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Songs of Sand and Grit: A Collection of Narrative Literary Journalism

Irina A. Kastner KSTIRI001

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Faculty of the Humanities
University of Cape Town
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Supervisor: Andre Wiesner

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Date: 05.06.08

Keywords

Narrative Literary Journalism, South Africa, Macassar Dunes, Nature Conservation, Hantam Hartsnare, Louisa Steenkamp, Refugees, Somalia, Marathon, Running

Abstract

Songs of Sand and Grit: A Collection of Narrative Literary Journalism

This creative collection entails four pieces of narrative literary journalism. All accounts are journalistic in the sense that they are rooted in the documentation of empirical life observation. In order to become a narrative, the genre typically requires ‘a protagonist, a quest, and a set of obstacles’ (Read 2000: n.p.). All the stories depict a specific microcosm epitomizing a larger social concern.

The introduction explicates the nature of narrative literary journalism and situates the four stories within this edifice. This body of work experiments with the classical form of narrative literary journalism.

The Soul Searcher tells the story of the ethnomusicologist John Turest-Swartz who wants to promote the little known rural musician Louisa Steenkamp. It traces the development of an indigenous South African band over a period of one year.

Thumeka in the Dunes is a career portrait in the context of urban nature conservation. The protagonist Thumeka Mdlazi is both part of the obstacle - the community threatening the nature reserve - and its solution, as a protector of the dunes.

A Place to Live under the Rainbow deals with the repeated attacks against Somali refugees in South Africa portraying victims and perpetrators alike. On a meta-level, the story also reflects on the topic of xenophobia in a more discursive style.

A Runner’s Mind is a first-person creative non-fiction narrative. The core of the story is the motivation for ultra-marathon runner Randall Turner to keep running. This account is framed by my own personal reflections on running and non-running.

All stories are anchored in a South African social setting and reflect people’s struggles and small achievements in overcoming seemingly hopeless situations.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

GRADUATE SCHOOL IN HUMANITIES

DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

I, Irina Kastner,

of 6 Lisanore, 293 Main Road, Kenilworth 7708, Cape, South Africa

do hereby declare that I empower the University of Cape Town to produce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents of my dissertation entitled

in any manner whatsoever.

signature removed

CANDIDATE'S SIGNATURE

05.06.08

DATE

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1. Introduction – Crossing the Borders of Narrative Literary Journalism

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1.1. The impact of narrative literary journalism

Tom Wolfe's prediction serves true: 'Pioneering in nonfiction will be recorded as the most important experiment in American literature in the second half of the twentieth century' (Wolfe 1989: 166). "The new journalism" has brought about fundamental change into the worlds of both literature and journalism in US-America and subsequently to the English speaking world (cf. Wolfe 1973: 37).

Up until the 1950s, journalism and literary were clearly distinct genres. Novelists did not write about daily life, but about myth and nobility in an 'aristocratic aesthetic' style (Wolfe 1965: vi). Feature writing, on the contrary, was considered banal and of low quality standards. There was 'no room for a journalist (...) in the big league' (Wolfe 1973: 21).

However, in the early 1960s, American journalists began to experiment and write features that 'read like a novel' (Wolfe 1973: 21/21). Wolfe perceives this new 'artistic excitement in journalism' (Wolfe 1973: 37) as 'far more ambitious', 'more intense, more detailed and certainly more time consuming' (Wolfe 1973: 34/35) than former styles of journalism. The "new journalist" had converted from a 'beige narrator' to a blotchy 'chameleon' (Wolfe 1973: 32/33).

Wolfe advocates the renaissance of realistic reporting techniques as the 'most valuable and least understood resource' (Wolfe 1989:161) for both literature and journalism. The common objective of 'absorbing the reader totally' (Wolfe 2000: 160) can be achieved by rooting writing, fiction or non-fiction, in reporting the encounter with the real world. Narrative literary journalism achieves this symbiosis of literary style and realistic reporting like no other genre and has therefore great social impact.

The form aims to affect the reader on an emotional level. Emotion, as the central element of a story, displaces the authority of so-called neutral information. When an emotive "blueprint" is branded in the reader's consciousness, i.e., a story can not only be rationally comprehended but relates to the reader's emotional biography as well: it affects deeper than mere facts and figures.

With Wolfe's stories and analysis of narrative literary journalism, the discourse around the genre gained new momentum and affected news production in general. Although his observations and writing style were neither a new invention nor a specific trigger for a comeback of narrative literary journalism (cf. Wolfe 1973: 37), it summed up the shift in the English writing world in terms of fact presentation in the second half of the 20th century.

On the one hand, the narrative element in journalism has driven sensationalism to new heights. Infotainment has become an accepted standard in contemporary media

consumption and yellow press journalism has turned into the most lucrative branch of the field. Story material is now and then even fabricated, instead of taken from real life; e.g., protagonists are cast or incidents are staged. The emotional element overpowers factual information. It is no longer the objective of the story to convey knowledge, but to create consternation.

On the other hand, narrative literary journalism by now provides a niche for complex journalism that is slower and more in-depth than conventional news reporting. By creating paintings instead of slide shows, narrative literary journalism functions as a counter-agent of “microwave documentary” and “news in 20 seconds”. Although personalized and subjective, the domain leaves room for complex contentious ethical deliberations.

For this creative production, 'Songs of Sand and Grit: A Collection of Narrative Literary Journalism', I chose ethical issues and social sites in a contemporary South African context that offer the reader a stimulating variety of emotional identities. As the title suggests, the four features largely adhere to criteria of narrative literary journalism which will be clarified in the next section. However, I have experimented with the established form towards a neo-conservative approach, in order to overcome narrative literary journalism's traces of opulence pertaining to writer's voice and personalised dramatisation at all costs.

The introduction will draft an approach to the nature of the genre and its criteria, based on notions by John Hartsock and Tom Wolfe. Furthermore, I will look at the virtual borders of narrative literary journalism, according to deliberations by Dan Lehman.

These theoretical deliberations will help to situate this body of creative work in the context of narrative literary journalism. Some insight into the research process and ethical obstacles encountered can prepare the reader for reading these non-fiction stories “over the edge” (Lehman 1997); with a critical informed mind.

1.2 The nature of classical narrative literary journalism

‘The range of what can be considered texts of a “literary journalism” or, “literary nonfiction” varies greatly among scholars’ (Hartsock 2000: 10). The contentious character of the genre stems from the ambition of narrative literary journalism to foreground literary qualities, while at the same time rooting the text in tangible reality. ‘The form reads like a novel or short story except that it is true or makes a truth claim to phenomenal experience’ (Hartsock 2000: 1). Various scholars (Craig 2006, Velleman 2002, Hartsock 2000, Kerrane/Yagoda 1997, Lehman 1997, McCord 1985) have struggled to categorize narrative literary journalism because of political reasons that affect their academic workplace and professional status, i.e., what qualifies as literature and what qualifies as journalism. Hartsock even speaks of an ‘epistemological crisis’ (2000: 15).

Despite these scholarly divisions, I will draft a working concept of what I call classical narrative literary journalism, based mainly on the notions of John Hartsock and Tom Wolfe, in order to clarify my later adaptations thereof.

Hartsock identifies the ‘narrative mode’ (2000: 1) as the genre’s most prominent feature. The narrative element distinguishes the form, not exclusively but tentatively, from conventional news reporting or other non-fiction forms (cf. Hartsock 2000: 13). The narrator opens multifarious dimensions to the journalistic text which make the reading process an intensely emotional experience and turn gathered facts into a literary format more vivid than a news report structured in the inverted pyramid.

Although contemporary news reporting foregrounds emotions as well, this does not necessarily turn a text. Narrative, according to Mark Kramer (2005), is identified by scene-by-scene and character-development. The form allows for speaking about persons beyond their demographic criteria. Narrative literary journalism - like life - provides unpredictable changes, depth, contradictions, and loose ends.

Furthermore, the narrative constitutes unfolding action, a crafted plot in which the reader gets to know the story in a certain intentional order. Instead of firstly clarifying what, who, where, when, etc., the narrative plot guides the reader’s emotions (cf. Kramer 2005). The reader’s willingness to follow the voice through a particular story structure is gained through transparent subjectivity that enhances the credibility of the given situation, because it is presented on a personal level; like a friend’s account of a witnessed incident.

However, the narrative quality does not downplay the genuine journalistic character of the form. Research methods and the writer’s socialisation are distinctly journalistic. Tom Wolfe emphasizes in his book *The New Journalism* (1973) the importance of rooting any

writing in field-work reporting. Only in-depth documentation of perceived phenomena away from the desk can subsequently be aestheticized into an absorbing story. The new journalists rediscovered devices used by the great realists of the 19th century, who gave writing ‘immediacy’ and ‘gripping quality’ (Wolfe 1973: 46); e.g., ‘scene-by-scene construction’, ‘realistic dialogue’, ‘third-person-point-of-view’ and recording of everyday ‘symbolic details’ (Wolfe 1973: 46/47).

Narrative literary journalism involves reporting in the form of novel writing. The severity of the formal debate is also as a result of the hesitance to allow fiction elements, e.g., thought accounts, into the domain of hard-fact journalism. Narrative literary journalism deliberately abandons the “objectification” of the conservative journalistic text, which according to Hartsock, means ‘disengaged journalisms that objectify the world as something different or alien from the viewing subject, namely either that of the author or reader’ (Hartsock 2000: 17). Contrary to traditional news reporting, narrative literary journalism resists the ‘tendency to essentialize or totalize distinctive phenomenal experiences’ (Hartsock 2000: 48). Instead, narrative literary journalism focuses on the ‘concrete particular’, a detail that stands as a synecdoche of society and refuses closure (cf. Hartsock 2000: 51).

In a nutshell, classical narrative journalism entails: scene-by-scene and character development, unfolding action, journalistic socialisation of the writer, journalistic research methods, transparent subjectivity, and symbolic details.

As the literary element in narrative literary journalism gains more weight, the question of boundaries between fiction and non-fiction becomes more evident. An attempt to define the genre by formal aspects only seems insufficient. Dan Lehman argues that for a critical reading of narrative literary journalism, the issues around the production-process need to be taken into account.

1.3 The virtual borders of classical narrative literary journalism

In his book *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction Narrative over the Edge*, Dan Lehman explicates the debate on the accountability of narrative literary journalism. The author believes that journalism has a 'social and material effect different from fiction' and describes the genre as 'a site of both artistic and social engagement' (Lehman 1997: 2/3).

Lehman advocates a reading of non-fiction texts within their cultural context. He refers not only to a historical contextualization but more to a relational analysis. According to Lehman, narrative literary journalism gains its unique momentum through its anchoring in a social reality impacted by the subjectivity of the writer, the reader, and the subject itself. 'Its full power and problems cannot be understood until the discursive relationships among author, subject, and reader that under-gird nonfiction are read as closely as the words that make up the narrative itself' (Lehman 1997: 2).

In his analysis, Lehman welcomes the approach by Phyllis Frus McCord in her essay *The politics and poetics of journalistic narrative*, to question the artificial lines between fiction and non-fiction. According to McCord, there is no difference because the emotional reading experience of a tale is in principal the same as reading non-fiction, since the reader might be equally absorbed in the text (cf. Lehman 1997: 4).

McCord further pursues a drastic relativism and claims that fact-checking for non-fiction accuracy is in vain because objective proof does not exist (cf. Lehman 1997: 8/26). She warns the reader of the 'fallacy of regarding non-fictional prose as tied to the world' (McCord 1985: 748). It is impossible for the reader to re-live a situation that has been read outside of the text. More than a matter of accessibility, it is a matter of passing time and situational context.

Lehman doesn't follow McCord to the degree of abolishing the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction altogether. McCord's binary focus, on the realization that fact ultimately cannot be verified, poses 'unequivocal truth against unequivocal falsity, assuming the latter because the former is impossible' (Lehman 1997: 8).

Lehman's ambition is not to re-establish the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, but to expound the issue of negotiating individual truth value and its impact on the reader (cf. Lehman 1997: 6).

The author accepts that any writing is crafted, therefore actuality does not equal non-fiction, and he acknowledges that fiction can affect the reader as well (cf. Lehman 1997: 7). Lehman furthermore moves within the poststructuralist paradigm that there is no place outside of culture from where objectivity could be judged (Lehman 1997: 8).

To Lehman however, McCord's radical argument expires in the field of journalism. 'Because I am concerned with events and characters that *always* have a presence outside the text as well, I do not have the luxury of disregarding the text's relationship (even though it always will be intertextual) to its anterior model' (Lehman 1997: 29). Other than characters of fiction, stakeholders of non-fiction have a susceptible future; this implies a social responsibility and awareness from the participants around the text. Lehman argues that the impact of truth is stronger than the impact of fiction (cf. Lehman 1997: 10ff). As soon as the reader becomes involved and draws actual consequences, non-fiction becomes a 'socially implicating act' (Lehman 1997: 7). He or she will, for instance, only give money to charity when there is surety that the described disaster actually took place. 'When characters die in fiction, characters die; when characters die in nonfiction, people die' (Lehman 1997: 14).

The author, however, suspects that the powerful contemporary currency of non-fiction might fade, as perceptions of reality change. 'Repeated popular media depictions of actual deaths will desensitize audiences to the power of the body that I am tracing' (Lehman 1997: 13).

Therefore Lehman advocates a position between fiction and non-fiction and argues that 'our minds are capable of comprehending a blurred genre status as the reader negotiates texts' (Lehman 1997: 23). According to Lehman, exactly in this blurred uncertainty lies the power of narrative literary journalism.

In line with James Phelan, Lehman agrees that truth needs to be negotiated in discourse (cf. Lehman 1997: 23). Post-modern authority is gained through transparency. The narrative non-fiction writer engages the reader in a deliberate negotiation process and the text is made trustworthy through a shared uncertainty; explicit doubt can even enhance credibility. By taking away the certainty of the situation and the authority of truth, the reader is taken out of her comfort zone and needs to decide for herself, to what extent the story pertains to her life experience.

The significant quality of narrative literary journalism, as Lehman outlines, is the attempt to bridge the gap between subject and object by foregrounding its own constructedness. 'By stepping out from the shadows and laying bare his or her prejudices, anxieties, or thought processes the reporter gives us something firmer and truer to hold on to as we come to our own conclusions' (Kerrane/Yagoda 1997: 16).

The best awarded narrative literary journalism stories have a high degree of involvement of the writer (cf. Williams 2006; Leblanc 1995). This technique achieves

transparency and credibility, since the validity of personal subjective experience is unquestionable.

This approach is, however, is not without its flaws. 'There is a distinct possibility for abuse here: the reporter's forgetting that he is not the story, just a means to it. And where the use of "I" should offer the reporter a means to construct a multidimensional and memorable character, in magazine journalism today it has become a reflexive cliché' (Kerrane/Yagoda 1997: 16).

Overt subjectivity can become tedious at the best of times. Since postmodern society has long reached a point where we acknowledge textual constructedness of non-fiction, I believe we don't always have to see the back of the observer to be reminded that it is not our own immediate experience we are reading, but someone else's.

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1.4 Stepping in and out of the virtual borders

In the following section, I will highlight some of the key issues that arose during the production process of this collection of narrative literary journalism, with regards to epistemological questions, like narrative structure, character development and voice as well as to ethical implications like balanced account or advocacy. According to Richard Read, narrative literary journalism needs ‘a protagonist, a quest, and a set of obstacles’ (Read 2000: n.p.). Beyond that, the pieces vary in their degree of congruence with classic narrative literary journalism and experiment with discursive and creative non-fiction elements.

In all stories, I followed certain conventional standards of journalistic accuracy, as defined by Kramer: ‘No composite scenes, no misstated chronology, no falsification of the discernible drift or proportion of events, no invention of quotes, no attribution of thoughts to sources unless the sources have said they’d had those very thoughts, and no unacknowledged deals with subjects involving payment or editorial control’ (Kramer 1995: 25).

The first story, *The Soul Searcher*, comes closest to a classic understanding of narrative literary journalism. In scene-by-scene development, it tells about the ethnomusicologist John Turest-Swartz who wants to introduce the rural musician Louisa Steenkamp to the world.

The piece shares a similar approach to Michael Paterniti’s *The Most Dangerous Beauty* (2003). Both are non-fiction, epic narratives telling the story of heroes and anti-heroes. Both pieces break with a prominent feature of narrative literary journalism – the overt involvement and transparency of the writer.

To ease any doubts, I chose to focus on direct dialogue in *The Soul Searcher* and mentioned myself only when clarification on the source of information was needed.

Immediately observed direct dialogue is the strength of the *Soul Searcher*, as the following lines illustrate. ‘Eventually, there were no open questions left to discuss. “*Ek het nie meer vrae om te vra nie, ek is dood!*,” Louisa said. John was puzzled. Why did she say she was dead? “*Dood tevrede,*” she smiled mischievously; completely satisfied.’

I gained this information through accompanying John to Calvinia and attending various rehearsals and concerts. I attended these meetings firstly in my capacity as a journalist, but also as an assistant to the band. I met the band and John on several occasions throughout the year and observed their development. A chronologically structured plot seemed most viable. Accounts of occasions where I wasn’t present, e.g., the Vleisfees, were largely derived from interviews with John.

The fact that only one account – by the participating musician Jan Isaacs framed through John’s memory and comment - was given on the happenings of the Vleisfees and implied accusations of organiser’s misconduct, is problematic from a conventional point of view, since the right of reply/defence has not been granted. However, the integration of a counter account by the organisers would have negatively interfered with two main features of narrative literary journalism, namely character and plot development. The filtered account by John reveals his increasingly more critical relationship to the band and his views of their cultural context and his sustained ambiguous role as a guardian. Furthermore, the incident towards the end of the plot shows the band’s first emancipating attempt hinting at future conflict potential.

In another instance, a balanced account was crucial for both character development, as well as the plot. Since I felt John’s filter was too strong and my access to the band’s accounts initially too weak, I went to visit Louisa and the band members in Calvinia without John to obtain their uncensored views. The band members did not speak English and my Afrikaans knowledge was insufficient to allow for in-depth conversation, which turned out to be an initial obstacle during the research process. With the help of a translator, I had an interview with Louisa that was free of John’s influence.

Thumeka in the Dunes follows the career of nature conservationist Thumeka Mdlazi. She is at the same time both part of the obstacle and the solution in the narrative; she is part of the community that threatens the reserve, and part of the solution as the reserve’s official protector.

The seemingly mundane topic, the work of a Nature Conservationist in Cape Town, portrays a pars pro toto detail of society. The story refers to the structural political problems of housing, crime, and the destruction of the environment, while remaining in the micro-cosmos of Macassar.

Over a period of one year, I accompanied Thumeka into the dunes several times. During an evaluation workshop, I acquired insights into the political implications of the Nature Conservation Area.

The feature on the Macassar Dunes emerged at a time when the reserve managers were in a phase of disruptions that could take outside strains with difficulties only. This was one reason why I had relatively little contact with the Area Manager Lewine Walters and more with Thumeka.

Furthermore, many statements were uttered by the conservationists with the heightened awareness of being public figures. The communication officer at Cape Flats Nature, Zwai Peters, read the article about Thumeka and made the following comment: 'City might find this information inappropriate for media and public interest, be careful.' I refrained from making changes to the text. Increasing professionalization of communication can become an obstacle for the journalist who searches for true-to-life stories with fractions and contradictions. Thumeka herself was not happy with the output of the story, since she felt my presentation of the situation was too negative and would diminish the possibility of installing hope within the reader. Propaganda was, however, not my intention.

Similar to the other stories, I tried to keep my own voice in the background and only mentioned myself in situations where allocation of speech would have been otherwise unclear.

Two essays served as role-models for this story. In *Love and Death in the Cape Fear Serpentarium*, Wendy Bremner describes the drive and passions of the owner of a serpentarium.

The essays share the objective of describing an unusual professional milieu with its unique encounters - especially with clients - and challenges. Both stories attempt to explain the protagonist's biographical background and motivation to work in their particular professions.

Erik Reece's *Death of a Mountain- Radical Strip Mining and the Leveling of Appalachia* served as further inspiration for *Thumeka in the Dunes*, because it contains similar concerns of environmental destruction and its consequences. The author's reportage describes the vanishing of a mountain through mining.

A Place to Live under the Rainbow diverts from classic narrative literary journalism in that it is a discursive journalistic essay that downplays character development in favour of philosophical deliberations.

Richard Read questions the moulding of a story on principle into a narrative form. 'By seeing events through the eyes of a main character, are we short-changing other viewpoints? By arranging plot points and scenes, are we bending reality to fit a preconceived narrative structure?' (Read 2000: 25). I think this applies especially to stories that deal with complex, abstract topics like xenophobia.

I wanted to deal with this topic on a more structural than episodic level; i.e., not only portraying the fate of one person, but the shades of various stakeholders, sites, and moods.

The story nevertheless needed personal grounding in order to gain emotional impact, by borrowing devices from narrative literary journalism.

I approached the topic of the attacks against Somali refugees in South Africa from different angles, e.g., personal, political, philosophical, and historical, and strove to reflect these appropriately in the piece. Focussing on only one person, e.g., Zamzam Hirsi, would have taken away many aspects of the topic, e.g., the views of the people in Masiphumelele or the NGO's assessments of the situation.

Richard Read faced a similar problem when he wrote about the Asian financial crisis in 1998 in his article series *The French Fry Connection*. The broad political topic entailed so many vital aspects that one protagonist could not epitomise the crisis. Hence, Read chose to follow a container of fries on their way to Asia (cf. Read 2000: 24).

In a similar way, I tried to link several aspects of the Somali refugee situation to give the reader a more holistic overview. The accountability of the story is derived from the fact that different sources - newspaper, online research, personal accounts, expert interviews, and observation - all melt into one picture, evidently cut to my frame of reference.

Building a comprehensive plot out of these information patches was challenging. The statements by the people I interviewed were closely related, although the people in some instances hadn't met each other or incidents occurred at different places. Other than in fiction writing, I could not simply invent personal and physical connections.

I therefore attempted to string together a topical thread. In the beginning a protagonist is introduced to give emotional access to the topic. Then a theoretical slot follows linking philosophical ideas to a specific reality. Before I can enact on first-person accounts of the attacks, an informative slot displays the efforts and failures of stakeholders to remedy the situation.

In the first paragraph, I clarify my position and leave the field for the unfolding topic. 'On my journey to answers, I meet Zamzam Hirsi, a refugee from Somalia, (...) We sit on the lawn outside the law faculty of the University of Cape Town. (...) Her legs crossed, she is picking blades of grass off my buttocks as if we were old girlfriends. Then she tells me her story.'

A Runner's Mind is the freest and most personal non-fiction narrative of this collection. Journalistic aspects, especially in terms of newsworthiness, are downplayed in favour of a literary account. The story derives its drive out of the tension of a married couple who approach well-being from opposite ends.

It is inspired by Amy Morgenstern and Studs Terkel. In her story *The Etiquette of Being a Breast*, Amy Morgenstern gives an intimate first person account of her experiences as a feminist who undergoes breast reduction surgery.

The first and last part of first person accounts of *A Runner's Mind*, i.e., my voice as the writer, are similar to Morgenstern's essay in that they combine a personal bodily experience with philosophical and cultural deliberations relating to the topic.

The core part in *A Runner's Mind* is a first-person account by the marathon runner Randall Turner. This part is formally inspired by a technique applied by Studs Terkel. The author gives a portrait of American society in his book *American Dreams: Lost and Found*. Terkel lets all character development and historical narration of events emerge from direct speech by the protagonists.

Similarly, by asking Randall to give his personal account of a marathon race, we get both an idea of his character and a general idea about running, in this case the Two Oceans Marathon in Cape Town.

However, the core part of the story is not pure direct speech but aestheticized fragments from two interviews with Randall. The text reads: 'When I am running free, it is self-induced and self-enjoyed. Somebody else speaking to me will break into my sub-conscious state and spoil it dictating where my mind will wander to. (...) The silence on Chapman's Peak broke when I ran past the watering-holes. People cheered and chatted.'

Randall's words are taken from an interview with him about the philosophical implications of running and the emotions of running free. In direct speech it reads: 'When you are running free it is self-induced and the pleasure of running free is self enjoyed. Somebody else speaking to you will break into your sort of sub-conscious state you are in and spoil it, because then you have to concentrate to make conversation with somebody else as opposed to you allowing your mind to wander where it wants to. Somebody else is coming along and dictates where your mind will wander to (...)' (Interview Randall Turner, November 2007).

To give the story a narrative drive, I combined these thoughts with accounts from another interview where he describes the situation of being taken out of the running free state on Chapman's Peak during a Two Oceans race. 'The only time that changes, is when you run past the watering wholes and people are cheering and chat and you having a drink.' (Interview Randall Turner, December 2007).

It is the role of the writer/editor using this naturalistic technique to ask the right questions and to put the statements in a discernable narrative order. The result is a polyphonic

account; it is neither entirely his, nor entirely my voice, seen through my aesthetic frame of reference, yet with a distinct label of non-fiction.

I believe that this essay collection fulfils Lehman's demand of activating the reader's social awareness in a South African context. The political aspects are evident in all stories: cultural heritage, environmental issues, xenophobia, and health. The advocating voice ranges from hardly tangible in *A Runner's Mind*, to overtly visible in *A Place to Live Under the Rainbow*. I follow Dan Lehman in his argument that in this case, an anchoring in social reality, i.e., the knowledge that all people in the stories exist in reality, is vital in maintaining the reader's concern. The stories of narrative literary journalism convey immediacy and urgency, despite their ambiguous degree of objectivity. This uncertainty allows for a vivid debate and ideally increases responsiveness about the stated issues.

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1.5 Conclusion: the reader's autonomy

In my view, classical narrative literary journalism, e.g., Tom Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (1965), has been a milestone for both literature and journalism in the 20th century, because it refreshed acknowledging the power of emotional appeal and upgraded daily and seemingly mundane details to symbols of greater social patterns.

However, I feel that rigid adherences to classical standards, e.g., involvement of the writer and character development as the central element, become repetitive and are not suitable in all contexts. My experimental diversion was largely based on withdrawing my apparent voice to give room to both the voice of the protagonist and the reader's mind. Furthermore - where the topic lent itself to that approach - I experimented with discursive elements, like in *A Place to Live Under the Rainbow*, which generate more intellectual stimuli than carving out extensive character development. In my last piece, *A Runner's Mind*, I diverted furthest from the form of narrative literary journalism because it downplays journalistic values of newsworthiness, currency, and controversy, in favour of free creative writing. Hence, I believe, the story qualifies as creative non-fiction.

With these adaptations, I intend to empower the reader to take the text as a stimulating forum for inner debate, and to detect bias and ideological occupation, while at the same time, be liberated from dunning pop-ups reminding one of the text as a biased construction.

It is for the reader to decide how far the source should be trusted and to what extent it is congruent with their own world view; or for that matter, to what degree a deviation of that world view will be allowed. In that way the reader can become an 'important partner in the negotiation of truth' (Lehman 1997: 19) balancing authority of interpretation. 'I'm the reason it's a story. I saw it. It's my vision. But you don't see me. That doesn't mean I don't have a voice, and it doesn't mean you don't have one either' (DeSilva 2002: 56).

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2. The Soul Searcher - An Encounter Retold

He was looking for something specific, although he didn't quite know what shape it would take. He made the search for dying cultures his day job, which extended into the nights. He travelled miles on end, often alone, through the vast African land, where he sought the people he had been told of by others. He listened to their tales, gossip, and most of all to their songs, since therein lay the object of his longing - the African soul.

Often people evaded him physically, and sometimes mentally, for life had other plans at the time when he himself was prepared for them. He encountered misery surrounding the people he visited, as they were poor, frail, and forgotten. Against all common sense, he spent much of his money on hopes that were dashed. Since he never knew what to expect next from this volatile life, he practised patience.

Eventually, the Soul Searcher found what he had been looking for all those years. She was there and yet she was out of his reach, for she was so fragile that a gust of wind might have blown her away at any time.

It was dark in the room covered with the green panels that swallowed all sound from the outside world. Heavy curtains blocked curious gazes. The central panel carried a wooden map of Africa. Unwieldy objects were covered with print fabrics. Despite the darkness, the room was not threatening. A trunk served as a tea table and next to it a red velvet couch invited one to sit and chat. Herbal scents wafted through the air.

After he had helped himself to tea and honey, John Turest-Swartz removed the fabrics from the latest sound equipment on the market and switched his computer into active mode.

As he browsed through the digital archive at his sound studio in Cape Town, the Soul Searcher could look back on more than a decade of work as a collector of indigenous African music and culture - almost a fifth of his life. His mission had led him across the continent, from Mozambique, over Sudan, to Ghana, Kenya, Mali, and Ethiopia, where he recorded and documented the indigenous music played by Africa's oldest people.

While John clicked through video clips, sound recordings, and photographs, he relived his encounters and, with an intense yet soft voice, described his search for almost forgotten souls. He had recorded the Trance Dance of the San people, taken photographs of wooden sculptures by a deceased Venda artist, and collected the songs of Cape Town's street musicians.

Many of the artists he had met lived in poverty. Nevertheless, they carried intangible treasures in their minds - the music and stories of their people. Their families and neighbours were often no longer aware of the intrinsic value of their elders' knowledge. Only when John, the white man from Cape Town, came to visit, when he brought money and equipment,

patience and attention, they glimpsed the importance and began to wonder about the commercial potential.

John was concerned about the great loss of African identity that might occur, should no one bother to preserve it. 'It's the kind of treasure that has to be carried over from one generation to the next, otherwise it dies,' he said. 'It goes extinct, like a species disappearing off the face of the earth.'

He was inspired to become a Soul Searcher by his professor of musicology Günthner Pulvermacher, a German Jew who escaped the Holocaust to South Africa. 'In pre-Hitler Germany there were some schools where people had the most extraordinary education. They studied Latin and Greek and Sanskrit, for example, as a basis, and then did things like Chinese astrology and the music of the world as well. So he knew a lot what later ... there wasn't even a word for it ... what later became the field of ethnomusicology.'

As a student, John was bored with the conservative notions of the university's music department about what music is and should be. 'I was always asking about Africa, but there was nothing. It was all European: Stockhausen and Berlioz, stuff like that.'

Yet John became more than an ethnomusicologist. He was a Soul Searcher who found his identity as a white, Jewish male, South African within the African music.

John's CV probably does not mention that he is a Soul Searcher but rather describes his profession as a music producer and the director of CAMA, the Contemporary African Music and Arts Archive funded by several donors such as the Ford Foundation and the Lotto Foundation.

In January 1994, John founded CAMA, after he came back from a trip to Asia that inspired him to devote his life to cultural heritage. 'I spent six months in Japan and was impressed with how much that country's government does to preserve their national treasures. In the morning before work there are even classes in *Ikebana*, the art of folding kimonos. People who know old traditions were seen as national treasures and treated as such. I started wondering how many treasures were being lost in our country.'



John Turest-Swartz, December 2007

Many years of working as an ethnomusicologist still left John with a deeper longing. Although he saw the urgency to preserve indigenous music, something had changed inside him in the past few months. His last encounter had altered the direction of his journey; now he wanted more.

John opened a folder on his desktop to play a video clip that showed an elderly crippled couple and a teenager playing a shrill song in a windy backyard. It was hard to believe that this unglamorous scene should have become the centre of John's dreams and yet it did.

John was driven by the idea of recording original artists. 'It is very rare that you find folk musicians, who create their own songs instead of only interpreting traditionals,' he said. For a long time he had to be content with the recitation of the known, until in November 2006 he met 64 year old Louisa Steenkamp.

Normally, he identified rural musicians through churches or mayors. Louisa, however, was found by the police. A brother of Tyron Hendricks, the police commander in Calvinia, told John about an old man, a blind woman, and a small child who made a living by playing the old Hantam music. He said that they played in the streets of the townships for food, coins, and old clothing.

The story intrigued John and he arranged with Hendricks to meet the family at the police station. 'When a police van comes and the officer says, "Get in!" you don't argue,' John laughed. In hindsight, he thought it was ironic to be introduced to his gem in such a way.

What John found at the police station didn't fit the original story any longer. Louisa's 80-year-old husband had died and the little child, her grandson Jonny, had meanwhile developed into a 20-year-old man.

Louisa brought along her brother Abraham; a gentle person with warm eyes and a heart-winning smile. At the back of the police station the three of them sat on flimsy chairs and played, while John recorded and videotaped their performance.

The moment Louisa started singing John turned blind to the physical world and fell in love with the crippled woman.

The first song Louisa ever sang for the Soul Searcher was a piece of old Afrikaans folklore. 'Bokkie sê my reg is a song that everybody knows in this community. It is not a city thing. "Baby, tell me true, Baby tell me true, because the train is leaving - are we on or not?" And normally it goes round and round and they sing the lines like this. She took this and said: "Bokkie sê my reg, is ek 'n struikel in jou weg?,"' John recalled. 'That means: "Baby, tell me true- am I an obstacle in your way?" And then the song becomes autobiographical. That is when I get goose bumps.'



Louisa Steenkamp, April 2007

Although his past experience as a documentarian had taught John that ingenuity can be found in the humblest of circumstances, he didn't expect such powerful music from this frail person. 'I waited for ten years to hear something like this. It was an absolute shock.'

He felt the urge to bring her to the world outside of the Hantam area and make her known. 'She should be recognised,' John said. 'She is a huge soul, living in a very difficult life; in a body that is beaten.' Through the guitar, Louisa's fine fingers had built a room where she could speak about the bitter story of her life.

Louisa's grandson Jonny accompanied her on the old *blikviool*. Its sound resembled a dissonant violin. Sometimes he played so loud that it drowned out Louisa's singing.

Her husband had made the traditional instrument many years ago. David Kramer once described the *blikviool* as a typical instrument of the Karoo, a progeny of the Hottentot violin *ramkietjie*, tuned to G, D and A. Louisa's husband had used an oil tin as the resonance body.

Rust had eaten the label away over the years. The bridge was made from a solid wood board under steel strings. For use as a bow, he had taken a shiny branch, tanned by sweat and oil, over which he had drawn horse hair.

Louisa explained her personal music history to me. ‘From my childhood days, I developed my talent on a *ramkietjie*, and from then, on a guitar with five strings. Then I found out it needed one more string. That is how I learned to play.’

Yet her skills were not a result of hard practising, she said. ‘But do you know who does give us this talent? This God that sits in heaven!’

Louisa’s music painted multi-layered images with words. She described the dry Karoo land that thirsted for water, like a child that thirsts for love. ‘*Die brak land vol kleuter, Mammie maak oop die deur so seker, die dröe land breek oop, Mammie, maak oop die deur so seker, ek staan buite vir so lank al.*’ Louisa was singing about herself.

She lived on a farm in Middlepos where her family were shepherds. ‘In 1961, both my parents were still alive. We stayed in the Karoo and looked after a herd of goats then. They came to ask me: “Which people live in the mountains and what goats are walking around there?”’ When she was still a child, Louisa’s mother abandoned her. Ever since then, she had lived as an outsider.

Louisa’s life had been an ordeal; that was for sure. ‘She talks about it as if it is a game,’ John said, ‘but it is very serious.’ All other facts were volatile. Whenever John asked her about her biography, the facts and stories changed each time depending on the hour of the day, her mood, and especially her audience.

Louisa censored her biography when she spoke to John. She didn’t speak about the mundane, the abuse, the poverty, and humiliations in her life. Instead she created a fascinating poem for him. He wanted to comprehend this mystery full of contradictions. ‘Other people say she has *always* been blind. Louisa tells me, she was blind in one eye from birth, but could see the moon and stars with the other eye until she was 38 years old.’ Then her late husband beat her so badly that she went fully blind, she once told John.

Despite the abuse, Louisa had loved her husband and still spoke highly of him. They were a team that made music for a living. Yet, as Louisa recalled, sometimes it got too much for him. ‘My old John didn’t like the songs very much. I had an old grey guitar and I wanted to play this, and he said: “No, woman, go cook food.” Then I just had to do what he said.’

There was no rage in her words, no regrets, no judgement of the people who hurt her. *Jy weet dan, maar jy vergeet dan*, said one of her songs. Even though, you knew the harsh truth, you forgot it, in order to live on and not be eaten up by grief.

Although Louisa's story was shattering in many ways, John's motivation for returning to Calvinia was not pity. He believed that her soul had an immense capacity to express the world of her people. 'Someone like Louisa can articulate the other side.'

And his concern was greater than conscience, since it involved him directly. As a mere documentarian John would have met Louisa, interviewed her, recorded her, documented her songs, and put them onto the website. 'But now I began to work much more deeply trying to understand her world,' John explains. 'Trying to understand her words, where she gets her lyrics from and actually trying to make a good sound that honours the integrity of her music and her spirit, but also is potentially commercially viable.'

John decided to put his career into the project and changed his focus from archiving music to producing Louisa's work. He wanted to get creatively involved. This meant that he had to shape her music to make it digestible for an urban audience.

For that he needed the full support of the community, which was not always easy to gain. John was no oily shark whose only objective was profit. Yet he was still a wealthy white guy from the city, who recorded rural coloured musicians and took their music away. Hence, the people he worked with sometimes expected miracles and didn't always trust him. Surely, he must burn CDs, sell them, and make a fortune from their work, they thought. What the people did not understand was that the music was often too raw for large public audiences - like a freshly mined diamond that needed to be cut.

However, the Soul Searcher wasn't in it for the money. 'I don't even know if anyone would buy it. It is different music from the Pub and Beer kind, it is not *Boeremusiek*, it is something else. And there isn't really a proper market place for that yet.'

John tried to stay away from loaded political complexities and rather focused on his goal. 'I am not there as a white man. I am not particularly conscious of my social conditioning. I am really there for the music and in this particular case I am there because I love Louisa.'



The road to Calvinia: April 2007

Travelling from Cape Town, one can reach Calvinia in two ways - either by taking a detour on tar, or else going there directly, via the gravel road. Although the gravel road is the more uncomfortable way, it drafts a mental map of the rough world beyond the mountains. The slow bumping ride makes the car creak dangerously. Stirred-up red dust finds its way through every hole until it eventually attacks the lungs. In the case of a breakdown, you have to hike through the mountains for help; there is no cell phone reception. It feels like driving on the moon. Civilisation behind the range of mountains seems unlikely. Every turn and every hill heightens the anticipation of the end of the road and the world, until unexpectedly the houses of Calvinia appear in the distance.

For John the drive to Calvinia is like a metamorphosis. 'Every time when we drive up that escarpment, you know that you are not just entering a different landscape, it is not just the Karoo, it is a different mindscape also.'

The Soul Searcher has lost count of how often he has been to Calvinia, since he first met Louisa. It must have easily been about ten times. 'There is something important about returning,' he said.

In May 2007, John chose the tarred detour and promptly missed the turn off to Calvinia, because his mind was racing elsewhere. This trip was distinctly different from John's previous visits. This time, he would bring Louisa to the city for two concerts he had arranged in Cape Town; one at a national environmental conference and the other at an Afrikaans cultural centre.

However, he had reason to worry about Louisa's well-being. 'She almost died when I visited her in December,' John said. 'Her blind boyfriend had beaten her up. Two ribs were broken.'

Apparently this was not the first time that she had been assaulted. 'This uncle that I am now giving grace to, he beats me and I cry,' Louisa told me on my last visit. 'With my John, the one that I was married to, I didn't get beaten so much and I didn't have so many marks on my body.'

Judging by the way she spoke about him, John believed that Louisa didn't want this man, Willem Oppermann, in her house. It seemed to John that he just moved in because he was blind as well and his family didn't want him.

John had asked her if she wants to move out of this abusive situation and perhaps live in an old-age home. Louisa made it clear to John that she definitely would not leave Calvinia. This was where she belonged, where she was known, where she could move around, smell and feel where she was. The violent environment gave Louisa's songs their compelling depth. At the same time, it constantly threatened her life.

Around the Cape Peninsula the weather had been cold and rainy, closer to Calvinia the dry heat was so strong that the air-conditioning couldn't cope as the sunrays pierced the windscreen.

John's concerns did not only pertain to Louisa, because he had announced her performance in Cape Town with a band. That band, however, did not yet exist five days prior to the event.

Last time he went up, about two weeks before, the Soul Searcher had tried to find musicians who could support Louisa and understand her music.

John had arranged to meet with an allegedly masterful accordion player, who lived on a farm 70km outside Calvinia. When he arrived in the middle of nowhere, the man had gone on his bicycle to visit a friend 40 kilometres away. John was upset that all his efforts were disregarded like that. 'He didn't have the responsibility,' John assumed. Or maybe the man was simply anxious.

Surprisingly Kovie Opperman had readily agreed to accompany Louisa instead, although he was known to only play solo on his *trekklavier* – as the accordion is called in Afrikaans. Kovie had quickly sensed the grandeur of Louisa Steenkamp and humbly stepped back to give the limelight to her.

On the contrary, the guitar player Jan Isaacs struggled to keep himself in the background. He played music with his head rather than his heart. Jan worked for the

municipality as a radio moderator, a police reservist and as an educational volunteer. Despite his lack of fine-tuning, he was a well-connected organiser with a cell-phone and therefore, a vital support for the project.

John put high hopes into Jakob Swarts, an old school friend of Louisa's, to play the lead guitar. In the boot of his car John carried a beautiful instrument as a present for Jakob. After convincing his 80-year-old father to sponsor the guitar, John had spent double what he had intended, but he believed that it was worthwhile. 'I'm sure Jakob never owned something like this in all his life. It is perfect for him. He likes to play fast. It even has a plug for amplifying.'

The fifth member of the *Hantam Hartsnare*, as John had baptised the band, was an old man named Oom Salie, short for Salomon Miller. He played the *blikviool*; however, not very well. Nevertheless, he visually complimented the character of Louisa's music through his dashing old-school looks.

John wondered how this make-shift band would cope in Cape Town. He seemed nervous about the experiment of bringing amateur musicians together that hardly knew each other, let alone played together. The concert was officially scheduled for Wednesday. Today was Saturday leaving five days to rehearse.

John's concerns came to an abrupt halt, when late in the afternoon he reached the signboard "Welcome to Calvinia".

The streets were quiet. Most people escaped the midday heat but one single soul flitted from one house to a neighbour giving evidence that there was life in Calvinia after all. Hot wind swirled through the road as if blown from an invisible hairdryer. The air was filled with Sunday-lifelessness that probably also oppressed the town on every other day of the week.

The heritage of the religious reformer John Calvin, after whom the town was named in 1853, seemed to have seeped down into the heart of Calvinia. The town was full of spirits; some to uplift and some to destroy.

Alcoholism was rife and the town was infamous for producing the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the country. According to the reservist Jan, of the 1000 teenage girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen, 800 were carrying life in their young bodies. The AIDS rate was estimated at 37 per cent. There was little hope of escaping poverty.

A tourist website praised Calvinia as 'a town in a time warp where the past and present are intertwined.' However, sometimes it felt like the present had not arrived at all. During their first visits, John and his crew stayed in a Victorian guesthouse. They had developed a friendly relationship with the hosts, until the day the band came for rehearsals. John recalled

the owner of the guesthouse saying: 'We don't want these people here!' Unequivocally she was referring to people from the township, like her namesake Louisa Steenkamp. In her mind, these people were of the wrong colour and lived on the wrong side of the tracks. Like many other South African towns, Calvinia was still racially and economically divided by the railway line that separated the townships from the town centre.

Since relationships turned sour, John has elected to stay at Mevrou Groenewald's guesthouse. The rooms had a distinct lost-in-time-feel to them. In the lounge, furnished with a mustard coloured velvet couch, John planned to hold rehearsals. The room was dominated by a painting of a river flowing through evergreen mountains embraced by a pink sunset. The colour was picked up outside the frame by the immortal carnations in a vase with golden edging. Crocheted curtains, yellow from smoke that was once supposed to blow boredom away, veiled the burglar-bars and whispered of another world beyond the railway line - one which was not as clean and quiet as this tarred part of town.

The harsh midland sun had carved deep traces into Mevrou Groenewald's face over the years, but she still smiled genuinely. She didn't mind that John brought people from the township into her home. In fact, she knew many of them personally.

'I like those people,' she said, but before Mevrou Groenewald could go on, their conversation was interrupted by a phone call from Jan. It was bad news. Jakob, the new guitar player, fled after a fight with his wife, because she threatened to sue him for domestic violence. Jan had activated all his police friends in the greater Hantam area to find Jakob, but to no avail. Jakob went undercover the day John wanted to bring him out into the limelight.

The sun had set already and the temperature dropped rapidly. The Soul Searcher had left the guesthouse to pick up the band members for their first rehearsal. When he finally returned, he looked exhausted. Only Louisa and Oom Salie were available that night. Jakob was hiding, Jan was busy with a criminal case, and Kovie had to attend to his tuck-shop.

At eight pm, John served the elderly people cheese rolls and hot chocolate; things you can eat without teeth. It was Louisa's first meal of the day.

'Daar sal omtrent 200 mense van die Kaap daar wees.' John always spoke to the band in Afrikaans. 'Yes Uncle,' Louisa replied with a distant calmness. Then she started crying, because her friend Jakob let her down. As Louisa sat there and wept, the room filled with fumes of alcohol. John was not fazed by the sudden emotional outburst; it was not the first one.

‘We have many things to discuss. The mayor will be there and my parents,’ he said business-like. ‘*Ai tog!*’ Louisa marvelled; she calmed down quickly. John fuelled the urgency. ‘You will perform alone and we have two days to prepare. We have to practise, practise, practise. We need to put together a play list and work on it so that it has a little bit of variety.’ ‘*Ek verstaan jou baie goed.*’ Oom Salie said, just to say something.

‘There will be lights over your heads and microphones,’ John warned, ‘when you sit on your bed, you sing wonderful, but with a microphone, this is mighty different.’ He was afraid that the elderly people might be overwhelmed. ‘The people will listen carefully.’

As the evening progressed, the numbing effect of the alcohol faded. Louisa was in pain. Her ribs, broken by her “flatmate”, stabbed into her side like hot irons. She breathed heavily, holding her stomach while her head had sunk onto her chest.

John refused to give Louisa ten rand for wine when she asked him for it. He offered her tea instead, but Louisa shook her head in disgust. John was troubled about the limited protection he could provide for Louisa. ‘It can’t go on like this, that someone beats annetjie like that.’

In search of a more light-hearted topic, the three spoke about the dress code for the concert. Oom Salie decided to wear his shining black and white leather shoes in Louis-Armstrong-style. John really liked them; that was what the people in the city would want to see. Louisa didn’t own anything that was fitting properly let alone was stylish. ‘*Ek het nie swart skoene nie, ek het net skoene wat’n bietjie te klein gekoop is,*’ Louisa explained to John and they decided to get her new black shoes and a cap.

Eventually, there were no open questions left to discuss. ‘*Ek het nie vrae om te vra nie, ek is dood!*’ Louisa said. John was puzzled. Why did she say she was dead? ‘*Dood tevrede,*’ she smiled mischievously: completely satisfied.

Before they could decide to call it a night, Jan arrived and seemed depressed. He said he had been looking for Jakob, but in vain. John was hardly listening to Jan, because in the meantime he had caught Louisa in a good moment, where she would freely talk about her life.

Louisa certainly didn’t keep changing the facts because she might have forgotten. Her memory was accurate, especially when it came to figures. She remembered the day when she got the guitar from John - the fifteenth of December 2006. She was born on the 22nd of February 1943, Oom Salie would turn 70 on the 27th of June; her husband was born on the 25th ‘*in die twaalfde maand van die jaar*’; died on the 28th of September 2005 and was buried on the first of October 2005. ‘*En my meisie is 32 jaar oud. Sy was in 1973 gebore, op die 24ste Augustus. Sy is 32 jaar oud en het drie kinders.*’

While Louisa recounted her life to John, Jan told Oom Salie the reason for his late arrival. The story became so outrageous that even John stopped interviewing Louisa. 'I was at Stoffie Jacobus' place and I think he murdered his wife,' Jan said. The farmer had stabbed his 27 year-old wife previously. Last time Jan had met her, she seemed nervous and after that she disappeared. '*As ek haar vra, is sy te bang om my te sê,*' he recalled.

Jan woke up last night dreaming of her. He went to the farm in the morning but could not find the woman. Instead he discovered that the farmer had held her on a chain like a slave. Jan was convinced that the man had killed her and started investigating.

As an undercover reservist, he was constantly involved in these kinds of gruesome sheriff stories. For another of his adventurous cases Jan had had to be a witness in court. At eight o'clock on the following Monday morning he had to drive to the Springbok High Court, about four hours away from Calvinia. Therefore, Jan and Kovie would only join the band in Cape Town later on Monday.

The trouble started when he recently took a lift with a stranger. Lying between them was a black plastic bag. When it got cold outside, Jan switched on the heater in the car. After a while, sweet scents filled the air and Jan became suspicious. '*Wat is in die swart sak?*' he asked. At first the man refused to show him. Only when Jan identified himself as a policeman did he open the bag. Jan found several bunches of Marijuana and 1,400 Mandrax tablets. Apparently the dealer was part of a drug syndicate.

By the time Jan had finished his crime stories, it was late at night. John asked whether he should take the band home. In his mind he had written the evening off as a bonding exercise, where not a single note had been played. To his surprise, Oom Salie suggested: '*Ons kan saam speel,*' and harvested agreement with everyone that they should practise a few songs.

The band played together for the first time and it sounded miserable. Jan was too loud, Oom Salie didn't listen to Louisa when he squeaked on his *blikviool* and her voice was tired and scratchy. At this stage it was hard to identify a melody. After a few songs, Louisa grew tired. Her eyes started watering and she noisily cleared her nose. It was time to go home.



Solomon Miller, Louisa Steenkamp; April 2007

At night the rural township felt peaceful. Teenagers hung around outside in the dark streets staring at John, the stranger in his white Mercedes. Dogs kept running in front of the bonnet, as if they were not used to cars. When John got out, he deliberately left his doors wide open, the key inside.

He dropped off Louisa first, to find that the neighbours were already curiously awaiting her return in front of her tiny purple shack; even her "flatmate" Willem stood in the doorframe. Inside it was pitch black - no light bulbs. When Louisa entered the house, the neighbours came along. Yet her environment didn't seem to be caring and supportive, but rather inquisitive and intruding - her home didn't offer protection. Louisa's blindness made her vulnerable in the rough life of the township. Children, street cats and dogs occupied her house as if it were their own.

During his previous visits, John had raised funds to make Louisa's life more bearable. He firstly got a builder in to even out the waves in the floor of her little shack, so that she wouldn't fall and break her leg. Then he bought a table and two chairs. Within a couple of days, they were stolen from under her feet.

All of Louisa's modest possessions, a red kitchen cupboard, an old rusty camping chair, a filthy microwave and a bed, seemed flimsily fragile and rootless like her - a temporary place on earth. Louisa took all this with a religious acceptance. 'Pray, raise your head to heaven, pray, pray. Don't look to the ground, pray to heaven. For in heaven is grace, not on earth,' she said to me once.

The next stop, at Oom Salie's RDP house on the outskirts of the township, felt much friendlier. His grandchildren were waiting already and seemed happy to have him back.

John wanted to see Kovie at his shop to ensure that he would be at the practice tomorrow at twelve. On the way there, he asked Jan what he must do with the money that Louisa would earn at the concerts in Cape Town. He felt cash was not safe with her. Within two weeks, R 1,000 could be gone up in spirits or stolen. Who would be trustworthy enough to administer it for her?

A caretaker received Louisa's pension to buy food for her, but apparently that did not work very well. Jan suggested that John give the money to him, though John was sceptical about this idea. Without a doubt, Jan was a good guy, but he was involved in many community projects and the temptation would be great to use part of the money for something else.

Kovie's tuck shop, where he sold the staple food of the township - Coke and chips - was brightly lit. A vicious-looking dog repelled potential customers. At the moment Kovie couldn't be bothered to chase the dog to the back of the house. When John came to visit, he was watching the *Super 14 Rugby*; the *Stormers* were winning.

He'd be at the rehearsal tomorrow at twelve, he promised. Kovie's witty eyes blinked through modern glasses. He had made his mark in Calvinia as a businessman. For him the trip to Cape Town was welcome break away from his routine.

Lastly, John dropped Jan at his church. The building was under construction. It had to be extended, because the congregation was constantly growing. Jan was also actively involved in that part of community life. The young man remained positive about life in Hantam although opportunities were scarce in the poverty stricken area. This weekend he had just come back from a campaign where he had travelled for thirteen unpaid days to high schools teaching learners about AIDS and teenage pregnancy.

When John eventually went to bed that night, he saw a stony road ahead of him. Four nights before the concert, the sound was raw.

The rehearsal the next day was scheduled around Jan's commitments. Church service ended at twelve o'clock and he planned to leave for Springbok at two. At noon, Jan was the only one who did not pitch at the guesthouse.

John felt the pressure from the organisers of the concert. They nagged him about the number of people who needed to be accommodated. With the way things were going at that moment, John could not commit himself to a fixed number. He stayed calm. 'Whatever happens, will happen.'

The rest of the band sat together and dwelt on what to play. ‘Start with the best!’ Kovie suggested. Louisa was more specific. ‘Uncle *Jon*,’ she said, ‘we will start with *Swartkop Skapie*.’

Swartkop Skapie was Louisa’s brand song. John explained to me why this song about a black-headed Karoo sheep was so central to her. ‘She says it is a song about a sheep that was on the farm when she was a little girl. There was this *hanslammetjie*, which is an orphan, whose mother had left or died or whatever. And she felt sorry for this little abandoned sheep, so she wrote this song. But it is actually about herself.’

John wanted the *blikviool* to open the concert. ‘People from the city will wonder what it is; they don’t know such a thing.’

‘*Dood reg*,’ Oom Salie agreed.

Louisa had a habit of adjusting the strings in between and during songs, whenever she felt it was out of tune. She would stroke every string gently but the last, which she plucked violently leaving a dissonant sound escaping from the room. John found this ritualistic signature unsuitable for a concert. ‘When you play before an audience,’ he explained to Louisa, ‘you cannot let them wait until you are finished tuning. Things like that have to be done before the concert – ‘*Jy doen dit een keer in die begin, en klaar*.’

John attempted a difficult balancing act of directing the dynamics without suffocating the essence of the music. He wanted to bring out the subtle flavours of Louisa’s compositions that often got swallowed by the clumsy accompaniment. He taught the band how to strengthen a song by taking away certain elements in favour of others. Instead of all people playing at the same time, for instance, Louisa should sing the first verse alone, then the mouth organ, that John had given to Oom Salie, should join in, and eventually everybody should play. Slowly the band members learned how to create an effect.

Kovie especially dove into Louisa’s world resounding her rhythms with his *trekklavier*. During sad patches, when Kovie stretched the long notes to the full scale of his instrument, he revealed a fading green Hawaiian print on the accordion’s pleats. Sometimes the ageing, clacking keys drowned out the melody. John stored a brand-new accordion at his studio in Cape Town, which Kovie could replace the old *Hohner* with, but there was some value in this worn-out nostalgia.

‘*Ek hoop nie julle dink ek is mal*,’ said John, proposing an idea to the band, ‘but I think it will sound better if Kovie plays his old accordion. ‘*Dit klink vir my so mooi*.’ The band agreed. They agreed to a lot of John’s suggestions, but not to all of them.

At five minutes to two, Jan briefly pitched to report a gang fight in the area. He therefore would have to leave again, but intended to catch up with them later. However, John knew that this was an empty promise and Jan would not come back that day. Experience had taught him to go with the rhythm of the people and to make do with whatever resources were available at the time.

Patiently the band worked on their slow progress. Louisa sang *Jy weet dan*, the song about the lonely girl who stood in the paddock stripped of her skirt. At first, they thundered along on their instruments almost mocking the silly half-naked girl. '*Die mense sal dink dis 'n ou rugby lied, dit sal die lied vermorsel,*' John interrupted, objecting to the gung-ho sports style of the band. 'Let's try it without the accordion.' He wanted to keep the funny overtone while at the same time allowing the song's bitter-sweet sadness to surface.

As they rehearsed the song over and over again, Louisa's voice became noticeably weaker. The pain returned. When she held her ribs, her hunchbacked torso slumped into a ball shape. She asked John for relief. '*Kan ek 'n pilletjie kry?*' John heeded to her plea and brought her Disprin and a cheese roll. This time, she gladly accepted tea with the simple appreciation of a child. Her skinny fingers wrapped around the hot cup ready to ease the pangs of malnutrition caused by poverty and long-term alcohol abuse.

Although her eyeballs had sunk deep into her head, Louisa's gaze was awake. When the white of her eyes flashed at you, it felt like she could see you with her inner eye. Yet the disability lacked any mysterious beauty; the blindness clearly weighed Louisa down. '*Dis nie mooi om blind te wees nie,*' she commented.

As the pain receded, her baked apple face and her thin lips relaxed, ready to sing again.

John once compared Louisa to Bob Dylan because they both never repeat themselves when performing. Lyrics and melody alter according to mood, audience and circumstances, as do the artists. A sad song could become a jolly song the next time.

This might marvel the audience, but made it difficult for the accompaniment like Kovie. With *Goudstad ligte* he struggled to jump onto Louisa's tempo changes. They had played the song about four times already, when John finally wanted to move on. Louisa, however, decided: '*Ons doen dit weer oor.*'

With painstaking steps John crystallised the beauty from Louisa's music and the band began to understand.

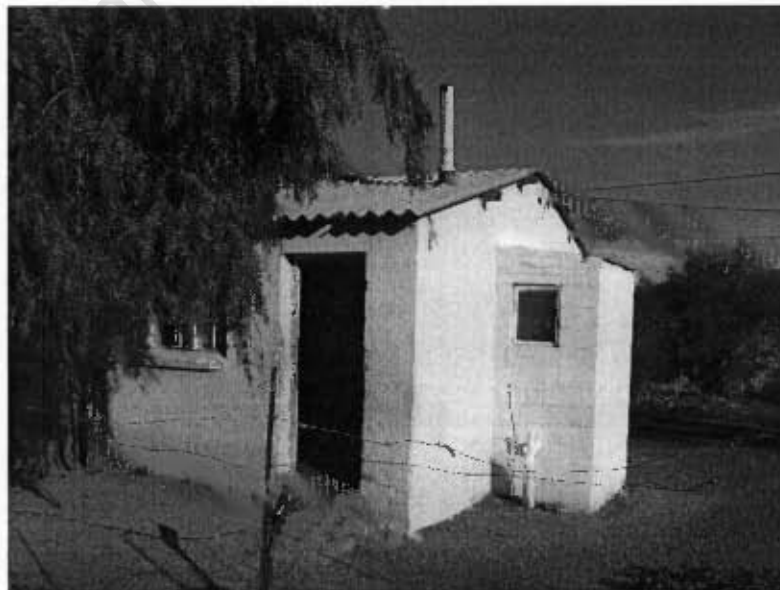
When John returned to the guesthouse after dropping everyone at home, he felt exhausted and the silent room allowed him to worry. The rehearsal had strained his patience and energies. Although, the band tried hard, they were obvious amateurs playing for fun. John was frustrated that Jakob and Jan were not committed. He had facilitated a unique opportunity for them and they were not grabbing it.

Since there was now one more seat available, John had decided to take Jan's girlfriend Audrey along so that she could look after Louisa. He worried about Louisa's drinking and how they would handle it in Cape Town. She would need some drinks to make it through the performance - but how many?

In moments like these, John wondered why he chose this particular job and doubt flooded idealism for a split second. 'I want to make Louisa's life a little bit better. install some self-appreciation. But maybe I am so wrong, and she has appreciated herself for a long time already.'

The next morning all the band members were readily packed waiting to be picked up. Audrey was first. 'I am a little bit anxious to go to the big city,' she admitted.

Oom Salie, on the contrary, didn't seem intimidated at all. He travelled Humphrey-Bogart-style with matching suitcases, dressed in a suit and hat with a green feather attached that matched his slipover. With the coffee flask under his arm he kissed his grandchildren goodbye. '*Bye Oupa, lekker ry!*' they said and waved until the dust clouds from the car had settled.



Louisa's house in Calvinia

Even during the day, Louisa's house had an eerie feel to it; as if the small hole swallowed happiness. Outside warmth and brightness eased daily miseries, inside smells of poverty and darkness chilled away all remains of hope.

Indeed, her home harboured a dark surprise that morning. The neighbour knocked on John's car window before he even opened the door. She nattered excitedly to John, like a telltale child reporting her sibling's unruly behaviour, as if John were some kind of authority who brought law and order into the community. 'He is in hospital, there was a fight.' John ignored her, simply keen to get Louisa out of that dump. As usual Louisa's house was full of people, however, no one bothered to pick up the broken mug or wipe the spilled coffee from the floor. The shattered window was further evidence of last night's fight. Willem was gone - apparently taken to hospital - and Louisa didn't seem perturbed about it.

Before they climbed into the car, John took photos of Louisa and her guitar in front of the purple house. Strong winds blew from the Hantam Mountains along the dusty road. Louisa stood stoically like a withered branch, while the neighbour kids were jumping around her and tried to be in the photo as well, although they might never see the end result. John aimed for the perfect shot, which epitomized the loneliness of Louisa's songs. When the kids lost interest and moved on, Louisa literally looked deserted. John pushed the button.

The mood in the car was jolly as the adventurous spirit of the journey took over. Oom Salie was excited because he liked travelling. Audrey was excited because she would spend some days in the big city sleeping in a fancy hotel. John was excited because everything had worked according to plan and there was hope that the concert might succeed after all. And Louisa was excited because her big day had finally dawned and she stood a chance of meeting her daughter Elisabeth in Cape Town, as she told John when they were passing *Giftberg* Mountain.

John was of the opinion that Louisa had never been to Cape Town before, until she explained to him how she had previously travelled alone by taxi to visit her daughter. The taxi driver used to pick her up at her door in Calvinia, then drove her all the way to Cape Town, and didn't leave her until she disappeared inside her daughter's house in Athlone.

The Soul Searcher was touched by this story. 'Today I am the taxi driver and I am responsible for this precious freight. There is only one Louisa Steenkamp in the world- *stem jy nie saam nie?*' John's pathos didn't faze Louisa much as she countered dryly: 'I am sure there are more.'

It was John's job to make this treasure heard of and spoken about. When they arrived in Cape Town, John was closer to his dream than ever before.

Louisa, Oom Salie, and Audrey checked into the five star hotel in Cape Town. Using a lift was a novelty to all. Louisa preferred it to the escalators which frightened her. Oom Salie joked that the bedroom doors worked like ATM's- with a bank card. Audrey experienced for the first time in her life, how it felt, when someone else did the dishes and made the bed for her.

In the evening John took the band out to a restaurant for a meal. 'At the Spur they come in with these little sparklers and they sing a song to them. All of them, Audrey, Jan, and Oom Salie, were absolutely flabbergasted by this event,' John recalled. 'Oom Salie was sitting next to me and then he turned to me making this very serious speech. He said he used to be a farm labourer and never in his wildest dreams did he imagine sitting in a city restaurant next to a white man having a meal and "talking like friends".'

The *Hantam Hartsnare* would have no more time to get accustomed to the wonders of the city. The whole of next day was scheduled for rehearsal in John's studio.

When Kovie and Jan arrived late on Monday night at the hotel, the band was finally complete. John's hope for a successful concert gained new momentum.

The biodiversity conference at Kirstenbosch was already in full swing when the *Hantam Hartsnare* met in a backroom for their last rehearsal, three hours before their first performance ever. The band had grown into a team within 72 hours. Three days ago they had played for fun, now they played for effect.

The band had practised the whole of yesterday at John's studio and seemed tired. John needed to juggle energy resources carefully and decided to rehearse just one more song before the sound check. 'I don't want to over-practise you,' he said.

To his dismay, the players weren't confident yet about their entries. '*Oom Salie moet weet waneer om op te hou met speel,*' John reminded him. Especially Jan seemed to have forgotten everything. That was when John changed his mind. 'I don't think we can have a break, people, you still need to practise.'

John's nervousness carried over to the band. Probably to calm herself down, Audrey spoke to Louisa like a child and repeated John's instructions as if she was deaf. When she became a bit too loving and caring, Louisa lost her patience. '*Los my!*' she shrugged Audrey off.

Then stage fright smacked Kovie with stomach cramps. He used to be very careful with food, because it had given him problems before. This afternoon, however, he had tucked into the hot *Rooti* served to the band from the conference caterers and now it hit back.

Louisa seemed to be the only one who was fully under control, like a tranquil centre in the eye of the storm. She laughed a lot and looked much livelier in this strange environment away from threats and abuse. She knew her songs and the order they had agreed on. Two hours before the concert, she even found time to create new *liedties* until they were interrupted by the sound engineer.

He carefully lifted Louisa's cap to put a wireless Madonna-style microphone on her head so that she could grow accustomed to it. For a few seconds, Louisa's two grey schoolgirls' plaits shone through. Very few people ever saw Louisa without her cap. She used to wear a washed-out toddler's beanie until John bought her a black velvet cap with fur edge, like Russian officers wear.

Too soon all rehearsal time had been used up and the sound-check on stage was due. The band was placed right in the middle of the Kirstenbosch greenhouse between the dense indigenous *fynbos* on the visitor's path, which curled up in a circle towards a little hill. Although they sat in the centre, the *Hartsnare* were almost invisible. About six sound engineers swirled around Louisa and the band, professionally readjusting cables, amplifiers, and microphones. The band looked lost between the bushes and technical equipment.

As the evening set in, it became chilly in the greenhouse. To warm up and relax, John shared a bottle of wine with the band back in the rehearsal room. Oom Salie crossed the line of relaxation and the gentle granddad turned into a touchy dandy throwing kisses at every female.



From left: Jan Isaacs, Louisa Steenkamp, Kovie Opperman; Salomon Miller; Kirstenbosch Greenhouse; May 2007

The conference visitors trickled into the greenhouse in small groups, while the band waited patiently back on stage. The people gathering for the award ceremony had just come from a long day of listening, presenting, and networking at the biodiversity conference and felt like food, wine, and light entertainment. First, however, there were a few speeches to overcome.

Finally, when the who's who of the conservationists' world had gathered, the mayor of Calvinia, Magda Dyers, introduced Louisa and the *Hantam Hartsnare*. The audience became excited and voices in the crowd whispered: 'It will be interesting to see what the Hantam music is like.' Louisa seemed to blend with the *fynbos* as South African heritage. A visitor said: 'Shame, look at her, she is ancient.'

The band opened with *Swartkop Skapie*. It sounded screechy. The audience expected something lively and light, yet what they heard was distant sadness.

Louisa's intimate music didn't come across to the 250 people scattered in the greenhouse. Neither did they see her, nor did they hear the nuances through the amplifier. All they heard was Oom Salie scratching his *blikvool* and Louisa's amplified sniffs. 'Maybe if you listen to it on the radio...', commented one man, 'but this just sounds painful.'

And yes, Louisa sang about pain, but how could you share in it, if you didn't speak Afrikaans, like many of the people in the audience? The language was the key to Louisa's soul.

'We found that the people of these "fragile cultures" all sing in Afrikaans. It is as if the language is a river in which everyone can swim together,' John once explained. Little research was done about Afrikaans music. According to David Kramer, Afrikaans was a language of the kitchens of the Cape, a mixture of indigenous and colonial languages spoken by the slaves.

Despite the language barriers, Louisa could hold the attention and curiosity of the audience as long as she sang alone. When Audrey and Jan joined in after a while though, the talking in the audience rose and the suspense was broken.

After 20 minutes the pain was over. The concert was shorter than anticipated, because it had started late and there was still an awards ceremony to come. The conference people interrupted the *Hantam Hartsnare* before the end of their play-list. 'This is an inspiration for young people like myself,' the organiser, who was in his late fifties, announced with a concluding undertone. The applause sounded more enthusiastic than the comments.

Louisa was perceived as an example of political correctness, a preservation project. The occasion urged people to say things like 'It is good for the youth!' and 'Our children can

learn from this.’ Even the minister of environmental affairs Tasneem Essop lauded the exemplary character of Louisa. ‘We are not exposed to this often enough. We are running the risk of loosing a footprint.’

In all good faith, reducing Louisa to an example of heritage preservation missed the point, because her insights went beyond *Suikerbossie*. Louisa could have touched the core of individualised despair that haunts Western contemporaries with her universal depth on topics of isolation and loneliness, but tonight no one was listening.

Two days later, Louisa got another chance to prove her depth. Deep into “*Boerewors Land*”, the northern parts of Cape Town where most people speak Afrikaans, in Durbanville, there was a little island of alternative Afrikaans culture called Rust en Vrede Cultural Centre. The organisers sold affordable quality wine by the bottle from behind a counter that apparently also served as a painting ground. It felt like a private party where you only know one person and happened to be spontaneously invited to. Strangers and friends relaxed on swing chairs on the veranda. The performance room, bright and clean, though cosy, seated about 50 people.

The crowd was in a good mood, mellowed by the Afrikaans poetry session which had just ended. Louisa was warmly welcomed when John introduced her. The audience responded immediately to Louisa’s music because they understood every word. Two days ago, people expected entertainment. Today, she was given room to offer poetry.



From left: Jan Isaacs, Audrey Eiman,
Louisa Steenkamp, Kovie Opperman,
RustenVrede May 2007

This was the night of the *Hartsnare*. The people understood what was going on inside Louisa's world. They laughed, they shivered, they cried with her and for her, physically and emotionally they were close to her.

Louisa sang: 'The conductor asks: why are you so sad? I say: let me take my journey. I'll tell you when I come back'. Oom Salie, who still wore his conference badge, spontaneously joined in. '*Kom t'rug*,' he sang with long vowels.

A single moment on that evening left a sour aftertaste. It happened just after the *Hartsnare* had finished performing and sat in the audience to listen to the second band *Red Earth*. Louisa had a VIP seat in the first row, visible to everyone. Someone had given her a glass of wine and she immediately gulped it down in one go like a nomad finding water in the desert. A woman in the audience laughed about it hysterically and pointed at Louisa, regretting that she wasn't quick enough to take a photograph of the "drolly" scene.

Other people were sorely reminded that feeding alcohol addiction as a non-monetary reimbursement to coloured people by white farmers had a painful history in the Cape winelands. The so-called "dop system" seemed to have retained its power.

John was aware of Louisa's addiction and often desperate about it. However, after going back to Calvinia time and time again, he realised that his influence was limited. 'There is no way. I mean I really love Louisa, and I would like to try whatever possible to help her, but there is no ways that she is going to change. She is living in a social situation where there is no Alcoholics Anonymous. There is no one to support her, if she decided to change. I had a long talk with her. I said to her: "You have got to listen, you got potential to have a career, you can earn money, you can be known, but it is entirely your responsibility. Nobody can do that for you." She sat quietly.'

The drinking problem affected not only Louisa. Oom Salie took the trip to Cape Town as an opportunity for a binge and eventually conducted himself so unbearably that John decided to kick him out of the band. 'Oom Salie is not in now. He was still drinking. He drank so much every time he got out of the car. At the hotel he would take the box of wine with him. I said to him: "Come Oom Salie, you can't walk into a hotel with a big bottle of wine!"'

The morning after the concert at Rust en Vrede, John saw the band off at the hotel. A few hours later, he got a happy phone call from Jan. 'He said, they stopped in Malmesbury and in Citrusdal and they went into the township and just set up on the street corner and started playing,' John recalled. 'They gave two concerts. He said about 300 people came around. And they were incredibly excited.'

However, the positive energy of the Cape Town concerts didn't last for long, as Calvinia's reality soon kicked in and hit Louisa especially hard. She had agreed with John to take all her salary in cash back home, reassuring him it would be safe with her. 'She said she's got a *trommel* - a metal box - in her house that only she has the key for and that is where she keeps the money in. That is like her bank.' John sighed. 'So I gave her all the money in ten rand notes. It got stolen within one weekend. They went on Friday the eighteenth, by Monday it was all gone.'

John suspected that Louisa got drunk on the Saturday and bragged to her neighbours about how much money she had made in the city. She hadn't had a chance to put the notes in her *trommel* but still wore it in a pouch around her neck. Someone, who was known to the neighbours, beat her up and took the money off her. The police later found the guy and arrested him, but the money was missing.

Nevertheless, now that the *Hartsnare* were an upcoming band, more money could come in with more concerts. Motivated by the initial success in Cape Town, Jan wanted the *Hantam Hartsnare* to play at the local community event of the year - the *Vleisfees*.

John didn't like the idea. The *Vleisfees*-organisers offered the *Hartsnare* R 2,000 for their concert. To John this seemed highly underpaid. 'Normally they pay artists R 10,000,' he explained. Furthermore, John had been warned that the *Vleisfees* might become quite rough, since it was more of an excuse for public drinking than a sophisticated party suitable for Louisa's fine poetry. Visitors had to pay a high entrance fee, which guaranteed that Louisa's friends and neighbours would not be there to support her. All in all, John thought it was a bad arrangement.

Jan called John to tell him that the organisers of the *Vleisfees* had urgently requested the *Hantam Hartsnare* to perform. When John phoned the organisers in Calvinia to verify, he heard a different version, where Jan himself went to the committee, driven by the idea of playing the *Hartsnare* on his radio station, and told the organisers that the band really wanted to play.

John could recommend to the *Hartsnare* what to do, but ultimately they were responsible for themselves. John and his team made a decision to keep out of it as much as possible this time. 'We'll fetch them, we'll bring them, we'll bring the instruments, we'll get them on stage, but Jan is now managing this thing. He must provide their food and refreshments.'

One week before the *Vleisfees*, the situation at Louisa's home got out of control. Willem, the man who stayed in her house, got drunk one night, screamed at Louisa, beat her, and eventually stabbed her in the neck.

That was more than John could tolerate and he took action. 'We had him removed now. I went to the superintendent of the police after it happened and I got him to send a police van. We went ourselves, we spoke to him and we said to him: "This is it now, finished, you are not coming back." He still came back the next morning. Louisa had instructions not to let him in. I hope he is still away. He had to go back to his family. Nobody wants him, so they just keep bringing him back to her. But it is her house, her space.'

Although Willem eventually didn't come back, he still had the power to frighten Louisa outside the house. 'The night before they had to perform on Saturday afternoon,' John recalled the incident, 'he was so wild and drunk that she had to go and sleep at the neighbour's place. She was afraid of him, so she couldn't even sleep at home.'

Louisa's sleepless night was evident the next day at the last rehearsal. When John came to fetch her, she wasn't dressed and didn't want to leave the house. John was nearly at his wits end on how to convince Louisa to come out. He was helped unexpectedly. 'Eventually her neighbours came and they stood around her and put their hands on her head. They prayed for her,' John recalled. 'It was very powerful. And she prayed intensely that she should be strong enough. We dressed her up, took her back and went to practise.'

Before the *Hantam Hartsnare* went on stage, an Afrikaans singer performed and was greatly supported by the audience, as John remembers with shivers. 'It was a young Afrikaans guy with "*Ek mis jou* - I miss you" on his old South African flag. His main song was called "I miss you"- "I miss the old orange, white and blue", in other words, "I miss the old South Africa." People loved that. That is the *Vleisfees*: very conservative, old South African, white Afrikaner, beer and *boerewors*, huge farmers with short pants and boots. Unbelievable situation! And that's where they wanted to perform; in that situation.'

As John had expected, the concert didn't go well. Jan had not provided food or refreshments for anyone, so the band was quite tired and worn out. 'The first song was good,' John recalled, 'and then it just went downhill from there, because Louisa just started singing slower and slower, losing energy. The sound engineering wasn't good. The audience, I think, kind of listened to the first song and then after that they just drank beer.'

Even when it came to the reimbursement, John's concerns about the *Vleisfees* were confirmed. 'They were promised R2,000 and were paid R1,400. I didn't get involved.'

The trouble of the *Vleisfees* could not break the resilience of the *Hantam Hartsnare*. A week later, John had arranged another concert close to Calvinia at the opening of the Botanical Gardens in Niewoudtville.

By then the make-up of the band had changed once again. 'Jan found a new guy, who is a really, really good guitarist,' John said excitedly. 'He amazingly plays guitar up-side-down, left-handed but without re-tuning.' Weynand Waterboer turned out to add great value to the band, because through his skilful playing he released the pressure from Louisa to sing all the time and keep the momentum going on her own.

John was happy to have Weynand on board for more than musical reasons. 'He looks like kind of a clean guy, you know.' The man was in his 30s and had a regular day job at the hospital. He could provide the stability the band urgently needed, especially since John had decided to give Oom Salie a second chance.

This time they were better prepared, because John was in control. At first the band played alone while the guests were arriving. 'Then we brought on Louisa, introduced her, and they played her songs,' John said. After about six songs, they gave Louisa a break to rest. The band kept entertaining the audience for about an hour. 'You know all the Gospel songs, so play the Gospel songs, but with no words,' John told them. He was of the impression that people loved the music this time around.

Even though the band had learned a lot since their first performance, John witnessed an incident after this concert that showed him that the *Hantam Hartsnare* had a long way to go to be professionals. 'People went from the luncheon and were taken to a tour of the flowers. The guests all moved off,' John recalled with a sigh. 'The next thing I see is Kovie, who is a very careful guy, with a whole lot of wine bottles.' He went around the tables and poured drops of red and white wine left in the bottles together to take home.

A moment later –when John was sitting with the organiser of the event - they saw the whole band carrying a case of wine. 'What are you doing?' he asked them. '*Nee, die mense het gesê di's ok,*' Kovie said. They had asked the caterers if there was any wine left. John did not agree. 'It is not all right. Look, guys, you are not a guest here. You are professional musicians, paid to come and play, and then you stay away.'

Professionalism also entailed commitment, which John sometimes felt was lacking. For instance, he was hoping that Jan would soon buy his own guitar to be able to rehearse with Louisa independently from John's presence in Calvinia. 'He is a well paid guy who has got a job. He can easily afford to buy his own guitar and he should. We are even thinking of contributing about R500 or something, but we want them to show their own commitment.'

Despite these hurdles, the Soul Searcher was convinced that his mission to make Louisa known was worthwhile. 'Last weekend when we were in Calvinia, we went to find the forest of Kokerboom. It is a desert tree, very ancient, they last 400 years or something. They grow in these very harsh environments, but they are absolutely beautiful. Louisa is sort of like that. Bringing her music out is a very special situation.'

Louisa had been grateful to John for her guitar, yet she believed it was divine intervention that changed her life. She told me, 'before, I had to borrow guitars to also show what I could do. But thank God, it is not Jan, or *Juffie*, or Big John, who gave me the guitar. The Lord said: "Go and give to the one who does not have, because tomorrow I give to you."'

Although he had put in so much, John didn't expect much revenue from this costly venture. He said to produce a CD with about 200 copies cost R 50,000. 'If Louisa was a great commercial discovery and I saw the potential to make a million out of this poor woman, then maybe I could use the word hijacking. But it is the opposite actually. To make a CD, I do all the work and that has been out of my own pocket. I have no funding for it.'

He wanted to finish the project by January 2008. 'I want her to hear herself on the radio and to acknowledge that she is terrific. And that is important to me and for that I make the effort.'

Moreover, John believed Louisa could become a national icon and internationally acknowledged. 'I think it is very important also for the country to recognize that here is one of the most amazing national poets, certainly the finest that I have ever met in South Africa. And she is unknown, except in her own little township. Especially Flemish people in maybe Belgium and Holland might be interested, because they might be able to understand some of what she is singing about. It is very South African.'

For now this dream seemed rather far away, since the recorded material was not perfect enough for publishing and there was a huge amount of research to be done regarding the content and origin of Louisa's songs.

Recently the Soul Searcher had made a discovery that set a different light on the project. 'Not all the music that she sings is her own music. Quite a lot of it comes from records that she once had.'

Maybe Louisa was a bit anxious to forfeit her hard-earned glory. John recalled a conversation with her where he asked her: 'Where does this song come from? *'Vir jare moes ek swerwe* - for years I was a wanderer, I couldn't find a home. I wandered around from place to place and no one loved me.'" Louisa was reluctant to give him a straight answer and said: 'It is a song about a woman whose husband beat her up, who was left alone with the children

and she goes wandering around looking for another place to live.’ John tried again. ‘Yes, but where does the song come from?’ and she replied: ‘Well, you know, it is about this mother who wandered around...’

In the end, John dropped all diplomacy. ‘Louisa, I know what it is about, but I want to know: where did you hear this?’ Finally she admitted to John: ‘I heard it on a record, I used to have a record player. I got someone to buy the record.’

This put John in a predicament, because he now had difficult research to do. ‘We got to track down where these other songs come from. We got to be able to acknowledge the writers; you can’t just publish. I don’t think that there are any particular music rights involved - I hope not - because I think that these songs are out of copyright. They are 60 years old.’

Through his work as a documentarian he had extensive background knowledge on the subject already. ‘These are songs from the Afrikaner community in the 1930s, before the war. In a time of real difficulties for the Afrikaner under British rule. These songs were born out of misery like the Blues was. It is fascinating because now 70 years later, there are relatively few Afrikaans people in that situation and certainly people don’t write this kind of song anymore. But those same songs are meaningful to the life of somebody in the coloured community, particularly a rural community, like really disadvantaged and poor people. So they are actually real, they have meaning.’

John said Louisa took her songs from three sources: ‘Her own songs- of which the main ones are *Spate of Gravel*, *Bokkie Sê My Reg*, and *Swartkop Skapie*. She’s picked up on a folk tradition, but she has taken it in a whole different direction. That’s one of the purest. And the gospel songs are songs that she has no doubt heard in a church environment. I mean that is not surprising- she used to sing at funerals. I think she still goes sometimes with her brother Abraham. The other source is songs that she has heard on records a very long time ago, because they are certainly not available today.’

Since this was many years ago, Louisa couldn’t remember who the artists of these songs were. Repeatedly John had asked her to give him some names. ‘She doesn’t know.’ John said calmly, ‘I don’t even know if she doesn’t know. Let’s just assume she doesn’t know.’

The blind spot in Louisa’s memory didn’t perturb John too much, since he had his own method to discern which songs were originally created by her. ‘I am absolutely sure which songs,’ John explained, ‘Her own songs are like water, she changes them all the time. That’s how I know.’ The songs where she kept the lyrics unchanged, came from a record.

To John, originality was not exclusively derived from scratch. ‘All her songs – and this is partly maybe her greatness – all the songs she does, whether they are records from a long time ago, whether they are Gospel, or whether they are her own - they kind of filtered through her spirit, so she sings them with incredible “Louisa quality”. They are not the same as they originally were. She is one of those artists, who has got such a stamp of her own personality, that she kind of owns them; they become hers.’

Louisa did not need John to praise her talent, but she valued John’s respect and acknowledgement. Her own community had despised and disregarded her for too long. ‘Uncle John sees it like this: “This terrible person, that you don’t even want to handle, you must hear what she does!” and this is what Uncle John does.’ He listened.

For her, meeting John was an answer to her prayers and in this way she approached the future of the *Hantam Hartsnare* as well. ‘If my colleagues want to go on, then I will go on. I wait for them, because they are the background music. I will walk in front. That is what we must pray about.’

People of Calvinia, like the mayor and the police officer, respected John’s efforts because, despite all constraints, he kept coming back. Many wondered about his tenacity.

Louisa’s explanation about John’s resilience, however, as usual, took on a different dimension. ‘*Juffie*, when Noah built the ark before the floods, he took a male and a female, a man and a woman, a pigeon and so forth. When after 40 days and 40 nights the floods stopped, he sent out the dove and when the dove returned with the olive branch, he saw the water had indeed stopped.’

‘Did the dove come back out of love, Louisa?’

‘The thing is, *Juffie*, Uncle John is not in love with me. He is in love with the music.’

3. Thumeka in the Dunes

University of Cape Town

About a year ago, the only sign at the entrance of the Macassar Dunes Nature Reserve was a billboard advertising Doom anti-cockroach spray. Now, in January 2008, an official board announces Mother Nature's inimitable playground behind the hill. I can't help thinking that last year's slogan 'Fast, Deadly, Doom' was more appropriate for the reserve than 'Macassar Dunes Nature Reserve - an initiative of the City of Cape Town and the Macassar Dunes Co-Management Committee'.



Baden-Powell Drive between Macassar Dunes Nature Reserve and Makhaza Township; April 2007

The coastal reserve is situated in the southern part of Khayelitsha, Cape Town's largest township. It encompasses a stretch of the False Bay coast midway between Muizenberg and Strand. From the air the area is shaped like a triangle, marked by the Baden-Powell Drive as the left axis, Kuils and Eerste River as the right axis, and the coast as the hypotenuse.

The area was named Macassar in remembrance of Sheik Yusuf from Macassar in Indonesia who was captured by the Dutch in the late 1600s and sent to the Cape. He and his followers lived on the Zandvliet Farm which later became a sanctuary for fugitive slaves and home to the first Muslim community in South Africa. Since his death the Kramat, built over his grave in the dunes in the 1920s, has been deemed a sacred place.

In sharp contrast, the littered surroundings of the Kramat are not considered holy ground. Macassar is the most threatened of Cape Town's 23 Nature Reserves, due to waste dumping, alien vegetation, 4x4 racing, sand mining, and illegal housing. The 1,500 hectare area contains the largest dune system on the Cape Peninsula and provides the greatest biodiversity. Six different ecosystems co-exist in close proximity. Besides the Eerste River, the marine ecosystem, and the dunes itself, Macassar hosts a high diversity of more than 80

different bird species, Strandveld vegetation with 210 indigenous plants, and the last stand of Milkwood trees on False Bay.

While I am driving further along Baden-Powell Drive from the resorts towards the Kramat, the scene reminds me of a romantic painting by JMW Turner. In the distance, soft hills swell in misty clouds. The Ferste River curls through lush meadows, where spotted cows peacefully graze between old farmhouses. However, the chances of finding anything living in the river are slim, due to illegal waste dumping.



Macassar near the Kramat; May 2007

The dunes have protected inland dwellers from the sea winds for thousands of years. Now they are being scraped away by people who simply attempt to survive, who need sand to build houses and more space to settle. Mother Nature had always been the provider. Now it has been declared restricted area by conservationists who by definition regard the protection of sand piles as more important than human survival.

Thumeka Mdlazi is both a resident of Khayelitsha and a protector of the Macassar dunes. As part of the cramped community she understands the peoples' needs for space to settle. At the same time, she can foresee the long-term effects of the degradation of the dunes when one day there will be no shelter from the wind, no birds to eat up the flies, and no quiet retreat left for the soul.

When Thumeka shows me the reserve, she speaks proudly about its beauty and factually about its decay. As we drive deeper into the dunes, the idyllic scene on the sea side of the road becomes spoiled. On a closer look, the dune paradise resembles a big rubbish bin.

The rangers have repeatedly called the city's waste removal department to clean up. 'They grew tired of coming out here,' Thumeka says.



Grazing cattle close to the Eerste River Mouth;
January 2008

In amongst the litter cows graze for greenery. I am thinking that at least the animals are a natural sight. For Thumeka, however, the livestock is a worry. 'Cattle bring alien plants into the reserve,' she explains.

The City of Cape Town cannot stop these activities, due to lack of staff. Thumeka, on the other hand, would never give up trying.

As a child growing up in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape, in a village called Idutywa, Thumeka loved listening to the elders who told her favourite tale of Imbulu the Monitor Lizard. 22 years later, she saw a real monitor lizard on a hike at Umfolozi Game Reserve near Durban and discovered that the

lizard was a crocodile-like creature instead of the monkey she had imagined from the tale.

'I am not sure, if it is because of human impact that I never saw it before,' Thumeka wonders. Humans might have pushed the indigenous fauna to the periphery of existence until they only survived in bonfire stories. The encounter with the monitor lizard fuelled Thumeka's interest in nature conservation. A few years later, she turned it into a career.

In 1997, as a young matriculant, Thumeka came to the city for the first time to live with her sister in Khayelitsha. While she was driving through Nyanga and Gugulethu, Thumeka saw how most people in the city actually survived. 'I was so shocked when the bus arrived in the townships and I saw a shack for the first time,' she remembers. 'In the Eastern Cape they have rondavels or conventional houses in the villages. Even my sister was staying in a shack. That was not what I expected at all.'

Thumeka tried to survive on seasonal waitressing, but she felt badly treated and really didn't like the jobs. 'I thought to myself - rather be useful and contribute and do something in the community than to work at the restaurant.'

She founded the community organisation Masifundisane with her friend Solomon Cedile in 1997. 'First it was focusing on crime. Afterwards we changed and became an environmental group.' The group organised countless workshops and community meetings

and eventually became so successful that they were able to invite people from other provinces and even from other countries. 'Whatever problems you find in Cape Town, you find all over South Africa,' Thumeka explains, 'and you need to work beyond and not only look at Khayelitsha.'

During that time, Thumeka was part of a lobby group that prevented the arms manufacturer Denel from building a waste incinerator in the township. People were afraid it would pollute the air of the densely populated area. 'Incinerators were rejected by other countries. So why must we build it?' Thumeka almost spits her words out in disgust. 'There won't be millions of jobs, because they build one incinerator. It didn't make sense.'

More than ever, Thumeka was convinced that she should fight against the increasing damage of her environment. 'For most part South Africa is just a dump site,' she says angrily.

While she was working as a volunteer, she didn't get much money, but she developed a sense for people and their environment. 'During that period, I gained a lot of information around broader environmental issues. Not conservation in the sense of plants and animals,' she emphasises. 'That concept is changing now.'

During an environmental workshop in 2003, Thumeka heard about bursary opportunities provided by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in the field of nature conservation. 'So I applied and my application was accepted.'

In 2004, she started her studies in Nature Conservation at Cape Technikon. Part of the agreement with her funders was experiential training during holidays at the Macassar Dunes Nature reserve. Within three years, Thumeka had climbed far up a steep career ladder.

Thumeka's job was daunting at times. Tafelsig and Khayelitsha are Macassar's rough neighbours. The danger comes from rapists and robbers who use the dunes as a hiding place when the area is deserted. Thumeka was only protected by her ranger uniform, and a walkie-talkie.



Thumeka Mdlazi, Macassar Dunes Nature Reserve; January 2008

Last year, Thumeka rescued a couple from robbers when she was out on duty. A distraught woman stopped Thumeka in her car, pleading for help. She and her lover had been surprised in the dunes by a gang of teenage boys, while they were having sex in the car. The boys pulled out the man and beat him up. The woman escaped.

When the boys saw Thumeka's car, they ran into the bushes. Incidentally, the police had also just passed by, but the couple didn't want to file a case. Both were wearing wedding rings and Thumeka believed they were cheaters. 'They were scared that they will be exposed.'

Thumeka's only partner at Macassar was her supervisor, Reserve Manager Lewine Walters. Despite Lewine's sometimes reserved appearance, she and Thumeka had an amicable and equal working relationship. The women monitored and maintained the dunes, reported illegal activities, and educated the people about the function and value of the reserve.

Actually this would have been a dream job, but resources were scarce. When Lewine started out at Macassar in 2004, the infrastructure ended at the meagre monthly salary. 'We didn't have a desk, no car, no phone, and no computer,' she remembers sorely.

Thumeka joined when things were better, but she also felt the pressure. 'We only got the vehicle recently. Lewine had a hired 2x4, but you cannot really go that far with a 2x4. You cannot really go into the reserve.'

Successful biodiversity management under these circumstances was almost impossible and the state of the Macassar Dunes deteriorated constantly.

The rangers had to fight with the City of Cape Town to receive the necessary funding and equipment for several years. 'Conservation is the last thing within the whole,' Thumeka

explains the funder's attitude. 'There are other social issues that are much more of a priority than nature.' After external organisations came to mediate, the situation improved and the conservationists came closer to their goal of harmonizing the community with nature. Thumeka wanted to teach the people that the reserve was more than a place to hide.

Last time I went into the dunes with Thumeka, we passed car on our way out. An old man chauffeured a young dressed-up woman looking a bit defiantly at Thumeka's ranger van and uniform. They offered no greetings. 'The other thing that is wrong is that people come here with prostitutes,' Thumeka said angrily. 'They are not supposed to be here in the first place.'

Certainly these activities didn't make a good impression on the school classes that Thumeka took on outings into the dunes. A highlight of the year for the conservationists was the Seep-hike (Schools Environmental Education Programme) that combined environmental with cultural education. The school kids wandered through four urban nature reserves, retraced the ancient footsteps of the Khoi who lived in the area many years ago, and visited the Kramat.

When there were no school activities, Thumeka had time maintaining the dunes. During her training period, she conducted a project of healing the wounds of a dune that had been violated by illegal 4x4 racing. The cars had cut a deep and broad aisle through the vegetation across the hill. Step by step Thumeka filled the cracks with branches to give the dune a chance to recover. One year later, one can still see a path scarring the dune, but no car would fit through it any longer.

From Baden-Powell Drive the lush green dunes of the Macassar Nature Reserve seem to invite one to come out here for a hike and a picnic. However, the area can become dangerous during winter season and in the evenings. 'We wouldn't encourage you to come here with your kids,' Thumeka's colleague Zwai Peter, Communications Manager at the umbrella organisation Cape Flats Nature, admitted to me once when we were driving past.

Thumeka and Lewine fought a lonely fight. More and more, the rangers had to take on the job of policing in the dunes, although they didn't have the authority to enforce the law. 'The police are not really interested in doing their job,' Thumeka sighs. 'At least we have to show our face in the dunes.' Thumeka could only talk to the people and advise them that their activities were illegal. However, two women alone could not guarantee that the state of the Macassar Dunes did not deteriorate. 'We don't have enough manpower,' Thumeka explains.

'Just hold on a minute,' she suddenly blurts out as we are driving through the reserve. 'This is so illegal what they are doing.' She jumps out of the car and walks towards a white

Mazda transporter. An adult man and three children - not older than ten - are busy loading sand on to the back of the bakkie. They are almost finished, when Thumeka orders them to stop digging and to offload. The man says to her that it is for a good cause. They want to build a crèche. Thumeka doesn't have mercy, though. 'The other option I have is to call the law enforcement and make sure that they give you a fine,' she says.

So the children and Thumeka start to dig the sand from the payload area with the small white buckets they brought. The kids look at her as if she is an evil witch. 'You don't have to look at me like this,' Thumeka says, 'I am doing this for you. You will understand one day.' When Thumeka raises her deep voice, she might sound intimidating to children, when I watch her checking up on the eggs of the engendered oyster catcher, I know she could not kill a fly.

There is another place, not far from the reserve, where they can mine sand for the crèche legally, but they have to pay for it. 'You can write a letter and indicate that it is for charity project,' Thumeka suggests to the man.

He thanks her for helping them offload the sand, but Thumeka is not very pleased. 'Why do you thank me? It is not that I am doing you a favour, it is just that I am late,' she says.

She wants to drive behind the car out of the reserve to make sure they are not coming back as soon as she is out of sight. 'We are following his ass,' she tells me back in the car laughing again. 'It is bad because he is starting a new hole there and people will think "Oh that is where we can mine."' He knows very well that it is illegal. He wanted to finish before anyone comes.'

The future of Macassar Dunes is uncertain, because it is not a declared heritage site. The land belongs to different people who have different plans. Part of the dunes is owned privately, part is the property of the city, and a section is nationally owned property that is allocated for housing. Responsibilities and utilisation plans shift from year to year like the dunes in the wind.

Historically there is much conflict between conservators and the people from Khayelitsha, who struggle for survival. They eat the plants and animals, use the wood for fires, and mine the sand. Usually, it is easier to convince children about the long-term value of a nature reserve. For adults the benefits of conservation are not immediately visible.

In its initial stages, in the early 80's, Khayelitsha was far away from the sea. Since Thumeka has moved here, the township has been expanding continuously and mushroomed to an enormous size. Khayelitsha means 'our new home' in isiXhosa, and 30% of Cape Town's

population lives here. The township, the result of poor urban apartheid planning, lacks all sorts of essential amenities and infrastructures.



Khayelitsha: April 2007

The City of Cape Town presents some unsettling statistics about the state of Khayelitsha in 2007. Unemployment in this area has risen to 60%, HIV/AIDS rate is estimated at more than 28%, and 32% of all households in Khayelitsha survive below the poverty line, where total income is less than R1,900 per month.

Most people, who live in the informal settlement have built their homes on bulldozed dunes. On the outskirts, tin shacks shove close to Baden-Powell Drive, a road that should mark the ultimate border to the coast and the dunes. On an open sand field, a handful of flimsy toilet boxes are put up and threaten to be blown over by the strong winds. Ten families share one toilet, according to Thumeka.

How can you care about protecting endangered plants when you don't have food on the table? Thumeka, who was unemployed for a long time, understands that more than anyone else. 'We don't want to preach conservation and conservation alone,' she says. 'The most important thing in this sector is that it helps to develop the community.' It is about finding win-win solutions.

That can be challenging, as Lewine once explained, while we enjoyed the deceptively peaceful view over Khayelitsha on Look Out Hill. She foresaw problems coming up in the dry season when the male Xhosa youth would leave their family and live in the bushes for a while to become men. 'This open field you see there, by the end of the year there are going to pop up about 50 temporary huts for the initiation rituals. The tradition requires of the initiator to go back to where they came from - most people are from the Eastern Cape - for the ritual. But

because of lack of funds they have to find alternatives in the city. Our problem is that part of the ritual is to burn the shack afterwards. And as a woman you can't approach. We rely on Zwai Peter to go to them, but even he has to take an older man along.'

Zwai was also needed as a spokesperson on the issue of illegal housing. The City of Cape Town and community leaders had agreed on a buffer zone on Khayelitsha's side of Baden-Powell Drive where no building was supposed to happen. Within a short space of time, this zone was violated due to the rising desperation of people for a space to settle. After a while, some people even erected their shacks in the reserve on the dunes which are moving, living entities that don't provide a solid ground to build a home.

In 2004, Zwai spoke to about 100 newly arrived settlers and told them that they can't build their shacks in the dunes. The people who came from the rural areas and always lived close to nature seemed to understand.

After the community awareness campaign, Baden-Powell Drive was re-established as the respected border. 'People seem to be aware of the consequences on the other side of the road,' Thumeka says hopeful. 'There is the wind and the weather.'

Nevertheless, it remains a continuous struggle because new people move to Khayelitsha every day. Each time Thumeka went out to the dunes, she was in for a surprise. 'There are new communities in the dunes, where two years ago was open space,' she says. 'You don't know if the next day, people have crossed the line.'

Not all people in the community are opposing the idea of a conservation area. There is a community group iLitha Lomso in Khayelitsha that advocates its protection of the reserve.

And there is the community of Macassar living around the Kramat directly at the reserve. They are mostly farmers who have been living along the Eerste River for generations. 'The people of Macassar are protecting the area, although they don't know much about conservation in a formal way,' Thumeka explains. 'They want it to remain for ever. They went horse riding and took walks along the beach. They are connected to the area,' Thumeka explains. 'The people of Khayelitsha could learn something from that.'

Thumeka believes the key in gaining the support of the community is highlighting the benefits that the reserve can bring. 'Some people have got different translations for the words community involvement. My interest was that we do not involve the young people of Khayelitsha and Macassar and other areas to just come and do clean ups and do the dirty work for us. That happens a lot. For me it is about involving people and making sure that you develop their capacity as well. They need to leave with something.'

When Thumeka's experiential training was over and she graduated from Cape Tech in early 2007, the city council asked her to stay at Macassar and work as an Acting Reserve Manager. In the meantime, Lewine got appointed as Acting Area Manager and became responsible for three reserves in the area in the South Central District around the peninsula.

The new situation for Lewine meant staying indoors a lot more spending time on administration. Hence, Thumeka mostly worked in the field alone.



Khayelitsha; April 2007

On their mission to engage the people, the conservationists spent a lot of time on the phone organising meetings, events, catering, transport, and funding. 'When you involve the community it is time-consuming and very expensive,' Thumeka explains. 'I have to call them, they don't have diary. I call them today for a meeting on Tuesday and again on Monday to remind them where I pick them up.'

The drawer labels in the rangers' office seemed to prove that priorities, after the long bureaucratic fights with the city, were now again as they should be. Biodiversity was in the first drawer, people were in the second drawer, and infrastructure in the third drawer.

In June 2007, Thumeka and Lewine prepared a project that combined the upper two drawers. A workshop for traditional healers should identify their needs from the reserve. As usual, Thumeka was restless and hands-on. 'We need to know which plants are in high demand, so that we can make a plan,' she said.

Lewine pondered, sitting on the only chair in the room, 'How do you invite people?' she asked.

Thumeka suggested: 'Use the radio to get the traditional healers. They are our main target.' She was already on the phone to make arrangements with the radio station.

Several people were interested in making a living out of the healing herbs found on the dunes. Collectors wandered through the reserve and picked up plants, the Rastafarian community traded them on the streets, and healers themselves used the plants for medicine. Some healers accepted artificially grown plants, others preferred naturally grown herbs from the dunes. The increasing demand threatened the resources.

Lewine's worry was more pressing right now. 'If it is traditional healers, are you going to be there with me?' Her Xhosa was not as good as Thumeka's by far.

This time Thumeka's voice didn't sound angry but warm. 'Yes. Don't worry about it,' she laughed. Lewine was relieved. 'Ah ok, because I thought how on earth am I going to be able to translate?' The healers' workshop was scheduled for two weeks later and Thumeka might have left.

It was the last project that Thumeka and Lewine organised together. From July 2007, Thumeka had been appointed as Reserve Manager for Atlantis. When Thumeka left, Lewine had to go back to her old position as Reserve Manager of Macassar. To date, the position of the Area Manager is still vacant.

Thumeka had good reason to leave Macassar. 'There is so much confusion at Macassar. When I was acting reserve manager, they didn't pay me,' Thumeka explains. 'The contract was kind of loose. "If we get funding we will give you R5,000." That is when I applied for the position in Atlantis.'



Thumeka Mdlazi, Macassar Dunes Nature Reserve; January 2008

However, money was not Thumeka's only motivation to move on. 'There was no conservator in Atlantis. Atlantis was an opportunity to initiate things and start from scratch. I could kind of pioneer. I am happy in Atlantis, although there are challenges.'

The problems in Atlantis, which is also a dunes habitat, are similar to Macassar. Thumeka's main task remains to reach the people. 'Nowadays everybody is talking about community involvement,' Thumeka explains, 'I know how frustrating it is when a decision is made on behalf of you. I have been in that position when I was doing community work. In most of the cases they are disasters. Those people are not consulted. I do not think that we are employed to make decisions for people. It is much better when people say: "We made that decision; we are part of that decision; even though we made a wrong decision." I believe in more brains anyway. It is difficult and time-consuming to consult. But it is the best way.'

University of Cape Town

4. A Place to Live under the Rainbow

University of Cape Town

The term “refugee”, a synonym for “displaced person”, describes someone whose security and bodily integrity are not guaranteed in their country of origin due to the threat of persecution. Refugees who find a place in a host country should no longer be considered “displaced”. Nevertheless, a roof and a spot to sleep do not suffice as a home. What strategies do refugees develop to integrate?

Due to lack of resources and infrastructure, South Africa struggles to accommodate the thousands of refugees who stream into the country each year. The first people to feel the additional pressure are poor South Africans who depend on the same governmental support as refugees. Hence, tensions initially erupt where the struggle for survival is toughest. What happens if the country of refuge cannot provide security either?

In a sequence of violent and sometimes lethal incidents over the past couple of years a hostile pattern against Somali refugees emerged all over South Africa. Why is one refugee group singled out as a target?

On my way to answers, I meet Zamzam Hirsi, a refugee from Somalia, who strives to better the lives of her compatriots in Cape Town. We sit on the lawn outside the law faculty of the University of Cape Town. Although it is a hot day, Zamzam doesn't seem to sweat under the layers of black silk intended to cover her body from the male gaze. Her legs comfortably crossed, she picks blades of grass off my buttocks as if we were old girlfriends. Then she tells me her story.

Zamzam's house in Mogadishu is still standing, although the roof has been gone for many years already. No one bothered to repair it or pull it down, since the people in Somalia's capital are more concerned with escaping the bullets of the civil war that has been raging in the streets for more than sixteen years.

Zamzam's father, the brother-in-law of former dictator Siad Barre, used to be a high-profile politician in Mogadishu. His Maheeran clan was in power during the time of the authoritarian regime. When the civil war began in 1990, the old established power distribution changed rapidly.

The estate of Zamzam Hirsi's family fell into the hands of the opposition party, the United Somali Congress (USC). ‘Mogadishu transformed itself into a clan city,’ the former ambassador of Somalia, Ali Hussein, describes in his book *Search for a new Somali identity*. ‘The assets left behind by the non-USC clans, whether prime buildings, farms, or transport, fell prey to the USC militias who thronged into Mogadishu from the hinterland. They do still

hold these assets (...), while the original owners of these properties are eking out the chequered life of refugees in far-flung foreign countries.’

From the beginning of the war to date, 7,818 Somalis have sought refuge in South Africa, according to estimates by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees - UNHCR. Hirsi was one of the first refugees to arrive in Cape Town in 1990. That time, South Africa was better known as a country that produced refugees.

Hirsi chose to leave his family behind in Kenya, where they lived in a refugee camp for six years. Zamzam, seven years old at the time, had good memories of the camp. ‘At least we had food there,’ she remembered and she received a thorough education that later in life would give her an advantage over her compatriots.

After he had lost all his possessions, Hirsi started a trading business in Cape Town in the early 90’s. Life had been tough for him at first, as his daughter recalled. ‘No outsiders were allowed to do business, but my father just started to sell cigarettes. He was the first Somali to open up his business in Mitchell’s Plein.’ Once Hirsi had made his trade viable, his sons and eventually his daughters followed him to Cape Town.

Meanwhile the civil war in Somalia became even more complex with each attempt at reconciliation. Somalia is a prime example of a colonially induced mess. Neighbouring states, religious associates, the former imperial states, and even ideological super-powers had abused Somalia for their own interests.

From within, clan rivalries have shaken the country and hindered sustainable development. Northern clans felt systematically undermined by southern politicians and planned to overthrow the government. The original North-South tensions became more complicated when, a few years ago, religious fundamentalists turned into an additional power-claiming entity.

Watching the country head for doom from afar was not in the character of Mr Hirsi. Despite his newly gained economic success, Zamzam’s father was a patriot and took an active interest in the disruptive events back in Somalia. Four years ago, in 2003, Hirsi decided to fight in the civil war against Islamist troops that occupy Mogadishu to this day.

Once again he left Zamzam and her siblings behind. In South Africa, though, where people call themselves “the rainbow nation” in the name of tolerance, a different kind of war was evolving.

Between 1997 and September 2006, 85 Somalis were killed in brutal attacks by South Africans, according to the Somali Association of South Africa (SASA). The unprovoked

assaults seemed specifically targeted against Somali traders and occurred all over the country. Although in some instances Somalis were killed without signs of robbery, the government long denied an underlying structural motive.

Several organisations like the police and various refugee organisations were unable to issue valid and reliable figures as even Sifiso Mbuyisa, spokesperson for the Premier Office of the Western Cape, admitted. 'The media, either rightly or wrongly, has accused the police of not investigating the killings correctly, not giving statistics. Depending on who you speak to, even amongst the Somali groups, they give you different figures as to how many people were killed.'



Zamzam Hirsi;
March 2007

Irrespective of numbers, the fact remains that Somalis live in fear. Zamzam knows many compatriots who want to return to Somalia; who consider to prefer a life without food, no infrastructure, and a devastating war, to an alien status that makes them fatally vulnerable in South Africa.

These fears are well-founded. In a 2005 report, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) wrote that South Africa is one of the most unwelcoming places for foreigners. 'In a world that is almost universally cautious about immigration southern Africans stand out as particularly hostile.'

Xenophobia is the common all-encompassing label for a range of hostile emotions, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours against foreigners. Francis B. Nyamjoh defines the term in his book *Insiders and Outsiders* as 'the intense dislike, hatred or fear of others perceived to be strangers.' The author sees its occurrence rooted in history. 'In a world fresh with the wounds of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, genocide and terrorism, xenophobia often explains, as much as it is explained by, poverty, underdevelopment, economic disparities, and assumptions of social and cultural superiority.'

In *The Philosophy of Money* Georg Simmel explicates xenophobia in the context of analysing anti-Semitic discourse. For the author the stranger is epitomized by the merchant, a classical stereotype of the Jew.

Simmel mentions examples of outsiders who specialised in finance and trading throughout history and from various cultures. 'The Jews are the best example of the correlation between the central role of money interests and social deprivation,' Simmel writes.

This connection can be applied to the situation of Somali refugee traders as well, because cultural and political circumstances leave Somalis little choice but to specialise in

trading goods. Simmel found this to be a general phenomenon amongst displaced people. 'Dispersed peoples, crowded into more or less closed cultural circles, can hardly put down roots or find a free position in production. They are therefore dependent on intermediate trade which is much more elastic than primary production.'

Somali refugees don't foresee the chance of returning to their home country any time soon and they build an existence in South Africa with the intention to stay. The landless strive to obtain economic independence through trading.



A Somali township shop in Masiphumelele, March 2007

Simmel believes foreigners can be more successful because they are free from the customary boundaries and prejudices of the regular citizens.

South African traders see Somalis as an economic threat, because of their persuasive achievements. Somalis have a reputation of running businesses successfully, no matter where they find themselves. Networking amongst each other gives them the advantage of being able to buy and sell large amounts of stock.

In that sense, their economic success is evidence for a successful adaptation to the modern world, whereas many South Africans struggle with this new order. Often they are uneducated and poor, with little prospect of improvement and they are scarred by the suppressive indoctrination of apartheid.

In Simmel's words, 'it was the hatred of national sentiment against internationalism, the opposition of one-sidedness which, being aware of its specific value, feels overpowered by an indifferent, characterless force whose essence seems to be personified by strangers.' Money, for Simmel the epitome of modernity, is the only possession of the landless and the mobile. Ironically, boundlessness and mobility are at the same time key qualities of refugees as well as of globalisation.

It is more than jealousy that grows the rage against strangers. The violent resentments from South Africans express a reaction to loss of traditions and the frightening confusion about where to stand in a globalised world.

The success of Zamzam's father in establishing a home for his family in Cape Town seemed all the more admirable considering the daily obstacles placed in the way of refugees.

Health care is an area of life where it hurt most. People complained to Zamzam over and over again about how badly they were treated at public hospitals. She had not yet experience the public health service, because she could afford a consultation with a private doctor for R100. 'They are nice, because I pay them,' she says. Zamzam used to tell her people to be patient and acknowledge that even South Africans received bad public health service. She tried to explain that it was a language problem and they should take an interpreter along. 'But now, with this incident last night, I am changing my mind,' Zamzam exclaims.

When her ten month old niece started vomiting, Zamzam and her sister immediately went to the hospital in Mitchell's Plein. No one assisted them while they sat there and waited with the sick baby. 'They just ignored us.' When she made enquiries about the procedures, they were told to wait. Eventually a nurse came to the family. 'Go to the chemist and get your own medicine. We are busy,' was all she had to say.

Having inherited the political genes from her father, Zamzam didn't rest in the face of injustice and tried to confront the nurse who discriminated against her aunt. 'When I went there to find out why she did it, she wasn't there and no one could help me tracing the incident back.'

Although most refugees feel the cold xenophobic chill, assaults against Somalis seem particularly brutal and targeted. Various parties give different reasons. The police, for instance, denied xenophobic motives for a long time and preferred to blame general crime when traders were robbed and murdered. This explanation expired as more and more Somalis were killed but their goods were left untouched.

The most apparent reason could be that Somalis stand out as a target. Unlike most refugees from the southern part of Africa, Somalis don't speak a Bantu language and dress distinctly different. Their tall and slender statures, lighter complexions and Arabic features are striking even amongst large crowds of people.

Abdinazir Ahmed Basir, a journalist from Mogadishu, explained to me that ignorance was part of the problem. 'People in South Africa are not taught about the African continent in

school. If I tell them, Somalia is next to Port Elizabeth, they'll simply accept it. Somalia is 9,000 km from here.'

For many locals, Somalis appear to be successful shop owners who refuse to employ local staff and share their business knowledge. 'Somali men don't employ male South Africans,' Zamzam explains, 'because they don't trust them.' According to her, this is only half the truth. 'All the Somali ladies that own a shop in the Mitchell's Plein area employ a local woman.' Zamzam believes Somali women are more trusting; like her 27 year-old sister Anita, who has her own stall selling clothing and bags.

Somalis have a strict work ethic that often hinders them from taking part in social activities and community meetings. Some shop owners work from five am in the morning to ten pm at night and even sleep in their shops.

Zamzam explains - rage flickering in her eyes - that Somali culture, with its many taboos, also contributes to this isolation to a large extent; for instance when it comes to marriage customs. 'Did you know that a Somali woman is not allowed to marry a foreigner even when he is a Muslim? Her family would expel her. But a Somali man can marry a local woman.' This taboo restricted Zamzam's chances of finding another husband in Cape Town after she got divorced.

Although the Hirsis didn't seem to struggle financially, which could not be said for most other Somali refugees, they didn't support her dream of studying law and becoming a human rights lawyer. Nevertheless, Zamzam advocated for her people wherever she could and mostly, she was needed in assisting with the bureaucratic officials of any kind.

The main challenge for immigrants is to obtain papers at the Department of Home Affairs granting them refugee status. Once you have the red refugee-ID document, you are allowed to work and own property in South Africa.

An insecure status as an asylum-seeker makes immigrants vulnerable. They cannot, for instance, open a bank account. 'People thought that Somalis keep their money at home,' Zamzam tells me, 'there were incidents because of that.' Once you received the refugee documents, you could store your money at the bank.

Home Affairs is, in most people's eyes, a total mess, ruled by systemic inefficiency and corruption. People wait for months and months for documents they should have received immediately.

After asylum-seekers went on hunger strike, Home Affairs launched a Refugee Backlog Project in April 2007 and managed to reduce the abhorrent figure of unprocessed

asylum-seeker applications from 100,00 to 75,000 by June 2007 (excluding new applications), according to the Minister of Home Affairs Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula.

Meanwhile, many asylum-seekers get arrested and abused by the police for not having any papers. This basically forces people into illegality and life as outcasts.

Life in Cape Town has taught Zamzam not to wait on anybody for help, but to take control of her own life. Although she has been stopped by bureaucracy and ignorance at times, she has often managed to make life easier for Somali refugees. The people needed her help due to her knowledge and language skills and she filled this role with grace.

‘There is a fountain in Mecca, discovered by the wife of Ibrahim,’ she explains the meaning of her Somali name, ‘when they were moving through the desert in search for water. When she called to God, she found the fountain. The water that comes out of there is holy and has the ability to heal the sick. It is called *Zamzam*.’

Zamzam was a familiar face at the Refugee Office on the campus of the University of Cape Town. Together with the Human Rights Lawyers, she translated, explained legal issues, and advised her fellow Somalis, who sought help at the Refugee Office.

In February 2007, she was chosen for a refugee seminar at the university called SAFER. The Canadian human rights lawyer, Deij Olukotun, conducted a series of workshops from the end of February to the end of March 2007 in the name of “Sustained Advocacy for Empowered Refugees”, aiming at equipping refugees with conflict resolution skills that should be transported back into their communities.

Zamzam was the only Somali female in the workshop but she had three male compatriots, Isse Mohammed, Abdinasir Ahmed Basir, and Mohammed Osman.

In the safe environment of the university, physically and sometimes mentally far above the people on the ground, the group of approximately 40 refugees discussed strategies to cope with the problems they faced. However, theoretical advice was not always easy to implement in reality.

During the session on xenophobia, Home Affairs’s Counter-Xenophobia Unit tried to explain the reasons for discrimination that every refugee present had already experienced outside. Mainly, so the argument, it was a fight for scarce social services. ‘South Africans were denied citizenship for such a long time, now they feel it is their turn first,’ the facilitator explained.

Furthermore, for decades South Africans were indoctrinated by apartheid propaganda to think of the rest of Africa as backward and barbarian. Therefore, hostility against fellow

Africans was more vicious than against other immigrants. The current media didn't correct this distorted picture, since news from other African countries was mostly about wars, corruption, and brutal killings. What good could possibly come from these places?

The South African government established so-called equality courts in 2003, as a delegate from the Human Rights commission explained, to combat these well-known problems. The courts order culprits to stop discriminatory behaviour, to write progress reports, and to apologise to their victims. However, not many people have brought cases to these courts yet, which is not surprising, given the insignificant sentences. Even the delegate had to admit: 'We are not an enforcement agency.' Intentions usually sound better on paper.



Mohammed, Abdinasir, and Zamzam, March 2007

Many refugees put their hopes into applying for resettlement in a Western country. However, chances are slim. 'From 7,000 applicants in 2006, eight were successful,' the SAFER coordinator Deij said. An NGO delegate confirmed that the problems that refugees face in South Africa are sufficient reason for Western authorities to allow them into their countries: 'Crime and xenophobia are no reasons for resettlement.' Hence, it seems better to combat problems locally.

During the tea break, Zamzam asked Dixon from Sierra Leone, if he had managed to arrange a caretaker for her Somali friend, who had been paralysed from a shot in his legs last year in an attack in Port Elizabeth. Dixon had forgotten about her request and Zamzam was upset. 'It will be about R400 to get someone to take care of him. No one will just do it for nothing. Dixon promised to find out where we can get help.'

There were only a few weeks left for Zamzam to network in person with the refugee community at campus. When the final day of the workshops came, many refugees scattered over the Cape Peninsula would see each other for the last time.

On this last day, conflict-resolution theory was practiced in a role-play exercise. The coordinator Deij urged participants to stay within their given roles.

The local Action Group uttered familiar stereotypes. 'Refugees give drugs to our kids for free and take our women away. The only solution we see is not to have foreigners.' The Refugee Organisation made an attempt for compromise. 'South Africa has more women than men. Let's share with our African brothers.'

Someone's phone went off and he climbed over the people to answer the call outside. Discussion continued. The Refugee Organisation defeated a wretched argument. 'Which jobs are refugees taking? They create the jobs in the first place.' At this stage the scene got somewhere close to reality, when the Action Group replied: 'So why don't you create the jobs in your own country?'

Again, someone's phone rang and he went out the room talking while the discussion was still ongoing. At first sight, these continuous interruptions seemed disrespectful and irritating. However, seeing it from the perspective of a refugee, who had little protection and lived in constant danger, keeping communication lines open and being contactable was a crucial matter. The UCT environment was safe, but if you switched off your phone, you wouldn't know if your family had been attacked at any given moment.

After the successful exercise the group proceeded to the closing ceremony. Zamzam's name was mentioned several times as an example of an outstandingly committed community leader.

Although SAFER wouldn't be repeated in the near future due to lack of funding, it bore fruits. The networking and exchange of ideas amongst the refugee's empowered them further than the mere acquisition of knowledge.

The three male Somali participants, Abdinazir, Mohammed, and Isse, had founded the Somali Youth Organisation of the Western Cape on the 8th of April 2007 with the objective of integrating Somalis into South African society. 'Today we are Western Cape, but tomorrow we are South Africa,' Abdinasir said full of hope.

A few weeks into their existence, they had already issued 50 membership cards. Obviously it was not easy to shut out the clan rivalries that were going on in Somalia. The organisation made neutrality a condition. 'The person who wants to be a member mustn't claim to be from a certain part of Somalia,' Abdinazir explained. 'We don't want to have representatives.'

One idea was to catch the attention of South Africans with soccer events, where local teams played friendly matches against Somali teams. Mohammed seemed especially happy about that because he was the director of the Somali soccer club in Bellville. The suburb was

his fourth home in South Africa, after he narrowly escaped an attack about a year ago that made it into international news.

The night of the 28 of August 2006 would change Mohammed's life forever. Leaving his family behind, he had fled his country of Somalia in 2003 to build a new existence in Masiphumelele, a township in Cape Town's southern suburbs. Within a few months, Mohammed had managed to establish a grocery shop to make a living.

For the local businessmen Somali shops were a thorn in their side as one, by the name of Dumisani, explained to the *Mail and Guardian*: 'They sell their products cheaper than us. They're not scared to loan money to the locals. There is not enough space and money for all of us. We were here first. Our people are simply scared that they will lose the little they have. The Somalis must go.'

The attacks came as no surprise to anyone. Some merchants had been repeatedly threatened and 'warning' robberies had occurred. One Somali shopkeeper told the *Washington Post* that every few weeks a young guy would walk into his shop and say: 'Tomorrow I am going to kill you.' The businessmen had given Somali shop-owners an ultimatum to leave Masiphumelele within three days. Since the Somalis had nowhere to go, the predictable was going to happen.

Mohammed was preparing for the night as usual, when the first stones hit his shop. According to eye-witnesses, at around eight pm, a group of about 200 people moved from Somali shop to Somali shop, looting and destroying as much as they could.

Mohammed kneeled in a corner hoping that his steel bars would hold the crowd. He called the police. Like him, some Somalis first tried to protect their property on site but were soon chased away.

Eventually a group of ten policemen arrived and the officers fired rubber bullets to stop the crowd. By then, though, shops were already damaged and looted. Only three of the 27 Somali shops in Masiphumelele remained untouched; yet no one was killed this time.

With his fellow Somalis, Mohammed fled to the mosque in Ocean View. During Ramadan, they sought refuge in Saldanha. Mohammed eventually moved to Bellville where he found a job as a shopkeeper at a Somali store.

Mohammed could not imagine returning to Masiphumelele. 'People who could save money could go back and start again,' he said, but he had lost everything during the attacks.

One of the women, who used to benefit from the Somali stock, is the township tour guide Charlotte. She always starts her tour with the same routine: 'Welcome to

Masiphumelele. Masiphumelele is isiXhosa for "Success". A year after the attacks, she takes me on a tour through the township.



A local shop in Masiphumelele, March 2007

Self-esteem amongst people in the fifteen year-old settlement is not prevalent. Most of the estimated 26,000 residents are originally from the Eastern Cape, the province notorious for its poor resources and education. The HIV/AIDS rate in the poverty stricken township is said to be as high as 30%.

A few months after the attacks, newly arriving Somali refugees settled in Masiphumelele and opened new shops. One can easily make out the difference between a Somali and a South African stall. While locals sell chips, cool drinks and cigarettes, and make R1 to R3 profit per sale, Somalis sell fake brand-name sneakers and clothing, and make R20 to R100 profit per item. 'They buy in bulk from other Somalis all over the country,' Charlotte explained. 'They network; that is their advantage. That is why they can sell their stuff so cheap.'

At first Somali traders were at peace with locals in Masiphumelele. 'That wasn't a problem, because we didn't have clothing shops,' Charlotte explains, 'but we had groceries shops and there are now a lot of Somali grocery shops. That was the big problem. There was competition. In this community it is all about survival.'

When asked about the current atmosphere in Masiphumelele, a friend of Charlotte says, full of foreboding: 'They will go out again soon' to hunt Somalis, to install fear, so that they leave their community and let local business people have their piece of the pie.

'They say, why can't other people, like the minister, take them and give them shops in town? Why don't they go to Fish Hoek and have shops there?' Charlotte knows the answer to

her own question. People in Ocean View don't want Somalis either, because they feel it would be competition for their businesses. No one wants Somalis.

The politician Sifiso Mbuyisa believes that chances for lasting peace in Masiphumelele are slim, unless poverty is eradicated: 'Some of the locals in Masiphumelele will tell you: "We feel like refugees in our own country." Some of them will tell you that they have never been to the Waterfront. Until as a government we address those challenges we will have those tensions.'

Almost a year after the attacks, there are no visible traces of the former destruction. To Charlotte it looks like before. 'The shops are all rebuilt. Some of the Somalians are back again and some of them are not. Everything is now back to normal.'



'Baraka's shop' in Masiphumelele, March 2007

Next to the ANC's office is Baraka's shop. 'He is the first Somali to open a shop here,' Charlotte believes. Baraka is not there and according to the new owner, Baraka never existed. 'Baraka the shop. Just name,' is all he is able to say in English, though his irritation about the question is non-verbal and unmistakable. Somali neighbours next door explain that 'Baraka' means 'a blessing from heaven'.

Mohammed knew the full story. The first Somali who opened a shop in Masiphumelele called it Baraka- 'to get a blessing in his shop'. From then on, locals named every Somali trader Baraka; it per se became the name for a Somali. 'They used to say: "The Barakas are coming," Mohammed said. 'Now they say: "The Somalis are coming." Now they are very careful.'

Due to the media attention Masiphumelele had received, the local community was sensitised to the power of labelling. They, in return, had to combat the paralysing stigma of

being xenophobic. From the outside it was easy to judge the community for their reactionary behaviour. From the inside it was a fight over scarce resources.

The township had become the symbol of a nation-wide conflict that had affected the Somali refugee community for a long time. When the Masiphumelele attacks reached international news, government took action and drafted a Conflict Resolution Pilot Project that was to be implemented in all the country's hotspots.

Eventually, an agreement was reached between the local Siyaka Business Trust and Somali traders whereby Somalis joined the trust and accepted their conditions. Several people who attended negotiation meetings said that the outcome was not beneficial for Somalis. 'Somalis must adjust their prices, share their business skills, and study English; all just to live in the community, when it is their constitutional right to do so,' Deij, coordinator of SAFER said. 'The business community has made, as far as can be seen, no concessions other than to allow the Somalis to remain – on its terms.'

The negotiation process was also impeded by hidden agendas amongst the supporting NGO's and ultimately endangered the existence of the entire reconciliation process. 'There was this competition. The various organisations were operating differently,' Sifiso explained, 'Each one had a different set of objectives, different goals. So we said: "We are all trying to solve this matter, how can we make sure that we work as a team?"' Eventually, only two NGO's - Islamic Relief and Africa Unite - remained as supporters.

From government's perspective the Pilot Project was a success. On Human Rights Day, the Premier's Office held a ceremony in Masiphumelele to celebrate the results of the negotiation.

The reconciliation mediator had agreed to establish a crisis monitoring network, a community building project, and a leadership skills training project. Those political pink bubbles sound glorious in the documents. However, it remains to be seen if their tedious implementation bears tangible fruits in the future.

Smiling into the camera at the community hall in Masiphumelele, the Premier of the Western Cape Ebrahim Rasool handed out certificates, hugs, and handshakes to the people of the township and the Somalis.

While on the one side of Cape Town success in conflict-resolution was celebrated, tensions against Somalis were boiling on the other side of the city.

One day after the Human Rights Day celebrations in Masiphumelele, on the 22nd of March 2007, Richard Engelbrecht had to defend himself on account of raping and murdering

eleven-year old Stacie Wiese in the Mitchell's Plein High Court. The murder allegedly happened under the influence of the drug *tik*, also known as crystal meths.

Helen Zille, mayor of Cape Town, used the opportunity of the court hearing to speak to people at grass-root level. In front of the court building, she addressed the community to fight against evil in their midst and identify drug dealers to the police. When Mrs. Zille left, people took action.

Zamzam's family owned the oldest Somali house in Mitchell's Plein. Since she was divorced and her father had left for Somalia, she didn't need all the space anymore and hired it out as storage room to Somali merchants. 'That night the traders didn't come, because all their stuff was robbed by the mob,' Zamzam recalled with a shiver.

About five minutes after Helen Zille had left, the audience stormed shops in the town centre opposite the Court and attacked Congolese, Nigerian and Somali shop-owners and looted their goods. Then the mob moved on.

Zamzam stood on the balcony when she saw them coming. She was alone at home with her seven-year old nephew. About 200 people, she estimated, were marching towards her house, screaming and throwing stones. Zamzam panicked, but managed to lock the outside gate, as the first stones hit her windows. Before she took the crying child to the bathroom, the only room with a lock, she glanced at four policemen watching the raging crowd idly.

From the bathroom they could hear the shouting crowd and the stones damaging her home. 'Eventually, I was ready to throw the baby out of the balcony.' Zamzam remembered her fear, 'I wasn't sure what was happening next.' After a period of time that felt like half an hour, people calmed down and the police told them to go away.

The mob had chosen Zamzam's house because it had a history. 'It is known to be a Somali house. We have been living here for more than ten years.' She could not explain, though, why the rage against drug dealers was directed against Somalis. 'We, the Somalis, don't have a history with drugs, we only do business,' Zamzam said.

Nigerians, on the contrary, had a reputation of being involved with big drug business in Mitchell's Plein. Tanzanians allegedly traded with cell phones, stolen by local kids who funded their drug careers. Yet these were only rumours: 'I only heard that. We don't mix with the Tanzanians,' she explained, 'The locals heard that story about the Tanzanians from the papers, so they attacked them.' Quickly, all foreigners became scapegoats for drug dealing in the area.

When she calmed down, Zamzam called the Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD), a watchdog authority over the police. She had taken the emergency number from their

spokesperson during the last SAFER workshop. 'The police themselves don't like us,' she believed. What she had seen in front of her house seemed to confirm that.

Zamzam arranged an appointment with the commissioner of the ICD to report the incident: 'When I went there, he said: "Today I am busy." When I went there again, his secretary said: "Not today, come back on Monday." When I eventually saw him, he said to me: "Whatever happened, it is over. We will try and have enough policemen in future. Two policemen will come and investigate the incident."' No one ever came to take note of the broken windows at her house. 'I have no trust in the police anymore,' Zamzam said sadly.

Since access to basic human rights is denied to Somalis, many consider returning to the war instead of continuing to live like an outcast. To Zamzam these ambitions seem unrealistic. Whenever her father calls his family from Kismayo in Somalia every few months and tells them of the war, Zamzam knows that returning is no option. 'For me, it is much better here.' she said, 'I could study and there are more opportunities. There is freedom.' However, the hostile climate of the township sometimes gets to her. She is looking for an alternative: 'I want to move out of Mitchells Plein, maybe to Cape Town. At least it is not so dangerous there for Somalis.'

University of Cape Town

5. A Runner's Mind

Randall is 51, I am 26. He is an ultra-marathon-runner, I am not. Yet we are married. As a matter of fact, I am quite unfit and overweight. When I first heard runners speak about "Chip Time", I thought they mean how long it takes you to empty a packet. Then I learned that it actually refers to the time it takes a runner to cross the starting line after the gun was fired. The magnetic micro-chip in the runner's shoe is scanned on several stations, recording your time against your registered chip-number. It determines if you will make the 6 hour cut-off for the 56km Two Oceans route; or if you won't.

Randall is 25 years older than me, but his running melts this age gap, according to medical studies. Although the researchers cannot link it directly, they assume that runners are extending their lives with each run. People say Randall looks like a 36 year old. He might outlive me, while I watch my own physical decay.

From the spectator's view, a marathon is like a theatre play. It is staged, it has drama, and it has action. Running is living the moment and overcoming agony. A marathon is like an Aristotelian catharsis. Ernst Jokl writes in his essay Running, Psychology, and Culture about the common dramatic aspect of sport and theatre. Both are 'sketches of a power of the mind that can be projected into reality.' Overcoming distance achieved through willpower is an indication of a possible future victory in life.

Both sport and culture represent an image of social reality that can be experienced in free time. Jokl says, 'sports and culture are identical in that both spring from leisure, from availability of spare time and unspent energy.'

I am more the arty kind. I prefer to spend my leisure time on the couch reading a book rather than sweating on tar wobbling past the rush-hour jams. My distaste for running dates back a good couple of years. In Germany, they called it Federal Youth Games but for me it was a mere public humiliation. They made us run in the mid-day heat for what seemed like hours. At that time the newspapers started to monitor ozone-levels and advised people not to exercise between twelve pm and three pm. At that time I began to read newspapers.

We were supposed to run 3,000 metres and were not allowed to give up. We ended up walking, a few other unfit children and I, who could not understand why running till it hurt was supposed to contribute to our overall childhood wellbeing. When I was ten years old, running in a circle and ending up where you began, in fact coming past the starting line three times, was the ultimate of pointlessness. It put me off for life.

Don't get me wrong. I always understood the concept of exercise when it came to soccer, basketball, horse riding, swimming, and the like. I would not consider myself a sofa vegetable who believes being active has some political implications best stayed away from.

As a member of the instant-gratification generation, I am too impatient for long-distance running. The benefits are out-of-sight. "The Journey is the Reward" doesn't appeal to me when the trip is painful and boring.

On top of it all, I have hang-ups with the ideological implications of running. Harder, faster, longer is a capitalistic, chauvinistic agenda that doesn't fit in with my yoga classes.

Marathon running has been the prerogative of men for a long time. At the first Olympics in 1896, a woman called Melpomene was refused to enter officially. She ran anyway. Long struggles for females attempting to enter the competition followed. In December 1963, the successful American female marathon runners Lyn Carman and Merry Lepper were still being advised by marathon officials to discontinue their training as it might make them barren. Luckily, that is history and women nowadays are most welcome and successful at marathon races.

In a way I understand why Randall runs. In a way I don't. His memory blurs. All races are the same and yet somewhat different. He talks me through the ordeal of a Two Oceans race, while we are sitting on the balcony. In Randall's words, running is living:

In 1997, I discovered a resilience that always seems to kick in when I need it the most. I was going to go out there and run for as hard and as long as I could manage and prepared myself for dropping dead somewhere along the route. I took the risk of not making it, which went against all the principles of running.

I got to a stage where my body was really protesting and didn't want to go a step further. Then my mental side kicked in and overrode that. I managed to finish the Two Oceans race in my best recorded time; four hours and seventeen minutes.

I wanted to prove to myself I could actually run a whole lot faster than I had done in the past. That was a foolish thing to do, because the only thing I proved was that this is not the way to run. There is honestly no enjoyment.

I couldn't move, it was just too sore. I just lay there in the heat in a shady spot with all the other corpses. It took easily about three hours before I left the sports ground.

For a few days before the race I was supposed to relax. I didn't have that luxury. When I should have been relaxing I trained to try and catch up. I am always under-trained; that probably goes for 80% of the field.

The race actually started the day before, when I went to the registration tent. I heard about how other runners struggle and could relate to it. Having made it to the registration means that you are now committed and there is no turning back.

I tried to eat the right food and took in as much carbohydrate as I could. It helps getting into bed early, although I must admit I didn't get to do it. The thought of being under-trained kept me awake and I worried whether I would be able to make the distance and whether my legs would take the strain.

The marathon started at 6 o'clock the next morning. The runners lined up in the Main Road in Newlands; where the swimming baths are. Behind me was this mass of 25,000 runners. It stretched back so far that I couldn't see the tail's end.

If you have a permanent number you are grouped in B or C, fairly near the front. In section C, I was up between the first 2,000 runners. I felt for the guys at the back, because I started out there in my earlier years

of running. It can take as long as eight minutes just to cross the starting line. You haven't even started your race yet and the top runners are already two kilometres up the road.

I always seem to come to the race in an unprepared manner. At first I was cautious. Once I ran a few kilometres, I got caught up by the euphoria around me. I gained strength from knowing that I was not alone out there, not the only one who was under-trained. Along the way I saw some people struggling and when I passed them, it served as a booster.

So many things happened around me that I rarely concentrated on my legs. Many people came out at a time when it was still dark. People huddled in little groups and sipped on their coffee. They brought banners, music, and refreshments; whatever could motivate the runners.

At the Fish Hoek circle -- the first really steep stretch 20 odd km's into the race -- I realized for the first time how tired I was.

There are people who just run the first 20 km's and drop out. The time in which you must qualify for the ultra-marathon is not that tough. That is one of the problems with Two Oceans. More unfit people attempt the run and the drop-out percentage is becoming greater. In my opinion, it needs to get back to the point where it becomes more of a prestige run.



Randall Turner,
Redhill January 2008

Two Oceans is a special race. For me it is the ultimate endurance challenge, even though it is shorter than Comrades. In Comrades you run almost twice the distance; 98 km as opposed to 56 km. You run the whole day from when the sun rises until when the sun sets.

Two Oceans is a lot tighter; six hours is the cut-off. Every time is still a challenge for me. I might think I am fit, but running Two Oceans will tell me, whether I really am.

Twelve years ago, I started running with a 21 km race. We were running the half-marathon in Wellington. There was no training, we just started running. I was a rookie, running and competing for the very first time.

There were over 3,000 runners. My friend and I managed to come, I think, under the first 200. He was so amazed at me that somebody running for the first time could actually do so well. I was amazed at myself, too. I had never read any magazines about running, I had no prior knowledge. I just went out there and I ran.

Experience has taught me that I can't just run for the sake of running, my body will complain after a while. I needed to run more strategically than just running out of pure exuberance.

There are days when I get up and I can run like the wind. Other times my body just refuses to respond. I had one alarming situation about two years ago where very early in the race – I had hardly run about 23 km's – my legs reached a point where they didn't want to go any further. My metabolism on that day wasn't in-sync. I was quite shocked because I hadn't even run past the first ocean and I knew what lay ahead. That race was probably one of the worst I ever ran; it was my ninth Two Oceans. Almost every step I took was painful. Throughout the race I never recovered. I had to continually re-motivate myself. That was difficult, but I made it.

About twelve kilometres from Fish Hoek, I reached the lower part of the Chapman's Peak area. We had finished the one ocean and were heading towards the second ocean; the tougher part of the race. When I hit *Little Chappy's*, as they call it, I encountered my first real incline which lasted for quite a while. That was the first spot where I saw people walking. It is a deceiving part of the race. You think that you have actually reached Chapman's Peak; but you haven't. It is still a long way to go before you get there. For somebody who doesn't really know the route, it can be very de-motivating.

Once I finished *Little Chappy's* and headed towards *Bigger Chappy's*, it became a lot tougher, a lot steeper, a lot longer. At that point I really needed to be mentally strong to be able to take myself through. Now I concentrated on each step. I went into a phase of

refocusing because there was this long hill ahead. It became an individual thing: Just me and the road; or my legs and the road.

Nevertheless, going up Chapman's Peak was the best part of the race. All the revelry and laughter subsided and was replaced by focus and a lot of introspection. Quietness descended. It was almost as if the race had now become a serious thing. I could actually hear the birds and the insects making a noise; and even the ocean at the bottom.

On *Little Chappy's*, I had my first view of the second ocean. It stretched for kilometre after kilometre. It is probably one of the most spectacular views I can imagine. At that point I reached my running-free stage.

I have made this wonderful discovery of how to let the physical take place in an automatic manner while releasing my mind. I never lost concentration; my senses remained as sharp as ever. At that stage I can almost say I had two bodies. One body was running and breathing and the other body was dreaming, planning, and reminiscing.

The fitter you are the quicker you get there. When I am at my fittest, it could take me anything from three to eight kilometres. I have to work hard initially to give my body the indication that there is a lot ahead. 'For the next three hours this is what I am going to be doing, pal, so you might as well get used to it.' My body responds to that and I slip into my own world.

When I am running free, it is self-induced and self-enjoyed. Somebody else speaking to me will break into my sub-conscious state and spoil it dictating where my mind will wander to. I can be in the middle of a crowd of people. As long as nobody addresses me, I can stay in that mode for hours on end.

The silence on Chapman's Peak broke when I ran past the watering-holes. People cheered and chatted. When I eventually reached the top it was such a relief. I took a bit of a break just to appreciate the fact that I had actually come that far.

From that point onwards there was a long downhill. I had to be careful and tried to resist the temptation of going faster, because I knew that I was going to need every little bit of reserve when I came to the build-up to Constantia Neck Circle.

I have never hit the wall. I had heard about it but there coming down Chapman's, I saw it happening right in front of me. We were running in a group of seven people when one of the guys just suddenly stopped. As much as his mind told his legs to move forward, they would not respond. It was almost as if communication had been severed altogether. His legs were like two poles; he could not bend his knees. His whole muscular system, from the legs

up to the waist, just tensed up; to the point where he could not move a single step further and virtually just fell flat on his face. Those around us almost instantaneously sprang into action. He had hardly hit the ground when a whole crowd of people was there to lift him up.

His face showed excruciating pain mixed with utter disbelief and disappointment at not being able to carry on. He was still young, about early 30's, looked well-built, fit and strong. He really wanted to run but he couldn't lift up his legs, so he had to be carried to the medical tent and massaged.

It was sad to watch a grown man crying. It is every runner's dream to run his tenth Two Oceans and get his permanent number. When he hit the wall, it was a whole year wasted. That is why he just broke down and cried, out of frustration of not being able to achieve his dream. To a runner, that is without a doubt, greater than the physical pain.

When I came down into Hout Bay, the support was phenomenal. People packed the streets to cheer on the runners, music was playing, people danced along the side on the pavements. At that stage, I had run my full marathon already and the hunger-pangs hit me hard. That is the nice thing about a race, there is lots of food along that stretch; chocolates, boiled potatoes, and ice-cream.

Actually, I run because I love running, whether it is training or races I enjoy them equally. It inspires me just to feel the tar under my feet. When I come back from training I am motivated, satisfied, and refocused.

In a race I rarely run free because there is so much happening that I have to concentrate on. And then of course I am pushed for time. I set myself a goal and I go out to achieve it. That is satisfactory, but what I achieve during training is much more rewarding in the long-term.

The stretch after Hout Bay became very lonely. It was the worst part of the race. I already had more than 42 km's on my feet, and was venturing into the ultra-marathon. The road at that section was tough; a lot of hard work lay ahead in the incline. Here just about every runner walked.

When I reached the point where I had never run any further than that during training, I started worrying whether I would be able to make it. That feeling stayed with me every step of the way until the finish line.

Then I did a run-walk-run-walk, for as long as I could, right to the top of Constantia Neck circle. Having reached Constantia Neck was a real milestone. I had conquered the worst the race could throw at me.

To be able to finish the race you got to break it up into discernible parts. You have to take each segment of the race and tackle it as a separate entity, while still keeping the whole in mind.

The fact that I am running ultra-marathons is indicative of the kind of person I am. When I tackle life I am successful when I break it down into parts. I live each part to the end, carry on to the next part, but still keeping the whole dream in focus.

The support on top of Constantia Neck was exceptional. The crowds were so thick that you could just about make it through there. I took a breather and had my legs rubbed down in preparation for the last section.

There was not much gradient after Constantia Neck Circle. It was a lovely downhill for about at least three to four km's. I went slowly there, because I knew that the section building up to Top Gate at Kirstenbosch was coming up.

What I have discovered is that to run distances you have to have patience. You can do a wild, frenetic dash in the beginning and hope to get in front, but you are not going to stay there for very long, because you go against what your body is designed for. And then you have spent all your energy and you have nothing left for the rest of the race. The whole idea about long-distance running is to be able to pace yourself.

And again that is the same thing with my character, I pace myself through life. I never dash and make rushed decisions. I give it thought, I ponder over it, and then I go and do.

The stretch up to Top Gate I negotiated carefully. Under normal circumstances it is not difficult, but by that time I had 48 km's on my legs already. Even though it was not very steep, it was quite tough. Making it to Top Gate meant that I had broken the back of the race.

The next few km were all downhill right to the highway. An hour before cut-off, I had enough time on my hands and enough legs to take me the distance. I could have walked but I shuffled along, because I wanted to push my body to the limit to find out how far I could really go; walking doesn't achieve that objective. Even though coming to the finish line that few minutes later won't make a difference, because it is the same medal that I get, I pushed up until the last minute.

I was actually able to shuffle a bit and run a bit. It still looked to the spectators a whole lot better than coming up towards Constantia Neck which had been so steep that you had virtually been forced to walk. To look good at that stage was humanly impossible.

The highway, two point five km uphill, was the most irritating part of the whole race, because all I wanted was to finish. Even if I had walked it, I had still made it, but the spectators didn't let me. They didn't understand that I had already conquered the toughest part. At that stage I had nothing to prove. All I was really doing was prolonging the inevitable; that was just so pointless.

Nevertheless, I got inspired by all the cheering and encouragement along this section and tried my best to shuffle along and at least look like I was running.

I have yet to see a runner walking down the last grass section. People are cheering because they know that you have made it; you know that you have made it and you get caught up in the excitement.

I heard the announcers at the finishing line announcing other runners coming in and the crowds at the stadium. I became re-inspired to not just run, but to look like the race had been easy and I would be able to tackle even more.

I believe most runners would never want to go another step. I had already switched off. At that stage I had had enough and all I wanted was to relax, put my feet up, and have a beer.

Having made it was mixed emotions for me. The physical side hit me first: 'Thank goodness I made it! Wow, what a great feeling to finish! Wow, I am so glad I didn't injure myself.' Injury would prohibit me from doing what I love best.

Then the non-physical aspects started appearing in my mind. I stood up to the challenge and I was successful. I had once again been measured and not found wanting. That gave me an amazing feeling of satisfaction.

You can fail. You can attempt to reach a goal and not reach it. You compete against yourself, rarely against somebody else. That only happens in the first ten places for the gold medal. 95% of the field is only in it against themselves.

The end result of all the effort that you put in is far more rewarding than in so many other instances in life. Running is a lot more than a hobby to me. It is a way of life and a barometer. Have I become soft? Am I just cruising through life? The more I put my body to the test, the more I succeed at it, and the more self-confidence I gain out of it.

There is certain peacefulness in the race that enhances my own inner peace. When I am in the middle of fellow runners and supporters it cuts me off from the real world and all its strife. I run myself free from the chains of unfitness, the chains of disorganised life, and the chains of physical restrictions.

It puts me into a world where I became elevated, as the competitor that everyone is cheering for. I feel that I need to ride on this support and not disappoint. For the time that I am running I have an order and a goal. When I achieve it, it is so rewarding that it lasts me for a long time.

For me that was it. I have run eleven Two Oceans and got my blue number; that was my goal. I know the Two Oceans race so well that I could run it almost blindfolded. I don't need longer, I don't need tougher, but I hanker after variety and making different experiences. The beauty is breathtaking yes, but I now feel I want to experience a different kind of beauty.'

Randall is a veteran. He believes he gets better at running as he gets older because long-distance running is a matter of willpower more than a matter of leg power.

He says it gives him a sense of freedom. The competition is measurable and fair. The digits of the clock run for everyone in the same pace. Jakl agrees that 'the universal recognizability of success and failure in sport is an essential element of communication and thus a means of advancement of freedom.'

Randall claims running helps him to organise his thoughts. 'First you do the hard work. You sweat, toil, and labour. You de-clutter your body, you pump oxygen, your blood flows faster, you perspire and detox,' he says. 'Now you have the time to take the thoughts lying around and systematically examine them, discard the unfeasible ones, file away those with potential.' When his body reaches the stage where it runs automatically, this order filters into his mind. *The pattern that brings rhythm into his body transcends into the psyche and processes the accumulated thought-clutter from the subconscious.*

Since the seventeenth century, the body has been despised as a subordinate vessel driven by sexual desire. The intellect was cherished as the pure human quality that differentiates us from animals. Nowadays the body is celebrated and we acknowledge and strive for fusion of body and mind. 'Like art, sport washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life,' Jakl writes.

According to various studies, marathon runners are more successful, more balanced, happier people because they dust body and mind regularly. So why don't all of us keep motoring until our toe nails turn black and fall off, like Randall's do once in a while? Because we are idle, lazy? Maybe the fear of failing is too great. Marathon running is an extreme sport that requires drastic sacrifices which I am not prepared to give.

The challenge of pushing the physical limits for its own sake is not appealing to me. I prefer listening to my inner voice and gently move within the requirements of my body to a healthy whole. Admittedly, this philosophy burns fewer calories.

Despite our different approaches to life, Randall and I reach our energy equilibrium of body and mind from opposite angles but come out at the same place. That is where we meet.

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