



Issue 02

The New Richmond Reader

February 2012



1st Ed.

Your Literary News from the Heart of the Karoo



Photo by Jan Currin

We have been encouraged by the very favourable response to the first run of The New Richmond Reader from members of new and old writer's groups, followers of Booktown Richmond as well as those on the general mailing list. This, notwithstanding the gremlins which crept in and deleted a few paragraphs from Darrel's story; so we have included it again for your pleasure.

As we grow and expand our readership we shall stick to some principles which we feel are important; The New Richmond Reader will be open to good writing of all genres, from short stories, essays, criticism, poetry, and satire, to photographs and book reviews. Furthermore we encourage submissions in all languages from established writers as well as from those who have never had their writing reach farther than the hard drive of their own computer.

From a very early age I was a subscriber to Blackwood's Magazine, the literary magazine which unhappily died a sad death in 1980, having been one of the best and most highly regarded literary magazines for well over 100 years. It is our goal to follow the Blackwood tradition of complete openness and literary freedom, all the more so in these very worrying times in South Africa when there are forces at work trying to undermine the most fundamental of our hard fought for freedoms.

The insidious encroachment upon the freedom of the press will without a doubt have very severe implications on the other freedoms which we are beginning to take for granted, and which just as easily can be pulled from under our feet. The New Richmond Reader will never bow to censorship of any sort. We promise to be completely open to all points of view and to worship no holy cows, political or otherwise!

Please send your submissions to the below cited mail address and feel free to contact us with your critical suggestions and ideas.

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Only Some Stories can be Told

Written by Rose Willis

Sweet, petite, silver-haired, Dolly Daniels was the star of the retirement home. She hailed from Beaufort West, a little town in the Great Karoo, where love ruled and hearts were trumps. Most of her working life had been spent in the town library, a good place to find out who's who and what's what. It was also the ideal place to indulge her passion for romance. Over the years she collected stories of romantic tales mostly from dusty old newspapers in the badly lit basement. Like a diligent vacuum cleaner she sucked up details, copied them into notebooks and stored these in a battered old shoe box together with brittle, yellowing cuttings. The box was tied up with an beautiful blue ribbon that once graced her golden pony tail but that was way back before silver threads stole the sunlight from her hair.

Now and then Dolly would pat the box and mutter: "This is my retirement policy." She secretly cherished dreams of one day becoming a famous writer and perhaps even acquiring a pink Rolls Royce, but that never happened. Like so many of Dolly's dreams this one too eluded her and this was sad because her Irish mother had always told her she "had the gift of the gab" and should transfer it to paper.

In her heart of hearts Dolly knew writing was beyond her. Storytelling was her gift, but she'd not been able to do that either while raising a rebellious son and dodging blows from an alcoholic husband, who'd been such a looker in his youth. One of the boys, he'd always been ready for a drink, but never knew when to stop. Rent and grocery money drained into the bar and Dolly's pleas simply earned her a bashing.

"I can stop any time," he said, but even his employers knew that was not true. So he was fired again and again. Eventually he brought his habit home, and there his efforts to lift his spirits doused the fire of Dolly's feelings. She hated herself for not being able to leave him, particularly when she saw him lying passed out, snoring, grunting and farting on the living room sofa, while the TV burred on in the gloomy room. His decline tore at her heart. He neither washed, nor changed his clothes. He did not eat and in the end he had the good grace to die. The boy, like so many of Dolly's dreams, just vanished. She had not heard of or from him for years and

and truly had no idea what had become of him.

But that was all in the past. Nowadays Dolly was happy. Her new world, a far cry from her beloved Karoo, was oddly peaceful. Here wheelchairs and walkers ruled. Hearing aids could be surreptitiously switched off when the conversation got boring. Aches, pains, pills and operations were prime topics and took precedence over world news. After all, at 80 who really cared where the world was going, or if the petrol price were soaring. Cars were a long forgotten luxury. TV played havoc with rheumy eyes and no one was interested in seeing youngsters jump in and out of bed, making love with people they had just met.

"Ag no man! Such things are just not right. Have these film producers not heard of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases?" asked Dolly from the depth of her Christian heart and strict Calvinistic upbringing.

So, it was in this world that Dolly, the skilled storyteller, came into her own. Soon she was the star of the tea lounge. Her romantic tales were a draw card and as aromas of Rooibos, Ceylon, Earl Grey and coffee, filtered through the room, they leant back in their ancient armchairs to enjoy the theatre her words managed to conjure up.

Dolly described lovers lurking in the shadows, anxious to meet, yet fearful of discovery. She exposed the echoes of ecstasy that filtered down passages in deserted dwellings and spoke of poignant piano playing that sent mournful melodies out into the night. She revealed lost dreams that once had danced across the limitless plains particularly as the dusk saluted the dying day, and she managed to impart to her listeners the pain of unrequited love as well as stories of passions so pure that they seemed to surpass the grave.

There once was a pale pink rose, she said, that was planted as an icon of eternal love in a secluded valley, named The Hell, by an irascible tax collector. This isolated spot had no access road and every stick of furniture and morsel of food was be carried up and over the mountains on the backs of men and animals. Yet, even in this harsh world a gardener promised to love a young lass forever and planted a rose as a symbol of this pledge. The lovers departed, but the rose lived on, kept alive by rain and mountain run off. It bloomed for years in the abandoned garden filling days with its beauty

and nights with heady perfume. The inhabitants hated the taxman's dark name for this valley, said Dolly. They preferred Gamkaskloof, (Lion River Ravine).

During the Anglo Boer War a band of Boers, outrunning a British scouting party crossed into this valley totally unaware that it was inhabited. They inched down the mountain and as the mist cleared they were startled to see a man clad in goat skins surrounded by a cluster of children near a humble cottage at the bottom. He smiled as he came to greet them. He'd long been aware of their approach, he said. His children had seen them long before daybreak and had gotten close enough to hear what they were saying. None of the men had been aware of this and it scared them, but the man said he meant them no harm. If he had, he added, they would long ago have found out.

Dolly also shared the secrets of the Nuweveld Mountains, once the most blood-stained place in South Africa, but named "new fields" by migrant farmers who'd crossed the dry-land in search of grazing for their flocks. . She told of folks in fledgling towns, on far-flung farms and in isolated communities; all were linked to this area's passionate history, a rich tapestry of vagabonds, runaway slaves, absconding soldiers and sailors, missionaries and pioneers escaping crippling laws and bringing the women who loved them into this wilderness. The men at times had to deliver their own offspring because no one else was close-by to lend a hand and the women, plummeted into a world where recipes books had no value, were forced to find food in the veld, raise children and load guns to keep marauding bands from their doors.

The residents relished Dolly's stories. She told of a love so profound that a woman tried to throw herself into her husband's open grave; and of a Victoria West woman who became concerned when she saw pallbearers puffing under the load at her husband's coffin. He had been a hefty fellow in life, yet he seemed to have become heavier in death. Just then the coffin slipped from the grasp of a bearer, the others lost step and to the horror of the mourners it plummeted to the ground. The corner smashed and a river of gold sovereigns flowed out from a false bottom. Mourners gasped, the widow was aghast. The man who had sworn undying love had tried to take his wealth with him.

One day the sister from frail care discovered a boil to be

the reason that a resident could not sit in comfort. This spurred Dolly to tell of a 14-year old girl who took advantage of boils on new her husband's posterior and learned to ride. The man was no lesser person than Sir Harry Smith and the woman his beautiful Spanish bride, Juana de los Dolores de Leon. While Sir Harry was laid up, she arranged for an officer to give her riding lessons. Once she could ride she never left his side.

The harsh Karoo was the curator of many romantic tales, said Dolly, adding that love ruled in her old home town, Beaufort West, the boyhood home of world pioneer heart transplant surgeon Dr Christiaan Barnard. Here hearts were trumps and even the main road, Donkin Street, was linked to a love story.

"This road was named to honour of Sir Rufane Donkin, a true romantic, who acted as governor from when Lord Charles Somerset went to England on leave," said Dolly. "Sir Rufane idolized on his wife, Elizabeth, and the feeling was mutual. Soon after they met she swore her heart would be his forever and it was. After they married Sir Rufane was posted to India where Elizabeth died shortly the birth of their son. Sir Rufane was devastated. Before he buried her he had her heart embalmed and placed in an ornate casket. He carried this with him until the day he committed suicide years later on their wedding anniversary. Then, Elizabeth's heart was placed in his coffin, to remain with him for eternity, just as she had promised."

Dolly loved this tale and always ended up by saying: "They don't make men like that anymore!" She totally ignored the old man in the corner, who countered: "Thank goodness."

Her listeners were outraged by scandals caused in Britain by Josephine Brink, precocious Richmond lass, who went to Europe where she changed her name to José. Beautiful, able to have almost any man in the world, she began pursuing a short, fat, nondescript, British nobleman, Ernest William Beckett, Baron Grimthorpe. He treated her abominably, promising to marry her when his wife died, but he never did, not even when she became pregnant. She then caused a scandal by hinting the King was the father of her son, and even had a painting done of him with the shadow of the King in the background. In time she returned to South Africa, re-married mining magnate John Lace, after persuading him to add Dale to his surname.

She squandered his entire fortune, but despite this he always loved her. He told friends that living with her was an agony, but the thought of being without her was unbearable.

Dolly's audience was intrigued by the story of a Scottish professional whistler and mandolin player, who stole the heart of a Karoo farmer, who crossed the world to marry her. On another day she told of emptiness left in the hearts of the townsfolk when the municipal auditor's wife, a fantastic singer died.

Then, Dolly told of a handsome young man who brought light and love to Beaufort West. He "imported" the first electric lamp and installed it outside his shop. According to the newspaper it was "very small but it shone so brightly in the dark, that villagers stepped out just to see it." This man swept the mayor's daughter off her feet and married her within a week of their meeting. Their love developed at such a pace it was impossible send out wedding invitations, yet "a goodly number turned up to shower the couple with rice and orange blossoms and to enjoy excellent wedding cake provided by the groom's friends".

Then, there was the story of a bride left at the altar. A dot on the map marks Bruidegomsberg (Bride Groom Mountain) where legend has it a young man on his way to be married lost his life. The wedding was to take place in Stellenbosch, but on the appointed date no bridegroom arrived. The bride was devastated. She felt she had been jilted. Only days later did she discover that her beloved had set out timeously with his best horses and a Cape cart, but while negotiating a steep and treacherous mountain pass, a dassie darted out and startled the horses. They shied, lost their footing and this sent the cart plummeting down the mountain side. While guests waited under the oaks, the groom and his horses lay dead at the bottom of the ravine, next to the crumpled cart.

And, so stories of loves and lovers rolled on day after day, but there was one that Dolly never could, nor ever would tell. It was linked to the village patriarch, the father of several handsome and eligible sons. When they became too "old to live in the main house", their father turned the adjacent stables into rooms and in so doing inadvertently created a new walking route through the village. Prowling moms and luscious lasses streamed past the new rooms, termed "Maiden's Hope" by village

wags. Dolly remembered this with amusement. A tear came to her eye as she remembered Bill. Against stiff competition she'd caught his eye and against a kaleidoscope of sunsets, they had fallen in love. The magnificent ring he placed on her finger now dangled from a slim chain around her neck. He was never able to fulfill his promise to marry her - a war and a grenade ended those dreams. Dolly felt dead when she heard the news, but a year later dapper David Daniels won her hand.

In times of financial strain he'd often suggested they sell the ring, but she refused, saying they'd need it in their old age. However, in the dark of night, when ghosts of the past came out to roam the shadows of her room, Dolly knew that it was this ring that helped drive David to drink.

About the Author



Rose Willis

Rose Willis became an icon of the Karoo – an area she had never even heard of until 1990. Then a joke brought her to the region and she never looked back. Feeling jaded after helping a client obtain a listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, Rose and her husband, Wally, told friends they were going to drive down the road, find a house they liked and move there. This was greeted by guffaws, but they did exactly that.

At Beaufort West they found the “skins” salesman selling a divine old mansion on the edge of town. In the midst of a divorce he wanted to divest himself of this investment, allegedly designed by Sir Herbert Baker in 1903 for one of the town’s first advocates. It had an elegant past, but it had been battered in the name of “renovation and restoration”, yet Rose loved it and they bought it. This was quite typical of Rose’s impulsive decision making. Way back she had stepped straight out of the class room and into the world of business, when friends were taking a break before finding a job. She had no time to waste, she said, she wanted to get on with life and so she did. From her initial job on a newspaper, she moved into promotion, public relations and advertising, working for multinationals and local conglomerates in the industrial and electronics fields, both here and abroad.

Now, she felt it was time to start a new chapter in her “Book of Life”. This house was perfect. It had fireplaces in most rooms, a huge kitchen (and she loved to cook), a mountain in the back yard, the Karoo National Park for a neighbour and it came complete with ghosts and romantic stories. It won’t work, warned friends, who reasoned Rose held city life too dear and that the hinterland would be too limiting. They were wrong. Take a break, fix the house, move on to Cape Town, they advised. That too did not work because before Rose realized it, the Karoo had crept into her heart.

Totally captivated by her new environment Rose set off in search of a job. No one was interested, but she persisted and eventually the then Regional Services Council offered her a mornings-only job, for six months only, so that she “could prove to herself that there was no work for her in the Karoo.” That was enough. She had a foot in the door. So, from a humble start with no office, no phone, no

desk, no computer, she set to work. In time the props were added and Rose was able to spend 13 years promoting the Karoo. She served on many committees, boards and councils. She attended local and international travel shows and she talked on every aspect of the Karoo that people were interested in hearing about. In so doing Rose helped the Karoo gain recognition in South Africa and abroad. Her efforts were so successful they won her many top awards including one for being the best communicator in a South African municipality and another, from the Western Cape Government, for being an unsung heroine of tourism.

In the beginning there was little more than Lawrence Green’s Karoo, as a reference, but once she started to dig Rose found so many interesting snippets that she created Rose’s Round-up, a unique little newsletter, which has been published regularly on a monthly basis since 1993. Then, in 2003, Wally died and with him went some of the magic, so she packed her several half-written books and many boxes of Karoo information and relocated to her family in Bloemfontein. There she wrote a popular book of Karoo recipes, published by Struik and dedicated it to Wally, the wind beneath her wings. This year she intends to blow the dust off of the boxes of half done work that line the garage walls, so who knows, perhaps more books will follow.

Karoo Dawning

Written by Darrel Conolly

Petrus de Waal had enjoyed a privileged if not a full life. The only child of wealthy sheep farmers, Marthinus and Sarie de Waal, he'd been born, bred, betrothed and now sadly bereaved on Jakkalsdal, the huge Karoo farm where, save for his time at school and war, he'd spent his sixty-five years. He glanced lazily at the glass in his hand then turned to the man-mountain seated alongside him. "Ja, Kleinjan," he sighed, "we've come a long way together, you and me."

There followed an uneasy silence as Kleinjan Baartman set aside his book, drew heavily on a big black pipe, then slowly released a thick cloud of smoke through yellowed teeth and broad nostrils from which a mass of curly hair sprouted. Kleinjan was a man of few words. A man whose face, however, spoke many. He had been born not two weeks after Petrus, the first son of Ouseun and Meisie Baartman, foreman and head cook respectively to the De Waal family. As children, Kleinjan and Petrus had been inseparable, but such were the influences on young Petrus - the prejudices of his parents and peers, the intransigence of his teachers, the blind faith of his preachers, the bias of the media, the hypocrisy of the law-makers, the silence of a society which chose not to question, and the impunity of the law-enforcers who controlled that society's every move - that they, understandably it could be argued, grew apart in the years that followed. This estrangement had proven a cruel and bitter experience for Kleinjan. To Petrus, it had been a necessary evil - or so his parents, and in time his own conscience, would have him believe.

When eventually Kleinjan replied, it was with slow and measured words. "A long way, ja," he acknowledged. Then with eyes fixed on his pipe, he pressed a gnarled finger into glowing embers, as if to emphasise his point. "Together?" he questioned cynically. "Not always, broer. Not always."

Petrus shifted uneasily in his chair. "Whatever," he sighed in resignation, as he sought to move the conversation in another direction. "And now she's gone."

Kleinjan could but nod his head in silent acceptance and let the wetness that welled in his eyes speak of their shared loss.

The two men were sat on the wide stoep that, with its polished floors and lofty corrugated-iron roof, ran the perimeter of the Jakkalsdal homestead, Kleinjan with his pipe and book, Petrus his brandy and memories. Before them lay the great open expanse that is the Karoo; the far-off mountains - just minutes before a sombre grey - now daubed with lashings of mauve and purple; the endless blue emptiness above awash with delicate wisps of pink, and red, and crimson; and at the very heart of it, nature's ultimate icon, a glorious amber-coloured sun, so dominant and so radiant that when, in the stillness of that passage of day that is dusk, a flock of birds flew by, it was as if all the feathered creatures of this vast and ancient land had as one, taken to the sky.

Petrus sipped at his brandy and leant back in the old rocker. "And now she's gone," he repeated to himself for the umpteenth time, and remembered how she had come into his life that unforgettable September morning, so very many years before.

It was 1935 and both he and she were home from boarding school for the September holiday. They met at the Carnarvon Spring Fair; she a peaches-and-cream bubble of youth in the throws of blooming, he an awkward adolescent who's pimples already had. She, the only grandchild of an 1820 Settler who had tired of British life in that corner of the African continent that was Grahamstown, he, the only grandchild of a trek-boer who'd simply tired of trekking. She, raised some thirty kilometres from Jakkalsdal, yet as only occurs in places rich in land and poor in resources, a next-door neighbour. She, who spoke so little Afrikaans and he so little English. So diverse were their backgrounds, observed Ouseun Baartman in later years, that the Almighty had ordained their coming together, for the good of the Union he had reasoned, whose twenty-fifth anniversary their meeting coincided with.

Despite the great distances that for much of the time separated them, their relationship blossomed over the ensuing years, with the two corresponding regularly - she from Port Elizabeth and he from Graaff-Reinet - their letters of longing and loving often overlapping, such was the frequency with which they wrote and the infrequent nature of postal deliveries. Holidays were eagerly anticipated, relished on arrival and bemoaned for their brevity when at an end. One year she and her parents had travelled to Hermanus for the Christmas holiday, and so unbearable had been their separation

that Petrus had sworn never to be parted from her again, a vow, alas, he would be forced to break not three years later.

It was the tragic death of her father that precipitated their marriage. With her mother, Isabelle, bedridden and ailing, ownership of the family's sprawling farm, Malvern, passed to her. And so it was that on the very day that Great Britain and France declared war on Hitler's Nazi Germany, Petrus Ignatius de Waal took Mary Sylvia Fitzgerald, then just nineteen years of age, to be his lawfully wedded wife.

Petrus and Mary dreamed of a family unlike those that they had been born into. They dreamed of a large family and spoke on their wedding day of the Jakkalsdal homestead resonant with the sounds of children. Many of them; six, seven, maybe more! And long may the De Waals of Jakkalsdal prosper and grow.

But this was not to be, for the Almighty had willed that Petrus could not father such a family. The humiliation of it drove him to bouts of deep depression unlike anything his young mind had experienced, and were it not for Mary's enduring patience and undying love for him, Meisie Baartman once later suggested, Petrus would surely have taken his own life. Instead, he sought solace in his work. But none was forthcoming, for whichever way he turned, it was as if all around him knew of the disgrace that was his infertility. It came as little surprise to Mary and all who knew of his shame therefore, that when the call to service came, Petrus wasted little time in signing up to fight the Nazi menace. He'd be a man among men in a place where one's manhood was measured not by the efficacy of one's seeds, but by the boldness of one's deeds.

Four long years of war awaited young Petrus de Waal, and for those who remained on Jakkalsdal, four equally long years of drought. Indeed, these would prove to be the years that shaped the future of both the De Waal and Baartman families, as it was during this time of heartbreak and hardship that both Isabelle Fitzgerald and Marthinus de Waal passed away. It, too, was the time when Kleinjan Baartman not only took his childhood sweetheart to be his wife, but at the insistence of Mary and to the consternation of the local farming community, also took up residence with his bride in the old Fitzgerald homestead of Malvern. "Now don't listen to a word that anyone says about you and Lisa moving

into Malvern," Mary had told him. "With Petrus away at war and his father dead and buried, it's up to you and me to keep this little lot afloat. That's a big responsibility, Kleinjan, so as of today I'm appointing you manager of both farms. And I won't have any farm manager of mine living in a shack; no matter what the colour of his skin!"

With Petrus 'up north' and, Mary mysteriously 'otherwise occupied' during the summer of 1943/44, the two would see each other just twice in all these years of war and want. Never would Mary explain her whereabouts during that summer, and because of his unwavering faith in her, never would Petrus raise the question. Quite how Kleinjan had managed both farms single-handedly for the better part of six months still baffled an extremely appreciative Petrus, and yet he'd shown little, if any, gratitude at the time. It was an attitude the big man had resented deeply.

A last ray of sunlight settled briefly on Petrus's face as chin on chest, he watched the brandy swirl back and forth in the balloon glass he idly twisted in one hand. Relationships were like that, he mused. Ebb and flow. Bad times, good times. It was natural therefore, that death should be part of the cycle. The ebb and flow of life, as affected by death. He'd often heard it said that a death in the family brought its members closer together, but up until this very moment, had never given much thought to it. For sixty-five years he'd known Kleinjan. Or had he? How well do you know someone, he questioned, when you're unable even to own up to your most basic shortcomings? They'd spent a lifetime together and yet he'd never been man enough to admit that it was Mary who had shown him the light of day. A lifetime together and he'd never had the stomach to acknowledge that it was she who had proved to him just what a coward he was and how good a friend was Kleinjan. The time to right this inexcusable wrong was upon him. "Know something, ou seun?" he said as he battled to find the right words. "If it weren't for Mary, the two of us might not be sitting here today." He looked deeper into his glass in search of inspiration. Or was it courage? "And if it wasn't for this dop, I probably wouldn't have the guts to tell you what I'm about to.

If Petrus was unsure of how well he knew Kleinjan, the same could not be said of Kleinjan's understanding of Petrus. Sensing a long outstanding, yet by now unnecessary explanation was imminent; the big man

squirmed nervously in his seat, but as was his way, said nothing.

“It was back in 1964. December 1964,” recalled Petrus. “I remember it as if it was yesterday. We were sitting right here on the stoep; Mary and I, just gazing at the stars. It was hot. Jislaiik, it was hot! Muggies everywhere.

“It’s crazy, isn’t it?” she said. ‘Here’s this fellow in America, Martin Luther King Junior or whatever he calls himself. Anyway, here’s this black fellow being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent resistance to racism. Yet just six months ago we jailed a man who espouses precisely the same principles. For life, mind you. We sent the man to jail for life, just because he demanded the same things for his people that you and I take for granted. Does that make any sense to you?’

“Who? This Mandela ou? But he’s a communist,” I said. Gees, Kleinjan, she nearly exploded, ou seun!

“Communist? Who said he’s a communist? You don’t know what you’re talking about, Petrus! He’s no more a communist than you are, and that’s saying something.’

“Well, he’s a terrorist. They proved that ...’

“They proved what, Petrus? They proved absolutely nothing! Anyway, I’ve had enough of this ridiculous conversation. The trouble with you is that if you have a problem with another nation or race, you automatically label them. Anyone who holds different views to your own is an imperialist, a communist or a terrorist. That’s particularly rich coming from someone who spent four years of his life fighting a fascist! And while we’re on the subject of labels, Petrus, I’ve got one for you. You’re a racist! If not an out and out racist, then certainly a separatist, and to be quite frank, I don’t know which is the worse of the two evils.’

“Shoo, Kleinjan! I’d never seen her so mad. She was fuming! So I tried to calm her down and get her to tell me what gave her the idea that I was a racist. You know, explain. I think that deep down most of us are racists; whites I’m talking about. But not in a vindictive way, if you know what I mean. It’s just the way we are.”

A red hue of embarrassment swept Kleinjan’s tawny face. Not the embarrassment that comes of being at

odds with one’s own shortcomings, but that which derives from a friend’s discomfort.

“Well, eventually she quietened down a bit, but she obviously still had a lot she needed to get off her chest. You know what it’s like with a married couple; you need to discuss something unpleasant, but because you know your partner will still be there tomorrow, you keep putting it off. Days, months, even years go by, and then something sparks it off and pow! ... it all comes out. At the end of the day though, it was us - you and me - that was on her mind.”

Kleinjan readjusted his position then lifted his large frame from the chair and emptied his pipe into the flower bed below.

Unmoved by his friend’s coyness Petrus pressed on. “I could see she was upset. ‘Seeing you and Kleinjan together,’ she said, ‘I’m often reminded of two lines from a song my grandfather would sing. I think it was his school’s anthem and he’d sing it whenever he was in a melancholy mood.’ She sang it for me, Kleinjan, in that beautiful voice of hers.”

Petrus wiped a tear from his eye. Immediately the big man beside him reached out and placed a comforting hand on his arm. “Go on,” he said softly, “she’s listening.” And in an unsteady voice Petrus recited the lines that had meant so much to the grandfather of the woman who had meant so much to both of them: “Forty years on, when afar and asunder, parted are those who are singing today.”

For a few moments the two men sat in silence, the one gradually regaining his composure, the other struggling to retain his. When eventually Petrus spoke, it was in full voice. “Although for some reason she never asked him, it was pretty obvious that the song reminded him of his school friends. ‘How sad it must have been for him,’ she said, ‘knowing that he’d never see them again, especially with him being in a strange land so far away. Forty years, Petrus. That’s a long time to hold someone in memory. Apart from the war years, you and Kleinjan have been together for almost fifty! How fortunate you both are. Yet look at the way your friendship has disintegrated. And it’s all your doing, Petrus.’

“I tried to defend myself, but she’d have none of it. ‘Have you forgotten those letters you wrote me from

school: like the one in which you said how you couldn't wait to get home; not to see your parents, or me for that matter, but to show Kleinjan how your place kicking had improved; or the one about the riempiestool you'd made for him in a woodwork class. They may seem trivial and somewhat childish now, but at the time they meant so much to both of you. Equally important - and I hope you'll never forget this - while you were at school in Graaff-Reinet, he was being put to work on the farm. A child denied an education by your own father because of the colour of his skin, damn it! Can you begin to comprehend just how far that sets a family back? Do you have any idea how it must have hurt? How it must still hurt? I doubt you do.

"And what of the war years when you were trying to find yourself, or whatever it was you were doing? He ran two farms after your father's death. Two farms. Not his farms, Petrus: yours and mine. You can't have forgotten that already, surely! It was love! Can't you see that? A deep, brotherly love that Kleinjan had for you that drove him for all those years. But that was a long time ago. Over twenty years ago. And all the while I've watched the two of you drift further and further apart; you, by fear of ridicule at the hands of some worthless people you call friends, he by fear of persecution at the hands of Vorster's henchmen. How sick is a society that allows its elected politicians and civil servants to drive a wedge between friends? No, family! For Kleinjan is family, as you will one day discover. How sick is a society that, having erred so, makes no attempt to correct its wrongs, nor seeks redemption?"

"She was right, of course. She always was. But I had no answers, so I kept my groot bek shut. The only thing that puzzled me was the bit about you being family. I mean, you're like a boet to me, I know, but the way she said it you'd have sworn we were blood brothers. But she wasn't finished. Oh no.

"When last did you fellows have a drink together?" she asked. 'By that, I mean a real session. I'll tell you when. Twenty years ago! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Mary,' I said, 'he's twenty miles away!"

"Thirty two kilometres, Petrus. I do wish you'd get used to decimalisation. It's been with us for four years and is not about to go away. Be that as it may, you visit Malvern at least three times a week, so what's preventing

you from stopping over for a drink once in a while?"

"Kleinjan, I'm embarrassed to admit it, ou seun, but I still didn't understand what she was getting at. 'Gees, Mary,' I said, 'we've ... sorry ... you've given him a nice house - a bloody mansion in fact - and we pay him as much as any white farm manager I know of. Then there's his kid. It costs us an arm and a leg to keep the little bugger, what's his name? Clinton! Yeah, to keep Clinton at that fancy school in Grahamstown.'

"I'm talking about friendship, Petrus, not your working relationship with the man or your moral duty to his family.' She paused, and with that look of hers - you know the one where she'd let you know exactly who was wearing the pants - she said to me, 'While we're on the subject - and this is something I've been meaning to discuss with you for a while now - for the job Kleinjan is doing, his salary is simply no longer good enough. I think we should give him a share of the business.' I couldn't believe my ears! 'But that's illegal,' I said. She gave me that look again, 'Then we'll just have to find a way around it, won't we. Apart from all his hard work, you don't know how good Kleinjan has been to you. One day you'll find out, and I just hope I'm still around to see the look on your face when you do.'

"I don't know what she meant by that last remark, but there you have it. That, ou seun, is how you came to be our partner, legal or otherwise: through Mary's wisdom and the goodness of her heart. Nothing to do with me, I'm ashamed to admit."

The big man rose gingerly from his chair and moved to the edge of the stoep. With one hand in his pocket, the other clutching the pipe he now sucked on, Kleinjan looked out over the endless plains that stretched before him. Plains he knew so well. Stark, moody, ugly, beautiful plains. He had been born amidst these plains on Jakkalsdal, he reminded himself, and would more likely than not die amidst them on Malvern, just 32 kilometres away. How confined had been his life. How parochial.

Night had fallen and a myriad stars now filled a black sky. In the distance Kleinjan could hear an isolated lamb bleating as the last of the sheep were herded into the kraal. It was the cry of a straggler. Just five years ago he could have told from here which lamb it was. Today, he couldn't be bothered. He was too tired; too bloody

tired to bother. With his back to Petrus, he took the pipe from his mouth and watched the smoke as it disappeared into the night. "Ja well, that was all a long, long time ago, broer. Nothing you can do about it now." He stared into the blackness and reflected on those lost years. "How time flies," he sighed. "Struth, it's 1985 already! Nineteen eighty-five," he repeated slowly. "How time flies." Wearily, he turned to face Petrus. "See you in the morning, broer," he said, and shuffled into the house.

Alone. Petrus de Waal felt sadly alone: lost of Mary and lost of hope. For whilst there had been Mary, there had been hope. Hope that the inevitable may never occur in his lifetime. That when twilight befell them, he might perish before she. It was less painful, he concluded, for a woman to preside over the death of a family line than it was for a man. The Fitzgeralds of Malvern were no more. How long would it be before the same would be true of the De Waals of Jakkalsdal? He leant forward, put his hands to his face, and wept.

Mary Sylvia de Waal was buried in the small Fitzgerald cemetery under a tree that only a European could contrive to burden such a parched land with: a large weeping willow which drank thirstily from a span of water caged by the dolerite-capped koppies that surrounded it. Perched on a hill, not a stone's throw away, lay Malvern, once of Fitzgerald, now of Baartman.

They sat in the open, at the foot of the hill that separated homestead from cemetery. The Anglican priest was a tall young man of commanding presence and voice. He spoke first of a childhood romance, the fires of which were lit when sweet Mary Sylvia Fitzgerald was just fourteen years of age, which caused some older members of those gathered to fidget uneasily in their fold-up wooden chairs. He recounted the initial difficulties their relationship had endured, she being of British stock and he of Afrikaans, which invited some in the congregation to nod their heads knowingly. The priest then reminded all of the day Petrus Ignatius de Waal took nineteen-year-old Mary to be his bride, and this was greeted with sounds of approval, for no young girl should remain unspoken for at such an age.

Wiping spots of sweat from his brow, the priest then referred to Mary's utter devotion to Petrus and how, early in their marriage, she would tell those so brazen as to question the couple's childlessness, that it was she

who could bear no children. This caused many to turn their heads and look in pity upon Petrus, and Petrus to drop his head in shame and gaze downward, while with scuffed boots he nervously stubbed the coarse grass which fought survival underfoot.

The clergyman then spoke of the De Waals' unyielding commitment to a better life for all who worked on their land, and this brought Petrus further unease for he knew that had it not been for Mary's hard work and determination, his meagre efforts would certainly have counted for naught. The congregation also learnt for the first time of how one evening shortly before Petrus had left to fight the good fight, Mary had chanced upon Kleinjan who, by the light of a candle, was teaching himself to read. So moved had Mary been that she had immediately offered her help, yet so proud was Kleinjan that he had politely declined. And so began a learning process which, had common sense prevailed, may have taken mere months, but instead took years. The value of self-esteem, however, cannot be measured in such simple terms, said the priest, and it was in this context that Kleinjan's decision to 'go it alone' should be seen. This touching insight was acknowledged with polite approval from those seated, and spontaneous hand clapping from those standing to the rear, which in itself resulted in calls of 'shush!' from those seated to the left, and 'shoo!' from those seated to the right. Returning to the De Waals' humanitarian efforts, the priest cited, in particular, their lifelong commitment to the Baartman family, who had for many years now occupied no less a dwelling than the Fitzgerald mansion, a revelation which evoked open gasps and stifled cries of 'skande!' from those to the left of the gathering and 'how could they?' from those to the right. And when the mutterings had subsided, he recalled how the Baartmans' boy had been schooled in Grahamstown, at one of the finest colleges in the land, which prompted the local member of parliament to rise from his seat, cry out that such a gesture was a 'bloody waste of good money!' and storm from the service in protest. The priest then touched on how, despite the laws of the land, Kleinjan Baartman had for the past twenty years shared equally in the profits and losses, the ups and the downs of Jakkalsdal and Malvern farms, which caused some to turn and look upon Kleinjan with envy, others to stare at Petrus in disgust, and Captain Fourie of the local constabulary to reach into a pocket for his notebook.

Once more putting handkerchief to brow, the priest

now told of Mary's decision in December of 1943 to be prosper and grow.

of child, which caused all of those remaining to turn in unison and gaze upon Petrus in puzzlement, and an ashen-faced Petrus to stare back at them aghast. With sweat now running freely from the priest's forehead, he told of how Mary's uncle, also a man of the cloth, had helped bring the baby boy into this world on the third day of September in 1944 and how he had, just days later baptised him Peter-Jan, whereupon collective cries of 'siestog!' reverberated from the left flank of the gathering, and 'good grief!' from the right. When eventually a quiet of sorts returned, the priest explained that the boy had been christened Peter after Mary's husband Petrus, and Jan after the boy's father, news of which caused Miss Priscilla Fitzgerald, a maiden aunt of the deceased, to pass out and fall from her chair and all others to rise from theirs and look down upon Petrus in abject horror as he, equally horrified by the revelation, glared back in stunned silence.

The priest went on to inform his now bewildered audience that Peter-Jan had been raised in the Port Elizabeth home of Mary's uncle. He told of how he'd excelled at school and, of his own choice, had studied agriculture at the University of Stellenbosch. Then, the priest said, soon after graduating from university in 1964 Peter-Jan had, with the help of his mother, bought a small farm in the Willowmore district. This had afforded him both security and the courage to propose to Sandra, who he had met at university and who he duly married a year later.

Kleinjan Baartman gently laid a hand on Petrus de Waal's thigh, as tears streamed from both men's eyes.

Putting his notes to one side, the priest then looked directly at Kleinjan and Petrus. Peter-Jan and Sandra, he continued, now had three lovely children; Petrus and Kleinjan, who were gangly youngsters in their early teens, and Mary, an eleven year old with a peaches-and-cream complexion.

"Then, in the summer of 1971," concluded the priest, "like my foster father who lies buried behind me, I was called to the cloth. And so it is both in this capacity, and that of son of the deceased, that I have I come here today: to bury my mother in the presence of my father, and the man whose name I and my family bear."

And long would the Baartman-de Waals of Jakalsdal

About the Author

Durban born and bred Darrel Conolly came to Richmond in the Karoo some few years ago, where he occupies himself writing both South African historical as well as fiction material. Darrel is well known for his acute social commentary and incisive wit. He is to



Darrel Conolly

be found at the KarooZing Richmond Gallery on Loop Street in Richmond where he occupies himself tending his garden or madly typing away on his computer; always classical music in the background.

A Divorce

Written by Keith Cornelis-Britz

Anyone who has lived through a winter in the Free State will tell you that there are wonderful dry bright days even in the heart of winter. When I got up that morning it was icy but when I left work to go to the Supreme Court the day had warmed. The sky was blue and walking down Maitland Street on the sunny side I felt the warmth of the sun. I needed its warmth because I was terrified. Even though my attorney had done her best to explain to me what the day held I felt weak in the knees. I walked past R Muller and there was music playing in the shop. A song was belting out – Ag Pleez Daddy Take us to the Drive-in. I hated that song with a passion. As much as I loved and appreciated Jeremy Taylor's talent for the satirical - that song got under my skin. The worst of it was that you couldn't get away from it – if you listened to Springbok Radio, which I did, it was on their play list and it seemed as if it was played every five minutes.

What got to me was that I felt the song took the mickey out of the Afrikaner unfairly. The accent was phoney because I had grown up in an Afrikaans community and I had never heard anything that vaguely resembled the accent which he used in that song. The irritation factor overcame my own apprehension for what lay ahead and soon I was at the Supreme Court and met up with my Advocate and Attorney. We went into the Court.

It was a large room that was filled with school type desks at which attorneys and advocates sat with their clients. We sat down and waited for the Judge to appear. I noticed that down the one side of the room backless benches had been placed against the wall and people were coming in and sitting there. I gathered that that was the 'public gallery', and three women drew my attention. They were dressed in midi-length lurex, Sunday best, with rather odd old fashioned hats on their heads. Don't forget that in those days a woman was not allowed into court without a hat on her head. Their demeanour was serious and their faces grim. They sat there whispering to one another, slightly overcome by the occasion, fully aware that divorce was socially beyond the pale.

The Judge entered, we rose and the court was in session. My case was seventh on the role and so I settled down

to wait, in the meantime absorbing the court procedure and mentally preparing myself for my turn in the box. I was so scared that my attention was drawn away from the three ladies at the end of my row. The divorce cases proceeded with decorum yet smoothly until case number six was called. A lady got up and went into the box and was sworn in. Her advocate stood up from where he was sitting and the case proceeded. The Judge read through the affidavits before him and asked her if they were correct and she nodded. Her Advocate then asked the judge to let her tell the story in her own words. He did this with a slight smile on his face and the Judge agreed.

"Jor Honna. Er..." There was a long pause during which she looked towards the three ladies that were sitting knees apart leaning forward with their hands on their knees in eager anticipation. They nodded encouragingly.

"Mrs. X you take your time. Tell the Court how it happened, but take your time." Her Advocate prompted.

"Jor Honna. My husband, die skelm, sed he went fishing. Jor Honna, he's going fishing every Saturday and den he come home late into the night. Sometime Sunday too late to take us to church. Then we fight. Saturday night Tant Sannie's," and she nodded towards the three ladies, "son went to the Virginia drive-in and he saw Piet's, that's my husband, kar there. You see your Honna we live in Welkom but Piet he lives in Virginia. An there was a woman in the kar with him."

Her voice broke and a sob escaped her. Again the Advocate intervened –

"I know it's difficult but try and tell the court what happened."

She took a deep breath, the ladies at the wall did the same, and again she glanced at them and continued with her story.

"As I sed Jan he drives all the way to Welkom an come and told me wot he saw. I foned Tant Sannie, an she foned Griet and she foned Gerda an they come to my house, an asked me wot I was going to do about it? I sed I dunno. Then Jan, that's Tant Sannies son, sed I have to go to the drive-in an see for myself. So we got into his kar and all the children they were crying an so they came along an then Oom Sakkie that's Tant Sannie's

husband sed he was coming too an we all squeezed into the kar an drove to the drive-in. An we drove up an down cause Jan he couldn't remember which row it was. Then we saw the kar, an the orange on the aerial was jumping up and down so I got out. An there was Piet in the back seat on top of the

Here her voice completely broke, the Advocate walked forward and offered her his handkerchief and let her blow her nose noisily, and when the emotion had subsided he again asked her to continue with her story.

“Well Jor Honna what could I do? So I pulled open the door, an sed – So this is how you catch fish, hey?”

By this time the Judge had discretely put his hand to the side of his face turning slightly away from the Plaintiff. Advocates and Attorneys were hunched low over their desks shoulders heaving but not a sound was to be heard. I turned away and looked straight at the three ladies. They were completely transported by her tale, reliving every incident as she told it and in total agreement. In the process of agreeing with each statement their hands which by then were on their knees had slowly moved up their dresses so that when I looked the hemlines were almost on their knees and there for all to see were peach pips rolled into their stockings to keep them up. I nudged my Attorney and discretely pointed, she looked across at them and her face turned a pale shade of purple and she nudged our Advocate with exactly the same result. By then the Judge had mumbled that the divorce had been granted and called for a recess and dashed for his chambers, we were barely given time to rise for his exit. As he closed the door behind him we heard a howl of laughter. We fled into the safety of the foyer and then and only then could we laugh out loud.

My case was heard directly after the recess and the divorce granted. The strange thing was that walking back to work in the warm winter sunshine, I again walked past that music shop, and will you believe it but Ag Pleez Daddy was playing on the radio inside, and it made me smile.

About the Author



Keith Cornelis-Britz

Keith Britz was born in Bloemfontein, spent his pre-high school days in Winburg, and went to a boarding school in Heidelberg in the then Transvaal. Since leaving school he has lived in 6 of the nine provinces. At present he lives in Cape Town. He wrote 'Sofie van Groot Daan' in 1984 and it will be in the bookshops towards the middle of February 2012.

In the years between he translated it – Big Dan's Sofie – which was published in 2010 after being short listed for the EU Literary Awards and long listed for the Sunday Times Fiction Award. Since then he has written the second book in this trilogy and some short stories for the amusement and at times the horror of his friends.

Omdraaisvlei [The story of another African Farm]

Written by Edwin Jackson

The day had finally arrived for Omdraaisvlei to be returned to the Jackson Clan. This was primordial stuff: the thrill of taking ownership of my fate, the nuts and bolts of the mechanics of survival as well as territory building. It was basic stuff and not well understood by me, and it had only just begun.

Sunrise on day one and someone was in the yard looking for work. His name was Barend Swart and he was about 30 years old. Of Khoisan descent, the sparse coiled tufts of sprung hair on his head mimicked the short, dry Karoo bushes of the veld. In an instant I realized that this was no longer a game.

“It is not right!” Chief had earlier exclaimed, plucking his pipe from his mouth. “It is not right! Seventy cents a day wages, man, it’s wrong! For that much money he will barely be able to feed his family, heh.” He began patting himself down, searching for his matches.

“Well, what would be a good wage then?” I asked, not having given it much thought before.

“At least a rand a day.”

“What? A rand a day! That means I must pay 30-50% more than the going rate!” And it was as if the emperor suddenly stood naked before me as the realization struck home that I had just received my first practical insight into social justice and the compassion that should go with it. It would strike me later that the stage set at Omdraaisvlei was not only for my own personal self-gratification but that there were other people living there too. I decided that I would set the wages from one rand and up. But first I should call a meeting of all my newly appointed workers.

In attendance was an elder, Klaas Hugo, who so to say came with the furniture. He was deep into his seventies and had been living on the farm most of his life. A tall man with a dark skin, he was married to Elsie, a diminutive woman with the tan-coloured skin typical of the Khoisan descendants. They lived in a small cottage

directly behind the chicken run close to the house.

Klaas’s routine each morning soon after sunrise was to saddle up his horse, Diamond and head out west to Nooitgedagt to check on the waters. He seemed to harbour a general distain for mankind. History, though, had compelled him to keep his opinions to himself and this was aptly displayed in his relationship with me, a young upstart who had come late into his life. However he had a secret weapon. Standing rock steady before me on the werf while receiving instructions he would, out of the blue and without a flicker of acknowledgement that there was anything out of the ordinary, slump, his legs giving way, and then start to shake. I later learnt that it was something to do with damage to the spinal cord that caused this but at the time it would seriously disconcert me as I tried holding my focus on his up-and-down eyes.

He once told me an extraordinary story of how, as a small boy during the Anglo-Boer War, he had stood watching wide-eyed as some English soldiers were lining up a Boer against a wall of the old Rosebank house a little distance off in the veld. He was to be shot but before this could happen a local farmer came galloping up on his horse, shouting; “Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot! I know this man, and he is not a spy!” Cynical as Klaas was, I could never tell whether he was having me on or not.

Towards the end of his life Klaas, feeling the burden of his imagined sins, set off on his donkey cart on a journey of atonement traveling from farm to farm. At each stop he meticulously paid off whatever debts he might have had, vowed that not a drop of liquor would ever pass his lips again, and that he was ‘bitter sleg’ and did not deserve to live. Then he would beg forgiveness for his sins much to the surprise of all concerned. He believed that his time had come and that by the end of his journey he would die.

One day I heard an excited kid yelling; “Hier’s hy nou! Hier kom Oupa Klaas!” I walked over to the road and, yes, on the other side of the duik came a donkey cart with the familiar figure of the old man bent over the donkeys willing them on with blows from his sjambok. Picking up speed the donkey cart came thundering down the dip then slowed to a walk as the road climbed. Ouma Elsie came out of her cottage next to the road to see what the fuss was all about.

“Wragtie! Hier is die ou skelm nou!” She ran back inside the cottage and came out with her kerie and began striking out at Klaas as the cart passed. Fortunately she mostly missed but struck instead the donkey nearest to her a mighty blow over the head bringing the cart to a standstill. “Wat die donner het jou so lank gevat?” she screamed at Klaas. “Hier’s ek stok alleen te wille jy rondry en lekker kuier!” She struck out again hitting him on his arms held up to protect his head.

“Hou op vrou met daai donderse geskreeuery en slaanery. Hier het jy amper vir ou Leibok dood geslaan! Gee kans! Laat ek eers uitspan...”

“Haai! Moenie jy terug praat nie jou bliksem!” The blows fell freely on his back sounding much like a carpet being struck. “Op jou knieë Klaas Hugo, en vra genade van die Here! Vra vir hom om jou sonde te vergewe!” The kerie struck Leibok on the rump causing the other donkey, Stampriet, to kick back before they both took off jerking the cart forward as Klaas fell to the ground.

“Keur voor! Keur die donkies voor!”

“Jou bliksem! Vat dit!” Crack.

“Hou nou op!” Crack.

“Hey! Elsie! Stop it now!” I belatedly intervened.

“Jay! Klaas Hugo! In die huis! Nou! Daar’s werk daar binne.”

The Bostanders had a long history with the farm going back at least to the turn of the 20th century. Piet came with the farm as did his father, Adriaan, who had the duty for many years to fetch the post once a week by mule wagon from the neighbouring farm, Nooitgedagt. The mules knew the road so well that they would trot on after dark while Adriaan slept, stopping only at the gates. Of Khoisan extraction, the Bostanders had left their mark not only on Omdraaisvlei but in the whole of the Prieska district.

The remainder of the staff were Keiser Jamangile, a Xhosa, and Tos, his Khoisan wife built to Saartjie Baartman proportions; Veeland and his wife Anna both being close to full-blooded Bushmen; Kenneth Ramashalla, a Basutho who had followed me from Rosedale;

Kerneuls, Jan and Platvoet and Bak a Bak, both sons of John Malunga and his wife Jane who had originally come with Smith from the Free State and had decided to stay on.

“There are three main items on the agenda today,” I said, calling the meeting to order. “The first point is that you must call me ‘Edwin’ and not ‘baas’. The second point is that I will learn from you all that I can about practical farming as what I know is mostly theoretical. However, once I decide on what is to be done then my decision will be final, rightly or wrongly so. Thirdly, I will not be a policeman on this farm. Either the fighting and drunkenness must stop or I will go.”

“Ja baas!”

“Who said that?”

“Ek baas.”

“You’re fired! Just joking. If you can’t call me Edwin then try ‘Meneer.’

“Ja, my seur!”

“That you, Klaas? What’s this ‘seur’ nonsense?”

“Maar kleinbaas, ons kan nie vir jou ‘Edwin’ sé nie want jy’s mos ons baas. Dit is net respek,”

Piet said standing up then sitting down again.

“Well, what about the drinking and the fighting then? It starts with the dop you get on Saturdays. Can we not scrap that?”

“Nooit, kleinbaas! Dis mos tradisie!” Veeland indignantly replied while the others nodded in agreement.

“Dit gee ons moed vir die week,” Keiser added.

John, the upright lay clergyman, shook his head in disagreement. “Dit’s ook nie reg! Drank is die duiwel sé werk!”

“I don’t agree with you. Having a couple of drinks is fine as long as you don’t let it get out of control. But we will see. And there must be no fighting! You will have three chances: after that if you still fight then you must go.

I don't care who are but there must be no violence on this farm." I kept quiet. There was no response. They were checking me out. "And I will learn from you," I persisted, trying to appease.

"Kleinbaas Edwin is reg. Ons moet ophou drink en baklei. Dit kan nie so aangaan nie!" Jane said breaking the impasse and catching me by surprise.

"Tshoe! Kyk maar hoe bou die weer op," Klaas said, changing the subject. It was true. The voorlopers were beginning to pile up in the North-West as the Northerly breeze stiffened.

"Die reën, hy kom," said John bringing the meeting to a close. I drove off to take possession of the house passing along the way a Bloukop kogelmander sitting on a fence post carefully watching the gathering storm clouds. Smith and his Mercedes crammed full with Mrs and the kids had just left, the dust ribbon settling as the car sped towards the tar road and his Free State farm. On my return for the second load of furniture the kogelmander was still there, having turned a few degrees to face the storm as it drew nearer. Chief had returned to Port Elizabeth the previous day and I was now truly on my own.

A few days later on my first Saturday, with the midday sun beating down mercilessly on us, I turned to face the staff. Some looked quizzically at me but most furrowed their brows and looked away. It would not do to look the 'baas' directly in the eyes for you never could tell. The trek pad began right there before you, on the werf, while the donkeys waited patiently in the camp. That's why it is better not to look the boss in the eyes as you are about to get your dop otherwise he will think you are too 'white'.

"My grootbaas." Shuffle. "Ek is George Gous." Shuffle. I stared at the thin black man before me. Where had he sprung from? His eyes dropped to the ground. We waited. "George is so verleë!" he whined, paused, and then slowly raised his head to look up at me. There was an abject, hang-dog look about him. "George is honger en dors." He paused for effect but got nothing from me. "Assemblief, my grootbaas! George soek koffertjies en suikertjies. Ook miskien 'n bietjie twak?" He hugged his belly as his eyes stay fixed on the ground. Shuffled a bit more.

"Coffee and sugar? But you don't work for me."

"Ai! So honger en dors."

"Well, hungry you might be so ask Jane at the kitchen for a sandwich and for your thirst why there's a tap over there." He stood rooted to the spot and I turned my attention back to the business at hand. It had become clear that I had inherited a very divisive situation where there was much drunkenness and fighting over the weekends. Smith had maintained the 'dop' system of doling out liquor at the end of the week. He also forbade the staff to have gardens as he considered this a waste of water. Not being able to create much of a home this left them with not much choice but to drink whatever wages they might get out.

"Luister manne. I told you at the meeting that there was to be no drunkenness and fighting at Omdraaislei. You can choose between your dop and vegetables. Which is it to be?" Laid out on the ground to one side of them were neat piles of vegetables. On the other side was a five gallon can of cheap sweet wine. Silence. No one moved. A dust devil jumped up and sped across the werf towards the stables scattering hens and kids along the way. The sun beat down. The rain that had fallen the day after the takeover had been sucked dry by the parched earth and follow up was badly needed to keep the first green flush from shrivelling up. Meantime more kogelmanders had staked their claim to the fencing posts and the storm watch. Scuffed boots and takkies stood to restless attention before me. Platvoet's toes stuck out of his takkies. Slowly I ran my gaze up his lank body until it settled on his goofy smile that ran up and down his long face like ripples on water. Someone had to make the first move but it wouldn't be him.

"And now," I asked, my words. "What will it be? A dop? Or healthy vegetables for you and your families?"

"Dit's chaila tyd! Kom ons maak klaar!" Klaas broke ranks and almost to the man all turned right and lined up behind the wine. John bent down to study the vegetables more closely. Klaas pushed out the large tin mug before him and closely followed my movements as I carefully poured the wine to an inch from the top. It had the texture and colour of diesel. I turned to the next in line but Klaas continued to stand his ground, mug held steady out before him, silently demanding that it be filled to the very top. I felt pressured: to submit to

17
his demand would be to undermine my authority but on the other hand at what point might his shakes begin scattering wine all over the ground? I poured.

“Baie dankie, my groot seur. Nou’s ek te vrede,” he said as he turned to shuffle his body, heavy with history, off to his cottage.

About the Author



Edwin Jackson

Edwin is a 4th generation farmer in the Prieska district of the Northern Cape Karoo. He inherited his farm at the age of 21, having left it at 5 years of age, when his father died in a small plane accident.

His first book *Flight of the Moth* came about as a result of a round the world trip after being diagnosed with Parkinson's and documents his experiences of tackling the disease as well as the unique experiences of his travels. He is still farming on a small scale but much prefers to be writing, especially in the wee small hours of the night. His challenges are many but he remains upbeat and positive about life, his disease, and the world in general. He turns 62 years old in October 2012.

On Edwin's "Omdraaisvlei [The story of another African Far]" he has the following to say:

I am writing my second book based on my life on a Karoo farm and how such a place can affect so many peoples' lives down the ages, not least mine.

It shows how a farm community, in the true sense of the word, can be built on the basis of mutual trust and respect even if at times painfully and slowly gained inch by inch.

My discontentment with some of the social mores and attitudes prevalent in the area, and in particular of the privileged white community, led me many times away from the farm on journeys around the world to the most remote of places and cultures that I could find in search of answers to the question of 'why me?'. It helped, too, in the time of apartheid to break down ingrained ignorance and racial attitudes that I had grown up with. I got to learn from other cultures that the more extraordinary and exotic they might appear to be, the more ordinary they became the longer

I lived with them, and the more they became like you and me. I learnt that ultimately we are all one with the human race. This knowledge I would carry back with me to Omdraaisvlei until slowly, slowly it began to affect my own changes within, stripping away prejudices and misconceptions.

The book will be also be layered with stories on life on the farm seen not only with my eyes but with all the inhabitants living there. It will portray the highs and the lows, the laughter and the tears, along the way.

Ultimately the book will bring all the threads of peoples' lives together in so much as it will show the communality of life that we all share.

For comments, suggestions and criticism, please do not hesitate to contact us via e-mail at any time.

If you wish to submit material we shall look forward to receiving your writings or photographs.

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Yours Sincerely,

The New Richmond Reader