this was not a routine visit.

Shortly after my meeting with Mr Mandela a year earlier, my father and I had had another difficult political conversation. I’d tried to explain again that my new political convictions were not just youthful exploration and rebelliousness. The ANC, for my father, was a terrorist, communist organisation whose “black power dominance” would inevitably lead to the downfall of the Afrikaner. He had warned me seriously not to “collude with this enemy”.

Now I broke the news that I had joined the ANC as gently as I could. I told them I’d thought and prayed about it and that I was sorry about the pain this would cause them.

My mother, when she heard, took in a sharp, shocked breath and then began to cry softly, shaking her head. My father, like his own

parents, doesn't easily show emotion. His face and eyes had become hard and he looked into my eyes.

"Wilhelm, I never thought you would allow yourself to be misled to this extent. I warned you that if you joined, our relationship could not remain the same. To me there is a big difference between a 'sympathiser' and a 'member' of the ANC."

The storm that had been brewing for so long finally burst. My father disinherited me.

I wasn't surprised that he was angry but I hadn't thought he would go that far.

There was no sense trying to explain. He was firm in his position – like his father, on behalf of his father. I was betraying the Afrikaners. I was shaming the Verwoerd family. There was no way he could shake hands with his son. My hand had become an insulting, clenched comrade's fist.

While my father spoke, my mother sobbed. I could hardly bear her helpless sorrow. She was caught between her husband and her son.

My father, not one for praying aloud, then said, "Let us pray." He ended with: "Heavenly Father, may Wilhelm come to his senses like the prodigal son and return from a faraway land."

He got up and left the table. I held Ma for a long time. Then Melanie and I left the house.

Stellenbosch

24 August 1992

On a rainy Monday morning it is good to be quiet for just a moment. Especially after Saturday evening's difficult conversation with Ma and Pa.

The intensity of his reaction – with Ma actually much more concerned about relationships in our family being harmed – did scare me a little about future conflict with family, friends, (true?) Afrikaners.

Although I understand from which ideology Pa sees the world, it hurts when your father tells you: "You are a traitor to your own people." And still, while I'm writing, and even on Saturday evening already,

my prevalent feeling is one of sadness and understanding of his behaviour.

It was a relief to be honest and to bring the conflict into the open. It is better than a situation where one is living a double life in order to avoid conflict. I never really felt welcome and relaxed in my family home anyway.

Nine months later, I made my first appearance on a public ANC platform. I was tense for weeks preceding it. Sometimes I regretted agreeing to make a speech. The meeting was going to be in a conservative, white Afrikaner neighbourhood, and friends and colleagues said that we were courting trouble, especially given that emotions were running high after the assassination of beloved ANC leader Chris Hanu in April 1993. I was warned that the militant Afrikaner resistance movement, the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), was planning to march in full force. They were said to be furious about the new "traitor" among the bunch of "black terrorists and communists". But green, yellow and black posters had been already been printed:

13 May 1993
Parow Civic Centre
NIEHAUS, BOESAK, VERWOERD
ANC meeting

The hall was packed and the atmosphere was festive. Election posters, balloons, flowers all over the room. On the chairs were copies of "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" with an Afrikaans translation alongside. There was an alarming commotion outside and later I was told the peace monitors and the police had their hands full keeping AWB and ANC supporters away from each other. Rumours about an AWB protest at the first public ANC meeting in this part of Cape Town had reached our comrades and taxis had started to arrive from the townships. The days of the Boers determining who belonged where and who could speak when were past. I'd been advised to first go to the ANC office in Cape Town

earlier that afternoon, from where I was brought to Parow in a car and with security guards. We'd slipped in quickly through a back door and onto the stage.

The atmosphere inside was rousing. There was music and cries of "One president, one Mandela!" and "Viva, ANC, viva!" There were fists in the air. My mouth was getting drier and drier. As a rookie, I'd expected to be the first speaker, but the poet Sandile Dikeni took the microphone first. He recited an Afrikaans poem, one I'd never heard before then:

Nkosi Sikilel' iAfrika

The song is carried by thousands of mouths

I close my eyes; like a choir of seraphim

those voices fall soothing on my ear:

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika

We ask your blessing, oh Lord, for Africa

I look and I see the multitude standing in front of me: Zulu
and Xhosa, Sotho and Shangaan

And I a white man – many nations, yes –

All united in asking God's blessing on but one home, but one
fatherland

Because the All-wise planted us together

And let us take root in South Africa,

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika – bless, Lord, the country of many nations.

– *HA Fagan*²¹

I do not easily show emotion in public. I had to swallow hard to hold back tears.

When it was my turn to speak I struggled to get my first words past the lump in my throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen, friends, opponents and... comrades!

"Comrades? I agonised about using this word here this evening. It is

21 Translated from the Afrikaans by Herman Fourie.

so laden with negative associations in the minds of Afrikaners. The last time I used the word was around the campfire as a young Voortrekker in the Seventies, when we sang the German hiking song 'Kamerad, Kamerad' on our outings. While we sang our carefree songs, many less fortunate young South Africans were being killed in the townships or were fleeing the country to join their comrades in the struggle against apartheid.

"If someone told me then that I would be standing here this evening, the shock would have put an immediate stop to my singing. Since then, 2 February 1990 came and went, and many things and a number of laws have been changed, but the question still remains:

"How on earth can white, Afrikaans-speaking Voortrekker comrades and ANC comrades be brought together? Is it possible to be liberated from apartheid, so deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of so many of us? Is it possible to find common ground between Voortrekker 'kamerade' and ANC comrades, while so many South Africans continue to live in separated worlds?"

I tried briefly to give a positive answer to this question, without being too idealistic and ended my speech with these words:

"I still find it awkward to say 'comrade', and especially 'kameraad' in Afrikaans, and to toyi-toyi. I still have much to unlearn and much to learn. But the bottom line is: it is exciting and liberating to join in the camaraderie of, let's call it our 'Comrades Marathon' towards a new South Africa free from oppression in our homes, in our factories and mines, in our politics!"

Now, 25 years later, I have to admit that I was too idealistic. Giving a positive answer has become ever harder. But that night, the response overwhelmed me. In amongst the cries, I heard fist-in-the-air shouts of "Viva, Verwoerd, viva!" A newspaper headline the next day read: "Verwoerd in tears over cheers". It wasn't wrong.

The following Sunday, I was running above Paradyskloof on Stellenbosch mountain when I found a faded, overgrown track. A steep hill up, a rocky downhill, through a gully and suddenly, for the first



time in years, I was on a path I had known well as a child and had not been able to trace for years. The feeling was one of deep healing, in spite of the painful conflict with my father.

During the election campaign, instead of driving past numerous small towns on the highway towards one or another exclusive holiday destination, for the first time I stayed where most people live. Instead of visiting friends or family in the nice part of town, I was welcomed in homes behind the

hill, on the other side of the railway line, around the corner where separate development had hidden people's suffering so effectively. It was the beginning of a distressing but liberating homecoming in the real South Africa.

On that Sunday afternoon at the foot of Stellenbosch Mountain, something was pushing me on. Around a certain corner was a view of my parental home in Uniepark. I decided to visit them. Perhaps it would help to tell my parents about my recent experiences, about my feeling of liberation, which the newspapers could not report on. The back door was open. The front door was unlocked. I called a few times.

No one answered.

Away from the excitement and inner liberation of the 1993-1994 election campaign, I continued to interrogate myself. If being an Afrika-ner meant identifying with people and their problems in (southern) Africa, on whose behalf did this identification really occur? Was it self-serving? Was - is - "engagement with African suffering" not perhaps a mask for what Anthony de Mello calls refined self-interest, feeling good

about myself by doing good to others? I told journalist after journalist that I had joined the ANC "because I had become tired of being a spectator". I wanted to "become involved in the struggle for a democratic South Africa, and at the moment the ANC is the best option". But was it really about South Africa and democracy, or was I just tired of feeling guilty? Or of not being part of a group any longer? Did I want to do something to make my mark? This Afrika-ner tale I told myself was good and well, but wasn't it just a story in the end? Was I really wholeheartedly committed?

My choice to join the ANC hadn't made my fears disappear. Too often feelings of white Afrikanerhood welled up like heartburn. Becoming a comrade in the early 1990s helped me feel more at home in the greater South Africa, but it didn't mean I wasn't still very aware of the symbolism of my skin colour, especially before the election when, for instance, I drove past a group of young people in Kaya Mandi who didn't know me. Particularly also after the death of Amy Biehl, the American anti-apartheid activist and Fulbright student who was murdered by residents of Gugulethu near Cape Town while shouting anti-white slogans in August 1993. At the time, and still, it is difficult to reply when a journalist asks: "Can you as a white person really identify with blacks in South Africa?"

And then there was the question of my ANC membership...not just the "African" part of it, but the "National" part of it. In July 1992, I received a warning letter from Baruch Hirson, a left-wing historian.

"...then I read of your joining the ANC. This was a courageous move and showed that you had overcome some of your doubts. Yet I was afraid for you. Not physically - even though that must always be a factor in decision-making of this order. I was afraid because I did not know if you had the ability to see that you had stepped out of one political laager into another. The nationalism you had once espoused had now been replaced by another nationalism (based on skin colour) but not affecting the very nature of the society that was to be erected.

"How can one dispute the need for the majority to appear to take

power and replace the tyranny of the minority? Yet, if not seen in class terms, the vision is illusory. A new minority, without overt colour differentiation, will rule South Africa with all the old injustices intact. And a black police force and army will do the suppressing as ruthlessly as the white police and army. Am I being pessimistic?

"There is a further dimension that must be stated most emphatically. The ANC has shown itself to be ruthless in its dealings with its own members. We carried details of their activities in the camps in Angola, and then in east and central Africa in successive issues of *Searchlight South Africa*. I do not believe, despite the commissions of inquiry, that the ANC has, or can, purge itself of the elements that commit this kind of atrocity. If they can, it will be against the course of events of every nationalist movement in Asia, Africa or Latin America. Up 'til now the main perpetrators of wrongdoing in South Africa have been found among the whites. But what we have seen among the black vigilantes (from Crossroads onwards), or in Inkatha, or among the comtsothis, or from within practically every black movement in the country, does not lead me to believe that SA will prove exceptional.

"I think I had hoped that you might declare your sympathies with the majority in the fight for justice, but would have stayed aloof from a movement that cannot do other than become a suppressive force ..."

Around the same time, I received a telephone call from an Afrikaner tannie. She told me she'd seen me on British television while she was in England. She berated me, telling me I had disgraced the country.

"I see you walking through the streets of Kaya Mandi," she said, "telling the whole world how bad things are in the black townships, how bad we white people are. Now I want to know: if you are so concerned about the suffering of the black people, why are you still living in Paradyskloof? Why don't you go and live with those people in Kaya Mandi?"

As with Baruch Hirson's warnings, from the perspective of a current South Africa, 24 years after our first democratic election in 1994, there

is an extra sting to her question. I still don't have a proper reply to it.

If memory serves, I rudely slammed the phone in her ear, despite the respect I had been taught to show my elders.

Since then Albert Luthuli and co.'s vision of a shared South African home has begun to feel more and more elusive. During the honeymoon period after 1994, I was hopeful that the TRC would make an important contribution to this delicate process of homecoming. I became involved full-time from 1996 to 1998 with this relatively inclusive reply to the most visible aspects of our bloody past. I have written extensively about my understanding of the TRC process elsewhere²², but in short, I was inspired by its vision. It resonated deeply with my re-formation in the Netherlands and England – the painful, liberating look-into-the-eyes of dehumanising truths, particularly about Christian Nationalist Afrikanerness, for the sake of true reconciliation. But, I had underestimated the difference in scale. Reconciliation on an interpersonal level is not child's play, especially when national reconciliation is at stake.²³ I also became increasingly disillusioned by the chasm between the TRC recommendations, particularly regarding reparations, and the ANC government's implementation of them. I was also disappointed by the utterly deficient support of especially the broader white community for this implementation. The commission's contribution has been engulfed by the increasingly muddy waters of South African society.

My participation in the TRC process did, however, reinforce my personal commitment to lasting reconciliation, as well as my desire to gain more practical experience. When the possibility of applicable international experience emerged I was ready. In March 2001 Melanie

22 See Verwoerd & Mabizela, *Truth Drawn in Jest*; Villa-Vicencio & Verwoerd, *Looking Back, Reaching Forward*; Verwoerd, *Equity, Mercy, Forgiveness: Interpreting Amnesty within the SA TRC*.

23 See philosophical reflection about the conceptual possibility of national reconciliation in Govier & Verwoerd, *Trust and the Problem of National Reconciliation*.

began her term as the new South African ambassador in Ireland and shortly thereafter I started work at the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation.

Initially I struggled to swim at the deep end of humanising dialogue between former enemies, but this exhausting, hope-giving facilitating felt like a homecoming from the beginning, which prepared me for the next phase of my life.

At the same time the coldness between my father and I had begun to thaw – partly because his anger was no longer regularly triggered by my, and particularly Melanie's, ANC activities, and partly because my work overseas had made him better understand my fundamental commitment to reconciliation. He gradually softened his insistence that I should resign from the ANC before I could be welcome in the family home again and we tried to avoid political conversations during my visits from Ireland.

In 2005, at the end of Melanie's term as ambassador, our marriage ended. She and our two children were keen to remain in Ireland longer and since my uncompleted peace work was at a promising stage, I also postponed my return to South Africa.

At the end of 2006 a young Australian woman unexpectedly appeared on the scene. Sharon had just completed her master's degree in peace studies at the University of Queensland and was looking for opportunities to gain more practical experience. I wasn't at all on the lookout for a serious relationship, but I couldn't resist the athletic Aussie with the cheeky smile and soulful blue-green eyes.

She was always aware of my deeply rooted feeling of responsibility about my future return to the country of my birth. Though she didn't fully realise what being married to a Verwoerd in South Africa would involve, she was open to, even excited about, the idea of walking this road with me.

After our wedding in 2009, she began learning Afrikaans so that my family didn't have to always speak English when she was present. This endeared her to my parents. I guess it also helped that she didn't have too much Khaki blood – on her father's side her family roots were in

the Irish working class. Sharon's decision to take my surname is symbolic of her commitment to my Verwoerd family and to reconciliation in the divided country of my birth.

We came back to South Africa in 2012 and once again I was confronted by the gaping gulf between white Stellenbosch and particularly Kaya Mandi, Cloetesville and Idas Valley. In my twelve years away, I had visited South Africa every year, so the socio-economic circumstances that showed how we had failed to move past apartheid were not a surprise. The real shock was the intensity of my feeling of political homelessness and my alienation from the current ANC.

The first large cracks between me and my new political home were already evident in the late 90s because of my involvement with the TRC. Then from Ireland, I observed with growing disillusionment how much literal and metaphorical sand and cement and bricks were being used by "deployed" "tenderpreneurs" to build homes for themselves and their friends and families. Baruch Hirson's prophetic letter began haunting me with growing intensity: "The nationalism you had once espoused had now been replaced by another nationalism...but not affecting the very nature of the society that was to be erected...A new minority, without overt colour differentiation, will rule South Africa with all the old injustices intact."

Now I was back in my heartland and I could no longer avoid this thorny question: did I still see myself as a member of the ANC? And now?

Like many ANC veterans, I feel that the current ANC is not the ANC of the struggle. I had been too naïve about the dark sides of the old liberation movement. Yet I remain deeply committed to the vision and values people like Albert Luthuli and Nelson Mandela personified.

This response leaves me uneasy though. Why do I remain so cautious, especially in public, to point a finger at comrades in green, black and yellow?

Given the history of the ethnic and race groups to which I belong, who am I to be critical about the self-enriching erosion of the ANC's costly-bought vision and values, particularly in the era of Jacob Zuma?

More than 80 per cent of the territory from which I deliver criticism, for instance, was appropriated by white people for ourselves and our descendants between 1910 and 1994. My skin colour means there is an important difference between me and those black and brown critics from within the ANC ranks. I remain unjustly advantaged. And before I can wholeheartedly relocate politically, I have some questions I need to answer for myself. Does my indignation about the pre-2018 government stand on a sufficiently solid foundation of humble self-examination? Do I, and my political critique and my deeds of restitutive responsibility, stand safely behind the glass of my family beach house?

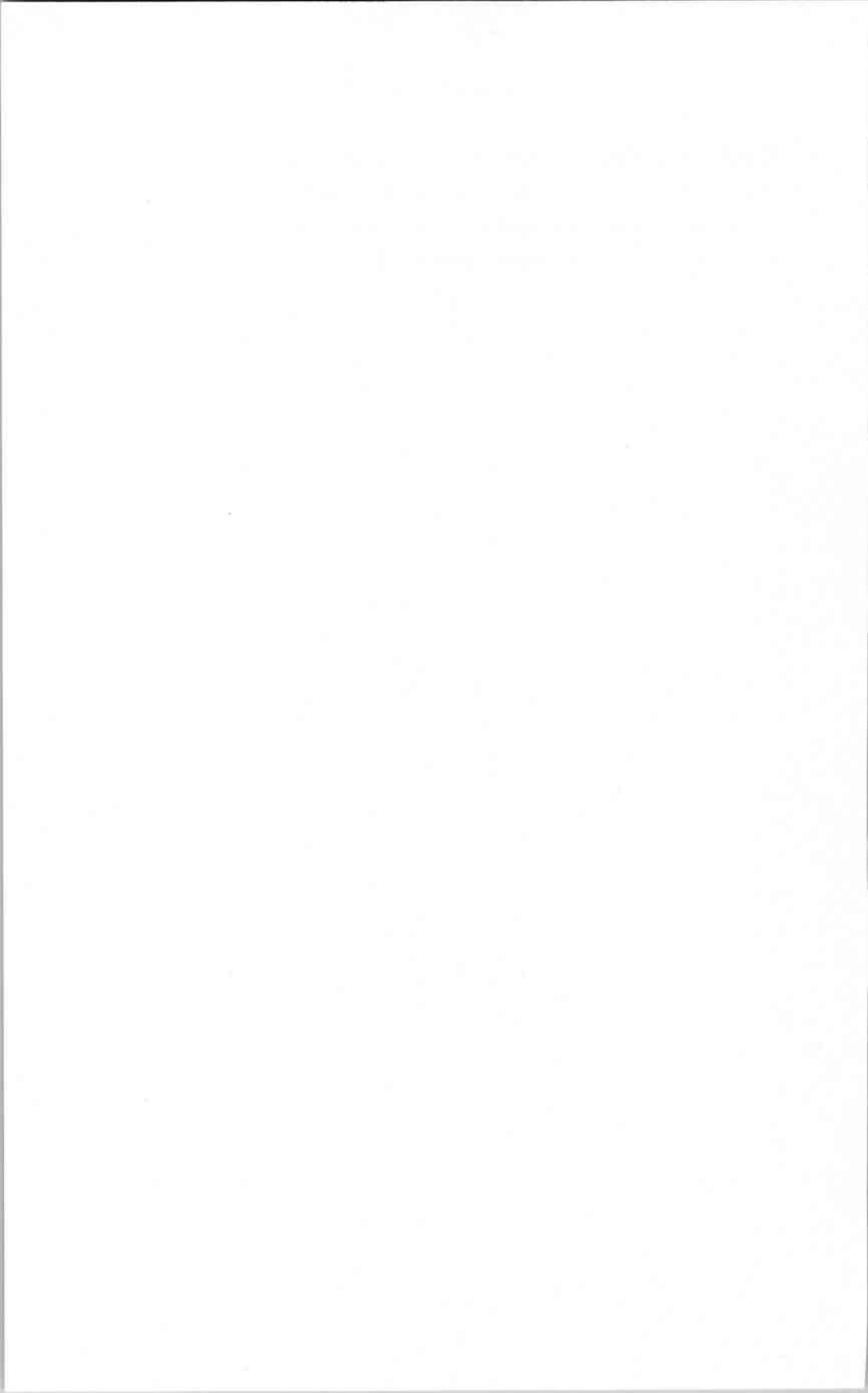
I was tempted to ignore these uncomfortable questions every time I saw another state capture news headline. But I didn't want to allow Zuma's ANC to seduce me into avoiding my role in genuinely transforming the visible and invisible legacies of apartheid.

Sharon and I found a place to live here where a few people were trying to give truth to Luthuli's large, uncompleted task of South Africa becoming a "home for all her sons and daughters". Over the last fifteen years or so, an extraordinary little village outside Stellenbosch has begun to take shape, inspired by a vision of a mixed, socially diverse neighbourhood with an ecological commitment. Returning to the country at the end of 2012, we began building our house in the ecovillage of Lynedoch, 12 km outside Stellenbosch.²⁴ At the beginning of 2018, there were around 35 families in Lynedoch. Our modest effort at a less separate neighbourhood is exceptionally challenging, given our diversity. In addition to visible differences in skin colour, we come from the middle class and the working class, from the countryside and the city, with different religious backgrounds and with different levels of ecological awareness.

My father is convinced it is an unworkable experiment. I am also not certain it is an adequate reply to that upset Afrikaner auntie's challenge to me in the mid-1990s: "Why don't you go and live in Kaya

24 See www.sustainabilityinstitute.net for more information.

Mandi?" Still, it feels as if the few of us who live here are at least trying to swim against the powerful stream of the aftermath of the Group Areas Act. Thanks to Lynedoch I also have a black family as neighbours. They are helping me to come home.



PART 2

Rehumanisation

*We always had a story to tell but there was no one
to tell the story to – who would you tell the story to?
If I was to tell any of the Afrikaans people at work, they won't
understand because they haven't experienced that,
they haven't gone through that.*

– Ashnat Adolph



Chapter 5

Exploring

*South Africa is a country of many baffling contrasts...
Between the euphoric vision of Dr Verwoerd and the
resigned apathy of a pass-law offender... stood a vast gulf of
apparent incomprehension – TRH Davenport²⁵*

28 January 2014

Shore House, Shore Park, Orania

It is almost 8 am. There is still a bit of freshness in the air, birds are chattering in the reeds. I am grateful for this wooden cabin right on the bank of the river, my base camp for the rather hilly inner exploration awaiting me over the next few days. It is a long way to get to Orania from Lynedoch in one go, especially since I chose back roads. Turned left at Matjiesfontein, via Sutherland, Fraserburg, Loxton. Two long, hours on dusty gravel roads in the heat of a summer's day; wonderful, spacious emptiness, with only the occasional farm house, surrounded by trees; unexpected signs of good, recent rain; rocky hills, stony koppies, rough mountain ranges – the Karoo. Directions to Highland Karoo, Tankwa, Roggeveld, Under Karoo.

An early pitstop at Matjiesfontein; no coffee available at the Lord Milner Hotel; visit the local museum. A whole section on the Anglo-Boer War – Matjiesfontein was an important British military base. My attention drawn to a picture of famous British generals who visited this base, including General John Denton French. And I'm reminded

25 Davenport, p.382.

of Pa's recent explanation of how Oupa Hendrik ended up with "Frensch" as his second name. It was supposed to be the Friesian "Frens" since his mother was from Friesland in the Netherlands. In the baptismal register this name was spelled wrongly as "Frensch". Years later, when Hendrik spent a short time as a teenager in Brandfort, this name evoked mistrust in the pro-Boer Free State, given bitter associations with the British general.

Anyway, I am glad to have made it safely to Orania. It is time to meet my cousin Carel in the Verwoerd Memorial House.



Carel and I are the same age and have always gotten along well. The Boshoff cousins were the family members we spent the most time with during my early years in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Carel (IV) took over from his father, Oom Carel, as leader of the Orania Movement.

Under the leadership of Oom Carel and Tannie Anna Boshoff (my father's oldest sister), the Orania settlement was bought from the Department of Waterworks in the early 1990s. For them and other supporters of the (white) Afrikaner *volkstaat* (nation state) movement, this small town in a sparsely populated region was a promising place to

start realising their dream of a geographical area within which their culture could safely flourish. While they have pragmatically accepted that Dr Verwoerd's vision of separate development for the whole of South Africa was no longer viable, they still believe that, in the long term, there is no real future for white Afrikaners in a black majority South Africa. Politically, my life has taken the opposite direction, but even during the turbulent 1990s, my membership of the Verwoerd family was never questioned by the Orania Boshoffs. Though I was at that stage married to an ANC member of parliament, they invited Melanie, our two young children and me to join the extended Verwoerd family's celebration of Ouma Betsie's 95th birthday. The only real concern for these Boshoffs, and Ouma Betsie, was whether my ANC involvement was a principled, faith-based decision.

Since then, Carel and I have maintained respect for one another's integrity, despite serious political differences. He was the ideal conversation partner for that stage of my exploration of shared, less-familiar roots of being a grandchild of Dr Verwoerd.

We sat at Ouma's dining table. We chatted about our children and the previous day's trek. Carel reminded me, with his typical soft laughter, that with repetition the journey became shorter. We are both of slender build, but he still has most of his hair and wears scholarly glasses. He told me about the great appreciation for Verwoerd being shown by Afrikaner visitors to this memorial house. They still talked, he said, about his "heroic role" in South Africa becoming a republic.

"Verwoerd was someone who stood his ground. He was not a timid 'peasant'. He could beat them at their game – whether it was at the 1960 Commonwealth Conference or in his on-the-spot response to [British prime minister Harold] Macmillan's 'winds of change' speech [in parliament in Cape Town in February 1960]. He was a source of self-confidence – we as Afrikaners can stand our ground, against anyone!"

I explained that my particular interest this time round was to deepen my understanding of Oupa Hendrik's impact across generations, including on his offspring, and especially within myself. I asked Carel

about his experience of his mother's father, of our Verwoerd grandfather. He remembered the "overwhelming love and support" from fellow Afrikaners and regular family visits to the Heroes' Acre in Pretoria where Dr Verwoerd was buried.

I was trying to get closer to Oupa as a human being, not only as a political figure, but Carel was not aware of any personal letters or diaries that might shine more light on our grandfather's inner experiences.

Early the next day, I was back in the Dr HF Verwoerd Memorial House. Carel had given me a key. It was a cloudy morning, with the occasional shower of much-needed rain. The coolness was welcome after the intense Karoo summer heat of the previous few days.

A rooster crowed nearby. It felt strange to sit by myself at this table. I had avoided the other rooms in the house until now. I remembered how exhausted Pumla was after our visit the previous July to Orania and this house. Where was I going to find the energy to open my heart, properly, to Oupa Hendrik? Would I have the strength to travel honestly, beyond political and family and memorial images of the silver-haired white man? Would it even be possible to truly connect with a forefather I'd never met as an adult? What did it mean to me, right then, that my paternal grandfather was Dr Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd?

Outside the rooster crowed again.

I decided to begin with an unrushed reading of *Verwoerd: Só ont-hou ons hom* ["Verwoerd: This is how we remember him"], a collection of insider remembrances compiled by my father. The first section consisted of often intimate memories by older Verwoerd family members. I hadn't got far with my previous attempt to read this book. My inner critic was too strong. Perhaps because at the time I was surrounded by pictures of Oom Bey. I'd been sitting in the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, where since 2013 I've been given a rather appropriate place to help transform the highly divisive legacy of Verwoerd. I'd brought this book to Orania, hoping that I'd be better able to tune in to my grandfather in this house.

There are Ouma Betsie's memories of their budding romance as Stellenbosch students in the early 1920s and a number of anecdotes from

my father's siblings that help me flesh Oupa Hendrik out in my mind. One aunt recalls happy family times on long car journeys, everyone singing, and their father being kept awake by one of the children playing with his hair. My grandfather loved playing with his grandchildren, I learned.

I recognised my father in Oupa Hendrik's style of child-rearing. He did not force his political views on his seven children; he was strict, but willing to explain his actions. He was passionate about farming and fishing.

I found some of Ouma Betsie's formulations striking: "Hendrik was an idealist par excellence. Should I be asked where his idealism had originated, I would trace it back to his parental home. He had grown up in an atmosphere of awareness of your calling. Undoubtedly, this had been reinforced by the influences of his youth, when he had made the quest of the disadvantaged Afrikaans community his own.

"To him, nationalism was something noble and unselfish that could bring out the best in a person. To me he was a life partner."

I struggled to read through this kind of political family recollection. I was so familiar with the views being expressed, yet I quickly became upset. I went for a walk along the Orange River. When I came back, I tried to articulate in my journal the muddy feelings evoked by this current attempt to stand, deliberately, within my Verwoerd family circle.

29 Jan 2014

Memorial House

I am surprised at how easily I feel swept along by some of these family reminiscences – a more positive portrayal of him as a person than I have allowed myself since 1986. I was not prepared for the pull of this river – blood is thicker than water?

On the other hand, I am disturbed by his (and my family's) highly restricted empathy for the human impact of apartheid...A child of his time? But what about contemporaries like Oom Bey, who were able to display genuine, cross-border compassion? Still, how long did it take *me* before I really started to change my mind?

The theme of Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations this week is "levels of consciousness". Starting levels are described in tribal terms: focus is on group survival and group security ...

I still had these things whirling around inside me when I went to visit Tannie Annatjie Boshoff at her house Volharding ["Endurance"]. She had lived in Orania for 23 years by then. She was 89 years old. The last time I'd seen her was in 1996, at Ouma Betsie's 95th birthday celebration. I told her I was happy that she could see me, despite short notice and her fragile health – she was recovering from recent heart troubles.

She asked after my parents' health, about my brothers, and my children and my new wife. She tired easily these days. She sat with her legs on a wooden stool, while we drank strong rooibos tea. Classical music played softly in the background. I explained that my current visit to Orania was a continuation of my faith journey and of the reconciliation work that I'd been doing for the last decade in (Northern) Ireland. She remembered the tensions between me and my father in the 1990s. She appreciated my attempt to reconcile with my Verwoerd family, including Oupa Hendrik, she said. I cautiously ask about her relationship with him and Ouma Betsie.

She told me a bit more about her own background.

"I am an Afrikaner, I grew up with our culture, since childhood, in a religious family, with the tradition of the Afrikaner – you are proud of who you are... of your history. We grew up at a place in the country, on a farm. That sense of secure belonging which you had in your culture since childhood... nothing on earth can take that away. We held family prayers every day."

Her eyes welled up when she remembered the years as private secretary and family friend with "Tannie" (my grandmother) and "Doktor" (my grandfather).

"It was wonderful for me to get to know your grandfather and grandmother. Ouma was the soft, friendly one. For my whole life, as long as he was alive, I had a kind of holy awe for Doktor. He was like a heroic figure.

"I had a huge respect for his ability to work – the nightly work. Often when I arrived at work in the morning, the other staff would say, 'Miss, you must come quickly, there is work from Doktor'. Then it would be in Ouma's handwriting. To me it was wonderful – their cooperation. It was a routine: every day for a while they go walking in the garden with their arms around each other. After dinner he listened to a story on the radio, then he would lie down on the sofa and Tannie played with his hair. He would relax for that little half-an-hour and then he'd start working again... they were always close to one another. The problems he was wrestling with, he discussed all of them with Tannie."

I ask her how she experienced their faith.

"I always saw them as deeply religious people. I know they used to read the Bible in the evenings, because Tannie would sometime tell what they had read the following day. I often went with them to Betty's Bay. Then they would not go to church sometimes to allow the staff to relax. Doktor said, 'These people are always on duty for me, wherever I go they have to go; you have to give them the opportunity to also go to church with their families'. The times when I was there, I remember at Betty's Bay, we would sit outside on the stoep with the view on the ocean and then we would listen to the church service [on the radio]."

Months after my Orania visit I went to Betty's Bay. I sat at Oupa Hendrik's iron- and yellowwood desk, in his Blaas 'n Bietjie study. I was surrounded by walls clad in yellowwood. The desk top has a few scratches and circular stain marks – I suspect from use by descendants. I'd used this space a few times as a student trying to write philosophy essays. I hoped it was not me who had been so careless with a coffee mug.

I could hear the familiar sound of waves breaking on the white beach. A neighbour's two-storey holiday home now blocks most of the south view that Ouma, Oupa and Tannie Annatjie enjoyed. Outside the big wood-framed window is the lawn. I was suddenly reminded of a family anecdote about the struggle to get grass to grow in the

dune sand on which Blaas 'n Bietjie was built in 1962. Ouma *and* Oupa participated in the laborious planting. Given the strength and frequency of the seasonal winds, each strand of grass needed to be anchored, for which they used hair pins.

When I leaned back in the chair, I could see, to my right, a section of the Kogelberg mountain range through the north-facing window. A few hundred metres behind me, east of Blaas 'n Bietjie, lies a small lake with Coke-coloured fresh water. After a swim in the freezing cold sea, this sun-baked lake is ideal to wash off the sand and salt. The lake deepens gradually, with sand giving way to thick, smelly, charcoal mud. I clearly remember the many mudslinging games we played as children, in between swimming, rowing and even sailing. Walking back to Blaas 'n Bietjie, there would be ripe sour figs to suck on in summer. When we were here with Ouma Betsie, she would walk with us, always pulling out invasive alien plants and picking up litter. And she knew the proteas, ericas and many other fynbos species by name.

Behind the flagpole, on the western side of this house, the milkwood forest still flourishes. The footpath we used as kids is overgrown, but by using a detour one can still reach the sandy shadows underneath the thick canopy. I feel like a child when I smell the milkwood, hear the creaking branches and come across the remains of our tree house.

It was winter now. The sea-side of the house received no sun. I sat with a hot water bottle at my feet. Right in front of me, against some books on Oupa's desk, I have placed a family photo.

The lines around my grandfather's smile as he holds me in his lap make his eyes appear friendly to me. Recently, my mother had told me again how much he'd loved his grandchildren. How, when our family visited Libertas (the official prime minister's residence in Pretoria), his first question was always: "Where are the children?" My mother took extra clothes for us because he liked playing with us in the mud puddles after the garden had been watered.

I was curious: How had I ended up in his lap? Who had given him the bottle of milk to feed me? What was the significance of me receiving milk from his hand? I wished it were possible to climb back into



this picture, to hear what was being said, to experience with them what happened before, during and after this photo was taken, to feel what they were feeling on that day.

But this cosy family scene was just another frozen moment in time, from a bygone era; a twinkling of an eye that *could not* be unfrozen. And yet...there I was, sitting in his round-backed chair with a red leather seat and it felt as though he was looking right at me. This leap of imagination unsettled me and I suddenly struggled to meet Oupa Hendrik's unblinking gaze.

Before me on my grandfather's desk was a bulky, black A4-sized notebook, the cover embossed with the word "Dagboek" [Diary]. It was Ouma Betsie's, and I'd recently discovered it in my father's library.

I carefully opened the diary. Underneath her neatly written "E. Verwoerd" my father had glued a typed Table of Contents on the faded, olive green cover page:

- 1-417 8 Nov 1958 – 18 Sept 1966
 421 13 March 1967 – 21 Oct 1968
 492 17 Apr 1992

The first, slightly yellowed, unnumbered page threw me immediately into the deep end of the politics of those years. Under the heading "Election to Prime Minister on 2 Sept. 1958" she wrote in ink:

30 Sept. 1958

Retrospectively I do want to write down how unexpected (perhaps that is not the right word) this election was for him... Before Adv. S. [Strijdom]'s illness and passing, he often said it wouldn't come on his path to become PM; their ages were too similar.

However, when the decision came, he was ready immediately.

The next few pages revealed that this was not only the diary of Ouma Betsie, the lively, elderly widow I recall from my youth, but was indisputably also the recollections of the wife of a prime minister.

8 Nov. 1958

Wonderful, quiet day after the Natal congress from where we returned last night. The Congress was large. The City Hall was filled to overflowing on Thursday evening and the reception and acclaim were enthusiastic.

...The next day many reactions from public; many testified there even though they did not originally support the choice, now they are convinced there is only one man.

29 Jan. 1959

Day before yesterday it was Motion of No Confidence.

H spoke for 1¼ hours – excellent according to everyone. [People] talking about new light that has arisen over the colour problem.

Also good reaction from Afr. newspapers... Find the explanation of the positive development plan for nat. ["native"] areas excellent and visionary.

11 Feb. 1959

Attended Dr Malan's funeral. Right afterwards, Dominee Gericke greets us. I hear him tell H: "No PM has come to power at such a critical time. But oh, doctor, it is wonderful to be so secure."

I read hastily through these pages, strewn as they were with political thorns. A part of me wanted to walk away, to close this big, dark book. But restricting myself to snug family pictures would not be honest. My grandfather was the prime minister and my grandmother was not only his darling wife, but his most fervent supporter.

I carried on.

12 April 1959

The Ref. [Reformed] Church centenary was incredibly large and incredibly hot! Crowd of 6 000 in the hall (zinc tobacco hall), and \pm 9 000 outside. Speech (full hour) received very well by enthusiastic audience.

Participated in second-reading debate about Separate Universities, Friday evening (10 April). Was a breath of fresh air: clear, extensive, destructive to the UP [United Party]. Many people congratulated him. Felt that once again that people realised here was a leader, a man of strength. Dollie Mostert, enthusiastic herself, heard two English-speaking people say directly afterwards: "It was a magnificent speech!"

20 May 1959

Colossal! I thought. Majestic! said Minister Louw.

It was the speech about the Bantu Development Act - 1 hour 40 min. long. It was tremendous - a continuous culmination of serious explanation and of logical expansion of the Opposition's point of view up to its terrifying end.

... The members and their wives swamped me with congratulations.

27 July 1959

Back from holiday at Botha home. Nice rest, should just have been longer! Beautiful reception at station by large group of public and MPs, and at Libertas flowers, flowers, flowers (from [NP] branches, constituency executives, constituencies) and many gifts of meat, chocolate, biltong, rusks. So unexpected, but makes one feel good.

17 January 1960

Eve of the 1960 session which should be exceptionally interesting as the Republican question is on the agenda.

19 January 1960 Tuesday

1:15 am. H. still working. He is speaking tomorrow.

Arrived home after the C [cabinet]-session yesterday and said: "I have full support." He was clearly glad, relieved, thankful. Arrived home after caucus this morning and said: "I have complete support. There were a few questions and problems but after my explanation, absolute unanimity – they even stood up to prove it."

H. doesn't say much, but he is clearly deeply convinced of the unity and the gen. trust.

Tomorrow is going to be a historic day!

10 March 1960

Macm [Harold Macmillan, British PM] has been and gone... There came the Wednesday morning which had been arranged for his speech to Parliament. Cold shivers when he said so directly that Britain could not support us in our policy.

Then Hendrik spoke: unprepared, without knowledge of and insight into his speech, but takes him on in a few sentences and makes a historic plea for the rights of the white man.

The applause was overwhelming, and within a ½ hour the reactions began to come, by telephone, by telegram, from near and from far. The country was cheering, the whites were proud, the Nationalists on cloud nine...even letters in the newspapers bore witness to the fact that

the English had been let down by Macm. Also in other areas in Africa, the whites felt here in SA was a man who could save the white man.

... Then yesterday, 9 March 1960.

In the Budget Debate, H. spoke for almost 2 hours. First replied to the opp. attacks on Bantu policy... thereafter a grand elaboration of the attitude after M.'s speech: the white man's right [triple underline] in SA, in Africa, in the world.

All this applause rang too loudly in my ears; the repeated underlining was too much to take. A cloud of heaviness descended on me when I thought about the height and the thickness of those walls of "absolute agreement", of deep ethnic pride, of flowers and flowers and flowers and biltong and *beskuit* that surrounded Ouma and Oupa. I needed coffee – proper, strong coffee.

Mug in hand, looking at the endless, unfenced ocean from the front lawn, I reminded myself that I was not writing a political biography or undertaking an academic study. I was searching for signals of my grandparents' humanity – for the sake of reconciliation with my family, with my grandchild self. I was trying to follow in their windswept inner tracks – in the midst of the intense party politics of their era... before I ended up in Oupa's lap.

The next section of Ouma's diary focuses on what they saw as his biggest political achievement: fulfilling the Afrikaner's Republican dream (even though that involved leaving the British Commonwealth).

21 February 1961

...Now we're going to London. The general feeling of support and empathy is particularly strong. The newspapers tell of the protests that are becoming increasingly organised against us in London.

We will have to see. Our point of view is known, after all, H. has stated it over and over: we would like to remain, but not at any price; we are not begging and we will not allow anyone to dictate to us. They can only refuse us due to our colour policy, and there we will not yield an inch. That is his "granite" attitude after all, and we are convinced the *volk* are behind him.

9 April 1961

...Even the hostile newspapers have written about his “unfailing courtesy” and his calmness and dignity. Under the strongest provocation he remained calm and dignified.

When he arrived back in the hotel room of the Dorchester ± 6 o’-clock on the evening of the 16th of March, he was clearly moved and upset. His words to me were: “Now they got on my nerves.” Then he told how moved Sir Norman Brook had been: he wanted to greet H., first had to turn away to wipe his eyes, then back, and again he couldn’t speak.

Thurs. pm went to inform the Queen about the decision. She appreciated it very much and listened sympathetically to the explanation. That evening we went to dinner at Buckingham Palace, and when she greeted H. at the farewell she was also particularly sympathetic. Earlier in the evening the Queen Mother and Dame Patty Menzies stood together. First-mentioned says, “I am so sorry about what happened. I could have wept – indeed I did.”

Immediately we received many letters of support from England and hundreds of cablegrams from SA to congratulate and thank us. When we arrived at Jan Smuts it was clear the people stood behind H. The vast crowd (50 000-60 000) and the cheering and singing were grand – and moving ...

And the stream of letters, many from English and UPs, continued. Wednesday at the garden party, the rush of people was so much that we felt uncomfortable. Many English came to shake his hand and said: “Thank you for saving our country!”

The Opposition and the English newspapers naturally revile H. as a deceiver, traitor, etc. Yet the sympathy, no, the adulation, still comes from that side.

...It’s so wonderful: in the midst of all the attacks and derision, in the midst of all the threats from outside, he remains calm and convinced. As he says: for us there is no alternative, we will have to remain steadfast, we will take up arms if necessary – submit never!

10 May 1961 – Presidential election

...It was a cool, sober procedure, yet moving in the realisation of what had been achieved, or almost achieved. Many people were moved. To me it's clear the strong feeling is as expressed by Maria Nel: "Were it not for Dr V, we would never have had the Republic."

Sometimes the prospects for 31 May look dark – apparently there are big plans for riots. We are keeping ourselves ready and trust in the Lord.

9 June 1961

Everything progressed so peacefully, we just feel thankful. It is clear the planned strikes and riots were prevented by the firm and comprehensive action of the government.

31 May was wonderful. It rained but that didn't matter. In fact, the Bantu chiefs who were present said the rain meant that the spirits of all their ancestors had returned to bless the Republic.

These political diary entries made me want to turn away inwardly – my stomach clenched, my ears closed up. But the many references to strong Afrikaner support – with repeated mention of growing backing from English speakers – helped to make him and his political context more real to me. Still, I sighed deeply reading about his "granite" approach to their "colour policy", coupled with that "thank you for saving our country", and "there is no alternative... we will take up arms if necessary – submit never!" And I was troubled by the "Bantu leaders'" interpretation of the rain on that first Republic Day – was that the full story? What about Chief Luthuli?

I went out for some fresh air on the back lawn. I reflected on the mountain, almost within touching distance, eternally standing guard in front of me. I returned to Ouma's diary and came across an entry that paints a striking picture of just how interwoven culture, religion and politics were. I was reminded of my days as an enthusiastic Voortrekker.

Golden Gate, Heilbron

25 Oct. 1964

Saturday morning to Heilbron. Theme of programme was "Chosen People, Chosen Leader". It was magnificent: thousands of school children from all the Northern Free State schools; many older people – one estimate was 12 000-14 000.

Hendrik's speech at 3 pm was brilliant. I have felt sometimes that he doesn't reach the high points in cultural speeches that he does in his political speeches, but THIS time he did! Theme was the dangers threatening our culture – more dangerous than a normal war: quiet process of eradicating feeling for what is our own, at school and univ., in church.

In the evening a beautiful programme of athletics, folk dancing, etc. Highlight a tableau in the form of a gigantic wheel (spokes were Voortrekker boys and girls; rim of wheel, folk dancers) with two little Voortrekkers with flares in the hub, with H. as Called Leader between them. It was impressive, his figure with grey head, the dark background with continuous lightning. Whole crowd sings "Lord, let your blessing descend on him".

But it was embarrassing for him. It was well-intended but not right. He also felt that way – as though he was part of an act. Naturally didn't know anything before the moment he had to walk onto the field and ascend the "hub". People shouldn't do this.

I was relieved when it was time for supper. I found it helpful to do something with my hands while I tried to digest these diary entries. I am pretty sure that, had I been a little older at the time, I would have joined in the singing. I am grateful neither Ouma nor Oupa were comfortable with all that veneration of a "Chosen Leader".

I fried onion and garlic, cut carrots and baby marrows and put them all in a pan with a big piece of boerewors. The smell of boerewors had been my downfall as a vegetarian in Ireland.

With a plate full of South African flavour I look for some soothing music. Afrikaans music seemed appropriate and I settled on Randall Wicomb's collection of psalms, sung in earthy, poetic Griqua-Afrikaans.

Listening to this music I remembered an entry in my diary after the most recent visit to Orania: "There is a part of me that feels 'at home' amongst my cousins and Tannie Annatjie.

"...as soon as I stepped out in Colesberg on the way back and started talking to people at the petrol station or in the supermarket, I felt uncertain, guarded. It was almost strange to speak to black people again, and I had been in Orania for only a week.

"As I drove home today I committed myself to listening with renewed effort to the experiences of those people who were on the receiving end of apartheid and Verwoerd."

Emily Mabeba, my oldest neighbour, is a dignified, grey-haired *umakhulu*, with large, brown eyes and a generous laugh. Her children, grandchildren and culturally conscious neighbours call her "Ma", for *mama*, mother in isiXhosa. Even though she's in her seventies, she insisted from the first time we met that I call her Emily. We chatted sometimes as we hung washing in our adja-



Emily Mabeba

cent, small backyards, or while enjoying some winter sunshine. A few times we even gardened together. I often want to call her "Ma", and not only because it is polite.

She tells me about her life one day, while we are sitting on the big sofa in her sitting room. From here, we could see a piece of the green lawn, with its thorn trees, at the centre of Lynedoch Ecovillage. Helderberg stands on the horizon.

She briefly explains the complicated story of her name – her Xhosa father was from Lusikisiki in the Transkei, her mother came from Lesotho.

“My biological father wasn’t really there for the family, he just disappeared. I was also a child that came after a long gap. The previous daughter was sixteen years old when I was born. So when I was born everybody was very happy, everyone gave me a name. I had so many names. I ended up using the name my stepfather had given me – Nomathembi. There were no saints with the names my family gave me, so the priest at baptism recommended ‘Emily’.”

Emily was in Grade 4 (formerly known as Standard 2) when Bantu Education was really taking shape.

“My stepfather kept on saying ‘there is a kind of education that is coming, and NONE of my children are going to be in that kind of an education!’ He arranged to send us to Natal where there were more Catholic Schools giving a good education – they were not under the government. Unfortunately I got sick, this was in 1952, so I couldn’t go to Natal. In April, when I got better, my parents just took me to Lesotho, to where my mother had been born. I came home twice every year – June and December – to Soweto.

“I was doing quite well at school. I would say thanks to my mother, because she instilled in me that I must read. So I could read and read and read. My mother use to bring me all those books from where she was working as a domestic worker. When the covers were torn, the white parents would throw away these books. Then my mother would collect them and bring them home. So I started reading at a very early age.

“Not experiencing Bantu Education has helped me a lot, because I view life differently now. And I relate to people in a different way. Because if you see a person who has done Bantu Education it seems as if there is a layer that has been applied to the person’s brain. I don’t know if I am putting it right, but it is something like...” She enfolds her fist with her right hand. “They cannot even take initiative, they have to be told, ‘do this’.

“With Bantu Education the schools in the townships ended in Standard 2. If you wanted to go further you had to go somewhere far from home, to the homelands. It was more difficult. Verwoerd’s reason was,

'don't let them get educated, because if they are educated you will not be able to subdue them. Let them study only as long as they need to be able to read and write.' I didn't hear him say it, but that was our understanding of his thinking."

Later the name Verwoerd became for them synonymous with how they were treated under the whole system of apartheid.

"Do you remember that recent SABC documentary on *Why Are We Angry?*, which [my daughter] Manda showed you last year? All the ongoing discrimination that black people talked about in this documentary was much worse then. You were ordered to do a stupid thing in public, and you couldn't say no. Because if you say no, these people will so beat you. You know, they will 'panel-beat' you, really, just for fun – the police and the white people around taking part. It was sad. It was bad.

"I could see if a person was going to slap me or smile at me. I could see that. So, if it's dangerous I would know and quickly get out of the way. And if the person smiles, I would smile back or talk to the person. That was the main question, because to them a black person whom they didn't know wasn't supposed to speak to them. Those were the rules: you can't speak to a white person until you are spoken to. But I was the one who would initiate a conversation ..."

"I would phone to apply for a job and the person would say 'Okay, can you come for an interview this afternoon?' 'Okay, I'll be there.' Then, when I go there the person at the front desk would be surprised. She would phone Mr So-and-So. 'The lady...Emily is here for the interview...' and then talk behind her hand '...and she is black.'"

Emily laughs softly.

"When she says that, I know I don't have that job. I would go just out of curiosity and answer all the questions, but I wouldn't get the job and that was that."

I am curious how, as a young person educated in Lesotho, she experienced being treated as an inferior person in South Africa.

"It was a bit tough. It was difficult because I was always questioning the way they treated me. I would say, 'but why would you do this to

me? Why?’ Some people would just become shy and not give me an answer.”

I remember one of Ouma Betsie’s diary entries, highlighting how radically different Emily’s and Oupa’s perspectives were:

17 April 1961

Today’s newspaper again reports on the organisation of non-whites to take over power in SA in 1963 – plans already in place, also from outside.

Then also the planned strikes and demonstrations by Brown and Black during Republic celebrations. What is becoming of all? People are clearly anxious. H. remains calm, says the government is aware of everything and will keep things under control.

This recollection makes me listen even more intently when Emily starts to talk about her being unfairly labelled as a “politician”.

“After school I needed to get a passport to go on a visit to Lesotho. When I was still at school there were no passports, you just went in and out of Lesotho. Then there was a time you had to get a passport. This man said to me ‘Okay, we have forms, but you must get somebody to sign for you, your father.’

“I said, ‘My father has died.’

“He said, ‘Your boyfriend, or somebody ...’

“I said, ‘No, I don’t have any relationship and anyway, I don’t think that I can trust someone like a boyfriend, no ...’

““These passport forms, a male *must* sign ...”

Emily explains that she was not aware at that stage of the law that treated black [and white] women as minors.

“I needed a man to sign for me. So I said, ‘No way, I am on my own and I am going to Lesotho on my own, no man is going. I am *not* going to ask any man to come and sign for me!’

“So I went for an interview to get a passport. The building was in Marshall Street. I didn’t realise that I would have to answer these questions in front of a panel – there were several people, six or eight,

I can't remember. I was looking at this one asking me the questions, meanwhile the others were looking at my reactions, my body language, things like that. And then I got my passport! I was happy that I got my passport, not knowing that I am already labelled a 'politician'.

"Okay, then I went to Lesotho, to the university, to see if I could continue with my studies. When I got there, what I saw was heart-breaking. Students were not together, they were in groups...it was so politicised. I didn't know what to do. They all wanted to give me their pamphlets. I said, 'No, I don't believe in what you are advocating here...' They said, 'Take it, even if you don't believe you can give it to others.' I took these pamphlets and, fortunately, threw them away the minute I got back on the train. I didn't want to be part of this, which was a good thing. Because when I got back to Joburg, I find these two guys waiting, as if they were waiting for me.

"They said, 'Okay, you come from Lesotho...'

"I said, 'How do you know?'

"They said, 'It is our business to know. What do you have?'

"I said, 'Things like what?'

"They took my bag and started checking it. Fortunately, there were not any papers from any political party. So I said, 'So you are the police, you've been checking on me. You know, for your own information, I am just a Catholic girl, with no intentions of becoming a politician. If that is not satisfactory, I don't know what will satisfy you.'"

Black political parties were not allowed. The ANC and the PAC were banned in 1960. I remembered the pile of TRC evidence about what typically happened to "politicians" in police custody. And the Biko book I read for the first time in Holland. I was relieved for Emily that she had not been caught with damning evidence.

Then she gives an example of why those "strikes and demonstrations by Brown and Black" increased in intensity.

"I remember one incident. Before I fell under TPA [Transvaal Provincial Authority] as a health worker, I never bothered about being registered somewhere. The Johannesburg City Council did everything for

us – even taxes, we never worried about that. The year I started with TPA, we had to go to SARS [South African Revenue Service] on our own to pay the registration with the Nursing Council. We kept on arguing that ‘we are not nurses, we are Clinic Assistants...’ But they insisted, ‘no, you must go and register.’

“It was the 31st December and this woman told us ‘if you are not registered by the 1st of January, know that you will have no jobs’. So we had to run to Pretoria to go and look for this Nursing Council and pay our dues.

“When we got to Pretoria we went to Standard Bank to go and change our cheques. We were so happy, ‘it is empty, let’s go in’, not knowing that we were entering the wrong door!”

“Just then we heard a commotion, I don’t know if it was outside. Meanwhile, these people are looking at us through a dark window. We didn’t even see that there were people on the other side. And we heard them saying ‘If those women are served we are going to break these walls!’

“The security guards were coming, ‘No, no, no, you are not supposed to be here!’

“We said, ‘Look here, we have things to do, just leave us alone.’

“Because we did not listen to the security guards this white guy who was in his office came out and he said, ‘Ladies, can I help you?’

“So we talked to him and he said, ‘Ladies, you are not supposed to be here, but what I can do is to take your cheques and while you wait outside I will change them for you and bring the money to you. Are you people from here?’

“We said, ‘If you mean South Africans, we are South Africans!’

“And he said, ‘Ja, but with a difference ...’

“We went outside and waited while he changed our cheques.”

“He changed the cheques and brought them out to us. The noise that erupted from that other side! We were supposed to have gone there. But we just left it at that and said ‘No, we cannot help it, there is nothing we can do’ and we rushed for a taxi.

“This guy was convinced that we are not South African, he wanted to know exactly and asked again, ‘Where do you come from?’

“So we said, ‘Joburg’ and he said ‘Joburg? Don’t you know that there are separate doors for Whites and Non-Whites?’

“We couldn’t answer him and just left him and went away. On the way back, I saw a nice dress in the window of Foschini. I went in and wanted to try it on, but the saleswoman said: ‘Only whites are allowed to try clothes on.’ I just put it down and walked away. I only started shopping again at Foschini in 2005, once they had black people in management.”

Emily relates some of her experiences as a “cheeky” health worker in the 1960s and 1970s, perilously navigating her way through the quicksand of the pass law system.²⁶

“In 1959 I had an opportunity to get a ‘pass’. I didn’t know there were stamps that needed to be placed in the ‘pass book’. I said, ‘As long as I have my pass book, everything is fine.’ So I got my ‘pass’ in 1959, then I went back to Lesotho. When I came back I realised there were so many stamps that I was supposed to have obtained.”

This made job-searching difficult.

“You don’t have such and such a stamp! Your pass is clean! Go and get such-and-such a stamp!”

“I go to the Pass Office and when you get to the front: ‘Why don’t you have a stamp? Where were you? You don’t have a stamp like this one, what happened?’

“I said, ‘I didn’t know...’

26 The pass laws tightened controls that had been in place since the 19th century, according to which only black men had to carry passes. In 1952 new laws were passed that led to draconian measures. The aim was to keep black people in their “homelands” and limit urbanisation. Breaking these laws led to heavy punishment, and from 1956, black women also had to carry passes. This led to the historical protest of women to the Union Building in Pretoria. The pass laws were the incitement behind the protest that became the Sharpeville Massacre. These laws were only abolished in 1986.

“So I was being labelled as ‘cheeky’, as a ‘politician’, because I was answering the officials’ questions. I could see people getting out of the Pass Office. When I looked there was this stamp in red ink. Anybody who got that stamp came out crying – men or women. I said to myself, ‘I am *not* going to have that stamp!’ I kept going to the Pass Office. ‘Okay, come back with such-and-such a letter’. I come back with such a letter and give it to them. ‘Okay, we see that you were in Lesotho, bring such and such ...’

“No, I don’t have such a letter, but I have just passed my matric and here is my certificate.’

“What! Cambridge Overseas Schools Certificate? Have you been overseas?’

“No, I told you that I’ve been to Lesotho...’

“But this is an overseas certificate?’

“Yes, if you listened I said that we were the first group to do this kind of matric examination because JMB has just ended and with the ending of JMB there had to be something else...”

JMB stands for “Joint Matriculation Board”.

“[It] was administered from Pretoria, for the whole of southern Africa. One of the reasons why it came to an end was probably the start of Bantu Education, because JMB was for everybody. With the new department of education there had to be four departments – ‘Coloureds’, ‘Indians’, ‘Whites’ and ‘Blacks’.

“There were a lot of Afrikaans people in the pass offices. I know there was a lady, this woman, I don’t know what I did to her, what triggered something in her, but when she sees me she would go into a tiff. She would start speaking in Afrikaans and I would stand there looking at her. ‘Why don’t you answer me?’

Emily speaks in a mock angry voice in imitation of her and then continues in a calm, quiet voice.

“You know what, lady, if I understood a thing of what you were saying, then I would have replied long ago...’ That used to infuriate her more! Unfortunately, she was the person who was supposed to help

me. She said 'I can't give you that stamp, I can't give you that stamp, you've got to get me a letter like this ...'

"Then I go, I get a letter like that, I give it to her.

"And she says 'Yes, but that is not enough! If you can give me £25 I will put the stamp in your pass without blinking an eye.'

"I said, 'No, no...I am *looking* for a job so that I can have money. You want money from *me*? No ways ...'

"That was my worst mistake! I was sitting there on the bench and she said to this person, 'You leave her to me, you leave her to me', pointing at me.

"I thought, 'Oh, I wonder what is coming now?'

"When I got into the office, she was sitting with a guy. But the guy was civil – he kept on speaking to me in English. She would speak in Afrikaans and when I don't respond she would go 'aggg, agg!' and then switch to English."

Emily again imitates a high-pitched, angry tone of voice.

"Ja, your father was paying his taxes in Lusikisiki, and that is where we must send you!"

"I said, 'To do what?', because I have never been to this place. I have never even *seen* this place. Just for me to answer her was so infuriating to her.

"She said, 'Okay, bring your pass here!'

"I gave her my pass. And she went to that stamp with the red ink! Ahh, that is when I grabbed my pass and ran out of the pass office. I ran out! I ran! I *ran*! The security people were wondering what was happening. They didn't even have time to stop me! The following morning I was there again.

"'Are you giving me what I need, or not?' I asked this lady.

"As we were talking I heard this girl from the Transkei speaking on a phone outside, saying 'Father, please sell that cow that you always wanted to sell and send me the £25.' I couldn't hear what her father said, but she said 'Otherwise I cannot become a nurse.'

"I think her father did it. I was just like one of the employees there:

I was going there *every* day. I said 'I will come here until they tell me what to do or until they give me the right stamp!' In a few weeks' time when I got there this girl was given a Section 10A!"²⁷

Emily's voice conveys how surprised she was, with a strong emphasis on the "A".

"I said to her, 'Did you pay the £25?' She said, 'Yes, my father did.' I thought, 'This is unbelievable!'

"10A means you can stay and there is *nothing* that can touch you. That was the best stamp. My pass book was blank. I was so desperate! Even if it was a permit to look for a job that was enough for me, that was all that I wanted. But I couldn't even get that.

"I then went to work in a peri-urban hospital. They didn't ask a lot of questions, but just got me a stamp. I can't even remember what the stamp said, but it had no qualification whatsoever so I started working. I worked and worked in the hospital, until I said, 'Ag, this is not the job for me, let me try to do something else.' I went to another hospital that was in the middle of a men's hostel. I could get away with working there because it was still a hospital. When it closed down, I tried something else, but I didn't succeed.

"Eventually I went to this factory – there were not many around – where they were capping these tubes. After eight months at the capping factory, I went to work again in hospitals, different hospitals: Rietfontein, Baragwanath. That's when I realised that my pass book was full. I then had to go and get a new one. At this point I was married, but I cannot even produce my marriage certificate. I just had to get my old pass book and I said, 'Please, my old pass book is full, give me a new one.' So they gave me a new one without any questions.

27 Stamps in black people's pass books indicated, among other things, whether or not they could look for jobs in "white areas" and live there, temporarily or permanently. The stamp that indicated they could not work in a white area at all was rendered in red. Article 10A of the pass laws allocated the right to stay in white areas on a permanent basis after they had worked for the same employer for ten years or for multiple employers in the same city or town for fifteen years.

When I came back to Bara the matron said, 'But we didn't check your pass ...'

"I said, 'please, Matron, it is a long story, can you just leave it at that?' And she left it at that."

"Unfortunately my younger sister was held several times. Because of the Black Sash,²⁸ I understood most of the apartheid rules. They made sure that whenever a rule is passed then they let me know. 'There is a rule, when you go to town make sure that by six in the evening you are not caught in town.' I can't remember what it was called, but it was 'white by night' only."

Emily met the white women human rights activists from the Black Sash in 1964.

"They told me how the laws worked, what was expected of me. When they could help, they would help. But in my case, they couldn't help, because I did not have the required stamps and so on. I didn't even have a birth certificate.

"When my husband died I was very afraid of losing the house - it was in his name. Thanks to Black Sash I knew that if you were employed for fourteen years in one place, then as a woman you were entitled to keep the house. I managed to get the right documentation and then received the right stamp. Without that I don't know what I would have done."

I sat back down at Oupa's Blaas 'n Bietjie desk to continue reading Ouma's diary as the wife of Prime Minister Verwoerd:

28 The Black Sash was founded in 1955 by English-speaking white women. They held silent protests with black sashes draped over their shoulders, first against the removal of coloured people from the voting roll and then against the pass laws. The Black Sash helped black people in cities with various practical issues and fought apartheid laws up to 1994. They are an active NGO to this day.

4 June 1966

The fifth anniversary Republic celebrations are over. It was a glittering festival. Pretoria was flooded – 750 000 according to calculations from a helicopter on the hills surrounding the Monument. The weather was beautiful: bright sunshine and no wind... The military show was excellent, brilliantly organised. One had such a glorious feeling about the future, because this crowd was just from Pretoria and surroundings. The same with the military show: a feeling of safety – the immense army forces, the aeroplanes, the guns, etc, were just a sample of what we have.

The entire Tuesday, 31 May, was an inspirational day: the military show that morning with $\pm \frac{1}{8}$ th of the *volk* on the hills and ridges (largest gathering in history), the mass choir that afternoon, the impressive lowering of the flag by the Navy cadets at 5 pm, Hendrik's speech and Mr Fuchs's gigantic performance of our people's story from 1488 to today – enormous, spectacular, beautiful.

...it was [H.'s] best speech...so sincere, so brave, such a confession of faith from the heart, so full of self-confidence, such a strong statement of the philosophy of our people!

Just before this enthusiastic entry Ouma had pasted two reports from *Die Volksblad* of 21 April 1966 which sang Oupa's praises for making "the Republic of South Africa, which had been just a loving dream for years, a reality for us".

Outside a winter storm was raging. The wailing wind reminded me of an earlier Betty's Bay entry in Ouma's diary, dated 27 July 1962: "...after the Session, we went to Betty's Bay to Sen. Malan's home for a week. Inclement winter weather, rain and stormy north-westerly wind the first few days. Probably Betty's Bay at its worst. Yet it was nice. Walked far along the beach in raincoats one evening, returned soaking wet, wonderfully clean and fresh."

With Emily's experiences still fresh I wasn't enjoying this scene as much as I had the first time I'd read about their wintery walk on a familiar beach. Later that evening I couldn't sleep. The rough north-

wester rattled the roof tiles and rain beat against the windows. I'd locked the door of the corridor leading to the living room, the study and my grandparents' bedroom. In the dark house I was haunted by Dudley and Ashnat Adolph's experiences of Republic Day, which was described so glowingly by Ouma in her diary entry of 4 June 1966.

I met Dudley and Ashnat at a workshop, facilitated by Sharon, on the spirituality of non-violence shortly after returning from Ireland at the end of 2012. We've since become friends. Dudley is from Emily's generation; Ashnat is a little older than me.

The other day, Dudley told me: "After 1961, we had this Republic Day festival, on the 31st of May, in the school I was teaching. It was compulsory – a flag-raising ceremony and the anthem.

"We used to wear black armbands. But if the principal reports you, you've had it, you go. 'If you don't stand and sing the anthem I will report you!' We used to turn our backs and so on."

Ashnat also told his story: "Every year, on Republic Day, we had to sing the anthem, 'Die Stem'. On that day we had to wear orange, blue and white, every year, at school. In later years, you hated this idea because it didn't make sense to you. Why do you have to celebrate this day, when this man has caused all of this to happen? I mean, you live in slums, you were forcefully removed from where you were comfortable, and you still have to celebrate Republic Day? That system was evil, simply evil."

I get up and light a candle. I listen to my favourite quiet time music of the last couple of years – *Sacred Treasures III: Choral Masterworks from Russia and Beyond*. This choir music from the ancient Eastern, Orthodox Christian tradition is very different to the Dutch Reformed Church music of my youth. Tonight I am again carried away by the slow, repetitive, melancholic melodies. As a zealous Warrior for Jesus, I had been intensely aware of the plight of Christians behind the Iron Curtain. Now it is the contemplative, sacred music from this region that reaches into my soul. I don't understand the Russian, but it doesn't matter. The exceptionally low bass voices touch parts of me that I am scarcely aware of. This music resonates with an inexpressible ache, a

dark cloud, in my deep self. It feels like a lament about what "my people" did to fellow human beings in South Africa, even a profound rage against Verwoerd as symbol of the white fathers in my tribe and my church: how could we have been so blind?

Dear Ou...pa

(My fingers rebel anew against the intimacy of "Oupa"...I start again.)

Oupa Hendrik

I am struggling. The closer I move to Emily's Verwoerd, the further I feel from you. The deeper I try to enter into my neighbour's experiences of apartheid – realising that there are millions of people with similar life stories – the more difficult it is to make any sense of separate development.

I remember Davenport's formulation of a "vast gulf of incomprehension" between your "euphoric vision" and the "resigned apathy" of a pass law offender in court. The grandmother who lives next door to me, Emily, was neither resigned nor apathetic. I now see an urbanised mother determined to find work, grabbing her pass book out of the hands of a rude bureaucrat, running, running, running to avoid that damning red stamp. My stomach fists when I then think of you.

I don't know what to say. Who am I to condemn you? I don't want to be a holier-than-thou know-it-all. But I am angry with you. I am furious with your many, many supporters.

Oupa, I cannot do it. I am unable to really listen to someone like Emily and feel any closeness to you at the same time.

I cannot look at the *Black Christ* painting and feel your heartbeat. I cannot acknowledge that you are the Soldier with the Spear and recognise you as the smiling man with that milk bottle. I cannot reconcile Oupa and Verwoerd. I *cannot!* And recently I often don't want to try. I don't want to be that grandchild on your lap.

Oupa, this attempt to be honest with you helps to unclench my stomach. When I sit quietly with myself, a deep part of me does accept the bond of blood between us. Including the blood on Verwoerd's hands.

I am not quite sure what it means, but I want to renew my promise of a life committed to reconciliation, also as a Verwoerd. This reconciliation has to include you. Even if only because I am trying to obey Jesus' commandment to love your enemies.

Despite a stormy night, sunrise found me on the main beach. Most of the clouds had been blown away. I was warmly dressed and sat quietly on a big dune, for a long time. Nobody else was in sight. I looked with half-closed eyes at the early morning sunbeams streaking across the bay. Towards me. A slight variation on a favourite John O'Donohue blessing came to mind: "May there come across the waters / a path of golden sunlight / to bring you safely home". Back at Blaas 'n Bietjie I found the full blessing:

On the day when
The weight deadens
On your shoulders
And you stumble,
May the clay dance
To balance you.
And when your eyes
Freeze behind
The grey window
And the ghost of loss
Gets into you...
When the canvas frays
In the curach of thought
And a stain of ocean
Blackens beneath you,
May there come across the waters
A path of yellow moonlight
to bring you safely home...²⁹

29 O'Donohue, 'Beannacht', *Anam Cara*, pp.11-12

Chapter 6

Immersion

*Suddenly, I reached the edge of the shallow water.
Below me an abyss of deep, bottomless water
appeared out of the blue.*

I WAS BACK in Blaas 'n Bietjie. It was a relief to come to terms with the irreconcilable tension between Emily's Verwoerd and Oupa Hendrik. This increasing tension had made it more difficult to honour my 1990 promise to President Mandela that I would devote the rest of my life to reconciliation. Because the commitment could not exclude my ancestors. My primary responsibility was to respond to the pain that Emily embodied, but I also had to honour the call of the Verwoerd blood in my veins – I needed to persevere with my attempts at deeper understanding. A few recent conversations with my mother had encouraged me. She'd renewed my desire to venture closer to the humanity of Ouma Betsie *and* Oupa Hendrik.

Blaas 'n Bietjie study

Dear Ouma and Oupa

I've just returned from a barefoot walk on your beloved beach. On Oupa's desk, in front of me, is one of my favourite pictures of you together – I took it from the cabinet in the living room.

You look truly happy in your holiday clothes, with windblown hair and broad smiles. In the blurred background is the familiar mountain.

It was cloudy when this photo was taken on the northern lawn of Blaas 'n Bietjie. This morning was also cloudy, but today is a wind-still

winter's day. The cloud compositions were different too; the dunes have been re-shaped by wind and tides. No wave is an exact copy. The dead bamboo lies entangled in different shapes. There were fresh dog tracks and even otter spoor in the sand.



You walked regularly on this wide white beach, but your footprints were swept away by the first high tide. There are more houses, and fewer shells and black oystercatchers; there is more rubbish on the beach and fewer fish and periwinkles in the sea, though I often still walk by solitary, patient fishermen. The same rocks stand firm against the ceaseless beating of the waves. The mountains haven't changed, nor has the blue-toe temperature of the winter water. The breeze is as fresh as always.

I appreciate that the gulf of time and life experience yawns large between us. I wish I could have known you better. I want to walk with bare feet towards you. I need to take my shoes off, because entering another human being's life is walking on holy ground.

I wish it was more than just a slightly faded photo in front of me. It appears as if both of you are looking straight at me.

I hope and trust that, wherever you might be, you are still smiling.
Your grandson,
Wilhelm (III)

Again I page through my grandmother's diary, in as receptive a state of mind as possible. There is a sudden change in tone:

23 April 1960

Exactly 14 days! On the 9th the man shot him ...³⁰

The whole thing is still so clear in my mind. It was a lovely sunshine day.

... The next I remember is a man in a neat, brown suit approaching quickly from the section just next to the partitioned area, calling out "Verwoerd!" and shooting about six inches from his head. It was as if he [the man] wanted to turn away, then he shot again – I thought at the heart. The blood streamed. He sagged to the side with both hands on his face, without a sound. I stepped forward and held him.

He was carried away, and the wives went to the cars to follow to hospital. Someone tells me, "Don't worry, Betsie, he isn't dead." Later one says: "His brain wasn't hit."

They say I was brave. I don't know. I just know everything was so unreal, I could not believe it had happened. Yet when I saw him lying there I thought: "Two bullets, he cannot live."

Prof Snyman explains again nothing vital has been hit. The second shot was also through the head: one through the cheek, close to the eye, bounced off the bone and into the soft tissue on the right-hand side; the other into the ear, through the air cavity, behind the palate, which is cracked, also into the soft tissue behind the left ear. The entire path of the bullet, nothing important hit, no nerves, no main arteries. A miracle from the Lord. Prof O says one almost can't even say one in a million!

I was surprised again, as was the case in her Orania house, by the impact Oupa's (literal) blood had on me. I felt closer to him.

I needed to go for a walk. I wandered southwards down the main

30 David Pratt, a rich farmer and businessman, claimed that he shot Dr Verwoerd at the Rand Easter show due to his apartheid policy. Six psychiatrists found that he was mentally disturbed and could not be held accountable, after which he was incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital in Bloemfontein. Shortly before he was to be released on parole, he committed suicide.

beach, where there is no longer a sign for the HF Verwoerd Nature Reserve. Around the first corner there is the calm inlet, where a brown mountain stream runs into the blue-green surf. As children we picked up shells here, sometimes with Ouma Betsie. The most beautiful ones, neatly arranged according to size, are still in a display cabinet in Blaas 'n Bietjie's living room. I reached an isolated cove. Two headshots from six inches and no serious damage. No wonder his family and followers regarded the survival of Dr Verwoerd as a miracle.

Back in his study I zoomed in on the photograph of the white-haired man feeding me milk. I looked for scars left by the Pratt attack. My mother told me later that the hearing in one ear was slightly diminished and that he struggled to pronounce certain words after the attack.

Two years after the attack, my grandparents fell in love with Betty's Bay.

14 May 1962

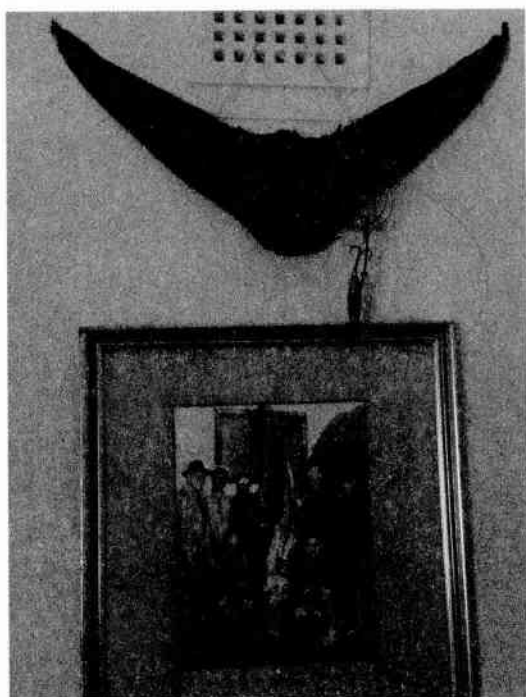
...the economic upswing...above expectation. Everything contributes to bring rest and peace – in contrast to the other African countries.

In April we spent a week with Sen. Malan in Betty's Bay and fell in love with the little place so fully that we immediately bought a stand. While we were still there, H. sat until late in the evenings drawing up plans for the house. We are so excited!

Later, there's her version of the story behind that tuna tail fin.

19 Feb. 1964

...on 31 Jan., H. quietly went out with the tuna boat Speranza belonging to the Hare brothers and caught a blue fin tuna of 468 lb. Struggled for 1 hour 55 min., but so fit, to the amazement of the fellow travellers. Not really sore or stiff afterwards. Big fuss in all the newspapers, perhaps even the biggest in English newspapers. I said jokingly more publicity than when bringing the Republic!



I fetched the small three-step wooden ladder from the study, stood it below the faded little piece of tuna and felt the rock hard, smooth tail fin. More than 52 years is sufficient to make the last hint of dead fish smell evaporate. In the picture Oupa looks tired, but happy. In the clothing cupboard just to the right of the study hang a few old coats. One looks like a well-used woman's raincoat, probably Ouma's. And there is a black raincoat of thick plastic. It looks just like the one Oupa is wearing in the picture. In the study hang a few slender fishing rods, but they tell only small fish stories.

I re-immersed myself in Ouma's political diary, pausing at her ecstatic Republic Day entry on 31 May 1966, with such interest that I got carried away to the extent that I stopped noticing the dates of entries. I turned a page and was shocked by this opening line: "Twelve days after his death..." The heading: "Libertas – Sunday 18 Sept. 1966". Page 395.

"I will try to write everything down as I remember it," she writes. I didn't feel ready to get under the skin of this part. The jolt I felt was

perhaps a glimpse of how shocking Oupa's death must have been for Ouma and my family.

A different kind of heaviness rose up – a sadness, mixed with powerlessness. A familiar inner resistance to Ouma's acceptance that "it was God's will", though with a new intensity. What type of god *wants* this kind of thing to happen? This was not a movie. I could turn back the page in Ouma's diary, but not the clock.

The gas stove has been around since the early 1960s and the worn pan I was using quickly got burnt. It was the next morning and I was preparing bacon and eggs, with the stove on its lowest setting. I made a cup of strong rooibos tea. Too much coffee makes me jittery. For some extra bite I added a few slices of raw ginger. The chair in Oupa's study was beckoning. The warm water bottle lay on my cold feet. I had aimed to open the diary on page 395, but then I remembered I still had to do my daily bit of translating the *Cloud of Unknowing*³¹ into Afrikaans. Half an hour later, I convinced myself that I need a second cup of tea. On the way back to the study I made a detour to the large living room window and watched a family of pheasants feeding on the lawn. It was time to face my grandfather's death.

Libertas

Sunday 18 Sept. 1966

Twelve days after his death. I am going to try and write everything down as I remember it.

From the aeroplane, on our arrival from the Cape, we could see that one of the two dams on Stokkiesdraai had water, unexpectedly, as it was still so dry and the fish would only come end Oct. Mr Wolfaard told us Mr Eins from Marblehall had let him know he was bringing the fish this weekend, and that he had filled the dam from the river. We

31 A 14th century classic in the contemplative tradition of western Christianity; a key text within the Centering Prayer movement, the cornerstone of my spiritual practice since the mid-1990s – see contemplativeoutreach.org.

changed into our farm clothing as soon as possible and went across the river to take a look. Everything was so pretty: the lucerne stretching out into the distance, the willows and poplars with the first green of spring. We went to look at the sheep, chatted with old Paulus, just enjoyed it.

Saturday [3 Sept] Mr Eins and his little daughter came with the German carp, ± 80, and we were all at the "launch". There was great excitement. Then we ate and Mr Eins went back home. We were glad to be alone. H. read newspapers and discussed farm affairs with Mr Wolfaard.

Monday morning we returned [to Libertas] with the car. It was 5 Sept., Settlers' Day, Wilhelm's birthday. The local children had come over for lunch, as always on a Sunday. Then we drank a toast to the three birthdays: Wilhelm on the 5th, H. the 8th, C. [Christiaan] the 10th, handed over a few presents. (But my present, a pair of sheepskin slippers, was in the Cape... I had kept them for the 8th.)

In the afternoon we rested until 4 o'clock, then first to Daniël's home, afterwards to Wilhelm's. He [H.] himself had expressed the desire to go since he hadn't been there for such a long time. That evening, Christiaan and Wynand were at home at Libertas. Last-mentioned had quite a long discussion with his father about his plans for holiday work. Then H. still worked... He didn't come to bed too late and we first had a bath, because we had to get up at 6 o'clock on Tuesday morning to depart from Waterkloof at 7 o'clock. He wanted to arrive before the caucus at 10:30 am.

In the aeroplane he read newspapers and looked at pieces in his briefcase, perhaps in preparation for his budget which would take place in the National Assembly at 2:15 pm.

We landed shortly before 10 at Ysterplaat and went straight to the Houses of Parliament where he got out after telling me I must see to it that the lunch would be ready at 12:30 pm instead of 1 pm, because he wanted to try and get there early in order to be able to sleep a little longer.

I had guests at 11 o'clock... When I saw them off ± 12:30 at the front door, I saw H. had already arrived at the kitchen door. We ate imme-

diately. There were [?] at the table as a present from someone, but I then said, "Should we rather keep it until this evening, then you can rest for longer?" He agreed and we went to the room.

I went to draw the curtains and took the bedspread off and lay down, while he went to the small lounge. He lingered there for quite a while to pack his little case for the National Assembly. When he came to lay down he said he had just gone through *Die Burger* quickly to see whether there was something he needed to know (on the aeroplane it was *Die Transvaler*). Then he undressed, as usual, and lay down. I had laid out a fresh suit and a clean shirt.

After a while he moved and asked: "Is it time?" I said no, you can sleep. It happened a second time, perhaps partly because the $\frac{3}{4}$ hour was longer than the daily 20 minutes, partly because he was lying on his good ear and wouldn't hear the phone, partly because he was always particular about being on time, especially when he had to speak.

At five to two, the phone rang and I had to wake him from a deep sleep. As always he dressed quickly and at 2 o'clock we departed.

On the way, Mr Pelser said: "Well, Doctor, I wish you the best, I hope it goes well." "Oh well," he says, "I am not going to speak soon. They must first get a good chance – it wouldn't be 'sporting' to fall in quickly and deprive them of the opportunity of getting in their attacks." (I think these were \pm the last words I heard him say.)

Arriving at the parliament building, at his office gate, he got out first, as always, and walked quickly inside, followed by Col Buitendag. I followed at an easier pace, got to the closed outside door, which was unusual, opened it and walked through to the usual entrance. Up the elevator – in a letter afterwards Mr Chris Sadie says he and his wife were with me, I don't remember.

At the entrance door Mrs Tini Vorster stopped me: "Ma'am, you should rather not go in."

"Why not?"

"No, I think you should rather not go in now!"

I pushed the door open and saw a bunch of men huddled together on the floor of the House. Then I realised something was wrong and

asked: "Is it my husband?" "Yes," she said. Immediately I suspected he had had a heart attack following a pain in the side he had a while ago.

I then walked to his office, Mrs Vorster too, expecting them to carry him there to wait for a doctor. When we walked through the walkway I saw them holding a man with blood on his face.

Then I asked: "What has happened?"

And she said: "He has been stabbed."

In the office I tell her: "My faith is strong, I feel that like the last time, he will recover. We just have to pray."

Then we kneeled and she prayed aloud – almost too upset, I thought.

Then Dr Jurgens came in and said they were trying to get Dr Barnard, the heart specialist. Hobbie also came in and Nita Muller. Last-mentioned was calm and agreed with a beautiful smile that he would live. The others were very upset. After a while, when they didn't bring him, I said I wanted to go to him. There was hesitation but Mrs V said yes, she thought they should let me go.

Then we walked to the Assembly Hall and they allowed me in on my own. I saw him sitting in his seat, supported by others, sallow, bloodless. I walk around behind him, touched his head, moist – I don't know whether I touched him again, I think I said aloud: "My darling!" and "Lord, help!"

Someone was busy with mouth-to-mouth, I think Dr Morrison. Suddenly I felt in the way and walked back to the office. They said they were getting an ambulance to take him to hospital. I waited to hear which hospital. They brought me tea.

Finally the report came: Groote Schuur Hospital. We went there. I was taken to the Supt.'s office where they introduced me to Ds [Dominee] Kinghorn, who previously was Els's family's church minister in Pinelands. He greeted us, asks after the Du Bois', said he was at the hospital by coincidence, had come from Malmesbury and just came to say hello to the Supt. They brought tea; he went out; he and the Supt. come back. He came and stood with me and looked me in the eyes, but said nothing.

I said: "Do you want to tell me something, Dominee? Is it over?"

"Ja, Ma'am," he said.

Then we went home. Soon a few ministers were there. I was completely calm, not bewildered. Annatjie came to the car and burst into tears next to me. I calmed her down.

(We had called Wilhelm from the office and I told him it was serious – he should let the others know.)

Then they told me all the children were being brought there that evening. Lucie also wanted to come...they picked her up and by midnight they were there. I was in bed already, the six (children) and Lucie had come. There was no distress, we were all calm.

Wilhelm said: "Mamma should remember, Pappa was only on loan to us for the last six years."

It was a new thought to me, and later I could accept it as such with thankfulness, gratitude that he hadn't passed in 1960. Then his life would have been incomplete – he *had* to live to bring the Republic. And what a full six years it was! How much he was granted to achieve, even to the end with the first interview with a Bantu PM [Chief Leabua Jonathan of Lesotho]. For that he had also laid down the pattern...How glad I am that he could also still see and experience the 5th birthday of the Republic on such an auspicious scale.

We came to Pretoria on his birthday, Thur. 8 Sept.

The children are wonderful, especially Wilhelm, who takes all the arrangements upon himself, with the help of Daniel. They are still doing everything. W. told me in Cape Town already that it was their desire that I go back with Elsabet [to Germany] for a while to recover.

The funeral was dignified. The newspapers reflect this. I just want to say it was an elevating experience, without uncontrolled emotion throughout, despite the huge crowd at the Union Buildings and along Church Street up to the cemetery. Ds Gericke spoke eloquently: let us be strong for our people.

And I cannot cry – not because of pent up strain, no, I am just at ease, I have peace in my heart, the peace of God.

Even when alone I don't cry. I don't feel like he is gone. I can speak about him as if he were still there. Yesterday evening, it vexed me:

am I heartless? I who have always thought I would be lost without his strong support upon which I leaned so completely – I who had felt an almost physical pain of loss with the death of my parents at an advanced age, as if something had been torn from me. I who had the privilege of sharing everything with him for almost 40 years. I should be shattered. But I accepted it from the first moment as the will of the Lord. After all, He could have prevented it in so many ways: by delaying our aeroplane, or our car on the way, or through the numerous members who were surrounding him when the lightning quick act was committed. It *must* have been His Will, and I do not feel angry at Him, I do not ask why – I just say thank you for everything that was granted him, and for the privilege of having been his wife and for sharing everything with him.

This morning I felt better, with a realisation that it is precisely his strength that makes me strong. I cannot collapse, sometimes I wish I could feel deep sorrow, desperate sorrow. Isn't it strange? Even at the grave, which I always thought would be the most painful experience, it wasn't like that for me. It was not at all as if it was him being lowered – even now when we take flowers there. For me he is just not gone.

And as someone said: he died at his peak, didn't live to be rejected like Gen Smuts and Hertzog – or to become old and decrepit like Dr Malan. So often he told me it could happen that he too gets rejected: in political life people will say Hosanna today, and tomorrow will crucify him. Thank You, dear Father, that he was spared that, that he received so much love and respect and support up to the end. Thank You for his beautiful life of service. Let his death help further to realise his ideals for his people, pull us together into a tight unit.

O'Donohue's "ghost of lost" washed through me as I read this section of the diary. I couldn't articulate my muddled emotions. I felt sad and, with Ouma's help, I was feeling closer to both of them. For the moment, I put on hold the knowledge that 6 September 1966 had been a day of dancing for so many others.

How could I express sorrow *and* “sorry”? I wondered. How could I genuinely mourn with Ouma, and my Verwoerd family, the bloodied loss of a beloved husband, father, grandfather...and, simultaneously, sincerely, express remorse for the blood on his and our hands?

“Immerse yourself in beauty and you will find the courage to do what is right.” I’d read this somewhere. I took my bike and went for a long ride in the World Heritage Kogelberg Nature Reserve, along the banks of the Palmiet River, between Betty’s Bay and Kleinmond.

Despite a long shower when I got back, I still felt flat. I went to a smoky, rough-edged bar that reminded me of Belfast’s working-class pubs. I watched TV sport and ate a fatty burger, resisting a strong urge to have more than a few cold beers. Ouma Betsie’s “book of mourning” was waiting around the corner.

Later that evening, in the familiar living room, with the curtains closed, I sat in my regular chair, from where one still has a bit of a sea-view during the day. I needed an appropriate ritual. At the end of Life Histories workshops, or to complete a wilderness trail in iMfolozi or the Scottish Highlands, my fellow facilitators and I always conducted some kind of closing ceremony. I’d not reached the end of Ouma’s diary, but I felt a need for something similar now. How could I respectfully acknowledge – in a way beyond words – what she had enabled me to experience with her?

I scrolled through my MP3 player and stopped at Hildegard van Bingen’s music, the album *Voices of Blood*.³² I listened for a while to the high-pitched chanting, then fetched the framed picture of Ouma and Oupa from the desk in the study. I placed their smiling faces on a small table in front of me. I put Brahms’s “Requiem” on and gazed at them in the candlelight. It didn’t feel quite right. Perhaps a walk on their beloved beach. The waves were louder than in the day, the sand cold beneath my feet.

32 Hildegard van Bingen was a 12th century Benedictine abbess, writer, composer, philosopher and mystic. She was also known as Saint Hildegard and the Sybil of the Rhine.

Like swells from the deep sea, something welled up in me, but it didn't break.

For the next eighteen months my grandmother wrote as a widow. It is raw mourning. I am astounded at this look into the intensity of her emotions. It is though a curtain has been pulled away from a hidden world inside Ouma Betsie.

Gradually, painfully her wish to "sometimes...feel deep sorrow, desperate sorrow" was granted. And yet she remained conscious of a lack of control: "I dare not break down." It is moving testimony to a familiar culture of public "dignity", typically measured by the extent to which tears can be kept private.

5 Kesselaar Ave

13 March 1967

Last night a peculiar dream.

We were at an insane asylum, H. and I. Then a nurse points at a higher floor, from inside (like a gallery) and says: "There is the man (the murderer). I think, "No, how can she say this?" and H. and I half-smile at each other.

Then she takes me up many stairs to see him and I realise she knows what she is talking about. When we got to the man where he was sitting working (I think writing), he was just getting up to sort of hand in his work (I think papers): a small, dark little man with long hair – looks like an artist.

I wonder whether I should feel I must attack him now over what he'd done, but no, there is no anger or hate or resentment. I wonder if H. would have also felt like this. Actually I know he would have.

Then I wonder if the nurse will take him to the man too and I think she shouldn't.

Again down the stairs: get to a child in a chair. He is told he should be ready, Dr V. is coming to him now – to me almost as if it is "the man", but then I realise it is not.

Retrospectively over the last months:

Went to Betty's Bay in Feb. Everybody thought it would be difficult, but it wasn't. Still: it was our first little home, in all details thought through and planned by him, and so nice for its purpose.

Last Sunday, 5 March, again such an empty, miserable feeling. Then I realised I couldn't go on like this, couldn't keep myself from everything and think only about myself.

At Wilhelm's

22 April 1967

My darling, this evening I suddenly thought of chatting to you – here in the book in which I sometimes wrote little pieces about our experiences and your work. So often things happen that I want to tell you about: why not in this way? Why didn't I think of it earlier?

Yesterday W. and I went to the cemetery with lots of flowers and we decorated your grave beautifully. I don't go often: never has it felt to me that you are lying there; there are also always people.

At Anetta's wedding when Mrs Enslin and her sister came to chat with me and I could feel they are thinking of you, I couldn't contain myself. I was so sorry it was at such an occasion... but I couldn't help it – just like I am sitting and crying here now.

14 May 1967

My darling, I just want to say how I miss you.

It was difficult to adapt to here again after the six weeks at Wilhelm's.

Yesterday I put a dark red rose next to your portrait – do you still remember our "little game"? How I used to welcome you when you were away from home, especially due to Senate sessions?

I also think of our first baby – me there in Cape Town in the Gardens Nursing Home at the top of Kloof Street. The delivery was short, and our first little boy was born on 14 Aug. 1928. They said only that he was weak, but regularly brought him for feedings – I don't believe he drank much.

Then, maybe the second day, you had to tell me the baby had a con-

genital weak little heart and would probably not survive. You were so tender, so loving. And when he died on the fourth day you had to go and bury him alone in the Woltemade Cemetery.

You wrote to Frau Fera in Hamburg that you didn't know a woman felt so deeply about something like this, but we were together and you were so sympathetic and we loved each other so much – and our life was still ahead.

A year later, on 5 Sept. 1929 Wilhelm was born...

Sunday 21 May

You know, darling, I have lost more than 20 lb...am weighing only 92 now, the least I can remember. Does the body have that much to do with the inner self? Is my feeling of being just half a person responsible for it? Is it the shock of the loss, after almost nine months?

Do you remember how in those early years when we were together on outings you could be such a pleasant, cheerful joker? Do you remember the walks after meals across the old golf course and towards Helshoogte? We were still so young – ± 20 years!

I cannot remember exactly when we "found" each other. It was in 1922, I think, my B.Ed. year, just before I went to teach in Oudtshoorn. You were an MA student, I think.

So many beautiful memories, my love!

1 June 1967

This morning the sun is shining after a short, heavy thunderstorm yesterday. The thought hit me: yesterday's rain was a song of mourning over you ...

25 June 1967

Still the letters come, my darling ...

I want to tell you of Douglas Fuchs's visit...It was about the planned SABC broadcast on 6 Sept. First he spoke about you, as always with deep admiration, and repeated the words I found so moving in his letter from then: "something unspeakably beautiful has passed, SA to me will never again be the same." He says: "Ma'am, there was some-

thing...something which personally touched us all, a kind of vibration which touched us all. You felt you are alive, you wanted to work, give your best. Now it is gone ...”

9 July 1967

For some reason the real events have come into my mind again and upset me. For the last while I again felt so empty and aimless...When I walked to the rondavel in the dark earlier this evening the thought came to me how wonderful it would be if the Lord wanted to take me away, like Elijah, just disappear from the scene and go to you.

Blaas 'n Bietjie

20 December 1967

Yesterday, while W., N. and I were on the way to Hermanus it became clear to me – you know, like one sometimes suddenly realises something clearly – that in the depth of my heart I do not *want* to accept you are gone. And I felt this is weak of me. I must accept the cruel reality. I must rise above my grief. I cannot continue grieving. What should I do?...Am I lazy or scared, or do I have too little self-confidence? May the dear Father help me to see what I can do. My love, can you not help me?

24 Feb. 1968

Today was the official opening of RAU [Rand Afrikaans Universiteit]. I went, partly for Wilhelm's sake, partly for the sake of the greatness of the occasion. What a wonderful occasion: truly an Afr. univ. in Jhb!...you should have been there, perhaps because we were in Jhb. for so long, so we experienced the rise of the [Afrikaner], so closely connected to everything.

It wasn't only me who felt like this, my love. Driving back, Carel said (we were alone in the car) he also felt the absence...He added, even though he is a church minister: "I don't know, I cannot understand why it was the will of the Lord. Maybe He has a hidden goal with it, but it is very deeply hidden."

21 April 1968

This evening I am so heartbroken, my dearest, dearest husband. Oh, I thought I was over the terrible sadness, but I am feeling again just like earlier – just want to cry, cry, cry ...

I went to give a beautiful portrait of you to Ds Gericke. He immediately said it was beautiful – he has never seen someone who could combine friendliness and determination in such a way in a photo. He again tells of how he could not take the hand of Tsafendas (I had asked whether he couldn't be brought out of solitary confinement, it is so inhumanly cruel). Ds G. says he cannot process the whole thing, it is the one, call it "worry" he goes to sleep with and which he cannot get rid of – then I am thankful again that I don't feel like that, even if the sadness is so deep – night, my love, I am crying over you.

There are visible tear stains on this last sentence.

Blaas 'n Bietjie study

Dear Ouma Betsie

Thank you for your diary.

Thank you for opening your heart. Thank you for your shaky handwriting as you remembered those final moments. Thank you so much for those tear stains, the naked emotion. A big thank you for these unexpected, deeply human signs of mourning a loss beyond words, for months and months and years after Oupa's death. I am so grateful that the transmitted family picture of "no tears at the grave" and "immediate, calm acceptance of God's will" is not the full story.

Thank you for your compassion towards Tsafendas – your concern about the cruelty of solitary confinement. Even though he stabbed Oupa to death.

Thank you for your faith. I struggle to tune in to your spiritual wavelength, but I do believe your piety was sincere. This gives us some common ground, the same sea to swim in, the same beach to walk on.

Love

Wilhelm (III)

This gratitude welled up spontaneously after days of intense reading and reflection in Blaas 'n Bietjie's yellowwood study. I returned to those framed pictures often. I better appreciated how big a gap his death left in, especially, her life. And when I eventually came to the point of typing up her detailed memories of those bloodied last moments, it was a surprise and a strange relief to feel that deep-sea swell beginning to break in me. My throat tightened, and the tip of a wave swelled up and came through my eyes.



The more I soaked in my Verwoerd family story, especially the life and death of Oupa Verwoerd, the sharper the contrast became between Ouma's darling and the Soldier with a Spear. Emily's experiences under separate development strengthened my awareness that Chief Luthuli on that *Black Christ* cross was indeed a representative of so many millions of fellow South Africans. My re-education over the last three decades has taught me that apartheid involved much more than the pass law system, Bantu Education, separate amenities, daily humiliations and regular "panel-beatings".

After the intense period of reading my grandmother's diary, I needed to hear again about the human cost of Verwoerdian apartheid, to listen deeply.

Dudley and Ashnat agreed to share some of their experiences during the time of Verwoerd with me and Sharon.

We went to their house and ate vegetable soup, and I asked about her family. The heartache beneath her smiles and laughter is closer to the surface than Emily's seems to be.



Dudley en Ashnat Adolph

"I am still trying to figure out my family," Ashnat tells me and Sharon one late afternoon as the sun set over the Grabouw mountains. "I was born in Edenvale, which is on the eastern side of Johannesburg. During the 1960s, we had big yards and we all lived together there. We didn't know who was black, or coloured or Indian. My mother's sister was married to a Chinese man. All her children were highly educated because they had the advantage that they could go to university, they could study and all of that. They were not white, but they were in a separate category to us. My aunt had the Chinese shop in the township. That was the only shop where there was a telephone.

"My [maternal] grandfather was from Malawi, he was a black Malawian. So our family roots were also scattered. My father was... what was he? He lived in Mozambique, but his father lived in Witrivier. His father was one of the English people who came during the Anglo-Boer War, and he had a farm in Witrivier. My father then left his own family [in Mozambique] behind and came to Joburg.

"We also didn't really know where we belonged. We were not fully accepted by the blacks or the whites; we were not white enough and we were not black enough either. Some of my family members moved to a black township because it would be convenient for them, instead of going to Nigel or Edenpark where the government forced us to go,

because that is about 100 km from where we were in Edenvale. If they were to move to a black township it was about 36 km.

"One aunt, Aunt Maxie, spoke different languages. It was difficult to understand her. She spoke a bit of Italian, a bit of Greek...so they classified her under 'Other Coloured'. She had to carry that passbook around her neck at all time, and it was so strange because she wasn't even that dark.

"My mother had an ID card, the green one, she was first 'Coloured', then she was 'Malay' - I don't know where the Malay came in - and then she was a 'Cape Coloured'. She had never been to Cape Town, but she was classified as a 'Cape Coloured'. The 'Cape Coloureds' were the people who were fair in complexion. Then they would say, 'okay, we'll make you a 'Cape Coloured'. If you were a little bit dark, they would say 'Other Coloured'.

"The Department of Home Affairs was in Pretoria. I remember that when you get to this building in Pretoria they would pull your hair, if they see your hair is too long. If you say, 'Eina!' then they would say, 'Okay, you are Cape Coloured'. If you say, 'Aitsjoe', then they would say, 'No, you are a darkie'."

Ashnat and Dudley often laugh during this conversation. Sharon and I are, again, not sure whether we should laugh with them or cry. I asked how it worked to go to an office to be racially classified.

"They would take you at face value..."

Dudley adds: "They would put a match through your hair. If the match sticks, then you are 'black'; if the match falls through, then you are 'coloured'. They would show you the number 88, 'wat is die?' (what's this?) If you say 'tag-en-tagtig' (eighty-eight), then you are 'black'; if you say 'agt-en-tagtig' then you are 'coloured'."

Ashnat continued: "My mother worked for a very rich English family. She would take us to work with her during school holidays. We always thought 'wow, it must be nice to live like this, we wish we could be white', because they had everything, things that we were not used to.

"We weren't allowed to go into shops like the OK Bazaars. We had to stand outside and give our list to the shopkeeper. They would go

and get what you wanted, but they wouldn't give you exactly what you'd asked for. And you couldn't complain.

"Where I grew up in Edenvale there were a lot of factories, like SA Breweries, Simba chips...all these big companies. For some reason the government felt we didn't belong there. So, in 1976 – I was sixteen years old, I was in matric – they came with bulldozers. I will never, never forget that day. It was terrible. I'm sorry to have to say this, but I developed such a hatred for white people, because they were the ones who sent the bulldozers. It was a forced removal. We didn't want to move, but we had no choice. And because we were defiant, we lost many of our possessions. It really is one day I will never forget.



Africa Media Online

"Even in the earlier years we couldn't have any visitors because they had to have a permit. And when the police did their raids, it was always in the early hours of the morning. If you took too long to open the door they would kick it in. As they called your name, you had to stand in your birth order. If they thought you were a bit too old, you had to put your arm over your head and, if your fingers touched your ear on the other side it meant you were an adult. Then you had to move out of the house. But where could you move to?"

I asked her whether you would be required to move then and there, in the middle of the night. She said yes.

"We couldn't buy a flat, we had no money to buy a flat or anything, so you just had to stay there. We were abused by the police month after month. We developed an intense hatred for them."

These police were mostly Afrikaans speaking.

"We were born in Edenvale. With the forced removals they wanted to create more factories or more houses. There was a part of Edenvale that was a good area and they wanted to use that area to build more houses. Edenvale was mostly an English community. And we would be in the way. We don't even know where that name 'coloured' comes from, but I think it is because, they claimed, we were born of a 'lesser race'.

"Then we were moved to Nigel. It was so far away, about 100 km from Edenvale. Some of the coloured people were moved to Eden Park, but that was also far from where we used to live. It was like living in Timbuktu. To get from Nigel to Johannesburg we had to take a bus from the township to the station and a train from there to Springs. At Springs station they had this beautiful subway for the whites to go through. We had to go on stairs...it was so risky, people used to fall and break their legs and we had no shelter. When it rained you got wet. This one day we decided to go through the subway. We got beaten up by the police. I was seventeen years old.

"It was one thing after the next.

"When I started to work I decided to move to Hillbrow, to get a flat, because it was much closer to where I was working. As a 'coloured' I couldn't get a flat in a 'white area'. I had to get a white nominee. You had to pay a deposit and then the nominee would disappear with your money. Then you would get a notice when you come from work and you would have 24 hours to move out because the nominee hadn't paid your rent. We moved around between ten to twelve flats while we were in Joburg. It was the same thing, every time, because we were not allowed to rent a flat.

"Then there was a bus service. At one stage they said, 'Okay, you can

use the double decker bus service, but you have to sit upstairs.' It was uncomfortable for older people to get up the stairs. The bus service was convenient at the time to get to work quicker, but it was most inconvenient because you were just not allowed to sit downstairs. And if it wasn't a double decker bus, then you were not allowed to take a bus at all, because you are not allowed to sit next to the whites.



"There was this place called Fontana in Joburg, I think it is still there, opposite Joubert Park. The only thing that we could have was a chicken, to buy a chicken and rolls. While you were opening the packet then the birds come and they all eat with you, in the park. There was nowhere for us to go to eat out. The only place was Wimpy International on the 50th floor of the Carlton Centre, but you couldn't go there every day. That would be like an outing, maybe once a week, just to get out, to explore, to sit at a table and eat like a 'larney'."

To best enjoy the beautiful southern view on the Stellenbosch and Kogelberg mountains, Sharon and I put our home's living room on the second storey. This provides an unobstructed view over vineyards stretching up the slopes. To visit our neighbours the Mabelas, as I was doing this morning, one must go from the living room down a few

dozen steps to street level. Then there is another stairway up to their front door.

As always, Ouma Emily called out a friendly "Come in!" and I entered to find her sitting on the sofa with the view on Helderberg. She was hemming green, yellow and red kitchen towels that had been cut into quarters. They were going to be mini dishcloths for children in the crèche to dry their dishes.

I went to sit with her on the sofa. Our conversation eventually turned towards the topic of Naledi's schooling in Soweto during the time of Bantu Education.

"I could feel before 16th June 1976 that something was taking place, but I couldn't put my finger on it. One day, my nine-year-old daughter, Naledi, came to me, 'Ma, if you don't see me tonight, don't be surprised.'

"I found out what they were busy with. They were looking through dustbins and taking all the clean ones to a certain spot. They were using the dustbins to store food. We didn't know. We had wondered why the dustbins were disappearing. The food was for those children who were in hiding, those children who were already being hunted by the police. Winter coats would just disappear, such things. We didn't know what was going on, until we heard on the news that the children were dissatisfied because they would now have to learn everything in Afrikaans. Even then, most of our teachers were not trained. I don't know if it was because of separate education or what, but our teachers were not trained to teach things like maths, science and so on. But they were thrown into classrooms - 'You are a teacher, you teach!' If you don't know maths, how do you teach a child maths?

"We only knew that the teachers were dissatisfied, but we didn't get the true story of what is happening. On the 16th of June my daughter said to me, 'Mummy, are you going to work?'

"I said: 'Yes, fortunately I work nearby, so even if they are struggling with taxis, I will walk back home.'

"She said:, 'If I were you, I wouldn't go.'

"I did go to work that day [because] when I got to the clinic there were a lot of police. They said, 'People, you have to go home.'

“‘Why?’

“‘Things are bad. The children are marching.’

“The children were gathering one another from one school to the next, and they were forming this big march to go into town. That’s when the trouble started. The police started shooting. There were helicopters, hippos [armoured military vehicles], mellow yellows – that’s what we called police cars. It was just busy. Police, police, police with guns, all over. And the hippos with black people in them. I didn’t know what language they spoke, I didn’t know if they were taken from other countries to come and patrol our streets. With the white guys I was brave enough, I said, ‘Guys, what is happening?’

“They would say, ‘We have just been told to come here to keep order. We don’t like the position we are in, but a job is a job and we have to follow orders.’

“You could see that they were scared. They didn’t know what was happening. They were just young white boys who should still be in high school perhaps. They were so young, nothing had been explained to them, they were just thrown into a situation like that. With the black guys you would try and speak to them in English but they would just show that they don’t understand. You could see that they were not local.

“On the 16th, everything was so quiet, because as we were coming there was a group of boys who said, ‘It is not safe for you to be walking in the streets, let us accompany you and show you shortcuts to get to your homes. Where do you stay?’ We gave them our addresses and they started taking us to our homes using not the usual routes, for our safety.

“On the 17th, I couldn’t stay home, I said, ‘No, man, I can’t, because everybody else can stay, except the health workers. Let me go to Baragwanath Hospital, if there is nothing happening in the townships Baragwanath will be open.’

“We had to leave early because the taxi men were also scared for their lives. On the 18th, I still went to Baragwanath. There were lots of young people coming in with injuries. Shot wounds, pellet wounds.

Those with pellet wounds would go home with the pellets in their bodies if the doctors were too busy to see them. It was difficult to see those students in their uniforms, still so young.

“It remained tense for quite a long time. I had to go to Coronation Hospital, which was the coloured area, outside of Soweto, not far from what used to be Sophiatown. I had to get there and so the Soweto incidents were far from me, though in Coronation we still got a lot of children that were shot in Soweto. They came to Coronation because casualties wasn't as busy as at Bara.”



Ten years later another wave of youth protests gathered momentum in the townships, including Soweto. In the midst of the tragic "liberation before education" strand of the anti-apartheid movement, Emily's resolute commitment to the best possible education for her children had frightening consequences.

"Later, at the beginning of 1986, during a time of school boycotts in Soweto, I took my other daughter and my late son to a boarding school. I didn't want children staying at home. A friend also took her children to a boarding school, in the Free State. Mine were close, in Roodepoort. One night some people knocked on the door and said, 'Mama, we understand that you have taken your children to school. On such-and-such a date, we must find them here.'

"There was lots of open veld around Zone 9 where I lived. On Sunday nights, I would take the children's school clothes and hide them in the veld. Early on Monday mornings, I would fetch the clothes, get a taxi, and take the children to school. I couldn't let any of my neighbours see our activities. It was dangerous. The youth activists came to me: 'Mama, even if nobody saw you, we know that you are taking your children to boarding school.'

"Fortunately, I had made ginger beer so I asked them to sit down. We started talking. I said, 'I see what you are doing is very good, but you must look at the consequences. Winnie Mandela, what is she by profession?'

"They said, 'She is a social worker.'

"Okay, and Nelson Mandela?'

"He is an attorney.'

"Don't you think those people will need somebody to run their offices when they come back? If no one is educated, who is going to run those offices?'

"They looked at me and said, 'What you are saying is sensible.'

"I said, 'We can't all be illiterate, some must study while some are fighting. That is how I see it.'

"They said, 'Yes, we need somebody like you, do you mind if we come again and talk?'

"I said I didn't. So they became regular visitors. I eventually asked for a transfer to the East Rand and moved there because it wasn't healthy anymore for any of us. My children were not safe, I didn't feel safe myself.

"Naledi herself was nearly a victim at one stage, because I forced her to go to school and I forced her to wear a uniform even though it was dangerous. And she was nearly burnt. It was just the Lord's doing [that she wasn't], because the shops were so near, just across the street."

"They were holding her [about thirty metres away from where the shops were]. They had petrol, but they didn't have the matches and nobody thought of just going to the shop to get matches. She was standing there, scared, you know.

"Someone said, 'You know what, we might be making a mistake. Did you ask her where she lives? Maybe she doesn't know what is happening in the townships.' So they asked her and she said, 'Sotepa.' This was an enclosed area for those working for Oppenheimer. I don't know if they were working in the mines or what, but they had beautiful houses and their area was enclosed. And Naledi told them that she was staying there.

"They said, 'We nearly murdered Oppenheimer's child!'

"Naledi didn't even tell me what had happened. I heard it later from the taxi driver who drove her away. He said, 'Mama, you have a brave girl!' He told me that they'd been ready to throw petrol on her and she didn't even cry.

"You know, sometimes when you are faced with a thing it brings out the best in you. Look at how the Lord does things. Her school bag was there. Nobody even pulled out a book to see her address.

"After that she couldn't wear her uniform. I said, 'You *will* get your matric, but maybe now is not the right time.'"

Sometimes, Emily explained, children going to school to write exams were beaten by young people wielding sjamboks to prevent them from going to school.

We discussed Sharon's exposure, as a maths teacher in Mitchell's

Plain, to the terrible legacy of apartheid education, and how tragic it was that two generations of children (1976 and 1985-86) had experienced all that tension and violence and were unable to go to school and how these people were now the parents of school-going children.

"I had to do two, three jobs to get enough money to keep my children at school. I had an agreement with the manager at the clinic to leave early every day so that I could get to the group of students I was teaching after school. I got home late every day. Naledi had to grow up before her time. She had to cook and clean and look after the young ones before I got home."

Emily recalls a picture on a postcard she was given in 1948 at her first Holy Communion. It was of two children standing before a rickety wooden bridge with several broken slats. Behind them is an angel with his wings around them. The picture has stayed with her as a reminder that God sends angels when things are hard.

As I wearily climbed the steps to my house, I wondered where the angels were in 1948. In 1976? In 1986? Where is heavenly protection against so much ongoing suffering, today? In the face of all she encountered, my neighbour's seven decades of steadfast, rock-like humanity astonishes me.

Ouma Emily and Naledi's experiences estrange me from, among others, my grandmother and especially her "darling". But my faith commitment to inclusive humanisation means I cannot give up on my blood family. I cannot stop trying to understand and accept them more deeply. Despite the accompanying darkness; even though it often feels impossible and overwhelming to stay on this Verwoerd track and continue on the journey I've started with my new neighbours.

During my visits to Orania, talking to family members, while I immersed myself in Ouma Betsie's dairies and especially during conversations with Emily, Ashnat and Pumla, I often had a sense of *déjà vu*. This feeling reminded me of a 1989 visit to Eilat, in south Israel.

Here the shallow, warm water of the Red Sea allows one to go snorkelling and get a close-up view of brightly coloured fish among beau-

tiful coral reefs. I soon became lost in this breath-taking underwater world. Until, suddenly, I reached the edge of the shallow water. Below me an abyss of deep, bottomless water appeared suddenly. My stomach knotted. I could not get enough air through the snorkel. I quickly turned around and swam back to safer water.

On my inner journey over the last few years, this edge-of-deep-water, out-of-breath feeling has made itself at home in my gut. I am pausing a bit longer above the dark depths now. With other swimmers holding my hand, I sometimes even swim down and peek over the bottomless edge. I need to extend these periods of deep-water swimming, even when I lose sight of the shallow, clear water.

My mediated understanding is that this type of immersion is unavoidable if love of enemies is to come home in my bone and my marrow. As long as I don't try to swim on my own, without my nearest and my furthest neighbours. And when my ingrained tendency to recoil from deep water wants to take over, or the seductive illusion of safe beauty draws me to shallow water, then it helps me to remember that Red Sea experience. Even though it doesn't feel very alluring, the profoundly unsettling love-your-enemies command is the heart of an undomesticated Gospel, the almost incomprehensible dark core of rather uncomfortable Good News. For there is so much more to the sea and to swimming than shallow-water snorkelling. If I restrict myself to where I am in full control, then my deep self will truly be lost.

Chapter 7

Beyond separateness

*In Lesotho you were in class with whites, with Chinese,
with Indians. We got to know one other, and that
was just that. – Emily Mabeba*

THE OFFICIAL PROGRAMME for the State Funeral of HF Verwoerd lay before me on Ouma Betsie's last dining table, in Orania. I took a closer look. There were a few copies and, among them, an A4-sized brown envelope. Inside were a few loose, A5-notepad pages with Ouma Betsie's unmistakable, though shaky, handwriting on them. They were dated December 1990. She was 90 years old then.

It seems she was in the midst of an intense inner conflict. She was haunted by the question of whether she could remain a member of the Dutch Reformed Church since the church had embarked on making a theological about-face, which had started in the mid-1980s: apartheid could no longer be justified on biblical grounds. In official church documents this political kind of separateness was, gradually, declared a sin. Ouma was sincerely struggling with how she could be a member of this church while remaining true to her deepest convictions, as both Christian and an Afrikaner.

Agalma Is dit 'n opklarering met 'n
broedskap?



Woensdag 12 Des 90 -

Verlede nag om 4h - 'n "visieervarings"
gehad, soos wêreldverreker broos die
vange here - so anders as my gewone
skrapgewante.

Eke was in 'n bysondome, iets soos Engel-
studie. Twee nie-blanke vroue, gewone bedieners,
tussen 'n blanke, 'n pastoor en 'n kerk. Wat
spogte gesigte asof hulle na iets soek.

Wat my skielik die vraag: Kan hulle weg-
gluip word? En ek kom na dit met opeenvolgende
"Christelike" verworpen en het gedink aan
die Bybelse gevalle van die apostele, Petrus
en Paulus. Is ons dan verkeer om te stry
in 'n blanke kerk? -

'n "Tweede sensasionele ervaring":

Eke was saam met ander mense in 'n soort
dankgag tussen twee styfgespanne duns draad
(soos rypen visdraad) en ons was raagloos
aan beweging warentoe, kon niks doen om
daaruit te kom nie. Eke was hangsaam wat
'n groot welvlede swaart maar wat die
prosessus versagel in dopstom.

Die was die verskeie kere om, op pad na
verrekening - ek het in my droom "handop
gestaan. Heer, God, help ons, help ons"
Dit is 'n helder wysheit en ontleding, maar het
kalmte gevind in my geloof, in die Heer as die
almagtige Beskerm - ook heil by die Heer.

Wednesday 12 Dec. '90

Last night at 4 am had a "vision dream", thereafter wide awake again like the previous times – so different from my usual sleeping patterns.

I was in a gathering, something like Bible study. Two non-white women, ordinary servants, between the whites, apart from each other. With uplifted faces as if they are looking for something.

For me suddenly the question: can they be shown away? And I could not reconcile it with honest Christianity and thought of the Biblical example set by the apostles, Peter and Paul [including both Jews and Gentiles]. Are we then wrong to struggle for a white church?

A second curious experience:

I was with other people in a kind of crush between two tightly strung, thin wires (like nylon fishing line) and we were powerlessly moving forward, could do nothing to get out of it. Somewhere alongside was a large, wealthy black man accompanying and watching the procession.

It was the most terrifying anguish on the way to destruction. In my dream I cried out aloud: 'Lord God, help us, oh, help us!'

Then I was wide awake and upset, but found calmness in my faith in the Lord as the Almighty ...

[At the top of the page:] "Afterwards: is it a revelation with a message?"

I was amazed that at the age of 90 she was willing to question their "struggle for a white church". Although her first dream's "revelation with a message" was smothered by the second dream.

I wonder what difference it would have made if the "non-white women" were able to come closer and pour out *their* fears and suffering, face-to-face, sitting on the same chairs, to women like Ouma Betsie? I was reminded of the wish expressed to my parents in that political letter from Maurits Street: "I wish you could have contact, real contact – as friends rather than as master-servants – with a black man or woman!"

Naledi was rather unimpressed, initially, with a Verwoerd as a next-door neighbour.

While Sharon and I were building our Lynedoch house she told me:

“When I heard that you were going to be my neighbour, I just thought, ‘Oh my God! Why does it have to be a Verwoerd!’ We had met before – over a number of years we’ve been meeting during your visits with groups from Ireland.



Naledi Mabeba

But I was checking you out, saying ‘Ah, I wonder...’ I’m grateful that I got to know you now, Wilhelm. And yes, you’re going to be my neighbour, good. And we’ll start a new journey together.”³³

We’ve been living within a stone’s throw of one another for a few years now. The three-generation Mabeba family remained remarkably patient for the eighteen months it took for the Verwoerd house to be completed. They even helped me and Sharon to cope with frustration, faced with yet another delay, even though our house was now blocking most of their morning sun. Later we find out that Emily had blessed our house as the foundations were being laid.

The plots are deliberately smaller than typical middle-class erven. The Verwoerd and Mabeba homes are only a few metres apart and there’s no fence between the two houses. One cold autumn day, following a bit of rain the previous evening, I tackled the lush weeds that respect no boundaries. I wasn’t expecting to see Emily, though I knew

³³ Naledi was a participant in the international Beyond Dehumanisation project I mentioned in chapter 1.

by then that she was a more enthusiastic gardener than me. She'd been hampered by a sore hip for a few months. She must have heard me, though, because she opened their front door and moved gingerly into the sun. We chatted about how sore our hands became from pulling weeds because of arthritic joints, what could be done about it, about African and Celtic healing traditions. Then she asked me after my mother's health.

Sharon and I had invited a few friends, some family members and the Mabebas to a ceremony to bless our Lynedoch house.

The relationship with my father had improved enough for him to accept our invitation. His blessing is restricted to the house, since he remains unconvinced that a mixed village like Lynedoch is sustainable. He participated quietly in the ceremony.

My mother arrived first, struggling up the many steps at the age of 87. When Emily arrived, she sought my mother out first. I helped my mother out of her chair.

"Ma, this is Emily ..."

They smiled and hugged, and then chatted until the ceremony began. I'd told them about one another in the preceding months and their mutual, unreserved warmth was sincere. It's the kind of people they are.

My mother is a down-to-earth woman from Sannieshof who grew up on the working-class side of the railway line in a small rural town in what used to be Western Transvaal and is now the North West Province. Like other Afrikaner women of her generation she gave up a career as a teacher to raise her four sons. Until recently, she still cooked my dad a "proper lunch" – consisting of meat, potatoes, two vegetables and a salad – every day in the same pots and pans they received as a wedding gift, even though she has hated cooking for the more than 60 years she's been married. Chronic back pain means she often has to lean on the counter on her elbows to peel potatoes.

She cannot easily be fitted into a box. For more than 40 years, she

has been, for instance, an avid Formula 1 motor-racing fan, glued to the television for every race, and thoroughly analysing it afterwards with my brother Hendrik.

The gulf of separate development within my family feels the most bridgeable with her. A good friend recently said I was "really your mother's child".

One day I quizzed my mother about the roots of *her* anger, where her stubborn aversion to the "Rednecks", comes from.

"My mother's family farm, Leliefontein, was near Malmesbury. She told us about one experience during the war. When she was four, in 1901, English soldiers arrived at their farm on horseback. All of them were mounted soldiers and they let their horses feed around the large haystack. Then the soldiers stood on the one side, smoking, and when they were finished smoking they threw the burning butts onto the haystack. Her mother and father had put her and her younger brother on top of the haystack to throw those butts down so that the haystack wouldn't burn. It was a big joke to the soldiers. They wanted to burn down the haystack in case Boer soldiers came there so that there was no food for their horses.

"She also always told of how her mother and some of the neighbours' wives used to fill chests with clothes and supplies like coffee and sugar and salt and send them to the concentration camps. Look, those people were not rich, they didn't have a lot they could spare, but what they could spare they did. The closest concentration camp was in the southern Free State. Quite a distance from Malmesbury. How they got the supplies there, she never said.

"My grandfather Dirk's family farm was Dwars-in-die-weg, near Velddrif. They had the experience of Boer fighters arriving on their farm. Naturally, they were immediately fed and given everything they possibly could. In the evening Dad's oldest sister, Engela, a girl of about fourteen or fifteen, played on the little organ and the Boer soldiers sang along. Naturally often they had to leave again in the middle of the night."

I try to understand why memories her parents told her about are still so alive in her after all these years.

"We lived in Springbokfontein between 1927 and 1937. There were quite a few veterans. Remember, this was Western Transvaal, De la Rey's world."³⁴

"And those memories of the war were still fresh?"

"Yes, yes. My dad took trouble to go to the three or four veterans in the area. He was very interested in history. He was an incredible history teacher."

"So the feelings against the English were deepened after the Anglo-Boer War?"

"Oh! Enormously! And they were transferred to us children [through the stories they were always telling]. Remember, the history we were taught at school was intensively about the Second Freedom War. And the Great Trek and Bloukrans and those murders of the women and children. Also Piet Retief's murder. Those were the main points. And of course Slagtersnek. That was a sore point.³⁵ We learned the most from my father.

"Often when we sat around the big old dining room table in the evenings, knitting or mending, someone was reading aloud. [Or we would sing. And we would often ask our parents to tell us about when they were children.]

34 General Koos de la Rey was a leading figure in the Anglo-Boer War and became a hero in the Afrikaner community as a result.

35 The deaths at Bloukrans are referred to as the Weenen Massacre in English; on 17 February 1838 Voortrekkers were killed by Zulus in the area called Weenen today, in what was then Natal. Piet Retief, a Voortrekker leader, and his group were killed on 6 February 1838 at the command of the Zulu king Dingane. The Slagtersnek Rebellion of 1815-1816 was a fairly small uprising by farmers on the eastern border of the Cape Colony (roughly where the Eastern Cape is today) against British rule, which led to the execution of some of the leaders of the rebellion. This resulted in bitterness within the Afrikaner community that is theorised to be one of the causes of the Great Trek. For a more complex look at all these events, see e.g. Noël Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People*.

"I think what was transferred was that enormous *hate* for the English. It was transmitted very specifically. You grew up with hate for every Englishman. And it must have come from your parents, where else? And they probably got it from their parents, who had been directly involved in the war. This is why I don't have time for an Englishman to this day, really."

As we sat there around the dining table, I think aloud that this type of hate isn't something that can easily be erased from a person's system.

"No, no, no! Also because we grew up with the whole thing that the English and the Jews controlled the business world. And how many Afrikaners were cheated by those people. Not just by the Jews, the English, the English – *they* had the money."

"So the money power of the English rubbed salt into the war wounds?"

"Oh yes. The Boers were supposedly compensated for their burnt-down farms, but they had to go and fetch their money in England. How many of them could do that? Terribly few."

I refer to the superiority I sometimes sense from English-speaking South Africans.

"Oh! The Englishman always looked down his nose. They always spoke of 'home' as England, they never saw South Africa as their home, it was only later generations that began seeing South Africa as their country. And not only a feeling, but an *attitude* of superiority. And that is why there was such a terrible struggle to get Afrikaans recognised...now everything is destroyed. Thank God my parents are no longer alive."

Emily also has her issues with English-speaking South Africans. While we talk about her childhood years, she remarks:

"I think the Afrikaans people are friendlier than English people. The English are pretenders, smiling at you while they hate you. Afrikaans people, if a person doesn't like you, they will show you that they don't like you. I prefer that.

"When I was young than ten, I was staying in this mission with

my uncle outside Pretoria. The mission was on a farm. The farm that lay on the right belonged to English-speaking people, and on the other side of them was an Afrikaans-speaking farmer. On the left was another Afrikaans farmer, and I had to buy milk from him. We were so scared of that man, because he was always patrolling on his horse with a whip. But he never hit me. One day I asked him, 'Why is it that you are always chasing the other people, but you have never done anything to me?'

"I can't remember if he replied, but only remember asking him that question. I was about eight or nine. I learnt to respect him – I never walked where he'd planted. I would rather take the long road than walk through his fields. And he respected that, I think. Sometimes I would get fed when I went to buy the milk. His wife would be making dumplings and things like that and she would give me some. With them, I could sit in the kitchen on the chair ..."

Astonished, I ask, "With the farmer present?"

"With his wife, before he came home," she confirmed. "The neighbouring farmer on the right, the English-speaking people, had peach orchards, but unfortunately I wasn't allowed to get to know them, I don't know why."

From discussions with Ma, I know that she'd feel at home in the kind of kitchen Emily described:

"It is terribly difficult for me that black people have so much hate for white people today. The Tswana with whom we grew up were half, sort-of...taken up by the farming community. When I think now of the farmers we knew then. At least once a year the workers' homes had to be limed, whitened down. That yard was swept every day. Do you know what I remember? The women had these grass brooms with which they made patterns in the dirt. The whole yard was full of little patterns swept out by that broom.

"We children often slipped away to go and eat porridge at the workers' homes. It was so nice eating porridge from the pots even when it was cold! My mother couldn't know about it, because 'it isn't healthy, it isn't clean'. Nothing happened to us. It probably helped to strengthen our immunity, if anything."

Not that everything was so rosy: "There were farmers who treated their workers like dogs, but they were sort of... not ostracised by the whole community, but they were not liked. And everybody knew: this one beats his people, that one does this, that one does that."

My mother tries to find word to describe the paternalistic race relations of her youth:

"It was a kind of... I almost want to say, a spontaneous relationship. Okay, no-one was overly friendly; those people didn't toyi-toyi and say 'I want to come and sit in your lounge, I want to sit next to you at the table'. But the attitude was so completely different to today... oh, Wilhelm, I don't know, I don't know."³⁶

My mother's present-day uncertainty is partially due to the influence of her father, Oupa Dirk Smit. Of his five children, it is said my mother is closest in nature to him. She tells me about his commitment to teaching and how he would care for children in his class, using the example of a child from a secret relationship between a black worker and a white farmer's daughter.

"I clearly remember the conversations between my father and my mother about that child. It was for certain one of the saddest things that happened in his school life, that that child wasn't allowed to remain in his class. The other parents simply ostracised the child. 'My child doesn't sit next to a half-breed, a hotnot.'

"In the little dorp where we lived, there was an area above and an area below the railway line. People from above the line did not mix with people below the line. We were below the line, but my father was a teacher. So there was at least some mixing with us."

36 In *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, A South African Sharecropper 1894-1985* Charles van Onselen contextualises these "bitter-sweet relationships born of paternalism and unending rural hardship": "Along with thousands of other [black] sharecropping families on the Transvaal Highveld in the years between the world wars, the Maines had the misfortune of reaching the zenith of their productive powers at that point where old-world paternalism and the social proximity of master and servant on white farms were giving way to virulent forms of racism."

“Did he choose to go live in that area?”

“Well, it was the only house available when we arrived at Sannieshof. Coming from a farm school, the family didn’t really know about ‘above the railway line’ and ‘below the railway line’, but, really, it wasn’t important to us anyway.

“In most communities, in the Afrikaner communities anyway, you definitely had class differences. The children in Pretoria I taught had come from homes that were definitely a step lower than the other children. Their fathers worked on the railways, on the roads, at the dairy. People from below the line always sat at the back of the church, though they hadn’t been instructed to sit there.

“There was this one family, the ‘dirty Coetzees’. My father went to the parents and pleaded, ‘Just wash their feet. Just wash the children’s feet so that they come to school with clean feet.’” Ma laughs a bit and then continues: “They were really the riffraff of the dorp.”

I sigh, and mention to my mother that it was often the people from below the railway line who had to apply the apartheid laws, since they worked as police, on the railways, for the state. The laws may have been made with good intentions but the people who made them did not necessarily convey those intentions to the people enforcing them. The different sides might not have shared the same vision.

“They shared *no* vision. And they had no understanding of the enormous harm and damage they were doing to relationships.”

I expressed my sense that Oupa had not heard enough from people who experienced his policy like that.

“He wasn’t able, Wilhelm, to get to everything. That he made mistakes, I readily admit. Naturally. After all, he was just human. He wasn’t perfect. But, Wilhelm, the basic idea of apartheid was, after all, to give people self-determination ...”

I am harshly reminded how much separateness there is between my mother and my neighbour.

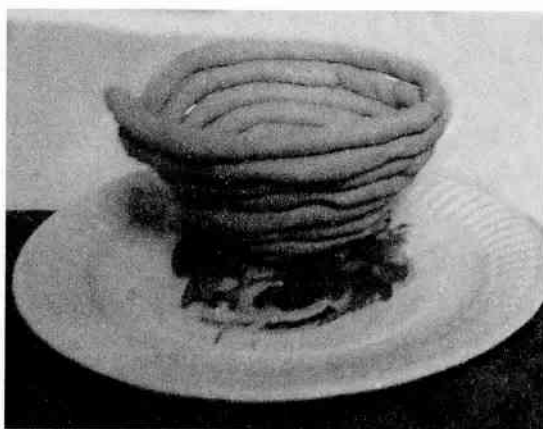
In Ouma Betsie’s nightmare neither the two “non-white women” nor the “large black man” have names or faces. They don’t say a word. No one asks them anything.

A few months after our Lynedoch house was blessed, I attended a life stories workshop. For three days, at Goedgedacht in the foothills of the Riebeek-Kasteel mountains, I sat in a circle with about twenty people from different racial backgrounds. The participants came from Worcester and were involved in an ongoing process of Hope and Reconciliation in their town.³⁷ I was co-facilitating with two friends, Themba Lonzi, from Gugulethu, and Theresa Edlmann, a white, English-speaking South African. It was an intense time. Listening and sharing from the heart. Eating, walking, laughing and playing drums together.

At the end of the workshop, in preparation for going home, we each received a handful of pottery clay. We had to make a symbol of hope with it, also using anything we found in nature. The facilitators constructed an arrangement in the middle of the floor where we gathered, using stones, sticks and fresh flowers, and with enough candles for each person to have one. Everyone in the circle was asked to add their own symbol of hope and to light a candle, with a dedication if they wanted to.

I've experienced many life stories workshops in Ireland, Israel-Palestine and South Africa. As the stories shared always differ, so too do the closing rituals. And yet I am struck by how the symbols offered speak across the bounds of language, gender, culture, class and colour, and at Goedgedacht I felt, as always, that I was standing on holy ground.

When it was my turn, I push my uneven spiral of clay, on a bed of multi-coloured flower petals and green leaves, into the middle.



³⁷ See www.restitutionfoundation.org.

I was pleased that my explanation of a fairly abstract symbol seemed to resonate with people: “If you look at two opposing points on the top layer, the gap between them is the largest. As you move down the spiral, these points come closer and closer, until they meet at the bottom, surrounded by different colours: yellow, orange, purple petals, and green leaves. This demands a willingness to journey deeper than the familiar, safe surface.

“For me the clay spiral also means that if one only looks from above, two-dimensionally, then this deeper journey appears to be a repetitive circular movement. From a three-dimensional point of view, it might feel as if one has to deal repeatedly with the same fears and prejudices, but in reality, there is growth.”

I picked up a candle but hesitated to express the dedication that had welled up.

The Goedgedacht workshop took place in September 2016, a few days after the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Oupa Hendrik. This had been a big moment for the Verwoerd family. My parents had flown to Johannesburg for a special ceremony, including the launch of an expanded *Só onthou ons hom*, the book of recollections of Dr Verwoerd edited by my father. Earlier that week, I’d spent the day, 6 September, in solitude at Blaas ’n Bietjie. And now I was sitting in this circle, with a renewed sense of the systemic wounding represented by Verwoerd, but also with a deepened awareness of shared humanity between those of us in the room.

I trusted my gut.

I told the gathering that the past Tuesday had been the 50th anniversary of the assassination of my grandfather and that I wanted to light my candle for him. But suddenly I couldn’t continue. There was a lump in my throat. I swallowed a few times, waited, and tried again, but my tongue still wouldn’t cooperate, and I felt tears in my eyes, that I tried to hold back. They seemed like a visceral reminder of the deeper layer of my blood family spiral.

I tried again.

“I light this candle for my grandfather...because I am trying, with the help of Themba and other black South Africans, to accept and

even honour him as my grandfather. But I am also acutely aware of the pain that he represents for most of you here.

"I am lighting this candle with the prayer that he is also now sitting in a circle like this. Perhaps with people like Chief Luthuli and Madiba. My wish is that they are also helping him to recognise his blindness, to see more clearly what apartheid meant in practice for people of colour. May he also be healed, like you are helping to restore my humanity. May he become a real ancestor, who will also support us and our children on our journey of deep healing."

I saw in my mind's eye the picture of the wooden bridge on Emily's treasured postcard. Is humanisation a wobbly, incomplete wooden bridge? And if there are not enough planks to fix the gaps, perhaps someone like me could make a start by throwing humble messages of inquiry across the gulf. Listening to the pain coming from the other side, without expecting return messages of forgiveness.

Back in Lynedoch, as I thought over the workshop, I remembered Themba's words during the Beyond Dehumanisation project: "I strongly believe that in places where there's been political conflict there is need for people to have sacred spaces where they are enabled to confront their own demons. Where they can cough out the poisonous feelings they have inside. Because that is what has enabled me to take so many steps on my own journey towards healing."

Emily's daughter Naledi echoed Themba when she encouraged me to include her mother's experiences in my attempt to find words to make sense of what it means, for me, to be a Verwoerd. "It is important that people should know. If the pain from the past is not let out, then it comes out in destructive ways."

Later, in an email after the Goedgedacht workshop, Theresa Edlmann wrote, "Am with you in continuing to process what happened at Goedgedacht. For the group and for each of us who facilitated it. Profound, filled with grace...and something of a homecoming to ways of being in the world, and South Africa especially, that I hadn't realised I was deeply aching for."



PART 3

Real Reconciliation

*"He is your grandfather. He is your grandfather.
He is your grandfather. And he came to represent a vicious system.
Let that not smother your gifts. Seek to be what you are,
to be someone who recognises that human beings
are human beings are human beings."*

– Desmond Tutu



PROFESSOR MOHAMMAD KARAAN, a member of the University of Stellenbosch's top management, visited me at my home to ask me something.

"We are planning a ceremony to remove the HF Verwoerd memorial plaque in the Accountancy building. It is important to me that a member of the Verwoerd family should participate in this ceremony. Are you willing?"

I hesitated. I was worried about the impact of my involvement in such a symbolic event on the newfound, fragile warmth in my relationship with my father. Mohammad assured me that it would be a dignified ceremony, one that formed part of the university's genuine commitment to greater inclusivity. My gut instinct was that this was an opportunity to embody my commitment to transforming the pain associated with Verwoerd.

But I'd again underestimated the depth of my father's loyalty to his father.

A few months later, on 27 May 2015, I was walking to the Accountancy building. My heart was beating faster than usual. The angry "Rhodes must fall" student protests had reached my Alma Mater by then. The atmosphere in the lecture hall was tense, rather like that evening 23 years earlier at my first ANC public meeting in Parow. But instead of the far right-wing Afrikaner protests outside the hall and cries of "Viva Verwoerd!", I was faced now with rows of white students silently holding up placards, with a cross through the orange, white and blue flag of apartheid South Africa, and black students singing ANC struggle songs.

I was introduced as a fellow comrade from the 1990s, but I don't think the students heard what was said. Their eyes remained hard and angry.

As I spoke, mostly in English, there was a tangible softening in the atmosphere. I gave a brief overview of my trek away from being a proud grandson, towards a humble acceptance of my shared responsibility for the systemic wounding personified by my grandfather as former prime minister. I dared to bring some of the deep questions bubbling within me into the open.

“Although it is almost half a century since [his death], I am grappling, again, with this question: how can I make *unifying* room for “Verwoerd” (as symbol of apartheid) *and* Oupa Hendrik within my growing commitment to radical, humanising inclusivity?

“Where do my 85-year-old parents and their Afrikaner friends fit into this picture? As I get older my love of family is increasing; my youthful inclination to confident condemnation of the sins of the fathers is lessening; my empathy is deepening for *their* transmitted pain, especially from the distant times of the “Boer War” and the more recent “Border War”; my understanding is maturing of their generation’s struggle to make sense of contemporary South Africa (including my participation in this removal ceremony).

“What about my children and their fellow members of the post-1994 generation? How can I contribute to translating their understandable resistance to “paying” for the pain of apartheid into a creative, liberating ability to respond?

“And my contemporaries, especially in white, Afrikaner circles – how do I productively distinguish genuine political disillusionment and reasonable blame fatigue, from avoidance of responsibility as (on-going) beneficiaries of systematic, unjust historical privileging?

“However, the most daunting question continues to be: how do I listen...listen...*really* listen to the heartbeat of the untransformed pain behind the clenched fists and the bubbling anger of mostly black fellow citizens? How can I play a positive role with regard to deeply rooted, unhealed emotional, moral and soul injuries from our apartheid past?”³⁸

38 The full ceremony can be found on YouTube.

The ceremony was livestreamed. Emily and her daughters Naledi and Manda watched at home. They give me warm hugs when I got back. This is the priceless gift hidden inside my acceptance of shared responsibility.

My father's interpretation of the removal of the Verwoerd plaque was very different. I went to see him. The previous day he'd sent a public statement to the Afrikaner Freedom Front and the rest of the Verwoerd family:

"I had no plan to comment, but unfortunately my son, Dr Wilhelm Verwoerd, was one of the speakers and he went so far as to commend the removal of the commemorative plaque of his grandfather (whom he did not know personally since he was born in 1964). He also described this removal as a victory for transformation. This left me with no choice but to distance myself, also in public, from his actions.

"Wilhelm gained experience in Northern Ireland as a facilitator in that reconciliation process. To his family's joy he decided to come back to South Africa, with his Australian wife, to devote himself to a similar calling. However, there is a big difference between reconciliation and the politics of conciliation. In conciliation politics it is the loser that always has to dance to the tune of the dominant power. This is what is happening in South Africa today. And this happened after 1902 [at the end of the Boer War], until someone with the authority of General Hertzog stood up and said, 'We will not go any further than this.'"

Pa's sister, Tannie Elsabet, was having tea with us. Earlier that Saturday, the two of them had been to Blaas 'n Bietjie to give an interview to an Afrikaans journalist who was busy with a commemorative documentary about Dr Verwoerd. We chatted, drank rooibos tea and had some of my mother's homemade lemon tart. My father struggled with the volume on his hearing aid.

When Tannie Els left, he looked me straight in the eye with a frown on his face.

"So, what do you have to say for yourself? I am very disappointed with your role in what happened on Wednesday ..."

I was taken aback. The previous Sunday I'd explained to him why I was taking part in the ceremony and I'd got the impression he was okay with it.

"I thought it was a good idea to first give them acknowledgement, so that there would be a better chance of them listening to you. But I was under the impression that you were no longer the person you had become in your student days. Now I am not so sure. I am particularly upset that you described the removal of the plaque as a 'victory for transformation'."

"Pa, if you read my speech, it is clear that I never used that language. It was an English journalist's interpretation ..."

"You can't blame a journalist. You participated in dismantling what we fought so hard for."

I tried to explain that in my speech I had stressed that I was not rejecting my family and that I wasn't uncritical of current politics. And I'd made a special effort to speak Afrikaans. But it was clear that it wasn't just my father's hearing aid that made it difficult for him to hear me. My parents had listened to the livestream and the singing and chanting before and after the ceremony had left a bitter taste of humiliating defeat, not unlike the feeling of defeat among Afrikaners in 1902.

"You left me with no choice, Wilhelm. I had to release that statement. I am concerned about what fellow Afrikaners would think. And I needed to make sure that they know it was not me who participated."

I can't remember everything that made my father so angry, but in the course of expressing his disappointment he gave me a rare glimpse of his slumbering anger about my involvement with the TRC's "one-sided condemnation of Afrikaners", not to mention my fist-in-the-air cries of "amandla!" on ANC stages in the early 1990s. Beside me, I could hear my mother's upset. It didn't take long, fortunately, for him to calm down.

"I do support reconciliation, but it has limits. There is too much appeasing going on today. It is time to draw a line ..."

"Pa," I said, "I'm really trying to understand your point of view. Please

accept that I am genuinely committed to reconciliation. This commitment implies that there is no room for demonising any human being, including Oupa Hendrik.”

And then, in a soft voice, he at last uttered the words I'd been longing for: “Perhaps you and I should agree to disagree.”

At last!

He excused himself and while he was gone Sharon told my mother more about what happened during the ceremony, her experience of the encouraging change in the protesting students' initial hostility towards me. When my father returned he was clearly reaching out to me and Sharon.

“Let's have a drink,” he said in English.

It was late May and there was a winter chill in the air. I suggested we have a hot whiskey, a favourite drink I'd learnt to drink in Ireland. My father didn't know it, so I show him how it was made with a lemon wheel studded with cloves, whiskey with boiled water and some honey.

When we left, my mother and father both said: “See you tomorrow for Sunday lunch.” This was so different to my father's prodigal son prayer 23 years earlier, and the ten years of alienation between us that followed that.

But reconciliation is not a Hollywood movie.

Overnight Pa received emails and phone calls from upset siblings and a few younger family members, including from cousin Wynand Boshoff in Orania. Wynand had circulated a public statement in which he “wholeheartedly rejected” my action. He accused me of participating in the “assault of a symbol”.

My father was quiet at the Sunday meal at a nearby wine estate, but that was not unusual. Then, after dessert, without warning, he became very serious. “There are a few things I want to say...” My stomach clenched and Ma tried to stop him, without success. She stood up in frustration and went outside. Sharon followed to support her.

“Wilhelm, I read your speech again this morning. It is full of contradictions – for example, you refer to Luthuli's scathing criticism and

then you also quote Walter Sisulu's encouragement to you *not* to blame everything on your grandfather. You have taken sides again. You didn't do this as a peace worker in Northern Ireland. Why are you doing it here in South Africa? You are still disloyal to your own people!" Then followed the dreaded words, "After what you have now done again, I don't think our relationship can be the same."

Somehow I managed to remain calm. I was determined not to go down the same road as two decades ago.

"Pa, I think I understand why you are so upset. My international experience taught me that many people in other contexts also react in this way to what is seen as a betrayal of family and *volk*. This is *really* not what I am doing, this is *not* who I am!"

My father's love of his father is, however, firmly rooted.

"Wilhelm, I am very unhappy about your criticism of Pa's policy. It is not enough for you to describe him as a good person. Pa's policy was *not* evil! That criticism is part of the communist propaganda to which you were exposed as a student. Politically you are still misguided. Just look around you at what is happening today. And why don't you also condemn the farm murders?"

"I blame you for putting your mother and me again in this position, where she again has to choose between husband and son ..."

I reminded him of Ouma Betsie's response to my political choices – her willingness to accept them as part of my faith journey, despite huge political differences between us.

"Pa, I really hope that we can stick to yesterday's agreement to disagree, that we would not question each other's integrity."

We walked back to their car in a heavy silence. My mother was calmer, thanks to Sharon. I resolved to go and see her soon. I felt unexpectedly open towards my father and had an unusual urge to embrace him as we say goodbye. I touched his arm softly.

"Thanks for your honesty, Pa. It's so much better than not bring truly honest with one other."

When he answered it sounded like he had a lump in his throat.

"I hope you remember the things I said today."

He gave Sharon a quick hug, "I am sorry that you were drawn into this," he said.

With a grave expression, he closed the car door for my mother, walked like an old man to his side of the car, and drove home.

I was encouraged that I felt less closed off towards Pa, even amid weighty, ongoing political differences. And I was concerned about how sustainable our informal agreement to disagree would prove to be. But this was exactly what "deep dialogue" in my work with Alistair had been about: facilitating relatively safe, risk-encouraging spaces where former enemies can talk honestly about the elephant in the room in search of better mutual understanding. The aim is to strengthen fragile human connections across bloody conflict barriers.

Between me and my father there were two big elephants: family loyalty and shared historical responsibility.

Chapter 8

Family betrayal

Pain which is not transformed is transmitted. – Richard Rohr

HOW COULD I better understand my father's intense, inflexible loyalty towards Oupa Hendrik? How was I to respond whenever I was accused of disloyalty?

My father's sense of betrayal – arising from his son shaking hands with the enemy – is familiar to me from my reconciliation work.

Rachel McMonagle was a twenty-something Protestant from Londonderry when she tearfully related this story. Her father was in the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) of the British Army and narrowly escaped a number of attacks by the IRA and related armed groups. As a five-year-old, she had once rushed between her father and a masked man with a gun, pleading, "Please don't shoot my daddy, please don't shoot my daddy!"

Years later, she became a youth worker in a divided city, known as Londonderry to Protestants and Derry to Catholics. She realised that she couldn't expect young people to reach across this divide if she was not willing to do the same, to meet her enemies. As a participant in the Beyond Dehumanisation project she related how this kind of meeting initially evoked a strong sense that she was betraying her family.

"I experienced a lot of resistance from my family, especially my father. He just couldn't understand why I wanted to get involved in this kind of peace work."

There is also Chen Alon, the inspirational co-founder of Combatants for Peace, who participated in the Israel/Palestine leg of the Beyond

Dehumanisation project. Despite a strong Zionist socialisation, having lost family members in the Holocaust, he reached a point where he refused to serve as a soldier in the Occupied Territories. He became convinced that it would be in the interests of everyone peacefully to change the injustice of the Occupation. Working with the enemy broke powerful taboos in his own community:

“A few years earlier I couldn’t even have imagined doing this. Initially I was terrified. You know, I was the son. My parents were proud of their son, a major serving in a combatant unit. All the friends and the family were proud of me. When I told my parents that I was about to form Combatants for Peace, the first thing my mother asked me was, ‘Isn’t that dangerous for you?’

“This working with the enemy was something exceptionally dangerous to her: it meant being banned, not belonging to society, not belonging to the mainstream, to the narrative... not to belong to the ‘us’.

“A close friend of my parents said to my father: ‘I saw the name of your son in the newspaper, but let’s not get into it because you know what I think. I think they should put them against the wall and shoot all of them, all these traitors.’”

The project highlighted the complexity and the universality of the dynamics of betrayal,³⁹ and helped calm me in the face of my father’s anger. Language, accents, contextual details, political ideals differ, but not the intense, underlying family and personal conflicts that typically accompany dangerous compassion for the enemy. The divisive power of bonds of blood is not restricted to my family only.

Aided by this wider frame of reference I now want to return to a subject referred to in Chapter 1, my inner discomfort with the Soldier in the *Black Christ* painting. Why does a part of me feel like a traitor when I accept that there is a lot of blood on the hands of Verwoerd?

39 Alistair, Brandon and I are making good progress with a book-length exploration of the transformation that come with these dynamics, including discussions of forgiveness, apology, acknowledgement, compassion and responsibility. In my mind I am dedicating this book-in-the-making to my father.

It is time to take a closer look at the meaning given to Oupa's death by his inner circle – his lifeblood as a sacrifice, in the service of his *volk*. And to explore, carefully, the traumatic impact of his violent death on at least my blood family.

No blood is visible on the Soldier's hands, but the symbol of the long spear leaves little doubt about the responsibility of Verwoerd and his followers, like me, for the spilled blood of so many fellow South Africans. Literally and figuratively. Why is it so difficult for me to see and to acknowledge this blood on Verwoerd's hands? I suspect more and more that this blindness is linked to the bloodiness of those two attempts on his life.

The redness of *that* blood colours the vision of people like me. As a blood relative of Dr Verwoerd I tend to focus, even unconsciously, on his lifeblood. I gaze again at the photo of me on his lap, with the milk bottle in his hands. I'm reminded of a traditional, mystical connection between mother's milk and blood. During the Middle Ages mother's milk was seen as the blood of the mother which gives life to the baby.

Just a few months after David Pratt's attack in April 1960, Oupa was back in the saddle. The sacrificial blood of previous generations inspired him to play a huge role in achieving the Afrikaners' cherished Republican ideal. On the fifth birthday of the Republic of South Africa, 31 May 1966, this theme of sacrificial blood featured prominently:

"Our state is founded on sacrifice. The blood of courageous men, courageous women moistened the earth of our land. In the life of a nation these sacrifices burn like a fire, a fire that can never be extinguished. It flares again and again when difficulties arise, even though it subsides in between. This fire, which steels the hearts of people, will preserve us. We will continue to devote ourselves, with heart and hand, to our *volk* and our fatherland."⁴⁰

A few months later Tsafendas's dagger achieved what Pratt's bullets

40 Extract from the 31 May 1966 Republic Day speech, chosen by Pa as epigraph for *Só onthou ons hom*.

had been unable to. In her diary, Ouma Betsie remembered: "It was such a grand speech, so full of beautiful ideas, so from the heart... You talk about the *sweat and blood* of previous generations – little did you know that just three months later to these your *lifeblood* would be added." (4 June 1967) (my emphases).

How can I begin to make sense of this language of blood? Why are the bonds forged by this lifeblood so powerful? The Beyond Dehumanisation Project deepened my understanding of the unbreakability of blood bonds. As colleague Brandon Hamber put it:

"Sometimes the issue of betrayal is so difficult because of the sacred nature of our engagements in conflict issues. If you lose a loved one, for example, normally what happens in that process is that we engage in a set of sacred bonds with that person: 'Whatever happens, the truth will come out'; 'one day justice will be done'.

"Those bonds are really sacred. They're not just about loyalty. They're beyond loyalty. We feel the same way about our ideologies, whatever that might be. There's a sort of sacredness about the way we make those connections – 'Ireland will be freed!' or 'the British Union will be protected'. These are sacred things. And the problem is that one can't ever properly break those bonds yourself. Because if you're making the bond with some comrade who has died, they can never release you from that bond ..."

This point of entry helps me to grasp the inviolability of Ouma Betsie's bond with Oupa Hendrik. It brings into sharper focus the intensity of my father's ongoing bond with *his* father. In her diary Ouma sometimes addresses Oupa as "Pappa" [Daddy], a term of endearment in a patriarchal culture. I can imagine both Pa and Ouma solemnly declaring, "Pappa, we will protect and honour your legacy, whatever the world might say about you! We will never forget your contribution to the freedom of our *volk*." Oupa alone can declare this sanctified promise as fulfilled. But he is dead. And the surviving family's unwritten covenant with him is sealed by his lifeblood. It is an unbreakable commitment. A sacred bond.

Brandon employs the word "sacred" in a secular, metaphorical sense

to capture the remarkable potency of these bonds with our dead. "Sacred" conveys a weightiness and a strength that go beyond loyalty. However, I am convinced that one cannot fully fathom the depth of these bonds without also understanding "sacred" in a more traditional, religious sense. After all, Oupa, Ouma, Pa, Ma and I were born into the Judeo-Christian religious and cultural traditions in which blood rituals have deep roots indeed.

Ouma Betsie's diary clearly shows her cultural-religious identification with the nation of Israel. Her church was the church of a *volk* and they regarded themselves as a covenantal people. In her faith tradition, solemn words are insufficient to forge a true covenant, a bloodless covenant is not real.

"Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.' Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'" (Exodus 24:5-8).

By the time that this ancient text was transmitted to Afrikaans-speaking Christian Nationalists like Ouma and me, this blood ritual was no longer literally understood. The blood in the covenant ritual was replaced by the pietistic, symbolic "blood of Jesus", which nevertheless retained the traditional power to exclude the Other.

Theologian Robert Schreiter stresses this group formation role of the blood ritual in Exodus: "The blood traced a line around the motley band of slaves and made of them something special. And that blood became for the Hebrews more than the blood of young livestock; it became the blood that made of them a family, that gave them a shared substance of life and purpose – a shared substance that did not begin or end with any individual, but was part of a great stream carrying

them from one generation to the next. It made them important to one another and to God.”⁴¹

Every sentence in this quotation can be applied to Ouma Betsie’s diaries, to the Afrikaners’ perception of being a chosen people.⁴² The bond between members of the “tribe” I was born into was indeed like a family bond. And “family is a bond of blood that cannot be broken”, as Tannie Annatjie declared in Orania. Especially when the blood sacrificed is that of a person – a political leader, a representative of the *volk*. Like a Piet Retief. Or an HF Verwoerd.

“I felt that it was your day,” Ouma wrote on the first Republic Day after Oupa’s death, “you brought the Republic... Your words about Retief’s idealism are strangely applicable, his one year of service that ensured his place in our history, how he bonded the [Voor]Trekkers into a *volk*. To us it was as if these words applied to you.” (31 May 1967).

“May his death contribute to the realisation of our ideals as a nation,” she wrote twelve days after his assassination, “bringing us together in tight-knit unity.” (18 September 1966).

This bond of blood between Dr Verwoerd, his family and his *volk* family was more than a constitutional connection. The two bloody attacks on his life provided enough blood to sprinkle on a shared sense of wounded self-respect following the Boers’s defeat in the South African war.

Biblical blood rituals are of course not literally at stake here. But my sense is that the symbolism of sacrificial blood not only played a significant role in the formation of a nationalistic self-understanding among people like my grandparents and parents, it also helped them to give meaning to Oupa’s bloody death. The metaphorical use of Mosaic blood rituals becomes an important key to deciphering my

41 Schreiter, *In Water and Blood*, p.17. See especially chapters 2 and 3 in Schreiter for more background on blood rituals as symbolic forms of communication for the sake of (re)connection between the divine and the group, and thus among group members.

42 See De Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdom*.

ancestors' use of blood language, including the strength of bonds of blood between them and Dr Verwoerd. We are dealing with a covenantal, consecrated connection.

A key difference is that the lifeblood sprinkled over the Hebrews in Exodus was that of a sacrificial animal. Oupa was not a young bull, even though his followers regarded him as innocent, without blemish and literally their representative. The lifeblood Dr Verwoerd referred to in his speech and which Ouma mentioned in her diary was human blood. It seems to me that the bond of blood formed by, for example, Oupa's death was even stronger than was the case with ritualised animal blood. After all, upon completion of the Mosaic blood ritual the group did not owe anything to the sacrificed animal that had given his life.

The dynamic of indebtedness reminds me of a revealing entry in the earlier, political section of Ouma's diary. In October 1964, Voortrekker Press and Dagbreek Press offered a holiday home on the bank of the Vaal River as a gift to the Verwoerds. Ouma writes about a conversation with a leading publisher, Marius Jooste:

"I said: 'But we will be so deeply indebted.' With a laugh: 'Debt? My dear Mrs Verwoerd, if we have to talk about debt, how will we ever be able to pay off the debt we owe to your husband?' (18 October 1964).⁴³

The life of Dr Verwoerd as a political leader already resulted in an unpayable debt of gratitude amongst his followers, especially given his vital role in the constitutional realisation of their ideal of freedom.

South Africa becoming a republic was also about much more than the achievement of a political goal. It gave meaning to the deaths of previous generations, people who had given their lives for this ideal. Thanks to Dr Verwoerd, the "sacrifice" of "courageous men, courageous women" were not in vain. But then he went further. Following in the footsteps of Piet Retief, his blood was violently added to that

43 This gift was too large for Oupa. He accepted the Vaal River home on a lease-lend basis.

intergenerational, covenantal stream. "He sacrificed his lifeblood for us!", I can hear his supporters declare with passionate conviction and unquantifiable gratitude.

Thus the death of Dr Verwoerd made the bond of indebtedness between him and his *volk* family even more unbreakable.

In my experience the powerful appeal of bonds of blood also has to do with cherished memories. A final September 1994 entry in Ouma Betsie's diary reads as follows: "Something incredibly beautiful has passed'... The lovely smell of good memories will remain as long as we live, no matter what others are saying."

This entry reminds me of Alistair's response when Brandon referred to "sacred bonds": "How do you break the bonds of conditioning that you feel are not allowing you to be who you really are without damaging relationships or... destroying memories? You have memories of your loyalty. You have memories, your sacred memories of people that you knew that are dead, or of the past, of your history. How do you continue to live and create a future where you have changed without completely destroying those memories that other people that are close to you still hold dear?"

This is most likely another reason why genuine love of the enemy is rare: this love endangers sanctified memories. Empathy across enemy lines can easily shatter a precious memory of a loved one.

This language of enemies suggests another reason why my father struggles so much to agree with my conviction that love of enemy should be prioritised above love of (blood) family. As a young, white, Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed person I knew who our enemies were supposed to be – the black terrorists, supporters of the communist ANC and rioters, like Themba. They all were perceived as external threats to us, the various cultural-religious families that gave me a sense of belonging. Now, what happens when one of us becomes one of them? How can I expect my father to love an enemy if that enemy is his son?

Some of the former IRA participants in the Beyond Dehumanisation Project explained this difference between easy and difficult enemies

as follows: "We had the visible and the 'easy enemy', if you want to call it that, which would have been the British who came into the country, they partitioned the country. But the more difficult enemy would be the Unionist [Protestant] population that live here in the North of Ireland, because they're just like us. I was never brought up to see them as an enemy because they were my friends, my friends' friends.

"It's more emotionally difficult, also within the loyalist [Protestant] community, with people in our communities who have killed their own people, even if it was accidentally. It's easier to deal with the trauma inflicted from without than the stuff we actually inflicted on ourselves. The bridge between Republicans and Loyalists might be longer, but seems to be easier spanned than the smaller bridge within our own community".

According to Alistair, the difficulty of building this smaller bridge has to do with sacred bonds: "I think this notion of sacredness and bonds also has something to do with how we've been conditioned – going along with the group or going along with the cause. Betraying all of that, betraying all of what you've been conditioned to believe is the right thing to do, feels like breaking sacred bonds. If you speak out against this conditioning you're 'supporting the enemy' or you're 'agreeing with the enemy'. *And therefore the blood of your friends, your community is not only on the hands of the enemy; this blood is also on your hands, because you're supporting those who did the killing.*" (My emphasis.)

No wonder my father and some family members were so upset about my participation in the ceremonial removal of the Verwoerd commemorative plaque. For them Oupa's blood not only flows in my veins – Dr Verwoerd's blood is also on my hands. Is love for a family traitor the most difficult because this bridge is the shortest, the most intimate, the most vulnerable?

Because, to crown it all, this traitor has also been baptised as Wilhelm Johannes Verwoerd?

A growing awareness of the sanctified character of blood bonds was increasing my understanding of the complex relationship between my father and my grandfather. However, I was pretty sure that sacrosanct bonds, precious memories and me shaking the bloody hands of enemies were not the whole story.

One day, sitting again in Oupa's yellowwood study, as I was immersing myself in Ouma's late night struggle with her membership of the DRC, my parents unexpectedly turned up at Blaas 'n Bietjie. As usual my 87-year-old father had not come to relax. He'd brought a replacement desk drawer, as a result of damage caused by a recent break-in.

He also had a copy of the expanded *Só onthou ons hom* with him. He and my mother had worked hard to have this edition ready for the 50th commemoration of Oupa's death.

My mother and I sat in the living room having a cup of tea, while my father pottered about with maintenance. Without being prompted, my mother started talking about Ouma's estrangement from the DRC.

"She was a sincere believer. Back then, church membership was a serious matter – you were born and buried in your church. Both Oupa and Ouma were raised in the DRC. Giving up her membership must have been traumatic."⁴⁴

The other time my mother had used the word "traumatic" was when I'd asked her about washing Oupa's blood-stained clothes.

She'd never received counselling. "Of course not! What did we know about therapy?" And my father has never said a word to her about that experience.

My grandmother's diaries, though private, had provided her with an opportunity for a proper mourning process. While her public face was stoic, she wept and mourned into her diary. My father would never have cried. My mother confirms this. It just wasn't done. If one has

44 Ouma Betsie joined the whites only Afrikaans Protestant Church, but during the last few years of her life she went with Tannie Annatjie and the other Boshoffs to the Orania DRC congregation again.

not grieved fully, then those tears are still in you. That type of emotion doesn't vanish by itself. It goes into the marrow of your bones. Which is why the suppression of tears often has tragic consequences.

The same applies to the obedient acceptance of a loved one's death because it is "the will of God". I'd been so glad to read in the mourning section of Ouma's diary that she confessed some uncertainty about God's will. That is a sign of healthy grieving: that you question everything, that you experience anger.

When I relayed all of this to my mother she agreed. She said your first reaction is to rebel, then to deny and "gradually one finds acceptance and peace".

I told my mother that I thought my grandmother's mourning was important. So many people from previous generations, and from mine, have not grieved properly. I am convinced that many Afrikaners' behaviour today has something to do with this stalled process. When you're caught up in an incomplete process of mourning then you don't have much energy to deal with the pain of other people.

My mother offered: "You are almost in a state of aggression."

"Yes," I said, "You become defensive. You defend those people from your group who died. Out of loyalty you almost have to defend them in their absence...even though this might not necessarily be what they would have wanted."

My mother said that the same thing happened with the men returning from the army, how they'd been left to deal with everything on their own. We thought about the children who'd come back in body bags, how their parents seldom knew what had happened to their sons. There was a lot of anger about how children were sacrificed by politicians.

We spoke about white anger, and how one cannot openly speak about white pain because it can so easily be interpreted as a defence or a lack of acknowledgement of black pain. Very often, it is. However, it's easy to spot how the cycle of blood continues. We continue to hurt one another, especially across racial boundaries, and the more hurt there is, the higher the walls become.

I encountered the notion of an endless cycle of blood from experienced Israeli and Palestinian contributors to the Beyond Dehumanisation Project. They reminded me that the destructive potential of bonds of blood was not restricted to one family or one nation or one generation.

Young HF Verwoerd's strong identification with the Afrikaners happened during a time when wounds from the "Boer War" were still raw. To what extent did this collective, untreated pain influence his later rocklike determination not to contribute to "the destruction of our *volk*"?

My great-grandfather Wilhelm had come to South Africa out of sympathy with the Boers. To what extent had Oupa Hendrik imbibed this solidarity in his parental home? I appreciated that his irritability regarding the English language and English-speaking South Africans was related to the perception that they felt they were culturally superior, but did his anger also come from remembering the spilled blood of those "courageous men" and especially the women and children in British concentration camps?

I hesitated to write all these thoughts about the role of transmitted historical pain in my Verwoerd family. As a white South African from an Afrikaner background I am acutely aware of two huge pitfalls along this track, most visibly leading back to the South African War. The first is to neglect the suffering of so many people of colour during the war seen as the "Anglo-Boer" War. The second is to underestimate their suffering as a result: how we as Afrikaners used our pain from the past to justify, or at least obscure, the systemic traumatisation of "non-whites". Because untransformed pain, Rohr warns, is transmitted pain.

I have some sense of why it will always be difficult for my father to understand me, but that doesn't mean I can avoid disagreeing with him. Or that I can fail to point out, humbly, why I do not see myself as a traitor.

As a white child, I never had to worry that a brother or parent with a slightly darker skin tone might suddenly be placed in a different racial

category, and fear them being moved far from the rest of the family as a result. How can someone with my background begin to understand what people like Ashnat and her family went through? And are still going through?

Sharon and Dudley are both teachers in township schools and often talk about the tremendous challenges they face. Many of these challenges can be traced back to the intergenerational political disruption of the family lives of people of colour.

This fragmentation is of course linked to the migrant labour system, which I have barely touched upon. Men used as cheap labour on the mines, not allowed to bring their families with them, going back to the "homelands" once a year, often starting new families in the cities. Not to mention the many women of colour, like Ashnat's mother and Emily's mother, who helped to raise white children, while living in their employer's backyard without their own children. What price did their children, their families pay as a result?

And then there was the impact youth resistance in the 1970s and the 1980s had on families. Emily gave me a glimpse into the vortex of bloody conflict between generations when the youth took the lead in townships in the struggle, and so challenged traditional relations with older generations.

"They said to their parents: 'You have been too quiet for too long. This is our time and you don't interfere.' It was hard for those children whose parents were in the police. They said they'd rather sleep with dogs, that their parents were sell-outs. The children thought that we as adults had been cowards and they wanted to fix things.

"I would let their anger subside a bit and then I would say, 'Still, whatever happens, even if you try to fix this, you will need your education, because without education there is nothing you can do.' Their response was that we were educated and what had it done for us? Which was true. It wasn't showing.

"But even then, I don't blame the older generation. Let me give you an example of what happened to my parents. My mother was a domestic servant. The husband was okay, but the wife was so...she had a tendency of trying to humiliate my mother when I was there.

"I said, 'Mum, why do you stick to this?'

"She said, 'I have no time to go and look for another job. If I leave here now and look for another job it means you will be out of school.' At that time she was earning £4 a month. And my dad as a railway guard was earning £5. This was in the late 50s.

"The woman would tell my mother she was stupid in a sharp and condescending voice. There was a gardener too, Christian. He was from Malawi. Mum was supposed to cook lunch for everybody and then cook for Christian as well. Mum would cook for Christian and then leave a little bit for me and for her. So the woman wanted to know why she was eating and not giving everything to Christian.

I asked Emily whether all of this meant that she didn't blame her parents because they were willing to work hard and accept humiliation so that their children could be educated. She said yes, that it had been done so that they had a chance to be better than their parents, and she had tried to give her children an education to have a chance to be better than she was. But the attitude of the youth resistance members had been that she was accepting wrongs that have been done to her as the norm.

We spoke about the heartbeat behind angry fists, the deep roots of humiliating, systemic wounding underlying so much "non-white" anger which has been erupting. About the "two faces" that many black people needed for survival – the friendly, submissive face at work, hiding the real face of anger and humiliation. Emily had told me how often men took out this anger on their wives at home. Did she think, I wanted to know, that some of the current tension, and the conflict and violence that we see in the townships are also a result of the fact that people are so angry about the way that they've been treated in the past? All while they were often dependent on taking any work they could get because of an insufficient education – and then when they come home it is tempting to take the anger out on someone else, or on themselves?

"Yes, Wilhelm, it is tempting in a way. That is why so many of our people consume so much alcohol. Some are trying to forget what hap-

pened to them. Another thing that I've realised: people in the townships have no hope, at all, at all. They've lost all hope. Having the ANC government in power gave them some hope, but they feel disappointed now. So they think that taking alcohol can give them relief, or make them forget, I don't know. But violence is also part of the hopelessness.

"And if you have been humiliated and your parents have been humiliated, on a daily basis, then that builds up...and your spirit gets wounded. I don't know if there is a way of carrying the humiliation. Because even in educated circles you get that humiliation."

I lit a new candle under the aroma-oil burner on Oupa's yellow-wood desk. For a while I'd been bringing this burner with me to Blaas 'n Bietjie to help with the mustiness of the unoccupied house. The aromas of lavender, sweet almond, jojoba and sesame oils lightened the atmosphere in Dr Verwoerd's study. That morning I also needed this support to breathe deeply as I headed again for fathomless water.

I had a copy of the *Black Christ* painting before me and studied it anew. Now I know that some of the pain that led to this protest art came from the violent impact of race classification on the artist's family. Shortly after 1948, when the National Party under Dr DF Malan came into power, Ronald Harrison's father underwent a "metamorphosis":

"There were expectations that the extremist laws of the Malan regime would eventually have an adverse effect on the lives of many families. My own family life would soon undergo a drastic transformation...Having been 'blessed' with a fair skin, my father had often passed for white, but the restrictions imposed by apartheid meant that his family - who were clearly 'coloured' - were proving something of an embarrassment. Slowly but surely his public appearances with us became less frequent. At home he behaved irrationally and was often in a bad mood. He spent less time with us, and when he did grace us with his presence, he was given to mood swings and bouts of unexplained anger.

“Dad had always been a caring father as far as I could remember, so his metamorphosis was hard to comprehend. Often, my dear mother would be at the receiving end of his anger, enduring both verbal and physical abuse.”⁴⁵

It is not only Albert Luthuli hanging on this cross. It is also the young artist. And his mother. His family. Ashnat and Emily are hanging there too. And *their* families. Every individual, and his or her family violated by the system of apartheid, is hanging there.

This is the family betrayal that my ancestors and I share responsibility for: the betrayal of the family as an institution. Apartheid also amounted to systemic family betrayal. Furthermore, those of us daring to call ourselves Christians are also faced with this painful truth: According to the Christian faith, people like Ashnat and Emily and their blood relatives are also members of the body of Christ, children of the same Father (Mother). It is this family that we have betrayed, we Christian Nationalist Afrikaners, including Oupa Hendrik.

I suspect the agreement between me and my father to agree to disagree about Oupa and apartheid will remain wobbly as long as we live, because sanctified bonds of blood are at stake. How can I as a changed person help create a future, without completely destroying those memories that my parents and others close to me still cherish?

During the Beyond Dehumanisation Project I tried to articulate my experience of “sacred bonds” as follows:

“There is something in me deeply responding to that notion of ‘sacred bonds’. I don’t often speak about it, but there was a strong dimension of faith and religion within the Afrikaner community and within the family I grew up in. When I was confronted with what was really going on in apartheid, the biggest challenge for me was at the level of faith. How could I be a member of a church justifying this system? How could I call myself a Christian when this is what we are doing to fellow Christians?

45 Harrison, *The Black Christ*, p.7.

“...it was only through a kind of reconnection with an underlying faith, that goes beyond the boundaries of those bonds, that I was able to navigate a way forward. For me those bonds with my family and community had to be broken at that sacred level and had to be healed at that sacred level – beyond emotion, beyond identity – for me to be able to do what I’m doing today.”

I am no longer that comfortable with my reference to bonds that “had to be broken”, or to Alistair’s allusion to the “destruction” of sacred memories. Are preservation or destruction really the only two options in dealing with those bonds of blood?

My experience – supported by many people I’ve been privileged to work with the last decade or so – is that the typical human reaction to (perceived) betrayal is too binary. There is a third option. Sacred bonds can be transformed.

Chapter 9

Shared responsibility

"I think what can become an enabler towards this journey of forgiveness is the acknowledgement of past wrongs. Part of the challenge is that people put up a high brick wall or they close up the moment you raise issues of the past. They are not able to confront their own role in the process where many people's lives were messed up." – Themba Lonzi

*"Our project is... at least to put on-stage the big elephant of denial, that if I am not doing this myself, I am not responsible." – Chen Alon,
Combatants for Peace, Israel*

I AM WHITE. I am a beneficiary of apartheid. I am Afrikaans. How do I accept my portion of responsibility? I often feel disheartened given the mammoth task of transforming the visible and invisible legacies of separate "development".

"What is it that people from my generation – people who were responsible, who voted, who benefited – need to *do*?" I asked Emily. "What would it mean for us to really take responsibility and not just talk about it?"

"What makes it difficult, Wilhelm, is that the healing needed is on a such large scale – people are disheartened, people are discouraged, people don't even want to talk about it. But just keep doing what you are doing, because you cannot include everybody at once. Some people have switched off their minds from this thing and you cannot even bring them to listen."

Blaas 'n Bietjie

30 July 2015

A wild winter storm has been lashing the house since yesterday. A few loose roof plates made such a racket I hardly slept – I was worried the roof might end up in the sea. Early this morning, there was a knock on the kitchen door. The woman introduced herself as Cecilia. She had come to clean the house. Later I went to the kitchen to make myself a cup of tea and found her standing at the sink, mixing a packet Grandpa headache powder into a glass of water. As I began to talk about the terrible weather she said:

“I was so afraid last night that the wind would blow my shack away...”

The wind has loosened the roof and the shack was leaking.

Her full names are Xoliswa Sotyalike. She lives in a backyard shack in Kleinmond, with her two children, her husband and a younger sister. They have been on a housing waiting list for ten years.

I know black house workers are not restricted to white, middle class families. But how is genuine communication possible across such unequal power relations? This is a major reason why my relationship with the Mabebas is more fruitful: we are equals, and we share the same vision of living together in Lynedoch.

I could and should learn to speak isiXhosa. But, after work, Xoliswa still goes home to her rented backyard shack, in the still separate black township of Kleinmond, next to the municipal dumping site.

Today's *Die Burger* newspaper happens to be filled with contradictory articles about the injustice of apartheid. An Afrikaner letter writer appreciates the “reclaiming of our history” by some Afrikaner cultural organisations. Someone else warns: “Nothing angers the violated more than attempts to deny or to explain.” I hope I am not, ultimately, doing that.

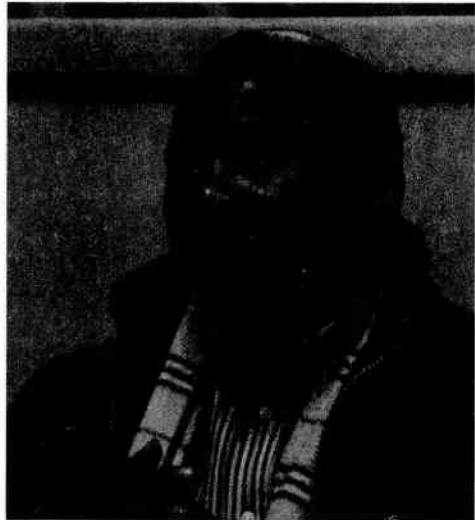
On a small island called Lusty Beg off the west coast of Ireland, a dozen veteran peacemakers from Northern Ireland, South Africa and Israel/Palestine were grappling with whether compassion and, espe-

cially, forgiveness could contribute to transforming cycles of revenge. Alistair was there, as was Brandon Hamber, an English-speaking South African from an anti-apartheid background, and Themba Lonzi. We were talking about how difficult it was to humanise relationships between former enemies.

Each contribution at the event was irreplaceable, but I wish to linger on the interactions between me and some of my fellow South Africans, Themba Lonzi and Brandon Hamber. Themba had told the story of the path he walked at the beginning of the workshop:

“My name is Themba Lonzi. ‘Themba’ means ‘hope’ or ‘trust’. I’m from a township called Gugulethu, about ten to fifteen minutes away from the city of Cape Town. I grew up under apartheid. I grew up in the violence of the conflict, so I saw a lot of horrible things as a young boy, like people getting burned by tyres and people being shot and killed by police. And I got involved. I got involved simply because I was angry. I was angry because of the oppression of our people. Every aspect of your life was dictated by the colour of your skin: where you went to school, where you went to swim at the beach in summer, where you were allowed to move around, where you were not allowed to move around, how our parents were treated by *young white men*. Our parents had to take off their hats, always bow to young men.

“So I grew up with a lot of anger and hatred and a desire for revenge. In our communities there were people who worked with the security police and those kinds of people were our targets because they were trying to destroy what we stood for. And even policemen, black policemen who joined the police force, were people we



Themba Lonzi

would attack [or whose homes we would burn]. I was supposed to be a young man playing soccer or cricket or going to school, but instead we grew up with a lot of fear and anger and we were ready to fight. In that process you lose a lot of friends, getting killed and shot, sometimes getting hacked and stabbed. I have a lot of bad memories of things that happened to some of my friends and people in my community. And of a lot of things that we did as comrades to those that we saw as enemies.

“Growing up it was painful seeing the difference: my community was poor and not far from where I lived, you’d see other people living a beautiful life, having it all. And you always wondered, ‘why I’m supposed to live like this and then people on the other side are living a comfortable life, like nothing is wrong?’ It makes you more and more angry.

“What has helped me to start to change, to see things differently, was getting an opportunity to really talk about my own personal thoughts on what I have experienced and the feelings that I have inside of me. This made me realise that living with negative feelings is like a poison that’s eating you up inside.

“Another turning point was to learn about some of the white people who chose to support our struggle for liberation in South Africa. Because for us, you know, the enemy was every white person in South Africa. But the moment you see white people who joined the struggle, you begin to realise that not every white person in South Africa hated us.

“I started asking myself, ‘What kind of a future do you really want?’ I think at the beginning we were clear about what we were against but sometimes not really clear about what we stood for. The process of really having the opportunity to meet people from other communities raised that kind of question for me. When I grew up in South Africa we were so separated; people couldn’t connect with someone from another community. Having that opportunity to sit in similar places like here in Lusty Beg, to listen to people and for people to listen to what you have to say, made a big difference.

“So I started a journey of dealing with my own personal negative feelings that I carried with me. And I still continue. I won’t lie and say, ‘I’m a healed human being’. I struggle with so many steps on my own journey towards healing and wholeness. I think for me the only question that became important was: what kind of a future do you want for our communities, for the children and the next generation? I think it’s all about looking at the little faces around you and that totally changes you because you know exactly what violent conflict does to a person. My dream is that young people back home don’t experience what I experienced as a young person growing up. I lost my youth. I was a teenager throwing stones and throwing petrol bombs and burning government property and being part of groups of people who sang and danced while another person was burning. Since then I’ve been on a serious journey personally and collectively, with a number of South Africans back at home who have dedicated their lives to transforming society and to reconciliation.

“This journey is not easy. I think it’s one of the toughest choices when you choose the path of trying to reconcile people. I think the easiest thing is to pick up arms and fight. I think for me that would be easy. But the most difficult thing is to try to bring people together.”

I felt humbled by Themba’s resilience and the insight with which he continued to transform the poisonous energy of rage into tough journeys of bringing people like me and him together for the sake of the children.

It felt appropriate to address my questions around apology and responsibility to Themba.

“If, under apartheid, I did something directly to you, Themba, it would to some extent have been easier for me to say today, ‘I’m sorry, Themba, for what I did’. And then together we could figure out a way to address that wrong. One of my difficulties is that what happened to you and your family and your community is also because of what my grandfather did, what my family did, what my community did, what I did as a member of the Afrikaner community, what my church did, what white South Africans did.

“Take Alistair’s question this morning: ‘What does it really mean to accept responsibility for the suffering of your enemy?’ Yes, Themba, I would have regarded you as part of a group that I saw as an enemy of white Afrikaners. I’ve moved beyond that perception, but what is my shared responsibility for what we Afrikaners did to our enemies, to you and your group? I’m not sure how the language of ‘I am sorry’ or even ‘responsibility’ helps me to grapple with that bigger, shared responsibility. What would be enough? What can I do that would really be meaningful restitution?”

Alistair responded first. “Wilhelm, why do you want to know ‘what is enough’? Let’s say *nothing* will ever be enough. Why can that not be okay? Because it’s not about un-doing, it’s not about making right what can’t be made right. It’s about what can I do with my life now, for the rest of my life, that might make a difference. Knowing that no matter what you do, it will ever be enough. Because the question ‘what is enough’ points to the danger of putting some kind of value on people’s suffering. There is the risk of wanting to find out ‘what’s enough so I don’t have to do it anymore’; ‘what’s enough so I can forget and let go?’

“Maybe we’re never meant to forget, or to let go. But it does mean that the way you live the rest of your life is about making that small difference.”

Brandon also challenged me: “This is something you need to let go of. You don’t have to represent the whole of Afrikanerdom in South Africa because of what your grandfather was. You should be measured on what *you* do *now*, not about what *he* did *then*. Maybe that’s [also] me speaking to myself: as an individual white South African I have to let go, I shouldn’t have to pay the price for everything.”

Then Themba spoke: “The fact that Wilhelm is part of this kind of work, it means a lot to me. I mean, his grandfather was the leader of the apartheid system, but personally he made a different choice in his life. I know he is a Verwoerd. That fact will never change. He is a grandson of HF Verwoerd, someone responsible for a lot of damage caused in South Africa and to my people. But Wilhelm has made a

choice to become part of processes of healing and reconciliation. The fact that he is able to acknowledge things that went wrong, that, yes, he benefited from apartheid simply because of the colour of his skin, for me, that means a lot. The moment people are able to acknowledge – and not only acknowledge, but take steps, take actions that are trying to seek redress – for me it means a lot ...”

For me there is something profound about what Archbishop Tutu and others call “ubuntu”. I tell Themba and Brandon this: “This means I cannot fully be myself without a relationship with you. It was only through relationships with black South Africans, with them being willing to listen to me and accept me for who I was, that I became liberated.

“I’m an individual, but I’m also in various relationships with many people. That is why I think the relationship with my grandfather, with my family, with my community, is not an attempt to shoulder every single burden. It is about honouring the familial connections. It is about knowing that people are still suffering because of what he did. And understanding that my acknowledgement of past wrongdoing because of my family connection can still make a small difference to that suffering.”

Alistair helpfully applied my question to his own life: “I have found at times in questioning myself about my responsibility for what I did, that there is a danger that I can also become complicit in allowing other people to scapegoat people like me. In a sense it’s much easier to take all of the responsibility than to challenge those within our own society. Because the reality is one person is not responsible for the conflict in Northern Ireland or for all that went on; one person is not responsible in Israel and Palestine; one person is not responsible in South Africa. Often those names and those people are figureheads that represent what other people were happy to go along with. And so at the end of a conflict people run for cover: ‘Who can we scapegoat to carry the load of us all?’ If we allow them to do that, then we’re complicit in that scapegoating.

“So, I’m prepared to take my responsibility for what happened in Northern Ireland in the conflict and for what I was involved in. But responsibility is about much more than that. It’s about the structural,

institutional sectarianism that existed in Northern Ireland, which was perpetuated by middle-class Unionism.”

On the one hand I was challenged by Alistair to be more honest with myself, to investigate more thoroughly the motives behind my question “what would be enough?” How much self-interest lurked behind my concern about too much shared responsibility? Was I trying to mark out a sustainable share, or was I actually trying to get rid of a heavy burden? To the extent that the latter desire was playing a role, my “enough” question became a symptom of my underlying tendency to accept too *little* responsibility.

Alistair also confronted me with this uncomfortable truth: compassion across conflict boundaries cannot be quantified. Even if I accept “too much” responsibility, it will still not be enough. No matter what I do it will still be inadequate restitution for my share in a crime against humanity. Accepting my shared responsibility is also about learning to live with this fathomlessness.

He pointed, on the other hand, to a form of complicity I’d not considered before. It is possible for me to accept too much responsibility as my own. If I highlight my part of a shared responsibility too brightly, then I am in effect contributing to scapegoating. If I am not prepared to challenge fellow Afrikaners and other white South Africans to also accept shared responsibility, then I’m making it easier for them to place the sins of the fathers on an individual and I become complicit in making the black sheep of the Verwoerd family also a scapegoat for white South Africans.

But is there a part of me that wants to be this kind of scapegoat? The more I am singled out, the more appreciation and even sympathy I get from black South Africans, and the more superior part of me feels towards other whites. I also need to be honest about this.

Emily once told me how hard she had to work to be accepted for training at Pretoria Technikon to become a dental assistant. Of the twenty places available, nineteen were reserved for whites. This story reminded her of something that had happened while she was working

at Baragwanath Hospital. This was the only anecdote she ever told me in which she segued into Afrikaans: "I was earning R300 a month. And this white guy was a porter. He hadn't even finished high school and he was earning R900. He asked to see my cheque. I showed him and he said, 'Wow! My vel is my graad!' (My skin is my degree)."

Apart from access to excellent education, my skin has also been my degree. It was the key to living and working and moving around and owning property in more than 80 per cent of South Africa, without being regularly harassed or constantly humiliated.

This systemic, racialised privileging continues to benefit people like me in many ways. My children also benefit from these *my-vel-is-my-graad* benefits. It is tempting for their generation, and mine, to become frustrated, to forget to zoom out to the bigger historical picture when faced with affirmative action or black anger towards whiteness. When I am seduced by personal struggles to pay a bill, or to get a job as a white, I just have to drive past the sea of shacks between Stellenbosch and Cape Town or visit the township high school where Sharon is trying to teach maths to be reminded of the glaring, unequal legacies of unjust white privilege.

In the 1990s, when I worked within the TRC, we agonised over the limited mandate and short time span of this Commission. I wonder what difference it would've made if the focus had been less on killing, abduction, torture and severe ill-treatment, and more on the wider, "slow violence" of the system of apartheid. The more I experience avoidance of shared white responsibility, around and within me, the more I wish for a nation-wide, community-based Truth and Responsibility Process, encouraging people like me to listen to the everyday stories of people like Emily Mabeba.

The Baragwanath Hospital porter was white and Afrikaans-speaking. Most of the white perpetrators that appeared before the TRC's amnesty committee were Afrikaners. The most visible faces of the apartheid state, apart from political leaders like Verwoerd, were Afrikaners in the bureaucracy and the police.

But Ouma Betsie also wrote:

1 September 1963

The day before yesterday we returned from [the National Party conference] in Natal. I was a bit sceptical about reports of a turnaround in Natal. The reality was overwhelming.

Already at Monday evening's dinner it was surprising: around 480 people, more than half English-speaking. H. received a standing ovation.

After H.'s speech on Tuesday evening – City Hall filled to capacity – Mrs Hattingh told me what someone next to her had said: “I am rooted to the spot, I can't move.” Nearby a group of three English people, one said: “Oh, if only I could touch his sleeve!” And then they started to sing “For he's a jolly good fellow!”

Next to this entry Ouma pasted a few newspaper cuttings. One headline reads: “English-speaking businesspeople covertly support Dr Verwoerd” (*Sunday News*, 11 August 1963).

I don't want to allow Oupa Hendrik's sins from the past to smother my creative contribution in the present. He would have to take responsibility for his own actions. I don't want to turn him into a scapegoat, but neither can I carry all the pain caused by him. I was a toddler when he was assassinated. I did not do what he did.

I do realise, however, that the division of responsibility in my Verwoerd family is not that clear-cut. Whether I like it or not, a part of me still feels co-responsible for what Dr Verwoerd did as politician. After all, he remains my grandfather. There is a relational dimension to my shared responsibility that cannot be reduced to causal agency and intention.

Emily gave advice on how to navigate this minefield. We spoke about how respect for ancestors was highly valued in many African cultures, but what, I wondered, if your ancestor was responsible for bad things? Ma Emily told me:

“You have to respect your ancestors. But I have come to a point that if they have done wrong, I talk to them in the spirit. I don't know when I started to do this, but if one of my ancestors has done something wrong to me, I call them to order. I sit on a chair and I bring

another chair and say to so-and-so, 'You sit here. I know you are my ancestor, but 1, 2, 3 were not supposed to happen. But these bad things happened. And they happened during your watch. You *have* to take responsibility for those things. They were your doing. I am not going to bear the brunt.' After this kind of conversation I would feel at peace about what happened."

I asked whether she thought I should do this with my grandfather.

"Yes, you need to do it. And according to our culture, use something that he liked. If it was whiskey, you take whiskey as an offering, as an offering."

I asked whether having called my ancestor to order the way she described meant that there would be release and whether the conversation would be good for my ancestor too.

"I think it is good for them too, because the way it makes me feel afterwards I think it does something to them as well."

And what if, I wanted to know, the things the ancestor had done meant that people were still suffering. How would such a conversation help?

"Wilhelm, this conversation with him still helps. Because even if he was not aware of the suffering when those things happened, he now knows."

Later, Themba agreed with Emily's advice: "In life and death one is connected to your ancestors. They are still around. One needs to talk to them, or to him, though not confrontationally. You ask him to remove the burden of his actions from you. One should not be burdened by the deeds of forefathers. You can also ask other ancestors to help with this lifting of the burden.

"It is more complex," he continued, "when it comes to those who are still suffering. Given the blood connection they will always see you as a representative of your ancestor. When they see you, it will trigger the association with what he did ..."

I wondered whether it was possible to do a public ritual to draw the lines between myself and my ancestry, to distance myself from what he did and to acknowledge others' suffering.

“Yes...but this is not going to be easy, especially if those who are still suffering don’t know you.”

I have to accept that my grandfather is my ancestor, that the bond of blood cannot be broken. I will always be his representative. Being a Verwoerd might add an extra layer to my whiteness, but it didn’t mean I had to carry the burden of all my grandfather’s actions. If he could not or would not help me lift the burden from my shoulders, there would be other ancestry prepared to support me.

I wasn’t sure how to follow Emily and Themba’s advice. I fetched the large family photo from the living room wall in Blaas ’n Bietjie and put it on my grandfather’s desk, and in my mind’s eye I put a picture of the *Black Christ* painting next to my smiling Oupa and Ouma surrounded by their grandchildren. A part of me still feels too young to call an ancestor like Dr Verwoerd “to order”. But I want to try, in my own way, to do what Emily suggested.

Blaas ’n Bietjie study

9 March 2017

Dear Oupa Hendrik

I can’t unfreeze this photo, nor this painting. But I do believe that, spiritually speaking, you are right here with me. How I wish the southeaster howling again around the corners of Blaas ’n Bietjie was strong enough to blow away the consequences of your political actions. Until then I am surrounded by those who continue to be burdened by those consequences. I pray that while I am writing this letter you will not withdraw behind a high wall. I pray that you will hear what I am trying to convey, even though I am only a grandchild.

Ouma Betsie helped me to learn to love you. I want to respect you as my grandfather, my ancestor. I am aware that I am in no position to point a judgmental finger at you. I am committed to accepting, for the rest of my life, my share of responsibility for supporting your policy and world view. For what I omitted to do once I became aware of what fellow sisters and brothers in Christ really experienced under

our Afrikaners' Christian Nationalism. For the many ways in which I continue to benefit from generations of systemic racial discrimination.

Oupa, I honestly don't want to participate in making Verwoerd a scapegoat, but I do believe, irrespective of what your intentions were, that the person holding the spear in the *Black Christ* painting is you. You are responsible for what you did when you were minister of "native affairs" and particularly when you were the prime minister. You were not an evil person, not any more than I am. I more or less understand that your most powerful motivation was the survival and flourishing of the Afrikaners. But apartheid truly was a dehumanising system and I understand why our family name is so closely tied to this evil system.

Oupa, for your contribution to this system, to separate development, you are accountable. Not I.

Still, I want to promise you: I am committed to do as much as I can to contribute to the transformation of the ongoing legacies of this policy. Also as your grandchild.

With grieving love,

Wilhelm

Following a period of prayerful silence in the living room, I returned to Lynedoch. On the way home, around the corner from Blaas 'n Bietjie, I drove past one of the few remaining public commemorations to HF Verwoerd.

The bronze plaque, mounted in granite, looks out over the mountains and the sea that I have also grown to love. It reads: "As prime minister of South Africa, Dr HF Verwoerd frequently visited Betty's Bay to relax from his heavy responsibilities. He loved the sea, the flowers and the mountains."

To the right, on the horizon, one can see the green walls and red roof of Oupa's place of relaxation. Suddenly, having just written that difficult letter, I feel a little lighter.

Chapter 10

Embodied ubuntu

“A human being is part of the whole called by us a universe – a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and his feelings as something separate from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us; it restricts us to our personal decisions and our affections to a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” – Albert Einstein

I FOUND THIS newspaper clipping in Ouma Betsie’s diary:



"Today is a proud day for the prime minister of South Africa, Dr HF Verwoerd, and his family. It is the day when Dr Verwoerd's late father, Mr Wilhelm Johannes Verwoerd, will be honoured by the baptism of the first great-grandchild that bears his name."

The mourning section of Ouma's diary contains a few more references to me as a toddler, during a six-week period of grandchild-minding while my parents were traveling through Europe. On 18 August 1967, she wrote about "a few restless nights due to the children's coughing". "Dirkie is maddening and obstinate, Wilhelmpie stubborn and unpleasant." A short while later: "The children are ill-mannered the last couple of days...W is getting up to more tricks, refuses completely to obey, cheeky - perhaps I am also to blame." (24 Aug).

Based on other things my grandmother wrote, I seem to have inherited a stubbornness from my grandfather. And the adoration of my grandfather by my grandmother, my parents, family and his followers, was also transmitted to me as a child. So was their piety, their fears and prejudices, and their bloodstained memories, symbolised by that suitcase with Oupa's washed clothes. This carefully preserved suit travelled with my family from the house in Pretoria, to Johannesburg and then, in 1971, to Stellenbosch. My bedroom, for ten years at school, was right next to that of my parents and the cupboard where that suitcase with its painful contents was stored.

Whether I like it or not, this powerful concoction is also in my blood. It is tempting to distance myself too quickly today from the political convictions and Christian Nationalism of my parents and grandparents. I can easily forget that in my criticisms of them I am also engaged in self-criticism. In my radical distancing from the philosophy of separate development I need to keep asking myself: am I not also running away from my own shadow? Am I genuinely prepared to face the evil within me?

It is particularly important to be as open as possible about my ongoing struggle with the shared religious beliefs of my youth. That is why my initial discomfort with the colour of the *Black Christ* figure is so revealing. As part of my ongoing decolonisation I am still coming to terms with how much damage was inflicted by my white god.

I have come to know Ashnat as a person of deep faith. I asked about how she experienced the Christian Nationalism of my youth, how she made sense of what people who claimed to be Christians were doing to her.

“It didn’t make sense. At that time we believed that God was a white person, that’s why all this injustice was being done to us black people. We didn’t even see ourselves as ‘coloured’, we were just all black.

“During the 1976 riots we moved to Nigel, Dudley moved on the same day. Dudley started a prayer group, with the brothers and nuns, as part of a charismatic movement. My younger sister Katy and I were the two youngest in this group. We thought, ‘this is cool, maybe God is not so bad after all. Maybe the god that we’d known in Edenvale was a white god, but this is a different God. It seemed like this God was loving.

“God is everywhere. It is the same God today, tomorrow and forever. [Back then] we were blinded by what we received.”

And were my people blinded I wanted to know.

“Yes, absolutely. It was time for us to move on, after we moved to Nigel and joined this movement. Dudley also started to make peace. The hatred of whites was so intense, but then we realised that we were serving a loving God, not a God of hatred.”

Ashnat remembered a poem written by her sister. She fetched the self-published collection, *In Praise of the One Whose Life I Carry*, by Katy van Wyk (OP) and reads from “The Dream and the Story”:

The time and the place for my birth
 was still to be held off
 for the fullness of time ...
 and sometime in a little township
 in the east [of Johannesburg]
 and at a time when people set boundaries
 and barriers,
 drawing in some

and keeping out the rest –
I was born, an image of God,
beloved of God
but classified a person of a lesser race
and given a new and false identity
– Coloured!

“There were those benches with signs of ‘SLEGS BLANKES’, [Whites Only],” Ashnat told me. “But my mother had to look after small children. The children would play and she would sit on the edge of the bench. These were white children. So it was okay for her to sit there while she was watching the children, but not on any other occasion, or with her own children.”

I wondered aloud how many black mothers have helped to raise white children over the years. Sharon asked Ashnat how it affected women like her mother who looked after white children, and in that sense had some power, but the children had more privileges.

“They were just helpless. But at the same time grateful that they had a job. And then they had this great love for those children. They loved those kids like their own children. They would protect those kids with their own lives, to make sure that no harm would come to them.

“At the time we didn’t really mind too much. If my mother was the same with us as she was with them then it was okay. She used to take us to work and we would play with the white children and she would be the same to them as towards us. We played inside the house. We couldn’t go outside and play with white children because we were ‘coloured’. That family was very open-minded. They were English people – I think that also made a difference.”

Emily’s mother was less fortunate.

“My mother was a domestic servant. As a domestic servant there were times when I would look for her, when I wanted money to go back to school and I would go to her place of employment. Sometimes I would come to that place hungry, thirsty, tired, having looked for the place, because some of these places were not within easy reach.

Then I would want to throw myself on a chair. 'Mama, please give me water!'

"Don't sit on that chair, don't sit on that chair!" she would shout.

"I would throw myself on the floor and look at her, 'Mama, what is wrong with you? It is in the kitchen!' If it was in the lounge I would understand. It is private, it is for the family...but in the kitchen?"

"Mama would say, 'You are not allowed to sit on that chair, sit on the floor.'

"You would sit in the floor, drink water. The white children would come in and see you on the floor, just look at you. The young ones might say 'hi' and then go to their room. Some of those things also opened my eyes. Sometimes I would ask her questions and she would say, 'In this house you must have your own cup, you must have your own plate, in fact your plate must be in your room, but you must have your own cup here so that when you drink water you drink out of your own cup and not touch any other cup.'

"Those things helped me to understand what was going on. And because I understood I knew that the children were brought up in the same way: you had to look at a black person not as a friend."

It is revealing that my father gives prominence to Oupa Hendrik's relationship with black servants. He refers in relative detail to an episode with Jack Matotse, who for a decade was their gardener in Johannesburg. Pa still believes that this interaction is "so typical" of his father's "disposition towards people".

"It was a Sunday afternoon. Jack was very upset and needed to speak to the *baas*, which had never happened before. I was in my room and could hear how the man was talking passionately, while my dad listened patiently. It was about some or other mistreatment by my mother. It was a very long story, including tears. Eventually, my dad managed to calm him down by talking quietly and responding to his complaints...it felt as if most of the afternoon was taken up. At last Jack was satisfied and the relationship [with my mother] was restored."⁴⁶

46 *Só onthou ons hom*, p. 61

I became increasingly convinced that my continuing reformation involved uprooting the surprisingly obstinate paternalistic and maternalistic aspects of apartheid.

In the early 1990s my father was quite certain that politically I was following the example of the younger brother in the parable of the prodigal son. I suspect, however, that both of us probably missed the truly unsettling message of this parable in Luke 15.

I learnt this truth the hard way during my time in the TRC. My diary tells the story:

15 November 1997

All this time I am also the older brother! It was quite a shock to discover so much of myself last night as I was reading in Nouwen's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* about the angry, resentful, jealous older brother. Me – a person who always tries so hard not to sin, to follow the rules. I am familiar with that feeling of standing outside – hurt and angry because I am not getting the attention I feel I deserve.

I am thinking of my recent experiences in the TRC: my sensitivity to accusations, even indirectly, of racism; my unhappiness at being treated like “one of them” instead of “one of us”, when there is racial conflict, despite my involvement with the ANC; becoming aware that in the eyes of many black colleagues I remain a white, Afrikaner male. And that strong sense within me of “I don't deserve this!” Which then leads to feelings of resentment.

(Like the typical reaction of indignation among “white liberals” to criticisms from within Black Consciousness circles, à la Biko?) Is this also the story behind the reaction of Christian Nationalist Afrikaners to criticism of apartheid – resentment...and shame?

Twenty years later, I still recognise this type of reaction in myself. I see the “older brother” in my quick outcry when someone in Lynedoch, directly or indirectly, accuses me of racism. And I see it in my father's sense of indignation when someone criticises his father.

Nouwen's key point is that it is much more difficult for “good people”

to truly return home: "The lostness of the elder son is much harder to identify... The lostness of the resentful 'saint' is so hard to reach precisely because it is so closely welded to the desire to be good and virtuous... Returning home from a lustful escapade seems so much easier than returning home from a cold anger that has rooted itself in the deepest corners of my being."⁴⁷

This is probably why the older brother does not have a happy ending in this parable. He is the child who is actually lost. There is no easy recipe for inviting this kind of son into the house. I suspect, however, that it would be helpful to acknowledge the presence of the older brother in people like myself and my father.

I attend church regularly, I give to charity, I pay for the education of my domestic worker's children to help with the upliftment of the poor, and I'm an honest taxpayer... Instead of acknowledging my shared responsibility for a crime against humanity I react with indignant resentment - "I don't deserve your condemnation! I am NOT a racist!"

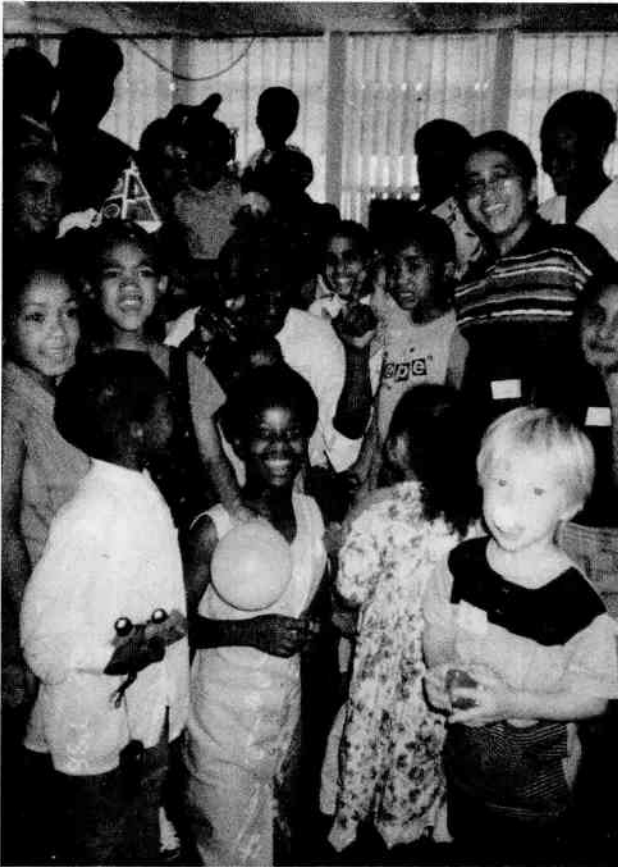
I am grateful for the undeserved patience and profound humanity that people like Ashnat and Emily and Themba continue to display towards me. In our conversations, Emily also went out of her way not to demonise any person or group. Not even the police.

"There was this one incident [in Soweto in 1976]. The police were trying to disperse these children. I don't know what happened, but this policeman was trying to shoot this girl. She was so brave you know. She walked straight towards the policeman. Before she got to him, she saw an empty beer bottle, broke it and carried on towards the policeman who had a gun. This white guy couldn't just shoot at a girl like that, he couldn't! He had to run for his life... to the nearest police station. Even in the police there were some that were very brutal and there were some who were still human beings. Maybe this man saw his daughter in this girl, so he just couldn't do it, he couldn't."

I experienced the same spirit of radical inclusivity in former arch-

47 Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal Son*, pp.70, 82

bishop Desmond Tutu.⁴⁸ A highlight of my time in the TRC was to see “the Arch”, as he is fondly known, in action and to have a few serious conversations with him. And I was happy that my son could experience him as Father Christmas, surrounded by other children of TRC staff.



Twenty years later, during a follow-up to the Faith Communities hearing of the TRC, we met briefly during a tea break. He unexpectedly invited me to continue our exchange about ancestors and reconciliation at a later stage. I sent him the two pictures I'd been intensely engaged

48 Desmond Tutu, Anglican archbishop emeritus of Cape Town, chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 1995-1998.

with: Oupa Hendrik feeding me with a milk bottle, and the *Black Christ* painting. Despite his fragile health, he made time for a pastoral cup of tea.

Sitting in a large, comfortable chair he apologised, in Afrikaans, for not standing up to greet me. He invited me to sit next to him, then said a short prayer. How was I, he wanted to know? I jumped in at the deep end. I explain to him how I have been struggling to face the pain represented in the painting without demonising my ancestor. How I wanted to transform the pain.

“I think already the very fact of you being concerned about the anguish and the pain that was caused by a policy...a policy which he didn't start, remember! He came in a long line of premiers. But he was a very, very clever man. He could argue the hind leg off a horse. One obviously wishes that he had been on the right side. Having said all of that, he was a human being like all of us, subject to the same pressures. At that time his white compatriots clearly wanted a separation between the races, that they should have a superior, advantaged position. I suppose he would have been silly – having gotten into power by those people – to do a somersault.

“I think that we should not demonise them, whilst not exculpating them. They were under the pressures of their time: they had just come out of a bruising war; they had sought to escape from the British, to find a place where they could live as they wanted to live...all of those things left their mark. And succeeding generations exhorted: ‘We are a minority surrounded by very hostile barbarians; if we want to retain our racial purity we have to separate ourselves from them. And if we want to maintain our hegemony, then you have to keep them down.’

“I would say that you have to be generous in your judgement of him. He was not a vicious man, who just wanted to be cruel for the sake of being cruel. He truly believed that it was possible to have races existing side by side, but separately – separate schools, separate churches, and not mingling socially. I am not trying to whitewash him, I am just saying ...”

He challenged me, three times, to accept my ancestor.

“In any case, there is not very much you can do about it. He is your grandfather. He is your grandfather. He is your grandfather. *Jy het hom nie gekies nie.* [You did not choose him.] He is there, in your family.”

But the Arch did not avoid the harsh truth, “There is that about him that he came to represent a vicious system, that he is seen as the symbol of a vicious system... though he wasn’t alone in that ...”

I recall how some black people were furious with Tutu during the TRC for his strong emphasis on the need to forgive. I am concerned that requests for forgiveness by people like me might have more to do with wanting to be freed from a burden of guilt than being rooted in a sincere commitment to restorative justice.

“[The] symbolism [of Verwoerd] is part of the pain that you have to bear, I think until... I don’t know when it will be that we will say, ‘yes, we have to forgive’ and say ‘he was a product of his time’.

“You would have to go to Mars to get away from pain that you have not caused directly. Just as much as you had nothing to do with the many *good* things you inherited.

“Be careful you don’t want to take on a burden that is unbearable. Yes, acknowledge things that should be acknowledged. And then do what you can to make this world a world where such things will be more and more rare – the things that bring so much anguish to your heart. Seek to be what you are, to be someone who recognises that human beings are human beings are human beings. That is already a massive renunciation of where your grandfather stood. When you are able to work with black colleagues in the TRC and didn’t have to use your whiteness for benefits. You used your whiteness mainly to help people get into the heart of some of the anguish.

“Don’t smother your gifts with this burden. Let him being your grandfather make you sensitive to the pain of people. And sensitive also to those white people who still want to play the race card, without being hoity-toity: feel a sadness for them and hope that their eyes will be opened.”

I felt the need to reflect with Pumla again on our visit to Orania a few years earlier.

"You know, at that moment I did not stand in front of a suit." Pumla frowns as she recalls that cold winter's day in Orania. Her hands point to the display cupboard evoked again in her mind's eye by our conversation. "I stood before a story... and the tragic history that led to this story. It was a strange feeling. What does it really mean for a black South African to stand in front of the story of the man who wore this suit?"

"And then you told me how your mother had to struggle for days to clean the blood-drenched clothes... The blood of her dead father-in-law was *in* her hands... it is almost like it is written all over her hands, the pain is written right inside her. She is washing the clothes, but she is also washing off the pain, in a way. I have a headache now from just thinking about this thing.

"What occupied me [that night] was just this question of 'how can I not connect to this pain?' As a child, singing that song about Tsafendas, I could not have felt these feelings. Because I have not gone through the experience of knowing humanity, of knowing you. I've not experienced what it is to be human. We need experience to have compassion."

This type of experience and the profound questions it raises lie at the heart of Pumla's academic work and her life task.

"How do we respond to the pain of the Other? What are our philosophical frameworks, our reference points to give meaning to these deeply emotional experiences like that day in front of the suit with your mother's story in mind?"

"It is not enough to draw lines and say 'this suit belonged to the architect of apartheid'. Those lines do not help us to connect with who we are as humans. I realise someone might say to me, 'you are a sell-out' when I describe my whole experience on that day. But does that criticism really capture what is going on? It doesn't. In fact, it glosses over some of the most profound aspects of what it is to be human, one to another."

I know that as impossible as it was for my mother to get all the stains out of that shirt, so it would not be possible for this black woman in front of me to whitewash Verwoerd. She will never deny the pain caused by a system of which Oupa has become the personification. And yet, she asks: "Who are we in relation to the Other?"

This is a question which presupposes a humanising openness to "the Other".

I told her that I understand that what she advocates is a purified, post-naïveté ubuntu... a type of ubuntu we cannot reach with rainbow romanticism. This superficial, commercialised "ubuntu" has to be challenged. But if this criticism results in us underestimating the depth of real ubuntu, then much will be lost, I proffered.

"Exactly, exactly! Because simple criticism of the impoverishment of ubuntu doesn't go beyond that, to where this inherent connectedness takes us, to the depths of being human."

I told her that my experiences with her, with the Arch, with Themba and Emily, was that there was a depth of spirit that went beyond "apartheid", beyond human separateness, *without* denying the pain and the unfinished business caused by apartheid.

"Yes, this is the ambivalence... how do we hold that space, where it is not simply about judging, or 'selling out', or all these terms that do not really open up the space for a richer conversation? It is stressful to hold this space. It asks for more than knowledge of the head, more than language of the 'heart'. It requires a return to *inimba*."

Pumla says "inimba" means womb. Where life begins.

"So we need to locate the ethics of our relating to one another inside the womb, both the metaphoric womb and the actual womb. As a man you don't have a womb, but metaphorically you locate it in the depths of your being. You go deep down to the start of life in the womb.

"This is where you begin if you want to encounter the Other as a human being. Because this is where we all come from. We connect in our nakedness as we were in the womb."



Glossary

Boer	Farmer. Also used as a word for "Afrikaner".
Boeremeisie	An Afrikaans girl
Dominee	"Reverend" in the Dutch Reformed Church and used as a polite form of address
Ma	Affectionate Afrikaans word for "mother"
Oom	Afrikaans word for and polite form of address for "uncle"
Ouma	Affectionate Afrikaans word for "grandmother"
Oupa	Affectionate Afrikaans word for "grandfather"
Outa	Outdated, racist, but at the time polite form of address for an older black or coloured man
Pa	Affectionate Afrikaans word for "father"
Tannie	Afrikaans word for and polite form of address for "aunt"
Umakhulu	Xhosa word for "grandmother"
Volk	A nation or a people

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