

# Mau Mau atrocity taught forgiveness

Her father was buried alive as a sacrifice to the Mau Mau gods of Kenya.

Impossible to forgive, you say... An abomination... An act to smite the heart and harden it forever.

Not so!

Such a bereavement happened to Mrs Agnes Hofmeyr in 1954.

But she and her husband Bremer, in time, forgave.

And they found afterwards their forgiveness not only brought healing to themselves, but tapped a fountain of healing in a land ravaged by murder and hatred.

Mr and Mrs Hofmeyr are visiting Australia and left Toowoomba yesterday after a weekend visit.

Both have been active in the Moral Re-Armament Movement since 1933. They have devoted their lives to racial reconciliation in southern Africa.

Mrs Hofmeyr's father was Mr Gray Leakey, one of the early British settlers in Kenya. He owned a coffee plantation. Bremer Hofmeyr is a former Rhodes scholar whose family emigrated to South Africa from Holland in 1743.

The Hofmeyrs now live in Johannesburg.

"The Mau Mau uprising was aimed at getting the white man out of the country, and it was based largely on superstition," Mrs Hofmeyr said.

"At one point a prophetess of the Mau Mau told followers that if the revolt was to succeed, a good white man had to die — to placate the gods of Mau Mau and for the sins of the white people.

"One night, 60 Africans broke into my parents' home, killed my stepmother, and carried

my father up Mt Kenya, a sacred mountain.

"There they buried him alive.

"We were overseas when we heard the news, and I felt desperate. I felt, 'there cannot be a God to allow this to happen.'

"I was full of bitterness, and felt I never wanted to see a black person or go back to Africa again."

Mrs Hofmeyr said at this point her husband Bremer said: "Let's be quiet, and ask God to tell us what to do."

"We did this... There came the overwhelming thought that we should have no bitterness and no hatred, but should fight harder than ever in the future to bring the answers of a change of heart to black and white alike, no matter what the cost."

They were back in Kenya within a year.

Mrs Hofmeyr said she and Bremer had spent weeks thinking about their friends in Africa, particularly their black friends.

"Many of these were ill-treated and humiliated by white people, and I always told myself, 'Well, other people did these things, not me,'" Mrs Hofmeyr said.

"But when we were seeking God's thoughts on the matter, the further thought came, 'You must be as responsible as others for the sins of your race, and try to put them right wherever and whenever you can.'

"This also was a big challenge and not easy to accept."

A young black man whose father was also murdered by the Mau Mau because he was a Christian and a chief, arranged a meeting for Mr and Mrs Hofmeyr to speak to about 7000 Kikuyu, the tribe whose members formed the Mau Mau.

The Hofmeyrs told the gathering, "We are very sorry our arrogance and selfishness, and that of many like us, helped create the bitterness and hatred in your hearts, out of which came the Mau Mau.

"We want to work with you to see the tragedies of the past don't happen again."

Mrs Hofmeyr said many of the Kikuyu came to her and told of their sorrow at what happened to her family and said they wanted to help carry the spirit of the meeting into the future.

"All the bitterness melted, and that point led us into the hearts and homes of many people in Africa," she said.

"It also made me realise that underlying all the problems were the emotions of bitterness, hate and fear — fear of the unknown. That applies particularly to the white people.

"Black people are very forgiving to those who sincerely apologise. We whites can learn from them in the ability to forgive."