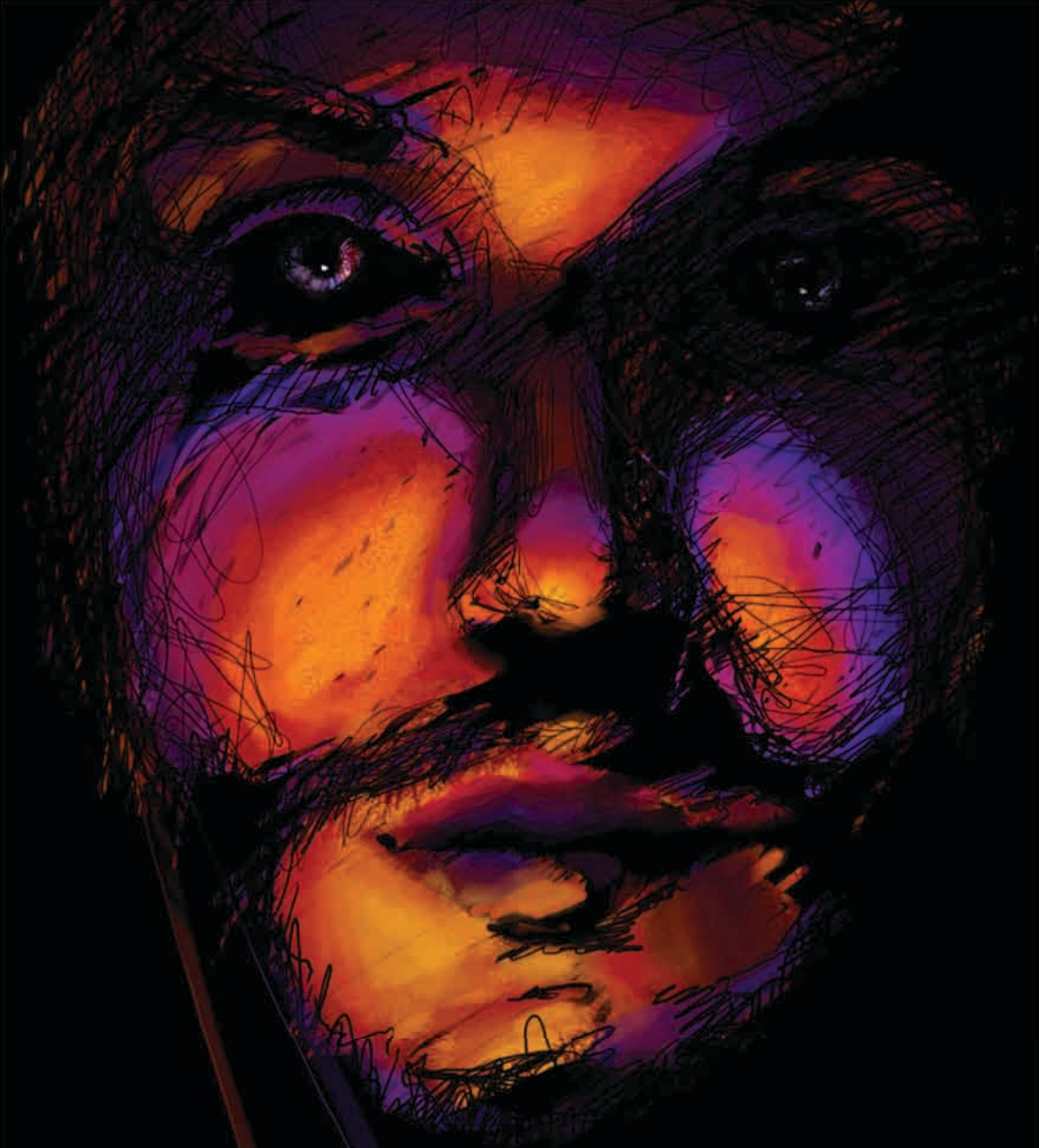




THE KESHWARS FROM DUNDEE

MUTHAL NAIDOO

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Muthal Naidoo

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FOREWORD

Marjorie Rughubar, who turned eighty-two on 16 January 2012, is the driving force behind this history of the Keshwar family that begins with her parents, Sewpersad Keshwar and Elizabeth Baines. As all but one of her siblings have passed on, the story relies greatly on Marje's recollections and does not include the stories of all her siblings.

This is not the usual account of racial conflict in South Africa. It is rather the story of members of a family who, in trying to escape racial discrimination, find themselves ineluctably drawn into its separate and unequal ethos.

Terms such as 'non-White', 'Coloured', 'Indian', and 'Native' were in common parlance before and during apartheid. The use of more modern terms in this biography would impose a different awareness and would be historically inaccurate. In pre-1994 South Africa, the word 'Coloured' denoted a specific "race" and referred to people of mixed black (Indian, African, Malay) and white parentage.

INTRODUCTION

From an interview, January 2010, with Vaychel Raman, (B. Pharm.), Manager: Managed Health Care, Adcock-Ingram, great-grandson of Sewpersad Keshwar and Elizabeth Baines, grandson of Marjorie Rughubar.

Vaychel Raman explains the need for a family history.

I have never really understood my background and it's extremely difficult to explain the history of my family to colleagues and friends and the truth is I don't think we actually know on my grandmother's side. Now with Tatum's¹ rise to fame, questions are being asked and it's difficult to justify how we could even be family. And I am looking for answers.

Being married, being introduced to my wife's family with its history, culture and religion, okay, my family doesn't have all that and that includes my father's side ironically enough, I started to ask questions and this is a quest for answers. For me that's the goal. I don't think it's a spiritual quest. My wife actually made me aware that I am not a deeply religious person. I am not religious but I am spiritual. The probable reason for my lack of interest in religion is that there's no background, no history. Maybe this is going to help me find some answers. For me it is purely a matter of knowing where my family has come from. Being able to document this story would fill in a lot of the blanks.

I also believe that this is a truly uniquely South African story. I don't know how this scenario could have developed in any other country in the world. Driven by political mayhem, dispersed into

¹ Tatum Keshwar became Miss South Africa in 2008

different communities and now this scenario three generations later, it could only have happened in this country.

I probably always had the idea of a family history, probably reinforced in the last two to three years. Maybe it even started back when Aunt Margaret's² son, Vasigen³, died in London in 2004. I had spent a lot of time with him when I lived in London in 2003 and had met my great-aunt Jenny's⁴ son and daughters for the first time. And there was always this undertone of not knowing the background. I heard stories from them that I had never heard before so it was always intriguing.

Stories about my great-grandmother (Elizabeth Baines Keshwar) were meant to be funny but they weren't; they were offensive. My immediate family, my grandmother (Marjorie) in particular, would have been offended by them. They were stories that came from Jenny's daughter and her husband. They told tales of the time my great-grandmother went to London. They claimed she never spoke English, only Zulu, and that amused them. There was a ridiculous story of her wanting to buy a live chicken in the middle of London and take it home in a taxi. Jenny's son-in-law implied that that was how she was brought up. It was the biggest joke. He always told these stories to make fun of my great-grandmother, his wife's grandmother.

I have always wanted to put a timeline to the whole thing to understand where it all started. I think there have been some attempts at looking at a family history, and I feel very sure that Uncle's Percy's⁵ boys have tried. But I don't know what information they have.

2 Margaret, seventh child of Sewpersad and Elizabeth Keshwar

3 Grandson of Sewpersad and Elizabeth Keshwar

4 Jenny, eldest child of Sewpersad and Elizabeth Keshwar

5 Percy, Sewpersad and Elizabeth Keshwar's second son

I am aware of schisms in the family. I see sisters and brothers, mothers and children, living discordantly. I can't help but think that it's the history that has contributed greatly and the only way to discover whether this is true is to answer a whole lot of questions. I see my grandmother and my mother, as she gets older, being isolated because people don't want to be pulled into this whole – what is it? – cycle of despair. So I think we need to answer questions before it follows on to the next generation.

I am concerned about my grandmother because she has so much to give. She is recognised openly in the community of Tongaat as having a mind that's well in advance of her time. Everyone says she was born a generation or two too early. If she had been born in our generation, she would be a leader in this country.

What follows is the story of a South African family, the story of Sewpersad and Elizabeth Keshwar and their children.

It is the story of a family living in a racist society, conforming to its norms on the surface but privately waging personal struggles to be free.

It is the story of a family that drifted apart to become both the confirmation and the contradiction of apartheid.

Chapter 1

MUMMA

(Elizabeth Baines Keshwar, the last years 1979 - 81)

She looked in the mirror and got a terrible fright: an old woman, with thinning gray hair and wild eyes was staring back at her. *Who is this intruder? How did she get into my bedroom and what is she doing here? And look, she is wearing my dress! She is a thief come to steal all my things!*

Mumma ran to fetch Marje who was busy in the kitchen. When Marje tried to reassure her mother that there was no one in her room, Mumma, on the verge of hysteria, took her daughter by the arm and pulled her to her room. As soon as they entered, Mumma pointed an accusing finger at the old woman in the mirror. 'See, there she is.' Then Mumma became outraged. 'What cheek! Look how she's pointing at me!' When Mumma saw the younger woman standing next to the old woman, her hand, as did the old woman's, flew to her mouth in shocked indignation. 'And she's brought a friend.' Marje put her arms around Mumma and began to move her gently towards the door. *How can Marje leave that woman in my room? Why doesn't she chase her out?* Instead her daughter was telling her not to worry and that her breakfast was ready. But Mumma wasn't interested in breakfast; she wanted that old woman out of her room. She vigorously resisted Marje's effort to move her; she knew that the old lady there wanted to steal her things. Even though she was eighty-two years old, Mumma was still quite strong and Marje couldn't budge her. Only after Marje solemnly swore to get rid of the old woman, did Mumma reluctantly go out with her but only as far as the sitting room, not all the way to the end of the passage to the dining room. Marje put her mother in a chair and went back into the bedroom.

Mumma watched Marje go, then quickly got up and followed.

She stood outside and peeped through the space between the door and the frame. As Marje was coming out of the room, she was startled to find Mumma right behind the door. She told her the old woman had gone but Mumma had to see for herself. She went in, looked around, but didn't see the old woman. She didn't notice the blanket that Marje had put over the mirror. Then Marje led her to the dining room, set her down at the table and brought her breakfast.

Mumma, Elizabeth Keshwar, had come to live with Marje in Tongaat in 1979. Before that she had lived with her second son, Percy. In the mid-1940's, when the Keshwar family moved from Dundee to Durban, they went to live in Kennedy Road in Clare Estate. In 1949, after Percy opened up a business and bought a house in Jacobs, the Keshwars moved to Jacobs. When Percy became a very successful businessman, he bought a house in Rippon Road in Sparks Estate and moved in with his wife, children and parents. After his father died, his mother remained with him and his family and was happily occupied helping to take care of her grandchildren. Once they were grown up, however, Mumma felt redundant, became depressed, found fault with her daughter-in-law, Rose, and complained about her to everyone. She believed that Rose was persecuting her and didn't want to stay with her.

No one understood what was happening to Mumma. Her daughters who were married and living far away saw only that she was unhappy and her constant accusations made them doubtful of Rose. One day when Rose handed Mumma a plate of porridge with sugar sprinkled over it, she walked that plate of porridge from Rippon Road, down Daintree Avenue, up Tarndale Avenue to Mercy's house in Asherville to show her that Rose had put crushed glass in her porridge. When Mercy, the Keshwar's second eldest daughter, told the family of this incident, everyone became anxious about Mumma. She was clearly delusional but her daughters began to suspect that there might be some form of abuse. After all

Mumma was becoming very difficult and it was frustrating trying to cope with her erratic behaviour. When Mumma accused Rose of stealing her money and her clothes and selling them, her daughters were in a quandary.

One Sunday, Margaret and Marje, Mumma's twin daughters, went to visit her in Rippon Road and found her quite upset. Margaret, who was married and living in Greenwood Park, wanted to take her away with her right then and there, but that terrified Mumma. The twins were worried; Mumma didn't look at all well. So Marje took her to see Dr Mall, originally from Waschbank, who had rooms at his home just a few blocks away in Randles Road. As he had known the family in Dundee and had often visited their home on the small holding there, Dr Mall would not turn her away.

When Dr Mall examined Mumma, he found her blood pressure alarmingly high, bordering on stroke. He worked painstakingly to calm her and bring her pressure down. He gave her a sedative and she fell asleep. Then he explained to Marje what Mumma was going through. In Dundee, she had had a home that she had worked extremely hard to make comfortable and beautiful. She had had to give it up when the family moved to Durban. After she lost her home, more losses followed. Her children grew up, married and left; her husband died and Percy's children outgrew her care. She had been robbed of her functions as wife and mother and had nothing with which to replace them. She felt bereft. Her life had lost its purpose. All that remained were material possessions: her bed linen, her clothes, towels, hair and shoe brushes, and she clung to them for dear life. She was afraid of losing them too and imagined that those around her wanted to rob her of them. She had lost everything that she valued and was not prepared to lose anything more. Dr Mall's explanation helped Marje to understand.

But Mumma was running from Rippon Road to Asherville every day to complain to Mercy. On one occasion, she was carrying all her money to give to Mercy for safekeeping and was mugged

on the way. Her assailant would have assaulted her but her command of Zulu had stopped him short. She had demanded to know why he wanted to hurt her when she had done nothing to him. In trying to get away from him, she was nearly knocked over by a Sydenham bus. This couldn't go on and Percy was forced to appeal to the family for help. That was when Margaret suggested to Marje that she take Mumma into her Watsonia home. 'Posey (Marje's daughter) will soon be married and you will be alone.' It made sense; Watsonia was a quiet and safe suburb of Tongaat.

That was how Mumma came to Tongaat in 1979 where she stayed until she died in 1981.

But the move to Tongaat did not change Mumma. She began to find fault with Posey who was preparing for her wedding. She accused her granddaughter of stealing her towels, sheets and good linen and storing them at her prospective mother-in-law's house.

Marje's strategy for dealing with her mother's irrationality was to treat her as normal and try to establish her in a routine. At Percy's, Mumma had been a regular churchgoer and Marje was keen to get her to Sunday services again but Mumma wasn't well so Marje spoke to the priest at the Catholic church who sent the lay priest, Mr Bull, to the house to give her communion and pray with her. But that was not good enough for Marje's twin sister, Margaret; she wanted Mumma to be able to attend church. As Margaret's husband, Bob, worked at Kempster Sedgewick, the car dealership, she asked him to look out for a cheap second hand car for Marje. Bob found a blue VW for six hundred rand and Mumma was able to attend church.

And Mumma was very happy to go to church – until they got there. Then the war began. Why did Marje bring her to this church? Why didn't Marje take her to her beautiful church that had a steeple and bell tower with bells ringing as the congregants arrived? And where was the pretty garden around the church?

The church in Tongaat was just a simple community church and Mumma hated going there for Mass.

After a month or two, however, Mumma began to settle down. That was partly due to Marje's caring neighbours. They were friendly and kind and gave Mumma a sense of security. The two Muslim families, the closest neighbours, visited at all times of the day while Marje was at school – Marje was a teacher at Buffelsdale Primary. The neighbours brought Mumma snacks and rubbed her feet when they were swollen and sore. As they understood her desire for seclusion and a quiet life, they ministered to her tenderly and unobtrusively. Mumma had been uprooted from Percy's home after decades and the neighbours' gentle care helped her to adjust to her new home. She got along well with them, was happy, and did not suspect them of wanting to steal her things, nor did she fight or complain much about her daughter – except of course when Marje became involved in community projects.

Being a public-spirited woman, community service was essential to Marje's well-being. But as it took her away from home a great deal, it made Mumma feel insecure and she became difficult.

When UNESCO declared 1979 The Year of The Child, Marje became involved in an undertaking that really set Mumma on edge. Marje and a group of her friends and neighbours had affiliated to the National Council for Women. When they were made aware of the urgent need for a special school and training centre for mentally challenged children in Tongaat, they took immediate action. Though they had no funds, facilities or equipment, they were not put off. With personal contributions and donations, they set up an interim school in Marje's garage. And the school opened and operated right under Mumma's nose. Children coming into the house to use the toilet and bathroom were a discomfiting and exasperating intrusion into her life. When Marje came home after school, Mumma would yell at her un-

til she had thoroughly scrubbed the toilet, bathroom and the surrounding area.

In late 1981, when Margaret, Marje's twin sister, was terminally ill with cancer of the throat, Mumma did not really understand and could not cope with Marje's many trips to Greenwood Park to be at her sister's bedside. Her mother's unhappiness made Marje realise that she would have to put Mumma temporarily in a care facility. On the advice of Mr Bull, the lay priest who had helped Mumma earlier, Marje applied to Northdale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg and her mother was taken into its geriatric ward where she remained for just over two weeks. Margaret died while Mumma was at Northdale but no one told Mumma; her children wanted to spare her the pain of losing the first of her children. They planned to bring their mother back the following Sunday. But on the Thursday before, they received a call from Northdale urging them to come over right away; Mumma had become critically ill and had gone into a decline. By the time they arrived at the hospital, Mumma had passed away. It was a terrible shock. Their anxiety over Margaret had made them oblivious to the gravity of their mother's condition.

Mumma's body was brought to Percy and Rose's home in Sparks Estate. The funeral service was conducted at St Anne's Church and Mumma was buried at Stellawood Cemetery. As the funeral service was held the day after her death, Mumma's eldest daughter, Jenny, and her children, who lived in London, were unable to attend. At the funeral, the family felt a double sorrow: they were mourning the death of a mother and grandmother and reliving the pain of having lost a sister and aunt the week before.

At the end of her life, Mumma, Elizabeth Baines Keshwar, did not really know who she was. She could no longer recognise her image in the mirror and had become an enigma to herself. But that

was the result of old age. Before she became ill, she knew exactly who she was. She had spent her earliest years in an orphanage, and consequently had no idea of her origins. She had never made mention of parents, family or home because she had not had that kind of traditional upbringing. But such considerations were irrelevant to a self-made woman. She knew the person that she had become: a wife, mother and above all an enterprising business-woman.

Chapter 2

Elizabeth Baines

In 2005, Marje joined the North Coast Writers' Club, a group of aspiring writers who met at the Tongaat Library to share and evaluate their stories, poems and biographical sketches. As Marje had always wanted to write the history of her family, she decided to take the few facts that she had about her mother's early life and her meeting with Sewpersad Keshwar and weave them into a story. Sitting at her desk in her Watsonia home and reflecting on Elizabeth Baines, Marje saw a troubled little girl, an orphan, running away, running right at her, right into her life. And her pen began to flow freely over the page transcribing from imagination a life for her parents based on meagre facts never before given coherence.

Here follow two chapters that she wrote.

Elizabeth's Story

by

Marjorie Rughubar

Chapter 1

Elizabeth Baines grew up in an orphanage, so it would seem. She appeared to have no family ties whatsoever. I assume she was a foundling left at an orphanage door and had absconded from there at the age of ten.

She hurried along the road, slowing down every time a passing

vehicle made its appearance.

‘Am I on the road that goes to Pietermaritzburg?’ she asked an elderly black pedestrian.

‘Aye! Aye! Aye!’ he responded as he hailed a bakkie driven by a European woman.

‘What is the matter?’ the driver asked. He remained silent looking in the direction of the young girl standing a few feet away from him. The woman was also staring at the girl.

Elizabeth was beautiful, slender, had a peaches and cream complexion, long black hair and thin lips. ‘Who is the girl looking for? Where is she from? Where does she want to go?’

The man stood hands akimbo, shaking his head, not knowing what to say. The woman alighted onto the side of the road. ‘She is so beautiful,’ she thought, ‘even though she appears to be lost and afraid.’

‘Can I help you dear?’ she asked tenderly.

‘I am looking for work. Maybe if I get to the city I will get work. But it is so far. I have walked a long time.’

‘What kind of work are you looking for? What can you do?’

‘I can sweep the house and wash dishes and look after small children. I can tie a baby on my back and wash and iron clothes, if only I can stay there too. I can also wash babies’ napkins and iron clothes.’

On turning around to look at the man who had stopped her, the woman found that he had disappeared, gone on his way and was out of sight. There was no sign of him.

‘What is your name?’ the woman asked.

‘Elizabeth. Elizabeth Baines,’ the girl said nervously, ‘and yours?’

‘You can call me Madam. Come with me. My older sister lives in Loop Street. She does have need of a helper and can provide a place for you to live in. But I am not promising you anything.’ She held out her hand with an affectionate smile. ‘Come,’ she said and helped the girl into the passenger seat of the bakkie and drove

off. 'My sister is not very far from here; we'll be there soon.'

Elizabeth overwhelmed at this encounter, did not know whether to laugh or cry. As they drove along, she stared out of the window taking in the scenery and looking at the shops and the people walking by. The driver sang a song Elizabeth had often heard, an Irish song that she hoped to learn some day. The singing eased her discomfort and fear of what was to come.

Suddenly the driver turned off the road into a long driveway and stopped in front of a red brick house with a corrugated iron roof. On the veranda stood a young man in a police uniform holding a saucer in one hand and in the other a cup of tea to his lips. Next to him stood an attractive young woman with shoulder-length brown hair and blue eyes.

'Hi, Andrea,' the woman called out, 'back so soon. Did you leave something behind?'

'No, no, nothing like that. I came back because I think I have found what you were looking for.' She alighted from the bakkie and stepped onto the veranda and talked animatedly to the couple. They turned around and looked at the little girl in the bakkie. Andrea then returned to the bakkie, opened the passenger door and taking Elizabeth by the hand, led her onto the veranda.

'This is Elizabeth Baines. She is looking for work as well as a place to stay. I thought she would make an ideal playmate and caregiver for Anna and Robbie so I brought her along.'

The gentleman and lady led them into a room, sat Elizabeth down and found out what they needed to know about the girl. Andrea disappeared into the kitchen and returned carrying a tray with cheese and tomato sandwiches, a cup cake and a cup of tea for Elizabeth. The little girl guzzled the eats hungrily. Elizabeth appreciated their friendly and trusting acceptance of her.

The policeman stood up and kissed the two ladies, 'I've got to go or I'll be late for work. Thank you Andrea for your thoughtfulness.' Then turning to his wife he said, 'The decision is entirely

yours Linda. I'll go along with whatever you decide. Cheerio.' And off he went. Andrea also left shortly afterwards.

Madam Linda Smith led Elizabeth to a room attached to their garage; it was clean but smelt stuffy. 'Here Elizabeth,' she said opening a large window.

Feeling a little more comfortable now, the girl said, 'You can call me Liz.'

'Well Liz, this is your room.' Madam was staring her in the face to note her reaction. 'This is a bed for you, a chair and table as well as a chest of drawers to keep your clothes in.'

On one side was a small curtained off shower and a basin, with a bathroom cabinet and mirror above it. Elizabeth's heart leapt with excitement. 'Am I dreaming?' she asked herself. 'Is this really, really true? If they are good to me and treat me nicely, I will stay with them forever.'

'Come Liz. My children will be up from their afternoon nap and wonder where I am.'

They returned to the house just in time to hear Anna and Robbie calling out, 'Mummy, mummy, where are you?'

'Mummy is here,' Linda called out as she entered their room. The children stared at Elizabeth standing in the doorway and clung to their mother. 'That's Liz. She is a friend that I found to play with you and take care of you when I am away.'

In the weeks that followed, the children became very fond of Liz and their parents soon felt upstaged by the attention she received from them. Their mother was a pianist and gave lessons to a few school children every afternoon for about two hours. Before the lessons she would send Anna and Robbie off with Liz. 'Liz will take you to the park for rides on the see-saw and swings,' and sent them off. At the park, Liz, watching over the children, met other friendly caregivers and had a chance to socialize with them.

Elizabeth's household chores in the morning entailed sweeping

the yard, cleaning up the home and doing the laundry. She was taught how to prepare vegetables for cooking and often prepared them for dinner. Linda was pleased with how quickly Liz picked up skills. On a Saturday morning, Mrs Smith would take Liz and the children with her as she drove to the market or to see her husband at the police station.

The Smith family was religious and attended Holy Mass every Sunday at the local Roman Catholic Church. Liz looked forward to this. She enjoyed the organ music, the singing and the service. Most of all, she enjoyed being dressed in her Sunday best. Sometimes Mr Smith went to church alone on a Saturday evening because he had to be at work on the Sunday. So Madam Linda and the children attended Sunday morning mass alone after which they would pay Madam Andrea a visit.

Before long, Liz became quite familiar with her surroundings and developed friendly relationships with the other maids whom she met in the park and at church. As she occasionally made deliveries to her master at work, she made friends with his colleagues at the police station who accepted parcels on his behalf when he was busy. Sometimes a young constable would come running after her with a parcel to take home that her master had forgotten to give her. Living with the Smiths, Liz acquired good housekeeping as well as culinary skills and developed into a house-proud young woman and an excellent cook. And she became a devout Catholic.

Chapter 2

‘Good morning, Elizabeth.’ Connie, that was the nickname of young constable Sewpersad Keshwar, who was reaching out for the basket that Elizabeth was carrying. ‘Can I help you with that?’

‘Thank you.’ Elizabeth handed over the basket. ‘It’s Mr Smith’s wedding anniversary today and madam has sent over some goodies for all of you.’

‘How thoughtful of her. Well! Well! Well!’ Contemplating the

beautiful young woman before him, Elizabeth was now almost nineteen years old, he sighed, 'I wonder if I will ever have one to celebrate.'

Elizabeth's reply was self-assured, 'Of course you will – after you've met her and got to know her well, you will know that she is Miss Right.'

'I think I have met her. Got to know her well? I'm not sure. That I still have to do.' He studied Elizabeth for a moment. 'Just not sure how to make the approach.'

Just then Smith came out of his office. 'I thought I heard you Liz.'

As Connie handed over the basket of goodies, he and Liz with one voice called out, 'Enjoy your special day.'

Giggling, Liz turned to go. 'Cheerio and good luck, Connie.'

The first time Liz set eyes on Connie, she was struck by his appearance: black hair, olive skin, sharp pointed nose and mischievous smile. 'He shouldn't have any trouble finding a mate. He's charming and polite.' Her heart missed a beat as she asked herself, 'What if he fancies me?'

A fortnight later, the church had a fund raising fete. Liz spent the day there with the Smiths and thoroughly enjoyed herself particularly as so many nannies, her friends from the park, were there too. Nellie asked her if she would be at the Youth Club dance that day but she had not given any thought to it. She was not sure she could attend. She would probably have to mind Anna and Robbie while their parents went out. It turned out, however, that Mr Smith was so pleased with how helpful she had been at the fete that he had purchased a ticket for her to the Youth Club dance. Madam was kind enough to drop her off at the hall; her boss would pick her up after the dance to bring her home.

But Fate determined that this was not to be. Later that evening there was a crisis at the police station so her boss sent Connie to the hall to pick her up and take her home. Connie lost no time in making her know that he cared a great deal about her and that

he would appreciate being able to see her more often so that they could get to know each other better. So began a relationship that continued to grow in love until death parted them many decades later.

Elizabeth was nineteen or twenty when they decided to marry. But Connie's parents were not pleased with his choice of a wife. She was not Indian and she was a Christian. To be away from his family and make life easier for them, Connie applied for a transfer to Dundee, at that time a small coal-mining town in Northern Natal.

Elizabeth had always dreamed of one day living in a house exactly like the Smith's house: a red brick building, with a corrugated iron roof, white windows and a beautiful evergreen hedge all around it. But her husband could only provide a two-bedroom corrugated iron house with a toilet outside, a little distance away from the house. All in all it was nothing like the home she had been employed in. To keep her happy, Connie tried hard to make their home as comfortable as he possibly could.

Determined that they would one day own the house of her dreams, Liz, as Connie now called her, assisted in every possible way to supplement their income. She made good use of the land surrounding their home, turning it into a garden and growing vegetables that were readily bought up by her husband's colleagues. Their wives relished the fresh carrots, beetroot, turnips, green beans, peas, lettuce and all vegetables in season that she produced. Liz also developed a flower garden and sold a variety of flowers and she supplied certain churches over weekends. Being a devout Catholic, Liz picked the most beautiful blossoms from her garden every Friday afternoon and delivered them personally to the nuns and priest at the Holy Rosary Convent Church.

This practice made her husband's heart bleed for her. His family's refusal to accept her as his wife had ruled out a Hindu marriage ceremony. His refusal to convert to Christianity and marry

in church had resulted in Liz's excommunication. She could attend church services if she wished but could not receive the sacraments. Nevertheless, her voluntary supply of flowers and visits to the church never ceased. When she started a family, however, her husband refused to let their children be baptized.

'I do understand how painful this is for you, Liz,' he said, 'but I cannot risk the agony my children would have to endure if they made wrong religious choices when they grew up. To be loved by God our Maker, all we need to do is be good and do good; to love all people as we do ourselves.' Their deep love for each other made it possible for them to respect each other's commitments and beliefs. So it was that they earned the respect and love of all who got to know them.

And Connie's belief in being good and doing good, reached beyond family and his immediate social circle. He was now Sergeant Connie and he readily assisted the Native (Zulu) coal miners, farm and factory workers, helping them to understand the laws that governed them at their work places, helping them to obtain their "passes" and be law abiding citizens. In their interactions with the miners and workers, Connie and his family acquired a good command of the Zulu language.

When the police force began recruiting new members, many young white bachelors came to live in accommodation provided by the government – what was termed the Officers' Mess. These young men needed a laundry service. Connie told Liz, 'The new recruits at the station are having a problem getting their laundry done. I feel sorry for them. So many have lost good clothing to people who offer to do their washing and then disappear with their things.'

'Is that so? How awful that must be for them.'

'As a matter of fact, Sergeant Boonzaaier has asked me to help him find a laundry maid.'

'Tell him I'll do it for him,' Liz said.

'Oh no, no, Liz. The garden keeps you busy enough. Besides in seven months, you'll have our baby's napkins to wash. As it is,

you are overworking; you shouldn't be working so hard.'

'But think,' she said, 'with the extra money I'll earn, we can do and buy so much for our baby. Mama Dube from the location came by today and asked me if I knew anyone who was looking for house help. Her husband's health is not good and she needs a job badly. Please think about it, Connie. We will be able to help her too. She'll do the washing and I'll do the ironing.' Connie was silent. 'We've actually been able to save quite a bit of money from the garden. Oh, come on Connie, let's not fail before we try. When I cannot manage I'll throw in the towel, I promise you.'

'We'll see,' he said. 'I hate seeing you slaving your life away. Don't forget, you will have to start crocheting, knitting and sewing things for the baby. You won't have the time.'

'Oh, please, please Connie, let me complain first then you can stop me.' All she could think of was the red brick house she so badly wanted to own and live in. Nothing else mattered. Furthermore, it had to materialise soon, now that they were going to have a baby. Those were times when babies were delivered at home and women in the neighbourhood helped in the delivery. In some areas of the town, some older mature women made a living out of it.

After considerable persuasion, Connie reluctantly agreed and Mama Dube was engaged to help Liz. And so began her laundry business. Satisfied customers, like Mr Boonzaaier, spread the word and the business grew, and so did the funds for the red brick house. Coal mining and bottle manufacturing were growing industries in this small northern Natal town. Railway lines and terminals were being built to export coal to other towns in the region and there was a wholesale influx of people into the area. New shops, pharmacies, bazaars, and doctor's surgeries were all signs of growing prosperity.

And Connie and Liz also made progress under these boomtown conditions. They purchased a large plot of land and obtained a loan from Goudge and Goudge Bros Brokers and Insurance Agents to build Liz's dream house. By this time Liz and Connie's family had increased to five. And enterprising Liz's business mind

continued to work non-stop. In a short space of time, she established a flower and vegetable garden, planted a variety of fruit trees: plum, fig, apricot, apple, peach, greengage and persimmons and she had a beehive. This was followed by a hen house with hybrid chickens: black astralorps and Rhode Island reds – good egg producing chickens and table birds. Then a byre was erected to house four hybrid cows and two bulls.

And Liz was earning from all her cottage industries, from the sale of flowers, fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, eggs, honey, milk, and butter as well as bottled fruit and vegetables. And from the laundry business that she and Mama Dube ran.

By the early 1930s, Connie and Liz had three sons and five daughters inclusive of twins. As the family grew, all the children were trained to make their contributions to the family businesses. Gardens had to be weeded and watered, and eggs collected from the hen house. Cows had to be milked and the milk had to be delivered to customers before and after school. Laundry had to be delivered after school to the police camp and to White customers living in the Berea area. So it was that Connie and Liz's offspring learnt to be self-sufficient, hard-working human beings.

On weekends, the family enjoyed outings. Liz would take the children to church on Sunday mornings. On their return home, they would stroll through the main street of the town window-shopping. Sometimes Liz would escort her children to the Oval on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon to hear the Police Band practising and marching. Sometimes they watched their father playing cricket or soccer. At other times they went to fetes organised by the wives of the white policemen.

Liz's home and family were her be all and end all.

But nothing remains the same. How could they when children grow up, become adults and make their own choices in life?

In this imaginative account, Marje shows a ten-year old who has run away from an orphanage and is taken in by a family needing a servant. She is a girl, a child really, all alone, living with strangers and supporting herself. She has a sense of responsibility, sound values, a strong belief in herself and a determination to make her way through life on her own. This characterisation of Elizabeth could be attributed to predisposition, a loving daughter's view of a mother she admired. But this is not mere supposition; Marje endows this little girl with the qualities of a mother she knew.

Writing of an idyllic life in Dundee, a small town in Northern Natal, Marje describes a family working and growing together, a family that is an integral whole, a happy family revolving around the powerful central figure of a mother confident and ready to take charge of her destiny. Though based on random facts, it is a romantic reconstruction that reflects a longing for that happy, united family of Marje's childhood before the move to Durban and to life in the big city where racial segregation and discrimination were the norms.

But prejudice had played its part in the establishment of the Keshwar family right from the very beginning. Sewpersad Keshwar was from a Hindustani family in Pentrich, Pietermaritzburg. When he married Elizabeth Baines, who was not an Indian and not Hindu, he alienated his family. Even though Elizabeth was olive-skinned with straight silky hair and good features, and would have looked a typical Hindustani woman dressed in a sari, a dot on her forehead and her hair in a bun, Sewpersad's family could not accept her. To avoid unpleasant confrontations, Sewpersad applied for a transfer to Dundee where he and Elizabeth set up home. Thereafter, there was little contact between the family in Pietermaritzburg and the

family in Dundee. Sewpersad's children knew of uncles, aunts and cousins but were close only to cousin Benny, Sewpersad's nephew, his sister's son, who had no qualms about visiting the family in Dundee. He became very close to them and always helped out in difficult times.

When Marje was about five years old, she remembers her father in his policeman's uniform with handcuffs on his belt, jumping onto his bicycle and riding out of the yard. Sewpersad left for work before seven o' clock in the morning and came back after five in the afternoon. Sometimes he worked the night shift at the charge office and came home at six the next morning. The family home was centrally located so the police station wasn't very far away. Seeing her father riding off to work and back is a vague memory; Marje remembers him more as an invalid.

The eldest, Jenny, over a decade older than Marje, had known him as a good cricket player; she had watched him playing at the Oval. By the time the twins, Marje and Margaret, were old enough to appreciate the game, their Dad had already given it up. And for the twins the Oval was simply a place for special occasions when the flag was hoisted and the Police Band led the parade while they sat on benches listening to the music and watching the policemen marching and leading their dogs. Marje doesn't remember whether her Dad took part in the events or whether he was just on duty.

Some years before he was retired, he purchased a taxi and hired a Coloured driver, Woody Tyler, to run the business for him. The taxi left very early in the morning and came back very late at night. It was a 1930's Chevrolet with a square roof, wheels with spokes and the spare wheel at the back.

When Sewpersad's condition worsened, he was sent to Roberts Heights Hospital (replaced in the 1980s by 1 Military Hospital) in Pretoria. The bones of his spine had fused and he could not bend or sit comfortably in a chair. He was unable to walk without a stick and even then, could only shuffle. At Roberts Heights Hospital, where he remained for two years, he was fitted with an iron brace that covered his back from below his armpits down to his hips. When he returned to Dundee, he was medically boarded and became a pensioner. On pension day, he would shuffle along with his walking stick, get to the Jager's home at the corner, then go up Anne Street to the Post Office to collect his pension. On his way home, he would stop at William's Bakery to buy something nice for the family.

Sewpersad was always the sympathetic parent. If one of the children fell and bruised a knee or bumped a toe, he was the one ready to sterilise, wash, plaster and comfort. One Christmas, he bought the twins celluloid dolls from Mr Amod's Green Stores. 'We were in the garden when he called us into his room.' Marje remembers Mumma ironing and Daddy sitting on the bed, taking off his shoes and belt. "When we went in Daddy gave us the dolls and told us to sew clothes for them; celluloid dolls came without clothes. We were very excited; we hugged and kissed him, climbed on his knee and brushed his hair because he had bought us the dolls. My doll with dark pink hair was a boy doll; Margaret's was a girl doll. Daddy was happy that he could buy us the dolls. So was my mum though she didn't show it. I'll never forget how delighted I was to own a doll."

Sewpersad was gentle and kind but Elizabeth was a strict dis-

ciplinarian. If the children swore in front of her, she marched them to the tap and washed their mouths out with blue soap.

Of Elizabeth's eight children, four were white with blue-eyes and fair hair. Each child had an English name and an Indian name but was called by the English name. The eldest child, Jumni, known as Jenny, born in 1918, and the first son, Norman, born in 1919, were genetic throwbacks to Elizabeth's white forebears. Jenny was beautiful, fair and dainty; Norman, her little white brother, had green eyes and an aquiline nose. But the third child, Mercia, or Mercy as everyone called her, born in 1920, took after her parents; she was olive skinned. As she was growing up, she was made aware of her difference by her parents' friends and acquaintances who took little notice of Mercy but always commented on Jenny's beauty, Norman's good looks, and their white appearance. Their remarks made Elizabeth very proud; she was illiterate but she had earned respect because of her two white children. As Mercy wanted her mother to be proud of her too, she did her best to please her and tried hard to be exactly like her.

Elizabeth was very generous to her neighbours, especially with her children's services. If a neighbour needed help of any kind, she would readily send one of the children to lend a hand. So, in addition to his household chores, Norman went next door to chop Mrs Adimoolam's wood, carry her heavy bucket of coal into the kitchen and run errands to the shop. When Mercy was just seven years old, Mumma sent her to help Mrs Adimoolam, who had just had a baby. The little girl had to wash the baby's napkins, sweep the yard and iron with a big, heavy old-fashioned stone iron. Even though Mrs Adimoolam had children older than Mercy, she was the one

they called to bath and dress the little ones.

Mercy's brothers, Percy, born in 1922 and Maurice in 1925, like Mercy, were not white and though they were loved, also understood that they were different. Consequently, the three of them became very close and dependent on one another. In 1930, when Mercy was ten, the twins, Marjorie and Margaret were born and they became her responsibility. They were fraternal, not identical, twins: Marjorie was olive in complexion, Margaret was white. In 1933, the year before Mercy wrote the Standard Six (Grade Eight) examinations and acquired a Primary School Certificate, the last child, Ella, was born; she was white.

After Mercy completed Primary School, Mrs Robson, a neighbour and good friend, whose daughter was a fine seamstress, encouraged Elizabeth to send Mercy to assist her daughter with her sewing. In working with Mrs Robson's daughter, Mercy discovered her considerable talent and ability as a seamstress and soon became an excellent dressmaker. She used her skills to earn a living from home and supplement the family income. In the late 1930s, when an Indian school opened in Dundee, she became the needlework teacher there.

When her father's health deteriorated to the point that he could no longer work and he was pensioned off, his authority in the home diminished. Elizabeth took control and was ably assisted by Mercy in running the household and taking care of the younger children. The daughter was as much a disciplinarian as the mother and she watched over her younger sisters with a strict eye.

Though the children had English and Indian names and a Hindu father, they were brought up in the ways that their mother had acquired in the white household in which she had worked.

Her influence over them practically eclipsed her husband's, but the children, aware that they were Indian, grew up with a divided consciousness.

Chapter 3

Life in Dundee (1920s and 1930s)

The Neighbourhood

The Keshwars lived on a smallholding near the centre of Dundee town. A gravel road with small stones, there were no tar roads, formed the boundary of their property. According to Marje, “If you fell off your bicycle you were grazed good and solid.”

At the back of the Keshwar property was the cowshed side by side with the fowl pen. The vegetable garden with beds of cabbages, broad beans, green beans, peas, lettuce, carrots, and turnips was on the other side of the yard. Just behind were fruit trees and the beehive. Near the house was a large concrete slab with a tap and concrete tub where the washing was done. When the children came out of the garden, they jumped into the tub and washed off their muddy feet before climbing the steps to the veranda and going into the house. Along the wall of the front veranda were beautiful potted ferns, fuchsias and other shade loving plants.

The Keshwars’ red brick house stood out amongst the white walled houses in the neighbourhood but all the gardens were very similar – the same fruit trees and hedges. A Coloured family, the Jagers, lived on the corner next to the Keshwars. On the other side of the Keshwars, was a Dutch family, the Coetzees, and on the corner, next to them, the Bharath Singhs. Opposite the Singhs were the Jekissens, a Gujarati family; the father, a tailor, was actually Jekissen Morar, but he was generally known as Mr Jekissen. Next to his house, was the De Beer home and next to it, the Swedish Mission with Mr Magney, who trained the children from the Mission School that was on the other side of the railway line.

The Mission School catered mainly for African children, Na-

tive children as they were called then, from the location and the surrounding area but a few Coloured and Indian children attended there as well. The school, a combined primary and secondary school, went from Class One (Grade One) to Matric (Grade Twelve). Mrs Margaret Mtimkulu, the principal of the mission school, wore horn-rimmed glasses and a scarf over her hair. As she was educated and held a prestigious position, Elizabeth admired her greatly and sent her the best of chicken curries and rotis¹. Elizabeth probably named Margaret, Marje's twin, after Mrs Mtimkulu.

As Mr Mtimkulu was an interpreter in the courthouse, and Sewpersad, a policeman, their work brought them together, they became friends and the friendship extended to their families. It was an enduring friendship. Margaret Mtimkulu and Sewpersad kept up a regular correspondence after Mr Mtimkulu died and the Keshwars had moved to Durban.

The Keshwars lived in an intimate neighbourhood where everybody knew everybody. They knew all the doctors: Dr Pellisier around the corner from the Keshwar house; Dr Lloyd a little further up and opposite Dr Lloyd, Mr Talbert, the pharmacist. Then there were the Davids, Coloured people of whom Elizabeth approved and whose children were acceptable to her as playmates for her children. Mr David, who worked for the government; collected goods from the station in his horse-drawn wagon and made deliveries in town and in the location. Next to the Davids, a Gujarati family: the wife had recently come from India to join the husband who had been in South Africa for some time. She could read and write in Gujarati but not in English. After her husband died, she brought letters written in English to Sewpersad to read and translate.

A German couple, Mr and Mrs Daniels rented a garden cottage at the back of the De Beers' yard. The husband was a very short

1 Indian round, flat bread

man, his wife very tall, very pretty with dark hair. There were no children. In the yard, they kept birds and a big tortoise with a very polished shell. Mrs Daniels often came over to chat with Elizabeth and always brought sweets for the children. She was very fond of Margaret and took her to do little chores in her house for which she paid half-a-crown (two shillings and six pence), a fortune to a child in those days.

When the war broke out in 1939, the police took this couple away. The neighbours were shocked. When Mrs De Beer came over, she and Elizabeth talked in whispers and chased the children away if they came near. That made the children more curious and one day when Sewpersad was home from work, they eavesdropped and overheard him telling their mother that a telephone had been found in the Daniels' chimney and that Mr Daniels was a German spy. In this remote neighbourhood, it didn't seem real. The Daniels lived among them and were their friends. They couldn't believe that Mr Daniels was a spy. A telephone in the chimney! Ridiculous!

The war meant little to the Keshwar children. All they knew of it was that they had to take a penny to school every month for the war fund. The Keshwars did not have a radio so news of the war did not intrude into their home. But news was essential to Sewpersad. The Singhs on the corner had a radio, a wireless as they were called in those days. Their wireless was a big piece of furniture, a cabinet with radio and record player and a speaker at the front. But Elizabeth, who disapproved of her husband visiting the neighbours or sitting in other people's houses, became angry if he said he was going to the Singh's to listen to the July Handicap results. To cover up his intention, he would take the children for a walk. When they reached the corner, they would sit on the grass while he stood outside the Singh's house listening to the racing commentary. On Saturdays, he collected the week's newspapers from the

Policemen's Mess and brought them home after work. After he had read them he put them away. He had another use for them that had nothing to do with news. When the children misbehaved, he pulled out a newspaper, rolled it up and gave them a hiding with it. But that was no punishment; not like Elizabeth's stick.

Chores

Elizabeth, an extremely resourceful woman, had turned the small holding on which the Keshwars lived, into a lucrative trading station that offered a variety of services to the local community. She and her children formed the production and supply team. And the Keshwar children were drawn into a routine. When they came home from school, they changed out of their uniforms, had a bite and went to work. On very hot summer days, they stretched out on grass mats in the spare room, or outside on the veranda, or in the breezy passage of the house and took a nap before beginning their chores

After they had rested and it was cooler, the girls washed their socks, ribbons and underwear and put them out to dry. Elizabeth was very strict about personal hygiene and cleanliness. Sometimes when they didn't rinse well enough to get all the soap out, she took the clothes off the line, rinsed them properly and put them out again while the girls were busy with other chores.

And there was much to do. Elizabeth produced a variety of items: poultry and eggs; dairy products, honey, vegetables and flowers. And she also ran a laundry service.

She had a big coop with about fifty fowls and two very cheeky roosters. When the girls went into the hen house to collect eggs, they were very wary of the roosters. Once when Elizabeth was in there with Marje and Margaret, one of the roosters bit off her toenail. Margaret got a shock and cried. But Elizabeth simply grabbed the bird, held it away from the girls and said, 'Pick up all

the eggs.' When they had collected all the eggs and put them into the basket, she let the rooster go and walked the girls out of the coop. Then she washed her foot with permanganate of potash, tore a strip from an old sheet and bandaged her toe. She washed this foot every day and it thrilled the girls to see the water turn red when she threw in the potash. On a Saturday afternoon, Elizabeth would get a chicken from the coop, kill and pluck it, wash it and put it out to dry. The girls loved watching her clean the fowl; it was going to be their Sunday dinner.

Work in the gardens consisted of weeding and watering. Pulling out weeds was a tedious job but when Sewpersad was there, it became an exciting competition to see who could pull out the most weeds; he gave a farthing for every ten weeds pulled out. With a penny (four farthings) they could buy a plain bun at Williams' Bakery. With two pennies, they could put the bun into a little white packet with icing sugar, give it a swing and they had a bun with a nice thick coating of icing sugar on the top.

As the children grew older the number of their chores increased. When they turned nine or ten, they became part of Elizabeth's laundry business and were expected to deliver washing after school. Elizabeth and her assistant, Mrs Dube, washed and ironed in the morning and had the clothes ready for delivery in the afternoon. The clothes were tied up in a large sheet made of Aurora flour sacks and the size of the bundle determined whose task it was to make the delivery. The older children, Mercy or Percy, delivered the big bundles. When Marje was about nine and old enough to make deliveries, her mother would place a bundle carefully on her head. "I would then have to support this bundle with the palms of my hands which had been scrubbed clean." She had to be very careful not to drop the bundle as she walked up to the Berea and the Officers' Mess. Collecting dirty laundry was easier – it was just

pushed into Aurora bags. That was Maurice's job; on his way home from school, he picked up the clothes to be laundered.

All deliveries were within walking distance of the house. Most deliveries were to the Officers' Mess about five kilometres away. According to Marje, "People, especially those in rural areas, walked long distances and thought nothing of it. Even today, ask a farmer for directions, if he says around the corner, you will find yourself driving for miles." The children also carried bundles of laundry to white homes in the Berea. There they had to be careful. If the dogs were about, they couldn't go to the door. Then they stood at the gate and shouted until someone came to take the laundry inside. If the dogs were tied up, the children were sometimes asked in and given a little titbit. Sometimes they got a jam or peanut butter sandwich or a scone. If they were very lucky they got a fried sausage. People always treated them kindly and the children were not afraid of them.

Elizabeth also ran a very successful dairy business. She had seven milk cows and a black bull. Norman took them to the pasture in the mornings and brought them back to the barn in the afternoons. When Norman went to live with sister Jenny, who had married and set up home in Durban, it became Percy's job. When Percy left Dundee to finish his schooling at Sastri College in Durban, it fell to Maurice, the youngest son. He brought the cows in at about half past four in the afternoon. That was in summer. In winter, he went much earlier. After Maurice had tied up the cows, they were milked and the milk was brought in. Elizabeth bottled the milk and the children delivered it to her customers. The milk that was left over was put into the separator and made into butter.

Maurice also had to check for holes in the wire of the chicken coop. If there were any, he had to collect the fowls with their chickens and put them under wicker baskets and cardboard boxes for the night to keep them safe from stray dogs and owls. Mar-

je helped Maurice with these chores. She was the tougher twin; Margaret was fragile and Ella too young. As there were too many chores for Maurice even with Marje's help, Sewpersad hired Dube from next door to help out. Dube's family, the Mtshalis, lived in the outbuilding in the neighbours' yard. Mrs Mtshali seemed to be an ill-tempered woman. She was always shouting at her children and beating them and the Keshwars heard them crying all day long.

But Dube was fun. Mischievous Maurice loved to play tricks on him. Once when he fell asleep under the tree with his mouth wide open, Maurice brought a lump of coarse salt and put it in his mouth. Dube woke up, ran to the tap and washed his mouth out while Maurice stood laughing at him. Then Dube chased Maurice around the yard, grabbed him and wrestled with him on the lawn. Afterwards they lay there laughing.

When Marje was about ten, it was time for Maurice to be sent off to Sastri College to finish his schooling in Durban and all his tasks fell to her. In the afternoons, she went down to the paddock to bring home the cows. She milked them and saw to it that they were all safe in the byre. Before she went to school in the morning, she milked the cows again and then drove them to the paddock. It wasn't all just hard work. It was very exciting when a cow calved because her mother would bring the first and the second milk into the house. This milk was called beestings. Elizabeth put the beestings into a big roasting pan, sprinkled it with cinnamon, nutmeg and sugar and put it into the oven of their coal stove. The milk would set like a big baked custard. Scrumptious! And that was their dessert for several days after the cow had calved because the cow had so much milk. Sometimes Elizabeth sent some of it out to the neighbours, big jugs of beestings.

Saturday morning chores were quite light. The children got up early, swept the yard, polished their shoes and got all their things ready for school on Monday. They did their school homework

and then ran errands to the shop for soap or a bit of washing blue or starch, or to the bakery for bread. Many white people came to the house on Saturdays to buy fresh vegetables, fruit and flowers. While Elizabeth collected vegetables or flowers, the children ran off to fetch newspaper in which to wrap them. The children wrapped and Elizabeth handed the purchases to her customers.

When their chores were done it was time for fun and games: skipping, hopscotch and their favourite game – three tins. On the side of the house was a wide grassy passage leading onto the road where the cows came in from the paddock. This was where they played three tins and football. They didn't have a proper football so they rolled newspaper into a ball, put it into an orange sack and, voila, a football! They played with it until it tore to pieces.

The Keshwar children always played at home, never in a neighbours' yard. They were forbidden to go visiting, forbidden to go into other people's yards. Their mother said their yard was big enough to play in; she didn't want them getting into the habit of popping into other people's homes. If a neighbour called her children, Elizabeth allowed them only a few minutes to visit. She warned them that when they heard the clatter of crockery, they had to come home quickly. She did not want them hanging around other people's houses at meal times.

Some Sunday mornings, Elizabeth took the children to the Holy Rosary Convent Church in Dundee. After church, they came back to a breakfast of bread and butter and tea. Then Elizabeth got busy preparing lunch. They nearly always had visitors in for the midday meal – friends from Newcastle or Waschbank who attended church in Dundee and brought lots of treats for the children. When their visitors left, the parents took a nap while the children sat in the yard by the fence listening to music. The Robsons, the Coloured family next door, provided the entertainment. Mr Rob-

son played the concertina, someone else played the guitar and they sang cowboy and hillbilly songs such as “There’s a new moon over my shoulder.” They played, sang, joked and had fun. It was a grand way to end the week.

In Dundee, the Keshwars enjoyed a peaceful, contented, comfortable existence built on the strength of the mother of the family. In creating a life for herself, Elizabeth had built a life for her family. She had used her ingenuity and talents as a producer and manager to set up a diversified enterprise on their small holding. As an innovative, hardworking businesswoman, she was quick to seize on new opportunities and make them flourish. And the children, in working with their mother, picked up entrepreneurial skills and conscientious attitudes to work that would carry them through life. More than her husband whose ill-health prevented him from being a dynamic leader, Elizabeth, the assertive, creative woman, set the children the example of a productive and fulfilling life. Though she was illiterate, her intelligence and creativity shone through all of her endeavours on that little farm in Dundee.

But she would be asked to give it all up. When Jenny’s husband, Ram Mistry, gained admission to a Medical School in Dublin and quit teaching, he asked his parents-in-law if they would move into his home and take care of his wife and three children. He would send for Jenny and the children as soon as he had qualified. Sewpersad and Elizabeth agreed and in 1947 left Dundee for Durban and made their new home in their son-in-law’s house in Kennedy Road in Clare Estate.

It was not a good move for Elizabeth. She had been prised out of her tiny economic empire and set down in a confining world where her existence lost much of its impetus. She was no longer a businesswoman, just a housewife with no real stimulus for her talents – not until her son, Percy, set up his Fish and Chips Shop in Jacobs in 1949 and asked her to manage it. Then she had an outlet

for her energy and business acumen once again.

As she grew older, however, there would be fewer and fewer opportunities for this energetic, enterprising woman and slowly she would lose the person she was.

Chapter 4

SCHOOL

All of the Keshwar children attended the Government School for Coloured and Indian children in Dundee. The school was so close to the Keshwar home that the children simply walked down the garden path, through the gate, over the road and were in the school-yard where Elizabeth could keep an eye on them. A few years after the twins, Marjorie and Margaret, started school in 1937, Norman went to live with sister Jenny in Durban and began his training as a welder. Jenny had married Ram Mistry, a mathematics teacher from Durban, whose first appointment had been to the Dundee Indian School. After serving his apprenticeship there, he had applied for a transfer back home and was sent to Sastri College, the high school for Indian boys in Durban. Ram and Jenny had set up home in Kennedy Road in Clare Estate, the area in which the Mistry clan had many homes. When Jenny's brothers were sent to Durban for their secondary education, they stayed with Jenny and she got to know them well. As she had married soon after her twin sisters were born, she did not really know her little sisters.

The twins, Marjorie and Margaret, spent the first two years of their formal education at the school over the road. When a new school was built across town in Old Baker Road, Sewpersad took the twins to school in the morning. Percy and Maurice rode there on their bicycles. Mumma saw that the twins were clean, properly dressed and their hair neatly plaited before she sent them off. She warned them against playing with woolly-haired Coloured children because they were rough. They were better off with Indian children who were passive and would not pinch, pull their hair or do nasty things to them. But the Indian children called them

Bushmen and the Coloured children called them Coolies. At home they had learned that colour made a difference and at school they learned that they were of indeterminate race, an awareness that would influence the choices they made later in life.

In the meantime life went on as usual. Elizabeth's laundry was a thriving business and her ironing skills were legend among the teachers, especially those who came into this rural area from Durban. There were no electric irons in those days and Elizabeth used a heavy stone iron with a triangular handle that she held with a cloth. The men brought their cream flannel pants and the women their pleated skirts to her laundry and that is how Elizabeth met Ruth Lewis a teacher at the new school.

Ruth Lewis, from Durban, had an Indian father and a Coloured mother. She was fair, had straight hair and carried herself like a white person. The twins adored her and thought nothing of stealing one of their mother's starched doilies to give to Miss Lewis as a present. Ruth, who had befriended Elizabeth and often visited the Keshwar home, would quietly bring back the things the children had stolen and leave them in the house. Maurice, also smitten with Miss Lewis, got into trouble for stealing a calendar with a picture of dogs in a basket that his mother loved. Elizabeth made him bring it back.

When the twins were in Standard Four (Grade Six), Sewpersad had them transferred to the Dundee Indian School. Mercy, ten years older, was a needlework teacher there. Marjorie and Margaret were now in an Indian school with Indian teachers, mostly male. They were nice, but very strict and fond of the cane. For every spelling mistake, children had to put out their hands for a cut. At assembly, the principal, Mr Joseph, stood on the veranda with a big quince stick in his hand.

The twins were surprised when they came home one day to

find the principal's wife, Rose Joseph, who had come to visit their mother, weeping as she talked to her. Elizabeth and Rose Joseph had become good friends. Then a few days later, Mrs Joseph arrived at the Keshwar home very early in the morning. The twins wondered why Auntie Rose was hiding in their house and were surprised to see her sneaking into their father's taxi and riding off. Later they learned that her husband had beaten her and Mumma was smuggling her out of Dundee back to Durban.

It was near Christmas time when the Josephs, who had made up, came back. Auntie Rose brought Elizabeth a huge packet of sweets, really nice sweets, not the Zulu mottos that the children were used to eating. Four pairs of eyes watched as Mumma put this brown paper packet of sweets on top of the wardrobe. When she left her room the watchers, Maurice, Marjorie, Margaret and Ella, quietly went in, made a hole in the packet and stole sweets from it. After that they helped themselves to sweets whenever Mumma wasn't looking. Then one day Mumma found a wrapper that one of them had dropped. She went into her room, examined the bag, saw that the sweets had diminished in quantity and called them into the garden. Each of them had to pick up a peach stick, go into the bedroom and wait. When she came in, she gave each one a hiding with the stick that he or she had picked up. They were being punished for stealing. Sewpersad never beat the children with sticks; he used a roll of newspaper. That made the children realise that their mother wanted to hurt them but their father did not. Mumma was a strict disciplinarian and very undemonstrative when it came to affection. She seemed cold and hard. All the tenderness the children received was from their father. But they knew that their mother punished them to make them good.

At the Indian school, the twins made a new friend, Manormanie Pillay. She lived close by in Butcher's Lane and walked with them to school every day. Manormanie came from a rich family. Her

brother, T. S. Pillay, owned a tearoom in the centre of town so she always had sweets in her bag for the twins. About fourteen, a couple of years older than the twins, Manormanie was very stylish; she used pretty star clips to decorate her hair. When she realised how much the twins admired the clips, she slipped them off one day and put them in their hair. When the twins went home wearing these clips, Elizabeth was furious. 'Never come into the house wearing other children's hairgrips and bows.' She gave the girls a good hiding and made them take the clips to the Pillay home in Butcher's Lane.

Manormanie, who knew she was very attractive, flapped her eyelids when she talked and swung her hips when she walked. Her sisters too were very stylish. For the ten days before kavadi¹, the Keshwars would see the Pillay girls in their saris with flowers in their hair walking past the house in the evening on their way to the temple.

The very strictly brought up twins, never thought of boys or uttered words like 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend' but when they saw Manormanie hiding behind the hedge talking to a boy, Abdul Kader Limbada, they realised that she had a boyfriend! And that changed their routine. They still walked home with Manormanie after school but at the corner they would run ahead and leave her talking to the bf. Mercy Keshwar, who taught at the school and knew about Manormanie, warned the twins to keep away from her. But Manormanie was their friend and their route home was the same. To avoid her they would have to run all the way to and from school – but they didn't want to avoid her. Mercy and Mumma feared that the twins would become involved with boys and felt they had to do something to prevent that. In those days, parents were terrified of their daughters falling pregnant and would do anything to avoid the shame of it. So Mercy began to look for a

¹ Kavadi is a sacrificial ceremony performed to give thanks for recovery from illness and to invoke protection from illness.

way to protect her sisters.

Now on Sundays after church, it was usual for Aunty Allie and other friends from Waschbank to stop at the Keshwars for lunch before returning home. During the visit, the talk often turned to the children and school. Then Aunty Allie and the others would boast about the girls from Waschbank who had gone to Little Flower Convent School, a boarding school for Coloured children in Ixopo, and had done well for themselves. Listening to them, gave Mercy the idea that boarding school was the answer to the boyfriend problem. She discussed it with her father and soon there was a lot of talk at home about the school in Ixopo. Mercy wrote to Sister Annuncia, the principal of the school, and received a reply indicating that Little Flower was a school for Catholic children. But Mercy did not give up. She went to the local priests, Father Coughlin and Father McCabe, who were frequent visitors to the Keshwar home, and asked them to intercede on behalf of the family.

Marjorie and Margaret took in all that was going on but said nothing, not even to each other. They had never been away from home and were terrified at the thought of being sent away. But they didn't dare complain. The children were not allowed to question and were punished at the slightest indication of defiance. If Elizabeth said, 'Marjie come here,' and Marje answered, 'What?' she got a clout. That was no way to answer. Once when Elizabeth called Maurice and he said, 'What?' she shouted, 'Come here, I'll show you what.' Maurice fled. He hid behind the barn door and wouldn't come into the house until his father went to fetch him. The Keshwar children had been brought up to obey; they did not challenge parental authority.

When a letter arrived to say that the twins would be accepted at Little Flower Boarding School, Marje and Margaret said nothing.

In 1943, at the age of thirteen, the twins were sent off to school in

Ixopo. Their clothes were ironed and labelled, and Mercy packed them into a tin trunk. They were to travel to Ixopo by train. On the day of their departure, Elizabeth gave them packed lunches for the journey and they walked with Mercy to the station. Mercy rode with the twins as far as Glencoe Station where they had to change trains, and put them on the train to Pietermaritzburg. At Pietermaritzburg Station cousin Benny, their father's nephew, met them and put them on the narrow gauge Ixopo train that went through Donnybrook. At about two o'clock in the afternoon the train pulled into Ixopo station where an ox-wagon was waiting for all Little Flower students. Those from Umzinto, High Flats and Koksburg arrived about an hour later. When they were all there, about twelve or thirteen girls and boys, they clambered onto the ox-wagon and rode off.

It was teatime when they reached the school and the nun who met them, took them to the dining room for tea and a sandwich. After tea, a Sister took them to the dormitory, showed them their beds and lockers, and where to put their things. Marje and Margaret had beds next to each other with lockers in between. They put some of their clothes and every day items like toothpaste in the lockers and left the rest of their clothes in the trunk, which they carried to the stockroom where it was numbered and put on a shelf. They would have access to the trunk on Saturday mornings between specified hours. They would have to make a request to Sister Celeste who would open the stockroom and watch them take what they needed. If they missed that particular time, they had to do without.

The twins' first day was painful; they were homesick and would have given anything to see a familiar face, Daddy's or Mumma's – anybody that they knew, even the face of a neighbour, Mr Bharath Singh or one of the Jagers or Robsons – somebody, anybody from home. Margaret simply sat there crying. Some girls, regular pupils

of the boarding school, saw her crying and came over. It was a common thing to find new pupils in tears and they knew that the twins were homesick. They asked where Marje and Margaret were from, then offered to show them around the school. The twins took comfort from their kindness and went with them.

The bell rang at five o' clock, summoning them to the church in the schoolyard. During the service, their new friends helped them to find the prayers in the prayer books and after the benediction that ended the service, led them back to the quadrangle. Though they had all come down to the church in single file, they walked back in informal groups. In the quad, they stood around chatting and getting to know one another. Some pupils were from the farms at Kokstad, High Flats and other places where there were no schools. These children had been at Little Flower from Class One (Grade One). When the bell rang at six o' clock, it was time for supper. They assembled and a nun led them into the dining room for a meal of samp and beans with gravy.

After supper, the pupils went into classrooms and were given books to read. Marge got *Black Beauty*, a book that would soon be banned when the apartheid government came in. The pupils read until the bell rang at half-past seven. Then it was a rush to the bathroom to brush teeth, get back into the dining room, kneel and say night prayers. Betty Du Preez, a Coloured teacher, led the prayer. That took about three quarters of an hour because they had to say the whole rosary. After prayers, they were sent to bed.

The next morning at six, there was a clapping in the dormitory to wake the pupils up. They got out of bed and knelt by their beds while nuns led them in prayer. Then a rush to the basins to brush teeth, get dressed for mass and make their way to the church. During the service, Margaret and Marje attempted to sing along. It didn't matter whether they were out of tune or not, they sang to be part of the crowd. As Marje recalls, "It was like being pushed into

the deep end; it was sink or swim.”

After church, it was back to the dorms, to make beds, and when the bell rang, to check the duty roster for assignments. On that first morning, Marje had to wash lavatories One and Two, then straighten the benches in the dining room and set plates on the tables. Pupils assigned to sweep the quadrangle, found their names next to the portion of the square that they had to clean. While nuns or monitors made a tour of inspection after the tasks were completed, students waited in the schoolyard for the breakfast bell. After breakfast, there was a fifteen-minute break before school began. Everybody had to be out of the dormitory before lessons and nobody was allowed back in, not even during lunchtime or playtime. If a girl needed a sanitary pad, she went to Sister Celeste in the Red Cross room. Nobody was allowed back into the dormitory before bedtime.

At first break, pupils stood around in the quad chatting until it was time to resume lessons. At lunchtime, they waited in the quad for the dinner bell, went in, had lunch and went back into the classrooms. School was over at three o'clock and everybody proceeded to the dining room for a cup of tea and a slice of bread and jam. Five o'clock was time for mass and benediction. Six was supertime; seven, homework and study time. At eight o'clock, the bell rang for night prayer in the dining room. By half-past-eight or a quarter-to-nine, it was back to the dormitory. Nine o'clock: lights out. It was a regimented existence; the twins were not used to having their lives so completely compartmentalised and rigidly ruled by the clock.

Even weekends were carefully programmed. On Saturday morning, the earlier up the better. Early birds did not have to wait for troughs in which to wash bed linen and clothes. They washed, hung up their washing and when it was dry, were given an iron and a table on which to iron. After the week's laundry had been put

away, there were duties: washing the lavatories and scrubbing the square. Saturday afternoon, a break from work and routine – time for sport: netball, tennis or hockey. They could run free and enjoy themselves.

On Sundays, pupils went to church in their school uniforms. After church, they changed into casual clothes for a day of relaxation and another period free of control. They sat under trees, played games and did whatever they liked until lunch. After the meal, the nuns took them for a very long walk. They came back to tea, and then to church for benediction. In the evening, after supper, it was time for entertainment in the dining room. First, a kind of talent contest: pupils came up and sang to the accompaniment of an organ. After that, the evening was given up to dancing. Though it was a co-ed school, girls were not allowed to dance with boys. At nine o'clock, they retired to their dormitories – time for bed.

At the end of term when most pupils went home for the Easter holidays, the twins and a few other pupils remained at school. Holiday time at the school was more relaxed and students played together, improvised entertainments and had fun, but they spent more time in church than anywhere else. Though the twins were not Christians, they looked forward to church. It was a sanctuary in which they could pray, express their thoughts and feelings and know that they were being heard. Having come from a home with parents of different faiths, their father a Hindu and their mother a Catholic excommunicate, their experience of worship had been desultory. At this convent school, however, they attended church regularly and being involved in Christian liturgical practices, they acquired a sense of security and were filled with reverence and awe.

Church was of such comfort that Marje wrote home begging her father to allow her and Margaret to be baptised. Sewpersad did not agree. 'All in good time,' was his answer, 'we will do these

things all in good time.’ Sewpersad regarded his wife’s excommunication as cruel and inhumane and did not want his children to suffer a similar fate should they choose to marry outside the church. He had not allowed them to convert but had not imposed his religion on them either. And that had left them in limbo. In Dundee, they had occasionally gone to church and certainly were aware of their mother’s religious beliefs but they had not been socialised into any form of religious worship. It hadn’t mattered at home because they had been in the midst of family with a strong mother and a loving father. But in Ixopo, on their own, feeling lost and vulnerable, regular prayers and church attendance gave them strength and they became Christians in spirit if not in fact. Their father’s refusal to let them convert would fix in their hearts for the rest of their lives a longing to be part of the Christian community.

Afrikaans was a compulsory subject at Little Flower School and the twins, in Standard Six, were encountering the language for the first time in their lives. Afrikaans wasn’t commonly spoken in the Dundee community from which they had come and the requirement was a shock to them. They had no background and no foundation in the subject. They would have been better off studying Zulu, the language they had learned to speak in Dundee. Why had this little convent school in Ixopo made Afrikaans a compulsory subject and a pass in it a requirement for promotion to the next level? Afrikaans would only become compulsory after the new education acts of the 1950s. But here it was in 1943, thwarting the attempts of the twins to get an education.

They couldn’t, in one year, attain the requisite level for Std Six (Grade Eight) so they failed and had to repeat the year. In their second year at the school, they managed somehow to pass Afrikaans, were promoted to Standard Seven and were completely out of their depth with comprehension tests and essay writing. As

for Afrikaans literature, that was totally impossible; they couldn't read the prescribed novels and poetry. But to their astonishment, they passed again at the end of the year and were promoted to Std Eight. When they failed Afrikaans again at the end of the year, they did not want to go back to school. But they were not given a choice.

Back in school at the beginning of the next year, Marje, no longer able to control her frustration, became a very difficult pupil. The first time she got into trouble, however, was quite unintentional but it provided the impetus for what was to come. She had walked down to the yard one day and was wandering around when she saw the priest, Father Aaron, sitting under a tree. Being polite, she greeted him and he began a conversation. Then he took her into his house and gave her a holy picture and a sweet. As she was making her way back to the hostel along the line of the tall golden cypresses that she loved, Sister Celeste, the nun on duty, saw her and asked where she had been. When she heard that Marje had talked to the priest she was alarmed but when Marje told her that she had gone into his house, she was horrified.

Sister Celeste took Marje to the principal's office where Sister Annuncia questioned her, then told her she was very wicked and accused her of tempting the priest by going to his room. Marje, who had no idea of sex, did not know what the principal meant. If she had known that the priest's house was out of bounds, she would not have gone there. But her explanation was ignored and she was punished. Sister Annuncia put rough salt on the floor and made her kneel on it. Every time she slumped, Sister gave her a cut with her cane and made her straighten up.

After that incident Marje didn't hold back. The unfairness of her punishment became the justification for uncooperative behaviour. Marje now openly showed how much she hated being there. In the dining room one day, she suddenly announced, 'I'm not

eating this bread.' When told she had to, she repeated, 'I'm not going to eat this bread,' and threw a tantrum. On another occasion, when she found a worm in the porridge, she stood up and shouted to the whole dining-room, 'Look I found a worm in the porridge, a pink worm in the mealie meal.' Margaret, who couldn't take her sister's unruly behaviour, cried all the time. That didn't stop Marje. When a nun greeted her, she would not respond if she didn't feel like it. She did not want to be in this school and had no other way of showing it.

As her behaviour got worse, she became abusive. One day, when coming out of the classroom, a boy touched her breast and she swore at him, called him a Native: he had frizzy hair. He slapped her and she complained to the Principal but nothing happened. So she wrote home that 'this fellow' had slapped her and nobody had done anything about it. In her reply, Mercy told Marje that she deserved the slap; the school had had enough of her nonsense.

When the twins went home for the winter holidays, Marje had to answer to the family for her bad behaviour. They showed her letters from the principal detailing every one of her misdeeds, went through each of her offences and then punished her. The family didn't understand the circumstances; they couldn't see how desperately Marje, and Margaret too, wanted out of that school. All they saw was Marje's rudeness and belligerence and they kept sending the girls back; that was greater punishment than a beating. And Marje became reckless. She called the nuns 'bloody Germans,' this was the 1940s, and defied them at every turn. It was too much; the principal wrote and asked her parents not to send the girls back.

The imposition of Afrikaans on the twins had almost destroyed perfectly decent young girls. The unreasonable requirement had given a completely skewed picture of their capabilities. It was the only subject that they couldn't pass, but they were made to feel like

complete failures and frustration had temporarily turned Marje into an aggressive, uncontrolled, anti-social person. But there was a positive outcome; Marje had learned to stand up for her rights. And expulsion, normally regarded as a disgrace, in this case, was a triumph.

At the end of the year, the twins left Ixopo for good, but they were not on their way back to Dundee; they were going to Durban to their sister Jenny's house in Kennedy Road. They boarded the train to Durban with pupils who were going to Umkomaas and other places. As the train approached Umkomaas, Margaret and Marje saw the sea for the first time. They were overwhelmed. At Kelso and Amanzimtoti, the railway line was quite close to the beach and it frightened them to see the big waves rolling up towards them. They were afraid and excited too. Marje shouted, 'Look at the colour! Look how the water comes up and goes back.' The other pupils on the train laughed and made fun of them. They told them that if they went down there, they'd never come out. Big sharks were waiting in the water to eat them up.

When they got to Durban station, brother Percy was waiting to take them to Kennedy Road in Clare Estate. As there were no cars in the family, the final leg of the journey was by bus. They carried the trunk and bags and made their way through the hustle and bustle of town to the Victoria Street Bus Rank. The girls had never seen such crowds of people, and all moving in different directions. When they got into this Indian bus, it seemed that everyone was looking at them. It was unnerving. After many stops along Randles Road, they finally arrived at the Kennedy Road bus stop. They got out, walked down to the house and were home, a strange new home, their eldest sister Jenny's home.

Jenny had a big house with dining room, lounge and several bedrooms. Jenny and her three children had one bedroom. Sewp-

ersad had another to himself because of his illness and because he meditated. He had his hours for meditation, but most of the time he just lay on his bed. When he got out, he just shuffled around or sat on the veranda, reading. Mumma had a room and there were beds in it for Margaret and Marjorie. Norman, Percy and Maurice had a bedroom downstairs; the space meant for a garage had been converted into a bedroom. Ella and Mercy were still in Dundee but would join them soon.

The Keshwar family had moved from their little Eden in Dundee to the big city of Durban. At Kennedy Road, Sewpersad and Elizabeth had made friends with Evaline and Reuben Joseph who lived in the area. The Josephs often visited and held church services in the Keshwar home to pray for Sewpersad. At these services, the Keshwars met other members of the Joseph family: their son Willie, a pianist, who was married to Phyllis David², and Reuben's brother and his family.

When Mercy and Ella eventually joined the family at Kennedy Road, Mercy met Reuben's nephew, Edgar, fell in love, married and left the Kennedy Road house.

² Phyllis David, married Willie Joseph, and after her divorce, married M.D. Naidoo, a communist and political activist

Chapter 5

Norman

(1919 – 1993)

The Keshwars' eldest son, Norman, left school after Std Six (Grade Eight) and went to work as a waiter at a white private club in Dundee. Sewpersad had been boarded and Norman had to help supplement the family income. Mr Williams, the owner of the bakery, had recommended Norman to the managers of the club. He had become acquainted with the Keshwar family through Percy, their second son, who worked for him, delivering bread in the morning and selling ice-creams after school.

Norman started at the club sometime in the early 1930s when he was about fourteen and worked there for a few years. Being a teenager and interested in girls, he began seeing one of the girls in the neighbourhood. His mother did not approve; the girl was from what Elizabeth considered a low class family and she did not want Norman mixing with them. One day, when she heard that he was at the girl's house, she went right over, pulled Norman out and sjambokked him all the way home. Then she packed him off to Durban to her eldest daughter, Jenny, who was married to Ram Mistry and living in Kennedy Road in Clare Estate.

This banishment, insignificant as it may seem, completely changed Norman's life. In the big city, he was unexpectedly thrust into a new way of life that would separate him from his family just as his father had been separated from his family.

In Durban, Norman found work at a garage where a welder was needed. As he was tall, with blue-green eyes and brown hair, the garage owner assumed that he was White and took him on as an apprentice. He would have to attend the white Technical College

for his training and was given a season ticket for the bus between Sydenham and the Durban City Centre. Finding himself taken for a White man and receiving privileges reserved for Whites, Norman was quite excited and a little scared at this unexpected development – he had inadvertently become a play-white and he embarked on this new life as on an adventure. At first it was simply an opportunistic means to a good job and better earnings so he did not think about the consequences of hiding his true identity. As long as he could get away with it, it was fine. It made no real difference to his life. When his brothers, Percy, in about 1939, and Maurice, about 1941, came to Kennedy Road, they colluded with him in the game. All three probably regarded it as great fun and enjoyed the thrill of it.

But as Norman couldn't be seen associating with Indians, he couldn't openly acknowledge his brothers and they couldn't appear in public together. So when they waited for the bus in the morning, Norman stood apart from Percy and Maurice; he was a White man going to the Natal Technical College and to work. He boarded the municipal double-decker bus and sat downstairs which was for Whites while Percy and Maurice went upstairs to the non-White section. Once the whole family was assembled at Kennedy Road, the situation became more difficult for him. His parents and sisters had expectations of him that he could not meet. Because they had to distance themselves from him in public, there was some resentment and a real distance began to develop even in private.

After Norman obtained his trade licence, he was earning a full salary as a qualified welder and, being a young man with means, was looking to have fun in his free time. But to keep up appearances, he was restricted in his choice of companions. He did not have white friends and had to choose from among his siblings. As his sisters and brothers ranged from white to shades of light brown, Norman chose white-skinned, green eyed Ella as his companion

for his Saturday morning jaunts into town. Elizabeth would curl her brown hair, put her in her Sunday best and send her smartly dressed daughter off with her smartly dressed son. She was very proud of them. When Ella came back from town, she usually had sweets that Norman had bought for her. One day, she came back wearing a red poppy; it was Poppy Day, the eleventh day of the eleventh month – Armistice Day, a day commemorating the end of World War I in 1918. On another occasion, Norman took her to the Metro Theatre in West Street to see ‘The Great Waltz.’ Norman with Ella walked into the Metro where no blacks were allowed, a young White man with his little White sister.

Then Norman met Natalie, a young woman from Sydenham, who travelled to work on the same bus. Natalie was also of mixed origin; her mother, a White woman, had married a Mauritian. Natalie and Norman were perhaps drawn together by their somewhat similar circumstances. As they could let down their guard with each other, they probably found relief and comfort in each other’s company and a relationship developed between them. Though they were seeing each other, Norman did not bring Natalie home and she did not meet the Keshwars. And when Norman was injured at work one day, the only person he could call was Natalie. She telephoned his family and informed them of the accident and that Norman had been taken to Addington Hospital, a hospital on the beachfront for Whites. Mumma dispatched Percy to the hospital with personal items that Norman needed. When Percy got to Addington, they asked him who he was and he answered, ‘I’m his boy, I work for him.’ He was then allowed in to see Norman. For Percy and for Elizabeth, this was a big joke.

But not for Sewpersad, the Indian father of the family. To have one son demean himself and the other repudiate his identity was humiliating. It must have hurt, but he put Norman first and showed no resentment. Norman had made a choice from which he

had benefitted in terms of work opportunity, salary and prospects for the future. By accepting his son's choice graciously and showing no bitterness or hatred, Sewpersad was unconsciously making it possible for all his children to follow in their brother's footsteps. Two more of Sewpersad's children would change their identities and relinquish the Indian connection. Norman had shown them the advantages; in a country in which job opportunities depended on race and colour, it was better to be White or Coloured than Indian.

Norman married Natalie in 1948; their marriage coincided with the transition to apartheid and the promulgation of new laws, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), The Immorality Amendment Act (1950), the Population Registration Act (1950) and the Group Areas Act (1950) – all aimed at keeping races apart. Segregation began to be strictly enforced and Norman and Natalie's situation became precarious and dangerous. As they had to protect their white identities, it became difficult to continue to maintain ties with Norman's parents and siblings. Worse – they had to appear to be racists so their visits to the Kennedy Road house were few and far between. Whenever they did visit, the family did not sit down together. Norman would speak privately with his father in his room. Then he would go into the kitchen to talk to his mother who was always happy to see her son and glad to have his attention. Like her husband, Elizabeth respected the choice he had made; unlike her husband she probably rejoiced in it. Mothers want to see their sons prosper and in order to prosper, her son had become white. Before her own marriage, Elizabeth had spent all her life with white people and she was very happy to have a white son. With Percy and Maurice, Norman talked about work. He was now with a company in Red Hill; his brothers, boilermakers at Falkirk Ironworks, were in a similar line of work. Marjorie and Margaret kept as far from Norman as possible. Ella

was still a favourite and he would pat her on the head and smile at her. Norman's wife, Natalie, always very heavily made-up, was very soft spoken and kind but the girls were uncomfortable with her; she was unaware that she made them feel self-conscious about their manners, speech and dress.

After he bought a house in Redhill, Norman stopped visiting the family altogether. And the family accepted that they had to keep their distance. The births of Natalie and Norman's children completed the breach between the families. The lifestyle that he had chosen, dictated that Norman keep his children away from his parents and siblings and in ignorance of their existence. He, however, did remember his mother at Christmas. Marje recalls, "Elizabeth so adored him that no matter what her other children bought for her, on Christmas morning it was the Christmas card from Norman with a one pound note in it that excited her most. And she would call to everyone, 'Look what my son sent! Look what my son sent!'" Whatever pain of separation she felt, she gave no evidence of it. She simply remembered her son with love.

Many years later, when Marje was shopping with her daughters at Bon Marché, a department store on West Street, she saw some white girls at the lace counter. They were wearing prefect badges and when she saw the name Keshwar on one of them, she realised that the girl wearing it was Norman's daughter. Her niece! The girl was in the uniform of Our Lady of Fatima Convent School in Durban North. Marje pointed her out to her daughters. She was Marje's niece and the girls' first cousin. They were all family standing at the lace counter together. But as non-whites, Marje and her girls were invisible to Norman's daughter. That was the first and last time that any of them saw her. And as for Norman's son, he was someone they occasionally read about in the business columns of the newspaper.

Though Norman had cut himself off from the members of his fam-

ily, he must have missed them. He kept in touch with Percy on the phone and there was the occasional circumspect visit to Percy's home in Rippon Road. That, however, was rare and he always went alone.

When Sewpersad died in March 1964, Norman was at the Combustion Works in Newcastle and Percy was having difficulty getting hold of him. He called Natalie who told him that Norman was somewhere out in Newcastle where nobody could reach him. Even she had to wait for him to call her. Percy was at a loss until cousin Benny, Sewpersad's nephew from Pietermaritzburg, suggested that they phone the police in Newcastle, ask them to go out to the Combustion Works, find Norman and tell him that his father had died.

The family delayed the funeral even though it is Hindu custom to bury a deceased person on the day of his death or the day after. When Norman arrived two days later, they proceeded with the funeral and cremation. After it was over, cousin Benny performed the havan¹ ceremony to release the soul from its earthly bondage. With Natalie seated in a corner watching, Norman dutifully assumed his role in the Hindu ritual and, for the duration of the ceremony, was his father's son again.

When Elizabeth moved to Tongaat to live with Marjorie, Norman came to see her a few times and brought Natalie once or twice. His mother, always so happy to see him, did not notice how uncomfortable he was with her. He talked to her at the tea table but his conversation was stilted. As he didn't understand that Elizabeth had become senile, he found her never-ending complaints irritating. When Elizabeth died in 1981, Norman and Natalie attended the funeral at St Anne's Church in Sparks Estate, a Coloured Group Area. They did not bring the children.

In the late eighties, when it became clear that apartheid was crumbling and there was no longer such strict separation between races,

1 The fire raising ceremony, a Hindu purification ritual.

Norman attended a few gatherings at Ella's or Percy's homes.

In 1993, he fell seriously ill and someone from the Ironworks' days told Percy that he had seen Norman at Addington Hospital. Then Norman died. His son telephoned Percy who called the family together at Mercy's home in Asherville where he broke the news. He also told them that Norman's son had made a special request that the family not come to the house or to the funeral. Everyone was shocked, some were outraged, but Percy was firm. 'This is the request that's been made and I think we should respect it.' Percy had the same conciliatory attitude as his father. But Ella who had been very close to Norman was most upset. 'I'm going; he's my brother and I'm going to the funeral!' Maurice decided that he would go too. And so they did. The country was on the brink of transformation. Ella and Maurice may not have been welcome, but they could not be stopped.

When he adopted a White identity in the late 1930s, Norman had regarded it as a personal, inconsequential matter. But it was not. It actually revealed the faultlines in what had seemed to be a cohesive structure, the Keshwar family. His defection brought to the surface ambivalence about race and identity that would lead to the dispersion of the Keshwars into different group areas and weaken the ties between them. Those who lived in Indian and Coloured group areas still met and acknowledged the bond between them and Mercy's house in Tarndale Avenue in Asherville became the family meeting place.

But Norman, who had cut himself off, was deprived of the loving care of parents and the companionship of brothers and sisters. In turn, the Keshwars suffered the loss of a living son and brother and felt the pain of not being able to share in his life. He had alienated himself from them to protect an identity that had forced him to live every moment of every day in fear of exposure. It was a trap from which only death brought release.

Chapter 6

Percy

(1922 – 1995)

When Percy was twelve and in Standard Four (Grade Six), he started working at Williams' Bakery in Dundee. Sewpersad's good friend and neighbour, Mr Malisa, a Coloured man, who worked at the bakery, got Percy the job of delivering bread on the bakery bicycle with its big wicker basket. Percy left home at about six in the morning and completed his rounds before school. After school, he took the ice-cream bicycle and rode around selling ice creams. When Ella started school, Percy had to deliver more than bread in the mornings. Ella, who didn't want to go to school, gave Elizabeth a good deal of trouble, crying and throwing tantrums as they walked to school. Percy solved the problem. After he had delivered all his bread, he would come home, put Ella in the William's Bakery basket and deliver her at school.

Percy, a smart lad, was always reading and studying. When the pupils in his class were given the topic, 'My Best Friend' and asked to write a composition, Percy began his with the following sentence, 'My mother is my best friend,' and then wrote all the reasons why. The principal, Mrs Cavanaugh, was so impressed that she called Sewpersad and showed it to him. Sewpersad took it home and read it to Elizabeth. He was very proud of Percy. When he died in 1964, the family found this composition that Percy had written in 1935 among his possessions. It touched them deeply. Percy's love for his mother, revealed in the little essay, never abated and, with the exception of the last three years of her life, he was the one who provided for her and took care of her after they moved to Durban.

At the end of 1936, Percy wrote the Primary School Certifi-

cate (PSC) Examination, the public examination at the end of Std Six (Grade Eight) that marked the completion of primary education. When he passed and was accepted at Sastri College, the high school for Indian boys in Durban, he went to live with sister Jenny and her husband, Ram Mistry, the Mathematics teacher at Sastri College. At Kennedy Road, he joined Norman, his elder brother who had been sent to Jenny a year or two before. After Percy matriculated from high school, he enrolled in the T3B teacher-training course at Sastri College. In those days, there were no teacher-training colleges for Indians and teachers' courses were offered at Sastri College and the Durban Indian Girls' High School.

After he had completed the T3B, Percy taught at Depot Road School for two years. When he learnt that at Falkirk Iron Works in Jacobs Road, he could earn four times what he earned as a teacher, he gave up teaching and applied for a job at the iron works. As Falkirk's did not hire Indians, only Whites, Coloureds and Africans, Percy had himself reclassified Coloured. When his younger brother, Maurice completed high school at Sastri College, he tried the teacher-training course for six months, gave that up, had himself reclassified and joined Percy at Falkirk's. The Keshwar brothers, who had worked hard on the small holding in Dundee, digging, chopping and filling bags with coal, were not afraid of the hard work that would be required of them as boilermakers at Falkirk's.

Percy and Maurice, like Norman before them, gave up their Indian identities for better-paying jobs. It was a matter of economics not race consciousness. Though it meant very little to them, the change of identity had happened at an opportune time – just a few years before the 1949 race riots in Durban.

The 1949 Riots

On the seventeenth of January 1949, the day after Marjorie Keshwar's nineteenth birthday in the year that she received her first

appointment as a teacher, race riots broke out in the Durban city centre. Sister Jenny, who had gone into town that morning to see a film at the Avalon Bioscope, was making her way to the Victoria Street bus rank to take the bus home when she was suddenly surrounded by people rushing towards her shouting, 'Don't come to the bus rank! Don't come to the bus rank! Don't go past the Indian market! The Natives are hitting all the Indians. Run back! Run back!' She turned and ran but didn't know where to go or what to do. Somebody from Clare Estate, who knew her, came to her rescue. He too wanted to escape the violence that had erupted and was making his way out of Victoria Street when he saw her. He called to her and opened the car door. She hurriedly got in and they drove off to Clare Estate. Jenny arrived home at about half past two that afternoon with the frightening news of the trouble in town.

She switched on the radio and the family gathered in the lounge to listen. Apparently an Indian stallholder at the market had beaten a little umfaan and this had started the rampage. Feelings of racial frustration and hatred, built up over years and suddenly unleashed, sent Zulus running through the streets attacking any and every Indian. The unrest soon spread along Grey Street, the Indian shopping area, where windows of shops were smashed and looting was rife. And the violence escalated. It spread to nearby Indian districts, and continued well into the night. The most hideous atrocities were being perpetrated in Cato Manor, a location outside of town where Zulus and Indians lived in adjoining sections. The Mooruths, bus owners in the area, were savagely attacked. Women and girls were raped, houses were burned and many Indians killed. Hordes of rioters ran through the streets ransacking and spreading havoc.

In the Keshwar home, Marjorie's father, Sewpersad, who was severely arthritic and had difficulty moving, told the family that if the Africans came to attack, he would get under the bed and

lie still. The rest of them should run away and take refuge in the garden, the bush, in the spruit below the garden or in the dongas where they wouldn't be found. Elizabeth refused; she wasn't going to leave her husband alone in the house. She went to the Sibiyas, a Zulu couple living in the outhouse at the bottom of the garden, and told them of the trouble in town. That evening the Sibiyas had a visitor and the next morning, Sewpersad, in his chair on the veranda, saw Mrs Sibiya sharpening a big knife on a leather strap that hung between two trees. When he asked what she was doing, she was very hostile and rude. Sewpersad went in and told the family, 'Well if we are to be slaughtered, it looks like Mrs Sibiya is going to do it.'

The carnage spilled over into a second day. After a short respite, it had begun again in the morning with renewed vigour and Indian communities were in panic. In areas that had not yet been hit, people left their homes, went into hiding and waited in silence. But in Clare Estate and the neighbouring Indian communities, Springfield Flats and Hippomere, the men began preparing for battle. They joined forces and armed themselves. In Kennedy Road, the cry was, 'Get out your bush knives; they are not going to do to the Indians in this road, what they did to the Indians in Cato Manor.' There were hideous rumours such as the one about Mooruth, the bus owner. Apparently his head was chopped off as he was running away, and the head went rolling down the street while the body kept on running. Gruesome stories of this nature fuelled the desire for revenge and Indians in Clare Estate were resolute, 'We are going to give as good as we get.'

The men on guard formed a battle line right from the top of Kennedy Road to the bottom in Hippomere. The Indians in Springfield Flats armed themselves with cane knives and waited. Men, women and children kept vigil; everyone anticipated the worst. Big navy trucks with armed marines came driving through Clare

Estate declaring it a safe area, but the men stayed on guard.

Everything had closed down and nobody went to work. The radio stayed on all the time. On the third day, news bulletins continued at regular intervals but the reports were of sporadic incidents of violence and by the end of the day the fury had spent itself. It was all over. The violence never reached Kennedy Road. When things had quietened down, Sewpersad asked the Sibiyas to leave. They were Jenny's tenants and had been there before the Keshwars came to Kennedy Road. After the Sibiyas left, the out-house was never let again.

Relations between Indians and Zulus, never cordial at best, had become much worse. There was now a good deal of fear on the one hand and open hostility on the other. When an Indian woman got on a bus and sat alone, an African man would sit next to her, put his arm around her, rub his face against her and molest her in little ways. So people boarding buses, made sure to fill up seats and bus drivers and conductors kept an eye on passengers.

The rioting had erupted just before the beginning of the school year, Marjorie's first year as a teacher, and schools had been turned into refugee centres.

When it was time for new teachers to report for duty, they were given temporary assignments and Marjorie was one of four or five teachers sent to Dartnell Crescent Primary School in town just across the road from the Greyville Racecourse. When she got to the school, she found every classroom and the school hall filled with people whose homes and possessions had been destroyed. Mrs Pauline Morel, the principal at Dartnell Crescent, had turned the staffroom into a clinic and her office into a dispensary. She had made arrangements for food and other basic necessities. The school was closed to its pupils and would remain closed for six weeks. Mrs Morel's regular staff members were assigned to the care of adults and babies. Some of the prefects of the school were

on hand to help the teachers. The temporary teachers were sent to teach refugee children in tents in the playground. And Marjorie's very first undertaking as a teacher was to try to offer some sense of normality to severely traumatised children.

In this group of temporary teachers was a very tall, dark girl, Dhanabaikium, who lived in Cato Manor. Though she had reported for duty, she was still in a state of shock. On that first day at the school, the group gathered around her in sympathy as she related the horror of her experiences. Cato Manor had been the worst hit in the riots and on that very first night, the seventeenth of January, when the rioters came, she had crawled behind a bucket in the communal toilet close to her home and had hidden there all night to escape being killed. When she went to look for her family in the early hours of the morning, she found a burnt out home and the violated, butchered bodies of her parents and siblings.

At the beginning of March, after all refugees had returned to their areas to rebuild their homes and their lives, schools returned to normal and teachers with temporary postings, received permanent appointments and reported to their new schools.

The 1949 riots were a wake-up call and being confronted with their racism, some Indians began to rationalise the attack on their community. They expressed the belief that police or government agents had instigated the riots to intimidate Indian political activists and prevent the African and Indian Congresses joining forces.

There may have been some truth to that. The 1940s had been a decade of Indian resistance to government policy. There had been ongoing protest against restrictive property and trade regulations from before the formation of the Natal Indian Congress in 1894. Continuing protest, litigation, deputations and passive resistance had led to the establishment of the Transvaal Indian Congress in 1904 and the South African Indian Congress in 1919. In the late 1930s, with the emergence of leaders like Dr Yusuf Dadoo,

resistance had gained momentum throughout the country and it came to a head in the Passive Resistance Campaign of 1946-47. Though there were no political gains, the campaign had energised and brought together the forces of liberation. And on 9 March 1947, Indian and African political leaders signed an agreement of co-operation known as the Doctors' Pact. The signatories were Dr A.B. Xuma, President of the African National Congress, Dr G.M. Naicker, President of the Natal Indian Congress, and Dr. Y. F. Dadoo, President of the Transvaal Indian Congress.

Though the 1949 riots had worsened relations between ordinary Africans and Indians, Indian activists remained vigorously committed to the fight against racist oppression. And the South African Indian Congress was a vital component of the Congress Alliance that in 1952 embarked on a Defiance Campaign and in 1955 organised the Congress of the People at which the Freedom Charter was adopted.

After the 1949 riots, African workers at Falkirk Iron Works wanted nothing more to do with Indian businesses. They urged Percy to open up a shop, a "hotella labantu", where they could buy bread and soup for two pennies. They didn't want to deal with Indians any more. They had no idea that Percy had been 'Indian' for most of his life and had become 'Coloured' in order to get the job at Falkirk's. Percy, of course, with an eye to business, could not pass up the opportunity. He got busy and by the end of 1949 had opened up a Fish and Chips Shop close to Falkirk's. He brought Mumma in to manage the shop and Margaret to assist her. It was a take away shop with a counter fitted with oil tanks in which Mumma fried the fish and chips. She kept fish and chips ready for frying on trays under the counter. Margaret worked at the side counter selling cigarettes and sweets, and ice cream from a freezer that stood against the wall. Percy, who by then had a car, dropped Mumma and Margaret off at the shop in the morning, and then

drove off with Maurice to Falkirk's down the road.

In the mid-1950s, when the house in Kennedy Road, which belonged to his brother-in-law Ram Mistry, was put on the market, Percy decided to move to Jacobs. Ram, having completed his studies at Dublin Medical School, had set up his practice in London and had sent for Jenny and the children. As he no longer needed the house in Clare Estate, it was up for sale. But a house in Jacobs was better suited to the needs of the Keshwar family; it was closer to work and the business. So they relocated once again.

In the mid-1940s, before the move to Jacobs, Percy had enrolled at the University of Natal. Working at the iron works, though it paid well, did not meet Percy's intellectual needs and he had decided to continue with his education. Thanks to the efforts of Dr Mabel Palmer, the university was open to blacks. She had fought for the right of black people to acquire a university education and in 1936 had succeeded in getting the University of Natal to open a door, albeit a separate door for black students: they were not allowed on the main campus in King George V Avenue. Lectures were segregated and classes for blacks were held at Sastri College and at a venue in Warwick Avenue opposite the fish and meat market. As the lecturers from the white campus also taught at Sastri College and Warwick Avenue, classes for blacks were held in the late afternoon and at night for both full-time and part-time students. There weren't many full time students in those days. Most black students had to pay their own way through university so they worked during the day and attended lectures at night, as Percy was doing. He was intelligent and ambitious and would emerge from the University of Natal with two degrees, a B.A. and a B.Com.

Percy was at university in the years following the Passive Resistance Struggle of 1946 and 1947. It was a time of mass non-violent protest in which people of all races took part. It was the period in

which Alan Paton formed the non-racial Liberal Party and spoke out forcefully against racial segregation. And during that time, in defiance of new laws prohibiting interracial mixing, blacks and whites of liberal persuasion, were getting together not only in protest activity but socially as well. In Durban, they met at Pumpy Naidoo's Goodwill Lounge in Victoria Street, at the International Club in Plowright Lane and at Alan Paton's home. These were the liberal elite, university professors and students, who came together in a spirit of euphoric defiance to enjoy the forbidden fruit of free association. Among them were Mrs Pauline Morel, principal of Dartnell Crescent Primary School, and members of her staff. Percy moved in these circles and that is probably how he met Mavis Naidoo, a teacher at Mrs Morel's school, whom he dated for a while.

As Percy was keen on music, he befriended Patrick Chambers the pianist at the International Club and when he decided to take up the violin, Patrick gave him his full support. Percy soon had many friends among musicians and one day was offered a piano at a very reasonable price. Though he was studying the violin, he knew that his sisters were keen on learning to play the piano so he bought it and Margaret and Ella had lessons at home. Once Percy and Margaret became proficient on their instruments, Sundays after lunch became musical afternoons at Kennedy Road. While Percy and Margaret played favourite songs like, "At the Balalaika," and "Just a Little Love, a Little Kiss," Ella, Maurice and Marje stood around the piano and sang. Sometimes their friends and neighbours, Willie and Phyllis Joseph, joined in. Then with Willie at the piano and Percy on the violin, they sang classics like "Jerusalem."

Percy's other love was theatre. Whenever there was a good play at one of the theatres or an opera at the City Hall, he would book tickets for all his family. And as long as Percy was alive, they never missed the Catholic Players' Guild Passion Play that was staged every four years in the tradition of Oberammergau.

The period between the late 1940s and the mid-1950s was a time of flamboyant political defiance; it challenged the recently formed apartheid government and flouted newly promulgated racist laws. And the new regime took up the challenge with a vengeance. For the next three decades, it would bring down upon activists the worst excesses of apartheid repression. For most people, however, life would continue in silent endurance. Even in abnormal times, people go on dreaming normal dreams.

And Percy armed with a B. Com degree was looking for bigger and better business opportunities. When he discovered that the Twynham brothers from Greenwood Park were planning to open a hotel, he was keen to buy into the venture. He sold the fish and chips shop and the house in Jacobs and raised enough to invest in the new business and a new home. He bought a house in Rippon Road in Sparks Estate and moved in with his family and parents – his brother, Maurice, and his sisters were all married by then and established in their own homes.

As the Twynham Brothers believed that the Coloured township of Wentworth would benefit from a localized hospitality industry, they planned a hotel that would cater to businessmen and tourists. They chose a site on the corner of Quality Street and Austerville Drive for their hotel. And The Palm Springs opened in Wentworth in 1970. It was under the management of Eddie Twynham, his brother, Dougie, and Percy Keshwar. The Springs, as it was locally known, soon became a popular venue for local community activities and for visitors, especially from Cape Town. It provided excellent accommodation and lively entertainment. The local band, Fantasy, drew crowds to the hotel; some of its musicians would later achieve stardom. The hotel also provided venues for the meetings and fund raising events of schools, football teams and charity organizations and was a meeting place for teachers after school hours.

Though The Springs began as an upmarket facility and maintained a high standard for a while, it eventually succumbed to the influences of its environment. The renowned/notorious Peter Swartz, a much feared policeman and gangster in the area, started frequenting the hotel. Then the gangs came in and made their presence felt. And the atmosphere changed. The hotel lost prestige and began to deteriorate. Eventually, it closed. The building, now owned by an American group, has been turned into a church.

During the years that Percy was associated with the Palm Springs Hotel, the Twynhams were frequent visitors to his house in Rippon Road. There was an unexpected benefit in that for Mumma. Sewpersad had died in 1964 and Elizabeth, who no longer managed the Fish and Chips shop, was lonely and at a loss. The Twynham brothers, who also had a widowed mother, brought her to meet Mumma and these two ladies became firm friends. Whenever the Twynhams came to Percy's for a meeting, they brought their mother with them and while they talked business, Mrs Twynham visited with Elizabeth. Whenever Percy went over to Greenwood Park, he took Mumma with him to see Mrs Twynham. When these grannies decided that they wanted to go away on a holiday, the Twynhams suggested that Mumma and their mother visit Jenny in London. Mumma was delighted at the thought of seeing her daughter and equally pleased to have Mrs Twynham, a literate, intelligent, younger woman, accompany her to London. It would be Elizabeth's first experience of flying but with Mrs Twynham's help, she knew she would manage very well.

They stayed with Jenny in London for about three months. And Elizabeth, who had thoroughly enjoyed the trip, came back rejuvenated. She took great pleasure in showing her children photographs of all the sights she had seen. Her grandson, Anil, Jenny's son and a photographer, had taken many pictures of the two ladies on their jaunts around the city.

After Percy gave up the hotel business, he went back to teaching, a career that he had given up nearly four decades earlier. He obtained a post as Accountancy teacher at Bechet High School in Sparks Estate, discovered a natural aptitude and became an inspiring and dedicated educator. In the mid- 1980s, he received recognition for his good work when the Department of Coloured Education presented him with a trophy for best teacher: his Matric students had obtained the highest marks for Accountancy in the whole of Natal.

Among the staff at Bechet, was an old friend from varsity, Harold Johns. In their student days, Percy and Harold had hung out together at places like the International Club. Percy had been an intimate friend of the family and had often visited the Johns' home in Umbilo Road. At Bechet, Percy and Harold renewed their friendship and maintained it into retirement.

At Percy's seventieth birthday celebration, Harold, one of the guest speakers, paid tribute to Percy's generosity and good nature. He told the gathering that in his first year as a teacher, he was posted to a school in East London and had asked Percy to visit his mother and give him news of her. To illustrate how reliable and good hearted his friend was, Harold pulled out a letter that his mother had written to him some forty years before and read from it. 'On Saturday afternoon, I had a pleasant surprise when Percy brought his very pretty little sister, Ella, to meet me, and what a delightful afternoon we had.' Harold's mother had been dependent on Percy's visits and on the little errands he ran for her. Harold was grateful to Percy for always being a most obliging and considerate friend.

Percy died of cancer of the oesophagus in the mid-1990s.

In the mid-nineteen forties, when Percy changed his identity and became Coloured, he had done it as a matter of expediency, but it

was also an unconscious repudiation of the idea of race. Colonial and apartheid governments, intent on classifying human beings, had created a race called Coloured. In doing so, they had demonstrated the truth of Nell Irvin Painter's assertion in her book *The History of White People*¹, "race is an idea, not a fact."

1 Nell Irvin Painter, 2010, *The History of White People*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co, Inc, p. ix

Chapter 7

Margaret

When Margaret married Bob Pillay, she came into a well-established Tamil family. The Pillays, a large extended clan in the Indian section of Greenwood Park, were well-to-do, owned a bus company, many properties in the area and had built a temple on their land. There were many professionals in the family, among them several specialist doctors. Babs Pillay, well-known Durban actor in the seventies and eighties, was from this family.

Margaret was now in a prominent family with proud South Indian traditions – customs with which she was unfamiliar. Like her mother, she had married a Hindu man. But her mother had not lived with her husband's family and Margaret's father had not imposed his religion or traditions on his wife. Elizabeth, therefore, who had been brought up in a Christian and white environment, had continued to live in the manner to which she was accustomed. And she had brought her children up in the way she had been brought up. Margaret, however, who had come to live in the midst of a Tamil family, had to adapt to new ways and accept that her children be brought up as good Tamil Hindus. Though Margaret conformed to the ways of the new family, her Christian consciousness, which had been reinforced during her years at the boarding school at Ixopo, made it difficult for her to be wholly assimilated into it.

Margaret had probably not anticipated such strong cultural differences between herself and her husband. During their courtship, she had known Bob as a flamboyant, extravagant man who loved socialising, going to dances, movies and restaurants and may have thought that they were quite compatible. But in South Africa, people of Indian origin, in general, live double lives. At home,

they follow, to a greater or lesser degree, traditional Indian ways. In public, Western norms and values prevail and they comply. Margaret had come into the home environment where practices were traditional.

As a workingwoman, however, she was not confined to the home. Employed first at a Singer Sewing Machine Shop and then at an Elna Sewing Machine shop, she was out in the world of work and in routines to which she was accustomed. When the canteen at Wentworth Medical School needed a new manager, she applied, was appointed and brought in her sister Mercy, who was now a widow, and her sister-in-law, Doreen, her brother Maurice's wife, to assist her. And she was with her own family during work hours just as she had been when she had worked with her mother at Percy's Fish and Chips Shop. The experience there stood her in good stead for her work in the canteen.

As she was keen to give her children additional advantages, she was happy to be earning and independent. She had three children: her son Vasigen, the eldest, her daughter, Thiri, and the youngest, a boy, Poovey. She saved her earnings and when the children were old enough, she took the family on a trip to the Seychelles. After Vasigen, finished matric, Margaret wanted him to study in London. She made arrangements with her sister Jenny for board and lodging and Vasigen went to London, where he became a dental technologist, married and settled there.

Margaret and Bob had a full social life. They went to dances at hotels and parties and to shows in the city. As Bob loved to entertain, there were also lavish dinner parties in the Greenwood Park home. And there were family visits. Margaret's family was spread all over Durban: Ella in the Coloured section of Greenwood Park was nearest. Mercy was in Asherville, Percy in Sparks Estate, Maurice in Wentworth and Marjorie, farthest away, in Tongaat.

One night, Bob and Margaret, on their way to a dance at

the Himalaya Hotel, popped in at Rippon Road to see Sewpersad and Elizabeth. This was sometime before 1964. Sewpersad was very pleased to see his daughter, so beautiful in her black evening gown. After the visit, Bob and Margaret drove off to the hotel in town. When they got to the Himalaya, they went into the dining room where they met with the other members of the Pillay family who made up their party and they all sat down to dinner together. While they were chatting and enjoying their meal, Margaret suddenly began coughing violently; she had swallowed a fishbone and it was stuck in her throat. She couldn't get it out and was choking. Bob and his cousin, Anand, (Dr. C. N. Pillay, a surgeon), took her into an anteroom but Anand couldn't see the bone and decided that the only way to remove it would be to make an incision in the throat. Leaving Margaret coughing uncontrollably, he went off to the hotel kitchen to get the sharpest knife he could find. Just as he re-entered the anteroom, Margaret coughed up the bone. They were relieved. Margaret seemed all right after that. But in later years when she had difficulty swallowing, there was a tendency to attribute her discomfort to the incident at the hotel. When the irritation in the throat persisted, Margaret sought medical advice and was examined many times at King Edward Hospital, but the doctors could not determine the cause of her problem. Some thought it to be a hernia; others had other diagnoses. No one really had an answer. All they could do was provide relief; and she lived with this tenderness in her throat for many years.

In 1980, when the condition became unbearable, Anand brought in Dr Fernandes, Professor and ENT Specialist, who ordered a battery of tests. After he studied the results, he broke the news to Margaret; she had cancer of the throat – at an advanced stage. Nothing could be done but they would try chemotherapy. She was devastated. Marje was the first to visit her at the hospital after she learned of her condition. Margaret was glad that her twin had come before the rest of the family. 'I have something to tell

you,' she whispered. 'Don't tell anybody, I'm only telling you and only you must know. Dr Fernandes told me I have cancer of the throat and I don't have much longer to live.' It was a shock. Marje couldn't accept it and challenged the doctor's finding. But Margaret took her hand and tried to make her understand. 'I don't want my husband's family to know.' She felt ashamed that she was dying of a disease that people feared and dreaded. She felt guilty about bringing disgrace on the Pillay family.

After Marje left the hospital, she drove to Percy's place in Rippon Road to pick up her mother. She had left her there because Mumma couldn't manage the long haul to King Edward Hospital. As Marje drove back to Tongaat that Saturday afternoon, she couldn't stop the tears. The news was a terrible shock; Margaret, her twin, her other self, was dying. There was a huge lump in her throat; she couldn't speak and was making every effort to keep Mumma from seeing that she was crying,

But Mumma, who had been very quiet, suddenly burst out, 'You're crying? Why?'

'Ma, Margaret is very sick.'

Mumma snapped back, 'I'm very sick. I've been very, very sick for a long time and I've never seen you crying for me. You don't care about me. I can be sick, I can die, nobody cries over me. And now your sister's sick and you're crying.'

At this Marje began to laugh and couldn't stop laughing. She laughed uncontrollably. By the time she pulled into Tongaat, she was laughing and crying at the same time. She was on the verge of hysteria as she drove into her garage.

Her next door neighbour, Hawa, a very kind, thoughtful Muslim girl, had been watching for her car and minutes after Mumma and Marje were in the house, she was at the door with a plate of samoosas and meat pies that she had made. Seeing how agitated Marje was, she made tea, sat with her and Mumma and chattered away about this and that. When Marje had calmed down,

she asked about Margaret. Then she cleared away the tea things and when she was satisfied that Marje was herself again, she went home. It was her kindness and caring, her comforting presence, being there and seeing to them, that restored Marje's equilibrium. And she thanked God for Hawa.

It was impossible to keep Margaret's condition a secret. Soon the whole family knew. After she returned home, Anand became her personal physician. He advised her not to take to her bed but to stay active – get up in the morning, dress, and walk about. But it was a period of desolation for Margaret. Even though Marje bundled Mumma into the car and drove to Greenwood Park every weekend to see her, Margaret wanted Marje with her all the time. Marje desperately wanted to be with her sister too but Mumma was under her care and Mumma, who didn't really understand what was going on, didn't want to go to Greenwood Park and didn't want Marje going there either. She was tired of visiting 'those people' every weekend. 'Why are you going there? Why can't you stay home? What's chasing you away from home?' And Marje was caught between a disoriented, elderly mother who needed constant attention and a sister who needed her comforting presence. When she sat at Margaret's bedside, Margaret would say, 'I'm going to sleep now, don't go anywhere. I'm just going to sleep for a little while but don't go anywhere. When I wake up I want to find you here.' Marje was under great stress and did not know how to resolve her dilemma.

When Margaret asked Marje to bring her jewellery that was in safekeeping at her bank as she wanted to divide it among her three children, it was almost too much for Marje. The thought that her sister was now disposing of her possessions and getting ready to depart this world, filled her with terrible pain and she was desperate to be with her all the time. One afternoon, hoarse and struggling to speak, Margaret said to Marje 'I couldn't sleep last

night; I couldn't breathe. I walked around opening the windows and doors and going outside.' As she spoke, Marje could see that it was an effort for her to breathe. Marje wanted to phone Anand, but Margaret wouldn't have it and Marje didn't want to upset her sister. But the next morning, when Anand looked in on Margaret before leaving for R K Khan Hospital, Marje took him into the passage and told him what had happened the night before. 'You should have called me straight away. She's suffocating; she's not getting enough air. You should have called me; you mustn't let her put you off. I'm going to the hospital now and I'm going to get Singh (Dr T. Singh) to do a tracheotomy. As she can't eat, we don't have to wait for a night's starvation to do it.' He left and went to make the arrangements at the hospital. When he telephoned to say that they should bring Margaret in for the procedure, Bob took her to the hospital.

Family members, who went in to see her after the surgery, couldn't make out what she was saying when she spoke to them. A nurse told her to put her finger on the tube in her throat when she wanted to talk. She didn't like the tube but she put her finger on it and her speech became clearer. When she was back home, she was constantly taking out the tube, removing the mucous, washing the tube and putting it back. Once when Marje offered to clean it for her, she turned on her sister, 'You think I'm so helpless, so useless?'

Still trying to find a way to stay with Margaret, Marje put in a request for time off from school. Her principal, completely unsympathetic, made no allowances and in fact monitored all her work and school duties even more stringently. And she couldn't simply rush off after school; there was Mumma. She tried to find a care facility in which to put Mumma for a short while but Tongaat had nothing to offer. In desperation, she sought advice from Mr Bull, the lay preacher, who used to bring Mumma communion. He advised her to write to Dr Poole, Superintendent of the Hospital

at Northdale in Pietermaritzburg, explain the situation and ask Dr Poole to take her mother into the Geriatric Ward. Marje poured her heart out in a letter to Dr Poole. 'I'm an infant class teacher and I'm having a difficult time with my principal. My mother's with me, she's old, and my twin is dying of cancer and I'm torn between them. I don't know whether I'm coming or going. Can you please just admit my mother? I know you have a long waiting list, but if you could just admit my mother until my sister's demise which is not far off, I'll come and fetch Mumma straight after.' She put the school telephone number and her home number at the back of the letter and posted it.

Dr Poole received the letter within the next day or two, a small miracle. He telephoned the school on Tuesday and asked to speak to Marje but Tony, the secretary, at the Principal's instructions, informed the doctor that she was not allowed to take calls during school time, and that he could not take a message. As Marje was leaving school at the end of the day, Tony came running up to her, 'Marje, a Dr Poole telephoned you this morning. Here's the number. Go home and phone him.' She went straight home, telephoned and Dr Poole answered the phone himself. 'Where are you, my dear? Your mother's bed has been ready for her from eleven o'clock this morning. Please bring her in as soon as you can.' Marje wanted to get Mumma off right away but in her old car she wouldn't make it to Pietermaritzburg. She telephoned her sister, Ella, who suggested that they hire an ambulance from the St John's Association. And that is how they got Mumma to Northdale Hospital.

Margaret's condition became worse; she was vomiting blood and Marje was racing from school to Greenwood Park everyday, coming back late, and sitting up past midnight doing her lesson preparation for the principal.

On Sunday, Percy and Marje went to Pietermaritzburg to see

Mumma. They arrived at the hospital just before three o' clock and were standing at Mumma's bed when a Catholic priest came up, asked if Mumma was Catholic and whether he could pray for her. Marge and Percy accepted gratefully and watched as he laid hands on her and anointed her. After the visit, Percy and Marje drove back to Durban, straight to Margaret. It was about five o' clock on a November afternoon and still light when they pulled into the yard at Greenwood Park. Mercy came out to meet them. 'Come quickly, Margaret's dying.' When Anand saw them rushing to Margaret's room, he stopped them, 'Don't rush. Walk in calmly and quietly.'

The whole family was there and people were standing around weeping quietly. Percy and Marje went in and Ella told them that Father Theobald had been to see Margaret. Someone had informed him that Margaret wanted to be baptised. Ella had also phoned him and asked him to come and pray for her sister but had explained that as she was married into a Hindu family, baptism would present a problem. Father Theobald had assured Ella that he understood the situation and she was not to worry. Ella described what happened when Father Theobald arrived at the house. He sat down next to Margaret, held both her hands and said, 'Margaret, you are very ill and want to be baptised. There are circumstances, however, that prevent this. But do not despair. You have no need of formal rites; you need nothing more than your desire for baptism. Your spirituality and belief in Jesus Christ have baptised you. You have always been a Christian; the strength of your faith made you one long before today.' Then he prayed with her and blessed her.

He was at Margaret's bedside at three o' clock that afternoon, the same time as the priest was with Mumma in the Geriatric Ward. It was a strange coincidence.

The week went by – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday – Margaret was

vomiting lumps of blood and a swelling, like a boil, had developed on the side of her throat. On Thursday, she went into a coma and Anand told them it was just a matter of time. Margaret's sisters and her daughter, Thiri, sat up with her on her last night, taking turns to keep watch. Early on Friday morning, Marje touched her sister's feet; they were cold. Margaret opened her eyes and looked at Marje, who called out to Mercy and Ella, 'Look, Margaret's opened her eyes.' Then Margaret heaved a sigh and was gone. She died at nineteen minutes past five on the sixth of November 1981. The sisters woke everyone up and family members came into the room but nobody cried. The house was quiet and calm. Cousin Benny, now the acknowledged head of the Keshwar family, suggested that the body be taken to the mortuary. Bob's family thought that would mean putting the funeral off to the next day, which was against Hindu custom. But Cousin Benny pointed out that as the growth on Margaret's neck had burst, it needed to be stabilised. The body could go to the mortuary that morning to be frozen and the funeral and cremation could still take place in the afternoon.

At half past seven that morning when their mother's body was taken to the mortuary, Margaret's children Vasigen, Thiri and Poovey broke down and cried.

On the Sunday following Margaret's funeral, Marje wanted to go to Pietermaritzburg to bring Mumma home, but they had all been through a harrowing week. Nobody had been able to sleep and they were exhausted. They needed a little respite; they decided to fetch Mumma the following Saturday. But on the Thursday before, they received a message from Northdale Hospital informing them that Mumma had developed breathing problems, was in a critical condition and would probably not last the night. This sudden emergency caught them off guard and they went into a panic trying to find transport to Pietermaritzburg. Alan's car wasn't working, neither was Percy's. They telephoned around and eventually Alan,

Mercy's son, found someone willing to lend them a car.

All the running around had made them quite late and when they were ready to go, Percy delayed them further. He kept walking back and forth aimlessly, not getting into the car. He wasn't himself. He seemed to be going through some kind of shock reaction. When he eventually got in, they rushed off to Pietermaritzburg. But they were too late; by the time they got to the hospital Mumma was gone. She had always said, 'I have eight children, all married, so there are sixteen children, and I have about twenty or more grandchildren but, when I die, I will die alone.' And so it came to be. Not one of her children was at her bedside when she died.

They had buried Margaret on one Friday and were behind Mumma's hearse the next Friday. Marje believed that Margaret had come to take her mother away because there was no life here for her anymore.

Margaret and her mother, both Christians at heart, had not been able to practice their faith because of their marriages. For Mumma it had been a quiet acceptance but for Margaret it had been a constant yearning. When she and Marje were at the Little Flower Convent School, they had had catechism, Bible lessons and had learnt to say the rosary. But when they married, they married Hindus and were the only two siblings who were not Catholic. Margaret, however, never gave up saying the rosary even after her marriage. When her father died in 1964, she had asked for the crucifix hanging in his room: nothing else, just the crucifix. When she worked in Durban, she had always gone to the Cathedral on the first Friday of every month. Catholics believed that this practice ensured that when you died, it would be with a priest at your side. Theresa Desai, Ashwin Desai's mother, who was married to a Gujarati and lived in Asherville, used to see Margaret at the Cathedral.

When Margaret went to visit Mercy one day, she found Theresa there. Theresa was surprised to discover that Margaret was Mercy's sister. 'You never fail to turn up at the Cathedral on Fridays. I have seen you lighting candles and always wondered who you were.'

Though he hadn't allowed his children to become Catholics, Sewpersad Keshwar had never stopped them from going to church. When the family moved from Dundee to Clare Estate, Elizabeth and the young Keshwars had often attended the local church. And when the priest, Father Hugo, was on his rounds, he would stop at the house in Kennedy Road where he would find Sewpersad sitting on the veranda reading the Bible. So they became friends and when Marje and the others came home from work or school, they often found Father Hugo chatting with their father. As a good Hindu, Sewpersad respected all religions, believed all were paths to God and spent time studying the beliefs and practices of other faiths.

But for Margaret, though she was married to a Hindu and living in a Hindu home, there was only one religion and after Sewpersad died, she was the one to say, 'Mumma was a Catholic. She was excommunicated because she married outside the faith. Now we must do something to restore Mumma to the church.' As Mumma was living with Percy in Rippon Road at the time, he took the responsibility upon himself, went to St Anne's Church, and explained the situation to Father Danker, who was very sympathetic. Percy took Mumma to the church and Father Danker performed all the prayers and rites necessary to allow Mumma to receive communion once more.

At the forty-day prayer and memorial service after Mumma's death, Marje was baptised and accepted into the Catholic faith. She knew that nothing would make Margaret happier. With Marje, the last to convert, all of Elizabeth's children became members of their mother's faith.

Chapter 8

Eulogy for Margaret

(The following is an article from The Leader, 13 November 1981.)

An Embryonic South African Margaret – the Universal Lord's gift

By Ranji S. Nowbath

Late last Friday afternoon, under a darkening sky, to solemn strains of a Tamil Hindu funeral service and the Christian hymn of hope after death, "Abide with Me," Margaret returned to her Maker, her body being entrusted to Agni, Hindu Fire of Promise of a rebirth and ultimate merger with Purusha, Eternal Spirit.

Many thoughts revolved in my mind while I stood, as is my wont at the Clare Estate Crematorium, against one of the brick pillars on the left of the chapel, for Margaret's passing was, to me, not just a death, the inevitable for everyone who is born.

Child she had been, wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law,

mother, mother-in-law, friend, but at the moment of her funeral she, her ailing mother, confined to a bed in Pietermaritzburg, her father already gone to his gods, her brothers and sisters and her children were rising towers of hope for, and guiding beacons to, a country and a people riven and wracked by religion and race.

Amalgam

If the country is prepared to accept it the Keshwars and their brood and their brood's brood are a remarkable amalgam of hope and faith for South Africa, something which neither Sewpersadh Keshwar nor Elizabeth Baines must have planned or

dreamed of when they married some seventy years ago. They were just two young people – Connie, as Sewpersadh was known, and Elizabeth – very much in love.

They settled in Dundee and it was there that I first got to know them through my beloved Bigya Didi. My uncle's family and the Keshwars were great friends while their daughters, Bigya¹ and Jumnie², were special chums and pals. The earliest memories date some fifty years back and are hazy but those of the years that followed are clear and distinct.

As I got through high school I developed my own bonds with the Keshwars. Then came the time when as a growing young man I visited Uncle Connie in my own right, no more as an appendage to my Bigya Didi for she had married, settled in a neighbouring town and was bringing up her own family and Jumnie had married

and settled in Durban.

The visits developed into a sort of pilgrimage. Uncle Connie, crippled with arthritis, was bound to a chair. Many have been the hours spent talking. He was very interested in education and gave his children whatever they could take of it. Aunt was shy and retiring...that is my memory of her.

Break-up

But, as happens in life, circumstances change, families break up and disperse, new associations develop, new interests are generated, people get caught in different groups and channels, contacts and communications weaken. The memories and the bonds remain and nostalgic recollections are exchanged at unexpected meetings, the bonds are refurbished but attenuation (sic) again.

Then comes that inevitable trauma and death opens up the reservoirs of memory. So it was when the message of Margaret's death came. That she was sick I knew. That she was terminally ill I knew but I am not one to

1 Bigya Didi i.e. Aunt Bigya
2 Jumnie, the eldest of Sewpersadh and Elizabeth Keshwar's children.
The family called her Jenny.

visit the sick and the ailing, not one to troop off to sick beds and hospitals. I did not visit Margaret when she was ill nor did I view her face in death. That is not my way of life. Not that it does not but ever so rarely vary. When it does the reasons most times are meretricious, some times genuine.

My friends and my relations, more particularly the latter, say that I am callous, grossly indifferent, that I have no feeling, that I am a cold-blooded creature, often not human. They may be right. They may be wrong. Most times when circumstances demand that I should visit the sick or pay my last respects to the dead, I simply reach for a drink.

But in death it was different with Margaret. As the coffin was borne slowly along the last few steps to the chapel there were strains of a Tamil Hindu hymn of hope, in gratitude to Shiva, Nataraj, Lord of the Dance, motionless, enveloped in overpowering silence, vibrating slowly, rising to a climax in a furious crescendo of movement, subsiding slowly, motionless again,

Purusha, Eternal Spirit, breathing into Prakriti, inert matter, quickening it with life, not much different from the proclamation at the beginning of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters."

Last Rites

Margaret's son, Tamil loongi round his nether body, symbol of a South African Tamil Hindu son at the last rites of a Tamil parent. Then, miracle of miracles, Professor Herby Govinden, with unshakeable faith and belief in Life Eternal and Everlasting, commending unto Christ Jesu, the body of a beloved sister. Then back to a Tamil Hindu service followed by that most enduring of Christian hymns, "Abide With Me."

And just when the funeral service begins several people from Northern Natal arrive. Among them Norma and sister Barbara. In South African terminology, Coloureds. A unique

grouping of two religions and two peoples, all sharing a common grief and for that one hour or so there was neither Hindu nor Christian, neither Coloured nor Indian. In the shadow of the finality of death they were just grieving people.

It was not any more the funeral of Margaret Pillay, born Keshwar, but a microcosm of hope for, and a promise to, a country harassed by passions and prejudices. A Christian country with White Christians calling their God as witness to the validity of the Separate-ness of its people and other White Christians calling the same God as witness to the One-ness of the same people; Indian Christians denigrating the religion of their forefathers; Hindus stirring to the call of "Arise, Awake", preparing to give battle against proselytisation, declaring the One-ness of all religions. For an infinitesimal moment in South Africa's time, all these were static, quiet, non-existent when Hindu and Christian and Indian and Coloured stood side by side, heads bowed in grief.

Hindu father

Margaret – may we in death call her the Universal Lord's gift to South Africa? – was born of a Hindi Hindu father and a Coloured Christian mother and brought up as an Indian Hindi Christian. She attended Indian schools, became a teacher in Indian schools, met, fell in love with and married Bob Pillay and the Tamil Hindu walls of Greenwood Park nearly fell down. They certainly cracked.

The Tamil matrons were aghast for Margaret was not Tamil, nor Hindu, nor all Indian. "Sacrilege, blasphemy," they cried. "Shiva Lord we crack our knuckles against our temples. May we be cleansed."

The young thought otherwise. A flowering of love eternal, everlasting. Margaret and Bob held together. Neither did they do what, as a rule, happens in such a situation: abandon family, abandon friends, abandon customs, traditions, abandon religion, abandon the community.

They stayed with the family. They stayed with the community. The children came and were brought up in the Tamil tradition and with the passing of the years Margaret became the beloved of all, as beloved as Ruth, the Moabitess, was of Naomi, her mother-in-law, wife of Elimelech. It might be that Margaret might also have entreated in the words of Ruth, "...for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God..."

The field was alien but she gleaned in it and made it her own.

Since Margaret first trod her special path to Pillay-land in Greenwood Park, nigh on twenty-five years ago, others, some possibly even more alien, have followed. Roman Catholic, Gujarati, a mixture of religions and tongues and people.

No chronicle

That group of Coloured people – to use again South African terminology – primarily women. Norma, her sister Barbara,

grandchildren of the Keshwars, children and grandchildren of Frank Maharaj of Waschbank, now Wasbank, who also married a Coloured woman. No chronicle of the Keshwars can ever be complete without the Frank Maharajs and no chronicle of the Frank Maharajs can ever be complete without the Keshwars. Such is the bond between them.

In the few hours of her death and funeral Margaret brought all these people together – some of whom live apart because of religion while others are compelled to live apart because of South Africa's racialism. For a while they were just people but from here whither?

South Africa's tragedy, as artificially created a tragedy as ever there has been in the story of man – is illustrated by the life and times of the Keshwars but Connie and Elizabeth have bequeathed a legacy of hope to the country and its people. Margaret by her life epitomised that legacy. There are seven other children and their lives chal-

lenge South Africa to cast aside the tragedy and to accept the legacy.

Jumnie married Ramesh. They live in England. Had they remained in South Africa they would have been obliged by the laws of the land to live in an Indian area.

A widow

Mercy, who married Fred (sic) and now a widow, lives in Asherville. The laws of the land decree that she live in an Indian area. Marjorie married Ishwar. She, too, is a widow. The laws of the land compel her to live in an Indian area. She lives in Watsonia, Tongaat.

Ela (sic) married Nicholas and the laws of the land order them to live in a Coloured area. So they live in Coloured Greenwood Park.

Percy married Rose and the laws of the land order that they live in a coloured area. Norman and Morris (sic), too, are required by the laws of the land to live in Coloured areas.

This is the tragedy of South Africa, that it decrees where and with whom people should live. Will the day come for Alan's Beloved Country when people will live where they want to and share their lives with whom they wish? Will rivers of blood flow before this happens?

Fulfilment

They need not for there is hope, but a hope pregnant with fear; a hope born of Connie and Elizabeth and expressed through the birth, the education and the fulfilment as growing child, wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, mother, mother-in-law, friend, of their daughter Margaret, her body surrendered last Friday afternoon to the Maker as an Indo-Coloured-Hindu-Christian gift, an embryonic South African, transcending religion and race.

The Rig Veda says, "Ekam sat vipra bahuda vadanti – Truth is One, the sages call it by various names," Christ Jesus said, "Love thy neighbour as thyself."

When will the time come

when my beloved Bigya Didi, now, no doubt, exchanging news and views with Margaret, will be able to visit all the Keshwar brood and their brood's brood without having to shuttle to and from Indian and Coloured

areas. Just up Wilson Street, into Collie Street, Bulwer Road and back down of an afternoon or evening talking with Jumnie, talking about what young girls talk of, love, marriage, home, children, the gods.

Chapter 9

Marjorie

At the end of 1947, Marjorie and Margaret left Little Flower Boarding School in Ixopo and came to live at Jenny's house in Clare Estate. Their parents had moved in earlier in the year, their brothers had been there for several years and their sisters, Mercy and Ella, who were still in Dundee, would soon join them.

Marje, like Percy, was academically inclined and following his example, went into teacher-training. At the beginning of 1948, she enrolled in a one-year course offered at the Durban Indian Girls' High School, obtained the T5 Teachers' Certificate and was a qualified primary school teacher. In January 1949, before she could receive her appointment, race riots ¹ broke out and Indian schools became places of refuge for displaced Indian families. Marje was sent as a temporary teacher to Dartnell Crescent Primary School where she taught refugee children for six weeks. In March, after the refugees had returned to their home areas, Marje received her official appointment to St Theresa's School in Mayville. The school was right opposite the Jesus Church where the Keshwars attended Mass at Christmas and Easter.

The principal of St Theresa's School was a nun and some of the staff were Catholic – Georgie Lawrence, Sylvia Lawrence's brother, and two female teachers. Two other women were Anglican and two men were Hindus. And there was Marje who hadn't made a formal choice though she was strongly inclined towards Catholicism.

In her first year, Marje was assigned a Class One (Grade One) and, in the years that she taught at St Theresa's, remained in the junior primary section of the school. She thoroughly enjoyed

¹ See page 53

working with the little first and second graders and realised that she had found her vocation. With her love for the children and her dedication to work, she developed into a really fine junior primary teacher. There was always much fun, laughter, activity and excitement accompanying the learning in her classroom. She made school what it had not been for her, especially at Ixopo, a place where children could utilise their talents and grow.

In April 1952, the school was very busy preparing for the Marian Congress that was to be held at the Greyville racecourse. The Marian Congress was a celebration of the centenary of the arrival in South Africa of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Archbishop Martin H. Lucas SVD, the then Apostolic Delegate to South Africa, would proclaim Queen-Mary-Assumed-into-Heaven the patroness of the Church in South Africa. Georgie Lawrence was organising a pageant and they were looking forward to being part of the celebration. It would be a memorable event and Marje felt uplifted.

In her first year of teaching, Percy had suggested to Marje that she study part-time to improve her qualifications. Marje took his advice and enrolled at the Technical College, a night school operating out of Sastri College; it represented the initial stages of what was to become the ML Sultan Technical College. The Tech offered part-time instruction to those who wished to complete their high school education. In those days there were three public examinations for school children. At the end of Std 6 (Grade Eight), they sat for the Primary Schools' Certificate (PSC), at the end of Std Eight (Grade Ten) they wrote the Junior Certificate (JC) examination and at the end of Std Ten (Grade Twelve), the matriculation examination. Marje enrolled for the Junior Certificate, which she had failed at Ixopo because of the Afrikaans requirement.

Teaching and studying meant long arduous days. After a day's teaching at St Theresa's, Marje took the bus home to Kennedy Road and in the evening took the bus to town to the Tech. It was safe in

those days. Her classes were from a quarter past five to a quarter past seven. Percy picked her up after classes on his way home from work. He had quit teaching after two years, was working at Falkirk Iron Works and had opened a Fish and Chips Shop in Jacobs. On Friday nights, Percy helped out at the shop, which stayed open late, and Marje took the bus home. She didn't attend classes every evening; different subjects were offered on different days and she attended three times a week.

Ella and Mercy, who had left Dundee in 1949, were now at Kennedy Road. One Saturday night, Krishendutt Rughubar, one of Ella's teachers at the high school in Dundee, popped in with his brother, Ishwar, to visit her. Krishendutt, who was still teaching in Dundee, was home for the holidays. In those days, newly qualified male teachers were sent out into rural areas and other places far away from home for the first few years of their teaching careers. During the visit Marjorie, who hadn't met Ishwar before, was surprised to learn that he was also studying for the JC at the Tech but was in a different class group. For some inexplicable reason, Marje took an immediate dislike to Ishwar – it was the typical romance novel reaction at the start of a relationship.

Following this visit, when Marje went to classes in the evening, she would find Ishwar waiting for her at the gate. After classes he would wait with her until Percy came. Percy took note and told Mumma. It was decided that Marje should not be meeting him outside; it would be better if he came home. So Ishwar started coming around on a Sunday afternoon. Sewpersad liked him, especially as Ishwar was a 'roti'², a Hindustani, like him. Mumma liked him too and treated him as a son. Unobtrusively, Marje and Ishwar became an item but they didn't go on dates; they met at home. The one time that they went to the bioscope, it was with the whole family. After they had been seeing each other for some time, they decided to get married. Members of the Rughubar fam-

2 Roti, slang for a Hindustani.

ily came over with a formal proposal³ and a date was set for the wedding.

The night before was the haldi⁴ ceremony and the next day they were married in a typically Hindustani ceremony at the Kathiawad Hall in Centenary Road in town. According to Hindustani custom, the father of the bride hosts the wedding and the reception. As Sewpersad was a pensioner, he could not afford the costs and the responsibility fell on Marje who was quite prepared for it. When she started working in 1949, her father had made it quite clear that she would have to save for such events. And right from the beginning, she had known exactly how to apportion her salary: one-third to her parents, one-third for personal expenses and one-third into a savings account in the bank. By 5 July 1953, Marje's wedding day, there was enough saved for the wedding and reception.

After the wedding, Marje went to live with the Rughubar family in their home in Alpine Road, also in Clare Estate. She continued teaching at St Theresa's School and in 1954 left to have her first baby. In those days, there was no maternity leave; women had to resign and reapply for a teaching post when they were ready to come back. Marje did not go back; she stayed home to take care of her baby son.

In her new home, she initially felt a sense of belonging. Her father-in-law had two wives; he had married two sisters. Chander, Krishendutt, Karundutt, Maheshwardutt and Ishwardutt were the children of the elder wife. The second wife had two daughters and a son. It was the Hindu custom in the old days for sons to bring their wives to live with them in their parents' home. Then each son with his family was accommodated in a room. The house in

³ In the Indian tradition, the boy's parents bring a proposal to the girl's parents and they negotiate an agreement.

⁴ Haldi = turmeric. The ceremony of rubbing turmeric on the bride's face to exorcise negative thoughts and feelings and ensure that the bride keeps her promise. The groom goes through the same rite at his home.

Alpine Road was big with about seven rooms. Ishwar and Marje had a room. Ishwar's brother, Chander, lived in a room with his wife, Bima. Mashie, whose wife had died in childbirth, lived there with his eight-year-old daughter.

This was Marje's new family and she had to adapt to very different customs in this household. All the young women had to take turns in the kitchen. Each one took over the cooking for a week at a time and prepared all the meals from breakfast to supper. The older women cleaned the vegetables, rice and other ingredients for lunch and supper. Marje, not used to cooking such large quantities of food, found it difficult to handle the big aluminium pots that they used, and often burned her hands. But she didn't mind; she wanted to get used to the new ways and please the family.

One of her tasks was to bath her mother-in-law. For this, she had to have a towel for the feet, a separate towel for the torso and a separate towel for the hair. Marje had to put on a clean frock before the bath. After the bath, she had to change into another clean frock before dressing her mother-in-law.

She had several tasks in the kitchen. One was the making of roti⁵ for the meals. She was not allowed to speak while preparing the dough – to prevent saliva falling into it. Another was the grinding of spices. As the family did not use commercial spices, all masalas had to be freshly ground at home. When it was Marje's turn to cook, her mother-in-law put out spices for her and Marje, who had never used a grindstone before, had to learn. Once she got the hang of it, she didn't mind grinding spices. But she also had to peel and grind garlic in such large quantities that her hands burned and the skin peeled off. She didn't complain.

Nor did she complain about having to put on a sari and all her wedding jewellery when the family was expecting visitors. Though that made her uncomfortable, she complied to please her in-laws.

5 Flat bread similar in shape and size to a pancake

It was all so very different for her, but she tried her best. Still she had the feeling that there was a lot of talk behind her back about her attempts to adjust to these new ways.

During her pregnancy, she had hidden in her room to knit up baby things. Her in-laws believed it was bad luck to prepare for the baby beforehand. When the baby was due, Marje went to her mother at Kennedy Road for the delivery and after six weeks returned to Alpine Road. Now that she had baby and was breast-feeding, there were new demands on her that interfered with her household duties.

Her brother-in-law, Mashie, was a teacher at SRS School in Overport – a platoon school. When there were too few schools in an area, some schools became platoon schools: that is, they accommodated two separate schools, a morning school and an afternoon school. The two schools used the same premises, had the same principal but each had its own teaching staff. There was a little overlap of classes at the end of the morning school and the beginning of the afternoon school and during that time some classes were held in the schoolyard. Mashie, who taught in the morning school, came home at about two o' clock in the afternoon and expected to have coffee served when he arrived. But baby Shiridutt would wake up at about the same time and if Marje didn't feed him right away, he got into such a temper that he would cry himself to sleep without having his feed. As he was a newborn, Marje was afraid that this would affect his growth.

One day, she came up with what she thought was a solution to the problem. She put out a chair for Mashie, boiled the water and put the Ellis Brown coffee essence bottle on a tray with everything else needed to make a cup of coffee. When her brother-in-law came home that afternoon, she called to him that she was feeding the baby but all the coffee makings were on the tray. After she had fed baby, Marje went into the kitchen. Nothing had been touched. She asked Mashie why he hadn't had his coffee; he did not answer.

At the end of that month he refused to pay board because Marje hadn't been giving him his coffee. All the sons paid board; it was their contribution towards the running expenses of the household. A family meeting was called to chastise Marje and she was told that she was incompetent and inconsiderate. Her husband, following the custom of *barka bhaia*⁶, sat there, listened and said not a word. She had expected him to defend her but he couldn't, he was bound by custom.

After the meeting, the attitude towards Marje changed; the family openly showed its disapproval. Marje hid her dismay and continued to cooperate as best she could but then something happened that turned her from a compliant daughter-in-law into the rebel that had been born at Little Flower School. Tuesday, the day for baby's check up at the Brook Street clinic in town, was also the family washing day. One Tuesday, Marje up early, washed all the baby's napkins and clothes and hung them out before getting ready to go to town. There were plenty of washing lines and she had left ample space for the family washing. It was a hot morning and she knew the clothes would not take long to dry. She took a bath, gave baby Shiri a bath and by eight o' clock was on the bus to town.

After her visit to the clinic, she bumped into Percy as she was walking towards the Victoria Street bus rank. Her brother had come to town to do the marketing for his Fish and Chips Shop. He invited Marje to come and spend the day with the family; he would telephone Ishwar and ask him to come over after work and join them for supper. Marje had not seen her parents and sisters for a while, so she grabbed this opportunity to visit with them. Ishwar came in after work, and they spent a pleasant evening at Kennedy Road. At about eight that night, Percy took them home to Alpine Road.

The entrance into their room was on the front veranda. When

6 *Barka Bhaia* (Big brother) One does not question the authority of the eldest brother and head of the family. Ishwar was the youngest.

Ishwar unlocked the door and pushed, it wouldn't open; something was blocking it. Ishwar pushed hard and the door budged. When they went in, they found all the napkins and baby clothes that Marje had put out in the morning, behind the door. They had been taken off wet and thrown there. Marje marched to the back of the house to her sisters-in-law's room. 'Bheni⁷, what happened to my baby's napkins?'

They snapped at her. 'You knew it was Tuesday, what you hanging up your washing? Where we must hang Karunbhai and them's shirts and vests and trunks?'

Marje was amazed and outraged. 'So what do I do? How do I explain to this baby that there are no clean napkins because you wouldn't make place for them on the lines?'

Then the whole family came out. They called Marje all kinds of names and her mother-in-law accused her of coming there to lord it over them. No one had a kind word for her. Ishwar, as usual, remained silent. But for Marje this was the last straw and she exploded. She told them that she didn't want to live with them any more or be part of their family. She said that she and Ishwar were going to move into the outhouse in the yard, do their own cooking and have nothing more to do with the rest of the family.

As there were tenants in the outhouse, she could not move out immediately. But she was resolute. Her in-laws realised that she would not back down and her attitude and intentions were communicated to the Keshwars in Kennedy Road.

As soon as the tenants vacated the outhouse, Marje moved in. On that very day, her sisters, Margaret and Ella, and her mother came to Alpine Road to visit, not her, but her mother-in-law. They sat in the dining room with Ishwar's mother and told her how sorry they were that Marje had behaved so rudely towards her and her family. After their visit with Marje's mother-in-law, they left: Margaret, Ella and Mumma. They did not cross the yard to come

7 Bheni – sisters

and see Marje. They made it clear that they had come to sympathise with Mrs Rughubar senior, that Mumma had come there to apologise for her behaviour. Marje was hurt but she realised that they did not understand and single-mindedly set about making her home at the back of the yard.

The outbuilding resembled a trailer home. There were two rooms: a bedroom for Marje and Ishwar and a dining room with beds for the children. At the end was a kitchen opening out onto a tiny veranda with steps leading down to a bathroom and a toilet in the yard. Ishwar put in a copper geyser that had to be heated with a fire. And that was their home for the next ten years. Marje's daughters were born in that outhouse: Shalini in 1957 and Amrita in 1959. Though the place was like a servant's quarters, Marje felt very happy and very comfortable. She was free and did not have to conform to customs and routines that she did not understand. Now that she had her own little place, she could invite her friends to dinner parties. She hadn't been able to do that living in the family house and following its routines.

Marje's friends were like-minded, fun-loving people. She had met them through her involvement in the DIGHS⁸ Old Girls' Guild. After she had started teaching in 1949, she had joined the Guild and become firm friends with other ex-students, Sash Moodley, Surya Singh who worked at Simplex Furniture Factory, and their husbands, N.T Moodley and R. N. Singh. Savvy and her husband, Telu Seebadri, and Yethra and her husband, Nineboy, were also in their close-knit group of married couples. With the exception of Surya, they were all teachers. This little clique had dinner parties, went to dances and often hired G.V. Naidoo's cottage on Tongaat Beach for weekend get-togethers. Sometimes they went picnicking at Genazano Beach. Surya always brought her children on these outings. So did Ishwar and Marje.

8 Durban Indian Girls' High School

Though Marjorie was happy because she was on her own, Ishwar, caught in a conflict of loyalties, was suffering. For Marjorie the move into the yard had been an act of self-assertion and independence. For Ishwar it was a devastating blow to his self-esteem; he felt humiliated and alone. His family did not isolate him but they excluded Marje from family functions. When Ishwar's youngest sister received a formal proposal of marriage, Marje was not asked to attend. She knew visitors were at the house but she did not go in and did not say anything. Ishwar didn't say anything either but he attended the little ceremony. When he came back, he mentioned that his sister had received a proposal but did not elaborate. Marje heard all about it from a neighbour, Mrs Varma. She had apparently asked where Marje was and why she wasn't present. Ishwar's sister, the girl who had received the proposal, had whispered to Mrs Varma, 'I don't want them (her prospective in-laws) to know that I have a Coloured sister-in-law.' It was the first time that Marje heard this openly expressed – this acknowledgement of racial prejudice. But it was out at last – the underlying reason for the dissension between Marje and her in-laws.

And Marje, in no doubt about her identity, had to deal once again with other people's ambivalence about who she was. Despite having lived all her life as an Indian in the Indian community, having taught at Indian schools, having married an Indian and borne children who were Indians, Marje found that she was still regarded as an outsider. This unwillingness of other Indians to accept her unequivocally as an Indian woman would plague her wherever she went.

Marje's move into the yard, a move out of the house and out of family, had severed tenuous bonds, but it had also undermined her marriage. She and Ishwar were from very different backgrounds: different faiths, different cultures and, as Ishwar's family believed, different 'races'. And bound by family tradition, Ishwar could

not support Marje. Though he had defied tradition in marrying a woman whom his family regarded as Coloured, once married, he was still in the midst of his family and had to conform to their norms and values. Unlike Marje's parents, he and Marje were not free to discover and develop a style and way of life of their own. And Ishwar, caught in the crossfire between two dominant forces, his family and his wife, felt powerless.

He had nowhere to turn and took comfort in the bottle. By the time Amrita, his youngest child, was six years old, Ishwar had become an alcoholic. When he and Marje went out to a dance, she did not feel safe with him at the wheel. As their relationship steadily deteriorated, Marje began to assert her independence from him. She went back to teaching and the rift between them widened. When she threatened Ishwar with divorce and told him she was going to find a place of her own, he simply said, 'The door's open, go.' In 1965, the year after Sewpersad died, Marje divorced Ishwar. She hadn't done it earlier as she had not wanted to hurt her father. Even though Ishwar did not believe that the marriage was irretrievable, he did not contest the divorce and was not made liable for alimony and child support.

The Keshwars, who did not condone divorce, were horrified that Marje had taken such a step; she had brought disgrace on the family. After the divorce, they wanted little to do with her.

And Marje was on her own with her three children.

Chapter 10

Good Hope Centre

After the divorce, Marje, who was now teaching at St Anthony's School in town, moved into Good Hope Centre with her three children. Good Hope Centre is a block of flats in Queen Street in the bustling centre of town and the Indian business area. Queen Street runs off Grey Street, and is the next street to Victoria Street with its cinemas, sweetmeat stores, Indian restaurants and fast food places. Good Hope Centre is also just a couple of blocks from West Street, the white shopping area. Life here would be very different for Marje and the children. They had been removed from life in semi-rural Clare Estate into a flat, high up above the ground with neighbours in close proximity.

It was an exciting new world filled with people, people and more people – but no father. The children were now in a single parent home and the loss of Ishwar from their midst was painful. Even though their father had unrestricted visitation rights and often picked the children up and took them to Clare Estate, having a visiting father was not the same as having a father in the home. The children wanted him back and often begged their mother to let him come and stay with them. Marje realised that the breach in the marriage had traumatised her children so she sent them to Dr Lowenstein at the Meyrick Bennet Centre for counselling. But it was very difficult for the children to accept the loss of a living parent even though Marje did her best to give them as much time as possible with their father. They always spent Diwali¹ with him. He was always invited to Christmas dinner at the flat. When he came, they would climb all over him, comb his hair, pull off his socks and put them on again. They loved their father and he loved

1 The Hindu Festival of Lights, as significant to Hindus as Christmas is to Christians.

them. They missed him and it was hard not to resent their mother for their loss.

It wasn't easy for Marje either; she missed her family too. Her sisters and brothers did not come around to visit her and she didn't feel free to visit them.

So one Saturday morning, when Marje found Mercy's son, Alan, at the door she could not believe her eyes. He was on his way to the Victoria Street market, and on an impulse had made his way to Good Hope Centre. Alan Joseph, about fourteen then, did the marketing for his mother every Saturday morning. Alan's visit overwhelmed Marje with joy. She hugged and kissed him, ushered him in, brought him sandwiches and tea and they talked. When he was leaving, she gave him a little money for a cold drink or an ice-cream. After that first visit, Alan stopped by every Saturday morning. Marje was always very happy to see him especially as he brought news of the family. Mercy's home in Asherville was the family hub and the Keshwars generally got together there on Sundays. When Alan visited Marje, he brought news of her brothers, sisters and their children. He was her only connection with the family and she cherished his visits.

As time went by family disapproval evaporated and Margaret and Ella began to stop by the flat. At Christmas time, Margaret with her daughter, Thiri, and son, Vasigen, came with gifts for Marje's three children. Being recipients of their cousins' generosity year after year, Marje's children felt the need to reciprocate. But with her meagre salary, Marje was just managing to provide for her family and could not afford much beyond basic necessities. One of Ishwar's friends, who often visited, felt sorry for the children. He took them to the OK Bazaars one Christmas and bought tins of biscuits that they could give as family presents. That Christmas, Marje and the children, bearing these gifts, took the bus to Mercy

in Asherville, to Ella and Margaret in Greenwood Park and to Percy in Rippon Road. They did not go to Maurice who lived in Wentworth, an area they did not regard as safe. Everyone they visited was happy to see them. It was as if nothing had happened and they had not been estranged for several years. It was Christmas time; family was seeing family and sharing the joy of the season – just the normal custom. And Marje and her children were back in the family once more.

Parties at Good Hope Centre

When Shalini was thirteen and in Std. Six (Grade Eight), she was seen talking to a boy outside the building. Shalini, a very beautiful girl, was a teenager and Marje understood what that meant, but she didn't want her daughter running around with boys. When she and Margaret were thirteen, they had been sent off to boarding school because her mother and sister were afraid they would start running around with boys. Marje was not quite as peremptory, but she wanted to protect Shalini just as Mumma and Mercy had wanted to protect her and Margaret. So she spoke to her daughter. 'If you are in love and want to get married, don't go to school, stay at home and cook for us. Learn how to clean and run the house. Forget about school.' To Shalini this was as unreasonable as boarding school had been to Marje and Margaret.

When the Himalaya Hotel began organising matinee dances for school children, Ferny (Marje's son's nickname) and Shalini wanted to go but Marje had heard that some of the boys carried condoms to these dances, and she would not allow her children there. Instead she came up with an alternative. 'I know you want to go to the dances but I have a better deal for you. Have your dance party here. Invite twelve of your friends, and I'll provide coke and all the eats you need. I will speak to the neighbours, tell them I'm having a little party for the children and ask them to excuse the

noise and the music from two to six, the same time as the Himalaya Hotel dance.'

Ferny and Shalini thought this better than nothing and Marje got busy. She spoke to the neighbours and found them amenable. She got a list of the friends that Ferny and Shalini wanted to invite, telephoned their parents and explained that as she did not approve of the children going to a public dance at a hotel, she was having a party at home and would be present to supervise. Would they be prepared to send their children? When she got the go ahead, she asked Ferny and Shalini to invite their friends.

The day before the party, they moved the furniture out of the living room to create a space for dancing. As she did not want the children scuffing her walls Marje wanted to put up a notice, "Please Keep your Feet off the Walls," but Ferny and Shalini asked her not to do that; they would tell their friends. Then Marje laid down a few rules: 'We will have all the windows open, and there'll be no running outside and going to stand all over the building. All your friends are to remain inside the flat. And nobody goes out onto the balcony or into the passage to smooch.'

When Marje told Margaret, Ella and Percy of her plans, they realised that she could not really afford the refreshments and took it upon themselves to do the catering. Percy offered two crates of cokes and paper cups, his wife, Rose, sent three-dozen scones with margarine and jam and Shirley Ephraim, a friend and neighbour, brought meat pies and meat rolls. In the end Marje had more food than she needed.

Finally, as they were in the middle of town, in the Victoria-Queen Street area, Marje had to make sure there were no gatecrashers and troublemakers. She got her nephew, Alan, and his friend, Ronnie Charles, to provide security. In addition, Alan would take care of the music and be the disc jockey. So everything was set for an afternoon of good, wholesome fun.

When the party began, Alan and Ronnie supervised the chil-

dren in the lounge while Marje fried samoosas in the kitchen, passed out all the eats and poured out the cold drinks. She kept out of the lounge and every so often Alan or Ronnie would pop into the kitchen to report on how the children were behaving. Alan, only a couple of years older than Ferny, said, 'Now that these kids have grown up, I feel old, outdated, over the hill.' And they had a good laugh at that.

At six o'clock, Alan announced, 'Right, this is the last dance. Enjoy yourselves.' When the last dance was over, the parents were there to fetch the children. They came right up to the flat to thank Marje. The children who had come by car left straight after the party, but the youngsters who lived in Good Hope Centre and nearby, started bringing in the chairs, sweeping and wiping up the floor. One lad ran home, brought his mother's polisher and polished the lounge floor. Anyone walking into the flat at eight o'clock that evening would never have believed that there had been a matinee dance there. What a wonderful and unexpected gift from the children. Thereafter, there was a special relationship between them and Marje; they regarded her as someone who cared and they treated her with the greatest respect.

There were parties every end of term after that, but Marje hosted only two more in her flat before she moved to Tongaat. Other parents, following her example, had taken on the responsibility of these supervised parties where children could have fun and be safe.

CHAPTER 11

NDF, MAD and *It's a Colourful World*

In the nineteen-sixties, theatre like everything else was segregated. Though black theatre groups had no proper theatre venues, facilities or funding, they were not deterred. African theatre groups were active in the townships and African, Indian and Coloured actors came into the Durban city centre to put on plays in all kinds of venues: hotel lounges, school and community halls and cinemas – which in those days still had screens that hung over stages. One venue used regularly was the Bolton Hall at the corner of Albert and Queen Streets, just down the road from the Good Hope Centre. The Bolton Hall, a Trade Union Hall, was a popular venue for meetings of organisations opposed to apartheid. It was here that the Brian Brooke Theatre Company, in defiance of racist laws and attitudes, performed to non-racial audiences in the 1950s. In 1954, Marje had seen their production of Cecil William's play, *The Kimberley Train*, which depicts the experiences of a play-white Coloured woman who is unmasked and humiliated. Marje had been very moved by it. It had had special significance for her because of her brother Norman.

Despite segregation laws, there was a tradition of non-racialism among fringe theatre groups in the 1960s and the Special Branch kept their rehearsals and productions under surveillance. The Durban Academy of Theatre Arts (DATA), founded in 1963, was a resolutely non-racial group. Its membership had its foundation in Pauline Morel's productions of Indian theatre classics such as Tagore's *Sacrifice* and *Muktadhara* and Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*. When DATA came into being, it invited people of all races to join and Welcome Msomi was one of its early members. But the Group Areas Act, which had segregated people into separate areas, made

it difficult for groups to become fully non-racial; African members in particular, who lived far from the city centre, had to make huge sacrifices to get to training sessions and rehearsals in town. So DATA remained mainly Indian in its composition.

So did the Shah Theatre Academy, a splinter group that came into being in 1964. In the years 1964 to 1965, Guru Pillay, Benjy Francis, Kessie Govender, Babs Pillay, Mohammed Ali and others played in several Shah Theatre Academy productions.

Guru Pillay was from a family of actors who in the 1950s had put on productions of Tamil classics such as *Galavar* and *Kavalan* at the Durban City Hall. Guru had studied Speech and Drama at the University of Natal in the late 1950s and had joined Shah Theatre soon after. His appearance in productions of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Clifford Odet's *Golden Boy* and Moliere's *School for Wives* established his reputation as an actor. He then went on to direct Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* in 1967 with Kessie Govender in the lead. In the same year, he broke away from the Shah Theatre Academy and put on an independent production of Sartre's *Men without Shadows* with Benjy Francis, Saths Cooper, Babs Pillay, Smiley Peters, Eileen Isaacs and Maynard Peters.

Marje, a regular theatregoer, saw all these productions, got to know the actors and often invited them to social gatherings at her flat in Good Hope Centre where the talk was about creating theatre opportunities for black people.

At Saths Cooper's suggestion, the Natal Drama Foundation (NDF)¹ was formed to help promote the work of amateur theatre groups. Marje became a founder member of NDF with Saths Cooper, Guru Pillay and Benjy Francis. The NDF decided on an annual Drama Festival to provide the incentive for amateur groups to keep working and building an environment for theatre. The Festival would take the form of a competition and groups would compete for a floating trophy. A panel of theatre personalities

1 Information about NDF and MAD provided by Guru Pillay.

would adjudicate the performances.

Marje played a key role as NDF's fundraiser; she was very effective in garnering funds from the Indian business sector. After her divorce, she had been very lonely, especially during school holidays and had spent most of her waking hours reading; TV would only come to South Africa in 1976. Once NDF was established, however, Marje's life became full and exciting. Holidays were no longer a trial. She was working with all these show business people and it was most stimulating.

Maynard Peters, who was recognised as an outstanding actor, became a family friend. Before he joined NDF, he had starred as the Lord High Executioner in a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*. He was a favourite with Marje's children. When he came to the flat, he would pull out a storybook and read to them. And he took on the roles of all the different characters in a story, changing his voice to be an old woman, then a young boy, then a mean old man and the children loved it and they loved Maynard. The story they most enjoyed was Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, with Tiny Tim and Bob Cratchit.

Then the first NDF Drama Festival was announced. The competition was open to amateur groups and to high schools. NDF officials visited schools and won the support of principals. They also sought out amateur theatre groups and invited them to participate. Each school or group that entered chose a play and began rehearsing. In the week before the official opening, arrangements were made for dress rehearsals at the Bolton Hall. Marje's nephew, Alan Joseph², took charge of the technical aspects of production and stage management. Though lighting equipment was inadequate and there was little in the way of stage décor, he was quite ingenious in creating lighting effects and organising sets. The first NDF Drama Festival was held in 1968.

² Alan Joseph, Marje's nephew, her sister Mercy's son, who went on to work with Des and Dawn Lindbergh and later became Market Theatre Manager and then CEO of the State Theatre in Pretoria.

In addition to the festivals, NDF also put on its own productions. As all members held down jobs or were students, they met over weekends and during school holidays for rehearsals and meetings. Guru Pillay, who had been appointed to a school in the town of Estcourt in northern Natal, had to travel down to Durban every weekend.

In 1968, the NDF produced its first play, *Charley's Aunt* which featured all the officials (Guru Pillay, Benjy Francis, Saths Cooper and Marje Rughubar) as well as Kessie Goven-der, Maynard Peters, Robin Singh and others. (Guru Pillay, 2010)

Marje was excited about taking part in a play. She was cast as Donna Lucia D'Alvadorez and thoroughly enjoyed the role. *Charley's Aunt* went on tour over weekends to towns in northern Natal, Ladysmith, Newcastle and Pietermaritzburg. While Marje was on tour, the children stayed with their father. Marje had entered into a thrilling new phase of life that grew more exciting with each new theatre venture.

In 1969, NDF presented a candlelight production entitled *Murder by Shakespeare*, a collection of murder scenes, e.g. Macbeth's murder of Duncan, the murder of Julius Caesar, the murder of Desdemona by Othello, etc. In 1970, the foundation presented '*With Love from Dickens*', a selection of extracts from the works of Charles Dickens." (Guru Pillay, August 2010)

In 1970, the work of the NDF led to the formation of MAD (Music and Drama). Guru describes how this came about.

When "Benjy Francis and Maynard Peters became interest-

ed in the plays of Athol Fugard, they formed MAD (Music and Drama); in fact, Maynard regarded it as his own personal possession! Benjy went to Port Elizabeth in 1970 to meet Athol Fugard and arrangements were made to present three Fugard plays in Durban, *Blood Knot* (with Benjy and Maynard), *Hello and Goodbye* (performed by White University students), and *Boesman and Lena* (with Fugard himself and Yvonne Bryceland.) This Fugard Festival, which was a great success, launched MAD. We invited Fugard to Marje's flat and spent a pleasant evening there. (Guru Pillay, August 2010)

MAD brought many prominent people to dinner at Marje's flat. In addition to Athol Fugard and Yvonne Bryceland, there were the Serpent Players, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, and Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko, a friend of Saths Cooper.

When the Drama Festivals came to an end, MAD replaced the NDF. Guru explains:

When interest in the NDF Drama Festival waned, Saths Cooper left us to join TECON (Theatre Council of Natal) and worked with Strini Moodley and others. They did works such as *Twelve Angry Men*, *Look Back in Anger* and an original work called *Resurrection*.

At this juncture we threw in our lot with MAD.

There was rivalry between TECON and MAD. Our talent pool consisted of Benjy, Maynard, Babs Pillay, Barrie Shah, Bobby Timol, Jenny Joseph³, Essop Khan and Mohammed Ali. Musicians Herby Govinden⁴, Andy Joseph⁵ and Peter Somasundram also joined us.

3 Alan's sister and Marje's niece.

4 Professor Herby Govinden from the University College of Salisbury Island, the university designated for 'Indians,' which in 1972 became the University of Durban Westville.

5 Marje's sister Mercy's nephew

We met at our workshop in Prince Edward Street and began to toss around a few ideas for a show. It was at this workshop in 1970 that I suggested that we write a revue on the whole concept of colour. I knew that people were interested in any issue dealing with colour.

I then wrote *It's a Colourful World* in a matter of three weeks. I found it very easy to write. The revue dealt with colour in all its aspects, social, political, sexual, love across the colour line, sport, race, marriage, colour consciousness among Indians, even took the colour issue to a philosophical plane!

It was very funny and at the same time poetic and philosophical. I stuck strictly to the subject of colour, and never deviated from that theme. As one newspaper critic put it: "The entire revue deals with colour and yet one never gets tired of it."

Herby Govinden and his team of musicians set the lyrics to music.

The revue became the talk of the town, and for the first time I saw

queues forming outside Bolton Hall in the way people queue to enter a cinema. (Guru Pillay, August 2010)

This is what Professor Herby Govinden, composer of the score and musical director, remembers about *It's a Colourful World*.

Benjy Francis discussed the script with me, asking me to consider writing the musical score. I hadn't been involved in such a venture before. I had composed music for schools (anthems), and had written liturgical church music. The script of *It's a Colourful World* was unique and challenging and I did request Guru's permission to adapt/amend the lyrics while I was 'experimenting with my musical ideas. I had a

fairly good grounding in western classical and popular music as well as in church music – performance (piano and organ) and theory – light classical (shades of operas by Gilbert & Sullivan), jazz and rock.

Maynard Peters who was one of the directors kept track of the musical score while it was being written and ‘tried out’ during rehearsals. Peter Somasundram and Andy Joseph also contributed ideas – and even wrote some of the songs which I incorporated into the score. A group of musicians performing on piano, keyboard, guitars and percussion provided background music and accompaniment during the show. The audiences responded enthusiastically and there were some very encouraging newspaper reviews. (Herby Govinden, September 2010)

It's a Colourful World took Durban by storm. It was a smash hit: unique, original and very entertaining, it presented the absurdities of living with racial and colour discrimination. The show opened on Friday, 22 January 1971, played to full houses, had to be extended and seemed on a limitless run. The main actors, Maynard Peters, Barrie Shah and Benjy Francis received great acclaim for their performances.

The following newspaper reviews, (transcribed from Andy Joseph's scrapbook) tell, with the freshness of the times, the impact of the musical on Durban audiences.

The show, originally planned for a run of one week, received such tremendous support that it was indeed extended and it played to packed houses for three weeks.

Ironically, its great success spelled its doom. As a “non-White” show playing to multi-racial audiences and lampooning colour prejudice, it could not survive in a racist environment.

**22 January 1971 (Leader/Graphic?)
'WORLD' at the Bolton**

The controversial "*It's a Colourful World*" comes on at the Bolton Hall today (Friday).

Based on everyday South African situations, the musical revue says all colour is beautiful. An interesting aspect of the show is the music which is all original and significant. Durban-

born Andy Joseph, brother of South Africa's well-known pianist, Chris Joseph, is on the piano. Andy has been responsible for composing some of the music. On organ is Peter Somasundaram who has also composed music for the show. Both Andy and Peter have a distinct taste for jazz.

Sunday Tribune: 24 January 1971 Review by I. G.

SWINGING SATIRE

REVUE: *The Mad show – It's a Colourful World* (Bolton Hall, Durban)

The Music and Drama (MAD) group has produced a completely original satirical revue that really swings. The music is tuneful and the dancing, if a trifle undisciplined, is lively and attractively presented.

The theme is Colour with a capital "C". Sketches, for instance, include the Black and White Song, Colour! Colour!, Why Can't The Blacks Be Like the Whites?, All Holds Colour-barred and *It's a Colourful World*, which gives the show a swinging finale.

Most of the sketches could stand considerable pruning – they are far too wordy. But it is original and clever and in parts very funny – like the no-contact boxing match between Black and White. It also carries a let's-get-together message.

Several artists showed exceptional talent and of the individual acts I thought Barrie Shah's "My Little White Friend" was beautifully sung.

Rating: Swingingly different.

Daily News, Monday, 25 January 1971

Review by Roy Christie

REVUE MERITS NATIONAL ACCLAIM

AN extraordinary event is occurring this week at the Bolton Hall in Durban, and by rights it should be packed every night by White South Africans. After all, it's not often that Whites have a chance to see the mickey taken

– with surgical accuracy – out of the colour bar by the people who are on the wrong side of it.

I refer to *It's a Colourful World*, an original South African revue, presented by the Music and Drama group,

a gathering of non-White Durban talent.

On the basis of what I have seen, however, I believe that *It's a Colourful World* should be presented in Johannesburg and Cape Town – that it should receive national attention, in fact.

It is a strange experience, as a White man, to sit in the audience and have to identify with the target of the caste's (sic) satirical barbs. There's a peculiar poignancy involved, particularly when the sometimes savage shafts are softened by a patent spirit of goodwill.

If you do not have a white skin in South Africa, there is nothing abstract about the Department of Community Development, or the Group Areas Act, or the law which forbids you to co-habit with your wife or girl-

friend while she's staying on her White employer's property.

There is one shockingly hilarious routine in which French bedroom farce blends with the permutations of the Immorality Act. And the melodic lament, *A Pair of White Legs*, has the bitter-sweet whiff of reality.

A sketch which is superbly successful satire features Maynard Peters as a nutty surgeon, Barrie Shah as his female assistant and Benjy Francis as a White man they have decided to dissect to see what makes him tick. Just as the mad doctor is about to take the man apart, Barrie warns him: "He probably hasn't got a heart..."

The revue is a completely original offering, largely from the pen of Guru Pillay.

Natal Mercury, Friday, 29 January 1971

CRITICS' CORNER - Revue – *It's a Colourful World*

"*It's a Colourful World*" or "How to write a satirical, musical revue dealing with South Africa's prime obsession without really offending anyone, and still get the digs in." That is how this might be seen, and the strange thing is, it really works.

As a revue on colour by a Coloured group, MAD – Music and Drama – this little musical jollification has points that are highly entertaining and educative for any whites who have the good sense to go and see it.

It comments on Whites, apartheid, Western culture and what apartheid does to people who are not

White. But the tone is such that the qualities that might be expected, bitterness and malice, are not even suggested. It is also very entertaining and, in places, very funny.

...The inevitable Blaar is dealt with thus – "Blaar, Blaar, Black Sheep, have you had your fill? No, sir, no, sir, there are houses still."

And there is a hilarious revelation of Indian colour consciousness in the skit where the dark Baba refuses to marry a nice Indian girl because she's black.

The music is effective enough and in two numbers, "*A Pair of White*

Legs” and “My Little White Friend,” it is outstanding.

In the long run, the final measure of its success as an entertainment, and not a polemic, is that as a

two-hour revue, the sole emphasis of which is on one subject, colour, one is never weary of that subject.

The show has its last performance tonight. D.C.M.

Natal Mercury, January 1971, “Mercury” Reporter Revue may extend its run

The original revue “*It’s a Colourful World*” presented by the Music and Drama group at the Bolton Hall in Durban has extended its run until Saturday, and “might continue for longer if the present good attendances are maintained.”

There is a possibility that the revue will be seen in Pietermaritzburg after its Durban run. This article appears next to a photograph of a scene

from the show.

The caption reads: THE SONG “Western Culture” ends a satirical sketch which analyses the White man and discovers that “he is just a human man.” It is one of the items in “*It’s a Colourful World*, “ whose run has been extended in Durban. (From top) Maynard Peters, Benjay (sic) Francis and Barrie Shah.

Just as the show entered its fourth week, it received a sledgehammer blow that brought it to a sudden halt.

On Wednesday, 17 February 1971, the Publications Control Board banned the script of *It’s a Colourful World* on the grounds that it undermined morality and was offensive to White people. Since White reviewers had declared the show innocuous, the banning came as a great shock.

A pall settled over the group. The euphoria of a runaway success gave way to anxiety and fear. MAD was suddenly faced with the reality of living in a racist society. The show, an entertaining send-up of colour prejudice, was a show, a simulation, not real, and it was funny. The banning was a slap in the face that forced the group to acknowledge real prejudice. People like Guru and Marje, teachers in the employ of the government, silently contemplated the possibility of reprisals. Surveillance, detention and interrogation loomed large in the minds of all. They had assumed that they had freedom of expression. Now they were awakened to the stark

realisation that they did not. They had stepped out of line and their criticism of racism, however innocuous, had been met with the might of the State. Freedom of expression was a privilege that did not extend to “non-Whites.” South Africa was indeed a colourful world and offstage colour was not entertaining or innocuous.

At first members met at their workshop in Prince Edward Street and at Good Hope Centre in a spirit of mourning, but anger overtook self-pity and activated them. True they were “Coloured”¹ but they were not ciphers; they would fight back. They had recourse to the law. But it was apartheid law, and that meant taking their challenge to racism from the stage and into the courts.

The following newspaper accounts, transcribed from Andy Joseph’s scrapbook, outline MAD’s struggle to reinstate *It’s a Colourful World*.

1 The terms ‘non-White’ and ‘Coloured’ appear in the newspaper reports of the show

Natal Mercury, Thursday, 18 February 1971
BUT REVUE CAN GO ON!
Political Reporter

The Publications Control Board has banned the script of the satirical revue “*It’s a Colourful World*” – but not the show itself! The board’s chairman, Mr J. Kruger, was not very sure yesterday whether the show had been banned or not. At first he said it was “not true.”

Then he checked and confirmed that the script of the entire revue had been banned. The producers of the show are to appeal against the decision which only comes into operation when it has been published in a Government Gazette. They have been told that all the scripts have to be sent to the Group Areas Board offices in Durban by Monday.

...They (the producers) were

told of the banning by officials of the Group Areas Board in Durban, after receiving a letter which read: “Kindly call at the Group Areas Branch Office, Masonic Grove, Durban, on 17/2/71 at 9 a.m. sharp re show ‘Colorful (sic) World’, and see Detective Warrant Officer van der Walt”. The letter was written on a page from an exercise book.

Fifteen minutes before the show was due to start last night, the doors of the Bolton Hall were closed and there was no sign of activity inside. There was no queue to see the show.

Meanwhile, critics in the show world have labelled the banning as a blow for South African theatre, and

have pointed out that a gloomy future probably lies ahead for theatre in the country.

The vice-chairman of the Young Progressives, Mr Trevor Moodie,

said last night that the only motive for the banning he could think of was political. "There is nothing immoral, disgusting or perverted about it."

Natal Mercury, 18 February 1971

Show had laughs but no hatred

By Doug Morrison

When I reviewed the show, on January 25, what struck me most about it was its lack of anything that could be construed as offensive except to someone who found it offensive to point out the flaws in a White-imposed system.

Although its subject matter

would appear to be perfect for expressing hatred, particularly for apartheid and whites, what was expressed was compassion and understanding.

It was also very funny and the audience that night appreciated it for that at least.

Daily News, Wednesday, 24 February 1971

FUGARD ATTACKS SCRIPT BANNING

By Roy Christie

ATHOL FUGARD, the distinguished South African playwright today pledged R50 toward the costs of the appeal against the banning of the script of "It's a Colourful World" the Durban non-White musical revue.

Speaking to me by telephone from Cape Town, Mr. Fugard said he regarded the banning of the script as "absolutely outrageous."

In his view the musical was quite inoffensive and, in fact, was characterised by "the qualities of understanding and compassion by these

people, who after all are at the receiving end of colour prejudice".

M.A.D.

Mr. Fugard is closely associated with "It's a Colourful World", for it was his personal dynamism which inspired members of M.A.D. – the Music and Drama group – to set about the creation of an original revue. While in Durban last July he exhorted the group to establish their own theatrical identity. "It's a Colourful World" is the direct result of that appeal.

Daily News, Thursday, 25 February 1971.

Shows without words: A new art?

Political Correspondent

CAPE TOWN, Thursday. AN OPPOSITION MP predicted today that

stage shows in South Africa might be reduced to silent mime if the Publica-

tions Board continues to ban scripts of productions but not the shows themselves.

Mr. L. G. Murray, M.P. for Green Point and chairman of the United Party's interior group in the Assembly, was referring to one of the board's latest decisions – the banning of the script of a satirical revue in Durban.

Mr Kruger said today that only the text of the show's script had been submitted to the board – and that the board had only considered this script

as a publication.

He said that the board did not give reasons for a banning and no details were given of passages it objected to. When asked how a show could proceed without a script, Mr. Kruger said that was for the producers to decide.

Mr. Murray said today that the board's decision raised the interesting possibility for the theatre that shows might now be reduced to silent mime because of the banning of the script.

Daily News (26) February 1971
REVUE ON AGAIN FROM FRIDAY
By Roy Christie

THE HIT non-White musical, "*It's a Colourful World*," is to be presented to the public once again from Friday

night onward while the script dispute with the censors goes on appeal.

On Friday, 26 February and Saturday, 27 February, MAD put on two performances of the show. The matter was still before the Courts and the banning had not yet been gazetted so performances were still legal. Nevertheless, re-opening the show was regarded as an act of defiance.

The Natal Mercury – 3 March 1971
BOARD TO SEE SHOW?
Political Reporter

THE Publications Control Board will investigate any further performances of the satirical revue, "*It's a Colourful World*." They banned the script a fortnight ago. ...

Chairman of the Board Mr. Jan-nie Kruger told me from Cape Town yesterday that if the show was being performed, and the cast was still using the banned script, even if only from

memory, "then we will have to have a look at this."

...it seems likely that members of the Publications Control Board will be making a trip to Durban to see the show for themselves. If they felt that it was necessary they could then ban the revue as a stage show.

...Mr. Francis told me that the decision to stage the show, which

played to multi-racial houses, had been taken only after legal advice had been sought.

...Referring to the fact that there had been no attempt on Friday or Saturday to stop the show, in spite of wide publicity, he said: "Mr. Kruger's

original comment that the script was banned but the show could go on, seems to have been correct."

...The producers of the show hope to take it on tour in Natal, and if possible, throughout the country.

Though MAD had taken the decision to proceed with the show, the banning had undermined the cast. Members felt intimidated and the show did not continue after the two performances on 26 and 27 February.

Daily News, 8 March 1971.

BANNED REVUE CLOSE

Daily News Reporter

THE non-White revue, "*It's a Colourful World*", whose Producers defied the censors by playing in Durban after the script was banned, will not be seen again.

The parents of some of the cast fear Government reprisals should the

show go on, it was said today. ... A few of the cast, who had previous commitments, had to leave the show anyway. One of those was the pianist whom the producers have found impossible to replace.

In July, Guru Pillay, the playwright, brought an appeal against the Publications Control Board in the Supreme Court. Mr. D. J. Shaw, QC, with Mr H. E. Mall (instructed by R.S. Pather and Mehta) appeared for Mr Pillay. Mr W. H. Booysen (instructed by the Deputy State Attorney) appeared for the board.

Natal Mercury, 27 July 1971

COURT ASKED TO CLEAR SHOW SCRIPT

Court Reporter

AN APPEAL against the Publication Control Board's banning of the Script of the satirical revue "*It's a Colourful World*," which played to multi-racial audiences in Durban in January, was heard by Mr. Justice Muller in the Su-

preme Court, Durban, yesterday.

...The revue was written by Mr. Ayya Gurusami Pillay, a teacher, and was staged by the amateur theatrical group Music and Drama in Durban from January 22 to February 13 this

year... The revue satirises the Immorality Act, separate sport and job reservation, as well as snobbery among Indians.

Mr. Pillay, in his affidavit, said he was a member of the Music and Drama group and at its request wrote

"It's a Colourful World."...He asked the Court to find that the script was not a publication or object in terms of the Publication and Entertainment Act and that its banning was ultra vires and invalid.

The unfailing reference to Guru Pillay as a teacher, i.e. a government employee, was a subtle form of intimidation. His appearance in the Supreme Court would have demanded fortitude and courage.

Natal Mercury, 30 July 1971.

REVUE APPEAL DISMISSED

Court Reporter

THE satirical musical revue *"It's a Colourful World"* undermined respect for the Immorality Act by holding it up to ridicule and was likely to induce some members of the audience not to obey the Act, a Durban Judge decided yesterday.

Mr. Justice Muller dismissed an appeal by the author of the revue, Mr. Ayya Gurusami Pillay, a schoolteacher, against a ruling of the Publications Control Board declaring the script of the play to be undesirable.

The Judge also found that the revue was "offensive and harmful to public morals" and was harmful to

race relations and prejudicial to the general welfare.

... "A large section of our population (White and Coloured) hold the view that it is perfectly proper to segregate the various races. On the other hand, a large section of our population (White and Coloured) hold the view that the Immorality Act is inhuman."

The Judge said that in terms of the Act all behaviour of a sexual nature between white and Coloured persons was regarded as immoral and was prohibited. It was the policy of the State, expressed in the Act, to maintain the races distinct.

The matter was taken on appeal to the Supreme Court.

Daily News, 30 July 1971 (Stop Press)
BOARD'S FINDING UPHELD

Mr Justice Muller today upheld findings of Publications Control Board that satirical musical revue "*It's a Colourful World*" was undesirable in terms of Publications and Entertainments Act.

Judge said in Supreme Court,

Durban, play brought White section of South Africa into ridicule or contempt and was harmful to race relations. He dismissed with costs appeal by author of script, Durban Indian teacher, Mr. Ayya Gurusamy Pillay.

The Judge of the Supreme Court, bound by apartheid law, dispensed the only form of justice possible to a "non-White" group that dared to lampoon racism in the South Africa of the time. Had *It's a Colourful World* been an inferior show and not so popular, it probably would not have attracted any attention. But being an outstanding piece of work, it was doomed.

With the banning of *It's a Colourful World*, members of the group lost the confidence and high spirits with which they had set about establishing non-racial theatre.

We enjoyed a remarkably long season – indicating that our experience was worthwhile. Who knows what more we could have done were it not for the banning orders due, no doubt, to the presence of the Special Branch whose presence was conspicuous among the audience! (Herby Govinden, September 2010)

Suddenly members were heading off in different directions. Benjy Francis went to London to further his studies, Eileen Isaacs left for Zimbabwe, and others settled down to family life. But not all exhibited a sense of defeat. Guru and a few others were stimulated by the success of *It's a Colourful World*.

I then started on another musical play, *Saras* (the story of an Indian girl) and we formed a production company consisting

of myself, Roy Jithoo, Herby Govinden and Essop Khan.

We approached Maynard in connection with presenting Saras under the banner of MAD. Maynard would have none of it. He refused. Then we hit on the idea of calling our production company MOD (Music or Drama)! And the MOD company presented Saras in 1974. (Guru Pillay, August 2010)

According to Herby Govinden, who composed the musical score, Saras also enjoyed a successful season during the '70s. But Saras was the only other original work produced by the group that constituted NDF/MAD/MOD and was, perhaps, its swansong.

There was one last attempt to save the company.

Benjy returned from London (in 1975) and revived MAD by presenting two Fugard plays, *Blood Knot* and *Boesman and Lena*. They had a short run in Durban. Then Benjy left for Joburg and that was the end of MAD. (Guru Pillay, August 2010)

Though the work of the NDF and MAD is presented here as part of Marje Rughubar's life experience, the theatre movement created by all those involved in the NDF and MAD is part of Durban's hidden theatre history, the history of the many groups that operate without the support of the State, the Universities and other institutions. NDF/MAD/MOD was one among many transient groups of players that continuously pop up and disappear after a few years; it is an on-going movement that persists under the mainstream. Its impetus is towards the production of indigenous theatre. These small groups usually begin with plays from the mainstream to establish themselves and thereafter begin to produce original work. NDF/MAD/MOD produced Guru Pillay's *It's a Colourful World* and Saras and TECON produced *Resurrection*.

The dissolution of the group that had made up NDF and MAD brought to an end a vibrant and exhilarating period in Marje Rughubar's life. With *It's a Colourful World*, she had laughed at the absurdity of colour prejudice but the banning of the show, which split the group, had hurled her back into the tensions of colour consciousness.

NDF/MAD had been Marje's extended family for about five or six years and after the collapse of MAD in 1971, there was nothing to keep her in Durban.

At the beginning of 1973, she moved out to Tongaat with her children.

Chapter 12

Tongaat

When the Department of Indian Education wanted to move Indian teachers out of city centres and into outlying areas, it offered subsidised housing as an inducement. People like Marje Rughubar, who had never thought they could own a house, were suddenly being presented with the opportunity to do so. Phyllis Naidoo, formerly Joseph, Marje's friend from Kennedy Road days, whose brother, John David, was buying a house in Tongaat, advised her to apply as well. When Marje's application was approved, John brought her out to see the plot and a little later Percy took her out again to choose from the plans on offer, the house to be built for her. That was in 1972, and in 1973 Marje, with her three teenage children, moved out of Durban to the North Coast

When they arrived in Tongaat, they went into temporary lodgings. Marje had had to move even though her house was not complete because she had received an appointment to a school in Tongaat and had to report for duty at the beginning of the year. And her children, her son, Shiridutt (Ferny), and her daughters, Shalini and Amrita (Posey), who had been admitted at Tongaat High, had to attend school. Marje's friend, Doris Raman, who lived at Good Hope Centre, was from Tongaat. She had arranged for Marje and the children to board with her mother while they were waiting for their house to be completed. And the Rughubars stayed with the Raman family for about three months.

At the beginning of the second school term, Marje received the certificate of occupation for her house and on the fourteenth of April, the Rughubars moved into their new home in Watsonia. In 1973, the house stood stark and alone in a strange place, no houses, no roads, no streetlights.

One evening, while they were in the lounge listening to an eerie radio play, *Dead Man's Shoes*, a knock on the door startled them and suddenly Shalini, Shiri and Posey were all in Marje's lap. She extricated herself, went to the door and tentatively asked, 'Who's there?' When a familiar voice answered, she opened the door and there stood five friends from Durban come to visit Shalini. They laughed when she told them they had been listening to a ghost story and had got the fright of their lives at the unexpected knock in this deserted place. The friends stayed for a short visit and then drove back to Durban. As the Rughubar children were now living in Tongaat, they soon lost touch with old friends and made friends nearer home. But Marje and the children kept in touch with family. They took the train to Durban once a month to visit Marje's brothers and sisters and their families. And family members often drove up to Tongaat on a Saturday or Sunday. Percy and Rose always brought Marje's sister, Mercy, whenever they visited.

Marje's first teaching post in Tongaat was at Brake Village Infant School. Brake Village, a small settlement situated off the main street of the town, housed a community of very poor people, employees of the Tongaat Group, the sugar company that had been established in 1875. Some of these workers were descendants of indentured labourers brought to South Africa in the late nineteenth century to work on the sugar cane plantations. The workers were poorly paid but were given rations and provided with homes, consisting of two rooms and a kitchen. When the employee-owner of the house died, the family was given three months to find other accommodation and move. If they were lucky relatives took them in or they found accommodation in people's backyards.

The Brake Village Infant School was located in the Soobramaniar Alayam Temple hall, which had three walls and a roof. There was no wall on one side and in bad weather teachers and pupils were at the mercy of the elements. In winter, morning sessions were held outside in the sun as the children did not have

warm clothing. As the hall was also the venue for weddings over weekends, the masonite screens that divided the hall into four makeshift classrooms, had to be moved on Friday afternoons. On Monday mornings, screens, desks and chairs had to be reset for lessons. The hall had a small stage for wedding ceremonies. The dressing room for the bridal couple at the side of the stage was the Principal's office during the week. Mr A.B. Jeeawon, the principal had a staff of two female and two male teachers and a pupil enrolment of one hundred and forty-four.

On checking the pupils' admission forms on her first morning at the school, Marjorie was shocked at the large number that bore thumbprints instead of parents' signatures. Something would have to be done about that. Late that morning, a parent arrived with a nine-year-old child whose birth he had just registered in order to furnish the school with the necessary documentation. Marje was filled with pity for the girl. At the staff meeting later in the day, she brought up the problem of the nine-year-old. As the child's cognitive skills and muscular control were well developed and she conversed fluently, Marje suggested that she be given a chance to cover the first three years of junior primary work in one year so she could catch up with the children in her age group. As she lived close by, she could stay for extra tuition after school. The teachers were sympathetic and all four agreed to help out. The little girl was conscientious, learned fast and made good progress. At the end of the year after a thorough examination by the Head of the Infant Education Subject Advisors, she was promoted to Standard Two (Grade Four). She had successfully completed three years' work in one year.

In her second weekend in Tongaat, a fellow worshipper at church approached Marje and wanted to know how she managed to teach under the awful conditions at Brake Village School. The stranger,

a Mrs Rita Cortis, who lived up the road from Brake Village, was appalled by what she saw there. She was a Remedial Education Inspector in the White Department of Education and felt the need to help. Marje shared her concern about the high rate of illiteracy amongst the parents and residents in Brake Village. As they could not read or write, they were unable to improve their circumstances. The women couldn't find jobs and the men were confined to menial labour. Mrs Cortis suggested that they approach the National Council of Women (NCW), for help and support.

NCW was an affiliate of the International Council of Women (ICW) that had been created in 1888, at the second international conference of the Suffrage Association. Susan B. Anthony, the American women's rights activist, and other suffragists, had formed the ICW with the aim of establishing National Councils of Women in each self-governing country of the world to improve conditions for women.

The National Council of Women, South Africa, (NCWSA) mooted in 1909, was established much later. As South Africa was a segregated society, the ICW had questioned the bona fides of NCWSA. When Joan Hemson became Chair, the organisation took definite steps towards becoming non-racial. Under Hemson, NCWSA, a Non-Governmental Organisation, became aligned with the liberal democratic movement of the times and though its agenda was social advancement, it was seen as a threat to the political establishment. It was, therefore, subject to surveillance by the Security Branch. But Hemson, undaunted, worked hard for the inclusion of African, Indian and Coloured women in the organisation. She was Chair of the Durban branch when the group of women in Tongaat applied for membership.

But Marjorie and Rita, with a few colleagues and friends – Vivienne Cox, Roylene Angel, Beatrice Makete, Doris Raman, Kay Charles, Sudhira Sham and one or two others who were eager to assist the Brake Village community, were too few to constitute a

branch and the Tongaat NCW group was designated an outpost of the Durban branch. The Tongaat NCW held meetings in the homes of different members. As Marje was Chair, Kay Charles, Secretary, and Rita, treasurer; their homes were the most frequently used for meetings. The Chair and Secretary also attended the 1975 celebration of International Women's Year in the Durban City Hall at which Dr K. Goonam and Mrs Helen Suzman were among the guest speakers.

When the Tongaat NCW drew up its programme of activities, it decided to tackle housing issues first. It brought to the attention of the Town Council housing problems in all areas: houses in Hambanati were badly constructed; new flats in Tongaat had no windows in bathrooms, no parking lots and there were no streetlights in the area; housing for Tongaat Group employees was inadequate. Their efforts met with little success, and they turned their attention to other problems.

With the support of Joan Hemson, Beatrice Makete, a qualified nurse gave up her career to establish a crèche in Hambanati for the children of working mothers. Mrs Makete also started a vegetable garden at the crèche and promoted the development of gardens in the village to provide for local needs. The NCW group held jumble sales, cake sales and raffles to raise funds for Beatrice's projects.

The Tongaat NCW then turned to the problem that was nearest to Marje's heart, the problem of adult literacy. Mrs Cortis contacted the Bureau of Literacy and Literature in Johannesburg and an Adult Literacy and Education lecturer was sent out to induct the NCW women, most of whom were teachers, in adult education techniques. The training was held over a weekend and at the end, the fifteen members who had attended were presented with certificates and were ready to start work. They set about recruiting adult learners from among people in Hambanati, Maidstone, Fairbreeze

and Brake Village. In Maidstone, domestic workers received tuition from Roylene Angel and Vivienne Cox. In Fairbreeze, Kay Charles tutored one woman at her school. Sudhira Sham, a teacher at Tongaat Primary, rushed to Brake Village after school, to her class of four adults.

Marjorie had by far the largest group of adult learners: twenty women, and a man who worked for the Tongaat Group. All were from Brake Village. They met after school hours in Marje's classroom at the Temple Hall. These adults readily learned to read nouns and verbs but had difficulty with conjunctions. These had to be put into sentences and repeated many times before their meanings were understood. But the group made steady progress. They were learning to read, write, send off telegrams, make use of banks, follow recipes, and sign for the food rations supplied by the Tongaat Group. They were also learning to sew and knit. By the end of the programme, these adults would be empowered to seek employment in factories and shops.

During the 1976 Easter vacation, Marje represented the Tongaat outpost at the NCW National Conference in Johannesburg where she presented a paper on the importance of Adult Education. Her presentation so impressed the Rhodesian delegation that she was invited to speak at the conference to be held in Rhodesia in July.

But what was of great concern at the conference that Easter in 1976, was the desperate situation in Soweto. NCW members from Soweto were unhappy and apprehensive as they spoke of the students' anger and frustration at having to acquire their education through the medium of Afrikaans. Marje identified immediately; it brought to mind her frantic struggle against Afrikaans at Little Flower School in Ixopo. So the student uprising in Soweto that followed in June came as no great surprise to Marje. Soweto parents had pleaded for assistance to enable them to avert trouble, but the authorities had ignored them. Though the happenings in

Soweto were tragic, the students had stood up for their rights.

At the end of 1976, the Department of Education closed down the school at Brake Village and transferred teachers and pupils to other schools -- Marje went to Buffelsdale Primary. With the closure of the school, the literacy programme came to an end, but the work of the NCW continued. The women held a Careers Day Symposium at which the guest speaker was Professor Behr, Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW)¹, the University for Indians. Careers Day was followed by a tour for school children to places of interest in Durban and included visits to Mitchell's Park and the harbour. The highlight of the trip was a tour of one of the boats in port.

When UNESCO declared 1979 the year of the child, the NCW women in Tongaat embarked on a new project. Vibha Desai, a student in the Social Studies Department at the University of Durban-Westville, who was conducting research into conditions for mentally challenged children in the community, made them aware of the parlous situation of these children. As guest speaker at one of the NCW meetings, she described their sad neglect. In many instances, the children were hidden from society and not given the special care they needed. Vibha concluded with an invitation to the women to help with her research. Moved by what she had told them, the women not only agreed to that but also resolved to expose the plight of the children and lobby for the establishment of a special institution for mentally challenged children.

But something had to be done for the children in the interim. Though they had no resources or funding, the women decided to set up an informal school to begin the care and training of the children. Marjorie offered her garage as a classroom. Mrs Saroj Pillay, mother of a seven-year-old Down syndrome son, volunteered to

¹ Originally established as the University College of Salisbury Island in the early 1960s, it was moved to Westville in 1972 and became UDW.

be their teacher and caregiver. Mrs Pat Govender, with a mentally challenged daughter, offered to assist her and to provide transport for children who needed it. When community members were approached, they also contributed to the project. The Vishwaroop Temple, just around the corner from Marjorie's home, donated chairs and a trestle table. Mr Mahabir, a furniture maker, built a Masonite blackboard and NCW members supplied crayons, newsprint, toys and other equipment for the children's activities.

When the women began to recruit children for their school, they became aware that they had to proceed cautiously. This was a sensitive issue; they had to be careful not to offend the parents on whose trust and support the success of their venture depended. After much wooing and many visits to explain the special needs of the children, parents eventually came to believe in their goodwill and gave them their support.

The school was set up in Marje's garage and operated out of it for several months. When Mr Derek Olds joined in the venture, he found new premises for the school – an old building in Greylands that they scrubbed, cleaned and furnished. It was their first proper school building. Mr Olds, who had a mentally challenged child in a home in Cape Town, also provided the NCW group with the plans of the Cape Town school that showed a beautifully laid out facility catering for all the children's needs. The women were inspired. They realised that this was what they wanted for Tongaat and began to lobby support for the project.

When officials of the Tongaat Child Welfare Society heard of their initiative, they invited the women to join the Mental Health Society and work together with them in setting up the school. The women accepted the offer believing that such an organisation would have better access to funding and the services needed. But a planner in the Department of Indian Education took over the project and instead of building the kind of facility that the NCW women had envisioned, he housed the pupils in a prefab building

that had formerly been the living quarters of the workers who had constructed the Hazelmere Dam. The women were appalled. And when the school admitted only Indian children and rejected pupils of other races who had been part of the school from its inception, they were infuriated. They had been edged out of the project and the school was now seen as the initiative of the Education Planner. To add insult to injury, the NCW was thrown a sop: Mrs Joan Hemson was asked to name the school and it became “The Golden Steps School.”

In 1988, Marje was unexpectedly faced with a new problem, a personal problem that forced her to turn her attention to her own situation. At the commencement of the school year, a Department of Indian Education official summoned local teachers to a meeting at the V. Moonsamy Hall at Flamingo Heights in Tongaat. Towards the end of the meeting, the official announced that teachers with T5 qualifications, those who had trained as teachers after acquiring a Primary School Certificate, would not be reappointed. They were told that they had to make way for the more highly qualified graduates from Springfield College of Education. Marjorie was horrified; she was being told that she was about to lose her job. She stood up to speak and reminded the official that having had Afrikaans foisted on them at secondary school level and with no foundation in the language, many of them had failed the Junior Certificate Exams. They had had no option but to enrol for the T5 teachers’ course. They had served the Education Department faithfully for decades, in her case – thirty-nine years, and had bailed the Department out by providing additional services at times of teacher shortages. She suggested that rather than dismiss long-serving, dedicated teachers, the Department of Education offer courses to upgrade qualifications.

A month later, a departmental circular sent to all schools, informed teachers that those who wished to upgrade their qualifica-

tions would be granted two years unpaid study leave to take up the M+4² course at Orion College of Education in Westcliffe. Marjorie enrolled for the course. Teachers from ages forty to sixty, Marje was fifty-nine, went to Orion College for a year, then to Springfield College of Education for a further six months and obtained qualifications of M+3. They returned to their schools and after another year of study by correspondence, they acquired the M+4 certificate. And in 1992, Marje became an M+4 graduate.

Marjorie retired from teaching in 1995 but continued with her efforts to upgrade her community. In 1999, when the Tongaat-Hulett's Group decided to sell the Group Hospital, Marjorie wrote to the Provincial Minister of Health and various members of parliament requesting that the hospital be turned into a Government Hospital for geriatric patients. Her experience with her elderly mother in the early 1980s had made her aware how necessary such a facility was to the community. She lobbied for support from all levels of government and sent public officials the following letter:

78 Watsonia Drive
Tongaat, 4400
1999-2-07

Dr Zweli Mkize
PROVINCIAL MINISTER OF HEALTH
Private Bag X9051
PIETERMARITZBURG
3201

Dear Sir

In 1973 English novelist, Anthony Powell wrote:-

“Growing old is like being increasingly penalised for a crime you

2 M+4 = Matriculation plus four years of training

haven't committed". 26 years later nothing has changed. Therefore a group of concerned, devoted community workers expressed their shame at being part of an uncaring society.

The thought that we can render once powerful adults who nurtured and raised us, often with little means, to weak child-like burdens who get punished for the crime of growing old and the crime of dependency, gnaws relentlessly at our conscience particularly in this the International Year of the Aged. Thus the Tongaat Child Welfare Society facilitated a meeting on Thursday, 28 October 1999 for members of the community who were committed, devoted and dedicated to improving and bettering the lives of these precious forgotten persons.

An interim working committee of interested and committed persons who would endeavour to work towards this cause was elected.

From deliberations and discussions that ensued what emanated was a vital need for a Geriatric Hospital and Frail Care Centre that will not only benefit the community of Tongaat but people in the broader geographical areas.

1999 has been declared the International Year of the Aged. There is general consensus that mankind is moving into an era of longevity. Of grave concern to us is, if we are moving into longevity, then how are we going to cope with the problems that accompany longevity, when at present there are no hospitals for geriatric patients?

This letter is an appeal to you to assist us in acquiring the Tongaat Group Hospital property, which is now non-operational, to serve as a Geriatric Hospital [which will be the first of its kind in South Africa]. This Centre will have several advantages to all people in need of such a facility.

a. It would provide professional care for the immobile, terminally ill, incontinent and bed-ridden senior citizens, thus improving their quality of life.

b. Other Aged citizens would have a place exclusively for their needs, thereby eliminating their long wait at polyclinics, generally spending an entire day before receiving attention. Such a facility would also ease the pressure on Polyclinics.

c. A hospital of this nature could facilitate the training of volunteers by professionally skilled personnel to equip members of the community with the knowledge and skills required for home-nursing.

d. With the establishment of such a Centre comes employment, although a certain amount of voluntary help will be recruited from the community, developing the essence of “MASAKHANE”, and emphasising the need of our people to unite to build our beloved country into a better place for all its people, in particular our Aged and helpless.

Our research into the present status of the said property has revealed that it is presently under the management of Mr Roy Alberdice of Alliance Property Group Ltd., Phone: (031) 312 7625), who was planning a sale of the property by Public Auction on 31 October 1999.

However, by informing him that we were making every effort to lobby for support from various role-players to acquire this property to be converted into a Geriatric Hospital, we were able to stall the sale, temporarily.

We make a passionate and earnest appeal to you for your in-

tervention, support and assistance in acquiring this property to promote the welfare and well being of our Geriatric patients who are fast becoming a forgotten and neglected sector of our communities.

Let us form a partnership to bring some measure of comfort to those who cannot help themselves, thus enabling them to have a better quality of life in their twilight years in the new millennium.

We look forward to a positive response to our compassionate plea and the possibility of convening a meeting with you at your convenience in order to discuss the way forward.

Thank you

Yours faithfully

M.S. Rughubar

Co-ordinator Interim Committee

*Cc : Dr Tshabalala
National Director of Health*

*Dr Sibongile Dube
Deputy director : Chronic disease and Geriatrics*

*Dr Ronnie Green-Thompson
General Secretary of Health*

*Tony Leon
Democratic Party*

*Patricia de Lille
P.A.C.*

*Mr Roy Alberdice
Alliance Property Group*

The following are copies of the responses that she received to her letter:

PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL
HEALTH SERVICES

ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATALI
EZEMPILO

PROVINSIE KWAZULU-NATAL
GESONDHEIDSDIENSTE

PRIVATE BAG X 9051
PETERMARITZBURG
3200

TELEPHONE : 103331 953176
LCHNO : 103331 952009
TELEFON : 103331 952765



330 LONGMARKET STREET
PETERMARITZBURG
3201

FAX :
ISIKHAWA SEPOSI : 103331 450792
FAXS :

Sec 07/01/200

Ref :
Enquiries : Prof. Green-Thompson
Extension : 3176

20th December 1999

Mrs M S Rughubar
Co-ordinator Interim Committee
78 Watsonia Drive
TONGAAT
4400

Dear Mrs Rughubar

RE: GERIATRIC HOSPITAL

Your correspondence dated 7th December 1999 and received on 14th December has reference.

It is receiving attention and we will be in contact with you shortly.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR RW GREEN-THOMPSON
SECRETARY OF HEALTH
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH : KWAZULU-NATAL
RWGT/sc/3260/99

Private Bag 8 6091
Westmead 3200

TELEPHONE
12700
TELEFON

(033) 3463176
(033) 3462506
(033) 3463768



POB LINDENHURST STREET
INTEKAMATZBURG
3201

FAX
033 3463768
PAGE 1

Ref
Enquiries : Prof. Green-Thompson
Extension : 3176

10th January 2000

Mrs M.S. Rughubar
Co-Ordinator Interim Committee
78 Watsonia Drive
TONGAAT
4400

Dear Mrs Rughubar

GERIATRIC HOSPITAL

Your previous correspondence dated 7th December 1999 has reference.

The Department of Health is response for hospitals, clinics and provision of health care to the Province. The Department of Welfare is responsible for Frail Care Centres. As it is not clear from your correspondence as to whether this facility will be a hospital or a Frail Care Centre, it would be advisable to contact the Department of Welfare.

With regards to Hospitals, the Department of Health is at the moment investigating the upgrading of Institutions and/or the provision of new Institutions in the Province. The priority will be based on the provision of services to the previously underserved areas.

We will consider your request if your response indicates that it is our Department's responsibility.
I await your response.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR RW GREEN-THOMPSON
SECRETARY OF HEALTH
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH : KWAZULU-NATAL

RWNT (cc: 1/2/16/1/1)

Province of KwaZulu-Natal

Health Services

Natline
100 Longmarket St
PIETERMARITZBURG

Gesondheidsdienste
Ezempilo

Private Bag
N 9051
PIETERMARITZBURG

Tel: (031) 952106/952120/952126

MINISTER'S OFFICE

Fax: (031) 952138

My Ref. : MH 5/2/1/2

11 January 2000

15/01/2000
Mrs M.S. Rughubar
78 Watsonia Drive
TONGAAT
4400

Dear Madam,

Re: REQUEST FOR A MEETING – MRS M.S. RUGHUBAR

On behalf of the Minister of Health, Dr Z.L. Mkhize, I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 7th December 1999, the contents of which have been noted.

Please be advised that the matter is receiving attention. You will be informed of the progress in due course.

Yours faithfully,


ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY

sm/



Republic of South Africa
Republiek van Suid-Afrika

MINISTRY FOR HEALTH
LININYANQO WETEMPILO
MINISTERIE VAN GESONDHEID
TSA TONA YA MAPHILO

Verwysingsnommer:
Reference number:

3/17/16

Privatebag/Private Bag X9070
Kaapstad/Cape Town 8000
Tel No.: (021) 465-7407/8
Fax: (021) 465-1575

Privatebag/Private Bag X399
Pretoria 0001
Tel: (012) 328-4773/4
Fax: (012) 325-5526

Recd 14/01/2016

2000-01-01

Mrs M S Rughubar
Co-ordinator Interim Committee
78 Watsonia Drive
TONGAAT
4400

Dear Mrs Rughubar

**ASSISTANCE IN ACQUIRING THE TONGAAT GROUP HOSPITAL PROPERTY TO
SERVE AS A GERIATRIC HOSPITAL**

Thank you for your letter to the Minister of Health dated 7 December 1999 concerning the above mentioned matter.

This matter is the responsibility of the MEC for Health for the KwaZulu-Natal Province and I have taken the liberty of forwarding your letter to him for facilitation of a prompt response to you. Please direct all future inquiries to his Ministry.

Yours faithfully

MS KASHINI MAISTRY
MINISTERIAL SERVICES

This is Marje's response to Prof. R.W. Green-Thompson:

78 Watsonia Dr
TONGAAT
4400
21
January 2000

*Prof R.W. Green-Thompson
Secretary of Health
Department of Health : KwaZulu-Natal*

Dear Prof. Green-Thompson

GERIATRIC HOSPITAL

Your correspondence dated 10 January 2000 has reference.

Thank you for your prompt attention to our correspondence dated 7 December 1999. Please be informed that our objective is to establish a Geriatric Hospital.

We are greatly encouraged by the fact that your department is investigating the upgrading of institutions in previously under served areas. You are undoubtedly aware that there is no Geriatric Hospital in the whole of South Africa and we feel that providing one would be a fitting, if belated, way of marking the International Year of the Aged.

We reiterate that our intention is to establish a Geriatric Hospital which will therefore fall within the ambit of your Department's responsibility.

We look forward to your response and close co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Mrs M. S. Rughubar

Co-ordinator – Interim Committee.

At a Child Welfare meeting, Marje presented her proposal with a display of Hospital Plans and copies of letters to the Health Department and Health Officials. Present at this meeting were the Town Clerk and Deputy Mayor of Tongaat, who promised to arrange a meeting with her to discuss her proposal. The meeting never materialised. And Marje could not garner support anywhere else either.

After all the efforts that the women in Tongaat had made to upgrade their community, an article appeared in a local newspaper that presented women as apathetic, helpless victims who made little contribution to society. Infuriated, Marje responded as follows:

Dear Editor

Response to Article “Local Women Need to Empower Themselves.”

The author of the above article makes an appeal for someone to help him find clarity and answers to his article. His questions tabled under ‘Why?’ compel me to explain why. All of his assumptions as to why he thinks women do not endeavour to empower themselves are absolutely and totally ridiculous. When men find women involved in a venture that will manifest their power and intelligence, they treat them with disdain and no stone is left un-

turned to destroy their plans.

I hereby furnish you with two very humiliating experiences suffered by a team of women dedicated to improving the lot of those extremely disadvantaged in their community.

(Marje then gives in detail the NCW's plan for mentally challenged children and her proposal to turn the Tongaat Group Hospital into a government hospital for geriatric patients. Her letter ends:)

A local church group has purchased the hospital and are using it to serve the community of Tongaat profitably.

*Marje Rughubar
78 Watsonia Drive
Tongaats 4400*

Marje is very much Liz Baines's daughter. Like her mother, she is dynamic, energetic, hardworking and enterprising. Her vision of a proper facility for mentally challenged children was taken from the NCW group and the institution that was established, Golden Steps, lost the services of magnanimous, public-spirited women who would have ensured provision of care of the highest quality. Marje's proposal to convert the Tongaat Group Hospital into a State Hospital for Geriatric Patients was not acknowledged or appreciated. Marje is a visionary and visionaries are often thwarted by people who have power but no vision.

Chapter 13

Last Words

Jenny, the eldest of the Keshwar siblings, who had left South Africa in 1954, lived in London where there was no legal requirement to identify herself by race.

The rest of the Keshwar siblings in South Africa were dispersed into racial group areas: Norman in Durban North, in a white area; Percy in Sparks Estate, Maurice in Wentworth, and Ella in Greenwood Park – Coloured areas; Mercy in Asherville, Marjorie in Watsonia, Tongaat, and Margaret in Green-wood Park – Indian Areas.

As they were scattered in and around Durban, the siblings, with the exception of Norman, visited one another in their different racially designated areas. Enforced segregation, which separated people into racial communities, couldn't really keep them apart. And Mercy's home in Tarndale Avenue, Asherville, became the place for family gatherings, and accommodated members of the same South African family who had been legally classified White, Coloured and Indian.

Margaret died in 1981 at a time when apartheid was going through its death throes.

Norman died just as freedom from statutory racism became a reality

Percy died soon after. He had always been free and had not needed the collapse of apartheid to make freedom of association possible for himself.

Jenny who lived and died in London escaped our local form of

racism but may have encountered other forms where she lived.

Mercy died at the beginning of the new millennium. Apartheid may have determined where she lived but not how she lived.

Ella died about twelve years into democracy.

Maurice and Marjorie are the only surviving siblings.

Maurice is a widower and has had the joy of seeing his granddaughter crowned Miss South Africa in a country with a democratic constitution.

Marjorie still lives in Tongaat. She is a grandmother and great-grandmother and has hopes for her great-grandchildren that would not have been possible before 1994.

THE KESHWARS FROM DUNDEE

The Keshwars of Dundee is a biographical account of the Keshwar family that begins in the first decade of the twentieth century and traces the lives of Sewpersad Keshwar, Elizabeth Keshwar and their children. It is based on the memories of Marjorie, the sixth child and third daughter.

In the first chapter, we meet Elizabeth Keshwar, an old woman, ill, confused and approaching death. After Marjorie loses her twin sister and her mother, she decides to chronicle the history of the family as a record for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Her story begins in the second decade of the twentieth century in rural Dundee where the family lives in peaceful, happy circumstances. When they move to Durban in the mid-1940s, they are forced to encounter racism and under apartheid with its rigid race classification laws, the family begins to come apart, and is dispersed into various group areas. Eventually, the stories of Marje and her siblings become separate stories.

They include such events as the 1949 riots in Durban and give a glimpse into the exciting, little known world of theatre activities in Durban when black people, in defiance of the law, were involved in the struggle to create a non-racial theatre movement that held the mirror up to the absurdity of the religion of racism.

MUTHAL NAIDOO



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