

An aerial photograph showing the World Trade Center towers in New York City in a state of complete ruin. The towers are reduced to a tangled mass of twisted metal and debris. The surrounding area is filled with rubble, and several American flags are visible on the remaining structures. The sky is clear, and the water of the harbor is visible in the background.

**THE WORLD
CAME
TUMBLING
DOWN
& OTHER STORIES**

★ ★ ★ **IRWIN** ★ ★ ★
★ ★ ★ **FRIEDMAN** ★ ★ ★

**THE WORLD
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DOWN
& OTHER STORIES**

IRWIN FRIEDMAN



**SEED BOOKS
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FOR ENABLING DEVELOPMENT**

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He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach himself.

He who is the author of a war lets loose the whole contagion of hell and opens a vein that bleeds a nation to death

Human nature is not of itself vicious.

I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. 'Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death.

If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace.

If we do not hang together, we shall surely hang separately.

It is an affront to treat falsehood with complaisance.

It is error only, and not truth, that shrinks from inquiry.

Thomas Paine (1737 – 1809)

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THE WORLD CAME TUMBLING DOWN

To *all* who lost their lives on September 11th, 2001.

6 October 2001

"Tomas Pegin" he said softly to himself in a feigned heavy east European accent. "You are now fifty years old, and where are you?"

For Tom Payne this was a time of reflection. Quite why he was thinking about his second generation ancestry at this time he was not entirely sure. Part of it was obviously linked to his turning fifty. But there was more to it than that. He tried to sort it out in his mind.

Firstly, there was the stark contrast of where he had come from and where he was now. From quite humble beginnings as the child of an immigrant Jewish family in east Brooklyn, he had now risen - some had even characterized this rise as "meteoric" - from being a lowly stock broker to being CEO of a leading New York

firm, New Investment & Corporation Engineers. NICE Inc. was his life.

Secondly, there was the mixed emotion; the turmoil created by his daughter's marriage into a very religious Islamic family coupled with the excitement that followed the arrival of his first grandchild a few weeks earlier.

Thirdly it was the anniversary month of his parents death. Soon it would be Rosh Hashana, the New Year, followed soon after by Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Lastly it was the contrast between his clumsy real name, which other children had mocked him about at school and his new polished American name which deftly brushed aside his origins with sophisticated elegance.

Coming back to the thought that started Tom Payne's train of thinking, he mused again and again, "Tomas Pegin, Thomas Pegin"

He glanced up unconsciously at the massive display

screen on opposite side of the road as he stood on the sidewalk waiting for the green light. Tuesday 11 September, 8.27 am. He was not in a hurry. There was plenty of time. He'd already had a very successful breakfast business meeting at seven and felt satisfied that he had already done a day's work. He would take the rest of the morning off. He was pleased, even overjoyed, that he was soon to meet his wife, his daughter and son-in-law to go and look at their dream home. After more than eighteen months of painful acrimony, there was the prospect of harmony again. He was pleased that with only a minimal cost to himself he could easily repair the relationships he had damaged by offering to buy a home as a gift, a peace offering to them in celebration of the arrival of his first grandchild.

He walked briskly through the Manhattan landscape. He loved the chance to walk. It gave him time to think and exercise his body.

He glanced upward at his office, high up on the 95th floor in one of the sleek twin World Trade Centre towers in front of him. Knowing how excited they were about the day, they would be waiting for him in his office.

Faster than he could comprehend, there was the unexpected roar of a low flying jet, which slid like a dagger into the building just about where he was looking. He staggered and put his hands to his head as he saw the explosion of billowing fire followed milliseconds later by a blast louder than anything he had ever experienced in his life. It was as if he had stepped from the outside to the inside of a TV screen.

For a few moments he stood immobilised. Although he knew in that instant that his family had been wiped out, he could not allow himself to believe it at that time. He felt as if he had been eviscerated and was looking at his disembowelled intestines in the seconds before blood gushed out and he would drop dead to the floor.

All around him people stood transfixed, like citizens of Pompey, amazed that their quiet mountain had turned to a fiery volcano. For a moment it still, like the silence that

follows the highest ebb a tidal wave, then all at once, like the backwash rushing inward towards the sea, a surge of people ran in towards the towers as debris rained downward. It seemed like just a few instants before emergency personnel joined them, surging urgently forward.. When he reached the base of the towers, he stood terrified. Grim, frightened, crying and injured people poured through the doors.

For a few minutes, he had a choice. Should he risk his life and go up and search for his family or should he wait here for them and help others. Soon the choice was made for him as the emergency personnel screamed for people to stand back and leave the scene. Then came a second jet plane more awful than the first, tearing into, slashing and ripping through the other tower. This time the surging tide of people came spilling and boiling outward away from the terrible turmoil in the towers.

As he moved back reluctantly, came the real horror, His recall of what happened from then on seemed hardly real. As he gazed up through the smoke it seemed as if

the towers were collapsing. Smoke and debris rained downward. The surging crowd moved outward ever faster. He was running too, aware that within seconds there would be the mother of all implosions. Tom Payne screamed as the world came tumbling down.

After escaping the hurricane clouds of choking dust and smoke, Tom Payne struggled to take stock of himself. He walked the few short blocks to his apartment. The babysitter was there with his grandson, Abdul. She was frantic with fear, because she had been watching the TV, when the incident happened. She had known that they were all meeting at the World Trade Centre that morning.

For the next two weeks Tom lived in a dazed zombie-like state. At first he hoped against hope that they had survived and that they would walk through the door as he had done. But they did not come, Then he contacted the hospitals, but there was nothing of comfort there either.

Even more painfully their bodies were never discovered.

So he had no funerals to attend. Although he was not religious, that made it particularly painful. He did not know how to mourn their passing.

Friends and relatives could bring no comfort. The situation was complex. He was an irreligious Jew married to a Christian Arab woman from Beirut. Their only daughter had married a devout Muslim from New York. Nothing could be messier and more difficult for those who knew them.

Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year came and went. Often in the past his family had spent the time with his parents, despite it not meaning much to him, personally. He had taken it for granted while they were alive. But they had also recently died.

Now it was just Abdul and himself. It got him to thinking about what linked them. He remembered his son-in-law's beautiful Islamic views about peace and tolerance. He thought a lot about Islam, and Christianity too. They were both Abrahamic faiths, just as Judaism was. They were more alike than they were different.

He watched TV a great deal, trying to understand, but it only served to deepen his pain. There was a continual playing and replaying the scenes he had witnessed again and again. Like a relentless ghost, the same terrible images would appear endlessly repeating themselves. Why had this happened he would ask again and again, much as he had repeated his name, Tomas Pegin, Tomas Pegin. Why had this happened. Irreligious as he had been, he found him asking himself in his heart, what have I done God to deserve this? What does this all mean? Why was God silent on this terrible deed?

As if in answer, he saw mental images of the terrorist Osama bin Laden, the man vilified as the mastermind behind the tragedy. Perhaps because of his dazed state, he could not immediately place the man in the role of villain, not so much because he doubted the credibility of the evidence regarding his involvement, but rather simply, because of his appearance. The man looked to him like a prophet. Sometimes he was Moses, about to come down from Mt Sinai with the sacred laws of the Torah, in a fury as he saw his followers worshipping a

golden calf in defiance of He, whose name was so holy, it could not be uttered. Then he was Jesus Christ, Son of Our Father in Heaven, who had raged about sacrilege in the house of the Lord, as he was about to be sacrificed on the cross for all mankind. In the final morph, he was the prophet Muhammad, himself, peace be with him, who enjoined the faithful to practise the five pillars of Islam and who taught that Allah is absolutely unique, omnipotent, omniscient and merciful. He was all of them, yet none of them at the same time.

In all this time he did not cry. His emotions were blunted. He struggled to care for Abdul, and came for the first time to learn something about mothering. He found it very, very difficult.

He tried to think about getting back to work, about being patriotic, about doing what the President asked and not being cowered by all this, about rebuilding his corporation, NICE inc. It was impossible. Everyone in his firm had perished. NICE inc. no longer existed at all, but for its legal form. All the records were gone. By now, even the finances, so finely tuned to the nuances of

world markets, would be levelled - credits and debits would be equal. There would be nothing. It was as if the entire corporation had been vaporized. He thought about the deals he had been cutting, about the corporations that they had taken over, dismembered and liquidated, extracting every ounce of value. He thought about the way they had bought and sold foreign currencies squeezing out profits as the values of money in emerging markets crumbled before their onslaughts. It was all part of the business. It had never worried him before, but now he felt strangely sickened. As if he had just consumed the food from a splendid banquet and eaten too much - the very thought of the splendour was nauseating.

A TV image suddenly showed a ghastly scene from Afghanistan. There was a wizened marasmic child looking at him knowingly from the screen. The marasmus that he saw was no new thing. Here in front of him on TV was the misery of mankind that the world had abandoned far before September 11th. It could have been Abdul.

Suddenly he understood. It was ⁱErev Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. God was speaking to him, and it was the terrible vengeful God of which the Torah speaks, fiery and angry that He had been disobeyed. And God said to him, "And I will cause your planes, pinnacles of your technology and your unremitting pride, to rain down on your citadels of wealth and forts of military might. I will cause your economies to shake and your trade to tremble. And if you still will not listen, then remember the ten plagues of Egypt and the slaying of the firstborn. My will shall be done."

And Tom Payne looked at Abdul and cried, weeping as he never had. "Tomas Pegin", he cried. Tomorrow there would certainly be Atonement!

ⁱ Eve

A STORY OF THE JUDGE WHO WAS ALPHABETICALLY CHALLENGED

For Justice Albie Sachs.

Saturday, December 03, 2005

Any good storyteller will know that there are subtle nuances in the re-telling of a story. Small though these differences may be, the story as told once in one setting, may manifest itself in an entirely different form in another. A listener hearing the same account on two separate occasions, realizing that it is essentially the same narrative, may wonder whether the storyteller has been entirely economical with the truth.

The storyteller has no qualms about the variation. For him a good story is like a brilliant diamond with it myriads of smooth facets, each revealing a sparkle that is undeniably from the same source while inevitably different. It has a fingerprint distinctly its own.

When the Judge rose to his feet that day to address the

audience gathered to hear how he maintained his faith during the dark days of Apartheid and eventually become a Constitutional Court Judge, there were a myriad number of ways that he could tell his tale. A myriad more that a listener could invent, when retelling the same saga to others.

Where is the truth you may ask? A good question, which even a judge, well versed in teasing out the obtuse logic of contesting advocates, might find difficult to answer definitively.

“People sometimes ask me” began the Judge, “where I stand on the issue of faith. ‘What am I?’ ‘What kept my spirit alive during the interrogation, the solitary confinement and recovery from the bomb blast that attempted to assassinate me and led to the loss of my right arm.’”

As he stood before the audience, with his shirt sleeve flapping loosely from just below his right shoulder, it was clear that he was a simple man who spoke his heart

in plain, straightforward English. Although he had a slight squint, his gaze was direct and honest, with a playful readiness to engage the truth directly, however horrible.

“A few years ago” he continued, “I faced a situation in which I could no longer dodge the issue the way I usually would, by turning the subject of my faith into a question rather than an answer.”

He looked at the audience with the most gentle and modest hint of a self-deprecating smile.

“There I was, about to be sworn in during one of the most moving of ceremonies – one that was celebrating the triumph of the establishment of our Constitutional Court - sweating and in a quandary about something most other people would have found trivial.”

Perhaps it was the Madonna-like smile or the honesty behind the gentle humility that signaled to the audience -

this was to be a fascinating story, but not one which would immediately reach its climax.

“Each Judge in turn was being asked to declare if she or he would uphold the constitution. Some used the bible, others merely affirmed. Being alphabetically challenged, I was, I think, last on the list, so I had plenty of time to vacillate while I awaited my turn.”

Unadorned though his description was, the audience could imagine the courtroom scene that day, with its row of distinguished judges, standing before the most adored of Presidents and televised before a nation, proud of its new heritage. Here was the birth of a court that would turn the abstract concept of freedom into relief on the faces of petitioners, seeking and finding redress through a spaghetti of contradictory legal arguments.

‘Under normal circumstances, if people asked me what I was, although I might feel a little uneasy about the question, I would have no difficulty in saying, I was a Jew, culturally that is. I was often asked the question at

SACS, where I went to school in Cape Town during the forties, especially after the war, when the world learned about the atrocities in Europe.”

The audience would not have known about a tiny flash of pain he felt as he mentioned the word Jew. He remembered the museum to the museum in the old Jewish cemetery in Prague. Two little buildings, two tiny synagogues, one containing the cloth hangings pillaged from the synagogues of occupied Europe before they were burned down, intended one day to be a museum to the extinct race. The other even more savage, displayed only a list of names of those exterminated in the camps. All this in the cemetery of a ghetto, where for over five hundred years so many Jews had been buried, the level was higher than that of the surrounding ground.

“But this was different. I was not being asked here to declare my cultural affiliation. I had to make a public statement about my faith and that was really difficult. I would have preferred not to. But it was important, I realized that. I knew that as a Constitutional Court Judge

I would be called on, at some stage, to adjudicate on matters pertaining to Religion and the State. If I was to be objective, I had to be clear about what it was I believed.

I was still struggling with my thoughts – it seemed like an eternity, waiting for an execution”.

He gave a tired, crinkly smile. The stump of his arm bobbed around in his right shirt sleeve.

“I could not of known how right I was. A few years after I assumed my role as Constitutional Court Judge, a case did come before me, which tested me to the limit. It came from a religious school. They were petitioning the Court for the right to apply corporal punishment to the children. Now, as you know, corporal punishment had been banned as unconstitutional in schools, as it was considered an affront to the human rights of the child. This was an issue on which I had very strong personal beliefs. You see, when I had been at SACS, I had the misfortune of being in picked on by one of the masters,

who delighted in giving me six of the best, virtually on a daily basis. This was strange, because when I think back, I was really a very obedient, and even studious scholar. He obviously had an interest in young boys bums. The only thing that saved me, was when he discovered the slightly plumper, more podgy bum of a fatter boy than me.”

The audience was transported back into the old study of the masters office where he did caning in private, where he would ask the lad to pull down his pants to reveal his behind. Like the meeting of the profound and profane, here was the interface between centuries of academic learning, professed in the books on the bookshelves and the instruments of its application, whips and canes fashioned in the style of the implements devised by Donatien Alphonse François, the Marquis de Sade.

“While the case was being presented to me, I would find myself back in my cell where I was being held in solitary confinement. I would hear the screams of the young offenders being given the lashes of corporal punishment.

It was a terrible time. I had long made up my mind that if there was one thing I detested, it was the use of violence to dispense discipline.”

For an instant the profile of the Judge against the bright white wall behind him became an icon for the contradictions of the country he had struggled for. The terrorist become constitutional court judge. The fighter become pacifist. The rebel become curator of traditional values.

“I realized that for this religious school, there was something very deep and cultural in believing that effective discipline required a cane. Though the notion offended me deeply, I had to respect that it was their belief. It was no different than all those times, through the struggle, when comrades, who I respected deeply, while telling me of the inspiration that they drew from their faith in Christ, would passionately and vividly describe how they would kill the boers.”

What did he do, wondered the audience? Did he swear or did he affirm?

“When it came to writing the Constitution”, he continued, alluding to the difficulty of separating church and state in the document, “Despite our different interpretations of faith, we had no difficulty in recognizing that all belief systems, including of those who had no faith, should be accommodated with respect. However, when it came to the preamble, that is where we struggled. There were those who wanted us to affirm the centrality of “Almighty God” and those who felt that such affirmation was an affront to those who did not believe, but nevertheless remained citizens who showed loyalty to the Constitution. This was the first real test for our Constitution and a trial also of my own faith and conviction.”

As any regular listener of good story telling will know, a good story rarely travels the path of an arrow. More usually it is the winding path of a traveler slowly wending up the slopes of the Andes to reach the

forgotten splendour of the lost city of Machu Pichu.

“We resolved it,” he said quietly, “when I realized that the faith is as much about culture as it is about theology. The songs that we had sung during the freedom struggle were like spirituals that praised the Lord, but for many it was not literal, it embodied the solidarity of a people oppressed. So when we included the words of “Nkosi, Sikekel iAfrica into the preamble of the Constitution, while it satisfied the faithful, did not offend the atheists, because it was the embodiment of a culture of pan-African resistance.”

The story had reached its *crescendo*. The traveler stood at the highest point of Machu Pichu and gazed down at the maze of buildings, set against the brilliant green of terraced slopes and could see centuries of civilization moving again amidst the ruins.

“Though the Constitutional Court did not give a ruling on the extent to which parents should have the right to include physical punishment in disciplining their

children, it upheld the view that religious schools could still maintain their culture without the need for corporal punishment. In other words, sometimes in the practice of ones faith, it is correct to behave counter-intuitively.”

The audience waited with baited breath.

What else can a story teller do than complete the story.

“At the instant my name was called out, I decided,” concluded the Judge, already preparing to take his seat, “Confirmed atheist that I was, I raised what was left of my right arm, symbol of my damaged body, testament to the ravaged path through which our tragic country had transcended, and said with a conviction that I did not know I possessed, “So help me God.”

THE FUNERAL

To all those whose funerals I should have attended

Sunday, June 13, 2004

The Funeral – the funeral of the late Rev. Jerose Hlongwana, to give it its correct sub-title. If I do not write it now, it will go the way of all funerals – to oblivion – end subtitle.

Funerals are the end of some stories and the beginning of others. And this story is no different.

It was a crisp winter day, not unlike today, the sun heralding its arrival with its magnificent blaze of orange to the east. In its passage through the underworld, it had cremated all that had gone on before and given us this clean, cold and beautiful, new day. Not a cloud in the sky, not a single thread, nor a tiny, fleecy cotton ball, to which one could attach one's heart to rejoice at the majestic triumph and freedom of the dawn.

The gentle light fell on short, brown dry grass, bare in patches, cheerless and lifeless. Ahead lay desolation. Hundreds of kilometers of road, back into the very heart of darkness and away from the uplifting spirit of the fresh light, trumpeting out its promise of the myriad things that could be done before the last rays of the sun dimmed in the west. I could invent a hundred reasons not to go. To be sure, if I had been religious, as I am supposed to have been, then I would have been a priest, a Kohen, and forbidden to attend funerals – but that would be a far-fetched excuse. The truth, is I do not like funerals. I do not attend funerals. I do not see the point.

I am white and washed out, bleached and faded away, only a pale vestige of being a Jew and an African. I am like parchment that has dulled and discoloured with the ages. It is impossible any more to see what once was written, though the marks bear testimony to an important text whose black symbols once told an amazing tale. I am like the existential spirit, the vital essence that many believe is left when the organs have degenerated after death, lingering and circulating, like a cold eddy among

the skeletal remains, before being called to heaven or hell. I am like that, but I am not yet dead. I am supposed to be alive, but already I am in limbo.

In my simple white soul, fragile and feeble as it is, life only has value in living – once it has gone, one is dead. That's it. The body, like fast food, or for that matter, even the most sumptuous meal in a restaurant, has considerable value while its on order and being eaten – but once that's done, it's like the twisted polystyrene pack, soiled paper serviette, used plastic fork, bits of bone and gristle and an empty cold-drink can – it's waste. The faster one dumps it in the rubbish bin, the better.

We've lost it. Lost the ability to pray, to be able say grace in thanks for what we briefly valued before discarding the remains in the bin – we do not cherish that shrapnel that we chuck away. Only a beggar or a hungry dog would look at such garbage again to see if any hidden morsels of nourishment are still to be garnered. And some fools say we should recycle this junk.

I did not arrive early. And I had no plans to wait until the end. I was there to be seen, pay my respects and leave and for no other reason. It was not that I didn't value Reverend Hlongwana in life, I did – deeply. But, more about that later. But I should have known, late as I was, an hour and a half late, that the funeral would not have yet begun, well not for outsiders, anyway.

The context is important. The road of desolation of which I spoke is the N2 north, which runs like the spine of the province, through lush hills of picturesque sugarcane towards a forsaken Caltex garage at the cross-road to Mtubatuba on the edge of Umkhanyakude, the light from afar, the fever tree, the sign of malaria, the bad air which decimates the people from time to time. But malaria, really, is now the least of their worries, as the black majority struggles to survive. Once upon a time one might have described the peasants as eking out an existence from dry and sandy soils, but who is one kidding – hardly anyone ekes any more, and there are no peasants. They are modern urban folk trapped in rural

people's bodies. Especially the young people who yearn for nightclubs and to watch the Bold and Beautiful people of Hollywood wile away their soapy lives. Hardly anything is growing. It's the brave new world now – two worlds in one country as our President calls it, rich and poor – the clean sophisticated ceramic tile, plate-glass, duplex and digital virtual reality of the first world and the dirty, dung floor, corrugated iron, imijondolo, total reality, umpteenth world of the rest.

There it was. Virtually at the Caltex garage, an absurd red and blue marquee flapping in the cool winter breeze. I make it sound accessible. The Caltex garage is off the road – to reach it one has to go over broken tar and potholes. Once no doubt, white motorists flocked there. It was the last chance to fill up before the long haul to Pongola along the same desolate road with only game parks and black reserves on the way. Not a place to get stuck. So the Caltex Garage would have been an oasis then. But now, it was different, the haunt of minibus taxis, and beat-up old vehicles on the edge of KwaMsane Reserve, a dangerous and slum-like place. A

cross-road, like those one reads about on the misty English moors, a place of threat, dread and hi-jackings – not the kind of place one would want to be – perhaps in retrospect a good place for a cemetery, or at least a burial.

Before long a few of my colleagues joined me and we waited a while at the Caltex garage before we wended our way along a littered path into what seemed to be mayhem.

We entered past the homestead. That would be the sanitized word for the motley scrap of buildings and jetsam, framing an assembly of cooking pots and food preparation activities. A group of women were happily preparing away, smoke drifting off in all directions, carrying the braaied aroma of the remains and entrails of one or more beasts, slaughtered a few hours earlier for this occasion. It seemed strange to me then that the women danced as we passed. At a funeral one should be forlorn. They smiled and laughed, prancing a warm welcome as we arrived

“The funeral has not begun.” I thought in the words of Churchill, in his deep and ominous voice, “We are *not* at the *beginning!* We are not even at the *start* of the *beginning.* We are *before* the start of the beginning!” Yet in fact, it had begun. As we entered, there were rows of people, almost all of them women, dancing and singing. The huge loud-speakers of a beat-up amplifier, tilted and precariously placed as they were, thundered out a pulsating rhythm to which the mourners jived and danced in anticipation of the beginning.

“Siyabonga Jesu.

Siyabonga....bonga....bonga....bonga....bonga.

Thank you, Jesus, Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!”

Although in a hundred forms of garb, young women, middle-aged women and older women, clothed in new and old T-shirts, blouses, dresses, suites, or whatever, they filled their various forms of cloth with the passion and shape that only women can give to garments. “Vuka, vuka, vuka – arise!” they throbbed in unison.

The venue – there is no other term for describing the place of the funeral – was cobbled together, if one can put it that way, from a range of permanent and temporary facilities, perhaps one could call them structures. The most permanent of these was a three-walled cement-block shelter, open on one side. Attached to this, and much larger was the grotesque bright red and navy blue marquee, together forming a floor plan like an inverted “T”. The hoi polloi sat in rows of wooden benches in this section of the structure. The few dignitaries, though quite how dignified they were in comparison to the plebs is uncertain, sat on a motley assortment of gaudy plastic chairs in the concrete-block shelter, most of which was not completely visible from much of the marquee. Not all the dignitaries had arrived, for many seats were still empty. The empty seats seemed not to matter. The prancing women filled the void with their passionate song. They looked beautiful in the incongruous red light that filtered down through the transparent red of the marquee.

I tried to sit on the benches with the hoi polloi near the

door where I entered. Sitting there had less to do with my identifying with the masses than wanting to be close to the door so that I could make a quick and inconspicuous getaway as soon as it seemed decent to do so. I should have known that would never work. What I think they call the “Bima” in Hebrew, the elevated platform, the podium or stage, in English, from which the ceremony was to be conducted was around a corner and not visible. For me to sit in so inconsequential position was simply not on. Several times, myself and the colleagues I was with, who in deference sat with me, were urged to occupy our correct seats in the cement block shelter near the Bima. Finally, after several attempts failed to move me there, determined, as I was to be near the door, an extremely well dressed man, in time to the pulsating rhythm danced over to me. After a friendly greeting, he grasped both of my hands, and with the gentleness of a mother guiding her young child, led me across the open floor and escorted me to the more appropriate place where I was to sit. This was my correct station. This was my penalty for not freely finding myself a place to sit in what I knew was the appropriate

area. I was seated in the middle row, right at the end, against the Bima. I was to be completely pinned in on all sides. There was absolutely no way I was going to get away early.

I sat bleakly looking around at my prison for the next few hours. On the floor, sitting on blankets against the wall facing me was the group of the bereaved family women. They were at least appropriately miserable. Next to me were chairs with dignitaries, of which I had become one myself. Almost all were men. Although they seemed less miserable, they did not participate much in the joyful singing.

Pale within my whiteness I sat there emotionless. The warm black people around me moved to the sound of the music. Across the empty space in front of me sat the musician, stroking his keyboard with a softness of passion that belied the throbbing music that pulsed from the heavy speakers. The floor shook to the heavy beat. Almost hidden by a heavy concert-worn amplifier, his

talent in urging an African sound from the exotic electronic instrument made it seem it sang for itself.

If I was waiting for a beginning, it was not to happen. What had been, when I arrived, simply continued, but it grew in momentum and urgency. I looked around. The walls of the shelter were unpretentious concrete block, stark and unplastered. Warping wood beams held up a simple corrugated iron roof, rusted in places and with holes in other places signifying that this was not the first place it which it was used, though it was likely to be its last. In the space between the top of the wall and roof, pieces of broken brick and other fill closed the gap. I have seen similar building methods in walls in rural France where one is charmed by its simple rustic beauty. Here it had no intention to charm whatever and was simply what it was. Holding up the warped wooden beams were iron poles, like pillars in the middle of a temple. Some were welded, others were bent. Long wall ties of wire ran down from the roof indicating an desire and hope that the roof would not blow away in a strong wind. The floor had been cemented in parts, but was

mostly just the swept dry brown earth, which, stirred to life by the pounding feet, puffed upwards now and again. Tied to the beams was one side of the marquee. Through the gap one could see the leaves of a tall tree, a telephone pole and wire and in a joy that stilled one's inner being, the shallow blue depths of the peaceful sky.

The décor was either tasteless or if it was intended to be aesthetic was the product of a decorator whose style was extremely daring. None of the plastic chairs matched. They were pale blue, red, green, navy, pink and of course white. The designs were different and there was no particular order. They were all of a different vintage, all marked by gashes and dashes of colour and dirt – a celebration of unpretentious functionalism that only cheap plastic can achieve. No simple wooden tables sawn and hammered together, no earthenware or baskets. Just plastic, banal and transient. Perhaps the colour did not matter, as they were, after all, comfortable plastic chairs. The Bima was a greater piece of art. Although impossible to see exactly how it was constructed, covered in strips of under-felt, it moved organically in

time to the beat. On the vibrating structure were two white plastic tables, one covered with a lace table cloth, the other bare, the logic for the difference being unfathomable. Both had been battered. On the table with lace were some plastic bottles of water. One was labeled Island Breeze Mango the other Orange. On the other table was a diverse assortment of prayer books, behind it, a panel of men, some elderly and statesman-like, others more youthful. Above their heads were Christmas decorations, streamers, tinsel and the like, determined to add good cheer and decoration to the impossibly unadorned and exposed construction. If kitch could be used to describe the clashing combination of aesthetic elements and the unbearable lightness of being of the scene in general, then there was no word that could encompass the additional delight added by the overhead decorations.

As time wore on, the beat seemed to deepen and become more urgent and blissful. The pulsating Zulu words deepening in their pace, always joyful, ever more celebratory. Where is the sorrow of the funeral I

wondered? How little we privileged pale beings, black though our hearts may be, understand what lights the charcoal depths of darkness!

Soon the coffin arrived carried by a group of pall bearers. More bizarre than the decorations, was the panelyte covered coffin with its golden plastic mouldings and its polyester leopard skin blanket, placed on a low wooden scaffold carefully covered with a soft velvety cover in the centre of the floor. Only for one brief instant did one of the women, seated on the floor wail out in muffled pain. Soon the cries were drowned out by yet more joyful singing which said again and again in passionate acceptance, “Siyabonga Jesu, thank you Jesus, thank you!”

Reverend Hlongwana had died in a motor vehicle accident while returning from a religious gathering. He was still quite young, in his early fifties, a good, solid man, a respectful husband and father. He had adopted and was caring for several orphans. How ironic. In a country characterized by centuries of oppression where

love and long-term relationships had been destroyed by years of migrant labour, where poverty is endemic, where now after all that and the first hope that the democratic transition promised, AIDS had emerged, slowly and irrevocably, the most terrible of all diseases. In a land of fractured families, where men and women clove together for only one thing, it had spread like lightning, to where every second or third person one met in the street were HIV positive. It had become the giant killer, slaying almost all in its path. And then when almost nothing else, except of course for murder, rape and shooting could be the cause of death, he was killed in a road accident.

One can almost hear the young bodies thud to the ground as AIDS kills them – every weekend there are funerals. Of course there is no, thud, it is a silent killer. And Reverend Hlongwana dies in an accident!

“God is wise”, sing the congregants, “God knows. Thank you Jesus.”

A group of Manyano church women clustered around the coffin. They seemed to represent all the ages of women, some beautiful, others let us say, more worldly. They wore a white uniform – symbolic of purity with blue capes, blue belts and white, tight fitting headgear. Uniform though they were, on closer inspection one could see that each uniform had been individually sewn. Each cape had its own pattern and a strip of lace or other material indicating that each had been made separately from all the rest. They each lit and held a candle taken from a packet labeled “Lighthouse Candles”. As they stood around the coffin patiently, for what was to be hours on end, they sang and moved in unison with the congregation. The candlelight flickered and illuminated the warm brown and black faces – solid womanhood, many short and obese, a few slender and tall. One of them, an elderly woman, who must have been at least in her nineties sang and danced with them. She wore a different uniform that was more purple than blue. Her face was deeply aged, ruttled with wrinkles from tribulations of which she probably seldom spoke. She patted herself frequently with a handkerchief as she

perspired profusely and was uncomplaining as hot wax dripped onto her hand.

Gradually the Master of Ceremonies appeared from among the panel on the Bima – a mature youthful man in grey pants, white polycotton shirt and matching tie. He rejoiced, perhaps more accurately described as shrieked, through a microphone while dancing in frenetic synchronicity to the rhythm. Almost simultaneously his counterpart, whom I came to regard as the Mistress of Ceremonies climbed onto the Bima. She was also dressed in the white and blue uniform. She seemed quite youthful, perhaps in her late twenties or early thirties and although short was quite beautiful. A full bosom blossomed through the shapeless uniform. Her massive breasts seem to bulge and nipples harden as she suddenly burst into song – its power was thrilling – with the force of a diva on a stage in front of a crowd of a hundred thousand people. Her mouth opened widely, and from slightly below her in the gentle light one could see her soft lips, white, perfectly-shapen teeth, the roof of her mouth and her tongue as it quivered. The energy of her

voice seemed to shake the earth, and with perfect timing the key board thundered out a forceful accompanying electronic drumbeat that reverberated through the assembly. She smiled and willed the audience to provide the counterpoint to her melody. As if to answer a call, another beautiful young women dressed in a seductive lace top joined her and they sang a heart-rending duo. The incongruity of it made me sit up in wonder – suddenly I was not noticing the time.

Instead of the mourning of death, it was as if this was a celebration of life, with the two seductive bodies of these young women dancing and gyrating in some form of fertility ritual. I could imagine them heaving and sighing, panting and thrashing in sexual ecstasy and orgasm. As they cried out to Jesus thanking him for the pain in their lives, it was as if they were investing their total bodies, their passionate femininity in absorbing the thrust of any dagger that life sent and climaxing in its piercing. Mischievous eyes caught mine as if to ask, why aren't you singing, rejoicing and dancing.

As I was about to sink into the oblivion of being observer I was called to participate. To speak about and pay tribute to Reverend Hlnagwana. What could I say?

“Ngiyabingela – I greet you!” I said, and then in English “I ask the question, what is a real man? ” My voice boomed out over the loudspeaker larger than life. “No one can answer me. But Reverend Hlongwana *was* the answer. He was a real man!” The crowd listened and nodded appreciatively. “He was gentle and modest and kind to women and children. When I was impatient and unreasonable he quietened me down – and when many of you,” and I indicated those in the audience who knew what I was talking about, “were angry and ill-tempered yourselves, he asked you to be more cautious with your words. He was a moderate man, a man of peace. A real man. We will miss him”

After me, there were many speakers, some passionate and fluent, some stumbling for words. There were well presented tributes, far finer than mine – well articulated and moving. And in every break the sexy duo would

move us again and the assembly would stamp and stomp in unison for the love of Jesus. People sent little messages written on pieces of paper, all paying tribute to a kind and generous man. At one point a bald elderly man in a meticulous blue dress leaped to his feet, and with the zeal and rage of a praise-poet darted across the floor like a wounded cobra, spitting and hissing. He would bring his arm down like an explosive bolt onto the plastic table. A few words from an open prayer book – but very few! Then the Bima shuddered as he leapt theatrically to clasp a congregant in a fearful sobbing, dreading the Lord’s power and majesty. Like the elderly woman he perspired with the effort, and little beads of sweat dripped down between the folds of skin on his naked scalp. A few more leaps and bounds of lashing and wriggling like a dying snake, and then quiet and silence. “Siyabonga Jesu. Siyabongabonga ,,,,,,,bonga. The rhythm and music blended imperceptibly into his closing words.

What I wondered would be the effect of this type of passion of orchestrated excellence, if applied to the

problems of everyday life – they would melt away? Why were they thanking Jesus now in death as if in celebration?

It did not so much hit as dawn slowly on me, that they were not singing about death, coming to terms with it or trying to escape it. They were celebrating life – the only life they knew, funerals, funerals and more funerals. Life was a funeral. At the very heart of darkness, in the deepest caverns and dungeons of blackness, where there was not the slightest glimmer of hope, one could dance to the pulsating solidarity of the chorus in a place where there was no light at the end of the tunnel. These dark people knew the ways of blackness. They knew depths that palefaces did not. It was the time that people gathered together, sang together, danced together. They could party together for hours more without tiring. It was almost as if it was here as well that after the party, after they had eaten and satiated themselves that men and women would get down to the business of making love together. Call a spade a spade – fucking each other because their lives depended on it.

As if response to my thoughts, women from all round brought blankets out of Golden Horse transparent plastic covers and draped them over the coffin to absorb the protective spirit from Revered Hlongwana who lay within. These blankets would fire-up tender bodies as they lay together and celebrated the difference between men and women. If not that, it would simply keep them warm.

Then they opened the coffin and we all filed passed to see him – to see the peaceful face of Reverend Hlongwana, waxlike with the corner of a sheet carefully covering a small portion of his skull where suture marks sewed closed an injury that must have ended his life. His smile was that of the Buddha – he had escaped the terrible cycle of rebirth.

We solemnly walked out of the shelter and out of the marquee. At last I had my freedom. As a whitey, with a black heart and detribalized in my isolation, I had to escape. But for the rest, the mourning had just begun. There would be the burial and after that the eating and

beer drinking. And when that was finished there would be the “After Tears” party into the early hours of the morning where harder drink would flow and where young men and women in particular, could put aside the sorrows of the day and dance their erotic fertility dances until the climactic celebration yielded to the dawn and the origin of new life.

So, though this story ends, the funeral was just beginning.

GOODBYE DARLING DADDY

Dedicated to our parents and their parents

24 September 1997

Goodbye darling daddy. Its exactly a year since you passed away, so there's been ample time for me to ponder the meaning of your life and mine. By a stroke of synchronicity, today is also our national heritage day, so I can consider writing this testimony as part of my patriotic duty. I can write an epitaph in your honour and engrave on your marble headstone not only the love I feel for you but my tribute to the deeper meaning of your life, my life and inevitably the life of the nation and universe.

In etching the stone I am aware of its composite structure and the way in which the shifting sand of ages has been cemented by the powerful metamorphic forces of time into a rock that can be polished to a shimmering shiny surface and into which one can chisel ones eternal terse message of remembrance. As I unveil this compact obelisk, removing the temporary white shroud, I am

aware of the mottled streaks and granules on the polished surface. While they are now welded and wedded in an impenetrable and rock-solid surface, they bear testimony to a time long ago, when all the constituents were fluid and moving, part living and part primeval immutable matter.

Now all that once moved in the stone is still. Still as the grave that rests quietly here in the cemetery amidst all the other graves, most with their own tombstones and epitaphs bearing glossed-over testimony to the complex lives of all those that so recently moved among us. Unmoving, frozen in time, like the streaks and granules that mirror in perfectly flattened bas-relief the immortal remains of the transient flux of the past. Living evidence that the shiny, smooth surface we see is an artificial veneer, a few millimetres thick, covering the dull, coarse interior of a reality which is the greater truth of the stone.

In composing this eulogy I am guided by this emergent principle; that the surface variegated beauty we see, is a manifestation of a deeper unlovely core that unattractive

as it is, forms the framework of all that is aesthetic. In human terms beauty is built on the beast within. Beauty red in tooth and claw.

Dad, like all of us was a complex entity. There was the veneer that he held out to the world, then there was the deeper being, whose full nature will forever be buried within a unreachable complex, like granules in the stone. In many ways his life was a giant lie, but one that revealed a greater truth. In understanding the lie I gain a deeper appreciation of the truth.

It is trivial to say that Dad was kind; that he cared for people. It is trite to say he was humorous, dedicated, enthusiastic, courageous and deeply religious. How many other epithets could I use that would convey no greater understanding of him than if I had said nothing at all. Yet as I explore the deeper part of his being which is accessible to me, the mottled shiny surface of those beautiful qualities become more real even if they are the expression of the beast within.

My father's terminal illness was very brief. He had not felt quite well for a while. In early July he had gone to see a colleague, (not an easy action for him, being a doctor himself) and insisted that reassurances that he was suffering from a cold were not right. Some initial x-rays soon revealed that the superficial symptoms he was experiencing were manifestations of an aggressive large pancreatic tumour that had already spread to his liver. Minor symptoms of discomfort, perhaps a slight paling of the skin and minor loss of weight were all that reflected the explosive growth spreading within. Such a surprise. For even at that stage, he was a zestful man at the prime of his life. The oncologist was straight and matter of fact when asked the inevitable question of how long he felt my father would live. His estimate of two to three months was eerily accurate.

There was a strange paradox to his illness. Although he was seventy-nine years old at the time, a few years beyond the generous "three score and ten" that tradition assigns us, he was a zestful person, more successful in

his career than he had ever been and at the epitome of his earning capacity as a psychiatrist.

My mother, who was some seven years younger than him, had aged more rapidly than he had and seemed many years his senior. Gradually over the past few years an idiopathic and inexplicable neurological disorder had afflicted her; first this had led to a deterioration of motor control of her extremities, rendering her physically disabled; but then incrementally and more devastatingly it had caused a gradual blunting of her incredible intellect and made her much more prone to succumb to emotional tempests that raged across her being from time to time. At times she was as gentle and loving as the “holy mother”, filled with an all-consuming kindness to all things; at other times she raged with anger and resentment that was unreasonable and unforgiving. Often she was depressed and wanting to die. Through all this my father showed an infinite tolerance, love and almost boundless compassion. He listened painfully at night when she would waken him with stories of her fears, anger or depression. He gently humoured her with a

warm affectionate tolerance when she chided him in front of all of us. Lovingly he supervised her medication to try and ameliorate the undeniable suffering she was going through, both physically and psychologically. She was angry at him, because although he was older than she was, he was the one who was healthy, who could drive and who could support them. She was the one who was dependent, who needed to be cared for and who would inevitably die first. When finally she was told of his illness, the shock was terrible. How could it be possible that he was more sickly than she was? How could it be possible that he would outlive her?

It was at this stage that Dad and myself began to share some of his deepest and most private feelings. We shared his great anxieties for my mother and what would happen to her after he died. He was torn with anguish that she would not cope and would die soon after him. But there was nothing he could do.

It was a profound and bitter insight that I gained about death and dying as I walked with my father through his terminal experience. As I accompanied him through this

brief period, I was amazed at the powerful value of courage in facing death honestly without false hope. While appreciating that the coping mechanisms for death among different individuals cannot be the same, Dad's approach to dealing with death was quite extraordinary. Whether it was because he was a psychiatrist, which I doubt, or whether it was because of his own unique view of his predicament, he dealt with death in a manner that took my breath away and will I believe, help me in facing my own death.

On learning of the dreadful malignancy in his body, he treated it as if he were dealing clinically with a tumour in one of his patients. There was no denial, no pretending that he might get better and no resentment. He did not feel the need to pass through the various classical stages through which one is supposed to pass in coming to grip with one's impending demise. There was no anger, no bargaining or depression. In a manner that reduced his trauma and that of all of those who were close to him, he moved straight into the phase of active and engaging acceptance that his life would soon come to an end. He

immediately set out to get his affairs in order and worked ceaselessly to within hours of his death to tie together the untied strings of his complex life. Not least of all he courageously dealt with the unfinished business that he had not been able to before.

It was hard to understand where Dad's inexplicable courage had come from. He had never struck me as a person who I thought would be courageous in the face of death. He was not macho and if anything showed a somewhat irritating over protectiveness to anyone in the family exposed to any sort of dangerous situation. Although nominally an orthodox Jew, he had restricted his faith to observance of the high holy days and saying kiddush on Friday evenings. Although he did start "laying tephilin" at my brother's urging, and was reportedly moved by this, his formal religious faith, in my view, contributed very little to his ability to face death in the resolute manner that he did. What did happen was surprising and showed yet again the power of forces that lurk deep in the being of the individual. He contacted the Rosicrucians, that Ancient Mystical

Order of the Rosa Crux (AMORC), a society he had belonged to some fifty years ago as a medical student and young graduate - an organisation which to all intents and purposes he had lost all interest in soon after he was married. His explanation was that it would help him to make some meaning of his life, as the Rosicrucians believe in the immortality of the soul and the transcendental powers that all individuals possess if they exercise them adequately. But in fact in the end, he did not resort to overt Rosicrucianism, or for that matter to any faith. He seemed sufficiently sustained by his own belief and his determination until the very last days to care for his family, his patients and the people he loved.

I believe that his courage was drawn from a wellspring of fear, much greater and deeper than the fear of death. He was tormented, as he probably had been with a fear and guilt that had dwelt as a deep, dark secret, hidden within him from all of his family for over forty years. A secret so deep and painful he believed that if we learned of it we would hate and despise him into eternity. It was this despising from those that he loved that he feared far

more than death Dare he ever share this dreadful secret? Fortunately for his peace of mind, strengthened by increasingly warm and mutual affection as his disease progressed, he decided to reveal the most dreadful secret that was tormenting his being, even though he feared what it would lead to. With the greatest trepidation I had ever known in him, he told me a story that stretched the bounds of credibility. As if he had been in a thriller, where he had been a spy and deceived all he had known for virtually all of his lifetime. Once again the great principle was in evidence. The mysteries and turmoil that can shred the inside of a being may manifest only here and there by the slightest recognisable surface ripple. Like the polished marbled surface on his tombstone, the shine on my Dad's respectability and accomplished role as a husband and father, never betrayed the granules and layers within.

My father had been deeply in love with a woman I did not know all of his life. For almost all the years that he had lived with my mother and brought up our family, denying us nothing, showering us with affection,

spoiling us, looking after us physically and emotionally, always being with us and caring for my mother with the greatest imaginable tenderness through some of her most trying years, he had all along been deeply in love with Sally Smith. For over four decades he had cherished Sally and looked after her as well, assisting her and her son, somehow managing to be with her at significant moments for her in a life that paralleled that of our family. In some curious and inexplicable way this love had never ever had a bearing on his love for my mother, for whom he always had the deepest affection. It had also never been apparent to any of us, especially the three of us, his children. As for Sally, whenever I speak to her now, which I frequently do, she cherishes his memory and remembers the years of his selfless sacrifice to him. How strangely improbable that a man could run a parallel life in the same city for over forty years, devote time and energy to people in both separate universes, develop a separate set of friends, without the two contradictory worlds ever touching and annihilating each other. The pain and guilt he must have felt must have been unbearable at times; but having started it, there was

never ever any going back., not even at the end, when his greatest concern was to leave a legacy that would care for everyone.

My father was amazed by my reaction. Rather than the anger and hatred at him for his betrayal of our family and my mother, I was filled with a blinding love for him, an emotion that outstripped even the warmest affection that I had felt for him in the past. In a flash I understood both the profound ambiguity of his life, his torment and the true depth of his compassion and capacity to demonstrate affection. Perhaps most of all, I loved him for his love and support to my dearest mother, who more than ever in her life depended on his unconditional love over the past few years.

Dad died within a few weeks of revealing his awful secret, which he also told my sister who shares my view. As he gradually weakened, he dutifully took morphine to lessen his pain and made no fuss whatever about his demise. Although he never ever told my mother, her women's intuition had somehow given her the

understanding that she was sharing his love; and yet even though he grew momentarily distant from her in the last hours of his life as he lay dying she knew that her had deeply cared for her in the most profound and loyal way that a husband can.

As I look at the cold grey marbled headstone of my father's grave, tears come to my eyes. The cobbled interior of the human being is polished away to reveal only the hard shiny veneer that remains - but the beauty within the stone shines more brightly for me than all the external gloss.

“To our darling father, husband, brother, friend and doctor. Your zest for life and your dedication will always remain our inspiration”

Goodbye darling daddy.

LOCKED IN THE BOOT

9th March, 1996

It was his nightmare come to haunt him in his waking life. He did not feel the pain as his body thumped into the cramped space. Nor did he feel humiliated - it was just the terror of hearing that awful sound of the lid thudding closed. All his fighting had been in vain.

He would have rather they had shot him than being forced inside. But that was over now. They had overpowered him, and he had lost, and now he was here inside that most dreadful of all places - the boot.

He lay for an instant paralysed with dreadful fear. It welled up through him and made him nauseous with panic. He could not bear to think of what lay ahead.

First he became aware of the darkness. There was not a chink of light. Then he became aware of the smell of petrol, mixed with the subtle smell of grease.

He screamed and thumped on the metal. Again and again, desperately hoping, though he knew it was in vain, that they were tormenting him and that they would let him out so that they could see his face.

There were footsteps crunching on stones and tarmac outside. He also heard screaming, then the short staccato crack of a burst of gunfire. Then nothing.

Soon he thought they would be back for the car. Then they would drive it away. That at least would be something; because they could not want to drive far. Maybe they would drive for a while, then they would stop and let him out. Even take him out and shoot him. That would be joy! Anything but not to be stuck in a boot. But they did not come. It was silence.

Every few minutes he could here a car thunder past on the nearby road. Sometimes it would slow down as if the driver were anxious about the meaning of the car parked where it was, with some of the owners possessions

strewn around. But none stopped. None would dare to.

It was just a matter of time he thought. And though he did not want to, he smiled when he imagined how he would feel when the boot opened and he was able to climb out. He would have been able to look at this and know that he had lived through the worst torment he could imagine.

He could not bear to think of it. He pressed his hands to his face and shook his head uncontrollably with fear. It was awful, ghastly, terrible, frightening, petrifying and scary. There was no description for it. It was worse than anything he had ever imagined. It was worse than the nightmare. It was pure torment. It was a kind of pain that he could not endure.

It was when he thought of the word pain that he groaned. He realised that he had no pain now - but how would it be when his headache started. There would be all this and there would be the headache as well - with no hope of relief. And the thought filled him with an

apprehension that was so profound, he felt as if he was drowning in the unfathomable depths of the bottomless pit of Hades.

It was cool. The sun had only just begun to rise when the car was attacked. For the time being it was not uncomfortable. But that would soon change. He could just imagine the sun rising and shining down on the metal. The dreadful heat would grow until the metal would be too hot to touch. And it would become an oven - not an inferno, just an unbearable steady heat.

Then he had an idea. Suddenly through the terror he was thinking again. The jack and the spanners that he used to change the tires. He would use them to burst open the lid. He knew that in the darkness it would be impossible to see the latch to work out how to loosen it, even if he had a screw driver. Hope came flooding back. Would it work. Could he force it open.?

His first disappointment was when he realised he was lying on the board that covered the spare wheel. It was

difficult to get it open. He could lift it a little, but as he moved to get his hand behind it it would snap shut.

All at once his temper flared. Damn them! Damn death! Damn this boot! He would tear the metal with his bear hands. He thundered against the metal with an intense rage. Kicked and squeezed the lid with all the force he could exert. But nothing budged. All at once with a great heave he ripped the board beneath him and snapped it. Relief came surging back. He reached down between the the board and to his great joy he found the spanner and jack without too much difficulty.

He became aware that he was feeling hot. All the effort was causing him to sweat. He reached up and felt the metal above him. It was warming up. The sun was beginning to shine. He could feel the air warmed by convection off the metal surface.

The spanner was in his hand. He was not sure if he could succeed, but there was a steely determination in his heart - the fear had gone. He was in the abyss, but here was a

ladder. Frail though it might be, there was hope!

He hammered on the metal with the spanner. He screamed and shouted. Perhaps someone would hear the din and come to investigate. Nothing happened. Vehicles continued to thunder by.

His head was beginning to feel full - not a headache yet, but the dreadful prodrome that announced the inevitable migraine would follow. The heat, fear and entrapment were bringing it on faster than ever.

He grappled with the metal. For some reason he could not seem to find a place where the spanner would fit in to lever the boot open.

Then he thought of the jack. If he could use it, then he could generate tremendous force and burst the boot open. But no matter where he tried, he could not find a place to put it. Then he realised with anguish, that it was not long enough to do what he had hoped.

The dread came rushing back. In fright he hammered harder on the metal around him. Perhaps he could get through behind the back seat. But that did not work. It was solid metal sheet.

If only they would come back. He would plead with them to open the boot. He would give them anything - all the things he possessed. They would be wealthy. Surely he could persuade them that he was worth more alive than locked in this boot. He would even offer to work for them for a year - anything would be preferably to a slow lingering death.

Then he thought of death. It did not frighten him at all. It was what was to come before death that frightened him. The blinding pain of his headache would be made worse by dehydration. Then there would be the stifling heat. The choking, awful, dreadful, unbearable heat - like being baked alive. How would he die? How could he make it come faster and be less awful? Was there any

way that he could kill himself and make the end less dreadful?

Gradually the terror passed. It was very hot now. The headache had started and was beginning to throb. He was sweating profusely. He had taken off his clothing and had found the wind-screen washer bottle, which was still half full of water.

Every now and then he took a few sips of water through the plastic tube, which he had disconnected. A few teaspoons of it spread out on his body brought a coolness that was like a strong ocean breeze as one lay sunning on the beach.

Where would he like to be now he wondered? Where would paradise be? And he thought of his patio overlooking his pool. Thinking of the times that he had sat there and looked out over his vista, and then walked out to dip in the magical coolness of the pool; only to sit again in the cool draft of the patio. He felt himself getting up and walking into the kitchen and reaching into

its icy coolness of the fridge to bring out a bottle of lemonade. Sitting quietly and completely cool he was looking out again over the peaceful vista; not a care in the world, with no pain in his head and only the cold wind blowing on his skin refreshing it and bracing him with its frosty crispness.

Then the peacefulness that had come over him faded, and there was a lucidity of a type that he had not known before; he took the spanner and crammed it into a space that seemed as if it had always been waiting for it. He pulled on the spanner and metal creaked. A corner of the lid opened and bright light poured in, like light at the end of the tunnel. He pulled and pulled and the light grew larger and larger as if he were going through the tunnel. Suddenly it was large enough for him to climb through. He was in the light.

DREAMWORLD AND THE DISJOINTED DAY

19th October 2001

I see a connection. Like a wormhole between parts of the universe that have no business being so close. A junction across dimensions. But it is in the very linkage, tenuous though it may be, that meaning resides. In the end it is about making meaning of fragments that one can barely piece together. Groundhog day, endless repetition, always starting with the alarm clock going off in the morning. Instead of a bright new day it is the same old day, sometimes and often painfully mundane, sometimes and seldom, explosive and life threatening.

And so it was. I remember it as an open day. I was meeting groups and demonstrating, teaching etc. And this particular group fascinated me. They were from Pretoria, I think. Or maybe it was actually a group from Bloemfontein, anyway no matter. They were an intriguing group. It was as if they lapped up my every word. I did have a lot to teach, but to be honest, I learned

much more from them. It was not just the theory of it, I was actually learning.

They explained how they had used crafts to decorate a Pretoria Hospital. Their explanation was so vivid, I was transported there. I could actually see a few of the rooms, resplendent in beadwork on virtually every fitting and feature. The connection there is obvious.

Then they left, almost as suddenly as they had appeared. Then I was walking around a gallery, an art gallery of sorts, an extension of the complex where I had been teaching. It was composed of a long hall with a series of small enclaves along the length of each wall, creating semi-separate cubicles. There were various isolated people sitting in them. Isolated, I suppose because I did not know them.

I got talking to a couple in an enclave that featured an unusual woodcut. It was an upright, statue-like frieze, that much I can remember, constructed in primeval horizontal layered bands, much as if it were an

excavation cutting through time. Strangely in one of the layers were glass-like drawers, tiny condiment containers that slid out. I recalled that earlier I had been there and had been eating a plate of food during the lunch hour and I had actually taken out chutney from one of the drawers. It seemed absurd, now of course. How did I know that it was real and not just there for show? But somehow I had trusted it was real and it was. I see a connection here as well to an Ilala breakfast of muesli, fruit salad and yogurt and an quiet supper of curried fish with chutney. The meal had been with the larger group.

Gradually the connections between dreamworld and the disjointed day become more apparent.

So, we were sitting there in front of this wonderful freeze and I was talking the way I usually do about something I only partially know about. I recollect the expression of the woman. The face depicted her amazement. I did not know either her other person. It wasn't a large group, I think. I was telling them about Jazz, of which I know nothing. I even admitted as much

to them. Nevertheless I said that many forms of music are like Jazz. I was so certain I understood what it was about. It was like connecting crime to the socio-economics of household subsistence studies.

It was quite, how can one say, irreverent to bring it in. There was almost a sense of shock. The Director tried to fence off this unwelcome intrusion by insisting that the 30 Billion I referred to was less than 5% of GDP. Another of the scientists was even quicker to point out that it was only 2.5%. Clearly the thought that crime was a significant contribution to household income was a disjointed intrusion on the rational subject of household income. It made me realise that I interject ideas into my day, that are sometimes better left in dreams. My ideas are often too shocking for the day, as in the observation that all Jazz involves an improvisation that ends in a cacophony. I gave an example of a recent piece that I had heard where bottles were played. And a mixture of percussion instruments Perhaps I was thinking of African Footprint.

All kinds of fragments come into this. Each, a tiny piece of a jigsaw, some from a dream, some from reality. Like a telephone call to a lover you never meet. All the time she is there with you. Like your dreamworld in your everyday. Something you want to reveal, but cannot, so it stays hidden in your subconscious, too painful to deal with. The hidden lives of who we are.

So after listening to me patronisingly explaining my version of Jazz, including my insight that only a few of the great composers reach this kind of improvised cacophony, I moved on.

I remember sitting around a table outside, if you ask me, it was a patio café's, such as one might find in parts of Braamfontein, or Berea. I know this because when I had to eventually go on home, after the meeting with them, it was dark and I recall just before leaving that it was dangerous to be walking through the streets at that time.

But somehow the meeting had been worth it, simple though it was. A group of strangers for the most part,

talking superficially, but in a profound way, deeply revealing of themselves. That I see now has clearly to do with the group I was facilitating last night. I was among a group of black people, only one or two of whom I knew. But we were talking about Hlabisa, a place I now know well. I could richly anecdotalise my talk to them about long associations, my care and compassion for that part of the world and their interests. About my passion for development.

Then there was this image of somebody arriving. I had met her in a previous dream, She was not beautiful or anything. But I remember the brief contact being a peak experience. One of those unforgettable moments with a stranger where one connects. And she came back into the group, this time with the boyfriend she had alluded to at our previous meeting. The connection just was not the same. Eventually both of them left, and then different members of the group began to disappear. That was when I left. Strangers when we came, people left without saying goodbye. Like a meeting where one has got to know each other intimately, and participants stand

up and leave without acknowledging each other, vaporizing the intimacy of the meeting.

Perhaps to end off, I can remember the day, disjointed, like a dream in itself. I've already mentioned the breakfast. Fixated by the need to get the newsletter out all day, it remained a perseveration throughout the day, like in a dream the knowledge that one must do something, but never having the time, however important or urgent it is. Then the crazy meetings. I've already mentioned the socio-economic study. Like it fitted into another piece of the jigsaw. I presented the day before on caring for orphans. The nightmare is real. AIDS will devastate us like a holocaust. Poverty will increase. No dream could envisage the horror. Then working on the newsletter, talking to the printer, rushing to email images to him, parts of files. Forgetting to print out parts that I had lost. Colour, black and white, one or two colours on coloured paper. What is more disjointed, DreamWorld or RealWorld. Where is the horror? Where are the deceits that I cannot reveal, even to those I love. My wandering off and meeting strangers, being intimate,

and then them passing off. Meeting people I have known before, but only fleetingly.

There is a connection.

