

University of Alberta

HOMELANDS

A narrative inquiry into home and belonging in
an informal settlement in South Africa

by

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DEDICATION

*This dissertation is dedicated to those who have
made my homecoming possible.*

* * *

To Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor
for entrusting me with your friendship and your stories.

To my parents for your love and abiding faith in me.

To Rachel and the Bocock family
for your affection and your lessons in belonging.

To Vera for your inspiration and guidance.

ABSTRACT

* * *

This narrative inquiry explores the experiences of 'home' and 'belonging' in Woodlane Village, an informal settlement (squatter camp) in Pretoria, South Africa. From July to October 2012 and August to September 2013 I spent time in conversation with four men inquiring into our experiences of home. Our journeys and our relationships are retold as narrative accounts. These accounts are set against the backdrop of the events that led to the creation of Woodlane Village and the larger social and historical forces that have shaped South Africa. They convey the nuanced and complex ways in which people make sense of home and belonging. In doing so, they reveal how individuals experience life in a temporary and transient community and the negotiations required to make a home in such a place. While the stories are situated within

Woodlane Village they speak to the larger experience of being human and the ways in which we create belonging through relationships. They speak of love and loss, of adaptation and resilience, and of the yearning to live in community with others despite the forces pulling us apart. In this way, the stories offer new insights to the unique realities of post-apartheid South Africa. The experiential complexity of life in the settlement mirrors the contrasts, tensions, and dynamics in the country. The resulting dissertation is a meditation on history, place, and identity — and the way our understandings of ourselves are constructed and refashioned through the stories we tell about our lives and our homes. As such, the work expands our understandings of narrative, intersubjectivity, and place-making. It also breaks new ground by bringing the methodology of narrative inquiry into the discipline of anthropology.

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* * *

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1

PROLOGUE

TO DRINK ITS WATER

By Ingrid de Kok

1

Home is where the heart is:
a tin can tied to a stray dog.

The only truth is home truth:
preserves on the winter shelf.

Those who carry their homes on their backs
live for hundreds of years,
moving inch by inch from birth to lagoon.

2

Beside the beaten path
to the veld where I once played,
dry riverbed and unwashed clothes
grey lizards on the rocks.
My shadow squats in the shade of a thorn
where children sift and store
the remnants of corroded bins.
Over the path, the rocks, the tree,
marauding sky, fiercer than memory.

* * *

SEPTEMBER 2011

I'm strolling along the promenade in Cape Town that winds from my uncle's flat to the affluent community of Sea Point. Table Mountain reclines in the background, a solid mass of sandstone and granite, languid, stripped bare of its cloud cover. The cold expanse of the Atlantic Ocean stretches to the Antarctic. The sun shares the sky with the moon.

After weeks of being at the mercy of my extended family, I am enjoying the opportunity to be alone. It has been an intense period of reuniting with relatives, many of whom I have not seen since my last visit to South Africa in 1993. I was twenty-three then and I am forty-one now. A lifetime of struggles, triumphs, turning points and petty routines spans this interval and yet it seems as if I was here only yesterday — such is the paradox of time.

My journey takes me past the apartment buildings that overlook the shoreline. The ocean is calm. Workers are clearing the beaches of kelp that washed up during a storm a few days ago. Nearby, a man is cleaning his clothes in a tidal pool. A mother watches as her two children play on the rocks. A sailboat tacks in the distance. Seagulls crisscross the sky on relentless patrols.

My thoughts wander back to the last month, trying to weave together a jumble of experiences: the peaceful days with my Oom Tobie and Tannie Henriette in their homes in Pretoria and Plettenberg Bay, the kitchen conversations about faith and family history; the time spent in a squatter camp in the posh suburb of Moreleta Park, tin and plastic shacks surrounded by mansions, the neighbouring churches that stood in opposition to the disenfranchised despite Christ's message of love, the decay in the heart of prosperity; the generosity of my Oom Japie and Tannie Minda, who welcomed me even though I was a relative stranger, whose hearts remained open despite grieving the loss of their son, Ricus — who at thirty-three years old had been murdered over four cell phones, leaving behind the photo albums of his previous life, the chronicle of his death, the coroner's report, the emails sent by friends post-mortem; the rugged beauty of the Cape Coast, the whales bridging in Hermanus, set against the revolutionary cry of "Kill the Boer" to banish the ghosts of apartheid; the remnants of the failed experiment in Afrikaner nationhood, the *Voortrekker* Monument commemorating the Great Trek of the Dutch settlers and their victory at Blood River, the *Vrouemonument* honouring the 26,251¹ Boer women and children who died in concentration camps following Britain's scorched earth policy of 1900 — the same policy of destruction that cost my great grandparents their farm and the lives of three children in four days in an internment camp. All of these memories and more are intertwined.

The walkway is a ribbon tracing my experiences of this place, tying together the contradictions: the hopes, the promises, and the false dreams. My immigration to Canada and subsequent return visits to South Africa coincide with turning points in this country's history: the Soweto Uprising in 1976, the release of Nelson

¹ Fatality numbers inscribed in stone on the Vrouemonument (Women's Monument): 4,177 women and 22,074 children. Elizabeth van Heyningen (2008) argues that the wake of this huge mortality established a mythology of suffering that fed into Afrikaner nationalism.

Mandela from Robben Island in 1990, the democratic transition in 1993 leading to the first general election in 1994, the rise of Julius Malema in 2011.

Since my arrival, I have felt a predictable displacement in a homeland that is at once familiar and foreign to me. Despite spending my formative years in Canada, I have a connection to South Africa and to ways of knowing that are deeply Afrikaner. I still speak the language and I share the heartache of loving a country where I no longer belong. But, I am also Canadian by way of conscience and nationality. Some of my relatives have opinions that I find jarring. They are the products of their upbringings and of a different time. And yet, they have also shifted their perspectives. The world is no longer one of black-and-whites and absolutes, but one of uncomfortable greys. They have discovered the limits of cognitive dissonance. It is no longer possible to hold conflicting feelings and thoughts in entirely separate orbits. Wealth and razor wire are poor defences against the forces of history and entropy, as South Africa becomes Africa.

South Africa remains a source of discomfort for me — the type of ache that occurs when a land gets into your bones. It is the phantom pangs of a lost limb, the longing for something solid upon which to stand.

I was born here in 1970 and my roots trace back to the first Dutch settlers who came to the country in the 1650's. My extended family is firmly planted in South Africa, although a handful of my relatives have moved to Canada, Australia, and the United States.

My parents were some of the first members of my family to leave South Africa, having decided to pack up their children to escape what they saw as the impending social, economic, and moral collapse of the country. The decision came with great sacrifice. For my parents, the cost was the loss of a previous life, the separation from family and friends, and decades of struggle to gain an economic footing in Canada. My sister and I paid the price of being set adrift in the liminal space between two societies — to grow up being of both places, but belonging to neither.

It turned out that they acted with prescience. The Soweto Uprising occurred three months after our departure. On June 16, 1976, children from several Sowetan Schools began protesting the introduction of Afrikaans as the language of instruction. In the resulting aftermath and riots, buildings and vehicles were burned, stones were thrown, police bullets shattered young bodies, and Hector Pieterse was shot dead at thirteen years of age. According to conservative estimates, 294 people were killed during the first three months of the protests, but accounts of the events are confusing, ambiguous, and contradictory. Over the years, the stories of these uprisings have been twisted to meet the interests of both the oppressors and the resistance movement. History offers no simple answers, but it is clear a line had been crossed that day.²

Our lives are full of moments where we are challenged to be bigger than ourselves — to see our individual stories within the context of a larger unfolding narrative (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). My parents' decision to emigrate is one such instance. It set a new direction for our lives. My paternal grandfather's decision to break away from the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK)³ to start his own congregation in 1944 is another such moment.

My grandfather was a former minister in the NGK who opposed growing theological perversions within the institution. During that period of time, both the NGK and the government were controlled by the *Broederbond*, a secret society of Afrikaner Nationalists who were driven by the belief that the Afrikaner *volk* had been planted in the country by God's hand and they were destined to remain there as a nation (Goldberg 2009). Under the *Broederbond*, the NGK church became a political instrument. The traditional Calvinism of the Afrikaners combined with a quest for political sovereignty to produce a Christian National movement that dominated South Africa from 1948 to 1994. The collusion of

² For a riveting analysis of this event see Pohlandt-McCormic (2000).

³ Dutch Reformed Church.

church and state provided the vehicle for Afrikaner independence and for the realisation of apartheid in 1948 (Van der Merwe 2009).

My grandfather became an outspoken critic of both the corruption in the church and of the *Broederbond's* role in politics and religion. As a consequence, he was under police protection because of threats against his life.

Yet, despite his moral stance, my grandfather was an acquaintance of, and was rumoured to have respect for Hendrik Verwoerd, the man who became the architect of apartheid and who once defined the policy of racial segregation as one of “good neighbourliness.”

I am not sure how to reconcile this discrepancy. My grandfather died in 1971 so I have never been able to probe this apparent inconsistency directly. It is one of the many contradictions built into my family story, which are mirrored in the larger Afrikaner narrative. In order to accept my family history I have to come to peace with stories that contain ambiguities, breaks, and dead ends. I also have to acknowledge the fictions and convenient myths that are often used to create a sense of coherence where none exists. Not all the pieces fit and no amount of mental magic can make them truly fit.

Perhaps, the root of my heartache is the tension between my love and my aversion of this country, and between what has been spoken of this place and what remains unspoken. I spent most of my adolescence wrestling with the conflicting emotions attached to my homeland and to the disruption of identity that accompanied my immigration experience. Growing up during the late 1980s, I was often embarrassed of my association to South Africa. It was during this period of time that international pressure was being exerted on South Africa to abolish apartheid. Although I was ashamed of my homeland's discriminatory policies, I was also aware of the hypocrisy that underlaid Canada's opposition. Canada's historic treatment of its Aboriginal population has been equally atrocious. We have also promoted a polarized society by creating Indian reserves, by classifying Aboriginal Peoples along

race lines, by denying them the right to vote until 1960, and by attempting to forcibly assimilate them through a church and state sanctioned policy of residential schooling.

The cover-up is worse than the crime. Memory drifts and fades. But sometimes “it is altered to protect against wounds that run too deep or knowledge that is too contradictory” (Pohlandt-McCormick 2000: 37).

South Africa has always existed at the periphery of my thoughts. It hovers in the background, a reminder that I come from elsewhere. It is a memory of home, codified in the Afrikaans language and the rituals of my upbringing. But it is also a place where history has been written in blood: the blood of family, the blood of violence spilled to secure a foothold in a land where the Afrikaner never truly belonged despite the delusions of divine providence and racial superiority, the blood that still pours out of the gaping wound between the rich and the poor.

* * *

How is it possible that I can still long for this place?
And what happens when the concepts of belonging and home are
as elusive as the imprints of birds in the sky?

* * *

I stop at the seawall and I marvel at how a simple concrete path can intersect with so many lives. There is the white man with his expensive clothing walking two pampered dogs in designer sweaters, while another man, black, in tattered rags, stops at each rubbish bin along the way for food. On the grass, a woman is working out with a physical trainer, strengthening her core. A nursing attendant is pushing an old man at the edge of life in a wheelchair. Gaspings at the ocean view. A trim woman in yoga pants and a tight purple top glides by. She is wearing a big floppy hat that obscures her face. A supple mystery. A black boy embraces a white girl on a bench. She rests against his shoulder, oblivious to

the flow of life around them. They are safely cocooned in their own universe or perhaps they merely embody the new South Africa — a nation balanced precariously between being and becoming, between ‘what was’, ‘what is’, and ‘what could be’.

This scene affirms the perception of our lives as being singular reference points in a constellation of shifting relationships that reaches beyond us. By the mere act of remaining mindful of the flow of events around us, we become one with the worlds we inhabit. I see how we are situated in a dynamic universe of multiple overlapping and co-created storylines. Through experience we enter history. We live through story and the narrative cannot be separated from the narrator (Cruikshank 1990).

I watch the black man in ragged clothes make his way methodically from one garbage can to the next, past the ice cream vendors, the tourists, the young lovers. We are walking the same direction, leapfrogging down the promenade. When I stop he pushes forward, when I advance he falls back. His stride is deliberate. He is focused on his task, his ritual of survival. He seems unaware of our choreographed movements — the tired old dance of rich man and poor man, one-step forward, two-steps back. When we cross I can smell his unwashed body. He is wearing a long jacket. His features are strong. He avoids eye contact. In my pocket, I have seven hundred rand, enough currency to fill his belly thirtyfold. I contemplate handing over the entire stack of folded bills to him. I hesitate. *What is the appropriate measure of compassion?* I watch him dig for crumbs in the bin and unscrew the top of a discarded juice bottle for a few drops of liquid. The ocean is full of water that he cannot drink.

I am agonising over how much money to give him. It is a petty debate given that I am returning to Canada tomorrow. It is unlikely that I will spend seven hundred rand in one day, but there are ancillary costs that I have to account for. There is also this sense of ‘what is mine’ and ‘not his.’ I suspect it is this same feeling of entitlement that keeps the wealthy secure in their mansions while the poor freeze in shacks in Moreleta Park, the same sentiment that

allows churchgoers to turn their backs, content in the knowledge that: 'Everyone deserves what they get.'

Our journey continues. I try to ignore the pressure in my head, the impulse to act, and the temptation to flee. I play out multiple scenarios, all of the threadbare rationales and reservations. *If I give him a handout would this be just another form of paternalism disguised as giving? But if I turn away, what does this say about my humanness? What if he uses the cash for booze rather than food? Why does this matter? If I were in his shoes, I might also indulge in a cold beer as a reprieve from competing with seagulls for food.*

We reach a split in the walkway where one part of the promenade continues along the oceanfront and the other returns to where we came from. I watch him circle back. I am frozen in my spot. It is as if my entire life has converged on this decision point. All of the years of confronting homelessness in Canada and all the experiences of witnessing and documenting poverty in locations like Tanzania, Haiti, and Pakistan seem irrelevant now. They are only memories of the past. In this present moment, I am faced with the irreducible question of whether to act or not.

I can almost hear the mocking words of Kipling's hymn to imperialism: "*Take up the White Man's burden – the savage wars of peace — fill full the Mouth of Famine. And bid the sickness cease.*"⁴

I turn towards him...

⁴ Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*, 1899.

* * *

SITE OF INQUIRY

It is a Monday evening in mid-August 2011, the end of a winter day in Pretoria. The sun hovers low in the sky, preparing to plunge below the horizon. Small plumes of smoke rise from shacks as residents of the temporary settlement of Woodlane Village prepare meals and seek warmth over coal fires. The temperature has dropped to around 2 degrees Celsius — frigid enough that even the delegation of Canadians is finding it uncomfortable. We are here on a site visit as part of a bilateral meeting with South African researchers to compare and contrast homelessness between the two countries.

The settlement spreads over 8 hectares of land on the corner of *De Villebois Mareuil* and *Garsfontein* roads near the exclusive Woodhill Golf Estate. It sits immediately adjacent to a gargantuan Dutch Reformed Church with a congregation of over 7000 people.

Woodlane Village is comprised of 846 households representing around 3000 people from Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Mozambique, and provinces in South Africa. Most of the residents are political and economic refugees. Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality provides potable water and latrines to the village. In addition, the area is fenced off and guards are posted at the entrances of the settlement not only as a measure of security but to limit its growth. The fence keeps others out and the residents in.

I feel an irresistible urge to wander the camp by myself with my camera. I need to dive into the sensory stream of this place without the voiceover and surveillance of a tour guide. I break away from my colleagues to search for signs, clues, and symbols to help me understand this locality. I am in a confluence of narratives⁵ that

⁵ In this dissertation, I will be using the terms, ‘stories’ and ‘narratives’ interchangeably. These concepts apply to a broader conceptualisation of narrativity as involving both the social processes of storytelling and the stories themselves.

flow in and out of Woodlane Village: the stories of the residents who live here and their experiences of migration, home, and belonging; the stories of those who fought to keep them out of Moreleta Park; the stories of the Dredges⁶ who have fought to keep them in; the stories of my family and our history; the stories of South Africa as it makes sense of its past and charts an uncertain course to the future.

It is hard to imagine that people here spend the bitter cold in shelters made of little more than plastic tarps, recycled cardboard, scraps of plywood, and zinc. Yet despite the makeshift construction of the buildings, the settlement has an orderly feel to it. There is a sense of care and pride. The shacks are organised in neat rows separated by wide lanes that permit easy access for motorised vehicles and also serve as firebreaks. Some of the properties are set up as grocery stores and spaza shops. Others have gardens. On warmer days, colourful laundry hangs from clotheslines and children play in the dirt roads between shacks. But on a miserable winter day like this one, people hunker down to avoid the wind that cuts across the open fields, ripping at the tarps.

The settlement is reminiscent of the camps I witnessed in Haiti after the earthquake in 2010, although the shacks here impart a feeling of greater permanence than did the canvas tents in Port-au-Prince. On the scale of durability, zinc and plastic sheeting outrank fabric, much in the same way as stone does wood.

⁶ Colin and Denise are married and live near Woodlane Village. Colin comes from an English-speaking family and Denise is Afrikaans. They are devoted Christians. Colin is a former pastor who along with Denise did extensive outreach work in the townships during the turbulent 1980s. They have advocated for homeless people living in the Moreleta Park and Garsfontein areas for over a decade. Their social justice efforts led to the creation of the settlement and they continue to do community development work in the village.

* * *

The notion of ascribing a measure of permanence to Woodlane Village is ironic, given the history of this settlement and its precariousness in heart of the affluent suburb of Moreleta Park.

It was created as a temporary settlement in 2009 by court order following years of advocacy and legal battles by Colin and Denise Dredge — a husband and wife who, as an act of faith, intervened on behalf of homeless individuals squatting in vacant land near Woodlands Boulevard Mall, the self-proclaimed “Fashion Capital” of Pretoria. The Dredges and the non-profit organization they founded in 2003, *Tswelopele Step by Step*,⁷ directed their early efforts to improving the living conditions of the squatters, but they were eventually drawn into defending their human rights in the face of repeated harassment by the metro police. The Garsfontein police, in response to vehement complaints from homeowners and businesses in the suburb, tried to forcibly drive the squatters from the land. Instances of property destruction, violence, and shootings were reported.⁸

The convoluted story that unfolded included: two raids in 2006 where the belongings of the squatters were burned with the municipality claiming it was an operation to “eradicate alien vegetation” and the police stating it was a crime-fighting effort⁹; a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeal that the eviction

⁷ Tswelopele is a Sotho word meaning to lift up, empower, and liberate. For an overview of the non-profit please: <http://www.tswelopele-sa.org.za/>

⁸ For an example of the vitriolic reaction of homeowners see “Glossa Estates Responds to Tswelopele Newsletter” at: <http://glossaestate.co.za/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/75-glossa-estate-responds-to-tswelopele-newsletter>

⁹ Squatters Get Interdict Against Police, IOL News, August 20, 2007. Downloaded from: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/southafrica/squatters-get-interdict-against-police-1.367108>

of the squatters by Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality¹⁰ was illegal¹¹ and that the government agencies were responsible to rebuild the structures demolished in the raids; the early morning razing of fifty more shacks on August 16, 2007 by police and security personnel in defiance of the interdiction; the subsequent court case that ordered the police to replace the torched shacks within 12 hours¹²; the non-compliance of the Safety and Security Minister, Charles Nqakula to this order, followed by a legal case where Adriaan Vorster, the attorney siding with the squatters, argued that: “If the police could demolish shacks at 4 AM in the morning then surely they could rebuild them at 4 AM in the morning”, and the subsequent ruling that held Nqakula in contempt of court¹³; and finally a legal agreement reached in 2009 between several home owners’ associations¹⁴ and Tshwane Metro Council that compelled the municipality to establish a temporary settlement for the squatters within a demarcated area and to devise a relocation plan for the residents in the camp.¹⁵ Since the creation of the settlement, the Dredges and their non-profit have been undertaking poverty alleviation and community upliftment work with settlement dwellers, including helping to institute a system of local governance.

¹⁰ The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality forms the local government of northern Gauteng Province and includes the City of Pretoria.

¹¹ Under the Prevention of Illegal Eviction & Lawful Occupation Act

¹² Court Orders Cops to Rebuild 50 Shacks, Pretoria News, August 21, 2007. Downloaded from: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-167845189.html>

¹³ Jail Nqakula, Judge Orders, Pretoria News, August 30, 2007. Downloaded from: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1168165887.html>

¹⁴ Meadow Glen and Meadow Ridge Home Owners Association, the Moreleta Park Extension 44 Residents' Association, Mooikloof Owners Society and Woodhill Home Owners' Association had been embroiled in extensive legal proceedings with the council over the fate of the squatters.

¹⁵ Residents in Settlement with Council Over Shacks, Pretoria News, August 24, 2009. Downloaded from: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-206991557.html>

* * *

The village is a crucible for many of the tensions South Africa is experiencing around land, migration, housing, the polarisation of classes and the entrenchment of an economic form of segregation, the role of the church and state in shaping the overlapping stories of place and nation, and the larger frame of globalisation that is reconfiguring the relationships between countries and shifting economic and political structures.

Despite being the most developed country in Africa with extensive natural resources and a well-established agricultural sector, South Africa has some of the highest income disparities in the world and suffers from chronic unemployment and associated issues of inadequate housing and homelessness (Morrow 2010; Hunter 2006). As a result of the housing shortage, rapid urbanisation, and migration, it is common for homeless individuals in South Africa to set-up rudimentary shelters on vacant land, on public and private property, and in parks. In 2009 almost one in four households in South Africa lived in informal dwellings/shacks or traditional housing, amounting to approximately 3.3 million households — 1.9 million in informal dwellings and 1.4 million in traditional housing. The growth in number of households has been greatest in the major cities because of rural–urban migration. The proportion of households living in informal dwellings in all the metros combined increased from 21% in 2002 to 22% in 2009 despite the concentration of house building in these places and the absolute number of households rose from approximately 0.9 million to 1.1 million over this period. In the Gauteng metros¹⁶, the number of households in informal dwellings rose from 0.5 million to 0.7 million and was accompanied by substantial growth in the number of informal settlements in the region (South Africa Cities Network, 2011). The flow of

¹⁶ The Gauteng Province includes the three metropolitan municipalities of Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni as well as two district municipalities.

immigrants and refugees from other African countries seeking economic opportunities in South Africa has also exacerbated the housing challenges (Morrow 2010). Woodland Village is a small example of a much larger dynamic.

* * *

LINES OF INQUIRY

As described in the previous section, Woodlane Village is a place of intersecting storylines: some are mutually supporting while others are competing; some are anchored in the past while others are unfolding in the present. The experiential complexity in the settlement mirrors the contrasts, tensions, and dynamics of South Africa. In addition, my personal story connects to this place due to my own experiences of journeying, remembering, and longing for a homeland.¹⁷ The following inquiry draws on this understanding of narratives to explore the experiences of home and belonging of residents of the informal settlement. The central concern is to inquire into their *experiences of living in Woodlane Village and how they make sense of 'who they are' and 'where home is?'*

In an era dominated by the master narratives of globalisation, transnationalism, and cultural hybridity, the concept of 'home' and 'belonging' are difficult to untangle (Ralph 2009). Home can be a site of harmony and security or it can be a site of oppression and conflict. It can both be an inclusionary and exclusionary space. It can be rooted in a particular place or it can be an unmoored concept (ibid). Because of the "mobilities turn" in the social sciences, "the relationship between mobility and fixity, and home and homeland is questioned as migrants move astride, betwixt and between old and new homes" (ibid: 184).

The inquiry is working from the assumption that the notions of

¹⁷ 'Homeland' carries multiple connotations. It conveys the sense of a birthplace, but it also has particular resonance in South Africa where the term is equated with the Bantustans or special territories set aside for blacks during apartheid.

home and belonging are fluid and dynamic. As Teerling (2011: 1084) argues, “Home is often related to relationships and family, self, safety, and journeying, associations which shift the anchors of ‘belonging’ away from the purely geographical.” Home is found in practises, relational encounters, habitual interactions, emotions, and memories. As Basso (1996: 55) says:

The experience of sensing places, then, is both reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic. As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process – inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternately both together – cannot be known in advance. When places become actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the mind may lead is anyone’s guess.

Being in places involves social encounters, immersion in the sights, sounds, smells, and atmosphere of a locale, and contemplation about the traces of thought, imagination, and investment that have influenced their physical and metaphorical construction over time: the laundry blowing in the winter wind, the firebreaks, the gardens and spaza shops, the residents cooking salted fish, the parade of foreigners on tours to see how the ‘other side’ lives, the fence that defines a physical boundary between inclusion and exclusion.

The transient nature of Woodlane Village and its complicated history straddling the tensions of displacement and integration, invokes queries about how notions of home and belonging are lived and expressed in transitional and marginal spaces.

How do personal journeys, memories, and imaginations shape these concepts? How do the experiences of migration from ‘veld to

*town*¹⁸ or from ‘country to country’ influence one’s sense of place? What does it mean to live in an informal settlement sanctified by a court order in a locality where countervailing forces oppose one’s presence and where impulses towards place-making are potentially at odds with narratives of otherness?

* * *

METHODOLOGY OF INQUIRY

I will engage in ‘narrative inquiry’ to explore these questions. Inspired by the pragmatist philosophy of Dewey (1938), this methodology positions itself as the study of experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). It draws on many of the concepts alluded to previously: the ideas of living through narratives; the notion of stories as being both the products and processes of intersubjective experience; the notion of experiences as being shaped by particular contexts of time and space; the notion of the fluidity of narratives and of their ability to not only allow us to reach into the past, make sense of our present circumstances, but to project our lives into the future. In short, we live “storied lives on storied landscapes” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 24). As such, narrative inquiry is concerned with the living and telling of stories — and with the processes whereby they are retold and relived. It acknowledges the “embodiment of the individual in the world” and, in doing so, focuses not only on personal experience but also on the sociocultural and institutional narratives in which personal experiences are formed, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray Orr 2007: 29). This conceptualisation is consistent with anthropological understandings of narrative and experience (Jackson 2002; Sharman 2007; Behar 1996).

The narrative inquiry process is envisioned to occur along

¹⁸ Afrikaans term for ‘field’ or ‘open country’.

three axes¹⁹, defined by: the ‘temporality’ of experience on one dimension; the ‘personal’ and the ‘social’ aspects of experience on the second dimension; and the elements of ‘place’ on the third. As a narrative inquirer I will move inward to reflect on internal conditions such as feelings, hopes and moral dispositions; outward to explore the influences of the environment and social context on personal experience; and backward and forward along the temporal line exploring experiences in the past, present, and the future (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

This notion of drifting in an experiential current is a key consideration in narrative inquiry. When we enter the field, we are encountering individuals who are in the midst of living their stories and we, as researchers, are also in the midst of living our own (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Horsdal 2012). In doing so, we remain attentive to the temporality, sociality, and locality of experiences. As we move outwards to engage with participants, we are simultaneously journeying inwards to reflect on how we are situated in relation to them, the field, and the questions of inquiry (or puzzles).²⁰ Because narrative inquiry is a profoundly reflexive and reflective methodology, our own histories and personal experiences are important reference points. The stories of our formations and the contexts in which these stories were told (time and place) elucidate the sociocultural and political roots of our understandings. They also represent the milieu of our emerging relationships.

From the perspective of research, the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space reflects the continuous interplay and engagement of researchers and participants as they live in the field, compose, and re-compose field texts, and as they move towards the

¹⁹ The term ‘axes’ is used as in a three-dimensional Cartesian coordinate system defined with an x, y, and z-axis.

²⁰ The term ‘puzzle’ is used in narrative inquiry instead of ‘question’ because it evokes the unfolding process of exploring experiences rather than seeking answers. I have chosen not to use the term because I have attempted to find a language that sits between narrative inquiry and anthropology.

co-composition of research texts (Clandinin and Caine, 2013). As our lives intersect, we begin to negotiate ways of being together that allow for an emerging collaboration and mutual exploration of the research phenomena.

The relational and transactional quality of narrative inquiry is critical. This has implications for how we negotiate entry into the field, how we negotiate 'living alongside' participants, and how we negotiate the creation of safe spaces for storytelling, reflection, and exploration. In narrative inquiry, the concept of 'field' corresponds not only to the traditional sense of a 'research setting', but also to a space created for mutual discovery and contemplation.

Over the course of three months (July 2012 to October 2012), I spent my days in the flow of life in the camp. My entry was facilitated through the Dredges who are undertaking community development work in the settlement through their non-profit organisation, Tswelopele Step by Step.

As indicated previously, the Dredges have longstanding relationships with dwellers in the temporary settlement and they are seen as trusted allies. They brokered my introduction to the members of the Executive Committee, who represent the interests of the residents of Woodlane Village. The camp is organised into 31 blocks and each block has a leader elected to support local decision-making and to help maintain safety and order. These block leaders, in turn, selected five individuals to serve on the Executive Committee. This informal body sanctioned my research in the settlement and three of the committee members collaborated with me as participants.

In my early wanderings in the camp, there were moments of curiosity and good humour; and moments of suspicion and hostility. Some individuals approached me. Others averted their eyes and continued to go about their business. There were serendipitous encounters and conversations. Questions were asked about my presence. *Who are you? Where are you from? Why are you here?* In time, my movements became predictable. People grew to anticipate my company as I figured out ways of blending with the rhythms of this place — every place has its quotidian patterns.

Occasionally, I shared the wood fires of residents to warm my hands. People invited me into their homes. Bread was broken. Story fragments, observations, and memories, as well as my personal reflections of this place and the unfolding questions of home and belonging, were recorded as field texts (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

Over time, I developed close relationships with four individuals who became friends and research participants: Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor. Their participation was organic and followed the path of deepening rapport. That being said, I was seeking individuals with a diversity of experiences and journeys into this community. I worked with men exclusively, because the gender dynamics precluded deep engagement with women. There are high levels of violence against women in the camp and approaching females would have potentially exposed them to risks because of jealousies.

Over the three months, further relational encounters occurred. I was introduced to family members, lovers, friends, and associates. These places and experiences called forth stories. Conversations, oral histories, and reflections continued to be the basis for emerging field texts. Once again, efforts were taken to situate the voices of participants in the three-dimensional inquiry space. For as Snow (Flaherty et al 2002: 503-504) says, “to do otherwise — that is, to abstract and dislodge voices from their relational and contextual moorings — is to misapprehend and thus misrepresent them.” Each form of field text (whether verbal, visual or found objects) added to the multi-layered sense of stories, lived and told. Each offered hints, flashes of colour, and shadings of experience in a burlesque where what was uncovered is merely suggestive of what remains hidden. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observe, memory tends to smooth out the details of experience leaving behind only contours and key markers of what once was. Field texts helped to fill in the richness, nuances, and complexities that are obscured in the shadow games of memory.

In the course of the inquiry, I was present to stories of ordinary

life, longing, trauma, hopes, misery, and resilience. The narratives spoke to the shared human condition, although each manifested the unique textures of personal experience — the way in which we are simultaneously individuals and parts of a whole. As Jackson (1998: 8) says, “Though individuals speak, act, and work toward belonging to a world of others, they simultaneously strive to experience themselves as world makers.”

As the three-month period drew to its conclusion, the collaboration shifted to producing interim research texts. “While some interpretations are always underway as the inquiry continues to be lived out with participants in the field, at some point there is a move away from the close intensive contact with participants.” (Clandinin and Huber 2010: 439) Drafting interim research texts allowed participants to be engaged in the analysis and interpretation of the data produced through conversations, transcripts, photographs, and field notes. As Clandinin and Caine (2011: 14) explain:

Often interim research texts call forth the telling and living of additional field texts, that is, they call forth further experiences to be told or lived. Interim research texts are a way to engage in a retelling and re-living of research relationships.

These interim research texts were co-created and reviewed with participants during a subsequent return visit to South Africa in August and September 2013. This dialogue led to further refinements of the narrative accounts (Clandinin and Huber 2010).

Eventually, the process of reflecting on field texts gave way to the development of a final research text. This represented a complex and difficult transition as the inquiry shifted back to the research questions, to look for “patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes either within or across an individual’s experience in the social setting” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 132). Issues pertaining to what was learned and to the meaning and

significance of these insights became paramount. In the case of the research, it was important to draw connections between the experiences of residents in Woodlane Village and the larger context of informal settlements in South Africa. *How do local and global worlds intersect? How does the 'personal' connect to the 'social'? How do these stories inform our understanding of the human experience of place-making? What are the practical and theoretical implications of these stories?*

* * *

PARTICIPANTS

DONALD: Donald and Christopher are brothers. They are Malawian by descent, but were born in South Africa. Donald grew up close to where the informal settlement is now situated. He spent most of his adulthood in prison. In addition to living in Woodlane Village, he owns property in Mpumalanga close to the home of his fiancée. He is employed full-time as a workhand at the adjacent NG Moreleta Church and does tailoring on the side. Donald is the Chair of the Executive Committee. I was introduced to him early in my time in Woodlane Village and our relationship developed as I sat with him while he repaired clothing in the afternoons.

CHRISTOPHER: Like his brother, Christopher spent a good proportion of his life at the fringes of the formal economy, but he avoided incarnation. He squatted on the land around Moreleta Park and Garsfontein as a street kid. Christopher lives in a shack next door to Donald, which shares a courtyard. He works part-time as a labourer. He stays in the camp during the week and visits his children and family in the outlying townships of Mamelodi, Soshanguve, and Winterveld on the weekends. I often met Christopher on Thursdays to chat.

BENJAMIN: Benjamin grew up working on the land out by Moreleta Park as cattleman before becoming a gardener and a dental technician. He has a wife and two sons who live in Hammanskraal where he owns a house. He is also a key leader on the Executive Committee. I typically spent time with Benjamin on Sunday afternoons when he returned from work. Benjamin often worked on weekends and he was active in his church so his availability to meet was restricted.

TREVOR: Trevor came to South Africa in 2004 as an illegal immigrant seeking employment when the economy in Zimbabwe collapsed. Since then he has gained a work visa and lives in Woodlane Village with his wife and five brothers. His son and daughter attend grade school in Zimbabwe. He is a leader in the Zimbabwean section of the settlement and represents their interests on the Executive Committee. He is one of the key figures in establishing a football league in the camp. I met Trevor on Monday or Tuesday afternoons when he got home from work. I also spent time with him at the soccer pitch in the settlement.

* * *

EXPLORING RELATIONALLY

Narrative inquiry reconfigures the research process away from the traditional paternalistic exercise of ‘speaking about’ and ‘speaking for’ participants to a collaborative one of ‘speaking with’ and ‘speaking alongside’ them (Ruby 1991). It becomes less an investigation of other people’s lives as a mutual exploration of experiential questions and a shared process of meaning-making.

This is a significant shift and it implies ethical and relational responsibilities on my part to maintain an ongoing dialogue with participants during and after the research process. As Clandinin and Caine (2013: 7) articulate:

It is important to understand narrative inquiry spaces as spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants; spaces that are always marked by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care.

The relational aspects of narrative inquiry compelled me to pay attention to ethical matters throughout the research process, as Denzin (Flaherty et al 2002: 485) eloquently says:

Properly conceptualized ethnographic research becomes a civic, participatory, collaborative project, a project that joins the researcher with the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue.

This re-alignment of power relationships between researcher and participants has obvious positive implications given the dynamics at play in Woodlane Village, such as the incidences of oppression and the stories of resistance that led to the creation of the settlement. The methods of narrative inquiry emphasise agency and choice, which can countermand some of the disempowering energies of exclusion and marginalisation. In addition, as Jackson (1998: 23) asserts, “Recounting one’s experiences in the presence of others is a way of reimagining one’s situation and regaining mastery over it.”

At the same time, the relationship between the private and public aspects of stories is a dynamic and delicate one, which required careful balancing and ongoing negotiations and commitments during the research period and beyond. This includes an appreciation that the lives of participants and researchers are “always in motion” and that this creates new opportunities for “new relationships to emerge, for lives to unfold in unexpected ways, and for the element of surprise to remain; it too means that there is no final telling, no final story, and no singular story we can tell” (Clandinin and Caine 2013: 21).

* * *

TURNING TOWARDS EXPERIENCE

The importance of narratives to human life has been widely acknowledged (Bruner 2004; Mattingly et al 2008; Monteagudo 2011). Recent conceptions of narratives argue that it is “through narrativity that we come to know, understand and make sense of the world” (Hydén 1997: 50). Narratives are both the products and the substrates of subjective and intersubjective experience. As Kleinman and Fitz-Henry (2007: 53) articulate:

Experience is intersubjective inasmuch as it involves practices, negotiation, and contestations with others with whom we are connected. It is also the medium within which collective and subjective processes fuse. We are born into the flow of palpable experience, where our senses are first patterned by the symbols and social interactions of our local worlds. But our emergent subjectivities also return to those symbols and interactions, reconfiguring, repatterning, and sometimes even completely reinterpreting them. Experience, then, has as much to do with collective realities as it does with individual translations and transformations of those realities.

We experience our lives forwards and backwards. Stories, lived and told, remembered and imagined, are the “primary embodiments” of our experiences and of our understandings of our personal and social worlds (Kerby 1991: 3). Storytelling allows us to refashion our personal and collective histories. Present-day insights can overwrite past understandings and shape our vision of the future. Experiences that are separated in space and time can be interwoven.

We are, as Nietzsche asserts, comprised of multiplicities “whose interaction and struggle is the basis for our thought and our consciousness” (1888: 270) or as Jackson (2002: 12) notes, “every person is at once a ‘who’ and a ‘what’ — a subject who actively

participates in the making of his or her world and a subject who suffers and is subjected to actions by others, as well as forces that lie largely outside of his or her control.”²¹

But the sense of ‘living through stories’ often gets lost in the word mill of anthropology as ethnographers codify and translate fieldwork into written form and into theoretical abstractions (Geertz 1998). The very exercise of analysis renders a certain violence upon our stories, especially when reductionism parses an integrated whole, when we try to isolate the threads of the Gordian knot or when we attempt to create theoretical scaffolding around a life. The constitution of individuals is not selective. It entails all of its pleasure and pain, knowledge and ignorance, limitations, and experience. Experience is “unruly” and “elusive” (Mattingly 2000: 184). “It overflows and confounds the words with which we try to capture or analyse it” (Jackson 1998:21). Academic discourse limits the extent to which we can explore the multiple ways in which experience is understood, embodied, and enacted. It is a game where the “chaos of fluid experience is translated into a coherent, authoritative text” (Mattingly 2000: 198). Geertz (1995: 44) articulates this challenge when he writes: “We lack the language to articulate what takes place when we are in fact at work. There seems to be a genre missing.” Describing human experience requires a polyvalent vocabulary — one where silence is as important as sound, one where memory, immediate sensory experience, and imagination co-exist.

Stories allow one to resist totalising and essentialising people’s experiences through the use of labels and categories. There is openness to narrativity. Stories shift through the telling, retelling, and reliving of experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). The conception of self is constructed in the endless reciprocal interchanges with others within a particular social and cultural context. (Duval and Béres 2011). Typologies bleed into one another. Dualistic categories collapse.

²¹ Jackson is summarising Arendt (1958: 181-188)

The fluidity of narratives was apparent in Woodlane Village where stories were told in different places and at different times, shifting in both form and purpose depending on the audience and the circumstances. As Rappaport (2000: 7) observes:

Communities tell stories. Settings tell stories. Visual symbols index stories. People change stories even as they act within them. Even as individuals are shaped by community narratives they are given, those very narratives can be reshaped by the people who receive them.

I remember spending countless hours with Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor and others in Woodlane Village. Relational encounters occurred in a variety of settings including around campfires, on the streets, on the football pitch, in automobiles, in their dwellings and in the townships around Pretoria. In our encounters, I recall numerous instances where they narrated their personal histories, drawing on past experiences to frame present-day realities and projecting their lives into the future. They spoke of shadow lives. In some cases, the stories were confessional in nature, disclosing a multitude of personal struggles. Other times, they were self-aggrandising, as individuals spoke of past accomplishments or of their prowess in navigating the dog-eat-dog world of South Africa. There were stories of grief and crushing losses, stories of hopes and dreams, stories of quiet resignation and defeat or of rage and defiance. Some stories divulged truths and promoted intimacy; others obscured the 'facts', deflected responsibilities, and manipulated situations for personal gain. Stories were a form of currency, exchanged in a marketplace of relationships.

These narratives manifested the complexities of poverty and marginalisation. Although they seemed to be contradictory at times, they captured the improvisational nature of life. The sense of drifting from one event to the next, of living on the 'cusp of the moment', describes an element of living on the margins (Rowe

1999). The narratives mapped on to the temporal quality of experience as individuals engaged in conversations, serendipitous meetings, immediate survival strategies, and ways of coping with boredom and loneliness.

In the course of my critical encounters with people in Woodlane Village, my story also shifted. Strangers became friends. The boundary between 'self' and 'other' collapsed. One cannot be privy to the intimacies of people's narratives, especially those involving suffering and struggle, without being re-oriented to one's own story and to the existential and moral questions posed by the human condition. The exploration of social phenomena often includes provocations of a personal kind. In my case, it forced me to confront my own experiences of vulnerability and emotional pain borne from experiences of immigration, social isolation, and family estrangement. Inquiring deeply into lives of others is a profound social exchange. It is often an unsettling journey characterised by, as Behar (1996: 3) says:

Loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of cowardice, the insight that is always arriving late, as defiant hindsight, a sense of the utter uselessness of writing anything and yet the burning desire to write something...

Narrative processes are essential to navigating the push and pull forces and ambiguities of life. Human life is shaped by dynamic tensions that require response, resistance, reconciliation, accommodation, and/or acceptance. Stories allow us to hold the disparate elements together by integrating and reinterpreting experiences to create a sense of coherence. One can argue that the most elemental form of agency is the choice we make in the stories we tell: what we choose to divulge and what we choose to omit; what surfaces and what gets pushed under. As Kelly (1997: 51)

points out, “To tell one story is to silence others; to present one version of self is to withhold other versions of self.”

It has been argued that the rich and immersive encounters that constitute the process and substance of ethnography disappear as anthropological writing takes a discursive turn away from experience. As Sharman (2007: 119) says:

If we wrote our analyses the way we pursue our fieldwork, we would produce richly textured evocations of experience with the same intimacy, vulnerability, warmth, and honesty. Our written work would exhibit the same commitment to connect with our audience, that is, our readers, to build rapport and establish trust. We would be willing to meet our readers more than halfway, to learn new styles of communication, to stretch ourselves, to be uncomfortable.

Some anthropological authors have suggested that a shift in method, style, and genre is required to imbue anthropological writing with the immediacy and intersubjectivity that are denied through the Kantian pursuit of objectivity. As Behar (1996: 25) has articulated:

The tendency is to depersonalize one’s connection to the field, to treat ethnographic work as that which is “other” to the “self,” and to accumulate masses of data that can be compared, contrasted, charted, and serve as a basis for policy recommendations or at least critique existing practices.

But it may be more accurate to declare that a fundamental repositioning is needed, one that is more than aesthetic, one that radically shifts the relations between ‘subject’ and ‘object’, one that positions experience at the heart of the research endeavour. Central to this realignment is the “pragmatist view of experience,” which

“reasserts the importance of the body and the senses in the production of knowledge” (Sharman 2007: 120).

According to Deweyan (1938) philosophy, experience should be a primary object of investigation. Experience is simultaneously personal and social. We are individuals and should be understood as such, but our experiences occur in a social and temporal context (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 2). Individual experience is constructed in relation to others. As Jackson (2002: 62) says, “Though stories emanate from personal experience, it is not the imprimatur of the individual identity that gives a story value, but the imprimatur of a community.” Furthermore, experience has a quality of continuity in that experiences emerge from other experiences. The remembered past, the lived present, and the imagined future are interconnected — and narratives are forms of representation that describe our experiences over time. As illustrated by the stories interwoven throughout this proposal, human life is “filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 17). As Connelly and Clandinin (2006: 375) articulate:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful.

This has profound implications on the research process and on how questions are framed, negotiated, and explored. The process shifts from a formalistic investigation of the ways of knowing of research participants to a mutual inquiry between researcher and participants into the overlapping dimensions of personal and social experience. As Sullivan reminds us (1995: xiv), “a life is a puzzle to

be decoded, but it is not a solution to the puzzle that one is after; it is an unlayering of the depths of the puzzle so that its mystery can be revealed.” It becomes a process of engaging in the intermediate space “between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (Behar 1996: 174).

* * *

LIVES IN MOTION

This dissertation is an experiment. It is an attempt to capture the sense of travelling through and into the stories of those around us. At the heart of this journey is a series of interlocking and crosscutting²² narratives of five men (myself included) as they reflect on the notions of home and belonging and their common connection to South Africa and to Woodlane Village. These accounts are set against the backdrop of the events that led to the creation of this informal settlement and the larger historical forces that have shaped South Africa.

The first storyline is a two-part account of my entry into the camp and the arc of my experience over the three-month period of fieldwork in 2012 (mid-July to mid-October) and the follow-up visit in August 2013. This is an inward and an outward journey that unfolds chronologically as I navigated relationships both in the settlement and with family and loved ones in South Africa and in Canada. As a researcher, I entered the field with all of the complexities, passions, and vulnerabilities of a human trying to nurture relationships with strangers while honouring the relations I have with myself and those I hold dear. And over the course of these journeys these relationships changed dramatically as I was

²² Crosscutting is an editing technique used in films to depict action occurring at the same time in two different locations. The camera jumps from one event to another, suggesting the simultaneity of actions (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crosscutting> (accessed December 13, 2013)).

exposed to new perspectives and new questions — some strengthened, some strained, and some broke.

The travelogue was written as a series of letters home in the form of glimpses and vignettes that convey the emotions, the sights, the sounds, and the clarity and confusion of my field experience. As such, each entry represents a snapshot in place and time, a single frame in a reel of film. Collectively, they trace an overall arc of experience, illuminating nascent perspectives on home and belonging and emerging lines of inquiry. These insights will be discussed in a subsequent reflection section. The structure and the style of presentation are unconventional and so I am asking readers to take a leap of faith as they travel through and across these vignettes. I also encourage readers to pay attention to the imagery, the colours and the shadings of home and belonging.

The travelogue is the primary structure from which the narrative accounts of Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor are anchored, although this structure is porous. The stories cut in and out of each other. In some places, they overlap and stack on top of one another — with each story filling in holes or creating interesting synergies. In other places, the stories diverge and challenge one another. Each is written in a way that evokes the sporadic, fluid, and shifting way in which people experience and speak about their lives. The stories represent the careful and sensitive interweaving of conversations and discursive fragments captured in hundreds of hours of audio-recordings. As such, they are reconstructions — attempts to embody the perspectives and the voices in a manner that is authentic, while maintaining readability.

The stories are presented in fragmented ways. Memories, anecdotes, and analysis are interspersed. There are holes and empty spaces. Stories begin and end, sometimes without resolution. There are mysteries, hints, and provocations. Queries are made and only partially answered. Within this structure, I will occasionally interject as lines of inquiry present themselves or as discursive fragments provoke deeper reflection on home and belonging. The format is suggestive of how we experience life —

not as a clean and coherent flow of events, but as the back-and-forth movement between immediate experience, memory, and imagination. It also mirrors the way in which stories are told and lived — the monologues, the piecemeal confessions, the fits and starts, the substance and the minutia, the segues, the repetitions and the contradictions, the calls and the responses. As such, the writing is more reminiscent of prose and poetry than it is of traditional academic literature. It is here that the true experiment lies as I grasp for a new form and style to convey the intensity, beauty, and richness of making sense of lives and our social worlds.

As a whole the narratives convey the nuanced and complex ways in which people make sense of home and belonging. In doing so, they reveal how Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor experience life in a temporary settlement in South Africa and the negotiations required to make a home in such a place. Although, the stories are situated within Woodlane Village they speak to the larger experience of being human and the ways in which we create belonging through relationships. They speak of love and loss, of adaptation and resilience, and of the yearning to live in community with others despite the forces pulling us apart. In this way, the stories offer insights of universal relevance, although they also address the unique realities of post-apartheid South Africa.

2

TRAVELOGUE

Part One

JULY 2012

* * *

WEEK 1

There is a pink glow outside the window of the Boeing as it races from Addis Ababa to Johannesburg. The moon is a sliver of white in the sky. I marvel at the dark features of the Ethiopian man sitting next to me — this man with his rich and timeless skin.

* * *

I am enjoying the midday warmth at my *oom's* house in Pretoria. The garden is alive with the chirps of birds and the sound of the domestic worker's broom as he sweeps away the winter debris. In this country, the black man still toils while the white man sips instant coffee in the afternoon.

I am in South Africa preparing to undertake doctoral research in the squatter camp known as Woodlane Village in the wealthy suburb of Moreleta Park. It is a homecoming of sorts for me, a chance to come to terms with the place of my birth, although at this moment I am casting my thoughts back to Canada.

I am uneasy about the relationship I have left behind, this apparition of a woman I saw a week ago when she dropped me off

at the airport. I wonder whether I will be able to maintain a connection with her over the next three months, especially as the gravity of our lives pulls us in opposite directions.

I had planned to travel with her across South Africa at the midpoint of my fieldwork, but our rendezvous was cancelled due to a case of cold feet and colder emotions. I had intended our time together to be a kind of safe harbour, a place to reconnect and counteract the drifting away that comes with distance and separation. I am worried that without this anchor point they may be pulled apart. I am bracing myself for a good-bye.

I once confided that our relationship had taught me the importance of saying hello to those I love, while always being prepared to say good-bye. There is an end to all things, whether by choice, design or circumstance. Everything exists within limits.

* * *

I wonder if she recognises how far I have journeyed with her — that my time with her has been a form of travelling. Even in the moments of tranquillity there was always movement. I am learning to read the signs and symbols. I recognise her joy and pain. I know that beneath her composed exterior she experiences the push and pull of turbulent emotions. I know that in the face of these ebbs and flows all I can do is to remain as still as a mountain to the sea.

* * *

She often asks me to tell her stories. Lately, I seem to be devoid of them, empty of grand adventures, even 88 days in South Africa seems more a crucible than a quest. Most of my recent journeys seem to be in pursuit of calm. They are the stories of my gradual surrender to the things over which I have no control. I am learning to accept the voids, the interrupted plot lines, the twists and turns of life. I am slowly relinquishing the fantasies of what could have been for what is.

* * *

WEEK 2

It has been a year since I was last in Woodlane Village. The place has a familiar feel. The sun hangs low in the sky. It is a warm day in late July. Across the field, where muggers are known to lie in ambush in the tall grasses, the labourers and domestics are returning home from a long day of physical work. They appear tired but jovial. They seem oblivious that their journey takes them on the same narrow winding trail where one of their fellow villagers was shot dead a month ago, over a few rand and a cellphone.

There is evidence of changes in the community since my previous visit. A few more small businesses have sprouted up among the 846 shacks that make up the settlement. Entrepreneurship is thriving. There are barbers cutting hair at the entrance of the temporary settlement. Inside a variety of eating establishments have joined the spaza shops. Chicken, spinach, and *mielies* are cooking in large pots over coals. There is an improvised photo-studio set up against the side of one of the plastic shacks with a painted mural serving as a backdrop for portraits. There are little manicured gardens fenced in with colourful pieces of recycled wood. And, as always, there are children running through the dirt

roads between the shacks. The same dirty and ebullient faces with their smiles full of play and mischief.

In the past year, the settlement has gone through a number of transitions. The churches in the community that once opposed the settlement have become reluctant supporters. The homeowners associations who fought to push the squatters out of their backyard took the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality to court over purported breaches of the conditions of the initial order that created the settlement. Their argument was based on a number of concerns revolving around inadequate influx control and criminal activity in the camp. As a result of their case, the court compelled Tshwane Metro to declare a formal township development in the area. Against the wishes of the homeowners a lasting solution for the temporary settlement is on the horizon. The unwelcome poor will soon be permanent neighbours of the inhospitable rich.

On this particular evening, I am meeting with the village leaders, five individuals who were selected by the 31 block captains to represent the 3000 residents of Woodlane Village on the Executive Committee. There is Donald — the lanky well-spoken Chair of the committee. Next to him is Trevor, a young Zimbabwean who had been the leader of one of the scattered squatter camps known as *Chinyamukwakwa* prior to the formalization of the settlement. Israel, an energetic South African is also present as well as Benjamin another local. William, one of the village busybodies is hovering near the gathering.

I accompanied Colin and Denise to seek the blessing of the village leadership to undertake my fieldwork. This husband and wife are at the heart of the story of this place, having engaged in a decade of advocacy that led to the creation of the settlement. Denise is a soft-spoken woman who grew up speaking Afrikaans. Her husband is a take-no-prisoner, bull of a man from an English-speaking household. They complement each other nicely. Her diplomacy counterbalances his penchant for bashing heads.

A group of small children surrounds Colin as he leans against his white *bakkie*, resting an ailing back, his stomach hanging

precariously over his belt, straining at the buttons of his dress shirt. They are seeking his affection. He laughs and teases them, saying, “I only have 5,000 hugs. If I give them all to you, I will use them all up.” The children with their runny noses shriek with delight.

* * *

I am standing outside of shack number 307. In Woodlane Village every shack has an address and they are organised into blocks. The building is an improvised affair made out chicken wire, bamboo, thick black plastic, plywood, and a variety of other recycled materials. The property is enclosed within a fence constructed of a similar hodgepodge of things. The security of the perimeter seems easy to breach with a pair of tinsnips, but it has enough protrusions to at least snag an intruder.

The gate to the fence is open and Donald is sitting in a tiny courtyard, which he shares with his brother, Christopher, who lives in 308. He is mending a pair of jeans with a sewing machine. Beside him is a pile of trousers with their crotches mysteriously ripped out. On a weathered couch sleep two cats. A painted sign on the side of the shack reads: *Tailoring. One-day service. After 10 days without collecting I sell to cover the cost and losses. We do alterations, zips, and stitches.*

In addition to being a village leader, Donald is the local tailor who acquired his skill in prison and later honed his craft in a boutique in Akasia that translated the styles worn by anorexic models in Paris to the curvaceous frames of African women.

While he is sewing, Donald is speaking rapidly in continuous looping sentences. He was, as Colin says, “vaccinated at birth with a gramophone needle.” He is relaying the Executive Committee’s decision to only accept a donation of meat from a local church under the strict condition that the food not be distributed freely to the camp residents. The village leaders are concerned about charity eroding the self-sufficiency of the community. They have made the decision to use the meat to compensate people for undertaking

small jobs around the settlement such as cleaning up garbage and mending fences. In this way, they will preserve the dignity of the residents. Donald is winding some light blue thread on a spool as he continues his story.

“Jesus, himself, said instead of giving people fish teach them to fish. Because when you are not there to give, they will starve. The only thing you can do is to teach them.

“Now if you decide to just dish things out, that is going to make the people the baddest of the people that there ever was and tomorrow they may even get to curse you for not bringing something to them. And you are just trying to make their lives better. But they will never see it like that, because they think you owe them that. Now how is that possible? You owing people you don’t even know. No, no, no, I don’t think so.

“But this is how we learn. We learn by our mistakes. The sunset, the sunrise, we learn something everyday. Then we get to put that into good use so we can succeed, in whatever we do.

“But this road as I have seen is not an easy one. This road we are travelling is a hard one. You may enjoy it...the hard part comes when you want to get more than we can achieve. But if we accept what we have...this is easy, real easy. You don’t have anything and nobody owes you anything. You just take it as it comes. Now the problem is even though I have whatever I have, I am still worried about something else that somebody else has. That doesn’t take me anywhere. That is worry and worry and more worry for no good reason. There is no reason for that.

“Now can you tell me where jealousy comes from?”

* * *

WEEK 3

It is Saturday afternoon in Woodlane Village. The temperament of this place changes according to the hour and the day and the position of the sun in the sky. During the weekdays, the village is quiet as the majority of the residents are away at work. Children play with improvised toys: a used automobile tire, a rollerblade as a scooter, a piece of wire and a tin can. The women do household chores, while the unemployed and the infirm kill time. In the evenings, the settlement comes alive as families gather around fires to cook meals. On the adjacent soccer pitch, players from the village league practise corner kicks as night falls.

But on Saturday afternoons alcohol sets the mood. Carling Black Label bottles are scattered throughout the village. Men huddle in little groups drinking, gambling, and chatting. The women have their own gathering places. Laundry is washed and hung to dry. The children who mill about on weekdays are conspicuously absent as if they have been hidden away from the affairs of men and drink. Speakers are blasting dance and *kwaito* and Afro Pop from the spazas and *shebeens*. At some establishments, men line up to catch a glimpse of a televised soccer game. The play-by-play blares its feverish staccato above the drone of gas-powered electric generators.

I am strolling through the rows of shacks, alternating between English and Afrikaans as I greet people along the way. Good afternoon. *Goeie middag*. How are you? *Hoe gaan dit?* I am making my rounds, trying to become a familiar face in the settlement. Some individuals recognise me, although I remain a mystery to most of them. They are not sure how to place me. For some, I am tourist, a foreigner. For others, I am one of the many churchgoers who come to the settlement to evangelise. I am neither. But perhaps I am both.

At the western part of the settlement I meet a tall black man wearing a leather baseball cap. The man smells of beer and has the

fragile hospitality of an alcoholic. The man invites me into his home. Moses has an agenda. He lifts up the mattress of his bed and pulls out a photo sealed in a plastic sleeve. It is a self-portrait showing him astride a high-end motorcycle. It is a fantasy of another life. He is hoping to exchange his story for the R6 needed to buy a package of *mielie* (corn) flour. He divulges fragments of his personal history, confessions masked as conversation, stories as commerce.

Moses tells me how he grew up with a childhood friend, a white boy, who his mother had raised as her own. He shares how their lives diverged as they grew older, how his friend joined the army while he, a black man, went to *kaffer* school. He shows a photo of a young man in his early twenties wearing an officer's hat. "You know what I mean by kaffer school?" He tells the story of how two decades later, his childhood friend is a top executive in the ABSA Bank, while he lives in a squatter camp. For the asking price of R6, Moses reveals the story of how, in his country, skin determines destiny.

* * *

It is a Sunday afternoon and the men in the camp are gathered around the football pitch. Most stand. Some sit on stacks of bricks. The younger ones are rambunctious and mill around the edges, pushing and jostling for a vantage point. Football is serious business around here.

At the moment, Trevor's team, the Power Bullets in their white jerseys are taking on their rivals, Vodacom in orange. The game is tied at 1-all. Opposing players are attacking and defending on the dirt field. The dust flies as their feet turn up the ground. The ball leaves traces as it skips over the surface. Most players wear donated equipment, although the odd individual runs barefoot.

One of the Vodacom players, Number 10, a stocky midfielder with talent and good instincts, blows a cleat and tosses the offending shoe to the sidelines, barely missing his stride as he hunts down the ball. He continues with one shoe. Eventually, his

persistence pays off when he scores the game-winning goal with a curving strike that finds the top corner. The Vodacom fans erupt.

Trevor looks disappointed as he removes his jersey. His muscular torso gleams with sweat and his chest is heaving for air. He gathers his team to debrief and prepare for their next match. There are always lessons to be learned and adjustments to be made.

Football is his passion. And he has been one of the key figures in organising the league in Woodlane Village. As a player and team manager, he has been working hard to ensure the Power Bullets are competitive and he has ambitions of testing their abilities in regional tournaments including one in Johannesburg in September. Their performance today was not encouraging, but they did not field their best players so there is room for optimism.

For Trevor, football is a metaphor for life. There is always a reward for sacrifice and disciplined effort. Trevor fled Zimbabwe for South Africa as an illegal immigrant in 2004. He took his chances and now his work ethic has paid off with full-time employment and a five-year visa.

* * *

I put down the receiver of the telephone. The weather has shifted and there is a cool edge in the air as night approaches. At this time of the year, the temperature in Pretoria whipsaws from the mid-twenties to the low-teens as soon as the sun drops. It is not uncommon to find frost in the morning.

I have grown fond of these periodic calls to Canada — this telephonic mystery of sounds being bounced from one part of the globe to the other, from wires to waves, from voice box to the tiny bones of the inner ear.

I enjoy hearing her voice on the line, the chance to know her. I remember our relationship briefly falling apart the month before I left for South Africa, the gap that appeared between us as if the ground we stood on had suddenly been swallowed. Since then we

have talked more frequently and candidly than we did previously. On the other side of an ending is a beginning.

Today, she tells me she spent the previous evening at the horse races. She sounds radiant, alive. I can imagine the excitement in her eyes. I appreciate the metaphor of playing the odds, picking a winner, and praying the animal doesn't pull up lame. The mechanics of due diligence and blind luck.

In my pocket I carry a pair of wooden dice she gave me as a gift with the simple instruction that "when in doubt just roll 'em."

* * *

In Pretoria, as in other cities in South Africa, drivers are warned to exercise caution at intersections to avoid smash-and-grabs and carjackings. They are further advised to keep all valuables in the boot of their cars away from plain sight. A purse or a suitcase on an adjacent seat is an invitation for trouble.

At many robots, street vendors hawk sunglasses, cellphone chargers, and other merchandise. According to a newspaper article, a woman was approached at an intersection by a vendor who pointed a pistol at her, hidden among a handful of electrical devices. Upon seeing the weapon, the woman commented in a polite, but straightforward manner, "No, thank you. I already own one." The would-be robber was too flabbergasted to continue.

Threats are real when they become the grist for humour.

* * *

It snowed in the Gauteng Province. Highways around Johannesburg were closed. Snow even touched Pretoria, a rare occurrence; some say the first time in 50 years. In the settlement, people seek shelter indoors from the winds carrying bitterness across the fields. Voices can be heard through the thin plastic walls of the shacks. Male voices, disembodied, like prisoners plotting in their cells.

“There are people you will never see during the day. They hide under rocks. They only come out at night. They cut the fences and they wait in the fields. Beware of the man who never shows his face during the day.”

I am walking through the village with two boys. I hold the hand of the younger one while the older boy strides alongside. We march without speaking. We fall silently into lockstep. Our language is movement. Up and down the rows we go.

* * *

WEEK 4

Donald takes a drink from a big bottle of beer. He is wearing a denim shirt, jeans and a white floppy hat. He has strong features, high cheekbones, and intense eyes. It has been a difficult day at the church where he works. A coffee urn has been stolen and now everyone is under scrutiny.

“We are all standing around. Everybody is claiming innocence. But this cannot be. And they have the dogs out sniffing everybody. But we all are all over the place. Our smell is everywhere. And so now even the dogs are confused and frustrated. It is ridiculous.

“It is this rotten potato thing. One rotten potato can spoil the whole bag. And now there are eyes on everybody. I feel uncomfortable, very uncomfortable. I cannot be myself. Eyes on everybody. Now, now, now we cannot laugh. And you know, work without laughter is just work.

“Sometimes, at the church, they try to make a war between man and woman. This is not right. Man needs woman. Man comes from woman’s body. And woman needs man. It has been this way for all times. Even the grass that grows over there grows for a reason. So why do we forget this?”

* * *

I have had a difficult time in the camp. These are early days. I feel out of place. The colour of my skin and my accent mark me as an outsider, even though I still speak Afrikaans. This is a new South Africa and my heritage places me on the wrong side of history. I feel awkward, insecure in my ability to relate to others. This is an old wound, scars from my childhood experiences of immigrating to Canada — always the one on the edge of the group, the one who doesn’t know the proper codes of belonging. I feel the impulse to hide, to become invisible. I wonder what compelled me to come here, why I always dive headlong into the unknown.

* * *

Isaac has died and his shack has been demolished as part of the court order that limits the size of the settlement. An empty space and debris are all that remain of his previous life. It was his third time at death's door. He refused his antiretrovirals and spent his final days in a hospice. Towards the end, he simply slipped into silence.

Since then the village leaders have been trying to locate his relatives so that a proper burial can be observed. His spirit must be spoken to and comforted before he is taken to his ancestral home. If the rites are not attended to, his spirit will not settle and there will be problems: scratches in the middle of the night, nocturnal footsteps, the movement of household objects, the parapsychology of torment. Isaac will be buried sitting upright. A cow will be slaughtered and his body will be wrapped in the hide of the animal before the hole is filled.

* * *

In the news

SA's billion-rand arms deal subs left high and dry.
R500,000 worth of lingerie missing from stolen Fiat Uno.
Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital terminally ill.
34 miners killed at Marikana Hill during a standoff with police.²³

²³ On August 16, 2012 the South African Police Service opened fire on striking miners at the Lonmin platinum mine near Rustenburg. The shooting incident was the single most lethal use of force by security forces against civilians since the apartheid era.

* * *

Colin and Denise have led unconventional lives. They have been liberated from the burdens of keeping up appearances and their actions fighting for the village have proven this — although in actuality their resistance to conformity was established decades earlier. They met in late November 1972. He was 19 years old and she was 16. He remembers her clearly: flared bell-bottom jeans, a tight green top, bare midriff, and wooden clogs. It was a Saturday and he proposed to her on the Sunday. She thought about it for a whole day and said yes on the Monday. They married six months later. Their journey started with a leap of faith.

Colin prides himself on decisiveness. In his world, there are only two choices: to act or not to act. As he says: “Make a decision. If it doesn’t work out, make another decision.” But for Colin, somewhere between decision and action there is always prayer.

In the early days of their marriage, they lived in the Vaal Triangle, an area infamous for its industrial pollution and its townships: Evaton, Orange Farm, Boipatong, Sebokeng, Sharpeville. At the time, the townships were rife with internecine conflicts and stand-offs with the South African Security Forces. Neighbours were pitted against neighbours and the police fomented unrest as much as they maintained law and order. Necklacing, massacres, and the death rattle of AK-47s were the norm. Curfews were in effect. In later years, security forces imposed states of emergency in Evaton (1985) and Boipatong (1992) in response to escalating violence.

People did not venture out in the dark in Vanderbijlpark. Nighttime was the dominion of the hyena and the *tokoloshe*²⁴ that steals children, rapes women, and bites off the toes of those who forget to put bricks beneath the legs of their beds before they fall asleep. *Passop vir die tokoloshe*.

²⁴ In Zulu mythology, *tokoloshe* is a dwarf-like water sprite. My grandmother used to warn me that the tokoloshe would steal me away if I misbehaved.

During the turmoil of the 1980s Colin and Denise started a church. They ministered to the jobless and the indigent before finding their way into Sebokeng. They travelled where few whites went at the time. Their experiences shaped the Christian activism that would mark their subsequent community development efforts: *Actions are more important than words; never do for others what they can do for themselves; address root causes; justice trumps charity; risk the unknown; live with faith and humility; every problem contains its own solution.*

In the mid-nineties, the fervour that fuelled their ministerial work was waning and they were contemplating new challenges. Then Colin fell ill. They were at a crossroads. They packed up and moved to Moreleta Park in 1996.

It took time for them to regain their equilibrium. Colin convalesced and Denise prayed. And they both grieved the temporary absence of a purpose-driven life — the existential vacuum left by walking away from fourteen years of spiritually rewarding work.

In 2001, they heard the call, an echo in the soul: “*Go to the poor.*” Their response was to search out the homeless. They went to the fields, to the borderlands, to the hidden places in their backyard. They ventured to where the destitute cowered from the rich, out of sight and out of mind, in Pretoria East.

* * *

Make a decision and act.

* * *

Benjamin motions to the land outside the fence, the veld that plunges to Garsfontein Road, the sloping ground transected by trails, short cuts through the dry brush. The surrounding hills are built up with expensive homes, suburban estates named after that which was destroyed in their making: Silver Stream, Woodhill, Mooikloof, Clearwater, Meadow Heights, Brookside, the Wilds.

This was farmland once, the place of Benjamin's birth. Cattle grazed here before gated communities walled off the fields, turning productive land into residential property. Agrarian livelihoods existed before the countryside became the city.

In the foreground, Benjamin's garden stretches between two latrines, a band of grass and flowerbeds awaiting the summer rain. The shoots of new growth are coiled for the change of seasons, weeks away. He speaks enthusiastically about the prospects of new life. Everything has its season. He affixes a wooden trellis to the chain-link fence. All living things need support to grow.

Benjamin is a small man, but he has an expansive vision. He is the proverbial gardener, pulling weeds and pruning, looking for new opportunities to cultivate. He speaks rapidly, itemising the concerns that need to be addressed in Woodlane Village, punctuating his observations with "you see" and "let me tell you." The illegal taverns are nuisances. Men squander their money on drink and beat their wives. The security guards at the gates of the camp are lax on influx control. The latrines need to be cleaned. There is a hole in the fence. You see?

* * *

Law of Equivalence:

Boerewors sells for R58 per kilo.²⁵
Razorwire sells for R40 per metre.

²⁵ *Boerewors* is a type of sausage popular in South Africa.

* * *

WEEK 5

“God can strike a straight blow with a crooked stick.”

— My aunt citing a Christian saying.

* * *

From a neighbouring tent the sounds of a Sunday service can be heard — prayers, hymns, voices raised in revelation. Donald shakes his head in disapproval. “People should not be playing church,” he grumbles. “Church is not fools’ business.”

He sits down and places the mirror at angle before plugging his electric shears into an inverter connected to a 12-volt battery. He begins trimming his hair, shaving down to the bare scalp. It is a windy day and the hum of the clippers is barely audible above the billowing of tarpaulins and the creaking of the bamboo fencing. A plastic bag is flapping wildly nearby.

Above the din, Donald talks about his life: how he grew up in this part of Pretoria before urban sprawl covered the jungle; how his father had worked at a nearby golf course before he died, leaving the family destitute; how at 17-years-old he began his career as a petty criminal before graduating to being a top dog in the Air Force, a prison gang infamous for organising jail breaks. Donald exchanged one jungle for another and somewhere in the process lost eighteen, perhaps twenty years of his life. He is not sure how long he spent behind bars. All he knows is that he entered jail as a juvenile and was released as a middle-aged man.

“I was still a young man. Trust me. I was still young. I went out there not even knowing what was going on. Because I get to find ways of supporting me and my family. And the ways I chose were not the good ways that one should choose, anyway. But now, if you

know all the things in this world, you get to pay after doing whatever you do.

“You know people don't understand. I grew up stupid. I found out about things whilst I was in jail. To be honest with you, the growing up made me hate white people. They had all this stuff and calling you, telling you to call his young child, '*kleinbaas*' (little master) and all that stuff. That is where the hatred started and I got into this stupid mind-set that I'm reclaiming what's my own. And it was real wrong.

“I found late that no, that was not the case. It is not working that way. Because, now, it got to the point when I was in jail where we were mixed, white and black. And I found out some of them whites were working for me. They would wash my washing. I would give them tobacco, buy them BB cigarettes, whatever. Now I started thinking maybe not all those people I was trying to hurt were as wealthy as I thought. They were only whites and then I didn't understand. Because here these people don't have nothing. It is me they are begging from.”

Donald turns off the electric shears. He takes out a small brush to sweep away the loose hairs that have accumulated on the back of his neck and shoulders. He checks the clippers, removing the stubble from the steel teeth. He is methodical, meticulous.

“Before I went to those places I ran. I didn't even know there are people calling themselves *Ngangelizwes*. My main thing I did is getting into the police station, before I get even to the fingerprinting I am out of that place. You know, I would go out like I am just going around the corner and I am gone. Sometimes, in one day they are catching me twice, but I am going to make it the third time.

“Ja, now, I would run until I am as big as this world. That's where the name *Ngangelizwe* comes. I will run until *I am as big as this world*. You will find me nowhere.

“But eventually, I couldn't even make it and I find out I have all this cases. And your card is going to be written as *ontsnapper* or escaper. Out there, I found out in jail I get to be somebody else

again. There you find there are those types of gangsterism. It was by choice or by design. I am not sure. But I found out I was one of the gangsters too.

“Yebo. I was the leader of the Air Forces. The Air Forces are the guys who run in jail, the ones who escape. We deal only with escaping.

“You should know. There is the Big Five. Those we call them the dogs, because they work with the police in jail. The Big Five. And then they just eat extra food that is there. That is their reward.

“And then we have the Twenty-Sixes, the ones who deal with drugs, robbery. And then we have the Twenty-Sevens. Their flags are plain red with no other colour. The Twenty-Sevens are the guys who are dealing with...if I hate you enough I just go to buy them and I am not buying them very expensive, I can buy them with a packet of tobacco. They are going to kill you. Dead. The Twenty-Sevens deal only with blood.

“And the Twenty-Eights. The Twenty-Eights are now the owners of the jail. They call jail ‘home.’ Jail is their home. The Twenty-Eights are the ones who rape because they take the other men and make them wives. That is the Twenty-Eights now.”

Donald pauses for a moment, gathers up his materials and carries them into his shack. He returns with two razor blades. He sits down and begins trimming callouses from his thumb, close to his fingernail, gingerly cutting away the thick dead skin.

“And that is when I found out that I am *Ngangelizwe*. You know this gangsterism thing. How does it work? Let’s say you are kind of like 3000 gang members. You will never know one another, all of you. And if one of you does something wrong, it takes all of you down. So one thing you should know...let’s say by choice that somebody who is your brother by number yesterday stabbed somebody and you don’t know because you are not mixing with them, you are keeping aside, but you have the number. Those guys they need to stab you back or kill you back if there is a killing.

“Because this stabbing of the people of number is a demeaning act. There is this thing called, ‘*Jy moet die bloed gaan haal.*’ You

must go and fetch the blood or take it back. If you don't take it back you should remember: you have a *number*.

“So if it is me, an Air Force Three, and I am being stabbed by a Big Five, I have only two days to decide. On the third day, I must go and stab back in order to be on my same position. And if it is a Big Five he has four days. The fifth day if it passes don't even think about it. Don't go beyond your number. It won't work. You work towards your number.

“So you should be up to date about what is happening around, so that you know where is your problem coming from. Wherever you sleep when you wake up you should know exactly. When there is problem you should know, which side it is coming from. The ones who are just getting hurt are in this only by blundering and then he doesn't know anything. Those are the ones who are the easy targets, because whenever there is a war they don't look for the ones who are looking. They are looking for the ones who are kind of like sleeping walking, walking sleeping.

“Even if you are alone. Even if you are alone, one man, you are representing all those who are there so that is how it works. There is no excuse. That is why if you get to die, you just get to die. Number is a stupid thing, because it doesn't ask you. It calls you.

“And now I tell you, for all those years, that is when I saw that God is really great. Trust me. You are just standing there! People are being hurt. Some are being killed. Nothing touches you. Nothing. Nothing. That's when I saw, 'No. I am not alone here.' Something big is protecting me. I am telling you, man!

“It will only be blood. It is your blood. And the other one's blood. And the other one's blood. Not my own. While I am standing there! I am not even doing this. Just standing. Some people are losing ears, eyes, noses, hands. Look some are dying. I am just standing there like that. But I am not getting hurt and I am not getting hit. Now, now, I am not talking about once. I am talking for all those years. Now, that was something. I said, “Wow! This is something.”

* * *

“Respect man. He is a different animal.
A man may smile at you one moment and kill you the next.
Respect man. He is a different animal.”

* * *

It has been over a month since I left Canada. Phone calls, emails, and social media create a semblance of connection, but I am starting to feel estranged. My experiences in the camp are pulling at me, turning me away from my comfortable existence. There are insights that only become apparent when I step away from the echo chamber of my life.

I cringe at the daily broadcasts from home, the stream of status updates and exercises in self-promotion, the communication of abundance: this is the meal I prepared last night; this is the wine I consumed; these are my beautiful friends; this is how I pleasure myself; this is the eastern philosophy that allows me to cope with my attachments; this is the yoga that teaches me to breathe in designer pants; this is the magazine article that illustrates my liberal sensibilities; this is the evidence of my enlightenment: my gay friend, my indigenous cousin, my polar bear surfing on a shrinking ice floe, my fieldwork in a squatter camp.

We post status updates so that we can hear our own voices. In the absence of flesh-and-bone interactions, the echo reminds us we are alive, that somewhere we belong. In Woodlane Village, the binary of life-and-death requires no such interface. Everyone knows that words cannot fill an empty belly. Everyone knows that dust is dust; that the day is hot and the night is cold; that *pap* requires flour, water, and fire; that no man or woman can long live alone.

* * *

I am susceptible to this drifting away, this pulling away from memory and feeling. In the afternoons, I make my way to the camp. I walk the rows. I say hello, wave my hand, and nod. Fall into conversations. Sense the waning sun on my skin. The dust in my nose. The smell of burning garbage, plastic, and paper. The sounds of voices, music, the chopping of wood, children at play. I try to remember where I came from. And what I left behind. As I forget, so am I forgotten. This wandering man. This drifting, ever-drifting, wandering man.

* * *

She came to him in the middle of the night. Somewhere in the dream of swimming the Limpopo River, water up to his neck. Crossing the border into South Africa, the crocodiles carrying away the bodies, the rushing water carrying away his clothes. When he reached the shore he was naked and she was waiting. On the other side of the electric fence where the lions roar, she waited.

* * *

WEEK 6

Corinne is arriving tomorrow. I am looking forward to taking a break from the fieldwork to tour the country with her. She is a Haitian friend who accepted my invitation to travel with me when my plans with my girlfriend fell through. I will appreciate her companionship on the 2400 KM drive from Kruger National Park to Plettenberg Bay and on to Cape Town. And I am thrilled she will have the opportunity to experience a country she has dreamed of visiting ever since she heard the tales of her mother's pilgrimage to South Africa in the 1990s. I am not sure how I will introduce her to my family. I am apprehensive about how they will react to the colour of her skin and I do not want to expose her to prejudice masquerading as politeness. I suspect that some of my relatives will be uncomfortable and I can only imagine the scandalous talk that will ripple through my family after the fact. I feel conflicted. *Am I selling my family short? Am I complicit in the bigotry by wanting to protect her?* After much agonising, I inform my tannie about Corinne's arrival. I offer to make a courtesy visit in Plettenberg Bay on our way to the Cape. They have a holiday home in this coastal town and will be in Plett when Corinne and I pass through.

* * *

I am sitting on a large boulder on the shore in Cape Town. It is a clear, sunny day, 22 degrees Celsius. By all accounts, it is one of the fairest days of what is reported to have been a long and miserable winter. I am enjoying the fresh air. I have always found the action of waves to be therapeutic. There are things that only nature can do for the human spirit.

My time in South Africa has been unsettling and I have been flirting with depression and anxiety for a number of weeks now. The combination of isolation, culture shock, and the emotional

overload of trying to make sense of this place have conspired to upset my balance. A recent phone call from my oom has also made me feel unwelcome. I can still hear the stinging rebuke of: "Please give us a break!" My proposal to make a house call in Plettenberg Bay was somehow misinterpreted as a request to stay over and as an imposition on their privacy. I am in shock at the misunderstanding.

Over Sea Point, two airplanes suddenly appear. Flying in unison, left to right. I can hear the growl of their engines increase as they dive towards the ocean before pulling into a synchronised loop. They do a number of flybys and then disappear into the blue and cloudless sky.

* * *

No use permitting
some prophet of doom
To wipe every smile away.
Come hear the music play.
Life is a Cabaret, old chum,
Come to the Cabaret!

* * *

On the television screen, the emcee is addressing the audience in the final scene of Bob Fosse's film adaptation of the musical.

"Meine Damen und Herren. Mesdames et Messieurs. Ladies and Gentlemen. Where are your troubles now? Forgotten? I told you so! We have no troubles here. Here life is beautiful. The girls are beautiful. Even the orchestra is beautiful."

After a series of video montages where the Kit Kat Girls break into a reprise of 'Willkommen', the camera closes in on the master of ceremonies as he says, 'Auf Wiedersehen.' He disappears behind a curtain. All that remains is a single spotlight and a moment of silence before the camera pans across the audience. The sound of drumrolls can be heard. In the distorted image, faces can be seen,

colours and shapes, the outlines of men and women. Suits, dresses, and tan uniforms. A woman's hat. Swastikas on red armbands. The film ends with a crashing symbol before the credits roll.

The scene is simple, elegant, and disturbing — and the message seems to have hit a little too close to home. Peter moves uncomfortably in his chair.

“I am not sure what to do. I feel like an economic prisoner. All I can do is watch as things crumble around us. There is an old joke: ‘What is the definition of a patriotic South African?’ A boer who is unable to sell his farm.”

Peter is 60 years old. He remembers coming to South Africa from Rhodesia when he was 27, looking for freedom and opportunities. At the time, he was only permitted to leave the country with the equivalent of R500. He eventually returned to Rhodesia to work for three years at a telecom where he earned a pension of 1,200 Rhodesian dollars. In 1979 he formally made the “chicken run” to South Africa following the political and economic upheavals in Rhodesia. He recalls returning to what became Zimbabwe twenty years later. At the time, inflationary pressures had driven the cost of a single postage stamp to 3,900 Zimbabwean dollars — far more than the value of his pension. It is this outcome he fears as Julius Malema threatens to make South Africa ungovernable.

“I ask you, where do I go as a retired, white male?”

* * *

WEEK 7

“Plenty sits still. Hunger is a wanderer.” — Zulu proverb

* * *

This is not one place. It is a many-sided place, a mercurial place — a place that shifts as soon as you try to touch it. It is a place where stories fold in and out of each other, where reality and fiction co-exist and are mutually reinforcing. Every truth includes a lie and every lie contains an element of truth. In this place, a falsehood is as comforting as an actuality. It is, as Donald says, “a compendium of wonders.”

* * *

My daily routine

I wake up at 7:00 AM and check my BlackBerry in anticipation of messages from home, some email, text or meaningful status update. Usually, there are few, but I look anyway. By 8:00 AM I have breakfast, my regular rations of eggs, avocados, tomatoes, and instant coffee. My oom skims through a stack of newspapers, while my *tannie* reads a book propped up on a stand made from pressed wood that has been laser-cut by a distant uncle — the same uncle whose son was shot to death a number of years ago over four cellphones. The maid, Martha, arrives around this time. She wears multiple layers of colourful clothing, long striped socks and a grey turtleneck underneath a light blue dress, a white apron and green sweater over top. A purple woollen beret covers her head. She has been working with my family since her late teens, more than thirty years now. She says, “*Goeie môre Oupa*” and “*Goeie môre Ouma*” before starting her chores. She sings while she works.

After breakfast, I usually ruminate about the upcoming day, look out at the swimming pool covered to keep out leaves, make

overtures to read a novel or research article on my iPad, make half-hearted attempts to transcribe the previous days audio-recordings from the camp. By around 10:00 AM I head to a local gym to fend off middle-age. I am perfectly coordinated in a bright blue athletic top with matching blue *takkies*. I walk past the old Doberman lying by the garage where the Mercedes and Land Rover are parked. I open and then close the padlocked gate before striding down the sidewalk that runs along the high walls protecting the multi-million rand homes. My path crosses driveways made of carefully interlocked bricks. Expensive automobiles are parked behind sliding metal gates. Dogs bark at me. I pass a resident walking the opposite direction, a chubby fellow with a quick wit. We greet each other and make fun of a gardener who is trimming the patchy winter grass with a lawnmower, sending huge plumes of red dust into the air. "He is mowing the dirt," the man jokes.

My workout lasts about an hour-and-a-half. To enter the facility I use a magnetic swipe card to clear the revolving security door. Once inside, I recognise familiar faces: the young man with a scar on his throat, evidence of a tracheotomy, the friendly one who always says hi; the elderly woman working with a biokineticist to learn to walk again, black socks and black canvas shoes, the fragile, teetering gait of a stroke survivor; and at the far end of the room by the stacks of weights the stocky man doing repetitions before a full-length mirror, the vain one who steals a glimpse of himself in every reflective surface.

After my daily exercise I spend a couple of hours listening to audio-recorded conversations with the camp residents: the stories of how they arrived at this place and where they see themselves going. In broken English, they describe the intersection of faith and fatalism.

At around 1:30 PM I have lunch with my oom and tannie, a substantial meal of potatoes, squash, green beans and beef in a tomato sauce. By 2:30 PM I take the 20 KM drive to the informal settlement. My journey takes me through several posh neighbourhoods and shopping districts. At most intersections,

hawkers are selling paraphernalia. Beggars, both black and white, are also common, although the white ones less so. The panhandlers have signs written on cardboard pleading for jobs and for money for bread, milk or pap. Some carry cups they shake. Most have detached looks.

Usually I arrive at Woodlane Village at around 3:00 PM or so. I take a quick walkabout to say hello to people and to check on things. I stroll the length of the settlement before circling back. I stop in at number 307. On most days, I find Donald sitting in front of his sewing machine.

By around 6:30 PM, just before sundown, I return home. On the side of Hans Strydom road, people are lighting fires before darkness sets in. They sit in semi-circles. Behind them a giant sign warns of “Armed Response” in screaming red letters.

Later in the evening, I usually share a simple meal with my tannie, brown bread with cheese or avocado, while she reads through the paper, *Beeld* or *Rapport*. The news is rarely good. She narrates the top stories: another murder somewhere, another boer killed; Woolworths not hiring whites, black empowerment gone awry; the miners’ strike in Gauteng and protests over municipal services to townships in the Northern Cape; the political machinations of Zuma and Malema; school books disappearing in Limpopo; the elimination of Afrikaans as a language of instruction; the further encroachment on her way of life. With each headline, her voice grows shriller.

* * *

My oom and tannie lead a comfortable and ordered existence in Pretoria. My uncle cannot imagine having a better quality of life anywhere else. He is dismissive of South Africans who have decided to seek greener pastures elsewhere. One exception is his son who, as a physician, earns far more money in Canada than he could in South Africa. According to his uncle, life is beautiful here and the only thing one has to remain mindful of at all times is the “threat of bodily harm.”

* * *

A lesson on spaces

1. The study

My oom spends hours alone in his study in front of his computer managing the various moving parts of his personal empire: properties, investments, battles over tax assessments. With the exception of breaks taken for meals and extracurricular activities, he can be found in his office most of the day and well into the evening. It is, as he says, “his comfort zone.”

Across from his *geelhout* desk is an entertainment unit with a large flat-screen TV that is usually turned to a sports channel, rugby or athletics. The office is lined with testaments to his various accomplishments. On top of a bookshelf are a series of black-and-white framed photos of the various sports teams he has been a member of since grade school: St Andrews First Rugby Team 1955, Eastern Province Junior Athletic Team 1957, Rhodes University Athletic Team 1958, UCT-US Combined Universities Athletic Team 1960, WP Athletic Team, SA Championships 1961. Inside a glass cabinet hang the countless medals he has been awarded as a Masters Athlete. In 2009, he received National Colours for his excellence in the 100 metres, 200 metres, and the javelin — one of his proudest accomplishments and one that he mentions often. On the door of his study are reproductions of his various degrees:

Bachelor of Commerce with Honours, MBA, Masters in Urban Planning, and Doctorate in Economics. Above the entrance, hang further testaments to his personal exploits: a framed image and a garland of dried flowers from summiting Mount Kilimanjaro, a Music Examination Final Certificate for the piano and a document verifying he reached the North Pole on the Nuclear Ice Breaker *50 Let Pobedy* on July 14, 2010.

Besides a single black-and-white photo of his wife when she was still in her twenties, there is no record of the rest of his family: his daughter and three sons or his grandchildren. The space commemorates personal achievement.

2. The kitchen

My aunt, a former nurse, spends most of her day with people. Playing tennis, attending various bible study groups, praying with the maid, giving injections to the elderly, playing bridge with old friends. She has a full and rich social life. When she is home, she spends most of her time in the *kombuis*, preparing meals for her husband. Both the fridge and freezer are covered with colour photos of her family: her siblings, her husband and their children, and their numerous grandchildren. At the centre of her life are God, family, and friends.

* * *

Diary entry: Apartheid writ small

I am still reeling from the fallout of my uncle's outburst. It had been an encounter eerily similar to ones I experienced growing up: the explosive attacks fuelled by assumptions; the tendency to look for faults in the other person's argument rather than to listen to the sentiments being expressed; the quickness to criticise another's character; the unwillingness to entertain other perspectives and seek common ground; and the tendency to dismiss another

person's perspectives with reproaches followed by the rationalising away of the heavy-handedness.

In hindsight, I should not be surprised by this encounter. From my first arrival, there were warning signs. A two-page document outlining expectations was one indicator that I was entering a highly regulated environment. Spaces were demarcated. There were "comfort zones" where I was not permitted. My uncle informed me early on that I was invading my aunt's personal space when I joined her in the mornings as she cooked breakfast. This was week one. I only discovered later that she enjoyed having me around and that my uncle fabricated the concern.

Ironically, I was content avoiding common areas like the kitchen or the television room. And private spaces such as my uncle's study I considered off-limits as a matter of principle anyway. The insult came in the patronising way in which these rules were explained. The injury occurred when he finally expressed his resentments in a tirade of manufactured grievances: "Please give us a break!"

This experience is an object lesson of the fragility of concepts like home and belonging. It demonstrates the thin line between spaces that are welcoming and unwelcoming. Home spaces are created and recreated, defended, and destroyed through social interactions. Differentials in power are at play. In an instant, the geography of my uncle's home has changed for me. Spaces that were previously considered safe have become hostile and uncertain. My freedom of movement within the house has become constrained. Common areas have become inhospitable and I have changed my behaviours to accommodate the altered interpersonal landscape.

The experience is reminiscent of growing up in a household where family dynamics and patterns of communication and individual dispositions collided with the immigration experience. The result was an environment filled with love, tensions, silences, assumptions, and contradictory messages. Highly charged emotions brewed under the surface, waiting to erupt at the slightest

provocation. Home was a contested landscape that I was never sure how to navigate safely. There was affection in this space, but it was conflated with high expectations and my fears of parental disapproval. In my mind, love and acceptance were conditional terms tied to performance and achievement — to excellence, to not making mistakes, to not showing weakness, to the right words and deeds. All of this was confounded by my attempts as a child and teenager to straddle the conservative values of an Afrikaner household with the more liberal values of Canadian society. At times, it felt as if I existed in the awkward space between two worlds — neither of which I completely fit into. When arguments escalated at home, my sense of belonging was threatened on multiple levels. The skirmishes put me on the outside of my family and this fed into my estrangement and sense of personal failure. My role in these conflicts provided evidence of my unworthiness as a son. Our relationships became polarised due to my struggles to cope with the disconnects and due to my parents' powerlessness to adequately bridge the growing relational fissures, in part, because they were also fighting for their lives. In a fractious emotional environment, the gaps were often filled with suspicion, frustration, and disdain. My struggles were interpreted as defiance rather than as the floundering attempts of a teenager to make sense of emotions and isolation. And I, in turn, often misattributed my parents' motivations. Intellectually, I had a sense of the dynamics at play, but lacked the emotional wisdom to put things right. I was left to reflect on and replay every negative encounter looking for my culpability and some path out and in the process entrenched a pattern of thinking that leaned heavily towards self-recrimination, shame, a hypersensitivity to the judgments of others, and a feeling that I needed to change who I was in order to be accepted.

That being said, it was also a home where I knew I was loved. And herein lies the complexity of the concept of home and belonging because the heart is able to embrace contradictions in ways that the head is unable to.

* * *

WEEK 8

I've searched the open sky
To find the reason why
Oh Lord, why Lord

The colour of my skin
Is said to be an awful sin
Oh Lord, why Lord

—Brook Benton

* * *

I am driving through Moreleta Park. I am nearing the end of my time in the country. There are only five weeks left before I will board a plane to Edmonton and face a different world. I received an email earlier in the day informing me unceremoniously that my relationship back home was over. Instant communication is a blessing and a curse. It was a direct message, unwavering and devoid of sentimentality. I always admired her ability to be blunt, a noble quality in my opinion. Mercifully, the demands of traffic are distracting me from the blow, although I still feel the shock, the calm of dissociation. Squeezed into the VW Polo with me are Donald as well as Donald's fiancée, Johanna and his brother, Christopher. We are on their way to visit a number of townships around Pretoria. We are retracing Donald's life.

“Look around you, Pieter. It grows to be this town where I don't even know which street to go, but I was born here. Because the jungle, it just crossed that way and that way and that way. Now it is a town, but I don't know which street is which, because it was planned by somebody who didn't even know what the jungle was.”

We merge on to Hans Strydom Road or Solomon Mahlangu Drive as it is now called. Originally, the road commemorated a Prime Minister nicknamed 'the Lion of the North' — an Afrikaner Nationalist and proponent for segregation. But it has been renamed to honour a hero of the struggle who was hanged by the apartheid regime on April 6, 1979 for the deaths of two white civilians killed during a shoot-out with South African police. According to the ANC, Mahlangu's execution was an act of political murder.

Donald points to the mansions built on the surrounding hills, the gated communities, and the shopping malls that sprawl around a water reservoir built in the shape of a cocktail glass.

"But, Pieter, my worry again is some people are accumulating wealth as best they could. Thousands, millions and millions in order for them to just die and leave those stuff out there for people who didn't even sweat for it. They are always after money. They just don't say enough is enough. So what does that tell you?"

"You mean like Malema?"

"Yeah! Yeah! Don't talk about that one. Okay, let's leave that one be. Because if we get into that one we are going to get to the point where we find people say bad things. But that guy, I don't like that guy at all. Because he doesn't seem to have that...sense of belonging.

"Look, this is not a thing of black or white. This is a thing of you being a human being and respecting peoples' rights or something. That guy doesn't have that. Now I am wondering if he's respecting his parents too. So, I doubt it. That guy is bad. Look, Pieter, if you were raised in a home — 'home.' Now I don't mean a 'house.' A house is where somebody can get away from cold or maybe rain. Now a home is where they can make sure, you know, that you are comfortable and you are loved. And you feel loved and so that you can also give love to people. But what do think of Malema?"

"I mean I am not making this as a joke. That guy doesn't have any respect. Look those people who died there by the Lonmin

mine...that was not a joke! People died out there. It might be a tragic mistake, but who would make that an opportunity for you to be on top? No, no, that is exploitation at its worst form. You can't do that. If you are meaning to go out there you would have another way of going out there, instead of that one. That one was bad. But look he uses it to the best of his ability. Ah, maybe it is his God-given talent. I don't know? But if that's a talent, then I don't know any more what talent is.

"Trust me, Pieter. No, no, no, no. I am not worried Malema is my own colour of skin. But hey, he does things that makes me steam in the inside, because if I had the choice I could just get him by the scruff of his neck and do stuff to him! Because look man you don't...if he was my child or my family I would just go, 'Hey boy! Come here! What are you doing?'

"Look, he is misleading people. If you believe in something you don't have to just take the whole world with you. No. Go down alone. You were born alone. You are going to die alone. Why take the crowd with you?

"You know I have this old man, you know this Mandela old guy. He seemed stupid to some people because they said after taking over as President he should have said, 'Kill the whites!' No! Look, in this nation...not one race can live without the other. We are here to be together. No one can live without the other. So, if you think you can live without another, you are wrong.

"Look let's use the example of Zimbabwe. They just tried to chase the whites away. Are they faring better? No! They are worst than they did the first time. Because, look, you take a plot from the white man but you can't manage it. Now where you going? What are you doing? Look maybe if they said, Pieter, teach me to drive. You are a white man. You came with this driving thing. Now, you teach me. I'm going to teach somebody. Somebody teach somebody. We are going somewhere. We are growing in this. But now I am taking this and then leaving you out there and I am not going to teach anybody else. So it is only me, if I die then it dies

with me! Is that the right way to go? That's not the road for me. Not for somebody.

“Look these people are taking plots that they can't manage. They take a plot that is thriving. It has everything. They take it after one year that plot goes down, down, until it is rubble instead of it being a plot or a mielie field or whatever. You don't do that. If you do that you kill self. I mean I never went to school, but my common sense tells me that if these people tried to combine, to work together they would have done better.”

The car turns into Mamelodi, one of the black townships bordering Pretoria. The national capital was designed as a model apartheid city with a wealthy white centre bordered to the north by a series of black communities housing a captive workforce. Out here the roads are unlike the thoroughfares in Pretoria. Instead of robots, there are an endless series of four-way stops and speed bumps, all of which are designed to slow down the Kombis and the cabs that drive without any apparent respect for the rules of the road or as Donald says, “They are sick. They drive as if they are in heaven.” It is an aggravating journey of stops and starts. And crossing each intersection is an act of faith, since there doesn't appear to be any rhyme or reason to who yields to whom. Welcome to Africa.

In the car, Donald and his brother are passing a large Carling Black Label back and forth, one of the 750ml bottles that pack a wallop. They have had several by the time we arrive at Donald's sister's house. If I weren't the driver, I would have joined them, but as Donald is fond of saying, “Life is not fair. It is not a bed of roses.”

The property is a modest RDP house with a dirt yard that has been swept clean of debris. There is a tree in front, a fence and a washing line, a storage room and latrine in the back. The house is a tidy two-bedroom bungalow with a living room, kitchen, and bathroom. By the main entrance, Donald's nephew is sitting in front of a computer, which is connected to a mixing board and two large speakers with plenty of bass. He is cutting CDs. House music.

Soul music. African club remixes. At the moment, the classic, 'Oh Lord, Why Lord' by Brook Benton is playing. It is one of Christopher's favourites.

Christopher has endured his share of heartache in the past few years and so there is an obvious appeal to this song. There is sombreness to him, an air of resignation, pain in his eyes. This is apparent despite his best attempts at humour. After a tumultuous break-up with his wife, Christopher left his zinc-plate shack in Soshanguve to squat in Moreleta Park before finding his way to Woodlane Village. Their relationship had been messy and violent. On the side of his neck are the scars and rope burns of a suicide attempt. Every weekend, Christopher spends the R60 cab fare to visit his children. He wants them to know that even though he is no longer with their mother they still have a father. They remain a family albeit a broken one.

While Donald, Christopher, and Johanna greet relatives, I unload an old computer from the VW that they have brought from Pretoria for Donald's nephew to fix and sell. He is a resourceful young man. Since losing his contract as an armed security guard, he has found other ways of bringing in money. He was once, as Donald says, "hired for his brains as much as for his gun."

Across the street a group of small children are playing in a yard. Mamelodi is an organised little bedroom community to Pretoria with winding paved roads and small neat houses, which show pride of ownership. It is a township with a suburban feel. When the children see me they point and giggle excitedly, "*Lekgoa, lekgoa*" — "white man, white man." I approach them. Through the chain-link fence they reach out to touch the hair and the skin on my arm. I smile and wink. White people rarely come here and those who visit stay in their cars, all darting eyes and tight lips. But here is an *umlungu* of a different kind.

The road trip is significant. My offer to go on this journey with Donald and Christopher is symbolic. Somewhere in the long hours of sharing stories and of being in each other's company we have

become friends. In a country where people have been killed for fifty cents or have had their eyes gouged out for a pair of running shoes, my leap of faith is appreciated. Although, in truth, I never felt I was taking much of a gamble. I trusted my gut. Besides, the big risk was coming home in the first place, for reasons other than personal safety.

At the moment, I feel numb. The unease of the previous weeks has faded, replaced by a feeling of surrender. I no longer have to struggle with divided emotions. I can now focus my attention on this side of the ocean. As Donald says, "We come into this world alone and we leave alone." And somehow in-between we have to fend for ourselves. There is a strange comfort in this.

We board the car and head to another cluster of townships: Mabopane, Winterveld and Soshanguve. We take a detour off the main motorway on to a winding dirt road that crosses an empty field with piles of burning garbage beneath high-power transmission lines.

"We lived here for a year me and my fiancée. Ja, we spend almost a year-and-a-half maybe two. Because now I lost my job, you know. And then finding out that if you lodging at somebody's place and you have stuff and then if you can't pay rent maybe for two months they just claim your stuff. Now I decided before I get to that point, so we go out there by my sister's place and we stayed out there before we go to Mpumalanga.

"So now, this is the whole story. You will find it as it is. I mean it is packed and compact. So you find the whole thing. I mean this is somebody's life. It was not a walk in the park, man. It was sad. Because I tried to be on my own. But at the same time, now if you know you are working contracts. You are tiling for six months. You are making good money. But for three years you are not working. So that money of six months can't afford you for three years. So it means you are going back to I don't know where..."

"It sounds like snakes and ladders. Have you ever played that game, Donald?"

“Yebo, now that is how it is! So I decided before I get to the snake. I was on the ladder. I said, ‘Hey, this is my last ladder.’ But, now, I know the snake is going to swallow me so I’d rather not be swallowed so I took a lift and went back out there. And that’s how you find me here. Yes, yes, you are right. Snakes and ladders, that’s how it is. It is life, man. It is life. You can’t change it.

“Pieter, you know there are people who are killing people for a cigarette. A puff. And I am getting sad finding out somebody is killing somebody for a just puff. Dying and taking the cigarette and then that cigarette pack is bloody. Running and lighting at the same time. And before long he is being caught and go to jail. Remember somebody has just lost his life and you just taken a cigarette that you are not going to even enjoy. It is sad.”

“So when did it become like that?”

“No, this is not about South Africa. The world is worse for me. It seems that way to me because I am reading about different places. Because I thought it was where I am staying only. But look, Pieter, you know the farms, places like this. Those were the safest places that you can get where your find your neighbour is kind of like three kilometres away from you. Those were the safest places where you could live and live happily ever after. But not anymore, Pieter. It changed. You go there, you find the very same things you ran away from in the location. You are going to find it out there — in the jungles now. I thought, ‘Whoa, whoa, what is going on?’”

* * *

“Pieter, so I told you about my friend Happy. In jail we lived like, it was funny. We lived with these tough guys. We were just skinny guys, but we were feared for what we can do. Because I tell you there it is survival of the fittest. So even we were skinny but we were the fittest because we didn’t have a choice, Pieter. We just get to do what we get to do in order for us to survive. So we were only two. Look I remember this time, I told you there is this guy that we get to stab 24 holes.”

* * *

“It’s over,” she wrote, “this is time it really is. I’m sorry to do this to you while you are away. I promised to be with you until you returned and I am breaking that promise. But what choice do I have? I don’t want to lie to you.”

An ending is always an ending — *‘finish and klaar.’* Sure, sometimes, one can sense the changing conditions and make the required course corrections. If one is perceptive there are usually signs of an impending shift in relationships: the silences, the reluctance to reciprocate even the smallest tokens of affection, the subtle straying from commitments, the ‘I love you’s’ that stick in the throat. Sure, sometimes, closeness can be restored through words or deeds. But an ending is always an ending.

I have always struggled to let go. I have spent most of my life agonising over circumstances that cannot be changed, clinging to the past or holding on to hopes that could never be. It is the tyranny of what-if and if-only, the burden of memory and imagination.

There is an end to all things, whether by choice, design or circumstance. One must surrender to reality, accept one’s losses, and move on. Perhaps, this is the lesson of my homeland. South Africa will never be what it once was and the dreams of what it could be are slowly being devoured by what it is.

* * *

For the next little while he will wander this country like the other toothless punters who paid the price for playing a rigged game, the ones who were kicked in the chops while they kneeled.

* * *

“When in doubt just roll ‘em.”

* * *

In a corner lot opposite his shack and his wife Sindi's restaurant, Israel is tending his garden. He dips a tin can with holes punched in its bottom into a barrel of water and gently sprinkles the vegetables, row by row. Over the years, he has patiently enriched the soil with compost, ash, and fertilizer until it now produces vast yields of spinach, cabbage, and carrots. The garden is fenced off with wire and a series of automotive tires, wide racing slicks, which serve as perfect incubators for potatoes. But the secret of Israel's bounty does not lie in the fertiliser or in the soil or in the tires. The secret lies in his relationship to his plants. He speaks to them every morning, welcomes them into the day and reassures them that he will return before sundown to feed them. This is the wisdom taught to him by his Oupa.

“When you see a man standing with his hands behind his back, he is talking to his plants. They have a heart and blood like us. Water is their blood.”

* * *

In the news

Strike ends as Marikana miners get 22% wage hike.
Juju to get day in court — warrant
issued for Malema's arrest on graft,
tax-dodging charges

* * *

WEEK 9

I have dropped by Donald's place. It is late Monday afternoon, a holiday. I brought a small USB jumpstick full of music. The tracks have African connections, retracing the trade of goods and slaves all over the continent and beyond to America, Cuba, and Haiti. The sounds share a common ancestry yet they are distinctive. On the other side of the enclosure, people are wandering by — their outlines and shapes sliced into moving lines by the cross-lighting and the bamboo fencing. They comment on the odd music, the foreign intrusion into their soundscape. "*Haw wena!* What is this that you are listening to?"

"The first week, the second week, you are not here, I just going to miss being with Pieter. Because you are this guy who does things the other way around. Pieter, I was here. Since I was born here, Pieter, there is nothing new for me. All the things are old news, but you are new news. I mean you are new stuff, Pieter, because you are you. And then it is in a way that I can't explain. Okay, maybe some people will understand, but some people can't even understand what I am trying to say. My whole life I was here, Pieter. And maybe I am just going to die out here willingly. Not that I am just going to resist dying because I know we are dying. And I am just going to die willingly, say, 'Hey, hey, come and die.' I say, 'Ah, good. Let me just get a cup of water, a cup of water and then I'm going down, down.' So it is going to be good.

"But, Pieter, you are this one guy who just...I mean to put it fair, you put the spanner in the workings...or the spanner in the wheels. I mean you changed the situation. I don't know if you know what I am talking about. You know somebody who puts the spanner in the wheels is somebody who makes things not work like they used to. If you put spanner in the wheels, it makes: *kara kara kung kong ka*. They do funny sounds. That's what you do for me.

“Now I am happy for that because maybe for my whole life I was waiting for somebody who can make a difference. Even though, you might not know and you may never know maybe. Because you can't be given a chance to know. But I am telling you personally. I can't rob you, Pieter. There is no way that I can do that, because you came willingly. I don't need anything from you. You don't need anything from me. We just met and then we do what we think is going to be the best for the world.

“You see, I don't have a friend. Acquaintances I have many...they just say hey! They are passing by but they can't come in. Because we are beyond that coming in and being together. Because, Pieter, you just have to be yourself in order to be with somebody for a couple of minutes, a couple of hours. Because if you rob me once, you can rob me twice. You rob me once you say, “Sorry.” I don't expect it twice. You do it twice I know you are not sorry, you just are what you are. Now, I can't say that I won't greet you. ‘Hey, how's that Don?’ ‘Hey, hi! Good.’ But you are passing. You are not getting in like you did the first time.”

* * *

“Hey! Don’t come in! Pass, pass. *Voetsek!*”

“Alright!”

“No, get in. Get in, Moses. It is Moses, you Satan. Get in. Oh, it’s Moses.”

“You motherfuck!”

“You motherfuck, get in Moses.”

“You motherfuck!”

“You can say that again, Moses.”

“Open!”

“I don’t open for anybody, Moses. Because that’s not closed. It is only that you are stupid, Moses. Moses, you are stupid you pretend to be clever. That’s not closed. Not closed. You stupid man.”

* * *

“Pieter, we are living with people. Don’t take people for granted, Pieter. Remember, one thing: ‘have the friends that you can like to have on your side.’ Instead of just having any friend who might just sell you out for fifty cents. Don’t go for that, Pieter. Have a friend that you can even die for. I mean I am trying to impress or give you something to think about this friendship thing. We don’t have to take anybody for a friend.

“That’s why I told you about Happy. That’s my only friend, because I am me. Okay, everybody we can greet. We can drink together. We can sleep together. We can eat together. But I have only that one friend, Happy! Because he is the one. Trust me. Happy can even hunt the people who kill you or who hurt you. Happy can hunt them out. That’s the kind of friend Happy is. So if you have that kind of friend, you have a friend. And that’s the kind of friend I have.

“And it is the first and I think it is the last, because I can’t afford to have another friend other than you. Even you, I didn’t choose you, Pieter. It just happened like it happened. I don’t have a

friend, Pieter. I tell you in my life I have only that one friend and then you seem to be the second one here. It just happened. I didn't choose Pieter. It just happened.

"I don't have a friend, because I know what friends can do. Pieter, you can have a friend and a friend can hurt you more than you can hurt for your whole life. That's why I don't need a friend. But those I have especially like Happy and you. I mean if I am hurting by you I can handle it but not anybody else. Because I can kill him I can even strangle him. Just get hold of his neck until he dies. Now I don't need that. Pieter, I don't need that at all."

* * *

"Pieter, the simple matter of it is that when the sun rises it is for all: the killers, the rapists, the whatevers, the mad, and the mad dogs and stuff. And when it rains it is always the same. It only amounts to which part of the world are you in or which part of the country are you in at that point in time. But all of these things are happening for us all and if it might not be raining for you in your part of the world that day, it will. Or it is bound to rain some other day as long as you are alive. Because when you are dead, I don't think you will be missing any rain or sunset or stuff. But if you are alive you are bound to see those things because this is part and parcel of our lives.

"Generations come and generations go. But the world still remains the same. The people are waging wars, killing one another, and the very same world they are fighting for is going to swallow their blood and them personally. But at the end of the day, it just remains there. So people are always making fight and then after all they go ahead again and make peace. But again, you will get that part again that there is time for everything. Time for sewing, time for tearing things apart, time for throwing away, time for hunting stuff, time for crying, time for being happy, time for war, time for peace and stuff. So it means all those things are not a mistake, Pieter. They are bound to be there, because they are there."

* * *

WEEK 10

For I'm the type of boy who is always on the roam.
Wherever I lay my hat that's my home,
I'm telling you that's my home.

—Paul Young

* * *

Donald is disassembling a pair of trousers so they can be refitted. He takes pride in his work, tracing a razor blade along every seam to cut the threads. The fit should be proper. The lines must flow. He doesn't believe in merely cinching the waistband and leaving awkward bulges as if a man has a chicken for a crotch. So he has taken apart the garment in order to make the appropriate adjustments before putting it back together. He works quickly. Donald learned to sew in prison and it was his salvation. It took him away from trouble, provided much-needed income, and more importantly created space for him to think. Sewing became a form of meditation. His hands did the work, while his mind was free to roam far outside the prison walls or to plan his survival moves, the strategies and tactics to stay ahead of the mad dogs. To this day, sewing brings him great comfort.

“You can trap the body, Pieter. But you cannot trap the mind. In my days before prison, if I ate food I would always wrap a little up for later, for self or others. Little packets of food for later. In prison, when my body ached from hunger I would go back to the memory of these little packets and my stomach would be full. Or I would grab a cold beer from twelve years back, you know. And often, Pieter, I would travel to places I have only read about. Far away. And I would be free. Free as in ‘free.’

“Wherever I lay my hat that's my home. As long as it is not under force, that's my home. A mind is a very powerful thing.”

* * *

It is a scorching day. The sun is ablaze, evaporating the shadows. Christopher reclines on a bench beneath a coloured sheet stretched above him. He is wearing athletic shorts. A floppy hat covers his head. He is complaining about the *gogos* in the camp who object to the immodest baring of his knees to the world. In the early days, when this was brush land and home was a hole in the ground, there were no such codes of decency. Nobody gave a damn about short shorts. It was a jungle and the rules back then were dog-eat-dog rules, flesh-and-bone rules.

“I am wearing a short pants then I feel this fresh air. Even it is not a fresh air. It is a hot air. It is burning. I really don’t know how to explain it, Pieter. It is very hot. So they want me in long trousers? I will die. Just have a look. I am just sitting by the shade, but I am sweating. So if I wear those long jeans what will happen with me? Maybe I will end up fainting, Pieter. So I don’t want to faint. Just need this little air, although, it is not a fresh air. It is a hot air. But I go with it. There is nothing I can do. And I am no longer somebody’s husband, you know. Because I just have to do this, because I am on my own. Nobody owns me. I own myself and I do what I need, anytime, anywhere.

“When I go out, exactly, I supposed to wear a long pair. Then that’s how they show respect. But whom do I have to respect, because I am my own man? Nobody owns me. All those peoples who are talking this are women.

‘No, you don’t have to see your knee,’ they complain.

‘Why?’

‘No, at the end of the day you will show us your 4-5.’

‘Over my dead body. 4-5 never. Never will you see that.’

‘Ja, at the end of the day we will be asking you to come and visit us. Because we are so fresh, you know.’

‘You don’t even stand a chance. Even if you can ask where will you find me? I am nowhere to be found.’

“When I enter the premises I just lock the gate, in my shack I lock the door then where will you find me. Because by six o’clock, I am no longer fooling around this street. And the gates are locked, the door is locked. So where will you find me? Nowhere to be found.”

* * *

On the other side of the mining town of Cullinan, Colin and Denise operate a farm. It is beautiful country, twenty-two hectares of rolling land. From the porch of the farmhouse, one can look across the front lawn where chickens feed on ticks and grubs to the flock of sheep and across the freshwater dam full of tilapia and carp to the citrus orchards and the beehives, and beyond to the tower of the neighbouring Coptic monastery.

The farm is an experiment — an attempt to create a self-sustaining enterprise that will generate income for their community development work, while also providing opportunities for people experiencing poverty to acquire vocational skills. When they bought the property, there was nothing here, only open land. But over the past eight years they have built an extensive infrastructure including a main farmhouse and secondary housing for the labourers; a series of greenhouses where they grow houseplants, succulents, and cacti; gardens where they grow mielies and vegetables; a number of buildings serving as workshops and storage areas; pens for chickens and sheep; and orchards for avocados, oranges, and *naartjies*.

It has not been easy. Two weeks ago a hailstorm destroyed one of the greenhouses, the weight of the ice snapping the wooden beams and damaging many of the cacti, their thorny armour providing poor defence against the pummelling. And a couple of years ago, a massive grass fire swept over their farm destroying many of the citrus trees and almost taking out the main house. It was only by the grace of God that the wind turned and swept the fire into itself and out.

The farm is also a place of promise. Colin and Denise's daughter, Chantal and her husband, Shawn, live in the main house with their four children. They recently adopted a toddler, Noah or as his birth certificate says Hope Madiba Africa, a black boy with a joyful temperament. Shawn manages the farm, while Chantal home-schools their children and those of the farmhands.

Shawn is a creative man with a wide-open smile, a short-attention span, and a green thumb. Despite growing up in the city, he has taken to farming. On the land there are plenty of activities and responsibilities to keep his mind occupied, whether this means delivering lambs, raising chickens, growing various species of exotic houseplants or building a tree house for his kids. He was born with a boundless imagination and restless hands. The farmhouse is full of his creations. There is a long dinner table made of the wood from packing crates. There is the railing of the house constructed from thin trees and thick branches tied together with brown twine. There is the artwork and the paintings, the little bottles of sand, sticks, and other objects suspended by string.

Shawn works well with the farmhands, Philemon, Ishmael, and Elliot. He listens to them, accepts their input when making decisions, and admits when he has been wrong. They respect him. Philemon is the lead hand, a Zimbabwean with a quick wit and sense of humour. He lives on the farm with his wife and three children. Elliot is a smart young man, only 28 years of age from Lesotho, an able worker with a gentle spirit. Ishmael is an older man, who survived the war in Mozambique but never fully recovered. He is fragile, walks with wavering steps, and talks to himself when he is alone.

All three of them lived in Woodlane Village before they moved out here. On the farm, they have acquired new skills ranging from welding to tending sheep. They have all learned together and they all have a stake in the success of this enterprise. Here, they are building a future.

But the farm is also a place of stories and mysteries. There is the story of Olle, a retired airforce officer, who lived nearby. He

was a short man with a long grey beard and a moustache, which curled up at the ends — the type of eccentric who drifts to wayward places to be on his own terms. Olle was a well-known naturalist who had a practice of destroying the engine blocks of poachers' vehicles with his sniper rifle before calling the police. After he died of old age, his family found freezers full of animals in his house — birds with their beaks frozen in ice, baboons in various states of catatonia.

And speaking of wild things, everyone remembers the story of the python, which lived in the rock formation behind Elliot's house amidst the skulls of bush pigs, a snake with a body as thick as a man's thigh. And everyone remembers the bees that swarmed the Coptic monks — the flourish of black robes and buzzing, the biblical comedy of orthodoxy and pestilence.

And there are the stories of darker things. Everyone remembers the day the Zulu woman showed up in the orchard with an *isangoma*²⁶ to invoke her ancestral spirits, her wailing audible all the way to the farmhouse. And everyone still talks about the German who lived on a neighbouring homestead and was rumoured to be a white witchdoctor. Supposedly, he had a habit of smoking dagga and he was married to a woman who had a habit of visiting the farmhands when he was away. One of the labourers she liked to call on was a black man by the name of Lucky. According to the story, the German was accused of raping a domestic worker, a young girl, and was shot to death not long afterwards. No one knew who pulled the trigger, but his wife claimed he shared with her a premonition of his demise at the hands of Lucky. As can be imagined, Lucky was arrested for murder. He claimed innocence and was eventually released due to a lack of evidence, but not before he was placed in a detention cell full of inmates who had been stoked by police to believe he was a child molester. Lucky, the man whose good fortune was in name only, fled the farm for his own safety and has not been heard from since. As a final twist in

²⁶ Witchdoctor

this story of bad medicine, the German's wife wed the German's brother and the investigating officer who pursued Lucky with such malicious intent ended up committing suicide.

Stories and dark mysteries, indeed.

* * *

"I love Donny. I can feel him in my heart. We have been together a long time now, me and him, over ten years now. If I ever lost Donny I'd go mad. I'd be off my head. Only he understands me. My mother and my father are dead. And I cannot talk to my sisters the way I do to him. So I would be alone without him. Whenever we are apart I feel him right here."

There has been a flash fire in Donald's shack. Johanna is in shock. She is an attractive woman with a strong and open face. In the candlelight the tears are apparent as she repeats her affection for him over and over. Her tone is earnest and desperate as if her affirmation can undo the near tragedy. She says she has prayed numerous times that if they were to die they would do so together. Donald laughs when he hears this, "That's not the way it works, baby."

Earlier in the afternoon, Donald's primer stove exploded, scorching the wall and melting the plastic roofing on his shack. Fires are a persistent threat in the camp and several residents have been burned to death in similar blazes over the years. It is one of the reasons the camp has been set up with firebreaks between shacks. When they go they go and there is little one can do except try to save the surrounding structures.

Donald got off lucky. He only sustained burns on his arm as he carried the flaming cooker out of his house, pulling an angry tail of fire from the site of the eruption to the outdoors. Unfortunately, Johanna crossed the path of paraffin, burning her foot and setting her dress ablaze in the process. Miraculously, she had the composure to strip before she incurred further injury.

In Donald's typical good-humoured way, he jokes that in all of the commotion no one even noticed that she was naked. He claims it felt like the sun on his skin and he wanted to cry, but Johanna was already in tears and he didn't want to frighten her even more. Only one person gets to cry at a time.

When his neighbours saw the plume of black smoke they rushed over. Some helped to control the fire, climbing the rickety structure to pour water on the burning plastic and wood. Others took advantage of the opportunity to rob his place. Security guards apprehended one person trying to carry off a stereo speaker.

As an act of defiance to would-be thieves and as a gesture of celebration, Donald is blaring his music while he makes temporary repairs to the gaping hole in the roof of his shack, as if to say, "Take that! *You tsotsis!*"

"God is great! You live for a reason and you die for a reason. I have two friends who burned to death in these fires. No, I'm not worried, man. It is only stuff. I am happy. We were not hurt. Happy!

"Everything happens for a reason, Pieter. Knowing the reason beforehand can help, but afterwards it is a matter of time. It makes no sense to worry about what has come to pass. Can we turn back the hands of time?"

* * *

"All this bad business. Let it pass so we can start over."

* * *

Donald's left hand is noticeably swollen as Johanna gingerly removes his dressings to clean his wounds. She dips the gauze in an antiseptic solution of Dettol and warm water, trying to soften the places where the bandages are sticking to his flesh. As she removes the dressing, his black skin is peeling away to expose the pink layers beneath. It looks bad. His entire forearm has been severely burnt. He seems to have a remarkable pain tolerance; although, it is possible the fire damaged his nerves. The danger now is infection and pride. Donald is a stubborn man and has refused to visit a doctor.

I watch as she works on him, coaching her to be careful, to preserve the fragile layer of skin, encouraging Donald to keep an eye on the healing process and to consider seeking medical attention. "Remember, Donald. Your hands are your livelihood. Don't take chances. You cannot work and sew with only one hand."

Donald looks tired. The events of the past few days have worn on him. There was the sorting of damaged items to see what was salvageable, the throwing away of precious items, the mountains of books that were destroyed, the scorched clothing, the repairing of the roof, and the purchasing of replacement items such as a new stove and new locks for his shack. And there were also the disappointments such as the robbery of his items during the fire and the theft of the R250 he paid for new tarpaulin, a neighbour disappearing with his money without returning with the promised goods.

"Pieter, there is not much we can do about this. These people know exactly what they are doing. This happens all the time. It is their intention. We cannot change a person and his intentions."

* * *

WEEK 11

From the shack opposite Donald's, number 540, on the other side of the street, the thuds and the yelps of a dog being beaten can be heard. The high-pitched squeals and *voetseks* continue, echoing off the metal walls. I yell for the abuse to stop. A passer-by informs me, "He is donnering the *hond*, because it snuck into the shack to steal meat. That's what I think."

* * *

I ask my tannie where I can purchase thick plastic sheeting to repair Donald's shack, the kind that can withstand the relentless sun. She warns me of the dangers of doing so, "If you give this to him, everyone will expect something from you." I reassure her that I know this. As a rule, I have resisted the temptation to give. I am aware of the corrosiveness of charity without justice, but this is a different situation. I see this as an act of friendship. Donald and his family have treated me very well. They have shown me respect and appreciation. "Donald and Johanna have planned a braai in my honour in Mpumalanga this weekend. It is the least that I can do to reciprocate their hospitality."

In South Africa, I have learned to listen and to observe, and to be selective in what I share with those around me, whether with camp residents or with my relatives. I operate at the boundaries of people's understandings. I act in ways that defy the conventions of this place. I follow my conscience. It is not my role to challenge their worldviews, although, I do recount the occasional story from my experiences here or abroad as reminders that there are many ways of seeing things. Life includes the good and the bad. There are rules and exceptions to rules.

* * *

“There is no new South Africa. It is the same place.
The only difference is that in those days we were supposed
to walk on the other side of the street.”

— Benjamin

* * *

There was a shooting in the settlement on Sunday, a man taking potshots at his girlfriend. He missed and fled the camp. Enraged neighbours tore his shack apart and looted his property, ensuring if he returns he will have nowhere to stay. The police were called but they were unresponsive, claiming there is nothing they can do and they don't want to risk their officers by pursuing the matter. In many respects, the police are useless and their role in the camp is detrimental. A number of the officers are known to be corrupt and are taking bribes to look the other way, allowing the illegal sale of liquor at the shebeens and the trafficking of drugs and stolen goods. For the right price, anything can be forgiven and forgotten. One exception to the rule is a white police officer by the name of Adrian who has a reputation for being a cowboy and an adrenaline junkie. He handles serious crimes for the metro and is trigger-happy. Another carjacker killed. Two more robbers dead.

* * *

My oom and tannie are making their final preparations before they board the Rovos Train in Pretoria for an extravagant three-day trip to Cape Town. Even at half-price the tickets cost over R20,000. There is a dress code on the train and men must wear a suit and tie for dinner. My uncle has proudly stated this requirement a number of times, as if this particular detail accentuates the refinement of what is claimed to be “the most luxurious train in the world.”

While they are going through their checklists, I am packing for a journey of a different kind. Later in the day, I am bound for the

rural province of Mpumalanga to spend the weekend at Donald's zinc-plate shack. As before the trip will also include courtesy visits with relatives in the townships along the way: Mamelodi, Madopane, and Soshanguve. Adventure exists at either end of the economic spectrum.

I will miss my aunt and uncle, especially my aunt with whom I have a special relationship nurtured by spending hours with her in the kitchen. The past few days have been difficult on her. Tosca was put down yesterday. The Doberman ate her last meal prepared by my aunt, eggs and bread drizzled with bacon fat, and then she walked with her owners to the veterinarian down the street. My tannie claims Tosca was ready to go and the dog seemed to have a spirit of quiet acceptance over the past week, as if she was making her final rounds.

My aunt is shaken by the loss of her companion of over 11 years. Wet eyes and sadness. The rhythm of life around her home has changed. There is no longer a dog scratching at the door in the morning for entry. Food scraps are no longer imbued with special meaning. Even the walk from the kitchen to the compost heap is suddenly a lonelier experience.

My time in South Africa has been an object lesson in change. In parts of the country, violence has erupted and dissipated and flared up again. The Marikana dispute has been resolved but the tensions have shifted to other mines and to other parts of the industrial machinery. A truckers' strike threatens to create shortages in food and fuel and to leave ATMs without cash, since even the armoured couriers have joined the work stoppage. Lorries have been petrol-bombed in the usual mayhem of *toyi-toying*.

And on the home front, relationships have come and gone. Family pets have died. I have watched my tannie grieve as she watches her younger sister slide into dementia — the pattern of forgetting becoming more pronounced and undeniable. Donald's shack has burned and been repaired. His skin has blistered and peeled away. The healing process is well underway. Life has its own tempo and sense of order.

* * *

Oh Lord, why Lord

So by listening to that song, Pieter, it has given me this imagination, “Oh, that’s okay. Why the whites they are hating me? Why? Because I’m a black person.”

But I have never choose to be black. Nobody chooses his own colour. It’s just that it’s a nature. If you’re born black you die black, you’re born white you die white. But the only point is, “If you are black how do you behave when you meet the whites? If you are white how do you behave when you meet the blacks?”

—Christopher reflecting on his favourite Brooke Benton song.

* * *

Night has fallen by the time I arrive in Vezubuhle with Donald and Christopher. It has been a long and exhausting ride. There was gridlock on the motorways, an unbroken stream of taxis and cars bringing workers home to the townships north and west of Pretoria for the weekend. The traffic through Mamelodi had been particularly congested and the highway to Mpumalanga was clogged with long convoys of orange buses, head-to-tail in the dark.

Vezabuhle is a rural settlement on the other side of Moloto and just beyond Kwamhlanga. It consists of a series of brick houses and metal shacks located on small plots of land. The houses are in varying states of completion with homeowners adding rooms as they can afford to do so. A few people have planted gardens and have grass, but most have barren dirt yards.

We enter the subdivision on a paved road constructed with a series of over-sized speed bumps designed to destroy the mufflers and undercarriages of even the slowest moving vehicles. People are walking alongside the road, shapes and shadows in the periphery. As the car crosses a bridge, spanning a culvert and a drainage area, Donald points to the spot where he once chased away a dog at daybreak for gnawing on the body of a man murdered in the night. The man lay stripped of his clothes, naked and covered in dust and morning dew, his head smashed in.

In the glare of the car's headlights, Donald unfastens the strands of wire in the fence to create an opening for the vehicle. Donald's property consists of two metal shacks, one of which serves as his home and the other as a storage room. He is proud that he recently registered his buildings to be electrified. In the dark, he fumbles with the connections to turn on the outdoor light and then proceeds to illuminate his shacks. He has to tidy up before everyone can settle. After the fire in Woodlane Village, he paid R1500 to have many of his items trucked to Mpumalanga so there is rearranging to do and space to be cleared. With the help of the others, he lifts a queen-sized mattress on top of the VW. They laugh as the car is transformed into one of the teetering buses common in developing countries with passengers, animals, and goods of all shapes and sizes balanced precariously on a madly tilting roof.

But before he goes any further, Donald needs music to work by. From inside his shack, African jazz fills the night air, joining the tunes coming from the neighbouring homes: baritone voices, saxophone, drums, and the beat — that driving beat. It is the cadence of brothers and brotherhood. Ubuntu has a musical heart. Christopher sits outside the shack smoking a cigarette and reminiscing.

“Donald used to sing jazz and used to whistle it when he doesn't want to sing it. Just whistle it. The way it is. Then I was just this young little boy, Pieter. Then I have to think and think again, ‘What does this guy hear through this music?’ Because this is the

bad music, not the best. That I will never play even if I got my own system and everything. But in the long run it happened, Donald is gone then I remain. He is in jail. He is out there. We can't meet. Then I have tried so hard to connect those items he used to play. Although, even if I try to hear them out, I don't hear anything. It's just a funny music, a stupid music, you know? But it happens one day, Pieter. It was the middle of the night. I got this small tape recorder, plenty of cassettes. Then I just keep on playing them because I remember him. I can't see him near my face. And then, there comes this feeling and this hearing of this kind of a music, Pieter. Then starting from there, I never stopped. And when he came out from jail, he only finds out that I am stronger than he is when it comes to jazz. I am not a dancer. I am a listener. And I am an observer, Pieter. I observe. I listen very carefully. And then it is whereby I start to learn. Then it is whereby I start to remember. Donald was feeling this. It is just that my ears were closed to this kind of a music. Until this today, Pieter, when I play music, Pieter. I just sit down fold my feet like this. Fold my hands. Put my beer over here. You will just see my feet is just going there and there.

“Because he was not here. I missed him so much. I feel like seeing him. And sometimes I used cry, Pieter, when I think of him. I used to cry playing the music he loves. When the music plays I know his moves. Then it is like I just see him in a thin air, you know. And then when the music finishes he is gone. He just vanishes in a thin air, in a thin air. And even most of my friends used to ask, ‘Hey man! Why do you love this kind of a music?’ I just have to tell them, ‘You know what guys? You don't know. I know. This music reminds me of my brother.’”

* * *

Donald makes room in his shack for a table and three chairs. His sister-in-law who lives next door is preparing a meal of pap and fried chicken for them. Her son is home after having spent three weeks in a hospital close to death. He is emaciated, his hands and

feet are blistered and cracking, and he has a withdrawn look as if he has not fully returned from the brink, his mind still locked onto the recent memory of near nothingness. According to her, the diagnosis was TB, but it is likely that HIV is also part of the mix.

She arrives with the food. We pass around a blue basin of water to rinse our hands, before eating with our fingers. We share a large bottle of Hansa beer. She has brought cutlery for the *umlungu*, but I join them in the African way. I have eaten like this before in Tanzania and Kenya. She seems surprised, but pleasantly so.

After the meal, we prepare the bedroom for the night, throwing bedding on the floor where Donald has offered to sleep with a Taser-like device at the ready. He activates the stun gun, demonstrating the vicious blue spark that can immobilise would-be intruders. Christopher and I will share the bed. The plan is to watch movies until daybreak or until sleep overtakes us — whichever comes first.

Donald scans through a number of films on DVDs before selecting a Hollywood action film, starring Wesley Snipes. While the film plays, he washes his denim overalls in a large basin, scrubbing away the accumulated grime of the workweek. In the dim light, his injured forearm appears raw, a patchwork of pink set against the darker background of healthy skin.

* * *

It is night-time in Mpumalanga. Under the black sky, Donald is pointing towards a piece of vegetation close to the gate to his property.

“You see this, Pieter. This is a flower when it grows. It is green stuff and it just goes opening up and in the middle it has another flower that flowers. They are kind of thin. They are white and they can just fly. You find them in the wind flying, so now here is where I am saying, ‘Now, whatever, father, my father. This is where I stay.’ Now, I am at my own place. So now, this is home for me. So you would know. That is where you talk to by it. It is our culture.

Even if you slaughter a goat, the blood must be over here. Not in the night, you do it by sunrise or by sunset only. By Sunday, I will come there and talk to my ancestors and tell them we have Pieter here. And if I did that, it means they know we are here, because we plant this beforehand. I will do this properly.”

* * *

“You see this is the sweat. Sweat.
This is the water from my body. We call sweat.”

* * *

We are on our way home from Mpumalanga. Ahead of us an old Toyota Cressida is obstructing traffic on the single-lane motorway. The car is moving far below the speed limit and is inciting other drivers to make dangerous passing manoeuvres. Donald is upset.

“That car has power. It can do whatever in order to give other people a chance. But he doesn’t! He just goes like he is riding a wheelbarrow. No, Pieter. That’s not funny. That one! Pieter, you don’t ride a car like you ride a wheelbarrow. That’s why there is a difference between wheelbarrows and cars. If I have a *sjambok*, I will sjambok him until the ambulance comes. No, these guys are not good. Accidents are caused. People’s lives are lost everyday about that stuff.”

* * *

Conversations on the ride home

1.

“I don’t know if you know, Pieter, but there are times when I am sitting there alone. It is night. I am trying to read a book like this because I am always a reader, Pieter. After reading stuff and I just close the book and then I feeling tears run down my face...tears, hot. I am not crying for anything in particular, Pieter. But there is something that ails me, Pieter, that doesn’t sit well. Now, Pieter, I was not aiming on it and I was not thinking about it. And there are stuff that I should cry about, I don’t cry, Pieter. I just look and I do what I get to do. But from nowhere when there is nothing, nothing happening, Pieter, there comes these tears and stuff. And you find out I’m just crying for a couple of whatever. Can you explain something about that? What does that mean anyway? Am I normal or am I sickenyana?”

2.

“Do you hear what I am telling you, Pieter? Do you hear me? Because we are not going to have this time to tell. We did what we get to do. So it came up to this. But I am not impressing anything on you. It is up to you to decide that am I right or wrong. Because there is those two: right or wrong. So it is up to you. But what I am telling you, Pieter, is the best that I can give you about my life and why and what I believe in.”

“You have done that, Donald. I have been very moved by what you’ve shared with me. You’ve taught me a great deal about life.”

“But the funny part is. I was not believing I would tell anybody some stories of my life. But I did that with you because I thought you deserve it, Pieter. I think you deserve to be told stories. Pieter, there are stories even at home they don’t know. But you know all this stuff, because I thought that going out there without telling it

all like it is, it would be a mistake. So there must be somebody else who can do it better than I can. So that's why I did it by you. But again, I didn't choose you, so we can think on that. I didn't choose you. The situation and stuff did choose that we meet so that we can get to whatever it is. So from there, I am not ashamed why I did it, Pieter. There are stuff that I am ashamed to talk about my life. Because I did stuff, Pieter, that is so weird you can think."

"You mean your experiences in prison?"

"Yes, the stuff that took me to prison is breaking into people's houses, but I told you I hated whites, Pieter. I told you. Like they hated us. It was just kind of like that. Now I thought I was doing revenge, but at the end of the day I thought this was not revenge. It was killing self, because they are not me. I am me. They are them. So that's when I started to hold my breath — and breathe and breathe and whatever stuff and trying to think better. Pieter, it is not about anybody. It is about me. I am not living for anybody. I am living for self. If I am doing for them because I am hating them so much and I'm doing it, what do you think that means?"

3.

"It opened my eyes to the way where I know that you are not anybody else, Pieter, like anybody else. You are Pieter. So I don't know if you know what I am talking about here. But if you don't know then I am going to leave it up to you to find out what I am saying. Because Pieter, I have been with people. And I will tell you again there are people who are attention-seekers out here. 'Attention' meaning wanting to be a celebrity even under the circumstances where you can't afford to be one because you don't belong there. But you wanting to be a celebrity and forcing your way into that and expecting people to accept you as one. But knowing that you have failed somewhere somehow. You are not that kind of guy. That I deduced according to my understanding and the way I do my stuff as the lousy guy like Donald. I just deduced and said, 'No, no. Pieter is not an attention-seeker.'

“Donald, you need to give yourself some credit, man.”

“No, I can. But not on this one, Pieter, because I am doing the guesswork that I think is accurate. Trust me, Pieter, because I will always be accurate. But I am just doing the best I can in order to do the thing. I mean reliably be true on them. So this is my deduction on the fact where we met and how we got to meet and what is in the betwixt and the between.

“Not anybody can go out on this high-wire stuff like you did. And then you know the high-wire walker, so you just go out there with this big pole holding like...trying to balance. But you know you never did that stuff before so you did that. And you did it more than the high-wire walker so I am happy. Pieter, I am telling you this because anybody I met just have this one attitude towards you that ‘Pieter is good.’ You are not pretending. You are good. Pieter, many people are pretending to be good. But you know that before the sun sets they are going out in the toilets and puke three or four times before they get to be themselves, because they are doing stuff they can’t stomach. Pieter you are as good as it comes.”

“I am not so sure about that.”

“No, no, no, I am giving you credit. I told you I am going to give credit where it is due. Pieter, this I am not telling you to do stuff. I am telling to know where you are in life.”

4.

“My worry is just living better, Pieter, and just being able to take care of self and family. And that’s all I ask for. Not much, not less. Because if it’s less, it means I am in the ‘suffering line.’ But if it is just in the level where I can survive on a day-by-day basis and when somebody dies I just get to bury them and then heal as best I can. Then, Pieter, I am good.”

5.

“I mean it is a struggle to go where I want to. But I might manage to do whatever I want to do, anytime I want to do it. So it means I am in a better position than others. So Pieter, there are people that are worse out there. So if I am trying to cry I am just mocking those guys out there who are really in the suffering line. Because me personally, I might be in the line of helping them out. We get to do what we get to do in order to make the world a better place to live for others.”

6.

“Don’t worry about self much because the very person you help maybe the one who will be taking you out of death the other day when you are nearly dying. Said, ‘No, no, no. This one is not going to die.’ Because of one small favour you did the other day. But we don’t think about that. We think about now and tomorrow. And then we don’t worry about the future because we think it will take of itself. But most of the time the future will not take care of itself, Pieter. It is us who take care of the future.

“If you are not there, Pieter, the ones who will remain will do that, especially if you teach them to do it right. They will do the very same thing you did whilst you were with them. So what is the difference there? No difference at all. But we are selfish, we want to live for self and take all the whatever for self and all the credit for self. Not giving to others. That’s where we fail, Pieter. Now sometimes when all the favours come to you, you should just say, ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa,’ and give it to somebody else. Then you are doing something.”

* * *

WEEK 12

In this country, a brick is
a building material,
a tool,
a stool,
and a weapon.

* * *

“Do you see my African pot? Black on the outside and white on the inside. That’s how we work things out, Pieter.”

Christopher is preparing morogo and beetroots, harvested from Israel’s garden. They have been washed and chopped and the water salted. Pap will also be cooked on the open fire. These are the staples of the traditional South African diet. In the early days of the AIDS epidemic, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, a former Minister of Health, promoted beetroot, garlic, and lemons to treat HIV as part of the government intransigence to fund the rollout of antiretrovirals in the country. The irony of this is not lost on Christopher. His brother is living with HIV and has been close to death a number of times, his life only spared by the availability of ARVs.

“I’m just eating beetroot because I like it. Not for the sake of what our health minister have told us. No! She was wrong. And she is no more. Nowhere to be found. So you can ask yourself, people’s that think they know about life, they die too. We used to have this genius guy, the one who used to transplant the heart, you know? Christopher Columbus.”

“*Christiaan Barnard?*”

“Exactly, exactly. Then the only thing that he used to help people with, then there he goes by heart attack. And he used to heal the peoples who suffer a heart attack. And he can even transplant

the heart. Chris Barnard. It's amazing. It's amazing. You heal people's disease, you die by the very same thing that you used to help people with."

Christopher rearranges the loose bricks, which form his fireplace. He begins chopping wood with a hammer and a pair of chisels, splintering the thin tree trunks. He crumbles some newspaper and stacks the kindling and smaller pieces of wood on top before lighting the fire and putting the rusty grill in place.

* * *

It is a quarter-to-six on a Monday evening and residents from Woodlane Village have gathered in the football pitch to hear an update from the police. There are about 800 people standing in a semi-circle around a white pick-up truck. On the tailgate of the vehicle, the senior officer from the Garsfontein station is addressing the crowd. He is a large coloured man with a bulging stomach, a baseball cap and a sidearm, a badge on his chest and stars on his shoulders, and a John Wayne attitude.

"How are you people?"

"Fine. Good."

"Can you hear my voice?"

"Yes!"

"For people that don't know me, the new people that came in here. I am Colonel Solomon. I am talking about the new ones who just slip in here and got a house there for themselves. I am Colonel Solomon. I'm in charge here for the crime. The crime goes up I must go and explain. If I must go and explain then something is going to happen here. Alright! I check the crime here. People are beating one another here at Plastic View."

Murmurs and chatter.

"It is always girlfriend and boyfriend and when they visit the shebeens they don't get anything then they just grab someone they beat them up. Usually when we check on the docketts, friends they

are drinking together then at the later stage one take the brick he hit the other one. I have serious problem with that. If this thing is not going to stop then I am going to bring choppers here. I am going to bring a lot of police officers here and then you are going to feel my presence. I don't want to fight with you. Let's reach an agreement when you are drunk you must go and sleep. Otherwise, I am going to close all of the shebeens here. And I know where they are. Who is the owner of five-one-nine? Who is the owner of shebeen 519? I will come to your place.”

Laughter.

“You are 519. You think you are God. You don't sleep. All night you just make a noise! We will deal with you! I'll take the whole liquor everyday. Friday I'll take the liquor. Saturday I'll take it again. Until you get manners. The people that are shebeen owners they cannot manage their people. When the people are drunk then they fight. All the fights come from shebeens. If you see two people are fighting why don't you split them? Say, 'You leave!' And keep the other one, the sober one. Or keep the drunk one then you tell the sober one, 'Leave man. We will sort this thing out tomorrow.' But what happens now, you leave the people then they fight at your shebeen, which means you cannot manage your shebeen then I am going to close it.

Want us to fight, people. I can fight. I can fight. I don't have a problem. And I am strong. You can take me to the *inyanga* he already know me. He is afraid of me. Right. I am not afraid of him.”

Laughter.

“I just want to talk a little bit about the crime. Assault GBH. Assault GBH is when you hit someone where get a mark where he must get stitches. It is Assault GBH that one. How can you hit your brother? All of you look the same here. How can you take a brick and you assault a person. A brick. Can you take a brick? The other day, I heard they take sticks they hit the other guy until he pass out.

Can you hit a person like that? It means that something is wrong with you. We must remove you from this place.

“Let’s work together people. This is my last time that I am coming here. The other time I will just be around here when we arrest you. I know a lot of you don’t have passports.”

Nervous laughter.

“Right. There were three barbarians that we arrested last week Wednesday. We arrested three barbarians here at Plastic View. They have the firearm and then they just rob anyone. They rob anyone here in Moreleta Park. They rob you people. And the people are keeping quiet. Ja, we arrested them and I beat them up. Ja, I beat him up until he took out the firearm. Ja, we’ll deal with you here!”

Claps and whistles.

“And I didn’t ask a small guy to beat him. I beat him myself. How can you allow people with firearms here? How does it work, people? Please people let’s work together as a team. This is my last time that I come here. I am not coming here anymore.”

* * *

“When days are dark, friends are few.”

— Christopher

* * *

Christopher is sitting on a bench reading the Daily Sun. Squeezed into the fencing behind his head is a single black sock. This is the same fence where green vines are now flourishing since the seasons have changed and the rains are more frequent. It is the same fence where the occasional gecko hunts insects and where children peek through the bamboo slats looking for mischief.

Georgie left his sock behind on Saturday night when he decided to examine his toes for injury and irritation. He is a tall, elderly man, repellantly smooth and obsequious, his skin glistening as if dipped in fresh tar. He is always operating on the sly. Some people reveal their dishonesty when they smile. In his case, his missing front teeth accentuate this impression. He carries a thick metal rod wherever he goes.

Georgie had come by on the pretence of visiting Christopher and Donald, but his primary motivation had been to bum smokes. When Christopher looked away, he snatched three cigarettes, which he pulverised, rolling the tobacco into a big funnel made of newsprint. He lit the homemade cigar and slithered into the night, a snake with one sock, staying only long enough for the take and the toke. His true nature is apparent to Donald. They go way back.

“Georgie and his metal rod. What does it tell you that he has to walk around with a metal rod?”

But Georgie is only one individual in a diverse cast of characters who frequent Donald and Christopher’s courtyard — some are friends, others are acquaintances by convenience. There is Benji, a wiry man with crossed-eyes and a habit of communicating by squealing like a Kung Fu fighter, freezing and pointing at objects in his warrior stance. There is Alfred, who

works with Christopher, lives next door, and comes to borrow money when he is drunk despite being one of the fortunate few in the camp with full-time employment. There is Piet from the Northern Cape, who is a foreman at the neighbouring church and believes dagga is a plant of God, because “it makes you smarter.” There are the hawkers who come with their shoes, bags, and USB cords for sale. There are the residents who come with their problems looking for solutions. And there are the customers with their clothing in need of repairs.

* * *

Reaction to the news

“Sick motherfucker! If you cripple the mines,
you cripple the country.”

* * *

WEEK 13

From the stereo, the bittersweet jazz of Norman, a musician from Winterveld, is playing — voices and instruments blending heartache with hope, the sorrowful refrains counterbalanced by the clear tones of the saxophone and the rhythmic reminders from the drums that we are alive. As long as there is a beat, there is life. According to Christopher, “Home is where the music is.”

Music is ever-present in the camp. The shebeens vibrate with kwaito and Afro-pop. People walk through the rows of shacks with soul and R & B playing on their mobiles. Some perform on second-hand electronic keyboards. Others simply whistle and sing. Most will take a moment to dance or at the very least tap their feet when the sounds grab them.

My friendships with Donald and Christopher have been built, in part, on our mutual appreciation of music, especially since I first surprised them with a compilation of African and Caribbean tunes. This gesture, along with the hours of sharing experiences, stories, and laughter, strengthened our relationships. I have become, as they fondly say, “Our brother from another mother.”

In two days, I will return to Canada. My experience in South Africa has been rich and nuanced, like the music — a complex layering of contrasting emotions, textures, and voices. An almighty mix of pathos and joy.

* * *

Life goes on. I spent the last three months swimming in other people’s lives. I have dived into their realities, but soon I will surface. I have witnessed their struggles and their celebrations. At times, I have provided a reprieve for Donald, Christopher, Benjamin and Trevor to share their stories and to make sense of their experiences, but this has not softened the harder edges of

their existence. Donald's shack still burned and Christopher is still about to face hunger when his job gets slashed at the end of the month from three days of work per week to only one. Christopher seems to be resigned to this inevitability.

"There is this slogan from the Bible. It says, 'Knock. Doors will be open. Ask. You will be given.' You know? But it is very hectic when it comes to whereby you knock and doors are not open. You ask. They don't give.

"Ja, but well, it's a part and a parcel of life. Because in life you can't force things to be like you want them to be. Anything goes its way, Pieter, until you reach your right track. So here I am. I start again, but I will just keep on thinking what is the best plan that can push me through. Although, I don't really know what kind of a plan will push me through. But I will keep on thinking. Because each and every evening when I climb on top of my bed, I can't even catch a nap, you know, because my mind is running so fast. I just lie down until sunrise. And when I wake up early in the morning, Pieter, because I never sleep, you know, I am so tired. And when I start to think where to go — south, east, north, west. I have no direction. Then I just start over here in this very same camp and it breaks my heart. It kills me, but I have no choice. I just have to take it like it is."

Life goes on.

* * *

I am waiting for my flight to London. In a few minutes, I will board a plane in Johannesburg, leaving summer in South Africa for the arrival of winter in Canada.

Soon I will return to my middleclass existence in Edmonton, a free radical in a world of steady orbits and predictable trajectories, a variable in a world of constants. The intensity and uncertainty of the past three months will be replaced by the regularity and routines of work and private life. There will be boredom, loneliness, and the licking of wounds. I marvel at the dual nature of time: how a period of 88 days can feel simultaneously so short and so long; how so much can change, while so much still remains the same.

Soon the only physical evidence of my passage through Woodlane Village will be the audio-recordings, notes, and photos from my fieldwork. I will start writing, reliving the relationships, translating experiences into text, weaving fragments into coherent narratives.

And somewhere in the process, in the stories and the silences, I will remember my journey home — the endings and the beginnings, the losses and gains along the way, and the love that remains.

REFLECTION

* * *

As I read through the travelogue and relive the initial period of fieldwork, I am struck by the patterns that emerged organically through the writing of daily accounts. There is a certain repetition in metaphors and images, a call and response in the descriptions of life in South Africa and in Woodlane Village. The travelogue — with its references to social interactions embedded in time and place — maps out the rough contours of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), while also recording my movement through this space.

Overlapping experiences shaped my inquiry into home and belonging. My time in the settlement provoked multiple lines of exploration. Perspectives emerged through the narrative encounters with research participants and others in the field. Puzzles around home and belonging also emerged out of my interactions with my relatives in Pretoria. The result is a personal anthropology that blurs the lines between direct experience and critical reflection; between emotion and intellect; between past and present; and between researcher and participant.

A sense of world travelling is evoked both metaphorically and in actuality in the writing (Lugones 1989). There are numerous instances where I journey through multiple places and spaces. These experiences include: the daily commute from a world of affluence (my relatives' home) to one of poverty (Woodlane Village); navigating the virtual world of electronic communication in order maintain a fragile link to Canada; the ongoing adjustments to accommodate the domestic rules and rhythms of my aunt and uncle; the dance of relationships with individuals in the camp. Everyday, I traversed these worlds. The contrasts were jarring. The ordered existence of my aunt and uncle with their comfort zones and gendered spaces was contrasted with the unruly nature of the informal settlement.

And yet, I also recognise that I only penetrated the surface of these worlds. There are depths to the lives of my aunt and uncle and to the lives of those who reside in Woodlane Village that are unreachable — unfolding mysteries and multiplicities. Can we ever truly know a life?

The perspectives that emerged through my time in the camp often challenged my worldview and the worldviews of both my relatives in South Africa and my friends in Canada. The more I immersed myself in Woodlane Village the more distant I became elsewhere. There is a sense of drifting through and across varying social and emotional spaces.

One of the tensions of the inquiry process was to attend to these contradictions and shifts, while resisting the temptation to reconcile them. The fractured structure of the travelogue with its juxtapositions of text is intended to convey this sense of ideas co-existing within the same narrative space. The result is a growing ambivalence, a collapsing and blurring of convenient mental categories.

As I reflect back on my field experiences, I recall a growing unsettledness over the three months, a feeling of being on the margins at all times — of being everywhere and nowhere at once. This alienation became more pronounced following disruptions in relationships. I have included accounts of complicated family dynamics and love lost in the travelogue, not out of narcissism or self-pity, but because they trace a certain trajectory of thought and feeling. They also describe a movement away from some relationships and towards others — a transformation of family into strangers and strangers into family. Perhaps, this dynamic of adjusting one's position relative to others (in the spatial, social and/or emotional sense) is integral to the process of creating and sustaining belonging.

The experience of heartache illuminated the emotional and relational dimensions of home and belonging. Love (or the loss thereof) became implicated in the conversations I had with Donald and Christopher on home and belonging. The mutual

acknowledgement of loss, longing, and vulnerability opened up lines of exploration. For example, grief and anger over fractured relationships is a key driver of Christopher's movement from the townships to Woodlane Village. This oscillation of travel is alluded to in Part One of the travelogue, but the pattern becomes more apparent in his actual narrative account where he describes leaving broken relationships for the anonymity of the bushes.

My experience of family discord also created an empathetic bridge to exploring belonging by revealing sensitivities and creating new pathways for inquiry. Questioning the notion of home as a safe haven is the root of subsequent scrutiny about power and inequality. As bell hooks (1991:148) writes,

At times home is nowhere. At times one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is the place, which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference.

Donald and Christopher described the influence of interpersonal dynamics on inclusion and exclusion. Donald depicts the brutal realities of prison life with the numbered gangs — a system of imposed belonging with its blood pacts. He warns of the shifting nature of relationships:

Remember, one thing: have the friends that you can like to have on your side. Instead of just having any friend who might just sell you out for fifty cents. Don't go for that, Pieter. Have a friend that you can even die for.

This characterisation of relationships also hints at the uncertainty and flashes of violence in South Africa. Woodlane Village is a place of ambivalent relationships — of neighbours and of strangers, of safety and danger. Donald reminds me: "Respect man. He is a different animal." The country is polarised. There are ongoing

frictions along the fault-lines of race and class. The legacy of segregation and the centuries of conflict have eroded trust and broken down communities. Racism persists even after almost two decades of post-apartheid rule. This tension is evident in Christopher's refrain of "Oh Lord, why Lord." My emerging friendships with Donald and Christopher challenge this narrative. I am a "spanner in the works", an anomaly that calls into question the historical pattern of relating between blacks and whites. Although, Colin and Denise's work in the community has shattered this divide long before my arrival. The travelogue hints at my evolving relationships with Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor, which reached different levels of intimacy and proximity. My journey into their lives followed the contours of our interactions and like all relationships our points of departure and arrival were different. Although all our relationships were marked by mutual affection, I was closer to Donald and Christopher than I was to Benjamin and Trevor.

There is a line of blood that runs through the travelogue — from the jokes and throwaway remarks to the headlines and monologues. Blood is both a signifier of family and a reference to conflicts. Allusions to death and mortality pervade the accounts. The sheer repetition of these references adds gravity to perceptions of the precariousness of life in South Africa.

This dark undertone is offset by the frequent references to God. The belief in Christianity cuts across these accounts, acting as a counterbalance to nihilism. Faith is an anchor to hope as well as a means of coping with cognitive dissonance. The belief in divine providence allows individuals to live with contradictions. Everything happens for a reason. As Donald says:

Generations come and generations go. But the world still remains the same. The people are waging wars, killing one another, and the very same world they are fighting for is going to swallow their blood and them personally. But at the end of the day, it just remains there. So people are

always making fight and then after all they go ahead again and make peace. But again, you will get that part again that there is time for everything. Time for sewing, time for tearing things apart, time for throwing away, time for hunting stuff, time for crying, time for being happy, time for war, time for peace and stuff. So it means all those things are not a mistake, Pieter. They are bound to be there, because they are there.

This belief is shared by the residents of Woodlane Village and by my family alike. It creates a buffer from asking deeper questions about the status quo. It allows both the haves and the have-nots to find comfort in their positions.

At the same time, a sense of ‘hoping against hope’ emerges through the travelogue. This clinging to ‘what-if’ and ‘if-only’ characterises my homecoming — from my naïve longing to maintain relationships to the expectation that my return to South Africa would neatly knit up the loose ends of personal history. It also speaks to the overall story of South Africa, which itself is one of ‘hoping against hope’ since the dream of the rainbow nation seems as difficult to realise as the Afrikaner dream of apartness.

Uncomfortable truths breach even the highest psychological and physical walls. The daily dose of negative headlines in the newspapers provokes anxieties that penetrate even the best security systems. I remember my aunt’s nightly reaction to bad news — the reminders of the insecure footing of whites in an increasingly unstable country. Home is a place under siege. The Marikana massacre and a rolling series of labour strikes occurred during my time in South Africa so there were valid reasons for concern. Although, this sense of insecurity and menace was also present even in the black media. The Daily Sun, for example, was full of tales of conflict, crime, and evil witchcraft in the townships. I suspect Christopher and Donald’s sometimes bleak view of humanity was reinforced by what they read in the newspaper.

The travelogue seeks to illustrate the dissonance I experienced

in my daily journey from the luxury of white suburbia to the hardscrabble conditions of Woodlane Village.

My relatives lived in an insulated bubble of wealth and privilege — a predictable and structured existence of regular activities and social gatherings split across gender lines. This idyllic existence was juxtaposed against the state of vigilance required to ensure nothing bursts the bubble. Social, political, and economic threats pushed on the outside. Family discord bubbled from within.

There is an insularity of thought that comes from wealth and privilege that allows for the abdication of personal responsibility. It is this same mentality that has kept the homeowners in Moreleta Park fighting the settlement. It often appeared as if they would rather push the problem out of sight and out of mind, rather than engage in a constructive dialogue on the growing homelessness in their backyard. Perhaps, my judgement is severe, but it strikes me that these same qualities are reflected in the historical portrayal of the apartheid state and in the patriarchal teachings of the Dutch Reformed Church. A rigidity of thought and fanaticism existed at multiple levels within the Afrikaner consciousness, shaping individual behaviours and group dynamics. It hints at a psychology that led to the adoption of a system of social control and exclusion that was doomed to failure from its inception, because it refused to consider the emotions and the suffering of those it oppressed.

The landscape in Pretoria reflects this legacy of control and segregation. As Sheperd and Murray (2007:6) state:

Through forced removals, the clearing of 'black spots' policies of influx control, the migrant labour system, the Immorality Act, and other devices of population control, the apartheid state managed a complex system of spatially conceived law enforcement. 'White spaces' and 'black spaces' remained separate through devices such as empty tracts of land — 'buffer zones' between areas declared for different racial groups.

Despite the legal reforms that have occurred post-1994, the pattern persists. The suburbs in Pretoria are highly regulated environments where only the wealthy can afford accommodation. For this reason, they remain predominantly white, although there are sprinklings of the African middle and upper class in these zones as well. That being said, the workers who service and ensure the upkeep of these areas are mostly black: the gardeners and maids, the parking lot attendants and security guards, the cashiers and clerks, the waiters and cooks.

The travelogue is peppered with allusions to place, grounding the narratives in particular geographies, localities, and social orbits. As Lippard says (1997: 7):

Most often place applies to our own “local” —entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke. Place is a latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal, and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there.

This geo-spatial and social organisation of place is reflected throughout the travelogue: from references to the design of the city to descriptions of the camp and its relationship to the surrounding suburb. Within this patterning, there are areas of uncertainty where different communities rub against each other. There are prime and marginal spaces and between these are zones of transition, uncertainty, and creative possibility.

In their work on street life, Snow and Mulcahy (2001) divide the urban landscape into two general categories: prime space and marginal space. *Prime space* is “any space that is used by domiciled citizens for residential, recreational or navigational purposes; by entrepreneurs for commercial, financial reasons; and by politicians

and their agents for political or symbolic reasons” (157). In contrast, *marginal space* is defined as having minimal use to residents; little economic value to entrepreneurs; and no immediate political or symbolic currency (Snow and Mulcahy 2001). In most cities, examples of marginal space include the disarray of vacant lots, unkempt alleyways, and derelict buildings. As can be expected, these categories are not fixed and there are zones of transition between spaces deemed prime and marginal. Urban landscapes are densely packed with multiple and often competing layers of emotional, social, and political meanings (Docuayan 2000). Transitional spaces are ambiguous. They are the borderlands — the zones between order and disorder, the proper and the improper, the safe and the unsafe.

Woodlane Village is a borderland between prime (city/town) and marginal space (jungle/veld). For the homeowners in Moreleta Park, the settlement represents an affront to the staid predictability of suburbia. It is a wilderness in the very heart of what they perceive of as civilisation. Yet, the settlement is an intact and functioning community sanctified by court order. It is multifaceted. In one way, it can be characterised as village-like. In another, it has the dynamics of a work camp with the turbulence and transiency typical of these settings. For some residents, the settlement is a refuge, a green pasture. For others, it is a stop of last resort — a no man’s land. These different ways of imagining the settlement co-exist, creating a site for creativity. The snapshots of community life and the discursive fragments in the travelogue are intended to evoke the emerging and shape-shifting nature of this place. It is this mercurial spirit that has made the inquiry into home and belonging so challenging and invigorating. Woodlane Village is a vision of the future (rainbow nation) fighting the undertow of the past (separate development).

Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor are also world travellers, navigating multiple social realities in order to negotiate home. The travelogue establishes reference points and threads that are picked up in the narrative accounts of Donald, Christopher,

Benjamin, and Trevor. As Rich (1972: 23) says, “The words are purposes. The words are maps.” There is an interpenetration that happens between their stories and mine. There is a sense of motion, contrast, and resonance in these accounts, hinting at the intersubjective nature of feeling and meaning-making. If Woodlane Village is imagined as a borderland then the travelogue and the interlocking narratives convey the mixing, improvising, colliding, and struggling for expression that occurs in this space. The travelogue and the narrative accounts are attempts to make visible this complexity. They are chronicles of experience as well as experiments in exploring and expressing the variegated notions of home and belonging. They represent the textual equivalent of a *bricolage*, where images, analysis, field notes, personal reflections, and discursive elements are interwoven and juxtaposed to produce a whole that is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

A number of threads are established in the travelogue. These strands are picked up in the accounts of Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor. Existential queries are interwoven with recollections and discursive fragments. Inner journeys are mapped on to outer ones. The accounts hint at the human capacity to create life worlds through storytelling. They provide insight into the negotiations required to create and to maintain home and belonging within these worlds and the fluid nature of these concepts. They also illustrate how historical and social forces shape these notions — how personal experience is mediated by the stories of the places we live. The narratives also describe the life trajectories that lead us closer or further away from the human relationships that give home and belonging their emotional charge.

3

CHRISTOPHER

* * *

It is midday and the sun is high in the sky, directly above Woodlane Village. Over the past several months, I have met Christopher on Thursdays to talk about life. The camp is quiet today, except for the sounds of children playing on the dirt roads, the squeals and the laughter, set against the sonic backdrop of domestic work: brooms sweeping debris, spoons banging pots, axes splitting wood. As usual, I find Christopher in the dusty courtyard of the compound he shares with Donald, reading the Daily Sun and smoking a cigarette. Every life has its habits and rituals. Thursday is a day away from piecework, a day for reading, washing, and staying in the shade. I recognise these repetitions and patterns as expressions of home. They ground us even if we are displaced.

* * *

You asked me where is home, Pieter. And I have tried to tell you. It is many places. I was born in Wingate Park in 1968. Do you see what my ID book says? My place of birth, 1968. We lived by the golf course. At the time, there were no mansions out here. It was farmland and we stayed in mud huts. It was different then, peaceful. My father worked at the Wingate Park Golf Club. You know, up there by de Villaboies and Jacques Street.

So, Pieter, I was born out here. But my roots trace back to Malawi where my father is from. Everyone knows the Bandas are Malawian. I remember before I got my ID, Home Affairs used to harass me.

“Who are you?”

“Christopher Banda.”

“Where were you born?”

“Around Pretoria.”

“Where?”

“Wingate Park.”

“Where is that place? You have to go back to where you are born.”

Do you see the strange joke of this, Pieter?

Anyway, I was born in Wingate Park. But things changed when I was four and my father passed away. I remember all the visitors coming over, but I didn't know what was happening. It wasn't until I was eight that I truly understood. I still recall seeing the black *meraai*, you know, the hearse, and all those mortuary things. As a young boy I didn't understand death, Pieter. But as I've grown older, perhaps, I understand it too well.

Yes, things changed. Life has its own intentions, it seems. My mother met another gentleman, and we moved to Winterveld. My stepfather was an abusive man. He was gangster, a cattle rustler, a car thief. I used to go door-to-door in Winterveld, carrying those big dishes on my head, selling the meat from cows he pilfered. I was his slave. He treated me very badly.

I started carrying guns and those big knives while I was just a young boy. My friends tried to convince me to knock him off and I had to tell them, “I'm not a killer. This old guy will die by his own mistakes. Not by my bare hands.”

So I ran away and came back here to this land. I was thirteen when I started living in the bushes. You see the *veld* over there? I would sleep in the tall grasses under those trees and then at daybreak I would hide my blankets and food under a rock and look for work. There were no houses then, just farmland. Piet Wolvaard

owned most of the land from here to Woodhill. And Mr Goldstein, another landowner, used to deal with horses — polo and show horses. You know, show horses, the ones that jive to records? They don't go anywhere. They just jive while the music is playing.

Life was rough. I picked up piece jobs at the golf course as a caddie. I never finished school and dropped out in Grade 2, but I learned English by caddying for rich peoples. So I gained something. There is always a give-and-a-take. Did you know the State of Israel owns Wingate Park Country Club?

But I was a naughty boy back then, Pieter. I used to rob peoples and I was a heavy dagga smoker. Peoples used to say, "Stay away from Christopher. He is no good." I used to knock peoples on the heads with a brick and take their stuff. I would go up to them and say, "Hey man! I am hungry. I see you got R100 so borrow me ten." And then if you told me a lot of stories or tried to dodge my request, I would take a brick. I would not throw it. I would just break your head. After you became drunk from the blow and fell down, I would take your money. Yes, I was a naughty boy back then. But it was a jungle.

You might ask me why I did such the things? Because of what? Hunger. A person will do anything to fill an empty stomach. You don't have anything to eat, so you must make a plan. What kind of plan? You must work in order to earn money to buy food. Or you must go and rob somebody.

* * *

"Most of the friends I was moving with are dead.
Crime doesn't pay. Trust me.
And some of them died here by the jungle."

* * *

I grew up in the bushes, you know — in no man’s land. And there was no law. Every wrong I did was right for me, because every wrong I committed was for survival — even if I could be killed for it. There was no one to look after me, because I was a street kid. You know a child that grows at home and a child that grows by the streets, they are not one and the same. Because the one that grows at home obeys his parents and then he must take a path by what his parents say. And the one that grows up on the street is in no man’s land. Each and every decision he makes is for himself: kill or be killed.

I lived out here for about seventeen years. That’s a long time. It was hectic. The police were punishing peoples, you know. They used to send the dogs to hunt us. And if they caught us we would be kicked, sjamboked, and pistol-whipped. It was very bad. Have you ever been hit by the barrel of a gun, Pieter? It hurts like a motherfucker. I was lucky to never be bitten by the dogs. Some of my friends were not as fortunate. When you saw a police car coming in those days, you would run for your life. You would just cover your arse, you know. Because if you stood around you were in deep trouble. And if they caught you, they would ask, “What do you want here? Why don’t you go home?”

Where must I go and live? Because I was born here.

You must know where the problem comes. While we lived in the field here, we used to cook and you must know one thing for sure, “Where there is smoke there is fire.” And those policemen knew what they were doing, “Oh, there are people out there.”

* * *

Section 26(3) of the Constitution

No one may be evicted from their home or have their home demolished, without an order of court made after considering all the relevant circumstances. No legislation may permit arbitrary evictions.

* * *

As I listen to Christopher, I imagine what it must have been like in those early days before Woodlane Village was established: the raised plateau; the shrubs and the tall grasses; the encampments; the helicopters circling overhead; the police dogs; the home fires inviting aggression; the hunting raids; and the animals in human form. I imagine the glee of the authorities as they wield their power, the heft of their *knobkierries*.

I recall how as a young boy growing up in South Africa I feared the dangers lurking in fields and untamed areas — an impression quite at odds with my upbringing in Canada where wilderness and open spaces have always evoked feelings of freedom for me.

I cannot remember where these initial apprehensions came from, although I suspect that somewhere I must have absorbed the warnings about walking unattended in the veld — to keep my eyes open for puff adders and baboons, and for *kaffers* in the *bosse*. I find it ironic that as an adult it is exactly these marginal spaces to which I am repeatedly drawn.

* * *

So things are better today, for sure, in Plastic View. We have this little freedom, but it's not a freedom that can take us somewhere, you know. Sure, I'm not hiding from the police anymore. I can just walk on by and if they confront me there is a reason. Maybe they will be asking for my ID book. Only us blacks have to show identification. Although we have this freedom, it is a blindfold, you know. It's freedom in disguise. They have blindfolded us so we no longer worry about apartheid. The only thing is it continues. If I go to Checkers, I am the only person the police will harass — because of the colour of my black skin, you know.

We are still suffering. There are more people here than jobs. Everybody wants to be in Pretoria or in Jo'burg, between those two places. It is where the greener pastures are, you know. We are

plenty. There are those peoples who are from far away, like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Botswana. And then there are us, the South African peoples. We are all competing for the same jobs: bricklayer, gardener, and tiling. I am just working from hand-to-mouth, hand-to-mouth. I got nothing! And although I have about three years working those kind of a piece jobs, I still don't have a banking account. That is how we are living here. But I just have to say, "Thanks God," because it is better than nothing. Half-of-a-bread is better than no bread. There are some peoples, Pieter, who can't even light a candle in their shacks as night falls.

In this country, we, as the blacks, are only appreciated for our hands and our backs. We are the labourers, you know. And these days, our hands come cheap. You see the whites and the blacks don't like each, but we live with each other. And we have this one problem that forces us together. The white man can't live without my hands. And I can't live without the money that buys me my food. I hate the white man and I know he hates me as well, but they seek me. They seek my wife so she can be their maid. They seek me so I must be their gardener. They seek me for many things. That is the one big problem I see between the two colours of peoples: we don't like each other, yet we depend on each other.

I remember at the country club the boss had a sick Rottweiler. He took the animal to the hospital in his Mercedes: China-eyes, two-seater. It was just the *meneer* and his *hond*. He took the dog to the veterinary clinic so it might live. But what about me, the man who produces at the company? They're not concerned about me.

They say, "Ah, man, you shouldn't worry because you are *sterk gebou*. You are power built, man."

I say, "Whoa, what the devil is happening in life."

Well, everything happens for a reason. What can I say?

* * *

In those early years, I stayed in the bushes during the week, and visited my relatives on weekends in the location. Even today this is my way. I stay in the camp from Monday through Thursday and then I visit my family in Winterveld and Soshanguve from Friday to Sunday. I met my wife in the location. By location, I mean the township or *lokasie* — the place we blacks live. In my father's day, the blacks lived on the farms out here in this area: Wingate Park, Rietvalleirand, Erasmuskloof, and Moreleta Park. But then as development arrived, we were forced to move to the townships outside of Pretoria. We were scattered to Mamelodi, Mabopane, Winterveld, and Ga-Rankuwa.

So it's whereby we were notified that we were no longer permitted to bury our next of kin around here. Most of the peoples who stayed on these farms were relocated to Mamelodi — some of them from here to Ga-Rankuwa, some of them from here to Winterveld. So it's whereby after our father passed away, we decided to bury him at Mamelodi cemetery.

But the bones of our dead are still buried out here, Pieter. You know where they built that big village complex? There were graves there. And even when you go by that street, Jacques Street, there are plenty of graves under those expensive homes too. One of my uncles is buried there. But today, there are no more graves, just beautiful houses. It angers me. They don't give a damn about other people's privacy, you know. They have built those big mansions on top of their bodies. Some of them are our family. Some of them are our friends. Because we grew up together.

Do you see my connection to this place? I was born here. In our tradition when you give birth to a child you cut the bellybutton and put it in the ground. And then, a tree is planted on top of that bellybutton. We become part of the land. That is our tradition.

* * *

Call of the land.
Earth beneath our feet.
Soil beneath our fingernails.
Dust and bones.
Going to ground.

* * *

Christopher's words strike a chord. I am reminded of my family's connection to the land. My grandparents owned an estate outside of Bloemfontein known as *Dagbreek*.

I have disjointed recollections of the acreage as a child — images cascading from memory. There is the house with its plastered walls and its wide terrace, set against the outcrop of boulders where the troupe of baboons lived. There is the long driveway leading from the main road to the house, a gentle sweep up to the rise where the house sits. I can remember standing on the porch and watching the billowing plume of a steam engine stretch in the distance. There is a tricycle, the colour of which has long faded from recall. There is the labourer plucking a chicken. There are the stories my father shared with me of growing up on this land, of learning to drive the family Cadillac as a ten-year-old, of owning a pet lion, of leaving university early to care for Oupa after he awoke paralysed one morning. And there is the legacy of the man who founded and grew the Reformed Dutch Church in South Africa from these grounds.

My memories are imperfect and fragmented. They only hint at the significance of this land to my family — the evidence of which is reflected in the name of the estate and the fact that, to this day, we refer to my grandparents as Oupa and Ouma Dagbreek, their identities synonymous with this place.

Both my grandparents are long dead, their bodies cremated. And Dagbreek had been sold decades earlier. It sits as a dilapidated park for holiday trailers. But the history remains. "We become part of the land," Christopher says.

* * *

“What happens if we are displaced from the places we once called home — whether by politics, economics or circumstance? To what do we anchor our identities then?” I wonder.

Being and becoming are interwoven. There is a union between ‘where we are,’ ‘where we come from,’ and ‘where we are going.’ In this way, the process of becoming is also a homecoming.

However, natural and human forces can disrupt this dynamic. They can fracture the bonds between the present, the past, and the future. And they can alter the sense of place that underpins our histories, our memories, and our dreams. Under these circumstances, home becomes elusive and uncertain.

In South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, there are places that have been wiped from the map. Mines have swallowed villages. Suburbs have replaced farmland. Cities have been reconfigured. Ethnic enclaves have been bulldozed and people relocated.

The process can be mapped through the shifting of place names. Some remembered, some forgotten. In recent years, roadways and districts in Gauteng Province have been retitled to commemorate the heroes of the struggle or to reclaim African identities, reversing the previous pattern of honouring the proponents of segregation. A poignant example is the jostling over the proposed renaming of Pretoria to Tshwane. In 2005, city council voted to rechristen the city, following the earlier amalgamation of the authorities within and outside of Pretoria into the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. The change is yet to be approved by central government, leaving the capital in limbo.

In Moreleta Park, the contestation over names continues with the surrounding homeowners referring to the informal settlement as Plastic View, while the champions for the camp call it, Woodlane Village.

The spatial segregation persists. You can rewrite the laws, rename the territories, reorient the landmarks, but the pattern of sin remains. The landscape has a memory. It holds the imprint of our dissonance.

* * *

I was in my late twenties, almost thirty, when I moved to Soshanguve where my mother lives. After my second child was born something shifted in me. I told myself, “No, I can’t raise my child like this...with the money of crimes. It is no good. I better try the other way around.” Otherwise my child will be a gangster because there is nothing you can teach him. The only thing you can teach him is about gangsterism, you know. You always have to be with your crew if you’re a gangster. You can’t make it alone. It’s whereby I tell myself, “No, now I have to start a new life.” Then surely I try hard, the best I can. Because by the time I was living in the jungle, everyone knew I was a bad person. They knew I would hurt them for their money. I am capable of this, Pieter.

So I asked myself this million dollar question: “Okay, those peoples...always when I come they just disappear and stay in groups. What are they talking exactly?” I wanted to know, but they wouldn’t tell me.

So I spoke to myself, “No, man. I’ve given these peoples a huge problem so that’s why they can’t afford me to be near them. And by those groups they are planning how to wipe me out.”

I could see in their eyes they were afraid of me and they were plotting, “Okay, we are four. He can’t beat all four of us.”

And on the other side of the field, maybe there are six of them and they are planning the very same thing. So I told myself, “No, the only solution that can keep me true and safe...I must stop bothering those peoples and I must make sure I’m never near them again...because I don’t know what they are talking about.”

So it is by the time, I started to think, “I better go and stay at Soshanguve, because everybody is scared of me. No, better go home now. Leave all of this bad stuff behind.”

Moving to Soshanguve was difficult. I knew the jungle like the palm of my hand, Pieter. What do they call these? Life lines. Do you see my calluses? They come from toil. I knew this place like the inside of my hand, but Soshanguve was darkness to me. I was a blind man even though I opened my eyes so very wide.

* * *

This country is a patchwork of wealthy enclaves, industrial zones, mines, and farmland spread across a vast wilderness. Outside the secure compounds with their modern amenities and electrified fences, there are jungle places: veld and *bosveld*; abandoned buildings; vacant lots; hollowed out cores of cities; dumps where garbage-pickers live; encampments; contested spaces between cultures and classes.

Jungles are places where new kinds of order emerge — often in the shadow of the towering social and economic partitions that seek to divide and control both the land and the living. Jungles endure despite our efforts to tame them. And often they come into being in direct defiance to their subjugation.

Woodlane Village is one such place.

* * *

My life changed after I started to go back home. Because there is a distinction between location and in the bushes, you know, in the jungle. It's two different places. At location it is whereby there are those community leaders and it's whereby there are those street committees, policing forums, you know. It's not like here in this camp. At home I had to change my behaviour. Nobody tells me that, "Hey man, you have to change," because I could I see I'm on a different planet. At location things are very different. Why? Because there is this kind of a thing: if you are troublesome, the whole community will come together, discussing you, "Hey guys. Do you see how is Christopher's behaviour?" And through that community there are some peoples who are enabling you and there are others who don't buy it. Some peoples say, "No, let us give him a chance maybe he will change. Some other peoples say, "No, he is too much. We can't take it anymore. We are supposed to discipline him." And that punishment is very painful because it is a kangaroo

court. They don't take you to the magistrate. They just work you over right there.

At home you have to behave. Like I told you, I was a naughty boy, but I used to make sure every time I visited my parents' place I was cool, because it's not where I am living. I am a visitor. Although it is my home, I am a visitor. So I left all my bad behaviour behind. I am clean. I don't fight with anybody. I don't cheat anybody. I come with my hard cash. Then I just have to spend and enjoy, you know. But when that hard cash starts to melt, you know, I start to get crazy, "Where would I get money? My parents live here and I can't cheat no one, because my parents will be in deep trouble because of me. I better do my stuff whereby I am living. Not at home." Do you see?

* * *

I have changed. Why? Because I witnessed many of the peoples I lived with in the bushes being killed or crippled. I settled down and thought twice about my life — because my actions were not my intention. It was what? Peer pressure. I was copying other people's bad behaviour to be part of the crew. But at the end of the day my eyes were opening and my brains were starting to think.

"No guys, I am no longer going your way now. I am going my own way now. I don't want to be this kind of an animal that others feel like running away from or killing when they see it. No, I want to be loved. Not to be hated."

I realised I better leave this place, because it is making me out of my mind. So I moved back to Soshanguve and it's whereby I started a new life.

* * *

On Thursdays, I sit with Christopher.

I attend. I prompt. I echo.

In a courtyard under the sun I sit.

* * *

Anyway, I was raised out here by the jungle. My father who brought me in this world passed away while I was still a young boy. I don't even have a picture of him. I can't describe how he looks. But Donald and the others know exactly how he was, because they are bigger than me. So it is very hard and at this point in time although I am not educated, but I have my children.

My firstborn is nineteen-years-old. Last year he completed his Grade 12 with a B average. I am proud of my child. I am not educated, but at least I have a child who is more educated than me. And where it hurts is their mother just left me, because I am not schooled and I don't have a decent job, you know.

We got three children, their mother and me. My firstborn, he is 19-years-old. My second-born is 15-years-old. My third-born is 5-years-old. It was a long journey to raise those children. But at the end of the day, by one minute, things changed, you know, this woman started playing funny tricks on me. She left me for somebody else, a truck driver. I am just a simple guy who is not earning anything, you know. It just blew up, just like that.

But sometimes in life, Pieter, the truth of things becomes clear much earlier. I saw it a long way ago. I used to tell my boys, "Hey guys, you know what? Love is not the same anymore in this house. I can see your mother doesn't love me. But I can't tell her to go, because tomorrow when you grow big, you will blame me for that. So I just have to wait until her actions speak louder than words."

At the end of the day, it's about four to five years back when it happens for real and I just have to call those children again.

"Hey guys, do you still remember what I have said to you?"

"Ja, we remember. You tell us about this and that."

"And what do you see now?"

"Exactly, it is happening. What must we do?"

"Ah, no guys, you don't have to worry. There is nothing you can do. This is my battle. Don't worry. She will remain being your mother. I will remain being your father. No matter what it takes. I will remain."

And you know what she has done? She has stripped me of everything that I worked hard for. She left me in my shack with nothing. My fridges, my home theatre system, my sofas, my bed, my blankets. She took everything that I got. Even now, at this present moment, it is very hard to get those things back, because I am only working part-time. When I visit my place I don't even have a chair to sit on. I just have to take something like this big can, you know, and make it a chair. Because I am soldier, what can I do? I am soldier with no gun. I am just fighting with my spirit.

But the stuff she has taken will not last. They will get old. They will break. In my life, I have this slogan, you know: "I wish a long life to my enemies, so that they may see my success or my progress." One day, they will see, because days are days, but they are numbered, you know. Each and every month there are Mondays, Tuesdays, until the month passes by, you know. You start the other month. There is Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday — just as usual. But days are numbered. You count from day one, day thirty, day one, day twenty-eight, just like that.

One day, things will change. And if they don't change I don't give a damn. I will even go six feet under the ground. By that time I will be dead and I'll be seeing nothing on top of this earth. It is fine. There is nothing I can do. Because hatred or jealousy is the freedom of fools, you know.

Because you can hate a person or be jealous of that person. Then you are just sitting around the corner, staring at people's belongings, becoming envious. You have no profit. So you better go out there and use your brains, use your hands, work hard then you will get something you deserve. To get a goal you must work hard. Then you will earn the goal that you are looking for. But by sitting down and folding your hands, you think things will just come where you are sitting. No chance. You can't get anything.

* * *

I lived at location for several years, Pieter. At the beginning, it was no greener pastures. It took me almost a year-and-a-half to get my first piecework. Eventually, I settled in. I got some odd jobs working at Centurion and then started my own shebeen, selling beer, cigarettes, and cold drinks. I acquired some land and built a shack — a simple house made out of planks and zinc plate, not bricks. In some ways my life stabilised, but in other ways I was faltering. My relationship with my wife was not good. We started harassing each other, me and my wife. So it is whereby I start to think, “It is better to go back to the bushes, because I can’t handle this situation. If I force myself to be near this woman, I will end up killing her at the end of the day.”

And I tried hard by all means to make it work. While I was out here at the camp she used to call me, “Hey, come back. Let us sort our problem out.” So I returned home. Life calmed down for two, maybe three weeks, but by the fourth it started again, you know.

You see my relationship with my wife was turbulent. I punished her for her infidelities and she punished me by being unfaithful. I guess we each got what we deserved. It pains me when I think of the impact on my children. They are not supposed to see their father beating their mother. And now, my middle boy is a problem child. He is only 15-years-old. But he is like a mad dog, you know. He doesn’t fear anything because he is always drugged. He is addicted to *nyaope* and now they tell me he steals everything he can lay his hands on to feed his habit.

I remember seeing him for the first time in the hospital. He had this tiny little body, all red and wrinkled, his leg the width of my thumb.

The nurses told me, “Hey babba. You know what?”

“No, I don’t know.”

“Take care of this young boy. He is going to give you troubles.”

“Why?”

“He is premature. And each and every premature is problematic.”

* * *

I recognise the truth in this caution. I was also born six weeks early and I recall the difficulties I caused my parents in a conflict-ridden adolescence. In this way, I feel an affinity with Christopher's son. I was also worrisome. I also fought my father to the brink. As a teenager, I was spiralling in my search for belonging, caught in the identity crisis of an immigrant.

Beneath the skin we are alike even if pigment divides us. In our stories I find commonality. I have also experienced moments of estrangement. I know the sting of rejection and the desire for connection. In my time in the camp and beyond, I have heard many men speak of strained relationships — often in the typically truncated vocabularies of male emotion. History is littered with accounts of men who have been set adrift in their worlds, cast aside by social forces acting against their need to be rooted. Perhaps, the notion of 'home' is simply an expression of the yearning to be grounded in associations and practices that give a sense of meaning, belonging, and security. And 'place' is merely the stage upon which these relations and rituals are enacted.

It is the dimensions of belonging and security that have been strained for me in South Africa. I have felt distant from my family both here and in Canada. The intensity of my experiences in Woodlane Village have been isolating, creating intimacy in my relationships with camp dwellers, but distance elsewhere. Some of the narratives I have listened to have been disturbing due to their emotional content — the charge of pain and tension. It has been difficult to translate the memories of these encounters into a language that is comprehensible to other audiences — especially to those I wish would most understand.

* * *

It happened like this. I was finished with my wife. By that time, I was seeing someone else who I cared about, but there were rumours that my ex had a three year-old boy who looked like me. I was trying to forget about her, but as I heard these stories it made me hot, you know. I was preoccupied with the thoughts of having a child, so I made plans to see him. I was busy hunting this woman. And exactly, when I saw my first-born on the street with his mother it was like looking at my younger brother, Billy. He had the same eyes and round face. It was clear the gossip was true. So it is whereby I started to fight for him — but not by hand, by mind.

“Let us go to my mom’s place. Let my mom see this child,” I implored her.

“No, that will never happen. He is not your child. He is somebody else’s child.”

“Okay, okay, I hear you. I understand. But how does it happen that he looks like me? That is a miracle. And even if I don’t have a single cent in my pocket I will make means so that we must go to the paternity test. I will make plans. I don’t want to give you a problem with the gentleman you are living with now. The only thing I want is this child. This is my blood. This is my flesh.”

So I convinced my ex to visit my mother. It was a wonder when my mom first caught a glimpse of my son.

“Whoa! Whose child is this?”

“I was always telling you I am a father. I got a child, but you never see him, but now is the time. The time is now. Tell me whose child is this?”

“No, exactly, exactly. This is your child. He looks the very same like you.”

* * *

As you can imagine, Pieter, my mind was racing. Here he was my child. And here I was his father. Yet, he was awkward about me. I was a stranger to him. So I had to make plans.

I told my mom, “Okay, you know I don’t want to break this woman’s relationship with the guy she is staying with. The only thing I need is this child. I want this child to know I am his biological father — not the guy he stays with over there. He is nobody. I am somebody. No, don’t worry, mom. I’m a soldier with no gun. I will make my plans and I will even face that guy and tell him the truth. He mustn’t fool himself.”

And she said, “No, Christopher. Just give us a second. Let me talk to this woman before you make things worse.”

I gave them that chance. I went out for an hour. I bought myself two quarts of beer. My mind was running faster than a jet, you know, faster than anything I could explain. I finished those two beers and returned to my mother’s place.

“Please, my child. We have talked this the other way around.”

“How did you talk it the other way around?”

“Okay, this woman says she made a bad move. She accepts the child is yours.”

“Yeah, that’s what I want. And what’s next?”

“No, she wants you to be together again.”

“This is very hard to accept.”

Eventually, my ex left with my son and I was alone with my mother. The world seemed to be closing in on me, Pieter, and all I could do was ask my mother this very same question, “Do you think this woman will cheat on me again?”

“No, the way she has spoken with me, no. Done is done.”

“No, mom, you know what? I believe less. I don’t need this woman. I need my child. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks. You can’t.”

* * *

So it came where I accepted she had changed. But, truthfully, I always feared it would happen again. There was a nagging part of me that suspected she was only with me for economic reasons. You see I was busy running my small business back then. I was a good provider at my family home, you know. I was taking care of my

mom, my siblings, and my niece. She recognised, “Okay, this tokoloshe is coming along now. There is bread. There is butter. There is everything. I better stick myself together and do as if I am perfect, although perfect I am not.”

So it happened. I was sitting at home one day and I got this funny feeling, “Hey man, you better go for a walk.” But not knowing exactly where I must go. I was like a crazy person, because I didn't have a clue or a direction. And then at the end of the day, I was wandering along the street where my ex was staying with this gentleman of hers.

Afterwards I was filled with these terrible thoughts, you know. In Midrand I knew men who hired out guns. But at the end of the day I just settled down and thought twice, “No, man. I don't have to. Let me just leave them. And the only thing is we got a second child now. And these bad stuff keep on happening so let me just acknowledge I am staying with a cheater in my house.”

I could accept this reality, Pieter. Nobody is perfect. All of us are cheaters in this world — each and every one of us.

* * *

We continued with the relationship until our third child was born and then things fell apart. Just have a look from the first child, a second child, and a third child. I was hoping we would grow old together in the very same house, even though we were playing funny games. Nobody is perfect. You can go to the four corners of the world and you are going to find the very same problems.

So we kept on fighting. I used to kick her like a soccer ball, you know, in front of my first child. I know it broke his heart. He used to cry out, “Hey, daddy. You don't have to! Leave mamma alone.”

“Okay, boy. I will leave your mom alone, but you are still a young child and you don't understand what is happening in this world. I wish you grow big and get your own woman then you will see the difference. But for now you will never understand.”

And at the end of the day before my wife and I split, I spoke to my first child, “I see now your mom, although how many times I *donner* her, she don’t love me anymore. And she never did. She was pretending. But now she isn’t even faking it anymore. She shows me she has found greener pastures, even though I haven’t caught her with another man in my place. I can feel it. Every human being has telltale signs, you know. And if you don’t have telltale signs in your body or in your mind then you must know you are not living, trust me.”

* * *

It happened I came home on Thursday. And she knew that most of the time I came home from the camp by Friday or Saturday. But, well, that day it was Thursday. So she arrived late at about quarter-to-ten in the night and she didn’t know I was there. Because I opened the padlock and the chain and then I made plans to lock the door while I was still in the house. I just tied that chain very tight, you know. Okay, when she entered and switched on the light she found me lying on my bed. She looked startled.

“How could you do this?”

“No, I was feeling like sleeping so that’s why I put the chain together.”

“Ja, I can see. Did you think I would be coming with somebody and you wanted to surprise us?”

“No, I am not that kind of a person. Maybe you are talking about things you are busy doing while I am not around. I am here because it is my place and I want to see you. Why worry?”

So we slept together and then by Friday, she woke up and went to work. While she was out, I bought myself a case of beer. It was in the freezer. When she came home at the end of the day I was busy grabbing them — one-by-one, one-by-one. Always a beer in my hand. Beer keeps me going, you know. And if I get nervous or angry it cools me down, you know. Ja, I did drink until late that day. We didn’t talk and she went to bed early. And by midnight, I

decided I better go to sleep too, because the kind of a life we were living was from bad to worse. I climbed on top of the bed with my clothes on, folded my hands, and then I was gone.

Early in the morning by half-past-four she woke up and asked me, “Did you answer my phone?”

“No, I never answered your phone and no one phoned while you slept so why do you ask me that? Were you expecting a call?”

“No, no.”

She fell asleep again and I went to the freezer to grab a beer. And here came this million-dollar question, you know, “Why should she ask me this?” And once she was snoring I took her phone. It wasn’t my original intention to do so, but I was growing hot. I started checking the out-calls and the in-calls, whatever. And it’s whereby I found out, whoa, there was this guy Johannes. He was phoning my wife almost everyday. Even my wife rang him almost everyday.

* * *

She took everything. But I was a mad man by that time, Pieter. I wasn’t thinking straight, because I didn’t want to lose her and we have children together, her and I.

I was talking to myself, “No, I will rather kill this woman, because she is cheating me. Okay, I have to kill her and myself. I just have think deep now.”

And then there comes this mind, “Why don’t you kill yourself? Leave her be.”

In fact, I did try. Do you see my neck, Pieter? Do you see this side? It is blacker than the other, you know. It’s where the rope went through.

So alright, I was drunk by that day. And I was busy talking to myself, “Today is my last day.” Ja, I make sure that, hey, babba, I have to drink more than I could expect, you know. And then when she came back from work she found I had six quarts of Black Label in the fridge — 6 bottles, 750 ml each. And I was dead drunk, but I told myself one thing, “Today is my last day.” And it was only the

two of us in the shack, you know. I was watching TV by the time she went to bed, but I couldn't see anything because of my moods. My mind was not there. I was just thinking about ending the story.

It was about quarter-to-two in the morning, when I took the rope and climbed on top of my bed. I tied it on the rafter of the shack, made a loop, and then "Here I go!" I was dangling before the rope came free and I fell. And you could just hear this huge noise: "Gud-dwah!"

My wife woke up and found the rope on my neck.

"Hey, what are you trying to do?"

And now I was feeling that pain, you know. It was like burning. So she was busy treating me with this kind of a salve. What do they call it? Germolene. By tomorrow, she woke up, went to the pharmacy and bought pain tablets, Germolene, and Mercurochrome to tend my wounds.

I asked her, "How can you treat me and on the other hand you're unfaithful?"

"No, Christopher, not meaning if I leave you I hate you. You are the father of my children. The only thing is you and me no longer stand a chance to live together."

* * *

I can see the scar on the side of Christopher's neck. I envision the desperate leap, the bite of the rope, the urge to fill emptiness with emptiness. I appreciate the impulse towards self-destruction. I felt this way when I was young and couldn't find my way in the world. During my darkest spells, I also fantasised myself dangling from the highest tree. We are not so different, you and I. Only the thin line between action and imagination separates us. I relate to what you are confiding in me. I can imagine the depths of estrangement you experienced in the dead of night. In the telling of your story you are bringing language to your suffering. I hope that in doing so you are able to find a measure of acceptance.

* * *

So it's whereby I accepted that "over is over." I don't have to fight anymore, because fighting everyday doesn't keep the children happy in the house. Because what we are teaching our children is this violence thing. Even themselves when they grow big and get their own women they will keep on beating them because they have seen that. They have seen this from their father who was always beating their mother. My stepfather used to do that to my mom, but I never adopted that. If I hit a woman I am angry and there is a cause — not for no good reason. So it's whereby I accepted that "over is over."

* * *

So any good act that I am busy acting now, I am doing for my children so that they must know there is a struggle for a good cause. Not to say almost everyday we must keep on fighting. There is "agree" or "disagree." If we don't agree together then we depart. It's what I am learning now, but even though I am not there anymore. Sometimes, I meet with my ex and her boyfriend and I just greet them.

"Salute."

"Salute."

"How are the childrens?"

"Ah, fine."

"I am going to visit them now"

That is what I need, truly. And if I meet my childrens I just tell them I was with their mom and her boyfriend. I tell them, "So did I greet them, so did we share a little joke, so did we laugh together, so did I tell them I'm coming to visit you guys. That's what I want you to learn from me. If a relationship is over, it is over. Accept it. Take it the way it is, go your separate ways and when you meet, greet each other."

That's how I live now. That is my strategy.

* * *

I thank God. Because by the time I was thinking of suicide I knew most of the time that we, as fathers, if our love goes over then the women win the childrens, you know. You find they are poisoning your kids against you. So my stupid mind was thinking, “Okay, I lose this wife and I will lose my childrens too.” All of which, I was wrong. I was dead wrong.

And even now still I ask myself, “What if I had died?” Still those childrens of mine, they will be missing me. You see? And it would have been too late by then. Even now, even though I am suffering I know I can communicate with them. You know, speaking to them, giving them that huge love. Because they can phone me even if I am staying here in the camp, if they want to know where I am and how do I cope. It shows I never lost anything. And it makes me happy and it keeps me going almost every day.

And I know one day my things will be fine. My score will be settled, because I am looking for this goal. And this goal is the only thing I need: just to build my childrens their own home. Even where they are living now with their mother is their home. It is their home from their mother. Where I am now it will be their home from their father. Then they will just pick and choose at the end of the day where to go. “We must go and live with mom” or “we must go and live with dad.” It is their choice. I will never drag them. The only thing I want to do is to build my place and they can choose where to live.

Because a shack has no guarantees. The sticks holding up the zinc plate will rot as the years go by. And one day the wind will blow and the shack will be gone. But if I can build a brick house, four rooms with a single garage — although I don’t have a car — it would be better. Ja, a house with four rooms and a single garage that is my plan.

I am dreaming about finding a good job. The only thing I have to do now is to not rush. I have to take one step at a time, because if I rush I will crash. I just have to take one step at a time.

* * *

“If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.”

— Sound bite from the flight to Jo’burg from London

* * *

I think for today. I am always wondering what will happen next. Why? Because as time goes by today becomes tomorrow. How is it going to be? How will I spend the rest of my time?

As you can see it is very hot today. There is not even a cloud to shield the sun from burning so harshly, you know. What about tomorrow? Nobody knows. Maybe it will be raining. Maybe we will never see the sun. Maybe it will be a windy day. Nobody knows. We will just see by tomorrow, “Oh, thanks God. Today is Friday.”

And then we just go along and it is Saturday, “Oh, thanks, God. We made it.” And we really don’t know what will happen on Saturday when we go to bed. By tomorrow when we wake up one of us is not rising. No one killed him and he never claimed he was sick or feeling a pain. It was a normal happy day but by tomorrow when we wake up one of us is dead, because we live to die. And we can’t change that. That’s how life goes.

* * *

We mustn’t be scared of death. We know we are going to die, but we don’t know how or when we are going to die. So we just have to keep pushing on. Each and every day I wake up and say, “Oh, thanks God, I have seen this day of today.”

Many other peoples never live to see it, because it is never only one person who dies in a day. People are dying each and every second that passes by. It is just that we don’t know each other. We are not connected. But if truly speaking we could see the dead of only one day the world over, we would see that millions are dying

each and every day, millions of people. So how could we be so scared of dying while we know we live to die? We live to die.

So that's why I just came out here and live my life knowing that, "Hey, one day I will be no more." And the only thing is I really don't know when I will succeed. Every step of the way I am just praying, "Oh, God, please give me some more living days so that I must reach my goal, so I must prove a point to my childrens."

Because I keep on telling them this, "Hey guys, never mind me. I know you miss me. And I miss you too. But we can't just stay over here, all of us, staring at each other's faces and then no profit. Maybe I will succeed one day. And it's whereby I can come home and do some better stuff as I promised. I feel for you guys. I have to build you a home, a place you will call home. But without working, where will I get the power or the money to do that? There is no chance. So guys, don't worry, you just keep up with a good schooling."

* * *

There are degrees of madness, you know. Even in my family we got those kind of a people. Some of them are good. Some of them are bad, you know. But you can't change a human being, because he is what he is. So you just have to accept him as he is.

There are those peoples who live in the night. They don't fear darkness, you know. When darkness comes its whereby they feel happy, because each and every wrong deed they are supposed to do it is very safe. Because it is night, no one can see so far, you know, just from nearby. So when darkness comes it is whereby the peoples of those camps start to feel happy because it is their freedom to do evil deeds. They are hunting for what they can get.

* * *

Can you see how Donald and myself have built our place? Do you see the courtyard and the fence that runs around our property? Not meaning that we are fearful of things. If death wants you, it will come. No locks or fences can keep death out. But by doing this, at least, we have some protection. So showing that even in broad daylight we lock our gate even if we are inside, so showing we don't want to mix ourselves with those other peoples. Not meaning that we hate them, it's just we are coming from different backgrounds. And even our behaviour is not the same. So by doing this, we avoid problems.

Until it comes to what? If somebody comes here, pushes my gate and forces it open, then I will fight for the good cause. I don't mix myself with those peoples, but if we meet by the street we greet each other. We can talk to each other for a little while and then it is finished. Because by this camp, I can't say I got a perfect friend. Everybody is my friend as long as we don't give each other a problem. We can talk, we can share our jokes, but not everyday. My best friend in this camp is my brother Donald. There is no one I am closer to. Some days, you find by 5 o'clock the sun is still shining. It is very bright, but you will find my gate is locked and even my shack is locked. I am in there. The candle is lit and I am busy reading my newspaper before bed. Because I don't need any trouble...because I know by the time I was a young boy, I was still growing, I was supposed to be naughty. But I am naughty no more.

I have changed. I have a different crew now, those madalas, you know. It is like I am living with my grandfathers, my uncles, my big brothers, you know. Ja, they are the peoples I am associated with in Soshanguve. They respect me and I respect them. That's why I have my own shack now out at location. Without them I would never have obtained my plot of land. They groomed me. Without them, I would be no more in this world of today, because crime was in my blood. This cheating stuff, you know. This bullying stuff was in my blood, because I lived for that. Mixing myself with these big guys

changed me. I told them stories about my life before I met them. I told them I was a piece of shit. So they appreciate that, “No, Christopher, you are a changed guy now. We hope that you keep on doing that. Change forever now. Don’t ever go back again.”

Every weekend there is a fight in this camp. Trust me. Every weekend starting from Friday, because everybody who is making piece jobs got his money in his hand, in his pocket, then they start to behave very badly — very badly. They are drunk before they enter the camp. There is a bottling store by the Checkers. They buy liquor from there then they just sit in the bushes and drink their beer.

Always whereby there is fighting there are shebeens nearby. Because nearby those shebeens there are guys playing dice. You know, gambling. There are peoples who admit they have lost their cash according to gambling. And there are those who won’t admit they have lost. They feel like winning everyday, you know. And it can’t happen. And then the fighting begins.

When I am drunk I make sure I am in my shack, I lock the door and go to bed, you see. Nowhere to be found. But most of the peoples that we are living with in the camp, they can’t do that. Always when they are drunk, they feel like fighting.

* * *

Christopher, did I tell you how safe I feel behind this fence of yours? I have always felt welcome here. This is not the case in all parts of this community. I have experienced moments of discomfort, especially in the early days when I could do little more than wander up and down the rows of shacks, waving at strangers. There were the occasional glares from people: suspicion in their eyes, clenched jaws, tight lips.

And yes, I still experience tinges of unease when the sun plummets beneath the surrounding hills and night sets in. As you have reminded me, this is a country where one can ill afford to

drop one's guard. I have never been fearful, but I appreciate the escorts to my vehicle when the blackness comes.

Feeling welcome and safe are not always one and the same, Christopher. Did I ever tell you how much I value the hospitality you and Donald have shown me?

I fondly recall our experiences together: the conversations; the music; the time in Mpumalanga, watching Hollywood movies and braaiing steak and *boerewors*; the night we prepared morogo and pap over the wood fire. I cherish the memories of visiting your family at location. I remember your mother giving me a hug and calling me, "My son."

As I have confided, my time in South Africa has been unsettling. I find the daily transition from the affluence of my relatives to the poverty of the camp to be challenging. It is difficult to bridge between these two realities. The world you have shared with me is rich, layered, and immediate — full of colours, sounds, and movement. The world of my relatives is more controlled, emotionally distant, and rule-bound. It is an ordered existence, obsessed with security and predictability. There are women's spaces and men's spaces and adult spaces and children's spaces. There is comfort, but not much warmth.

The opposite is true in the camp. The boundaries are more porous. Joys and struggles run closer to the surface in this place. And perhaps, there is more honesty here as a result.

* * *

You know in life there are ups and downs. Nobody can change you if you don't want to be changed. You have to talk to your inner: you, yourself, your brains, your activity, your whatever. You have to talk to yourself before anyone can guide you. If you expect to be led by other peoples, you will go nowhere. You can guide me now, but if you leave me alone, my bad behaviours will return. They will hunt me, because that's what I need. But if I don't need them, then nothing will happen.

* * *

I was a heavy dagga smoker. I quit eight months now. Because the dagga they sell now is not the same as I used to smoke. It is much stronger. It messes with your head. It makes the addicted go crazy. They don't even eat. Trust me. They think they are in heaven, but they are walking in hell, you know. They are so deep in a shit, Pieter.

I tell my son, "Hey, boy, you are going down. Trust me. Because the dagga you are smoking now is not the same dagga I used to smoke. This is a poison. Don't you wonder why I have quit? Why? Because it will be as if I am your teacher or whatever. So that's why I quit. Why? If it was the normal dagga, I would still be cross with you, but not as I am now. What you are doing is very dangerous. It is taking your life, bit by bit. At the end of the day, you will be no more."

And he is a tough guy, you know. But he is going down little by little, you know. I am praying every day that he quits. Because when it comes to education, he is very bright. He is a brilliant and a naughty boy. By the end of this year, they chucked him out of school. His behaviour is the problem. I really don't know how he will survive without schooling. Education is the key of life.

And I keep on telling him this everyday, why? Although I am not educated, it is not my fault, you know. Because I was raised by someone who didn't care for me. I couldn't stand how he mistreated us. Sometimes his friends challenged his behaviour.

"Hey, why are you treating those children so very bad?"

"No, those are not my children. Those are my slaves."

My mother knows I nearly killed that old man, because he was abusive. He used to beat her in front of us, you know. And he used to call us names as he pleased. It hurt so much having him insult us at our deceased father's place. So I ran to the bushes because there was no life over there. And it is whereby I lost my education.

He is dead now, Pieter. Nobody killed him. It was his time to go. Because if your time comes, even though you can run from

here to Japan, you are going to die. Death follows like a shadow. Death is like that. You can't play funny tricks with death. It is a trailblazer. You can hide underneath your bed or dig yourself a hole. Death will find you. At the end of the day, the dirt will cover you. And then you will be no more.

So even that old man died. Before he passed I used to visit him and I would bring him items I know he loved.

"Hey boy, I am sorry," he used to cry.

"You are sorry about what?"

"No, the way I handled you guys. It pains me. It pains me.

"How so?"

"Because I wasted your life."

"No, you don't have to worry," I would say.

* * *

I am very nervous for my boy. The world is turning around, so we have to go along. We have to change our pathways. We must do what is best for us so that by tomorrow if peoples meet us on the street they see us as human beings — not as animals. But the thing that scares me is my young boy. He is no longer a person. He is an animal. Trust me. He is going nowhere. And I am afraid he is going to die young. Because in the world of today, life is too fast. It's not slow like the time I was growing big. No, life is too fast, I am afraid.

The life that we are living now is most dangerous. You know, during the apartheid era, crime was not like it is presently. Today, it is worse. Because by the apartheid era there were no robberies like today. Sure, there were some masterminds who raided shops and whatever, but not like today. Now we have this freedom, you know. Everything is for free. Drugs are for free. Rape and murders are for free.

* * *

Christopher opens the Daily Sun — a tabloid chronicling life in the townships in Gauteng Province. It is his favourite newspaper, a gateway to the wider community.

“Here is another story that breaks my heart.”

“He woke up early to go and queue for his pension grant. But thugs were up even earlier and were waiting for him! Today the old man is fighting for his life in hospital. He was stoned and stabbed and the cruel criminals almost ripped off his 4-5,” he reads.

“Do you know what they are talking about 4-5, Pieter?”

He continues, “The madala was found at about 6 AM by petrol attendants at the Caltex garage between Block C and Block X in Mabopane, north of Pretoria. One of the attendants, Rosinah Macheta, said: ‘It was the end of our shift and we were sweeping the cement before we left for home. We saw a naked, bleeding man lying next to a diesel pump. His face was swollen as if he had been hit with stones. His mouth was tied with a cloth and he was shaking and confused. We called the police and an ambulance, but we don’t know who the madala was or where he lived.’ The man’s clothes were not found. He was wrapped in blankets by paramedics before being rushed to Odi Hospital. Police said they were investigating.”

* * *

Dream of Cape Flats

In the morning, the children find them.
At the edge of the township, on the field.
Soiled dressings and anatomical debris.
Dirty syringes on the soccer pitch.
Needles, sharps, and *doringdraat*.
Not all who play here are stung.
But the hazards remain
for those who sprint
barefoot.

* * *

Yes, this is a world for living dangerously, Pieter. Did I tell you I was stabbed out in Soshanguve? It was 1992, twenty years back. I can't remember the day or month. Somebody close to me, one of my best friends, attacked me, you know.

At that time I was a waiter at the Wingate Park Country Club and my manager hated me so bad. He accused me of stealing and I was so fed up with him that I quit. I took the pay they owed me, my savings, and my UIF papers and I was out of there. It came to about R4500 — a significant amount of money.

When I visit location, even today, peoples see me as this cash machine, this walking ATM. They need this and that — that and this, you know. So in town I planned to make a little surprise for the peoples I am living with. I bought this huge bottle of cane spirit, a quart of Smirnoff 1818. And then I bought two packs of *braaiwors*, two packs of briskets, and two packs of tripe.

Those peoples were just sitting around at home. Some of them were hungry. They didn't know what they were going to eat for the day. So I called them over, "Hey guys, you come here." We made some firewood. We started braaiing this meat. Then I cooked them pap, you know. We ate. After eating I bought them a case of Lion lager. It was my favourite by that time, so twelve 750 ml bottles of Lion, very cold. After drinking that beer, I bought another dozen. Then it's whereby the whole shit broke loose. As I was going out the gate, my friend came over.

"Hey, my friend. I see you got plenty money, my friend. How about you give me five rand?"

"Five rand for what? Aren't you happy? Just have a look. You were hungry. I fed your stomach. Now you are strong as a lion. And before I came you were sober. I bought you beer. Now you are drunk. It's my money, guy. So don't play funny games with me."

Thankfully, I had given most of my hard cash to my eldest sister for safekeeping. I only had about R160 in my pocket. But it

was huge money by that time. It was huge. So I was busy arguing with this friend of mine.

“No, my friend. I give you nothing. I have done more than is expected of me. No more, no less.”

I pushed him by the side then went by. Maybe within two minutes I heard peoples screaming at my back, you know.

“Hey, Christopher, Christopher! Watch out! Watch out!”

By the time I turned around, Pieter, it was whereby he stabbed me in my neck. Then I didn’t feel anything because I was drunk, you know. My mind and my heart told me: ‘Grab this guy and beat the hell out of him!’ But I couldn’t hold this guy, since a muscle in my neck was severed.

* * *

I stayed in hospital for several weeks until I recovered, although to this present day my left hand is not as strong as my right. The left one is just a helping hand, you know. It has no more powers.

So goes my story. I returned home and met with my attacker’s parents. They pleaded, “How much money do you need?”

“Nothing. You never sent your son to crook me. It came out of his own mind, so why should I take cash from you? The only thing I need is to hunt him. I have to cause him a pain so he must go to the hospital. He must see how it looks over there.”

So well, I have done it. I hunted the motherfucker until I found him. There was nothing he could do. I just found him. He never knew I was there. I was right behind him before his friends raised the alarm. He tried to run, but it was too late.

I could have hurt him, Pieter. But it was not in my mind. I am not the killing type. Besides he died his own way.

* * *

Before he died, it happened again. By the very same guy, it happened. We were together, busy playing dice. I was coming back from my mother's place at Block W. I was staying by Winterveld by that time. So I found them. They were gambling and I joined them. Because even I myself can throw bowls, you know.

It was my lucky day. I won R1850. And afterwards, I decided to go and sleep, you know. Why? Because I was a rich man by that day. I won R1850. Ja, I was rich man by that day.

So the very same guy knocked at my room with his crew, Pieter. They knocked.

"Eh, who is there?"

"No, man. We have no money now. The rest of our cash is in your pocket. Please man, just wake up. Let us go to the nearby shebeen and then buy us a case of beer, at least we will be happy."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

And then I started thinking, "Okay, those motherfuckers want me to get drunk so they must rob me."

Okay, I just woke up, put on my clothes, and stepped out. I locked the room and we went nearby, to the nearby shebeen. I bought a case. I just bought it. But now I was thinking of running away while they were busy with this liquor thing.

* * *

It was night, pitch black, and no taxis were running by the time I made my escape to Block W.

Along the way, I met with two robbers, two *tsotsis* prowling in the dark. We didn't know each other. They asked for a match for their cigarette.

"Hey babba, borrow us a light."

"No, I don't have a light."

"But we can hear it. It is making noise out of your pocket."

“No guys. I don’t have one for you.”

I could feel the threat. I took my key holder, because it was darkness, you know. That key holder saved my life. It was hanging over my hip and I unlocked it as if I was breaching a gun. They heard the sound, “Clack-clack.”

“Hey guys! One step more I break your head!”

They froze and I ran back to the shebeen with that crew again, thinking, “Oh, today is not my lucky day.”

* * *

I was sitting with that thug and his crew, drinking beer when my friend showed up, the same one who took me to the hospital. He was looking for me very urgently.

“Hey babba, I hear you won such a big money,” he said.

“Ja, just look at what is happening. Those guys want to kill me for my winnings. They forced me to buy a case of beer.”

“Don’t worry. I am here now. We will sort them out.”

Another companion of mine arrived at the same time.

“Babba, I heard your story. You made it. It was your day.”

I told him about my predicament, “Here are the peoples. They forced me to buy this. It wasn’t my intention.”

“No, they are mad,” he said. “I must change them now! I’m not scared of these guys. Watch me!”

He stood up and said, “Hey guys, you know what? Your time is finished now. Now is my turn. Did you force Christopher to buy twelve bottles? Okay, now the beer is mine. So you go!”

They stood up and left, all sheepish and unhappy. I was pleased, you know. I got two of my friends and I am the third now. So I got this manpower. And I got this huge money in my pocket.

Alright, it happens we did finish those beers. We were feeling great so we decided to go to another shebeen at location, a busier place, but a long way to go.

We arrived only to find the same crooks we drove away. Then they planned again, because now they were eight and we were only three.

Ja, then it is whereby all hell broke loose. They whispered, “Ja, here is the guy who won the game. He has plenty of money so we must make plans. He is enjoying himself with his crew, now what about us?”

So they were busy scheming. And that young guy who chased them away saw everything. He came over to warn me.

“Hey Christopher, you know what? Those peoples are planning very, very dirty tricks. Do you have a knife?”

“No, I don’t have one.”

“Take this for some protection, man.”

I opened the blade and then stuck it across my belly before going to the washroom, Pieter. Ja, the things I have done that day were very horrible. It was like a horror. Trust me.

I was standing right by the toilet. Then there came one of these thugs, because he knew I got money. He never waited for his crew or whatever. I was just standing like this. I had already finished peeing and had zipped up my trousers, but I stood there as if I was still urinating. But I had this sharp knife now, you know.

The first guy who came at me was armed himself. I spun around suddenly, stabbing him. He screamed and dropped his knife, because I hit him where his power began — in the place where his shoulder meets his arm. As he tried to escape, I grabbed him from behind by his belt. Then it is whereby I kept on stabbing him, Pieter. I just kept on stabbing. Stabbing, stabbing, stabbing. Maybe eight holes in the back. Then I turned him around, holding him by his belt again. Maybe eight holes in the front. By then his crew was standing there.

“Hey guys, you know what? Now is do or die! I know you want my money but it is not yours! It is mine. And now, I am leaving. And I am going with this guy. You just stand where you are. If you follow me I will kill him. Trust me.” I forewarned them.

I grabbed that guy. One of my friends joined me and we took him. And I was busy stabbing him along the way. His crew stepped forward and I yelled.

“Hey, you stand. Otherwise, I kill him.”

I just kept on stabbing him, you know. We dragged that guy maybe a distance from here to the Pick ‘n Pay. By then, we were taking turns with the knife. Even my friend said, “No, you don’t stab him right. Bring it here. Let me show you.”

We were like two crazy people. We swapped one another with that very same knife. At the end of the day, I just seen that guy’s intestines were out, you know. Out!

Then it’s whereby I started thinking he was dead so I better finish him off. But he was still alive and kicking. I nearly slaughtered him like a chicken, because his intestines were out. I thought, “This is no longer a living thing. Let me chop off its head.”

I was drunk and I was drugged. I was drinking beer, smoking dagga and then anything I was doing was like, ah, nothing. Ja, I put my knee on top of that guy’s chest and I put the knife on top of his throat, you know.

* * *

I don’t know where my other friend came from. Out of the night he came running and he kicked me. I toppled over and the knife fell out of my hand. He grabbed the weapon.

“Christopher, what are you doing?”

“No, I just want to kill this motherfucker.”

“No, this man is already dead. Leave him.”

That guy was still alive and kicking. By that time, I was spattered with blood, you know. And it seemed like I myself was badly injured, but there wasn’t even a single scratch on my body.

“Eh, friend of mine. You see now we have made a horrible thing. Now the police will be after us and even this guy’s crew will be after us, so we need somewhere safe to hide.”

And that place was obvious to me. It was this place again.

* * *

His crewmembers were busy tracking me, Pieter. But they never caught me, because I was like a wild cat. You know a wild cat avoids humans, because people always throw stones. It has to keep on ducking and dodging to get away from harm. That was my kind of a life.

Since that day, I have told myself, “No, I don’t have to carry a knife.” Why? Because it might happen I will end up killing somebody. If I kill somebody with my bare hands or with my teeth that is a different matter, but I don’t want to carry a knife anymore. I have seen what I am capable of when I am full of anger. Because most of the time, I regret after something bad is done. Then it is whereby I start thinking, “No, man. I have lost it. I shouldn’t have done that, but I can’t change it. Damage is already done.” So that’s why by all means I try to respect everybody who is near me. Because I got this anger when somebody provokes me until I cry.

It hurts me so much. How can I cry and yet nobody hits me? So the words somebody has spoken to me they make me cry. They have harmed me, spiritually and emotionally. So it is whereby I start to be very aggressive and troublesome. I just tell myself, “No, I don’t have to carry a knife ever again.”

Ja, this is the story of our Woodlane Village.

* * *

My wrong deeds caused these events. I created my enemies. They used to hunt me everywhere, you know. That’s why I started a new life. And I am happy with this new life, because it takes me somewhere.

Most of the peoples I grew up with are no more. Some of them are dead. Some of them are crippled. Some of them are still in Winterveld. They are like old men now, you know. They no longer have teeth in their mouths, because they were kicked in the faces.

Did I tell you I saw a friend today? I was fetching water to wash my clothes and he passed me. He looked like an old man, you know. He lost his right eye. They gauged it out, Pieter. Those are the peoples I was living with. I never imagined I would see one of the peoples I was doing this stealing thing with, you know. It breaks my heart, because he is still a young boy, maybe I am older than him by 15 years. But he looks like an old, old man, Pieter. This old madala, you know, with one eye gone. He has no teeth, you know. It was like I am dreaming when I see that guy, Pieter. I didn't recognise him at first then he calls me by my name, "Hey, bra Chris." It was amazing, Pieter. It was like a dream come true.

We were once so close — like a belt and a trouser, Pieter. A finger and a nail, you know. Ay, it amazed me, Pieter.

"Hey bra, Chris." He called me by name.

"Oh, Godfrey!"

"How you do, man?"

"Fine, fine. I always pass by here. Where are you staying?"

"Just over here."

"Now I am in a hurry. Maybe tomorrow I'll bring you a visit."

Even now I am still trembling, Pieter. He is like the walking dead. He is no more Godfrey. And the worse part is that he is still down there in Winterveld.

By the time he left home he raped his aunt or his mom. Raped her. That's why the bad luck followed him, because we believe this as blacks. There is this thing called 'bad luck.'

And the elders will tell you, "Okay, go you will see in front where you are going. Nothing will come alright." And exactly, I hoped they did curse him with that spell, "Go and you will see."

Then exactly it happened. Within three months they gouged his eye out — one of his eyes out. They broke his feet. They stabbed him all over. He is like a chopping board, you know, and he was once such a pretty young boy. But he is no longer the pretty young boy I used to know. He is just a scary thing.

* * *

And yes, Pieter, I have also been attacked in Plastic View, several times. But the only thing is some of those peoples pleaded for forgiveness. I just try to forgive and forget. That's what I am trying to do. Why? Because being angry will never help me with anything. I know if I am cross then maybe I will end up killing somebody and I will end up in jail. And jail is not where I like to be.

I just want to live a happy life, you know. So that's why I want to be trustworthy. I must trust others. And they must trust me so that if a huge problem comes, I can count on them to help me. They must know that we can work together — that we are a crew.

And that's how I feel about the peoples, the old madalas in Soshanguve. That's why I go out there to visit, whether or not I have money in my pocket. Even if I only have the R100 for transport, I go there. Why? Because it's where my crew lives. Even if I don't have the money to buy myself a beer, I am going to drink till I drop. And you will never know who has spent over there, because we are a crew. We are doing this together. We are together on top of everything we do. So that's why you will find out each and every Friday I go home. That's where I have this feeling, "I am at home. My spirit is free."

But when I am here in the camp I am not free. It's just the place where I live. It's just the place where I live.

* * *

Excerpt Mandela's Inauguration Address, 1994

To my compatriots, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld.

Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal. The national mood changes as the seasons change.

We are moved by a sense of joy and exhilaration when the grass turns green and the flowers bloom.

That spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland explains the depth of the pain we all carried in our hearts as we saw our country tear itself apart in a terrible conflict, and as we saw it spurned, outlawed and isolated by the peoples of the world, precisely because it has become the universal base of the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression.

* * *

Mandela's words resonate with my ambivalence about our homeland. Since my time here, I have been struck by how the splendour of this country is juxtaposed with a violent past that continues to bleed into the present.

The inauguration speech evokes the sensory and emotional connection I have to this land — and to the promise of renewal that comes with the rhythms of this place. It is this sense of common origins and shared spiritual inheritance that is threatened by racial tensions and class warfare. It is as if the natural world is beckoning us to step outside our troubled memories and narrow visions to a more expansive way of being.

* * *

You will know, Pieter, it is not easy for us to live together as peoples. There are some of my black brothers who don't love us as much. Look around you at the houses out here. It seems like they are no longer black peoples, living in those fancy homes and driving those fancy cars, you know. They are white peoples. Why? Because if you approach them speaking this Zulu language or this Sotho language then it's like they don't even hear you. It's like they just speak English one way or another.

Because even our black brothers who are staying in those suburbs don't trust us. And they are speaking this accent English, you know. Even if they know Zulu or Sotho, they don't hear you. They treat you as if you are coming from another planet, you know. They just ignore you. Why? Because they are filthy rich. They are neighbours with the whites. And if you come from this camp you are so in a deep shit. You are not a human being. You are a crook. You are a robber.

And if we don't understand each other when we meet, they point their fingers and laugh, "No, this is a stupid one." So I ask you, Pieter, if we can't communicate together who is the stupid one between us?

* * *

When I am here with those other groups, I have to speak many languages: Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa. When I am home with my mom, I just speak Sotho — Northern Sotho language. And when I speak to my siblings, we speak Zulu, you know. So that's how it is. And in most of the cases as the Malawian boys, I don't know the Malawian language, because I never grew up there. I just know a little bit of that language.

* * *

I appreciate how the words we speak create a sense of community and intimacy. I left South Africa when I was still very young, only six years old. I have spent most of my life in Canada where English and French are the primary languages spoken. But Afrikaans holds a special place in my heart, because it is the language of my upbringing. It has always been associated with family. My relationships with my mother and father and my siblings are encoded in Afrikaans. It is very much a home language. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons I feel a sense of community when I return to South Africa and hear it being spoken in grocery stores and on the streets. It promotes belonging even though the other cultural reference points are alien to me.

* * *

We are considered 'foreigners,' us Malawians. Just as the Zimbabweans are considered "foreigners." But forgetting one thing: we are family. Nothing will change that. Although, we are speaking different languages, family we are. Why? Because we are the blacks. And so the only thing that should happen, love, love, love, always.

But instead of love there comes what? Hatred and jealousy. That's why most of the time I say, "Jealousy is the freedom of fools." A fool doesn't know the differences. Trust me. A wise man

knows between right and wrong. But a fool thinks he is right even if he is wrong — each and everything he does is right for him.

So that is why I say, “Jealousy is the freedom of fools.” Why? Because most of the time when I am looking at the people living together at location or in Plastic View, we are one and the same. It’s just that we differ with what? The groups.

There is this group. They are the robbers and when they meet their plan is to do what? Go out and rob peoples. So they are wrong, but for themselves they are right. Why? Because that is their structure.

And then you find our group. We don’t feel like hurting others, you know. We just like being together. Let us be happy. But just between us as a crew, you know. And that’s where we are, because that’s what we’ve taught ourselves. It is in our brains to be this way.

And there is the group. They don’t rob anybody, but when you pass they point at your back and whisper, “He thinks he is too smart. Just have a look what he does.”

They are the backstabbers. And they don’t groom themselves between right and wrong. They just keep pointing fingers at others, “Just have a look. He thinks he is smart. Look his trousers are torn. Look his shoes are worn. But he thinks he is smart.”

If you see my clothes are tattered, why don’t you lend me a hand, instead of pointing a finger while I am passing by! I don’t have eyes at my back, you know. My eyes are here on my forehead. So I love peoples who confront me directly if they have a problem with me. And then they tell you what’s wrong. I love those kinds of a people because they are not the backstabbers, you know. But the ones who whisper, I don’t need those kind of a people.

* * *

I never bluff anybody with something I don't have. I am just going straight with the life I am living. And in most of the time, I make sure that each and every month, I must go and meet with my crew and pay my funeral scheme. Why? Because I know I am going to die one day.

At our location, there are those peoples. We live with them. We party with them almost everyday. But when Mr Death comes, Pieter, it is a shame. When you picture that person he used to wear those fancy clothes, but when his moment of silence comes it is a door-to-door campaign. His family is busy asking for money.

"Mr Who-Who is dead so we are asking for a donation so that he must get a proper funeral."

Those people are forgetting one thing: wearing fancy clothes doesn't mean you are better than the person who is wearing torn clothes like I do. You are just a human being. You are living the very same life. So you have to think first before you do things. You don't have to jump to conclusions. So you have to do what is best for you and your family, first. Although, simple you can be, lousy you can be.

The only thing I respect in life is Mr Death. Because Mr Death doesn't choose whether you are rich or poor. He just grabs you when the time is right. The only thing that I need in life is to be buried with dignity when I die. That's what I need.

* * *

Ubuntu is no more, Pieter. Ubuntu is gone. There is no more humanity in this country. Peoples used to trust one another, whether they knew each other or not. And if strangers came by your place they would be welcomed as family.

But now it is very difficult to do so. We have done this on many occasions in Winterveld. There is this guy who came and he was lost. And it was already dark, so we gave him a spare room, some food, a blanket to sleep, you know. Early in the morning we woke

up and we prepared some tea and bread for his journey, you know. When we checked in on him, we found that he was gone along with the blankets and other items in the room. He was nowhere to found. So it's whereby we started to change. Because you can feel pity for somebody but at the end of the day that person will harm you. No matter how best you try to protect him.

* * *

There are peoples you feel pity for. And in some cases, that same person is going to take your life. You take that snake into your house and at the end of the day it bites you. And there are cases where the person that you failed to help will be harmed. That's how life goes.

So these things are killing us, Pieter. As human beings we should try to trust one another, to protect one another. So it is very painful. Somebody comes in need of help and you deny him. And then by tomorrow when the sun rises, people tell you a person is lying there by the bushes. He is dead. He has been stabbed to death. And when you investigate you find it is the very person you turned away the previous night. It will haunt you for the rest of your life. But you haven't got a choice.

* * *

The thing that caused this is jealousy, you know. Maybe you can answer me, where does jealousy come from? Jealousy. It comes from the eye, Pieter. It is where jealousy comes, you know. Nobody wants others to be better than him. So the problem is the eye.

You are better off than me. So what do I do? Start to be jealous. The only plan is to steal from you. And yet I didn't have to struggle to get these items. I just take them by one minute and I will sell them very, very cheap. Why? Because I never earned them. That's why there is this slogan, "Easy come, easy go." I just pass them through very easily because I never sweated for them the way you have. I never got pain for them. So that's how it happens — from the eye. Jealousy starts from there.

* * *

So that is what is happening. In every corner of the world it is happening between whites, blacks, Indians, coloureds. It is happening and it will happen. There is no one who can stop it.

Why? Because we are taught by others. Some of us learn from our parents. Some of us learn from the streets. So that's where we go wrong like my second-born child. Most of things he is doing he did not learn at home. He has learned them from the streets. It's just what? Peer pressure. He wants to please his friends with his life. And he forgets that his days are numbered. Today is gone. Tomorrow won't be forever. Days go by and then you get old. And then you realise you haven't done anything right for your life.

It reminds me of my mother's words when I was younger.

"I brought you into this world, boy. But I am not in charge. I raised you while you were still a child. Now you are an adult. You make your own decisions. You do what is best for you. There will be a day when you will be in so deep a shit and you will remember what I say."

I just took that very simple and easy at the time, thinking, ah, this old lady is playing games. She knows nothing. I thought myself wiser than her. But there were times, tough times, when I was so in a deep shit that I remembered each and every word she said. Then it is too late because damage was already done.

* * *

My conscience killed me. Then I had to accept and I had to change my ways. I am the one who has to forgive and forget. Because if I don't forgive myself I will be haunted by the memory of my misdeeds for the rest of my life. It doesn't help anybody, because over is over. It is the past tense. Now I am looking for the future, Pieter. I am looking for the future tense. No more past tense.

* * *

“Gone are the days when chicken feet were eaten by dogs.”

* * *

Each and every one of us thinks we are right. Why? Because we don't think straight. There is this slogan, “God for us all, but everyman for himself.” I love that slogan, you know, because it tells a truth. God is for us all—black, white, Indian, coloured, whatever. He is for us all. But everyman is for himself.

Like now, I am sitting here in Plastic View and I pray to God. But God will never bring me something to eat, to fill my stomach. I have to go out there and make plans to get food to fill my stomach. Most of the peoples don't go out there and make plans. They just sit on top of their asses, “Ah, God is there. God will provide.”

It will never happen. God loves us all, but we have to make moves so we can survive. By sitting and thinking God will provide for us we will die of hunger.

* * *

The only person I respect is Mandela. Ja, that guy is a hero. They sent him to jail for so many years. But he never held on to those grudges, you know. He didn't need any blood to spill so he did forgive and forget. And then he did try by all means to start all over again. But the peoples who are outside here, living these fancy lives, going everywhere they like, they are still robbing us. They are still robbing us, Pieter.

Look at how our president just uses us to make him rich, you know, by voting him. He knows very well that peoples are suffering out here. How could he need a house worth R203M? It shows that he doesn't care about other peoples. He only cares about himself and his family. Before too long his term will be up and he will never be voted again as a president. So he will be sitting in a mansion and then what about us? And then we will vote for another dunderhead, so that he must become rich while we must remain poor.

* * *

Jungle.

Hideaway and
Hunting ground.

Frontier.
Borderland.
Grassland.
Edgeland.

Homeland.

* * *

So you see, the jungle has always been a refuge for me — a place to hide. I ran here to escape destructive relationships and violence. I ran here many times. In the bushes, there is anonymity. Even today you can see in the camp there are those peoples who commit crimes without feeling fear or shame. Why? Because they come from nowhere and cannot be traced.

In this way, there is safety for some and danger for others. In this way, Plastic View is a community of strangers, because we do not know each other. There are all these peoples from different nations here seeking greener pastures. They are living in groups, you know. More especially those Zimbabwean nationals, they are living in groups; those Lesotho nationals, they are living in groups. And often if there is fighting in the camp, it is between those two nationalities. Because those peoples from Lesotho don't want the Zimbabweans to have relationships with their ladies and likewise for the Zimbabweans. If a Lesotho national has a relationship with a Zimbabwean national they get angry, "How could this foreigner be in love with our own sister from our own country?" Then it's

whereby they will gang up on each other and start scrapping. They hurt each other very badly.

It is funny, Pieter, that my family and friends in Soshanguve think, “Oh, Christopher is staying at town. He is living a beautiful life over there.” There is no beautiful life over here. It is like in hell as you can see. It’s like in hell, because we have nowhere to go — especially if, like me, you only have these kind of a piece jobs. At least the peoples who are working on a daily basis, Monday to Friday, are going somewhere.

So people back home think I am living this fancy life. Why? Because they never visit me. I am ashamed, you know, to take people from location and bring them here. Because life at location is better than here. The living conditions are better. But the only thing that keeps me here is the money. If I had a plan to earn an income in Soshanguve I wouldn’t come here again and again. No, I would have stayed at location. But I got no greener pastures over there.

And besides, life is not all bad. I know people here, Pieter. There are those that I stayed with while I was in Israel’s camp. I know them and we support each other. We greet each other and if we are hungry we will share our mielie meal and our beer. Some peoples, I can call my friends, but not many.

Did I tell you about my time in Israel’s camp? In those days, we knew everybody in our site and we didn’t need to live behind fences. It was relatively peaceful because Colin and Denise had started to work with the police and we weren’t being hassled as much. And we weren’t living in holes in the ground anymore like before. We were able to build shacks out of plastic like you see here. So things were turning around in a good way.

* * *

Christopher, I have sat here with you in this courtyard numerous times over the past few months. I have baked in the sun. I have shivered in the shade. I have endured the seasonal shifts from

winter to spring — the bone-rattling cold of July and torrid heat of late-October. I have breathed the dust and the smoke. I have listened and I have shared. I have seen you make peace with your life, with the broken bits, the silences, and the echoes of anger and pain. I have seen you sustain your hope despite setbacks. I have seen you commit to live with integrity despite the temptation to turn away from your truths.

You have taught me that home is embedded in relationships and that we have to accept the dualities of people and places. The essence of our being is not changeable. You have taught me that home can be a site of both comfort and conflict. You have taught me that where we rest our heads at night is not necessarily where our hearts go when we close our eyes.

It is difficult to reconcile the paradoxes of this country of ours. Even the truth seems inadequate to set us free, because it cannot reconcile our contradictory natures. It simply exposes the realities. It reveals who we are and leaves us with the responsibility of choosing who we become.

But perhaps, Christopher, this is solely my struggle — for I am ‘from here,’ but not ‘of here.’ Perhaps, I crave stories that are coherent and seamless. Maybe, I am searching for simple plotlines, when this country demands a more nuanced acceptance of its history as if it is saying to me, “If are you seeking to know me then you must do so on my terms.”

I marvel that you and I have developed a friendship with this degree of candour. At times, I think what we have built together holds the key for the redemption. It is only through relationships that we heal. It is only through relationships that we can even come to understand ourselves.

In many ways, I feel I know you, Christopher. But there is much that I will never truly comprehend. I was born in South Africa, but I cannot point to the place where my umbilical cord was cut and planted in the soil. And when I die, my body will not cry out to be buried here. I have been uprooted from this place.

* * *

“You know, Pieter, being with you is an honour.
I am happy for almost everything we have done together.
I was dead. It brings me alive, you know.”

* * *

Christopher opens a glossy magazine printed by the local church. It features a photo of rows of colourful shacks with the church hulking in the background. He narrates an article written by Denise Dredge. The story is a counterpoint to the messages of doom that have dominated the news since the Marikana massacre and the truckers' strike.

“This has never been truer than it is today in South Africa where crime, corruption, and negativity about the economy became the favourite topics of small talk. In the midst of this situation we became aware of large numbers of homeless folk living right here on our doorstep. Our challenge was would we practise love or fear?”

“Ahhh, it is happening.” He laughs.

“So we embarked on a journey befriending the homeless people living in the veld here in Moreleta Park. Later the informal settlement Woodlane Village was established next to the NG Church. In the process we discovered that people who were poor are not different from ourselves. Our environment has opened us up to the miracle of love.”

* * *

They are two wonders, you know, Colin and Denise. They are heroes in this camp. Trust me. They are the ones who forced those other white folks to love us, to trust us. Although there are criminals amongst us, not all of us are crooks. Just as I was telling you before, there are white folks who are no good to the blacks, but not all of them. Some of them are good. Some of them are bad. This is kind of like vice versa. Even the blacks, some of them are

good to the whites, some of them are bad to the whites. But if we can practise this little thing: L-O-V-E. If we can practise love between blacks and whites, forward we will go. Forward we will go. Because all of us are human beings. We ought to live together. And we don't have to fear each other. If I see a white person, I just have to take it like this: "This is my brother from another mother." I have to. Although, we differ with colour, but our blood is the same. I can take a Chinaman, an Englishman, and a Malawian and put them together, cut them along. There is no one who will produce a Malawian blood or a China blood.

* * *

I remember the story a Canadian friend told me about living in Stellenbosch in the late-nineties. She shared a flat with three women from South Africa: an Englishwoman, an Afrikaner, and a woman of Indian ancestry. They were friends.

The calculus of race was revealed in the bathroom rituals of her roommates, a simple formula. If the English girl bathed first, then none of the others cleaned the tub before using it. If the Afrikaans girl washed first then only the Englishwoman did so. If the Indian girl bathed first then both the English girl and the Afrikaner cleaned the tub.

* * *

We are the creation of God, but we don't love each other. It is amazing. And it breaks my heart, you know. Although, I don't have the money to do the things I want to do. But I am happy because I am alive and kicking, you know. And being alive, it means something. And I live by the grace of God.

Although, I don't have money to feed myself at this present moment, but by the grace of God it happens! I don't go to bed by an empty stomach. We are many peoples here. Why don't I go out and visit my neighbours?

“Hey neighbour. You know what? Today my things are not going straight, man. I don’t even have food to eat at my shack. Just piece of a bread, it will add something.”

And if we have that humanity concern then we are going somewhere. But the only thing is that we don’t trust each other. From blacks and whites, Indian, coloured, Chinese. It is very difficult, you know.

But Colin and Denise, they make wonders. Trust me. Those I can call them, they are the saviours. They are the angels. They are the ones who have been sent by God to come and save the peoples who are suffering in these bushes. So they have combined us. We are together now, because of them. Ja, it is amazing. It is amazing. Really. And I am grateful about them.

Ja, they are amazing. Trust me. They are amazing. Because most of the time they don’t spend their time in their fancy house, you know. They spend their time here in this camp. They are fighting for my patrols and me, you know. So that we must have a good life.

4

BENJAMIN

* * *

The garden runs along the northern fence of the encampment, between two plastic latrines. It consists of a sweeping bed of flowers and succulents surrounded by a manicured lawn. The grass has been trimmed to the length of a putting green with scissors. Vines are creeping up the chain-link. Plants are tastefully arranged among rocks and ornaments: a birdbath, the silhouette of an angel in rusted metal, a warthog, ceramic rabbits in bright colours. Amidst the squalor of the camp, the garbage, the men urinating against the fence, Benjamin's garden is a revelation. It reveals much about him — his pride and attention to detail, his work ethic and his commitment to make the settlement a home.

* * *

My name is Benjamin. I was born in Pretoria East in 1969. There are seven in my family. My homeplace was here, this land. Back then it was open fields, trees and bushes, the occasional sprinkling of houses. It was mostly farmland: cows and sheep, goats and chickens, some horses. My father taught me to tend cattle out here. It was a long time ago, a long time ago.

You see the fields out here. A white man named Wolvaard owned all of the land. All of this land. He was very rich and he also had properties outside of Pretoria. My father was a farmhand for

him for many years and went out to Hammanskraal to look after his cattle out there. The children stayed behind. And we were growing big and sometimes we visited him that side. And when I was little older the farmer paid me to watch his cows here. The salary was R40 at that time for a farmhand, forty rand. But I was still a boy so my pay was much less.

But eventually, that old guy sold his land and we had to move. Some of my family went to Mpumalanga and others went to Moloto. I followed my mother and my sisters to live with my grandparents in Pyramid on the way to Hammanskraal. They worked on a farm owned by Greeks growing cabbages and other vegetables. I stayed in Pyramid for a long time. I completed primary school there and eventually worked at the farm for R2 per week. When I looked at that money it was too much for me! Yes, R2 was too much for me!

But it wasn't enough to pay for High School so I dropped out. I just came to this side of town to work in the gardening service. It was the first job I landed when I came this side of town. I was maybe eighteen or nineteen years old by that time. I worked there for about ten years and eventually I go to Silverton, because the guy who owned the gardening service bought a house out there. He had a room in his office so we had a place to stay. You see?

I love gardening and working with living things, Pieter. Watering the grass. Growing flowers. Caring for the animals. I wish one day to look after the cattle again. I am good with the cows, Pieter. If I had money I would buy a small plot of land and just do farming. I used to look after hundreds of cattle for Piet Wolvaard when I was younger out by Hammanskraal. I know how to check their health, the signs. I know when they are not well. I know when I am supposed to give them injections.

Do you see my garden over there by the fence? All the plants were discarded once, tossed in the rubbish heap. I saved them, made something beautiful out of rubbish. You see?

So anyway, I was working at the gardening service. The wife of my boss got sick. She just got sick. I don't know from what or what.

And she passed away. That guy was heart-broken, very sad. So he sold his business and I found work at a *fabriek* that made energy bars and mielie-meal. It was called PVM. I just go there.

I worked there for maybe six years and then I came back to this side of town. But there was nowhere to live. So I started staying in the bushes, you see. We slept just here. Close to where the fence is today. You see? A group here. A group there. All over this place.

Life was too difficult. Not like it is now. It was too difficult, because we never know what we should do. If the police found our stuff in the bushes they would burn it. You see? You can run away, but when you returned maybe your stuff was nowhere to be found. Or maybe everything was broken. Everything.

* * *

I can tell you many stories of this place. You see? Now people say that they like it here, because they can build a shack. They have proper shelter. They can sleep at night. But that time we didn't get to. We had to lie in the grass or maybe on top of a tree. And you must know that if the police come they'll chase you. They'll bring the dogs. And you must know you will be bitten if they catch you.

* * *

And then one day Denis and Colin arrived. And they came with their guitar and they were playing music for the people. And they were singing. Giving people bread and all that stuff. Until, until, everything was moving very well. They just combined everyone. They brought all the people into one place. And if the police came to bother us they would tell them: "No! You should not do people like this. They are not animals. They are people."

* * *

Excerpt from legal judgement

THE SUPREME COURT OF APPEAL OF SOUTH AFRICA

Tswelopele Non-Profit Organisation v City of Tshwane
Metropolitan Municipality [2007] SCA 70 (RSA)

1. In the early hours of Friday morning 31 March 2006, about one hundred persons were evicted from their homes on a vacant piece of land in the Pretoria suburb of Garsfontein. Officials from three governmental agencies in a joint operation expelled them from the rudimentary shelters they had erected. The pieces of plastic and other waste materials they had salvaged from surrounding building sites to construct their homes were put to the torch. Many of their belongings were destroyed. Sixteen immigrants without South African documentation were arrested and later deported.
2. The operation was carried out by officials from the nature conservation division of the Tshwane metropolitan municipality (Tshwane) (first respondent), the immigration control office of the Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs) (second respondent), and the South African Police Services (SAPS) (third respondent), accompanied by members of the Garsfontein community policing forum. Even though the Constitution provides that 'No one may be evicted from their home, or have their home demolished, without an order of court made after considering all the relevant circumstances', and even though the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act

19 of 1998 ('PIE') decrees that 'No person may evict an unlawful occupier except on the authority of an order of a competent court', there was no court order. The eviction violated the law and the Constitution.

3. This led the first appellant — a registered non-profit organisation committed to the upliftment of homeless and destitute people in the Moreleta Park area (Tswelopele ('Progress')) — to bring an urgent application ten days later in the Pretoria High Court. Twenty-three named residents who had been evicted (the occupiers) joined the proceedings as applicants. In the founding affidavit, Tswelopele's treasurer, Mr Colin Wilfred Dredge, a chartered accountant living in Moreleta Park (which borders on Garsfontein), described what he saw after receiving a call from distressed occupiers. Dwellings in which they had been living peaceably for at least eighteen months had been destroyed. In the wake of the police, Tshwane employees were burning shacks and cutting down trees. When challenged, officials from all three government agencies refused to show him authorisation under a court order. Indeed, he says, he was threatened with arrest for obstructing the police in the execution of their duties.
4. In the face of this, Tswelopele sought an order directing the three respondents to restore the possession of the occupiers before all else (*ante omnia*), and in the interim to provide them with temporary shelter. The notice of motion also sought costs and further or alternative relief. The founding affidavit couched its claim for relief under the common law *mandament van spolie*: but it also expressly invoked the occupiers' procedural protections under PIE and their rights under sections 25 and 26(3) of the Bill of Rights.

5. In answer, Tshwane protested that its officials were there merely 'to eradicate alien vegetation' (even while admitting that its nature conservation division was not responsible for the site), and that they did so believing that the police 'were acting lawfully'. Home Affairs said it participated solely 'to identify non-documented illegal immigrants'. The Garsfontein police station acting commander, senior superintendent John Tinyiko Masia — who admitted planning the action with the other governmental agencies — described it as but a 'crime fighting operation'. He and Home Affairs (though contradicted in this by Tshwane's deponent) denied that any dwellings were destroyed or dwellers evicted. Instead, they said, the occupiers left 'voluntarily', leaving their waste materials behind to be cleared.

* * *

Now in 2009, end of August, Colin and Denise moved us up here. They just bring us here on top. Why? Because the homeowners and the shops said we were making noise. They said we were drunk and making a disturbance. You see? Now Colin and Denise went to the council and told them they should move us. So we came here on top. To come and stay here.

And in the beginning the fence just ran to here. Here. Maybe up to this street only. You see? But when the metro and the government were surveying the area they found people were still living in the bushes. And they asked, "Why you leave people outside?" And Colin and Denise said, "This parcel of land is too small. It can't afford all those people."

So you see what they did? They just came to *las* the fence together to make the camp big. So now there are many of us living here. Too many. And we don't know everyone. But back that time if somebody broke anything or committed a wrong, we would know, "No, that guy is doing like this." You see? We could go to

him or just take him to the police. But now people are many and we can't do anything.

Why is this happening? Because all people's family are coming here. So here is your place. Maybe you bring your brothers to stay with you. Three or four. You bring them here. Maybe, let me say it this way...like these guys from Zimbabwe. So one of these guys is going home. When he arrives people will ask him, "How is living that side?" He says, "Hey, living that side is good!"

* * *

Pieter, I have two sons who live that side in Hammanskraal. Steve is sixteen years old and Sello is eleven. My wife is there too. I have an RDP house in Hammanskraal. I go home once every month to visit, twice if I can afford it. It is far away. Let me say, it like this: it takes R51 to go one-way.

I take money back home. Because, there is no jobs there. You see? If there were jobs there then most people would not run this side. It has been this way for many years. I have lived in the Pretoria-side for twenty years now. Long time.

* * *

Message to my sons

"Don't think everything in the world just comes for free. You see how I am staying? If I was not staying like this you will never eat. You see? That is why I am sleeping in the bush. To make for you a living. And you must learn from this today."

* * *

Pieter, when I first lived out here, it was hectic. That time, these people were using these sticks. Every weekend they were fighting. There used to be groups fighting every weekend. But when we moved this side they stopped all those problems. Because we are going there, we tried to talk to them. We say, "If you don't want to listen we just call for the police. They must come and take you, because you're not such a person that can live with people. We don't want such a person."

We need the people to think. They must remember where from they come. When they find a job they mustn't think about self only. They must remember the family they left behind. They are suffering. They must work and send something back. They must use their mind. They can't just stay here and drink all the time.

* * *

If you have the independence of mind and you use what is available to you, everything will go easy in life. But if you're not prepared to do something with your own hands you will go nowhere. If you don't have hands or you don't have ears to listen that is one thing. But if you are able-bodied and chose to do nothing then you are plain lazy. And you must know there is nowhere to go. You see?

* * *

"What keeps me here?
Why would I choose to live in two places, you ask?
Let me tell you this way: I have worked for the people.
I can't just leave them."

* * *

I'm not the kind of person who drinks or goes to the shebeens. No! Everyday when I return from work you will find me with my two dogs. They are called Muffy and Scruffy. I will get wood and make my fire and cook some food. Maybe I will say hello to the people. Or maybe I will take my dogs for a stroll in the bushes.

Most of the people in this camp respect me very much. If there is a problem they just run to me, because they know what kind of a person I am. If you live in a community you must be friendly for the people. Then everything will be good for you. But if you are not good to the people then they will not come to you and if you have a problem then no one will help you. No one.

* * *

I love gardening. Because of what? You see that flower? It just stays over there and bothers no one. In my life I say if flowers were friends then I do pick flowers. They just sit there very nice. They never fight with you like people do. You see? I can go over there and smell that flower and it will not complain: "Why you broke me? Why you do like this?"

It is therapeutic. My heart is happy when I look at my garden. It keeps my mind occupied. If I am not feeling good then I just take the wheelbarrow and my dogs into the bush. I just go into the bushes to look for stones to add. You see?

I want to tell you something. If I didn't put this garden like this then this place would be very, very bad. I just put the soil there and I just planted the flowers. People must not put rubbish anymore. Because if there is rain you will find it will reek. You see? I try to keep the environment clean. If this street is dirty you couldn't stay here. You couldn't.

But you see not all streets are the same here. This side and that side you find too much rubbish. It is not good. The problem is we are not the same, you see? We are not the same. One person does things the way he wants; another person does things the way he

wants. If we were looking the same way you would find this place would be very, very clean. The problem is that we are mixed cultures. I think if it was only South Africans living here then this place would never have been like this. If you try to talk to the people from elsewhere, they don't listen. And if someone doesn't listen to you what are you going to do?

You see the Zimbabweans and the Lesotho people do not visit each other. They don't understand each other. You see? In December sometimes they fight. They throw stones. You find all the people run away and they are standing outside the camp.

Not everyone follows the rules. You see that hole in the fence. People are just passing through at night to steal: wire, cables, and all types of things. And if we mend the fence you will find that tomorrow they have broken through again. This is very problematic. It creates the wrong impression for the surrounding homeowners. They think we are all the same, all tsotsis.

Me, when I'm living inside this fence, I feel very safe and I am happy because I can see where I am going. You see? The fence says this is home. It says someone lives here.

Yes, this is going to be a very good place. It is going to be a better community, because we have changed a lot of things. At first, there were no community leaders. There was nothing. It was lawless. The people were doing whatever they felt like. But now we have created a few rules in a good way. And for the most part people are abiding by them.

And now they are talking about building a township out here with houses and apartments — places for people to own and rent. This would be historical. It would be the first place like this in Pretoria. And if this happened I would try to make it work. I will make a budget. You know, for food, for rent, for my children.

It is remarkable how quickly life can change, Pieter. Time is a funny thing. Sometimes, it feels long and sometimes it feels short. Did I tell you that three years ago I used to sell vegetables in the village to make ends meet? And before that I went through a period of no job. And now here I sit as a dental technician.

The establishment of a township here would be a significant development. It will bring big, big changes. I think many people will be displaced should this come to be. You see many who live here don't have their papers. And many are unemployed. Let me say out of the 2,661 people in the camp only about 1000 are working. Some are begging. And then there are others who are supporting themselves through illegal businesses such as the shebeens or through crime. They are just taking that money and they are eating it. They have no plan for the future.

So let me ask you, where will these people go when they build houses out here? There will be rules in the new place and these rules will exclude these types of businesses. You cannot run a shebeen or a spaza shop from a rental property. And they will build big walls around with electrical fences and security guards and no one will be able to get inside. Many people will be forced to live in the bushes again.

You have to have a plan for tomorrow. You cannot just live for the day, Pieter. I am anxious about young people here who are not educated and are wasting their lives on liquor. And even those who are employed are not banking any of their earnings.

You have to have a plan in life. You see Woodlane Village is a temporary place. But it is a good place to save money. We don't pay for our housing. Maybe I can give myself ten years for working. You see I am saving my money to start a business in Hammanskraal, Pieter. I am planning to purchase a tent, and chairs, and tables that I can rent out for parties, weddings, and funerals. Maybe I can charge R250, maybe R350 per day. You see? And then maybe I can also buy cattle and some donkeys.

But in the closer time, I have responsibilities to my family. I want to fix my mother's house in Mpumalanga. The walls in the back of the kitchen are falling down. Maybe by this February I will buy four piles of bricks and ten bags of cement and I will repair the house for my younger sisters and their children. Me always I am helping them. You see?

* * *

I want to tell you the truth. If you want to be safe in life, you have to look after yourself. If you don't do so, you'll never be safe. Even me, if I am walking in the camp at night, I'm not safe. They can beat me or they can shoot me or they can stab me. You see? But if you are looking after your life, nothing will disturb you.

Let me put it this way, I don't believe there is a Satan in this world. You make decisions. When you drink you don't have good manners and you think you're invincible. If you have a bad heart, you will act in evil ways. But it is your choice. You see?

My eyes opened up years ago. I was unemployed and listless at the time. I came home one night to find my first wife with another man, Pieter. I was infuriated and ashamed. And if it wasn't for God and my ancestors I might have caused them harm. Maybe I could have grabbed a knife and killed them. But, no! I made a different choice. I accepted the situation. My wife left me with the responsibility to raise my first-born. You see? My eyes opened and I realised I had to make a plan for my life. I woke up.

* * *

So yes, this place you can call a home. Because I can't move now. I can't move now, because it's the place that I work for my children. You see? I can't move now it's my home this one.

Most of the homeowners around here don't know me. They just find me here. But they don't know that the first person to stay here was me. They can have their houses. They can have their golf courses. I know this place before all these things. I was born here. And unless they remove me by force I will stay. I will stay here for the rest of my life.

* * *

Sello is coming to visit me in a couple of weeks, Pieter. He is coming to town. He likes to visit when school is closed. I want him to grow up and know the town. You see? I want to tell you that his mother has never been to town. In our culture she cannot come this side until I finish paying the *lobola* and make a wedding. And her parents have never been this side either.

But I don't want my son to stay here by himself, because it is not safe. Because these shacks can burn. You see? So I will take him to my work in the daytime. I always take him to my work. You know, where I make false teeth and the dental things.

And when he is here I will take him to the shops. We will walk around. When he grows big, he will come to town to find work, just as I have. But I want him to learn first. He must be educated. You must know that life is different now than when I grew up. Most of people today are just going to the school of computer, to the school of work. They are not like us. We didn't have those things. We just learned with our minds. You see?

He must be brilliant to read and write. He must get the money easy not like me. I am getting the money tough. Because if he is not going to use his mind, he is going to suffer.

* * *

I am sitting with Benjamin on his patio overlooking his garden and the veld that stretches towards Garsfontein Road and the mall complex beyond the thoroughfare. The terrace consists of a fiberglass awning covering a bench-seat salvaged from a car with windbreaks constructed of colourful billboard vinyl, advertising a lunch special and featuring a giant photo of an egg sunny-side up. From our vantage point we can see people walking on the other side of the fence through the narrow trails that coil through the tall grasses and shrubs. In the lane in front of us, passers-by greet Benjamin as they stroll home.

“Hey bra, Benj. How goes it?”

“Hey Rudolph!”

“Can you borrow me a smoke?”

“*Eish*, Rudolph. I am all out.”

“Wena, how are you?”

“Fine, thank you. How are you?”

Benjamin is telling me about persistent problems Woodlane Village is experiencing regarding tenancy in the shacks and his frustrations with the Executive Committee. Although, the initial court order specified the terms of occupancy in the settlement including the creation of a registry of legitimate owners, the system has broken down in the absence of enforcement. He describes in hushed tones how people are selling or subletting their shacks to friends and family. Some shacks have even bought and converted into shebeens by absentee landlords and there are even rumours that some of the illegal liquor establishments are run by the police.

“So these guys came to my place last night, Pieter, maybe eight or nine o’clock. They claimed they had put someone up in their shack to protect the place while they were gone and that he had sold the property in their absence. They were from Trevor’s part of the camp and they wanted speedy resolution to their issue. I said, ‘Go talk to Trevor.’ They offered to bribe me. I said, ‘Go talk to Trevor.’ You see the dilemma, Pieter?”

As Denise has pointed out, the registry is redundant as soon as the last name is inked. She claims that inconsistencies in the decisions regarding tenure have also plagued the Executive Committee — raising concerns that individual members are making decisions based on patronage without discussing them with the larger committee and that this is creating dangerous precedents and strained relationships at the executive level.

Benjamin seems to have a particular grievance with Donald due to the perception that Donald is reluctant to sit down to negotiate community matters. He claims that when he goes to Donald to discuss issues he is rebuffed.

Benjamin is frustrated by the challenges the committee is experiencing to make collective decisions. He prefers to deal with problems that come up on his street by himself.

“Pieter, there are lots of things happening in my community. Sometimes they’re coming at my place at night. They just come to make me wake up. They say, ‘Come and help us.’ I just go there. I’m not afraid, because of what I know. I don’t owe anything to anyone. I don’t fight with anyone. I go with all my heart. If I find a problem I will stay there. I will sit there and negotiate. I will do what I can to solve the problem.”

* * *

You know what drives me, Pieter?

Many people here are not in a stable condition of life. They go blindly about their business. But if someone can give them advice and encouragement, they can open their eyes. They can see what is life. Most of the people here, they just sit on top of their minds. They don’t think what is going to happen tomorrow.

5

TREVOR

* * *

I am reclining on a well-worn leather couch in the living room of Trevor's shack. The dirt floor is partially covered with a brown carpet, made of a synthetic material of unknown origin, pocked with cigarette burns. A chair sits in one corner of the room opposite a plastic tub full of chicken portions. Pieces of meat are frying in a black skillet over a wood fire. Near the couch is a half-wall that provides privacy to a bedroom in the back. A black Peugeot mountain-bike is leaning against the partition. An open pack of cigarettes sits on top of the wall along with a bag of coins. A small metal gate secures the entrance to the shack, allowing a clear view of the bustling street. The living room is simultaneously open and closed to the outside world. It is a comfortable setting for domesticity as well as a gathering place for men: his five brothers who live in the camp, other leaders on his street, the teammates on his football squad, the Power Bullets, the juveniles who come looking for support and mentorship, and the customers who buy cigarettes from him.

I met Trevor in late July 2012 when I was first introduced to the members of the Executive Committee in Woodlane Village. Trevor represents the Zimbabwean section of the camp, which runs along the south-eastern edge of the settlement. Over the course of three months we explored his journey to Woodlane Village and the symbolic significance of his immigration to South Africa from Zimbabwe. We met on Monday or Tuesdays afternoons when he

finished work or we talked on Sunday mornings before the start of the midday soccer matches. Trevor is employed full-time as a labourer for a construction company. Our conversations were brief and were squeezed between his obligations as a community leader and as a key figure in the Woodlane Village football league.

Whereas Donald and Christopher shared their stories in a steady flow of memories and ruminations, Trevor is a man of action rather than of words. He is selective in what he discloses, so the fashioning of his narrative account required greater leaps of faith to clear gaps, interpret single sentences, and follow emerging trains of thought. Some of the colour and textures were filled in with archival research. As I recomposed his story I was drawn to several questions. *If I were Trevor what would I reveal to my children about my life? What would be the emotional and moral context for my decision to leave Zimbabwe?*

His experience in South Africa is framed as one of upward mobility — a journey where he seized opportunity when faced with circumstances beyond his control. He along with his brothers entered the country as refugees in 2004 to escape the economic disaster in Zimbabwe. They eventually obtained the paperwork required to work legally in South Africa and then after a period of time brought their wives and children over. Trevor has a strong circle of family support in the settlement. They pool their resources to provide a lifeline to their relations back home.

Like many of his fellow Zimbabweans, he came to South Africa educated, ambitious, and unfettered by the historical baggage of growing up in South Africa. These qualities have given many of his countrymen a competitive advantage in the workforce, while also exposing them to xenophobia given the widely held perception that they are stealing jobs from the locals.

He is a newcomer, which in a psychological sense affords him a certain freedom and a sense of possibility. In South Africa, he has created a new life, while maintaining his obligations to those he left behind. But in order to do so, he has taken significant risks.

* * *

“There are stories you don’t cherish.”

* * *

The water was surging when they arrived. Trevor was with two of his brothers and his uncle. It was dusk. They could see groups of men wading across, partially naked, clothing piled on their heads. Some carried satchels. Others clasped hands against the flow. Shapes blurred in the darkness. On the other side of the Limpopo River was the electrical fence and beyond that the wild expanse of Kruger National Park.

They waited for the current to subside, camping out of sight. There are horror stories of refugees being swept away by the torrent or being pulled under by crocodiles. They exercised caution, scanning the horizon for helicopters and border patrols.

After two days, they made their prayers, said their silent farewells to their homeland — and stepped into the water. Under the cover of nightfall, they moved in a v-formation, arms interlocked. The water was up to their necks, pushing them downstream. Their hearts pounded as they strained against the river and the rush of fear.

The Limpopo River is the boundary between Zimbabwe and South Africa and crossing it was a rite of passage: the movement from one life to another. There were about 200 other people on the journey with them that night, joining the hundreds of thousands who had gone before them and the thousands who have died trying. They were the border jumpers, the ones who fled poverty for the milk and honey of South Africa.

Beyond the river they split into groups — forty people here, sixty there. Some moved in the direction of Pietersburg. Others headed towards Pretoria and Johannesburg. They followed the

directions given by the *impisi*, the hyenas that profit by guiding illegal refugees across the border into Kruger Park.

For three days they walked, twelve hours at a stretch, the weight of their clothes becoming unbearable. Their reference point was the mountain with the tower and the blinking light — their instruction, “Go south.” They abandoned their shoes. The sun seared their skin. The thorns cut their feet. In the evening they slept fitfully, wary of lions and other threats. They scattered at the terror of roars. People disappeared in the night. And in the morning they marched onwards, their numbers dwindling.

Yes, there were many perils on their journey. There were the bandits who preyed on jumpers, robbing and raping on both sides of the river. And of course, there were the dangers of drowning and of crocodiles. And there were the border patrols with their assault rifles and the electrified fences with their lethal charges. And on the other side of the wires, there were the lions prowling the shrubland as well as the risks of exposure and physical exertion: heatstroke and exhaustion; dehydration and starvation; injury and sickness; the breaking of the spirit and the will.

Yes, there were many ways to die out there.

But there were just as many ways to be brave.

* * *

“You are supposed to struggle in life.”
You are supposed to work hard.
You must be strong to be a man.”

* * *

My name is Trevor. I was born in 1979 in Masvingo Province. It is a rural area in the southeast of Zimbabwe — a land of mountains, savannah, and jacaranda trees. My family have raised sheep and cattle here for generations. I always imagined farming this land, growing old here. A place enters your skin, becomes part of you.

In 1999 I married my wife, Alice. I remember the optimism of our wedding. I was twenty. I had just finished my military service and I was eager to build a life with her. We had our first child, Cletos, a year later. We named him after my father. He was born just as my country was starting to fall apart economically. Industries were shutting down and this led to mass unemployment. Later I would learn that the collapse was triggered in part by Zimbabwe’s participation in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo — the same war where I had been deployed. The conflict had bankrupted the country. Crippling inflation followed. And the growing fiscal difficulties were compounded by ill-fated policies such as land reform, which forced white farmers off their properties and in doing so destroyed the agricultural base of the country.

At the time, I was employed as a clerk in the government, doing bookkeeping and secretarial work. It was a respectable position but rising costs had stripped away my earning power. When the factory in Chipinge closed its doors and one of my brothers lost his job, we decided it was time to seek greener pastures in South Africa. I had a wife and a son as well as aging parents to support. And since none of us could afford a passport, we had to enter illegally.

We made the jump in 2004, traversing the Kruger. I was 24 years old when we completed the same trek our father and uncles made in the 1960s and 1970s, looking for work in the mines. It was an arduous journey. I am proud we proved ourselves men.

We settled in the Venda region of Limpopo Province and found piecework. The jobs didn't pay well and in some cases we worked only for food. Some employers exploited us, because of our immigration status, threatening to have us arrested if we complained about poor labour conditions. I know hardship and I know hard work. My hands are calloused and my back is strong. I was a soldier once. I know what men can do.

My brothers and I stayed in Limpopo for about six months and then we returned to Zimbabwe on a bus with cash in our pockets. Entering South Africa without papers is difficult. Leaving is easy. Every year South Africa happily deports thousands of my countrymen. They ship us out and we keep coming back. We have little choice. There is no future in Zimbabwe. Only poverty and misery awaits us there.

In 2005 we came back to South Africa. This time we entered the country legally at the Beitbridge border post. With our savings we were able to obtain passports, although it took us almost a year to do so. My brothers stayed in Limpopo, while I made my way to East Pretoria, following rumours of plentiful work and of other Zimbabweans living here.

* * *

In those days, the authorities were hunting people without work permits so life was heady. I had no idea how challenging things would be. There was nowhere to live and so we resorted to squatting on the land close to where Woodlands Boulevard is located. We weren't able to build shelters, because they drew unwanted attention from the police. We slept under plastic. At first, I had no blankets and I was hesitant to light a fire for fear of burning the bush. Without fire there is no cooking of pap and

without pap there is no warmth in the belly and no strength in the body. You can imagine how uncomfortable it was in the winter when nighttime temperatures dropped close to zero or in the summer when the rains came down. Cold stays in your bones.

Our existence was rudimentary. The only readily available source of clean drinking water was the tap at the nearby graveyard, which we were only allowed to access from 4 PM to 5 PM everyday. Some people drank out of the river even though the water was contaminated.

We were unwelcome. The Metro Police tried repeatedly to drive us out, bullying us and destroying our belongings. There were several raids in 2006. They used armoured vehicles and helicopters. Others arrived on horseback. They came with dogs and guns.

At that time, a white couple named Colin and Denise came to our aid. They delivered food and clothing and set up life-skills classes under the trees. They advocated on our behalf when we required medical attention or when we needed protection from the police. And more significantly, they fought for us in the court system, eventually holding the authorities responsible for their mistreatment of us. With this ruling came a measure of protection and for the first time we lived without the constant dread of police brutality.

In 2007, we were relocated across the road to the plateau where we now live because of the planned expansion of the mall complex and the mounting opposition from the neighbouring homeowners. At first, we spread across the land in twenty-six encampments of varying sizes. Things were unruly and conflicts were frequent. Eventually, we organised into three main camps based on nationalities and established a system of leadership. Those from South Africa and Lesotho set up their stands in one area. The Mozambicans located elsewhere. Chinyamukwakwa became the Zimbabwean site and I was elected as Vice-Chair of the camp along with my friend Selas who became the Chair.

* * *

Bedtime Story

You are sleeping when they come. You awaken to the sounds of horses galloping. Mounted police surround the camp, circling in the dark, their torches scanning for fugitives.

If you break free, they will catch you. You will be beaten. From your shelter of wood and plastic you hear the thunder of pursuit. The rain of blows. The strikes of batons. They only chase those who flee. Evasion is a sign of guilt. Best to swallow your fears. And lie still amidst the trampling of hooves.

* * *

My life started to change after I settled in Chinyamukwakwa, even though I was still staying in the bushes. I built a proper shack. My wife joined me from Zimbabwe. I found full-time employment doing tiling and I was able to send money home to support my family. Back then we couldn't make electronic money transfers and without proof of residency we weren't able to open bank accounts. So we arranged to have the currency delivered in person. One of us would return home every six months to do so.

Staying on the veld was dangerous. We were vulnerable to assaults and robberies. The *tsotsis* targeted Zimbabweans, because they knew we had cash and nowhere to store it securely. We had to either carry the money on our person or hide it in our shacks. It was common for people to conceal up to R10,000. I was attacked several times. This is one of the reasons I constructed a shack with an inner wall made of concrete blocks. I wanted to prevent intruders from gaining entry by merely cutting through the plastic sheeting.

It was a lawless time. Fights among the different nationalities were frequent, especially between the people from Lesotho and

those from my country. People were vulgar and disrespectful. Men would saunter about without shirts, half-naked. It was not safe for women and children. Some men even threatened to take my wife, while I was away at work. Only my brothers prevented her molestation. So it was a risk for her to come here. But we had been apart a long time. Absence wears on the heart.

As I said, things started to improve towards the end of 2007. We worked with Colin and Denise to establish a system of numbering for all of the shacks so that residents could be located in case of emergencies and so that they had proof of residency. The police stopped terrorising us. And with the emerging leadership in the camps we started resolving our differences and becoming neighbours to one another. With these changes came an increased sense of safety. Towards the end of that year, we cleared an area of the land for a football pitch and started organising teams. And then people started bringing their wives and children to the camps. Families were reunited. And on the fifth of September 2008 my youngest daughter, Caroline, became the first child to be born in Chinyamukwakwa. She was the symbol of a new life. We could finally see where we had come from. And where we were heading.

* * *

I am pushing Trevor to return to the uncomfortable past as I seek to know the history of this place. There are stories he would rather forget such as the points in his journey where he was powerless. I can see the pain in his eyes as he describes the affront to his wife. His worldview is a forward-looking one. Does it make sense to return to memories of distress or as he says, the recollections that bring shame and tears?

As we talk there is a constant flow of customers coming to the entrance of his shack looking to buy cigarettes, one rand per smoke. Business is brisk. Across the street, the music is pumping from the shebeen — one of the few two-story structures in the camp. The building is an engineering miracle. Young men are

strutting about. Among them, children are playing. The Zimbabwean section of the settlement is always lively.

Trevor conjures up the experiences of many immigrants who have been forced to leave home in order to make livelihoods elsewhere. It is similar to the sacrifices my parents made when they left South Africa for Canada in the late 1970s. At the economic level, the decisions are easy to understand. Necessity compels industriousness. But I wonder about the psychological impacts of these dislocations: the losses as well as the gains.

At the same time, Trevor's positivity is a refreshing counterpoint to the undertow of melancholia I have experienced here. I am grateful that he resists my nudges towards the shadows. He provides a brief amnesty from the negative headlines about the labour unrest, the Marikana massacre and the murderous thugs, the tenderpreneurs, the fraudsters as freedom fighters and the would-be revolutionaries who risk upsetting the order of things. The occasional hero story is a welcome distraction from bad news.

It reminds me of the transformative power of narratives to create and sustain hope. We make choices in the stories we tell. And these stories shape the arc of our lives and the options available to us. The questions of how we are portrayed within these stories are significant. Are we victims of circumstance? Or are we active agents who make plans and take actions to make the most of the opportunities available to us.

* * *

In 2009 a court ruling created Woodlane Village and we moved into this enclosure. Can you see the fence that runs along the perimeter? And these rows of shacks? We are mostly Zimbabweans along this street. Many of us came from the Chinyamukwakwa encampment. Over the years, our numbers have increased as family members have joined us. Five of my brothers, along with their wives and children, are here now. They have joined me and my wife and our youngest child — you know, the one who was

born in the bushes. She is four years of age now. When she is old enough to attend school she will join her two older siblings, Cletos and Auxcillia who are staying with my parents in Masvingo.

Yes, life is better in Woodlane Village. There is order and structure here. The municipality provides clean water, latrines, and garbage pick-up. Out in the bushes, we were not able to buy a good blanket or a radio because there was no security. Today, there is safety here. I have managed to build my little shack with a garden and a cooking area where my wife runs her small business selling chicken portions. There is a fence around the settlement and guards at the gates. I can sleep peacefully at night.

And more importantly, I am able to support my family back home by sending them R1500 per month. With this money I have been able to build a three-room house, help my parents financially, and pay for my children's school fees. I have also maintained a small herd of goats and sheep. In the last few years, I have also purchased some cattle. In my country, cows are a form of banking. I have become an able provider.

Yes, life is better here. But when the word spread that we were going to be moved into the settlement many people thought this was a ploy by Home Affairs to round up all the illegal immigrants and deport them. The scars of those earlier abuses by the police and the municipality are still evident. It takes time for people to trust.

* * *

I miss home, the place I was born. There are nights where I dream of the countryside, my goats and sheep grazing nearby, the soil sandy beneath my feet. In the distance I can see the *kopjes*, the rounded mountains of granite, and the *mopane* trees.

I imagine sitting with my father and other men discussing politics and the ways of cattle. I see the expressions of delight on my children's faces as I chase them around the yard, kicking up dust. I see my mother stirring a pot of *mielie-meal* in the kitchen, smiling at the corners of her eyes.

These are the colours and textures of another life: the russet of the brick house, my son's bicycle leaning against the wall, the washing line stretching to the distant pole, clothes twisting in the wind; the garden with its splashes of red and green, the tomatoes and the *morogo*.

Yes, I miss home. But we have to sacrifice.

We have to be willing to let go in order to hold on.

* * *

“A place where you will be free.
Where you can work and make your plans in life.
Where no one will harass you or say:
‘No, you mustn’t do this.’
This is your home place.”

* * *

As much as I long for my homeland, my world has expanded since coming to South Africa. I have a wide circle of relationships here in Woodlane Village. I know more people from different parts of Zimbabwe than I did when I lived in Masvingo. On this street we come from all over: Bulawayo, Harare, and Chipinge. Together we have become a big family and this network of relations includes people from other countries such as Mozambique and Lesotho. Even you, Pieter, have joined our circle.

And to be honest with you, even when I lived in Zimbabwe, we could not make livelihoods on our family plots. Economics forced us to work away from home. Most able-bodied men sought their fortunes in cities such as Harare and Mutare and beyond. We would only return to the farm every so often.

As far back as I can remember there was the movement of men from the farms to the cities. There has always been this migration. Even my father spoke of this.

* * *

Football healed relationships in this camp. Football is the church for the people. It is where they get to know one another. They say, “You know Trevor, his team is very strong. You know Selas, his team is very strong.”

But not all elements of life in Woodlane Village are healthy. The shebeens do not unite us. They create problems. People drink and gamble and fight. Some forget their relations. Some destroy their families. Men find new lovers and abandon their wives back home. They forget their histories. They forget where they have come from and what they have left behind. I saw this dynamic when I was serving in the Congo — the behaviour of men when they are far from home. It is the seduction of greener pastures.

Do you see these boys who come to my shack looking for cigarettes? They are only fourteen and fifteen years of age. They left Zimbabwe to look for opportunities here. They say there is drought back home and the people are starving. But they are too young to work. Jobs are scarce out here in Pretoria East. No one will hire them. So they spend their days hanging around in the camp when they should be in school. What kind of future will they have without a formal education?

Here they will only learn bad habits: laziness, gambling, and drinking. And when they grow up they will be ruined for work. They will not have the power to handle a shovel and a pick.

In this life, we have to take initiative. We have to be entrepreneurial. I am always imagining new ways of earning extra money. When I lived in the bushes I ran my own little tuck shop, selling fruits and vegetables. And now I sell cigarettes to supplement my income and my wife sells cooked chicken to do the same. Every rand helps.

* * *

Stick by stick the weavers build their nests.

* * *

“To be a good leader, you have to be a social man.”

* * *

In this life, we have to show leadership and good judgement. It is what separates us from animals. My father is a councillor in Zimbabwe and he was a positive role model. He taught me to act with dignity and to listen to all sides of an argument before making a decision. Being a leader means caring about others and listening to their concerns. But it also means taking a stand. This is something that Colin and Denise have also imparted on me.

Take for example the issue of charity. There are people in this camp who cannot look after themselves — the elderly, the ill, and the disabled. Yes, we must support them where we can. But if you are of sound body and mind do not expect a handout from me.

And take for example the issue of shebeens. These liquor establishments are ruining the settlement. Alcohol is the root of much of the problems in this community such as the misbehaviours and the violence.

This is one of the reasons that I have been so active with the football league. People need healthy forms of recreation and football allows us to build community. When we started we only had three teams competing, but now our league has ten teams. We play on Sundays and large numbers of spectators attend our matches.

* * *

It is called the ‘beautiful game.’ Eleven players per side converge on the pitch to contest the match. The ball is passed in looping arcs and straight lines, hopping on the dirt field. The men move in offensive formations. The ball is kicked from the midfielders to the strikers, who are penetrating on the wings, probing for

vulnerabilities in the defence. There are waves of attacks and counterattacks. Tactics bend towards improvisation. Discipline and preparation flex with talent and creativity. Thoughts and emotions are channelled into movement.

As I watch Trevor's team on the field I can appreciate the drama of football, the dynamic tensions between artistry and athleticism, between acting and reacting. It evokes passion. The suspense is mounting as the Power Bullets are preparing for a corner kick with time running out. The players are moving into position, looking for the elusive winning goal. The fans are coiled in anticipation. Football is something to believe in.

It is more than a game. In Woodlane Village, a league has been formed with its own governance and administration. Teams have been established and rosters determined. Rules have been set and referees assigned. Language and cultural barriers have been overcome. Leaders have emerged.

In the settlement, soccer is playing the same developmental role it did on Robben Island when the political prisoners organised the Makana Football Association in 1964 to exercise the democratic muscles required to overthrow apartheid.

Many of my conversations with Trevor have explored the community-building function of soccer. It is as he says a 'church.' Every Sunday afternoon, the people assemble at the field to rejoice the game that unites them. Football is their sacrament, their ritual of communion and celebration.

* * *

“When you work hard in your life, there is fruit in front.”

* * *

So, yes, there are troubles in this community. I myself have given up drinking, Pieter. I have seen what it does to people's judgment and their behaviour. Men beat each other and they beat their wives. And the violence has on occasion escalated to murder.

There is thievery in this community. Tsotsis live among us. Just down this street there is a group of robbers who own a gun. They terrorise others, preying on the unsuspecting as they walk in the fields on their way to work. They bypass the security stations by smuggling the stolen goods through holes in the fence. But truthfully, the guards are inept. They turn a blind eye to the criminality, as do the police. The guards are supposed to patrol at night, but they rarely do. It is wild here in the evenings, especially on the weekends. The music is very loud. The drunks stumble around in the dark. They gamble. And they fight.

Sometimes, the community retaliates against the offenders. Last week there was a shooting in the camp. A man fired at his girlfriend out of jealousy. No one was injured, thank God, and the perpetrator fled. His neighbours demolished his shack afterwards. It was a clear message that his behaviour was unacceptable and that he is no longer welcome. But such people's justice is dangerous and we would rather have the police deal with these matters.

So, yes, there are troubles here. But we make a home by working together to improve the situation. This was the lesson of my father. I remember as a young boy sitting quietly while he met with other men in the community to discuss issues. So in many ways, I am continuing his legacy.

* * *

I experienced terrible homesickness after arriving in South Africa. At first, there was no honey to be found in Pretoria East. No, not in this hostile place. The shock of dislocation was intense. I only saw my family once a year and our communication was sporadic. We didn't have access to telephones. It is much easier today. I speak to my mother at least once a month now. Although, I experience anxiety when she calls because she is not one to dial me up simply to say hello. No, usually she only phones to tell me of worries back home: outstanding school fees, not enough food on the table, sickness in the family, the ongoing messiness of living.

It is difficult to be away from my parents and my children. There are times I feel lost and I miss the counsel of my father. The way forward is not always clear to me, but I have faith in the positive trajectory of my life. I know the rewards of perseverance. I have seen how dramatically things can change for the better. And I have also seen how quickly they can swing for the worse.

This knowledge keeps me motivated to make my contributions here and in Zimbabwe. The evidence of progress can be subtle. There were eight boys and one girl in my childhood home. And we only had one bicycle among us. Now all my children have bikes. Life is much easier for them, because when I was younger we had to walk fifteen kilometres to the nearest store to buy bread. It is remarkable how even a modest bicycle — two wheels, pedals and a chain, handlebars and a stiff leather seat — can open up the world.

* * *

As Trevor speaks about his life, I am drawn to the references to movement. His story is one of travelling across multiple landscapes. There is the landscape of the physical world, the terrain: the borders to be crossed, the rivers and the wilderness, the countryside giving way to the cities. There is the landscape of time: the processes of aging, the changing of the seasons, the periods of separation from family. Another landscape is the psychological one, the emotional and spiritual topography. His story not only describes a movement from one country to another, it also describes a passage from boyhood to manhood as he assumes new responsibilities as a father, a husband, and a son. It chronicles his growth as leader with deepening obligations. He is becoming a social man. He moves from reacting to circumstances outside of his control to making purposeful decisions about the life he wants to lead and the type of role model he wants to be.

There is a tension in life between dodging threats and chasing opportunities. Trevor's story is a combination of both. It is an exodus from a country that is disintegrating but it is also a movement towards an economic future, a movement towards becoming a better provider within a family.

There is also a tension between holding on and letting go, between attachment and surrender. In Trevor's immigration story I hear parallels to the story of my father. They both describe how making a home involves securing the anchor points of belonging — identities, relationships, memories, and traditions — while at the same time relinquishing other lifelines. Sometimes, in order to preserve what is most dear to us, we have to surrender the places of our origin. In this way, the notion of 'making a home' becomes one of wayfinding. Home is not something that is given to us. It is something we create and recreate through our choices. It is a process of individuation as much as it is one of forming healthy attachments.

Both Trevor and my father made courageous decisions to leave their birthplaces for the sake of their children. They gave up the constancy of home to establish long-term security. In the case of Trevor the pressure to leave was proximal to the mounting economic difficulties in Zimbabwe. For my father, the impetus to emigrate was distal as he anticipated the moral and social decline of South Africa, the death spiral into hatred and violence.

Where do I sit within this process of holding on and letting go? Within this place-making process of creating and recreating? I have a conflicted attachment to this country and to my roots. In some ways the disruption of my sense of home is also a disruption of my identity. It is a gut-level thing, an unsettledness that defies language, nausea in the pit of the stomach. It is the tension of yearning to be intimate with a place that continually breaks your heart.

This is my homeland, the birthplace of my discord. How do I come to terms with this country and its people, my people? What do I embrace and what do I renounce?

* * *

I grew up listening to the stories of my father. He spoke of the time before the fall of Zimbabwe, of the rhythms of rural life, of the wisdom of land and tradition. He taught me that genuine richness is family, that a healthy flock is more precious than a vault full of cash, that relationships are the only reliable form of currency. He taught me that we must look beyond the given moment. We must plan ahead. We must care about more than just ourselves.

One day, my children will be older and they will ask me to share the stories of coming to South Africa. What will I tell them?

Perhaps, I will say that in the beginning I was a boy on a long journey to manhood. I grew up in the country and moved to the city. I established a livelihood and then saw that livelihood combust. I watched as poverty swept Zimbabwe like a grassfire, the edge of flame destroying everything it touched, farm-by-farm, village-by-village, town-by-town, until there was nothing left to burn. I will speak of the angry waters of the Limpopo River. I will describe the blistering heat as we crossed the veld. The thirst of three days walking. The fragility of bodies against wilderness. I will speak of the faith of proceeding without clear directions. I will confess that I could not have endured the trek without my brothers. I will tell them that to succeed we must persevere and work together. In life, we are never as strong apart as we are united.

I will share the story of my sacrifice, my prolonged absence. To make a home, I had to leave a home. I will remind my children that they are never far from my thoughts. Every morning I hold their memories close as I trudge to work. And every night, I whisper their names as I fall asleep in a distant land.

These are the stories I will tell.

6

DONALD

* * *

“The blind know better than us.
It is not about seeing.
It is about understanding.”

* * *

The water is scalding my hands as I scrub Donald’s work boots to remove the splashes of red paint. Somewhere in the tumult of the fire on the weekend, a can of primer had been knocked over. Items salvaged from the blaze are scattered around the courtyard: a porcelain cat covered in soot, charred books, blackened dishes and plates, clothes to be repaired and washed by hand.

Donald is fortunate. A stove sparked a similar fire in May, wiping out eight shacks in the village and leaving 36 people homeless. One tenant lost his prized motorcycle.

It could have been much worse, but the process of cleaning up and repairing the damage will take time. Even the paint is stubborn, resisting my efforts at removal.

I have grown close to Donald over the past three months. It is only in the last little while that I’ve been able to show my affection with deeds rather than words. There is a comfort that comes from bonding through work, much in the same way that my fondest experiences with my father involved toiling together — building a fence, ripping out trees, clearing a road, stacking firewood. Physical

labour is a point of connection for men. It provides a safe space to express deeper sentiments. The hands are the way to the heart.

Although, I think the turning point in my friendship with Donald (and Christopher) occurred earlier when we visited his family and friends in the townships. It was an opportunity to journey together, to share adventures outside the confines of the settlement, to go where they call home.

In hindsight, there was nothing remarkable about the form and content of our encounters. They were rather ordinary. There were the long commutes to the townships and the stops along the way to run errands. There was the gridlock and the stifling heat. The intersections, the stop signs, and the speed bumps. The impatient and absent-minded drivers. There were the countless introductions to family and friends, the halting conversations and polite smiles. The gestures of hospitality: a cold drink, a seat in the shade, a knife and fork for the guest. There were the moments of awkwardness, boredom, and fatigue. And on the return journeys, there were the road stories, the jokes, and the recollections of the sights seen and the people met.

They were mundane encounters. The only remarkable thing is that they happened. My relationship with Donald unfolded in a similar way. It is the accumulation of quotidian moments that led to trust and with that trust the slow unveiling of truths. It happened as one man listened to the musings of another while he sewed, substituting one yarn for another. A rather ordinary process made exceptional only by the fact that it occurred between two men from opposite sides of South Africa's racial divide.

* * *

I was born in 1960 on the twelfth of December. I am the third oldest in my family. I have a brother and a sister who are ahead of me. My older brother is deceased now. He was murdered around Mooikloof in 1982. Back then it was called *Zwavelpoort*. It was still jungle by then.

So anyway, we moved here by 1968 — the same year my brother Christopher was born. We came from a place called *Bophuthatswana*. That's the name. It was the gathering place or homeland for the Tswana people. It is just north of Pretoria and our father built us a house there before he died.

My father worked at the Wingate Park Country Club. He passed away in 1971 after a long illness. What do they call that? Cardiac arrest, I think. Yes, that's what the death certificate said, 'Cardiac arrest.'

We buried him in Mamelodi. We were still young then. We didn't understand death. As children we could see something was wrong. People were coming from all over. Some were crying and some were throwing tantrums. But as children we didn't know what was happening.

Anyway, as I said, this land was jungle back then. I remember when the reservoir was built out on those hills. You know the one that looks like a wine glass? People worked round the clock to construct it, day and night for two years. And after it was finished, we started seeing roads materialising — a road here, a road there. The cars appeared and then the houses came. It began like a joke, but the changes continued until the land transformed into what you see today.

Life was good while my father was alive. We were going to school right here. And on weekends we caddied out by Wingate. That was the thing back then. People from faraway — Hammanskraal, Jo'burg, Mamelodi — would come here to caddy.

* * *

It was mostly farms out here. One man owned this land before they built those million-rand houses. The whole area running from Checkers to the Garsfontein Extension and all of Mooikloof belonged to him. His cows grazed here. And he employed hundreds of people.

In those days, we knew our neighbours by name. If visitors came by they would say, "I am here to see Mr So-and-So." And we

would reply, “Oh, Mr So-and-So lives up the road about five kilometres away. Let me take you.” And if you arrived late and the sun was setting we would offer you a place to stay for the night. We would welcome you. We would give you warm water to wash your feet. We would slaughter a chicken to fill your belly. And in the morning we would walk with you. But this spirit is gone now.

* * *

“The world has changed. People back then would run away from animals and go to people. But nowadays people run away from people and go to animals.”

* * *

Gone are the days of the night vigils and the honouring of the dead. In my youth, people from all over gathered for a wake. They showed respect with silence. They brought their condolences, strengthening one another with the verses of the departed. You know, bandaging the wounds of the grieving, so they could heal.

“The Gods have given, the Gods have taken.”

“When God closes one door another one opens.”

But as time passed, some people failed to attend the night vigils. They wouldn't share words of support. They wouldn't give donations to the family. They wouldn't partake in the feasts.

They forgot we all wear the same blanket. We all experience sickness and frailty. We all die. And in this forgetting, they soon discovered that when tragedy befell their family only a handful of people showed up. Some bore witness, but few shared in the feast. The cow was butchered, but the beef was wasted.

But we can safeguard against this by lending a hand to our neighbours. In this way, we become a community. But trust me, if we fail to support one another, the meat will be squandered. One man alone cannot eat a whole cow. It will rot. And you will find that even if you take the meat out in wheelbarrows the beggars on the street will not eat it.

This is how we are living in this world of ours.

* * *

Things turned upside down after my father's death. I was still a young man. Trust me. I had to find ways to support my family and me. And the ways I chose were not good ways. I chose bad ways. Although for me, they were good because they put bread on the table. It was kind of a joke. You know? I was doing my things but eventually my problems caught up with me.

I went to jail for a long time and when I came out I didn't recognise the world. My siblings were still children when I left and when I returned they were adults with their own children.

And the jungle was no more. I came back to find a town where once there had only been fields and bushes.

* * *

In our culture wherever your relatives are buried is your home. It is your place. And if you have worries or a heavy heart, you would go and sit by your ancestors' graves: your grandfathers or great grandfathers. You know, just taking your worries out there. And even if you're just sitting there silently and not even saying your prayers aloud, you would feel better. You would come away blessed. This is how we lived.

But now those burial places are white man's land. And we have nowhere to go with our worries. They have built big houses out here. And the owners would never believe that their properties sit where once were graves, because whatever was there previously was demolished and replaced with new landscaping and greens. And everything is neat and orderly.

Look out there! I had family all over. I was born out here. My grandfather was here. My uncles and aunts lived in Mooikloof. Look! All of my family were here and now all of them are in Mamelodi, Soshanguve, Mpumalanga, Moloto, everywhere. We are scattered and we don't even have the time to visit one another.

* * *

There are many graves out there — and not only ours. I remember an airplane crashing in these fields. What do you call it? A Spitfire? You know that airplane with the long nose? The one that is built like a butterfly. Hey man, that thing goes! It rides very fast. It goes “WAARRGH!” They use it to drop bombs. It is kind of like supersonic — faster than the speed of noise or something like that. Ja, it made a huge hole, but if you go out there now you can’t find where it was. You can’t.

Things are happening. But this is life, man. And this is how it is. And out there, right in front of the church there is a tunnel. And that tunnel is where my forefathers hid when times were tough. It’s still out there! And some people go close to it without knowing its history. But if you get to that place and look at it, you will get the idea that, “No, something happened out here.”

* * *

To make a long story short, in my criminal days I specialised in home burglaries. I would look for specific things: jewellery and other expensive stuff. You know like those watches with the blue dolphins on them. I would not ransack the place. I would not smash it to hell. No! That was not my way. I was so selective that people would think the stuff was misplaced — not stolen. And I didn’t resort to violence. If the homeowner returned unexpectedly I would slip away. I was an escape artist, an *ontsnapper*.

I was very good at what I did. And I felt justified in my actions, because I believed I was taking back from the white man what had been taken from me. I hated the white man for his arrogance and wealth. You know, he acted superior to us. And we cowered like dogs to him: “Ja, baas. Nee, baas. Goed, baas. Ekskuus, baas.”

I gained a reputation for avoiding incarceration. In the early days, before my imprisonment, I could break out of a police station before the fingerprinting. I was out. Running was in my blood.

But it wasn't until I was locked up that I discovered I was *Ngangelizwe*. I told you about the 'numbers' before, Pieter. You know, the 'numbers.' You are chosen. In prison, I discovered I was somebody else. I lost almost 20 years of my life, because of this gangster thing.

Even today people are always wondering, "Why do you only have one child? Your younger brothers and sisters have three or four children and you only have one!"

They don't understand.

There is no making children in jail.

* * *

As I listen to Donald, I appreciate his opposition to authority that is imposed rather than earned. I react in similar ways to structures based on privilege and entitlement. It is the unfairness of the distribution of wealth and power that politicised me initially when I started documenting homelessness. It has always been a source of quiet rage for me.

I remember a clarifying experience I had in 1993 when I spent time on a sheep farm on the edge of the Kalahari. The lead hand, Hendricks, a middle-aged man with a face ripened by the relentless exposure to the sun and his Bushman genes, called me '*kleinbaas*' (little master) despite my youth and my lack of farming acumen. The ludicrousness of this is still jarring to me. I corrected him by suggesting he call me by first name — telling him that we both knew I was clueless when it came to sheep. I suspect he saw my gesture as being equally bemusing and absurd.

* * *

THE STORY OF NGANGELIZWE

They call this ‘the beginning.’ Or you can call it ‘the beginning and the end.’ They say there were ten guys at the beginning. And these ten guys were the ones who were talking about things. Like you and I are doing right now.

Among these ten, there was this guy called Ngangelizwe, which means “as big as the world.” That’s me.

Now I am giving you the picture of how it came about. There were only these ten people and they were talking about fixing the community. “We should do this and that.” And whatever they agreed upon they did.

But there was this guy, the Number Ten guy. He was always disagreeing. Whatever they talked about he said, “No.” He came up with reasons for not voting for this and that. They even challenged him by saying, “What is with you? Why do you always question whatever we are suggesting?”

So they started talking about building a school.

“What is a school?” The tenth guy asked.

“A school is a place where we can educate our children.”

“No, No, I think a school is good.”

And at another meeting, they discussed building a hospital. Now in Zulu we call this ‘*umtholampilo*,’ which means ‘the place that gives life.’

“What is a hospital?” The Number Ten guy asked.

“You! You always stand in front of the upliftment of the community. What is it about you?”

“No, I want to know. I’m not going to agree if I don’t know.”

“A hospital is where you are healed if you are sick or injured.”

“Are you telling me if I am going to die and I visit the hospital they will stop my death?”

“No, no! They can’t do that. If you get to die, you get to die. But if you can be saved, you will be saved.”

“Oh, I understand.” He said, “Umtholampilo is good! It can go with the school.”

And then at another meeting they discussed building a jail.

“No. What is a jail?”

“You, you, you! You’ve got many problems. Whenever we speak you interrupt us. A jail is where we house people who are doing wrong.”

“Ha! Now, you tell me that my cows will stay in your *kraal*?” He replied. “I don’t think so!”

“Ja, if we get them and we lock them up, they will stay.”

“No, I don’t think so. They will break the place apart and run away, because they don’t belong there.”

“Since you have such a big mouth, let’s start with you and show you what jail is like!”

So they took that guy and locked him inside this tiny little room, kind of like a toilet.

“Ja, now we will see what you will do.” They laughed.

Now you should remember that those nine guys put him in jail. They became known as the police. And now we call them the Number Nines, the Nines.

Now they became the police on top of the Number Ten guy. So they say that on the first day Ngangelizwe’s heart was green. Green. They brought him food, but he refused to eat. He just looked at the food. And on the second day, his heart was red. Again they brought him food, which he didn’t eat. On the third day, they say that his heart was white — white, because on that day Ngangelizwe took the spoon they provided him and started scratching at the brickwork until he opened a hole and ran away.

“I will run until I am as big as the world. You will find me nowhere.” He said.

And that’s where the name Ngangelizwe comes from.

* * *

If you are in jail it means you are 'green,' because you are locked up. Now if you are 'red' that is when you are stabbed or maybe you want to escape. In escaping you might hurt somebody or you might be hurt yourself. You might kill or be killed. So that is when you are red. But now if your heart is 'white' it means you are free. White means freedom.

* * *

I hated jail. Prison is no place for the faint-hearted. Trust me. I was arrogant because I thought I knew everything. In life, things work against you when you assume you know it all. It takes time to learn.

Now the funny part is that some people don't even get a chance to learn because they die outright. I will tell you like this. There was this young guy. We grew up together. So this young guy was fascinated with our lifestyles — you know, this fast life we were leading. One day he decided to accompany one of my friends into town. Now this guy was living at location and this was the first time he visited town. Just here in Elarduspark he was shot dead. Shot dead, the first time he came to town. Just for his troubles, because he was fascinated by the lives we lived.

"Please give me a space. Let me come with you."

"No, not today. We will take you another time."

And then always we would leave him behind. But this time around, he convinced that other brother of mine to take him. They broke into this house, but a neighbour saw them and called the police. Simple. They didn't know they were being watched. It was kind of like 1980, somewhere there. So the police arrived while they were packing up the stuff.

"Hey! Police. Stand!"

Now that young guy raised his hands. Trust me. But they shot him anyway. And the other one who was always robbing stuff, they just kicked him around and arrested him.

He was shaking like a leaf when he told me this story.

“You know so-and-so?”

“Yebo.”

“Ellis is no more.”

“Why do you say so?”

“We just went out. You know he was crying to go with us to town so I took him. Now as we speak he is dead.”

It was sad. And that brother of mine received three years for his trouble. And after coming out, the family of that young guy were still on top of him, “You! You killed our child!”

It is funny.

* * *

Man, I don't know what I was thinking back then. I was mixed up. I only cared about self and the things coming my way. And the funny part is I knew it was bad. I have a great mother who was trying by all means to tell me.

“Son, what is it with you? What do you want in life? If it's damage you are looking for, you will find it. You have to change your ways, because you are going too far.”

In prison I started to understand and respect her words. I got the drift of what my old lady was saying. It was not for me to cry to her for help, because she would have told me one thing.

“My son, didn't I say you were going astray? Didn't I say so?”

Now, I did her a favour — a big favour — and she respects me for it. Not *once* did I ask for her sympathy or support.

She was not to blame for my poor choices.

* * *

But there are those inmates who want to punish their families for not visiting them while they were behind bars. You think it is a joke and you find this guy killed so-and-so after being released or he stabbed so-and-so nearly half to death.

I observed the behaviour of other inmates and I soon recognised, “No. This is not the life for me.” You should know that

in prison you are not guided to do the right things. They don't give a damn about you. But one thing you should know is if you make a real effort to change your behaviour, there are people who are watching. They will know. Even if you don't announce it or write it on top of your forehead, "I am going for a change." Your actions speak for themselves. "No, that guy has something going for him." They will know because of your behaviour, man.

I take responsibility for my decisions. I am my own man. Nobody can buy me. I have always been this odd guy who goes my own way. I do not follow the crowd. I am not going to say, "Okay, you are right" simply because I am outnumbered or intimidated. No! I will say, "You are wrong!" Even if you hurt me, I will cry out, "You are wrong!" So you would know you are mistaken. And the funny thing is if I know I am wrong, I will not accept you saying I am right. I will not take it. I believe in my own truth. And I will not adopt your plansenjana unless I can see them working for me. But should they make sense I will borrow them to fit my needs. Trust me, I will take your ideas if I believe them to be helpful to me.

* * *

I was afraid of fights as a young boy. In jail, I learned to resort to violence, because it is the only language people understood out there. In that world only fighting is comprehended. You have to fight back, Pieter. Fight!

And if you are ambushed, you don't cry to the guards that somebody hurt you. No, even if you are covered with blood, you tell the authorities you fell. You lie. You stay put. And then your attackers will be wondering why you are not running away.

Before too long, even before you are stitched up, Pieter, you go out and hit them the way they hit you. That's the only way they will understand you are a man. You can stand on your own. And that's when you get respect.

Now, that friend I was telling you about. He was really mean. And look, we were not big guys. No! We were big in the head and

in the deeds, but we were not big guys. We were kind of like skinny, Pieter. But we could do our stuff. We were good in what we did. And we didn't do stuff only when we were together. No! Happy can do his stuff. And I can do my stuff. He just had to show his face at the window and say, "Don! Do it!" And I am doing it.

That's how we trusted one another. And even today, we can't change that, Pieter. We really caught on to one another. I don't know how it happened. But in all of the thousands of people I met it is only that guy. Even now that's how it is. He is like a brother to me. You will get to meet him. You will know him.

* * *

Pieter, I was arrested in 1974 and was sent to New Lock prison. We were crammed into a holding cell. We slept three or four to a bed. In the night somebody wet the blankets. When we woke we were soaked in urine and no one could identify the culprit. And then we got the beating of a lifetime.

"Why you pee? You bastard! You bastard!"

After that experience I realised, "Hey, this place is real shit. Shit like shit. It stinks." I tried to avoid that place as best as I could, but I couldn't do so forever. So I went out there again. Now, the second time I was locked up, I started thinking, "Why are these people acting like they were born here? Plastered and painted with this place. What can I do in order for me to be the same?" Ah, Pieter, trust me, I wasn't like them. I was worse than them. They got to fear me more than I feared them.

It was simple. It was all in my mind — all in my doing. Pieter, you got to do stuff that others will puke when they see you do. Kind of like, people are sitting there, maybe fifteen, twenty people, sitting there and one of them is pestering you because he has all these friends. He is just agitating you because he has protection and you're alone.

Now what I did, Pieter, in order for me to be recognised, I just acted like I was afraid. But one thing that I did, you see that brick?

That brick? I put a piece of that brick in a double or triple sock. And then I relaxed like it was nothing. But whenever the jail is closed they are sitting there, all of them, in a group. I told myself that I am going to hurt that one more than I can hurt anyone. I am going to smack him to hell and back. So I am taking that sock and I am making it short. I am wrapping it in my hand like so, Pieter. I am just hitting back, whichever way I can. You don't make it long, Pieter. It will end up striking you. You make it short, kind of short, like a short string. Don't make it long. And then after I did that I just started strolling, you know. They are sitting there by the hallway, all of them, looking the other side and making jokes, "Haha!" But I know who is my guy, so I am just taking a stroll, going down there, up there, many times over so that they put it in their mind that I am just going up and down.

But there will come a time when I am going to go out there and grab my enemy and I am going to work him in front of his friends. And I am alone, Pieter. Remember, I am alone!

I am going to make sure they have just made their bed and me I didn't make my bed. Because I know if I retaliate, the guards will remove me. So my bed is wrapped up. Everything I need to take with me is tied in a bundle.

Now when the time comes I am just making that stroll up, down, up, down...when my time comes I just go straight at him. It is all blood spitting. Look, those who are outside they can't stand up, Pieter! Blood is working power. Blood has power, Pieter. They are just being splattered by blood and they just sit there, because anyone who stands up will be struck. Because I am standing up. I just hit and hit. And when I hit I tell him, "You don't shit me! Because I will shit you more." And I am hitting hard!

* * *

And everyone knows it was my deed alone. I did it myself. And so everyone is scared of you, because you hit the first one, and you hit the second one, and the third one! But it is only a trick of the mind.

Simple. Haha! And after that you can just pull your hat over your eyes and take a nap. And they will never know if you are awake or asleep. Then you can take four or five hours to recuperate. So you are surviving, Pieter! That's how you should do your stuff, because if you don't fend for yourself, you're in for a hard one. Oh, you're in for a hard one!

So even if you sleep, you bark, "Hey!" And they jump, because they know you can act. And you don't lose it. You just always do the stuff. And that's how me and Happy lived.

And sure, Pieter, we were feared and hated. But the people couldn't question what we did because we did it in order for us to survive. And we were the backbone of the *Ngangelizwe* thing. Everything that happens anywhere they would come to us.

Trust me, Pieter, whether I was alone or with Happy, we made sure we had an answer for them. And we always answered appropriately, because we had the book. And in the answers there can be three ways in which you can solve stuff. We had a rulebook. It was in our heads, Pieter. So that's how simple it was for us. We were hated by the police and by the other gangs, but we survived. We survived where nobody thought we could.

* * *

"Number has a mind and a life of its own. Number by itself can kill you. There are many people who have laid down their spirits for Number. In Number there is no talk without action. In Number, you talk now, you act now, Pieter. Number is alive. It has done wonders and it has done countless damage."²⁷

²⁷ See also Human Rights Watch 1994 for a description of the prison conditions in South Africa at the time of Donald's incarceration. This includes a fascinating overview of the number gang system.

* * *

These are difficult stories to listen to, Donald, although over the years I have heard many uncomfortable stories. People's accounts of living on the streets of Edmonton were often wrenching. I have learned not to judge others for their experiences. I listen and try not to react to what I hear. I maintain eye contact. I lean in. I know how messy life can be. I probe for understanding, but avoid fetishising the ugly bits. I do not need to know all the details in order to comprehend your story. Although, I leave the space for you to express what you feel you need to. I respect you to be the curator of your experiences. I am listening for the patterns and the sum of the parts to help me understand your life, leaving space for new perspectives to emerge, for new twists and turns. I know living is a constant telling and retelling of stories. I know that a single sentence sometimes communicates more than a paragraph of speech. I know that silence often carries more meaning than sound.

All this I know. But I struggle when stories trigger my own vulnerabilities. As I listen to your accounts, I am not struck so much by the violence, because this is just a part of life — the physical expression of the aggressive negotiations that often take place in communities. No, I am impacted by your references to the forces of exclusion and oppression. In many ways, your stories of prison life are allegories for the social dynamics in this country. They speak of the power games of dominance. Even some of the descriptions of your workplace, the church, evoke this sense of intimidation and coercion. I remember one account you shared with me of the minister referring to the devil while pointing at you. This is the same prejudice masked as faith that permeated apartheid. This venom seems to run so deeply in this country that I wonder if anyone is immune to its effects. Intolerance has hardened all of us. Even the softhearted require a thick skin to confront diehards. I am thinking in particular of Colin and Denise who have continually confronted bigotry in their advocacy work. They have shared anecdotes of parishioners whose angelic expressions twisted into contempt at the mere mention of

Woodlane Village. One elder claimed he could fix all of the problems in the camp with a match and a canister of petrol.

Donald, I marvel at your ability to endure all of this, while still maintaining a sense of yourself. I am not sure if I could have survived the same.

My time in South Africa has been polarising. I feel out of place here. My stay with my relatives has magnified this sense of isolation. I feel the sting of unwelcome. I anticipated awkwardness as a foreigner in this camp, but I didn't expect to be blindsided by my own kin. And the break-up of a relationship in Canada has added salt to the wounds.

I know that this seems insignificant in comparison to what you have endured, Donald. But perhaps, the most painful rebukes are the ones that come from loved ones, especially when they are unexpected. A sucker punch is more painful than a direct attack. Maybe, this is what you were referring to when you counselled me about the sacredness of trust and friendships. You warned me once to be selective in the friends I chose, because a friend can betray you more than an enemy. In the world of prison, I can see why a friendship is a life or death thing. I appreciate the loyalty you have for Happy, your comrade in arms.

I was naïve in assuming this would be an easy homecoming. I thought I could neatly sew up the loose ends in my personal story. I have always felt like an outsider, a dislocation fomented by a childhood where the confusion of being a newcomer in Canada dovetailed with conflicts at home. Perhaps, the true gift of my time here is the insight into my displacement.

I have asked you to explore with me the concepts of home and belonging yet I am struggling to honour my part of the exchange. These notions seem alien to me. How do we create a sense of belonging when we are estranged from the people and places we call home? Is it possible to experience a 'sense of being in the world' that transcends relationships, histories, and localities — one that allows us to be at peace in a world of conflicts, contradictions, and constant change?

* * *

Welcome Home

It is the spittle on the lips of fury. The stale sweat of duplicity. The curse behind clenched jaws, the 'kaffer' cutting loose from pious tongues. It is the eyes blinded to all they refuse to see, the ears deaf to all they refuse to hear. It is the bellies full of *koeksisters* and *kitskoffie*. It is your flesh and blood.

* * *

Donald, the more I seek to understand my homeland and my Afrikaner ancestry the more alienated I become, because I can see the residue of what disturbs me most about this country in my own family.

The source of discomfort is not a terrible family secret, because we were raised to treat others with respect (although this often came with an air of superiority). No, it is rather the mixed messages and duplicities I see in Afrikaners that are crazy making — the affirmations of love and piety co-existing with harsh judgments and quiet hostility.

What do I embrace and what do I renounce? There is much I admire in the *boere*, their directness and no nonsense attitude to life, their tenacity and their will to survive, their connection to the land and their traditions, their balance of faith and pragmatism. These are attributes worthy of preservation. But these qualities were perverted long ago, mutated by the excesses of power and privilege into self-righteousness, insularity, greed, and inhumanity.

It has been almost twenty years since the Afrikaner ceded control over South Africa. Since then millions of whites have fled the country. A truth and reconciliation commission exposed the

grim details of the atrocities committed under apartheid.²⁸ Attempts were made to craft a new story of nationhood founded on shared heartache. Some Afrikaners stayed. The wealthy among them maintained their lavish lifestyles, while the less fortunate slipped into poverty with the evaporation of white patronage. Some endured the psychic shock of accepting their complicity in a racist society. In the glare of honesty, they experienced the unmaking of their worlds, the repudiation of all they once believed in. For some this represented liberation, an escape from the straightjacket of repressive values, the release from false selves. Others carried on in a state of cognitive dissonance and denial, nary facing their own biases, preconceptions, and repressed emotions — their grief and anger forced inwards, their hatred locked behind tight lips, pulsing temples and politeness.

²⁸ For a provocative chronicle of the Truth and Reconciliation process and the complicated psychology of Afrikaner guilt see the writing of Antjie Krog (1998 and 2003).

* * *

Airforce Three — By the numbers

1. I don't have anything in the jail.
My kingdom is outside.
2. I die where my brother dies.
Wherever my brother's bone falls I will follow.
3. Day and night, I am reading the wind.
4. I always identify with my own kind.
5. I cannot bring poison to my brother.

* * *

Trust me. If you get to die you get to die. But die for what you believe in, Pieter. Die for something worth dying for! Don't die for nothing!

And what is worth dying for, you ask?

Brotherhood! Don't touch my brother, Pieter. Don't touch my brother! If you have a problem come to me. Tell me. I will solve it. If you do it yourself, I will be coming for you. And, Pieter, I don't think you'll survive that one, because I'm coming full out.

We stabbed somebody. In my life I never did that before but I stabbed somebody twenty-four holes. And I did it for a boy I never met personally. Because that boy was like our brother. He worked in Atteridgeville and that's where he delivered dagga for us. He worked at what you call that? Rubbish removal. And this rubbish was taken to Atteridgeville and that's where they got bundles and bundles of dagga.

So on the day he was attacked, we were eating breakfast when the message arrived: "Hey, one of our brothers just got stabbed."

It was bad, Pieter. Real bad. And since he was harmed we were in, because we were 'the guys.' We lost our appetites, me and Happy. We left the food and just sat there like robots. It was real bad because the gang who stabbed him were like our second blood. They were the Airforce Fours. I told you they are the splinter group

of the Twenty-Eights. And hardly a couple of months earlier they beat the biggest gang in prison at that time: the Big Five — the police of the jail. They beat those guys to a pulp, which means they were now ‘the guys.’ Now we were nowhere near their power, but we had to go and challenge them. We were the laughingstock, Pieter. But we did it, we got one of their brothers and we stabbed him twenty-four holes. He shit in his trousers. We caught him and stabbed him until we couldn’t stab him no more. It was bloody, us bloody, him bloody, all over the place. And all the people were looking only.

And we just said, “Yes, *Ngangelizwe!*”

* * *

Happy was on the other side. He screamed, “Don, do it!” He came to the window and yelled, “Don, that *number!* Do it!”

I was where the number happened. The Airforce Fours were banking that nobody would challenge them. They were the strongest. But I did it!

I told you there are guys who are getting into stuff without knowing the situation. There was this guy who was selling dagga, making thousands of rand in jail and having this big head and he was Airforce Four. But he wasn’t communicating with his gang. And he was staying in my cell. And hey, man, we were the most hated bastards. So I thought, “Okay, I am going to catch this one, because he is unaware that stuff is happening.”

He was just a big guy eating money. He was a shuffler — a sleepwalker. He couldn’t even pick up his legs. He was strong in body, but weak in mind. He got into stuff without knowing how it works. You should be up to date when you wake up in the morning and before you go to bed at night. You should know what’s happening in your camp so you can remain vigilant, so you know your enemy. But that one thought he owned the place. He was shuffling and I knew instantly, “He is the one.”

* * *

Donald's stories of prison mirror his descriptions of life in South Africa. The normalisation of violence in this country demands situational awareness and caution. Although in my time here I have yet to get a clear sense of the level of risk. Predatory crimes such as robberies and carjackings get significant media attention, shaping the paranoia of the middleclass and contributing to a booming private security industry in South Africa. But the majority of the victimisation in South Africa occurs among the poor and much of this is occurring within circles of relationships (family, friends, and acquaintances) rather than between outright strangers. This poses interesting questions about the potentially corrosive impacts of violence on the nature of community and by extension how people conceive of home and belonging in places with high ambient conflict. How do you reconcile these tensions?

* * *

In life, you don't have to be like a car. You can start a car with keys or without keys. You know, there are people who hotwire automobiles. But if you are unable to drive then you must expect an accident. You can't go nowhere. A car can't drive itself, man.

So when you get into the car and you should be prepared for the road. You should be of sound mind, because you are not driving for yourself only. You are driving for yourself, the pedestrians, and the other drivers. And some of them are not even drivers, like the guy who just stole his uncle's vehicle. You have to watch out for him because he is speeding and he doesn't even know where the brake or the clutch is. It is a problem. You have to look in the front, in the side mirrors and in the rear view mirror. You're driving for all the people. So, it's a car. It needs you driving it. Now, like me, I need me driving me. I don't need anybody driving me.

* * *

So there is the story of this suffering guy. He has this old bakkie with odd-coloured doors. You know, the doors are from different vehicles. And one wheel of the bakkie is bigger than the others. And when it rides, it goes bumping, bumping along — kind of like a cripple hobbling on a stiff leg.

Now this guy is going about his own business, trying to make ends meet. And there are these other guys who drive this BMW. It is stolen and they are on a getaway with a bag full of cash. Let's say R3 million. The police are chasing them so they think, "We are going to be caught. We must stash the money." They take the bag and toss it in the back of the poor guy's truck. And he doesn't even notice, because the vehicle is always making funny noises.

And when he gets home, he goes to bed. He is tired and miserable. In the morning, he wakes up and looks at his dirty truck and says, "No, man. This old bakkie of mine needs a wash. I must give it a shine." And then, "Hey, what is this bag in here? And upon opening it, "Oh my God! Whoa, whoa! Oh my God!"

Now look, this guy didn't plan on getting money. He was suffering. But suddenly he is a wealthy man. I mean a multi-millionaire, a couple of millions rich. He didn't earn the money. He was merely at the right place at the right time.

The same applies to the wrong place at the wrong time. Let's say you were at the bank during the hold-up. There was a shootout between the robbers and the security guards. And in the crossfire and you got a bullet meant for the *skelms*. You died for nothing. You didn't even know death was coming.

This is how things happen in life. It is about 'timing'. Everything has its time. You can't change it. You have to accept it.

Now this doesn't mean if trouble comes you shouldn't try to kick...kick...kick back! No, you have to fight the best way you can! But if you fail, you must know it was meant to be.

It didn't just happen out of the blue.

* * *

This is one of the many humorous stories Donald has shared with me over the past few months. This little throwaway tale is a commentary on the vagaries of fate and a reminder of the different ways in which experiences can be interpreted. It captures the capricious nature of life in South Africa, while also describing his moral outlook. In this parable, one person's misfortune becomes another person's good luck. An innocent bystander dies during a shootout at a bank while the robbers escape. The criminals misplace their loot during the getaway and a poor man becomes unexpectedly rich. Life is all about timing. Despite the apparent unpredictability there is an order to all things.

According to Donald, we must accept responsibility for our actions, while also surrendering control to divine providence. Others in the camp echo this viewpoint. Donald's neighbour, Peter, for example, has told me on numerous occasions that the "aim is to accept life as it is."

I appreciate how this perspective helps individuals cope with their diminished social status, but I wonder how compensatory beliefs have fed into the ongoing subjugation of the poor in this country. It also makes me question the role of the churches in supporting the status quo. There is a dual-edge to the Christian dogma that can undercut as well as sustain domination. The stories we tell ourselves can set us free or they can merely assuage our feelings of marginalisation and in doing so feed into the very dynamics that maintain the power of others over us. There is a fine line between faith and fatalism.

* * *

There are memories that worry you if you think deep. Like the time you found guys hiding in the bushes with guns, waiting to kill you. But you didn't know. You were just walking. They pulled the trigger and in that instant you stumbled. The tree splintered next to you and you started rolling — tumbling and tumbling for cover. You were lying there, covered in dust, your ears ringing. You are lying there, alive and breathing, because you tripped at the moment the bullets flew by.

There are memories that worry you if you think deep.

* * *

I learned to do tailoring in prison. Doing the sewing. Reading as many books as I can. Trying to avoid bad influences. Those were my strategies for survival. Nobody can force me to do something I don't want to. I have a mind of my own.

Even though I was stupid, I knew there was stuff I should do and stuff I shouldn't do. Being in prison meant I had messed up full-time and so I didn't have to mess up anymore.

Enough was enough.

* * *

Pieter, I never went back to jail after I got out in 1997. Never. I moved in with my sister in Mamelodi for a while. You know the one you met?

When I first got out of prison I got some contract work and rented a place. But you know the problem with temporary jobs. They are unreliable and you might find yourself only be employed for three or four months. So I decided to go to my sister's place. And while I was living there I ran a tailoring business on the side. I had this Singer sewing machine.

I lived with my sister for awhile and then came the day when her son complained, "I am not comfortable with my uncle living

here. And since this is my home and I am your child, I am not going help out as long as he is around. I want to feel free at home.”

So his mother told me this. I understood. I said, “Ja, my nephew is right. This is his house. I should make plans and go.”

I couldn’t find a place to live around here. I convinced my fiancée, Johanna, we should relocate. So we took that one-and-a-half room shack of mine. You know, the zinc plate one. We spent R1200 to have it moved to Mpumalanga. My fiancée owns property out there. It is home.

We started hunting some land to put it on. Out in Mpumalanga you can’t just buy property. No, you have to go to the chiefs for permission. You give them money and they will give you a letter with a stamp on it.

That’s my place. I eventually got it registered to me. Because that is how we understood one another, me and my fiancée.

I said to Johanna, “Look, out there it is close to your house. I am leaving my community so I can’t go out there to Mpumalanga and make it a mixed whatever. So if we go out, if we find a place it is going to be in my name. Even though we are together and we might help one another out. But it should be my place, because you know how we live, we people. They would say at the end of the day you took me out there. You brought me in your place and you are taking everything over so it should be in my name.”

We decided that. And she is real good and understanding. We did that and then at the end of the day it was registered in my name and just last week Johanna said, “No, you can’t do it without lights so where is your ID?” And she took my ID and the papers of the stand and she went out there. And I just got the phone call that the electricity people did come to have a look and so it maybe before the month is out we will have lights.

* * *

Pieter, there in Mpumalanga I never stayed with those people long. But they just embraced me, Pieter. They accepted me even though I was an outsider and different nationality-wise. Out there they didn't know me. I came only with this woman.

And some of them were aggrieved, "Ja, this woman can't. She stayed here all these years and she couldn't marry one of our sons? But now all of a sudden she comes with this guy from wherever. Now this guy comes and takes her away."

They couldn't believe that we would be moving out. Because at her mother's place Johanna is the breadwinner. Look, Pieter, I have never met greater people. They accepted me even though I was an outsider and from a different culture.

Pieter, remember that flower I showed you? The one I planted by the fence? It tells my ancestors that this is my place. This is my home. And if you slaughter a goat the blood goes there — on the white flowers by sunrise or by sunset. The blood goes there.

* * *

So Pieter, I have my place out in Mpumalanga but I stay here in the plastics. I am close to my work at the church. It is far to Mpumalanga and it is expensive for bus fare. One day, I dream of living out there. Maybe knocking off at three o'clock and then commuting to my place and spending the night out there. And then coming back here in the morning. Doing this during the week and then staying out there on the Saturday and Sunday. And maybe, one day I will buy a second-hand car so that I can travel back and forth.

I am not aiming for much. What I can do is try to build my home and just sit out there. And since I am working I hope to work forever — you know, assuming I am not dismissed or the firm does not close down. But even then, I can always do this sewing of mine. As long as I have my place, I think I will be doing better. There is nothing more I want in life.

* * *

I have lived out here for several years now. Early on we stayed in makeshift shelters. In the morning, we would wrap up our plastic and our belongings and put them in a hole before going to work. Because if the metro police spotted our stands they would come and break them down. They would burn us out. It ended up that even Charles Nqakula, the Minister of Safety and Security, was fined about R15000 to rebuild what the police had destroyed. Because Colin was now fighting with his lawyers, "These people are homeless so you can't just burn their shelters." And they won the matter in court and they told Nqakula to pay. He didn't pay and the matter was taken to Bloemfontein. And out there by Bloemfontein that's where they charged him kind of like R15000.

And then the people started living out here and Colin visited all the time. And then the metro police were hitting the people, hurting them. But eventually, it came to the point where they decided to build this camp to control the living.

Man, it was bad. Real bad. If you know what bad means. It was real bad, because we were living out here. There were no guarantees, you might be going out and leaving your tarp in the hole, your food and whatever...and when you come back somebody had stolen your stuff. And it was an everyday occurrence. And sometimes you would be forced to live from one hole to another. You would put your stuff here today and then tomorrow the police would come and chase you away. Everyday from one hole to another.

They would usually find us. Because you should know that even if it is jungle wherever a person is walking the trail is starting to show. You might use different trails, but at the end of the day they will always point the same direction. That's how you will know there are people out there. You might find fifteen paths that all lead to the same place. And that's how you know something is happening out there. The trail will always sell you out.

* * *

Excerpt from legal judgement

THE SUPREME COURT OF APPEAL OF SOUTH AFRICA

Tswelopele Non-Profit Organisation v City of Tshwane
Metropolitan Municipality [2007] SCA 70 (RSA)

15. That the wanton destruction of the occupiers' dwellings violated the Constitution was not disputed. What must be owned is how far-reaching and damaging the breach was. The governmental agencies violated not merely the fundamental warrant against unauthorised eviction, but (given the implicit menace with which the eviction was carried out) the occupiers' right to personal security and their right to privacy. It infringed not only the occupiers' property rights in their materials and belongings, but trampled on their feelings and affronted their social standing. For to be hounded unheralded from the privacy and shelter of one's home, even in the most reduced circumstances, is a painful and humiliating indignity.
16. And it is not for nothing that the constitutional entrenchment of the right to dignity emphasises that 'everyone' has inherent dignity, which must be respected and protected. Historically, police actions against the most vulnerable in this country had a distinctive racial trajectory: white police abusing blacks. The racial element may have disappeared, but what has not changed is the exposure of the most vulnerable in society to police power and their vulnerability to its abuse. Reading comparable case reports from the decades preceding these events, it is impossible not to endorse appellant's counsel's submission that in its lack of respect for the poor and the vulnerable, and in the official hubris displayed, what happened displays a repetition of the worst of the pre-constitutional past.

* * *

So I am good at this sewing thing, Pieter. Real good. There was this time I saw a woman on the train with ripped trousers.

“Hey, look! Look your zip is torn.” I said.

“Hey, how did you see that?”

“You don’t have to worry. I make fashion.”

“No, no, what were you looking at?”

“No, that’s my nature. I am looking. Come over here.”

In the train, I was sewing and she was standing there. I got the call because I carried the needle and thread with me. So I just stitched it up for free right there and then.

And the bystanders were saying, “Wow, this man is doing it.”

“Yes! Don’t worry that I am looking at your crotch or something. Because I am the fashion man, yes.”

“How did you see that?”

“No, no. It is my nature. It is in me. I am looking where you can’t look.”

* * *

In this camp, people are living in groups according to their understandings: me and you here and that one and that one over there. That is how we live and interact. We are in groups. In a way we are a community. But like I told you, we rarely intervene on each other’s behalf. One day you may hear me crying. Will you knock on my door? No.

We are not good neighbours. Neighbours should be caring and loving, because you should try to be the neighbour you would like to have. So meaning, you should take responsibility. You know, not doing to others what you don’t want done to you.

Now, it doesn’t apply here, because everybody is in the mindset to make money. They don’t care about anything that gets in their way. It might be a person. It might be a dog, a cat. It should just get the hell out of the way, because they are out for the money. That is the problem of this place.

It is not really a community here. Look, where have you ever been where you find out all the people are businessmen? Who is going to buy and who is going to sell? Three houses in a row: shebeen, shebeen, shebeen. No! It doesn't work like that.

Okay, making money is good, but let it be in a way that is acceptable. Mr So-and-So, let's say maybe in this street, maybe two shebeens. One on the corner here, one in the middle of the street maybe, and one tuck shop at the far end. But, it is not like that here. It is a kind of like at the flea market, you know, where people are only there for the business. In this camp, you find the whole street is selling one and the same thing — and with this comes the competition, the jealousy, and the scheming.

* * *

People are not doing things blindly. They are doing it because they have the knowledge. They have know-how. There are these guys in all locations you find them under the trees. They are seeing. They are planning. They are conspiring, "Oh, this guy is always clean. Where does he work?" They get to plot. And then they see you everyday so it might happen that one of the good days after you go, they break into your place and rob you blind. And if by bad luck you are home, they may even hurt or kill you. You will find you have been crippled for such small stuff: a DVD, maybe a flat screen TV, a leather jacket or a pair of *takkies*. Look, those *takkies* might be expensive, but you think that they are going to sell them decently. No! *Takkies* of R1000 are going to be sold for R50 or a case of beer.

* * *

I told you the other day that this guy was playing his music half the night. By maybe past two to three, early in the morning, he went to sleep. In the morning when he awoke up he found all his equipment was gone. In his house! He slept there! He secured his gate and he locked his door and while he was sleeping they took his stuff: the amplifier and those big speakers.

* * *

If you are in a position where you can drink beer twenty-four/seven then are you no longer in a position to say you are suffering. Where do you get the money to buy beer? Beer is expensive. A bottle of beer is kind of like from R15 to R20.

So this place, even if they want to demolish it, I might be saying, “yeah” even though I would lose my shack. I would agree to that. Because this is not a place where you would want to raise your children. No, no, no!

* * *

We ran out here to make a life. I mean there is no place like home. But if home no longer feels like home, we are lost. We are a lost generation. That’s where we are. I mean it is only the *oh*’s and the *ah*’s all the time. There is no way out of this one.

“Oh, oh, oh!”

“Ah, ah, ah!”

It is like you are wondering what is coming to this world. Wow!

If someone says, “Wow, it’s a wonder,” he is questioning what happened to life itself. It just evaporated “poof” into thin air like a magician with his trick. It shouldn’t work like that.

But now I am getting back to the point where you, as the Bible says, will find things are not as they seem. This indicates the end of the world is upon us. Look what the world has come to. It has gone to the dogs, man. Trust me. The dogs are ruling instead of the people, because when man was created he was given dominion over every animal on Earth. He was the boss, meaning he had the brains. But I doubt this now.

I think we are getting to the point of ruin. Humans have always been destructive. I mean if you find a place unspoiled by human beings, you will see a natural cycle of birth and death. But let humans touch a place and you will find real devastation. I mean the death will be all the way. Humans don’t preserve anything. No, we are always kicking things about. We only live for today and we think tomorrow will take care of itself.

* * *

But we do have a solution here. We do. But the path is narrow and the path is hard to follow. You find you don't have the will or the power to walk it. You know people have died for talking about Jesus. Some beliefs are worth dying for. Trust me.

People are dying for less, because of their belief. Less! Less! Let's go to the story where we are sitting here and maybe gambling or just relaxing. Now, I have this cigarette, my favourite cigarette or maybe I have a packet and I just open it and light one. And maybe I don't have a light and you say, "Okay, let me light from you." And while we are talking, you forget that I gave you my cigarette to light from. Now the cigarette is gone.

"I said 'light,' man. I didn't say 'Smoke it and finish it!'"

"Hey man, this is funny. You just opened the pack. You can't just worry for one cigarette."

"I'll give you hell, man."

"Okay, I'm done. Look, take R10 to buy another cigarette."

"Look, asshole! I need my cigarette!"

There is no way you can recreate that cigarette. It is gone. I could accept the R10 and cool off. But you find out somebody dies for that cigarette. I needed to kill you.

Why? Why is that?

* * *

"The man who will never die." — Tattoo on Donald's forearm

* * *

When they built this camp they took people out of the jungles. Because we were isolated: a group here, a group there. The camp was intended to house the workers. You know, the people looking for jobs or those of us who need to live closer to the jobsites. Or those of us saving money so we can do better for our families.

But today you find there are people here who own cars. Somebody has three taxis or a motorbike. And all the while, he lives here in the plastics. So to me this indicates that the camp has changed from what it was meant to be. And now, there are brothels here. There are prostitutes. Beer-selling twenty-four/seven. There is no more sleeping. And you can't tell anybody anything.

Whereas, before we came into this camp we got together and made laws about how to live together. During the weekdays nobody blared their music after nine o'clock at night. And on the weekends, Friday, Saturday and Sunday we were only allowed to play our music until eleven o'clock. Those were our rules and we obeyed them.

It was a community of a kind. And if you were away and we saw a stranger going through your belongings we would chase him away. And when you returned, we would tell you what happened in your absence. Trust me. If a newcomer came everyone would know he was not from these parts. Even in location it is like this. You might go to one location, from one location to another, but the people who live there will know you are not of their place.

And in the early days of this camp before the expansion, I lived on the coolest street you could get. The boundary of the settlement used to be right behind my shack. It was peaceful. Everyone knew one another. Then they brought in other people and the dynamics changed. The newcomers didn't give a damn about the laws. And that's when you started to find somebody is taking two stands and he is building such a big house that you can't tell where it begins and where it ends. And that's when the shebeens started multiplying and crime increased. And today you find these liquor

establishments, like 519, blaring their music all night long — and with the drinking and the constant ruckus you find problems.

I think it is going to stay this way forever until they demolish this place. It can't change, because even the police are afraid to tackle the matter. And informing on the troublemakers is dangerous and futile. So most of us have learned to live in silence.

And with these changes came the deaths. You know, when we lived in the bushes you could go years before you heard of someone dying and usually this was of natural causes. But bad things started happening after we moved behind these fences. Somebody burns to death in his shack and people claim it is an accident. They say he was a drunk.

This doesn't just happen. Fire is very painful, man. You can't sit there while you burn out. No! You would be kicking and screaming. But at least four or five people have died here by fire. I know for a fact they were murdered and their deaths were made to look like accidents. There was always a quarrel that preceded the blaze — you know, a fight over gambling or over a girl. And then the next morning you hear that guy burned out in his shack.

* * *

So you will find I am living in this birdcage. That's where I am. And I like it in this birdcage, because you can't just invade it like you want to. You know there is this stone throwing and stuff. But if it comes here, trust me, not even a stone can pass through. You see this mesh and the wires?

You will find that I built my shack real strong. Inside the tarpaulin I put a perimeter of sticks to keep intruders out. You might come to cut the plastic and you will find this barrier. And along the ground you will find a zinc plate that protects against the water. My shack has always been very secure and very dry. No bad people or bad weather can get in, especially when I lock the door and the gate.

* * *

The troubles are long overdue. Illegal immigration is changing South Africa. You should know this is happening in many countries. And that's why you find crime is so rife. Not meaning there was no crime before. But now it is bad, because foreigners who don't belong here and don't care about anything are committing the wrongs. They are only here as visitors. So they are getting to do whatever they please.

I will let you know that the people who are born here do not rob others blindly. No, they do it like this. They would rather move from their place of birth and go elsewhere to do mischief. They go where they are not known.

* * *

In English, we have this saying, Donald:
"Don't piss in your own backyard."

* * *

I told you about these neighbours. You find that somebody is breaking into a house on your street, maybe only six or seven houses from you. You just turn the other way and say, "Ah, that's not my business." Trust me for what it is worth, one day it will be coming to you. Those people are marking you. They are working through you. They know you are not going to worry too much so they will commit further crimes. Maybe on the very next day, they jump a couple of houses on the other side of the street. Before too long, the whole street has been robbed, raped, and murdered. That's how it works. You should have stopped it whilst it started. So that's why people should stand up for their community.

* * *

“We should act. Not think and think late.”

* * *

Yes, life has changed from what it was. It was not always this way. We were good neighbours once. Bit by bit this spirit eroded. You would remember this revolution thing, you know, people toy-toying: “Power to the people! Hara hara!” These protests came with a price. The price was too big. Many have died.

To cut the story short, other countries have been liberated long ago and the people from there understand how to work the system. So when a place becomes newly democratic, they come rushing to seize opportunities. They come to exploit the situation, because they know the average person doesn't understand what is going on. Many are being robbed — the rich, the poor, the dumb and blind and all. Everybody needs to get to the top. And those who are at the top need to feel secure in their position, so that's where the crooks come in. And they are slick, man. They are slick. They don't wear disguises. They come plain and smooth. And they are very humble. You would love them.

So you will find the thefts and the bribes and the swindles. And the poor are taking the brunt of these scams. The illiterate and the poor are getting ripped off on a daily basis and there is nothing they can do about it. Even if they want to, they can't unless they change their situation around this literacy and stuff.

But there is nothing I can do about it. I can't stop it. It just keeps happening and happening and happening— all over again. I mean history repeats itself out here.

* * *

I don't think it is all about the country. It is about the people and the time. That's what I think. For this simple fact, if you know what I am talking about. Some people have every opportunity to be bad

and yet they refrain from wrongdoing. And then there are those who grow up in good homes and they turn out bad. So how would you explain that one? Can you tell me what happened?

Look, let's talk about this great man, Mandela. He went out there for twenty-seven years. When he came out of jail, people wanted to kill. They smelled blood. He said, "No! No! You don't have to. No!" You remember the time Chris Hani died. The people were up in arms. Even at the funeral they shot in the air and he calmed them down. And they listened.

* * *

But now again, poverty drives people crazy. Some kill themselves, some become robbers. Look there are individuals who make something of themselves even when they are faced with destitution. You know, collecting tins, and making items that others will buy even though they don't have money. Some take plastic and wood to produce art. They make a living out of nothing.

And yet there are others who just sit down in the face of hunger. They put the blame on top of poverty. This doesn't sound true to me. But this is life. You will never know what sounds true and what doesn't. But in my opinion, it doesn't sound true.

We can do better than that.

* * *

I am always observing the world and wondering, "Why is it this way? Is there a reason behind all of this?"

You can see we are bad, man. We are bad. And we are getting worse by the day. Like I asked you, "How is it possible for people to be good one day and then bad the next? How is that possible?"

It makes me think, "What has gotten into man to make him change overnight."

Look, I am talking about big stuff here. This is happening according to my knowledge of the world. It might take a long time for you to understand this. I am talking about is big stuff here.

Look, some ladies are unable to leave their daughters with their fathers, because they might return to find the father has raped the daughter. And I mean a daughter who is young! I am talking about a child who is innocent of all this stuff. Young like two years old. You find she is badly hurt and traumatised. She is just big eyes and out of her senses, because something terrible happened and she can't explain it. And her father did it.

So you can tell me, how does this come to pass if we are good and if we still have a sense of fatherhood or parenthood?

Because when I grew up the community raised the child — the community. As I am a brother, I am a brother to her. As I am a sister, I am a sister to her. And the whole community would discipline the child.

But this has also changed. Today, if you see a child misbehaving on the street, you can't correct his behaviour. If you try, the parents will come running and screaming, "Don't touch my child!" And tomorrow, when the problem is fully fleshed and they need your support, they will find that their neighbours have folded their hands. The problem has grown from the smallest grain of sand to this monstrosity and they can't do anything about it.

Everything has changed. Today when you have a problem you stick to yourself and you might even think of killing self because you can't find help out there. But you did it to yourself, because you couldn't work with the community.

* * *

I realised I have this capacity to think and to make sense of right and wrong when I was in jail. I started questioning the world, especially the life of prison, "What is going on here? No, I can do better than this."

You can incarcerate the body, not the mind. Trust me, for what it is worth, not the mind. The mind is going wherever it wants. You can go to America whilst you are incarcerated. You can go to India. It's only up to you to give it a try. So that's what I did. And lucky enough, and I discovered reading. Books are my life. They made me. Even though I didn't go to school, I started to understand the world through reading.

Today, I love them so much that my fiancée fights with me.

“Ja, you! You love your books more than me.”

“Please, this is a habit and it's hard to break. It's like a craving.”

Trust me if I don't have a book I am going mad. Because I can sit out here for years and years. I will greet you and return to my reading. I will die with a book in my hand.

* * *

Donald shares a newspaper article:

“What was supposed to be a leisurely ride turned into a nerve-wracking experience for two mountain bikers when they were assaulted and almost had their bicycles and a cellular phone stolen over the weekend.

The two cyclists, Johan van Graan and Barry Whitehead, were riding in the open veld next to the Plastic View informal settlement when they were attacked by two men.

According to a police statement, a man who they had passed hit Whitehead with a steel pipe over the head. When Whitehead fell off his bicycle his attacker hit him again and took his bicycle.”

— 17 August 2012, Pretoria East Rekord

* * *

“To be neighbourly is to greet one another when we meet.”

* * *

Talking, talking, talking all the time. And only to find what you are talking about doesn't make sense. This fighting all the time and for no good reason at all. You know this thing of you fighting other people's battles? And at the end of the day nobody worries about you and your feelings. When there is a scrap you are the first one to be called. Now, that tells you something if you know what I mean. So I realised that I was being used. This is hard to acknowledge if you are a person who likes to be helpful — even though sometimes you are not being helpful. “No, I am being used here.” It is getting to be a bad habit. Because whenever there is a fight or something, you are the first one to be called out, “*Haw wena*, come. Let's go.” You are at the forefront of it. But when you have your own battles there is nobody coming to rescue you. So that's bad. Like real bad.

You know if you own a tool you should take care of it. Show appreciation. Clean it. Dust it off. Look where it is scratched and show it some love. Because one day you are going to need it again and if you neglect it then it will be no more. People are no different.

You know, helping others is good, but when it comes to the point where we are being used it is bad. We are human beings. We are creatures of habit. When it is our habit to help others, despite how often they hurt us then we can't change. Because all the time we see the brighter side of life and the good in people.

* * *

There was a preacher in Jo'burg or Klerksdorp or some similar place. Now this preacher loved people — in the same way Colin does. Helping here and there. Listening to their struggles, giving support, feeding the hungry and so forth.

One day he was riding in his car and he picked up three guys hitchhiking. He stopped to give them a lift only to be killed, you know. It was like the dog biting the hand that feeds it. It was like that to me.

It made me sad when I read about it in the newspaper. I like the Daily Sun. It carries stories: the good, the bad, and the ugly. All kinds of stories. So I read that article and it touched me the wrong way and I felt bad.

Now, look, that man was a light. He was the way for many people who looked to him for guidance. Those guys have killed that light, leaving those who depended on him in darkness.

* * *

That is why I say life is a 'compendium of wonders.' It is this mixed thing. It keeps on rolling. You think you know it all and then you get to the other side and you find it is something else. And then you turn it around and you find it is something else again. It gives you many reflections of itself. That is why I say life is a compendium of wonders.

* * *

You know, we don't help one another as people. Like I told you the other day, as a person you would rather run from the people and go to the animals. You will be safe. I told you that. And if you don't believe me then you should go and find out for yourself.

And even here by the plastics it is happening all the time. I told you the other day I was escorting a friend of my fiancée. She was

visiting. It was like past seven to eight on Friday night when they phoned me.

“She is coming here. Can we go together?”

“No! You stay. I will go.”

I met her by the mini-Pick n’ Pay and on the way home I told her, “If you visit again, don’t come in the night. It is not safe.”

So the next morning, I was walking to the bank to confirm that my fiancée’s money had been properly deposited, you know. She doesn’t have this SMS notification thing. Anyway, just up ahead I found this guy lying on the side of the road, bloody all over. He had been kicked to hell and back, footprints all over his person, trampled.

“What’s going on?”

“Hey, these guys took my money.”

“When?”

“Yesterday in the night.”

So, I mean it is real funny.

* * *

Somebody dropped a cat at my gate. It was kind of blindenyana. I felt sorry for this creature that had nothing to do with its blindness. So I took it in. It didn’t feel like a stray. It was home. But it is better now. It couldn’t even see, but now the cat has children and its children have children. I think love can do this.

* * *

I slept late, you know. Early in the morning, these guys woke me.

“Hey, hey, hey!”

They were knocking on the gate. I thought it was the police.

“Open up. Open up!” They were yelling.

“What! Okay, who are you?”

These guys were drunk. I was waking up, dizzy.

“Ja, where is that trouser?”

“Ah, guys, wrong. You don’t work things like that. You didn’t even pay for that trouser! When did you bring the trouser? And what kind of trouser is it? Somebody sent you to retrieve the trouser and you don’t even know the trouser. And you just come banging on my fence.”

They were from Lesotho with their blankets and their big sticks of iron. And I could see they were cheeky. They were pointing.

“Hey! Don’t do that. Don’t! I am not your friend. Look, you didn’t even give me anything. Look! You just can’t come here just past six and bang on my gate!”

Working with people is a problem. Trust me. It is a problem.

* * *

This is the breeding ground for the devil. Trust me. Straight up. Because living here is like...Well, let me put it this way, God will decide which way we go. It is only by luck we are surviving. There are people who are being killed here and you find out they were torched to death. People are dying like flies. Then there are the illnesses, you know. Sleeping around without protection and even if they tell you about HIV you say, “No, that stuff can’t touch me. I am a big boss.” And before too long you are just going down and down. And even if they say, “Go to the clinic,” you refuse to seek medical attention, because you don’t believe in such stuff. These are some of the things killing people.

But a community is a community. What can we do about it? It is only that the people are not committed to being a community. They are committed only to making money. They are not coming here to build anything. And whatever they find here is broken, so they are going to break it more. They are not here to build. They are here to break things. So that is how bad it is.

Okay, this community would have worked and it might work eventually, but only if the laws are enforced. How would you feel if you have this neighbour? You are sick. You are well. It is day. It is

night. This neighbour of yours doesn't worry. He just blasts away with his music. How would you feel about such a neighbour?

I mean can you imagine living in a place where there is no respect for peace and quiet, where there is commotion all hours of the day and night? No! Only in places like this do you find that.

Ja, and these days they will tell you about democracy and the rights of this and that. Now, this democracy is sometimes so stupid to me, because you give somebody rights in order for them to trample on other people's rights.

* * *

The world is going to the dogs. Because if the people aren't heeding the laws, then only the dogs will bark and bark and do their thing. And it will be good.

The dogs are barking. They have this sixth sense, you know, this sixth sense. They don't have a mind that can reason, "Today, I am not well." No, they just use their sixth sense. If they feel you're intimidating them, they start growling, "GRRR, GRRR!" And if they feel you are friendly, they just bump, bump their tails. That's how they know they are happy. But if they feel something is wrong, you will see their tails going straight up and then the snarling begins. That is how it works.

* * *

Always if you are together as a group you find there are stories one cannot avoid, so I prefer to sit alone. And if my input is required maybe I will offer my opinion. But mostly I leave it to them, because this is how one can succeed in a group that is always fighting. Fighting about everything.

* * *

At church I stay out of the gossip mill by reading. They decided this one likes to read, because a book doesn't talk back. You will only read as much as you want to read and if you need to stop or maybe fall asleep, the book can't say, "Hey, wake up now! You started, now you finish." No, you stop where you stop. You start when you start. The book doesn't have a worry. And that is why I like books so much. A book is a best friend. You read when you are in the mood and if you don't feel like it you just mark the page and leave it until further notice.

* * *

And now today at church somebody started this funny talk again. Now I find out lately by the third-person that no...this is no longer about people getting cross with me. This is kind of like pressing my buttons, because I can see by their looks, by the way they act.

This has happened before. You know in jail many times I found people making jokes about our place where we stayed in Winterveld by our young sister.

"Hey, hey! You know in Winterveld? In Winterveld you find somebody sitting in a Kombi with his hands hanging out like he is driving. Haha! He is not driving. It's a *toilet*."

Now this is a joke by place. And I know it is pointed at me. They are just too scared to ridicule me directly. I have broken bones for that. All the people laugh.

"I am not *Winterveld*. I am Donald...so you might..."

They might laugh as best they can but one of these guys might just make a wrong funny move...then I get to break their bones. But now I am seeing the same behaviour at the church. But I think, God willing, Pieter, I am just going to be patient as best as I can be and ignore these things. Because I am not going to be the joke out there everyday.

* * *

"I have to grow some protective skin. Like a crocodile."

* * *

This position is really problematic. Really. Because the people are sick. By the church there, Friday they had this big party. There were kind of like food parcels like I told you. They decided that the food parcels are plenty and so they should be distributed. There are people who took three wheelbarrows full and they were going to give those to the needy. Maybe, this girl gets two packets because she is sick. And then these people are coming along. And me, I am the one who is handling for Colin and the camp.

“Madala, madala!”

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“I heard there is food.”

“*Haw wena*, I don't know nothing about food.”

“But I know it is you!”

“No, no! Wrong. Wrong!”

Of course, I knew what he was talking about. But this food is meant for people who can't do nothing for self. You know, kind of like the old and the sick and those who are broken.

Now you can see this guy is fit and able. He can work, however he is lazy and chooses to beg instead. I am not going to fall for this. I know all the block leaders in the camp and they are supposed to identify the feeble and the needy. They don't just pick anybody that shows up. These people are strong. They can go and work.

* * *

You shouldn't have to worry about others while you are suffering. You should worry about self, because you can't be in two or three places at the same time. You just get to be where you are. So you get to think hard, “Now, I am here. How can I better my life or myself?” At the same time, you are not alone. You have people around you. You have these people who are not worried about how they can better themselves. Like you see in this community, here it is *God for us all, man for himself*.

* * *

Look, I am talking about children being born in holes like snakes. It has happened here — people living in holes. You are walking through the scrubland and you hear a child's cry. You look up, thinking the noise is coming from the trees. You are mistaken because they are underground. Someone has dug a hole and scattered dirt around to conceal the spot. And unless you know how to read the signs, you will stroll right by without noticing. Only the sounds will be evident.

Here, you will find children who have been raised in holes in the jungle. When they say 'home,' they are referring to this place. And when this land is turned into a suburb and they no longer have a home, they will dig another hole in another jungle. That's how people live.

* * *

Home is where I feel comfortable. If I find myself among mad people, I will pretend to also be crazy. Because this is how we live. If you are not mad, you are dead. So if the people around you are mad, you must feign madness. Or you must act wilder than them, because that's the only way they'll recognise you as a human being.

Tell me if all the people are dirty and you arrive in a clean white suit will they accept you? No! They will come with their sweaty hands and grab you all over. And by the end of the day, you will be filthier than them. You must be like them. The same applies here.

Look, the people are teaching you. You might come to the place a good guy and law-abiding citizen, but you find out all the time at the corner, you get the *klap*. You must decide whether you should be like them or worse.

And then when they come, "Hey, that guy is no good." Because you kick back, you slap back, you bite back. But if you always cower, you will be eaten alive. Trust me.

* * *

But you can get to the point where you know wrong is wrong. Look, there are some people who don't recognise their own wrongdoing. They just do it because they enjoy doing things and even if you catch them they are just big eyes. They don't understand what you mean.

Until it gets into you, this understanding of 'this is wrong' or 'this is right.' Then you can start making decisions. It is kind of like an evaluation. I mean you have these two items. They are both heavy and you have a long walk ahead. Can I carry both of them? Which one should I take? Which one should I leave behind?"

You get to choose what you can live with.

* * *

"We have this habit of seeing the bad things in people. What I do know is that you can't put a good man down."

* * *

Lately, I discovered, "No, no, this is not working out like it should. This is not the way. This is not the road." And I mean, this is not something that someone else tells you. You get to feel it. You get to live it. You get to know it. Not by being told. And you don't go to school for that one. It just comes natural. You don't go to school for that one.

* * *

I just pray to God that one day the people will see the light at the end of the tunnel like I do. Because nobody showed me, I just saw it. So maybe they will too. But if they don't that's not my problem. But I will always be praying for them, "Lord, God, please try to make these people of Woodlane Village and me included see the light at the end of the tunnel."

* * *

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

— Quote by Theodore Roosevelt
posted above Donald’s bed.

* * *

Darkness is setting in and Donald is heading indoors to wash up before going to bed. It has been another long day of work. He is in a positive mood. Life is returning to some semblance of normality after the fire. He is chuckling as he says farewell.

“Chris, I am good man. I am good.”

“Okay, Johnny B. Goode.” Christopher replies.

“*Johnny B. Goode. Johnny B. Goode tonight.*”

“Do you know that music, Pieter?”

“I know that song, yeah.”

“*Johnny B. Goode tonight.* Who is that guy, Chris?”

“Ja, it is Peter Tosh.”

“No, no!”

“Not Peter Tosh?”

“*Johnny B. Good, tonight.*” Donald sings excitedly.

“Oh, it is not Benjamin Paul?”

“No, no!”

“Okay, I have lost my mind when it comes to music.”

“Oh, you should know that guy, Chris! He is an uglyenyana guy, but good spirit-wise. Trust me, he was good!”

“Since I don’t play music anymore I have lost everything.”

“Chris, that guy...he was good. Look, he was a respectable guy, but only on the uglyenyana side.”

“Exactly. I understand.” Chris laughs.

“But I like that guy very much! *Johnny...*”

“Who is this guy? I have lost him, Pieter. I lost everything. *Boom!* There it goes. Even the memory of music I have lost.” Christopher laments.

“It is weird, Chris, how one forgets stuff.”

“I know. I can’t even figure him, Don.”

“Ah, let me forget this. Because it’s making me mad.”

“Yes, go to sleep. Try not to think about it.”

“Maybe by tomorrow it will...”

“It will! Trust me before you go home I’ll come back with that one. Trust me for what it’s worth!”

Donald retires to his shack.

“That’s the best song, Pieter. ‘Johnny B. Goode.’ I used to love that song dearly. Because by that time I was a heavy dagga smoker, Pieter, and I couldn’t sleep without playing that song. Because when it said, ‘Johnny B. Goode,’ it seemed like it was saying ‘Christopher be good,’ you know. It’s just that I forget the name of the guy. But that’s the music I used to love.”

“The Rasta stuff.”

“Exactly. Because I played different Rastafarian songs...but I used to love them all, you know. There is this guy they call him Carlos J.J. — Don Carlos. He was one of my favourite singers, Pieter. When it comes to this song, they used to call that song

what? 'Suffering.' *Suffering*. Trust me. By getting that song, Pieter, you will feel it in your blood, in your emotion, in your spirit. Because that suffering song is very hectic. When it comes to the video of that song it's whereby you will feel anger and pain, Pieter. Because that is something that happened in real life. Like that song of Bob Marley, 'Buffalo Soldier.' Trust me, if you look at that video, Pieter, it will hurt you. It will burn your desire."

"Chris, do you remember that guy's name is Eddy? Eddy who? Eddy who?" Donald returns.

"Eddy Grant! Eddy Grant!" Christopher exclaims.

"Eddy Grant!" Donald replies.

"Thanks, Bubba D!"

"Eddy Grant, yeah! Eddy Grant!"

* * *

Trust me when one door closes another opens. We might miss the opportunity because we concentrate on the closed one. There is no way all the doors can be closed while you are alive. If all the doors are closed then you are dead. But while you are breathing, trust me, a door is going to open up. It might be somebody coming along and asking, "Hey man! Why are you sitting there lonely?"

That's the door opening. You are still alive.

So don't die before you die.

Die when you are dead.

* * *

It was the first time we brought this white guy to location. And everybody was surprised and curious: “What is happening?” Are they working together?” They couldn’t make sense of it.

There is this rainbow nation thing, but nobody embraces it. So people were wondering what’s going on. They don’t have to speculate. They only have to ask and the truth will be told. It is up to them to accept it or not. It is up to them. It is as simple as that.

I was happy and I am still happy, Pieter, because this is an experience for me. It is one I won’t forget. One day I will look through photos of our time together and reminisce. I mean rewind — you know, rewind the cassette and remember those were the days. Even when you are no longer here, you will have left something behind that others will continue to wonder about. And somebody who knows will tell them, “This happened.”

Pieter, being with you is something that I will carry with me for my whole life, for the period of time I am still alive. Even if I am old, like telling my grandchildren, “Look, me in my day.”

I will do it right. Trust me. I will do it right.

* * *

Pieter, my people, we are not rich. Some of us not learned. But if we say we you are a friend they will die for you. Nobody can touch you, Pieter. They will lay their lives on top of yours, because that’s what we believe. We learned this one thing: a friend is a friend. So you don’t do stuff to friends. If you do stuff to friends that means they are no longer friends. It devalues. But if you do that to me, I know am devalued from your side. So I can’t ask, “Why you do that?” No, no, Pieter. I can’t ask you that. I know I am devalued so it means you no longer cotton to me. So it is alright.

* * *

“Pieter, I am grateful for our time together. Tell me, on our journey together is there anyplace where you felt discriminated?”

“Who me? In my experience here?”

“I am asking about this funny family of mine in Mpumalanga. Is there anywhere you felt discriminated against?”

“No, no. I think people were very welcoming.”

Even some trying to give you spoons like you can't even eat with your hands. They start to wonder, “How, how?” It is not a how, how thing. You are a person. You can do whatever people do. But for them it comes hard, because for them they only know *umlungu* is spoon and knife and fork and stuff. So, Pieter, you did well! I mean more than that. It's only that I wouldn't have liked you to get in the position where felt hemmed in or intimidated. I didn't see that, Pieter, but I ask you because I might not see that for personally me but for you.

No, I never got that sense. If anything the only thing I felt a little uncomfortable about is all the attention I was getting. People were too nice to me in some ways. They were so accommodating.

Yebo, they are, Pieter. They should because this is how they are. Ubuntu means humanity. And humanity is cottoning other people on to you.

7

TRAVELOGUE

PART TWO

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2013

I am back. A year has passed. It is another Sunday in the camp. The ambience is familiar. The players are gathered at the soccer pitch. There is the smell of burning garbage and dust. But there are also subtle changes. The guard post by the back entrance of the camp sits vacant. I am walking past piles of debris that weren't there a year ago. A string of razor wire has been strung along the pathway to prevent men from urinating on adjacent shacks. This is also new. I spot Israel next to his shack. He is braaiing some *boerewors* and chops. His wife, Sindi, is nearby. He appears casual in shorts and a striped t-shirt. He has grown a goatee. I realise that this is the first time I have seen him without a hat. He has closely shorn hair and a wicked scar on the back of his head. Morphology is history in this country. Bodies are maps and records. I notice a patch of barren ground behind Israel where morogo once flourished. He tells me that jealousy destroyed his garden. He removed the spinach for fear that his neighbour, Rambo, would poison them and he would be held responsible if people were to become ill. According to Colin and Denise, the backstory is more complicated. The empty lot is the former stand of Rambo's ex-girlfriend. This is the same woman who Rambo beat into a near vegetative condition with a brick, her skull so fractured that pieces

of bone had to be removed from her grey matter. She survived, but was never the same again: partial paralysis and epileptic seizures. After her recovery, men in the bushes raped her. Rambo repented and came to care for her. She eventually died of AIDS and her shack was torn down leaving the contested piece of land. I never caught her name.

I ask Sindi about her restaurant. She says she closed it down since she was hired as a hairdresser and has to work on weekends. As she speaks, the sunlight catches the sliver of gold on her incisor.

“It looks striking.” I comment.

“*Dankie.*” She says.

I make my way to Trevor’s shack. It sits empty, swept clean. His brother notifies me that he left for Zimbabwe the day before and won’t be back until mid-month. The double-decker shack across the lane has been torn down and is being rebuilt. I turn around and walk towards Donald and Christopher’s place. Their compound is locked up. In broken Afrikaans a neighbour informs me Donald went to Mpumalanga for the weekend and would be back later today. I ask about Christopher. He says Chris no longer lives in the camp. He lost his job and is staying in Soshanguve. He has been there for over a month now. I inquire about the state of affairs in the settlement. He smiles.

“The metro is back in court. We will know on the second of the month. It has been awhile since you’ve been around.”

“Yes, it has been a year,” I say.

I say *totsiens* and turn up the lane. A group of young men are gathered in a circle, gambling. The atmosphere is tense. One man jumps up angrily. In this game, there are always winners and losers — some sorer than others. At Benjamin’s shack, I am relieved to find his decorative garden is still exquisitely maintained. A young Rasta man tells me Benjamin is away today. I assume he returned to Hammanskraal. I circle back towards my car. I bump into another neighbour of Benjamin who says he remembers me from before. I ask where he lives. He gestures to the shack decorated with a wire lizard. He tells me a chameleon is a magical creature,

because it can change colours. He stretches the word *ka-meee-lee-ooon*, dragging out the vowels.

“I love all of the animals of God.” He says. “I am sorry. Today I am drunk. Maybe, tomorrow we can talk. You can visit me again.”

I move on. I am considering whether to loiter until Donald returns or go home to sleep. I am jetlagged. I catch sight of Donald. He looks dignified in a navy blue sweater with a tweed jacket over top, olive-coloured trousers and polished black shoes. He smiles, a flash of white teeth — *krokodil tandé*, as Christopher likes to tease him. “Pieter!” We clasp hands and bump shoulders. Reunited.

* * *

Donald sets up his sewing machine to resize a pair of jeans. The waist size is 42, but the inseam needs to be shortened significantly. As Donald jokes, the owner is “a powerful dwarfenyana.”

Much has changed since I saw him last. His brother-in-law in Winterveld hung himself about a month ago. “Many men die out of pride,” he says. The vigil was scheduled for the same day that his best friend, Happy, finally arranged to put a ring on his wife’s finger. “Life can be very funny. I couldn’t go. But Happy understands. He knows I have to choose family above all else.”

In addition to this loss, his property in Mpumalanga was burglarised recently and he had to take out a loan to install fencing. “Trouble, trouble in the land of plenty,” he laughs. Donald is in the process of legally acquiring a handgun as further protection. Johanna’s nephew used to watch over his place, but he passed away earlier in the year. He had been ill previously from TB and quite likely HIV, but he seemed to have made a full recovery. “His face was all round and fat again.” His death was unexpected. “We can’t get off Scott free. Life has a way of sticking it to us, Pieter”

* * *

“Life goes on. When we die we will be replaced.
It doesn’t matter how important we are. The dead are forgotten;
only the living are remembered. This is how it should be.
Even Jesus Christ is only remembered on Sundays.”

— Donald

* * *

Moses has dropped by on the pretence of companionship. He sits down on an overturned drum. He is looking for a handout, a swig of beer, some cash to feed his habit. He is at the stage of dependency where staying drunk is his primary motivator. People are a means to an end. He is bantering with Donald, angling for an advantage.

“You are my very best pal.”

“Moses, I am not your friend.”

“You are the champion of the day-to-day, Don.”

He continues to needle Donald. The conversation turns into a passive-aggressive exchange — an escalating series of jabs. Donald is visibly annoyed. The tone of his voice shifts. He is sending clear warning signals. Moses is oblivious, his half-wit matched unfairly against his opponent’s full-wit. Donald snaps. In one motion, he kicks Moses in the chest, sending him to the ground, and pulls a stun gun out of his pocket. Before Moses can react, Donald shocks him twice in the neck. The attack is decisive and controlled. Moses stumbles to his feet, wide-eyed, his cockiness sprawling beneath him and lurches on to the street.

“There is a time for joking and there is a time to stop. Moses manipulates others. He doesn’t have people he calls a friend. He treats me like a cash cow. Friendship is not bought.

Happy is my only friend. When there’s food, we eat. When there’s something to drink, we drink. And if there’s nothing, we just talk.”

* * *

Wife kidnapped by ninja.
Need R10 for karate class.

— Beggar sign at intersection

* * *

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2013

I ask Colin about the piles of debris accumulating in the settlement. He explains that he and Denise are refraining from interfering in day-to-day matters such as garbage removal. The community must learn to take care of itself. Besides, they have both experienced health problems in the past year. Colin has been treated for repeated bouts of double pneumonia and Denise has had heart palpitations. As spiritually rewarding as their community development work has been, it has taken a toll. There is always the residue of exhaustion, the sudden jump in stress when the phone rings.

“The leadership needs to step-up. They are adults. If they want to live in a pigsty it is their business. Selas and Francis approached me the other day. Francis runs a shebeen and a brothel, but somehow retains influence in the Zimbabwean community. Selas used to live in Woodlane Village and he is active in the football league. They were complaining about the children defecating on the soccer pitch and its proximity to the rubbish heaps. They wanted me to help them move the field. I told them I doubt that this will stop this behaviour, since some of their players are themselves pissing everywhere. I said, ‘Listen, you guys have ten teams in the camp now. That is 180 individuals or so. Don’t tell me you can’t organise these men to stop people from shitting on your field. Francis, you have no problems kicking people from your

shebeen when they misbehave! You can set limits and expectations. If you want your children to be eaten by rats or infected by fly-borne diseases that is your problem.’ I can be a real *donderkop* sometimes!”

The phone rings. It is Benjamin with a message about Betty, a young woman whose newborn was recently hospitalised due to HIV and tuberculosis. The infant has been released from the infirmary, but Betty lives in another squatter camp on the far side of the mall and Benjamin is worried that she might be attacked when she crosses a darkened field on her way home. Informal settlements have popped up all over Pretoria East, part of a growing epidemic of homelessness in South Africa. The incidence of rape is also staggeringly high in the country. Only a couple of weeks ago a female resident in Woodlane Village, was sexually assaulted and chopped within spitting distance of the guard station at the main entrance. Benjamin has made arrangements to put Betty up for the night.

* * *

“We all want to own things.
But who owns us? Who owns our life?
Once we understand we don’t own our lives,
we can live without fear.”

— Donald

* * *

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 7, 2013

I have stopped by my aunt's place to have a late lunch before I make my rounds in the camp. I have been back in Pretoria for about a week now and this is the first time we have gotten a chance to talk. I dish up the curry chicken with rice, green beans, and sweet potatoes.

My aunt hails Martha, the maid, to greet me. She waves and laughs. "Hello, Pieter!" My aunt is making last-minute preparations before her departure. There is a list of chores for Martha and Patrick, the gardener, to complete while my aunt and uncle are away. There is the money to be put aside: for wages, for groceries, for Patrick's medication. Bread and meat have been purchased and stored in the freezer for them. My aunt observes that it is only when she readies herself to leave that it clicks in how invested she is in the lives of Martha and Patrick. Martha has been working for my aunt for more than thirty years. They are close. They pray together. My aunt and uncle supported Martha emotionally through her divorce from an abusive husband. Over the years, they have helped pay for her housing and food and they are providing financial support for Martha's daughter, Busi, who is attending nursing school. My aunt is proud of Busi. "*Sy is 'n baie oulike meisie.*" And in the case of Patrick, she helps him manage his schizophrenia by providing stability, encouragement, and ensuring he takes his meds. The support is consistent with my aunt's personality and her former vocation as a nurse, although the attachment she has to Martha and Patrick is not atypical of the bonds other Afrikaners have with their domestic workers (Du Toit 2010).

* * *

“It is only that love is love. It is blind really. And we come far me and her. And I think I can't find somebody better than her. Trust me there is nobody better. You will find the beautifulenyana one. The roundenyana one. The slenderenyana one. But the fact is you can't find the perfect thing. There is nothing like perfect in this life. Your life is what you make of it, Pieter. If you say it is bad, it is bad. If you say it is good, it is good.”

— Donald, describing Johanna, his fiancée.

* * *

FRIDAY, AUGUST 9, 2013

The car pulls into Christopher's plot in Soshanguve. I am in the Toyota with him and Donald — about to depart for a braai with some of Donald's co-workers from church and then on to Mpumalanga for the weekend. The property consists of a barren patch of land with two modest zinc-plate shacks set at right angles. The yard has been carefully raked. As soon as I get out of the vehicle, Donald's mother rushes towards me, “My son! Thanks, Lord.” She is wearing a pink housecoat and light blue headscarf. She gives me a big hug. She seems elated to see me and I am slightly taken aback by the show of emotion.

The shack is furnished like a proper home this time, replete with TV and a stereo system. When I was here last year, Christopher joked that he didn't even have an empty drum to sit on. Christopher has offered up his shack to his sister after the recent suicide of her husband. Ruth has moved in with her belongings. His mother has joined her to provide support through the period of grieving and shock. His niece and his nephew, Neo

are also staying there. Neo is a bright-eyed eight-year-old with a polite manner and maturity beyond his years. He will accompany us on the weekend.

Donald comments that he is a sweet little boy. I ask him about his son, Wonder, who lives in Mamelodi and is of similar age and disposition.

“Do you get to see him often?”

“No, not as often as I would like to, Pieter. It is expensive to visit him and I only go when I can afford to. You see when I arrive everyone expects something from me. And I cannot give to my son only. I have to give to everyone. I have seen what happens when I arrive empty-handed. By the end of the day the people have such long faces. It is an uncomfortable situation, because I know I need to be more of a presence in my son’s life. A child needs that affection and those kind words. Money can’t buy love, Pieter.”

* * *

It is nine o’clock when we reach Mpumalanga. I aim the car towards the gate to provide illumination as Donald unlocks the padlock and chain. I had hoped to make the journey before nightfall, but a series of social calls in Soshanguve had delayed our departure. It is always this way when I visit the townships with Donald and Christopher: the deliveries to make, the reunions, the lifts given to relatives from one place to another, the conversations, the celebrations and the laughter. There is a free-flowing sociability here that contrasts the private and reserved ways in which my family relates to the world. I did not grow up in a household where there was a constant stream of relatives, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances. People rarely dropped in unannounced. Even telephone calls were regarded as unwelcome intrusions. Some of this can be traced to the immigration experience, which created distance from extended family, transforming blood relations into relative strangers. Although my parents are by their own admission very introverted, which also influenced how our household interfaced with the outside community.

We disembark. Donald has made improvements to his property since I was last here. A break-in compelled him to install perimeter fencing. He has converted the shack that served previously as a storage room into a bedroom. The other remains a kitchen with a guestroom. The cooking area is well equipped with a fridge, cupboards, hotplate and a microwave. An outhouse has been built in the back.

While we unload the vehicle, Neo punches and kicks the air in mock karate moves, stretching his legs after the lengthy commute. The weather is frigid and overcast. Donald connects the electricity, turns on the outside lights, and cranks the music. From his laptop, protons and electrons stream through a cable into an amplifier and large speakers, before bursting into the night as African jazz.

* * *

I am satiated with pap, meat, and cooked cabbage. Christopher empathises, joking that his “stomach is as hard as a football.” It has been a long day. I am bushed and ready for bed. Donald bolts the shack from the inside and brings out a bucket in case one of us has to pee in the middle of the night. We bury ourselves under layers of blankets. I am on the edge of the bed next to the thin metal siding of the shack. Neo is squeezed between Chris and me. Don is on the other edge, watching a B-rated Hollywood film about a giant anaconda that devours unsuspecting tourists on a tropical island.

* * *

Drops of water strike my face. The moisture from our breathing has condensed into beads on the underside of the zinc-plate roof. I have slept fitfully. The cold from the exterior wall has penetrated my body, the blankets being insufficient to cover me. I am awake while the others sleep. For a moment, I am alone.

* * *

SATURDAY, AUGUST 10, 2013

“You take it as it comes. I am good at this suffering game.” Christopher laughs, “What can I say?”

We have finally returned to Donald’s plot after a day of driving, mixed up directions, and detours. This included hunting for an ATM so Don could withdraw money and buy airtime for his phone and getting lost in Moloto trying to locate a distant relative of his. The only instructions Don was given by his cousin after numerous conversations — which exhausted his patience and his mobile minutes — was to turn right after the bridge and “just go straight, *umalume*.” The directive to “just go straight” proved misleading. After getting lost and stopping several times to get accurate coordinates from locals, we finally found the shack on a road that could only be reached by making left and right turns. For any creature other than a crow, there was no direct path.

His cousin turned out to be a friendly, but slow-witted woman in her mid-forties. Don’s irritation dissipated when he realised she was “not all there.” He had been introduced to her son at the recent wake of his brother-in-law and had recognised the family resemblance immediately: the lanky build and long limbs. Out of courtesy Don had arranged to visit the boy’s mother when he confirmed the family connection and ascertained that she lived close to his place in Vezabuhle. It was the first-time that they met in-person. They chatted for an hour or so. I listened to the incomprehensible conversation in Sotho, taking breaks periodically to chase Neo around the lot and give him helicopter spins.

* * *

We get out of the car, exhausted and frustrated. I notice how gaunt Chris looks, his cheekbones more sunken than when I saw him in 2012. I ask him how he has been. “Ah, well. Life is awkward, my

man. What can I say?” It has been a trying year. After losing one of his regular piece jobs, he has dropped even further below the poverty line, the threshold becoming evermore difficult to cross. “Thanks be God, I am not starving.”

He has moved back to Winterveld, having struck up a romantic relationship with a woman who he professes to love. Chris says she is voluptuous, gesturing with his hands that she is heavy-set the way he likes. They support each other, even though it is a relationship with an uncertain future. He says her other man is in jail. He confesses that he doesn’t want to break them apart. She must make her own decisions about where to put her loyalty and affection. He is a “wandering stranger” in the meantime. He cannot fall asleep at her place because it is not his home. “Nothing that starts in secrecy will end in secrecy.” He describes lying beside her while she snores, counting the hours till dawn. At six o’clock he escorts her to work and then he sleepwalks to where his children live in Winterveld, resisting the urge to rest when he arrives. It is still dark outside and he doesn’t want to rouse them. He fights fatigue for the remainder of the day, waiting for the call from his girlfriend indicating the all clear to return.

The death of his brother-in-law has been a blow to the Banda family. Ruth not only experienced the loss of her husband. She was also summarily banished by her in-laws who blamed her for his suicide. He did not leave a note explaining his reasons for hanging himself. Don confided that his brother-in-law never reached out, his act one of impulsivity in his opinion. “I cannot understand why someone would not just pick-up the phone and call for help.” Chris is more circumspect. He knows the quiet desperation that throttles a man in the middle of the night.

According to Don, the death has been upsetting, although, they seem to be bearing the grief with quiet dignity. They have grown accustomed to funerals and night vigils. Everyone has had to circle the wagons, especially since Ruth’s in-laws seemed hell-bent on exacting revenge on her. They even went so far as to breach the customary burial rites, which must be followed in order to ensure

that the spirit of the deceased does not return to torment the living. They tossed the rope carelessly into the *lapa* after they cut him loose. And when they brought the body home for the wake, they carried the casket past the front gate and straight through the main door of the house instead making new entranceways. They were intentionally trying to bring her misfortune. Don went to a sangoma to acquire the concoctions necessary to cleanse the scene and counteract the attempts at spiritual sabotage.

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 11, 2013

On our return to Pretoria, Donald points to a nearby hill, which he claims is haunted. It swallows all who attempt to reach its summit. "You must not walk there. It is a ghost mountain." We eventually make our way to the Mabopane Highway in the hopes of gaining time. As the freeway sweeps through the countryside, I see a hillside adorned with biblical passages. In white rocks, the message reads: "*God is groot en goud.*"

* * *

Benji has stopped by Donald's place and he is piss-drunk. He sits in the corner wailing and squealing. He is so inebriated he can barely stand. He stumbles, sits down. Lights a cigarette. Smokes. Lights another one. Smokes. He mutters that he is going to kill me.

"*Ek sal jou moerrrr!*" He howls.

"*Ek sal jou donnerrr!*" I retort.

"Benji! You are good at this wolf thing." Don laughs.

* * *

MONDAY, AUGUST 12, 2013

Awakenings

1.

My father shares a story of the first time he realised how skewed the racial politics were in South Africa. It was the 1960s. As a child, he recalls seeing a black woman wailing in an emergency room at the passing of her child. The infant had died in her arms while she waited for medical attention. My father's first reaction was bewilderment. He couldn't understand why the *meid* was so distressed. After all, it was only a *kaffer* who died. In this instant, he awoke to the incipient nature of prejudice. It was a searing moment of clarity.

2.

It is 1990 — the year Nelson Mandela was released from Robben Island, a key milestone in the abolishment of apartheid. My father is waiting for a top-up at a gas station. An expensive vehicle pulls in and the driver opens the window to throw a handful of money on to the tarmac before screeching off. The black pump attendant comments to my father, "You see that man. He didn't have enough money to pay for his fill so I let him to go home to get the outstanding amount. And this is how he thanks me. You would treat a dog with more respect."

3.

I am visiting with some family friends at their holiday property near Hermanus. It is 1990. We have just finished a day of swimming and water-skiing. We are having a conversation about the AIDS epidemic that is taking hold in South Africa. The middle-aged woman who is a devout Christian tells me that all of the infected should be taken to an island and shot.

4.

I am in Soshanguve with Donald and Chris attending a party with one of Don's colleagues from church, a man by the name of Patrick. It is Women's Day, August 9, 2013. I notice one of the women carrying a plate of *boerewors* into the adjacent house, a tidy brick building surrounded by a lawn and shade trees. Patrick invites me to join them for the meal. His voice is soft-spoken and respectful, "Unless of course you aren't comfortable eating with black people."

5.

Denise observes that they have made significant progress in building relationships with the churches over the past year. There are now twelve congregations that are supporting the community development efforts in Woodlane Village. The biggest turnarounds have been with the Afrikaans institutions. Once they overcame their opposition they have become deeply engaged. It is a useful reminder to maintain a spirit of possibility — to give others the benefit of the doubt. Change is the only constant. There are no fixed positions.

6.

The fire is flaring — spewing toxins into the atmosphere from the blocks of compressed wood and a large ball of burning plastic. "The moon is out." Don observes, "God is knocking." Chris leaves to purchase vendor food. He returns with fried fish wrapped in newsprint. Don brings a heaping plate of pap. We dig in. Away from the fire's luminescence, I can't tell if I am reaching for flesh, fin or head. I am hungry and the crispy skin tastes delicious. One of Donald's neighbours shares the meal.

"When you eat with us, you will know us." Piet tells me.

* * *

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2013

I am waiting for Benjamin. One of his neighbours waves me over. “My name is Barby.” He offers me an upturned drum as a chair. “We are drinking 365 days a year,” he jests. He is fresh-faced and pleasant. “Me, I come from Limpopo.” He says with a big smile. He asks if I smoke. I say, “I do on occasion, but only with company.” He gestures for one of his mates to fetch a cigarette.

Benjamin arrives. He is pushing his bicycle past a large white bus parked at the front gate and up the gradual incline. When he arrives at his shack, he gestures angrily at a young man who is drunk. Benjamin has little patience for people who waste their time drinking and less for insolence. He is soft-spoken when he speaks English but in Sotho his tone is explosive and cutting.

“How have you been, Benjamin?” I ask.

“Fine, fine.”

“What is up with that young man?”

“Ah, he is drunk. And cheeky!”

I ask him about his family. He explains that life is similar to when I saw him a year ago. He is still saving money to buy a tent, but managed to purchase a cow in the past year. He now has six head of cattle out in Hammanskraal. Cows are a form of savings. “I will not starve.” At his shack, there is a pile of heavy gauge zinc-plates that he will be taking out there, along with other items. He is amassing materials so that he can build a home for his sons. He is anticipating the potential redevelopment of the settlement, but he also wants to move his belongings to a more secure setting. Earlier in the year, Benjamin let some relatives stay in his shack. They smoked drugs and stole some expensive items including a compressor.

He tells me plans are still in the works for a township here, although the legal battles continue. The municipality is taking another run at evicting the tenants of the settlement. This time the human rights lawyers representing Woodlane Village are taking

their case forward on behalf of individual residents. They have managed to get signed affidavits from over 630 of the 846 households in the village.

I tell Benjamin that I have finished his story after a year of transcribing and writing about my field experiences. I suggest he accompany me to my car so I can give him a copy. He says that is fine. He needs to head that direction anyway to buy food for his dogs at Checkers.

As we walk the length of the settlement, we pass residents making their preparations before sunset. Some are chopping wood. Some are cooking meals. Some are retrieving laundry drying on wire fences.

“Let me tell you this, Pieter. We now have a problem with shebeens that have these jukeboxes and snooker tables. We are losing the war against these places.”

“Do you see that guy there with the knife? He stabbed his girlfriend viciously. And now he is back, standing there with his knife. Let me tell you this, the police are useless around here.”

* * *

Pitch black. A misshapen moon. Campfires. Smoke. Voices and kwaito. Remember the barbed wire at the edge of the trail. Recall the warning sign, the tattered flag. Sidestep the rubbish pile, where children play and defecate. Scan the shadows for night creatures — the ones who hide in daylight. Greet the faceless ones who pass on your way home.

* * *

THURSDAY, AUGUST 15, 2013

“You can’t tell me you will live forever. None of us are invincible. All of us get sick. Get sad. Get to cry. Because we are human. So we should understand our emotions so we can do better in life. So let us be constructive, instead of being destructive. Trust me.

Look your name, *Gift*, is beautiful. Gift is a blessing. Because blessed is the hand that gives rather than receives. Gift is a beautiful name. You can do better. Follow it through. Walk the talk, man.

Look we are not here to destroy you. We are here to help you and your woman. Give your woman a bit of freedom. Nothing will happen that is wrong. We are here to build you and her. We are one thing.”

— Donald counselling a neighbour who
beats and locks up his wife.

* * *

It has been a busy week of managing conflicts in the settlement. Neighbours have come in and out of Donald’s courtyard with issues to be discussed, his gate a revolving door of community grievances. There is the matter of Gift and his mistreatment of his wife. There is George who has let robbers move into his shack in exchange for beer money. One of whom, Lucky, recently stole a scooter. There is Francis who is threatening to build a soccer pitch where he is not permitted to do so. There is the impending court case. I admire Don’s energy. Despite his oft-bleak view of the state

of neighbourliness in Woodlane Village, he gives a damn. I can see the responsibilities of leadership are wearing on him.

“When you find people living in a group like we do, we are a community. It is only that we don’t have the ways of a community. You can even try to teach them, but they will not listen, Pieter. Look you can tell somebody that he should not extend his shack, because when the fires come it will burn down. He says, “Ja, ja, ja.” All of a sudden the very same person you were talking to is extending his shack. And all of sudden he is the very same person who is burning down, down, down.

“This is life in the camp. There is nothing new here. It is the same thing over and over again. That’s why sometimes I have to say, ‘No, I am locking here.’ I say, ‘No, no, no! Speak! Speak!’ When you speak, I say, ‘Go to the police station, man. I’m not working that one. I’m not a police officer or a social worker.’

“Sometimes, it seems that you barely get to sit and relax when there comes this bastard with a big head and big shoulders.

‘Hey, Madala I have a problemenyana.’

‘Hey, what problem?’

‘My wife ran away.’

‘What do you expect me to do? I’m not a social worker?’

‘Ah, but madala I heard can you can fix stuff. You fix trousers, jackets, jerseys. You even fix shoes. I hear you can even fix this woman-business.’

“I am tired, man. Hahaha! It is as bad as it can be.”

* * *

I am sitting on the grass with Benjamin next to his veranda. One of his dogs is on his lap. He warns me not to pet it.

“This one bites. She stays indoors all day long. Muffy only comes out when I return home from work. By quarter-past-five she is waiting for me outside.”

“She looks after your place?”

“Yes. She is very protective, this one.”

“It has been awhile since we spent time together.”

“Pieter, this time I would like to take you to my mother’s place. You see? I would like to show those peoples.”

“Out in Mpumalanga?”

“Yes, I must tell you how did my life really start and how I did find the ID. And I must show you all of my mother’s sisters. On that time, they took me to Home Affairs. We didn’t use birth certificates like we do now. We used the certificate of the church. On that time the government trusted the churches. You see? They knew the church gave a real paper — not a false paper. But now, the churches are making corruption. They are making false papers. You see?”

“But you were born here.”

“Yes! Right on this land. Yes! Like today when the lawyers called me they asked me a lot of questions. ‘Where are you coming from? Where were you born?’ I just told them I was born here in Pretoria. I just gave them all the statement and they said that they would phone again. And Colin also called me to say that he will send the papers here for me. I am supposed to sign those papers. And I must take them to the police station. You see?”

“These are the papers for the court case?”

“Yebo.”

“So as you look into the future, do you see yourself staying here, Benjamin?”

“Pieter, I can tell you...I think on that time if I am still alive. Government must look for me. They must think about me. They

can't just leave me. Because they can see I'm volunteering to make this place so it must be a miracle. You see?"

"And what happens if a township doesn't get build out here?"

"According to me, if they are not going to build on this place, I don't get such a problem. Because I have my own place in Hammanskraal."

"So you'll just pick up and make a life out there if you have to."

"There is no other way."

"And you've ensured that you have security by having cows."

"Ja, if I see there is no life in this place again then I will just go back that side and look after my cattle again. With the money I get maybe I buy a fifty kg bag of mielie-meal. And I will eat that fifty kg for a month and maybe two weeks on top of that. You see? I am just milking the cows. I am just eating the porridge with the milk. Life is still going on. If I am going back, I am not going to suffer. My life is going to equal on the way, because I have learned a lot of things. I have learned a lot of things."

"You mean living here?"

"Yes. I have learned a lot of things. Because I have experienced a lot of things that I didn't know will come into my life. But always when I am sitting I am thinking: 'Eish, today maybe the day can happen like this. Or tomorrow the day can happen like that.'" You see? I learn a lot of things. And when I am sitting with the people I am giving them advice. I tell them that if God is still giving us powers we will meet each other."

"You have seen things happen in this community that you didn't think were possible."

"Yes, I have learned a lot of things. Just like today the lawyers will come and phone. They will bring the papers. These are the things in my life that I didn't think would happen."

"So the current reality of the community is a miracle. Because years ago you when you lived in the bushes you would not have imagined it could be like this."

"Yes, and even most of the people I grew up with never realised I was clever until they saw me in the newspaper or on TV. I didn't

get that intelligence from school. I just got it by thinking about what can happen tomorrow.”

“You gained it through your experience here.”

“Yes. You see there on the other side in Hammanskraal, they have chosen me to be one of the local leaders. Teaching the children...”

The phone rings. It is Colin. He wants to take Benjamin to the Grasfontein police station to sign an affidavit. He will swing by the main gate.

* * *

Colin pulls up in his white Nissan bakkie. We hop in. He speaks quickly, briefing Benjamin on the most recent legal developments while he drives.

“Benjamin, I have read through the whole affidavit. It is fine for you to sign it. I have been through each point. This relates to the eviction order. I am going to ask you to initial each of the pages and then at the end of the document you will sign your signature and you are going to show your ID book. According to your knowledge and the legal advice you have been given we have appointed the Lawyers for Human Rights as your representative. Now, what we are also saying is that Tshwane has never spoken to you guys as individuals.”

“Yebo.”

“And they have never spoken to you as a group.”

“Never.”

“We, Tswelopele, do not represent you. Okay?”

“And the court order said they need to engage with you as a village. We are just interested to see that Tshwane doesn’t get away with anything. Okay?”

“Yebo.”

“So that’s the way we are fighting it. We also said we don’t want anyone evicted out of the village. Because in terms of the *Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act*, the PIE Act, they can’t just chuck you off without finding

an alternative place to live that is viable and is within an area where you can get work. So we are just not interested in that.”

“Yes, Mr Colin.”

“They say that you are illegal occupiers. We are saying, ‘Rubbish! You are ‘unlawful’ occupiers, but you are not illegal.’ So they can’t come with that one. So we are chucking that one out. And they can’t evict Zimbabweans because the court order said that is the jurisdiction of the police and Home Affairs. They haven’t spoken to one Zimbabwean. They have made the assumption that the whole camp is just Zimbabweans and Lesotho people. And we are saying the government lets the people in. They let the Lesotho people in and the South Africans live here. And the court order says that they have to provide for everybody not just South Africans. So we are not interested in that so we are just saying chuck it out, chuck it out, chuck it out. Okay?”

“Yes.”

“And the lawyers spoke to you and they said that you are born in the area and that you have lived here since 2005.”

“Yes, they have phoned me and I talk to them.”

“Okay, I’m just telling you so you know what you are signing.”

“We are also saying that Tshwane can’t take Home Affairs to court, because that is illegal in terms of the law in this country. You can’t pit one organ of state against another organ of state. We are also saying that the homeowners associations — Woodhill, Meadow Glen, Meadow Ridge, and Mooikloof — are making assumptions without having spoken to you once. We have tried to engage with the homeowners and they have just refused to talk to us. But that is as Tswelopele and that’s why we are saying that we are not representing you. We are assisting you. We are not your spokesperson. We have never ever been your spokesperson. It is just that as a non-profit association we will defend the law and we will challenge the law. But you guys have not been spoken to.

“Yes, Mr Colin.”

* * *

We leave the Garsfontein police station. On the return trip, I ask Colin about the court case and the progress in Woodlane Village. It seems there have been significant transformations since my first visit to the camp in 2011. I tell him I would have to split a thousand different ways to fully understand all the macro- and micro-level shifts occurring here. Matters seem to be reaching a tipping point.

“What will be the outcome of the court case?” I ask.

“It will get thrown out of court.”

“Oh, the eviction order will be dismissed.”

“Ja.”

“And the other case will establish parameters for the rentals?”

“No, then we go to court in November about the type of engagement, because Tshwane Metro has failed talk to us. And they haven’t given us a plan. They haven’t engaged us. They have made unilateral decisions. So we are saying: ‘Go to hell.’”

“Really?”

“It is fascinating, Pieter.”

“Does this bring you closer to building something?”

“No, it just brings us closer to the engagement phase.”

“It just gets them to the table.”

“It brings us, Tshwane Metro, and the homeowners together.”

“Okay.”

“Somebody has to bring a proposal. Now we have a proposal and we know it is viable, because it is totally funded. Okay? That’s the nice thing about it.”

“Okay. Your proposal already has developers behind it.”

“Oh, yes. We have the World Bank behind us.”

“The World Bank?”

“The World Bank. The Danish government. The Swiss government. It has been funded to the tune of five billion rand. Okay? Ten thousand housing units. We got two schools. We got our own government buildings to run the place. We will have our own nurseries, crèches, health facilities. A little bit of light industrial farming.”

“Okay.”

“So we will start a garden company. You can take two days out of every week to give us sweat equity to pay for your room or whatever it is. But the other three days you have to go look for work. If you don’t find work you have got attend a class in the afternoon. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“We want to educate people. We want to skill them. There are amazing things that can be done. And it is proving itself, because we have ninety-five per cent of the households working at least three times a week. Okay. We have got our kids in school. You must see the results of this private school. Okay? These kids have the same education as my grandkids have at Woodhill College for R20 a month.”

“Wow.”

“You speak to James. He can hold a conversation. James is what, all of six years old? Okay. He can hold a conversation with you on practically any subject concerning biology, trees, birds, cars, Gautrain, a jetliner. He has been to the zoo. He has been to the aquarium. This child spent the afternoon with us one day. That kid never shut up for one minute.”

“You’re saying ninety-five per cent of the households work.”

“Ninety-five per cent of the households have one or more representatives working at least two to three times a week. Or else we would have massive hunger in here. And we don’t.”

“Okay.”

“Because they are able to feed themselves. They are buying meat. They are buying fish. They are buying vegetables. And our children are healthy. And there are only like six children we feed because they have a mental illness or a deformity. Or we know there is a sickness.”

“Okay.”

“And then we work with the mothers of those children. Over twelve weeks Denise starts a business with them. Okay? So we run a business with them. After twelve weeks those women don’t come

back, because they are able to run a business. The whole meat industry started with one guy after I said to him, 'Why don't you buy chicken and sell it?' Okay? And he bought chicken and sold it and other people started catching on. And then I said, 'Why don't you buy bread and jam and make sandwiches?' Now how many spaza shops are there now? How many vegetable shops? We have never ever said you should buy beer. We won't support it. But we've started ninety-five different operations in there. I mean Donald has sewing. Sindi had her restaurant. So everybody goes out to work in the morning. A lot of the Zimbabweans don't work, because some of them are just too damn lazy. But you look at the Lesotho people they are digging ditches every damn day."

"Some of the guys bring their wives out here and their wives stay home with the kids. Therefore the guys must have sufficient funding to keep their wife and their child here. They have a better way of life. It is not a perfect way of life. But in Zimbabwe, it is hell. Okay? You have starvation or you have nothing. What are you going to choose?"

"Ja, true enough."

"So the guys come here. We let the guys across the border and once they are here we say, 'No, you can't work. And no, you can't live anywhere. Which is absolutely stupid! So that is where we come in and we fight the laws to change that kind of attitude."

"You can't keep letting people into the country and then not allow them to be productive parts of society." I paraphrase.

"You can't! And we have proved it here. They are productive parts of society. Everybody used to say, 'Oh, they are all just *skelms* and rogues.' And we're saying, 'Prove it! Again, it is your prejudice. You just aren't listening!'"

* * *

The pick-up truck rumbles along the dirt track that leads to the small security gate on the backside of the camp. Colin has one more stop to make before he calls it a night. He has been called in to help the Executive Committee resolve a grievance concerning George and his occupancy. Donald, Benjamin, and Israel gather to discuss the matter. George is standing by silently in anticipation of the outcome, a tall man in the shadows.

“Me, yesterday when I was at my place the security came to me and said George is sleeping in his house with Lucky. They just called me and said, “Let us go and take George to his place. You see? We have walked there. The security guards chased Lucky. They say, ‘George, you know you are supposed to go to your place.’” Benjamin reports.

“Like I am saying all the time, ja.” Donald replies.

“I told George that he must go to his place. He must go and sleep. I told him that Monday we were busy negotiating the problem with his shack and that Donald said that if he don’t come back he will break the shack down.”

“Yes, I will break the shack down.” Donald agrees.

“I just take the security and Lucky just snuck in. I didn’t bring him in. That old guy must chase him away.”

“And now, it is not only Lucky. I am worried that six guys are sleeping out there. Tell me, six guys sleeping out there! And you remember that we caught that Lucky guy with a stolen scooter and in hardly a week he was back. There are six guys who are not registered to stay there. What worse things could they do?”

“Who else is sleeping there? He didn’t tell us about those guys.”

“No, only yesterday after you go.”

“Now, it is funny. If that is the case, we are supposed to work together as leaders. Now remember, even if George was not there and if that guy comes and it happens to take stuff. What is going to happen? I don’t have an answer on that one?”

“Georgie can stay here for the time being and then we have to

look for the plastic. Then he can come and build his shack.”

“Okay. Now, that is not a problem. The problem is the people staying with him. These are guys who hide inside all day long and then do their stuff in the night. We are going to have problems. You know like Lucky. Those guys sleep in the day and wake up at night. Look, leave this to me. I will sort it out. Trust me, if they don’t leave you will find that the place is down before too long. I will go out there to personally chase them away!”

“You must chase Lucky! You must chase Lucky! I can’t even take Lucky. That one is thinking he is very clever.”

“That is not a problem, Benjamin. Anybody who is going to be in there, other than George I will chase them out until I break the place down. The place is registered only in his name. In the meantime, I am going to buy a lock for George. So that he can secure his shack. And if they break in and I have to continually chase them out then I am going to get tired. I will break the place down. Because I don’t need any tsotsis out there!”

Colin jumps into the conversation. He has had his fill.

“George, I am telling you right now. If you don’t stay in your house I am going to burn it down.”

“Thanks a lot. Thanks, Colin.” Donald chimes in.

“I am going to burn it down. I will break it down and I will get rid of you. Okay. I will put you out on the street again because you don’t listen.”

“Yes.” Benjamin says.

“Do you understand me? I am tired of talking to you! Donald is tired of talking to you. Israel is tired of talking to you. Benjamin is tired of talking to you.”

“Yebo.” Donald says.

“When they can’t agree. They bring me in. And I am going to make a hard decision. You refuse to listen to us. Therefore it says, ‘you are going to go out.’ You will not be able to come back. I have tried to look after you for four years. But you don’t listen.”

“Thanks Georgie. Your place is out there. Go out to your place. You are welcome.” Donald instructs George.

“Donald fought for you. He fought for you, because I was there.” Colin continues.

“What am I supposed to do?” George asks.

“You must live in your house by yourself.”

“As simple as that.”

“By yourself, no *chommies*, no *skelms*, no wife. Okay? You moved in here on your own. Okay. I think you don’t listen because you drink too much and then you think that you know everything. Do you understand me?”

“Are you staying there, Georgie?” Donald asks.

“I don't know.”

“What do you mean you don't know? It's you who should be staying there. It is either yes or no. It is as simple as that.”

“Yes or no.” Israel jumps in.

“But if you can't give a reliable answer of yes or no then that is something else again. And that is a killer one.” Donald says.

“So what am I supposed to do?”

“You live on your own. You chuck the other people out. And if they won't move then you talk to Donald and he will chuck them out. Or else I will come and chuck them out. I am not scared of them.” Colin answers.

“Okay. Yes, I understand.” George acquiesces.

“Thanks, Georgie that is a reliable answer.” Donald affirms.

* * *

FRIDAY, AUGUST 16, 2013

Christopher throws another block of wood on the fire. The flames leap up, creating a circle of light within the courtyard. The bamboo fencing appears in sharp relief and the red of his jacket pops. Beyond that there is a precipitous fall into blackness. It is the nature of a place built on an open field and denied access to electricity. In Woodlane Village, the social dynamics change at

sunrise and sunset. There is a stark contrast between the worlds of daytime and nighttime. When darkness falls, most residents stick close to home. Women and children stay indoors. Others, like the single men, follow the music to the shebeens, seeking excitement and companionship. The addicted look for drugs and alcohol. And those with predatory impulses venture into the night to victimise. Crime is conflated with drunkenness and darkness. Rumour has it that Molamo was rolled again the previous evening.

“So this guy screamed for help but I just take it lightly. And they just robbed him!” Christopher says.

“But Chris, he should have known better. He always shows off his money because he wants to attract some jeri-jerinyana of this lady.” Donald adds.

“Hahaha!”

“Flashing your money only brings trouble to self. But now, that guy thinks he’s a ladies man of a kind. He is stupid. Hey, hey, *voetsek!* It doesn’t work that way.” Don continues.

“You can’t do that people are hungryyy, *wena.*”

“We need moneeey. We are here for moneeey.” Chris jokes.

“Hahaha.”

“Kill or be killed, man. For what? For moneeey. Hahaha!”

* * *

Donald says he is fed-up with George and his obstinacy. He strolled past George’s shack earlier only to discover that it was wide-open, unoccupied, and storing items belonging to someone other than George. This was after talking to him about harbouring tsotsis. The final straw was George’s poorly disguised threat that Donald should be careful not to follow the path of his older brother — who was murdered in Mooikloof. Donald storms off with a padlock to close the shack down.

“Yesterday, you heard what we talked to George about? And did you hear when Colin asked him to respond? He didn’t respond. He says he doesn’t know. But *wena*, look at that madala with his

grey hair. He says he doesn't know what to do! Do you think that is the real thing? No, I don't think so.

“Georgie is playing games. Look, he is kind of stupidenyana and cleverenyana. He can speak English and I mean English is the best language in the world. Because it is the language of the master.”

* * *

“And you can ask yourself one question:
What kind of a person does not meet with his own family?”

— Christopher asks of George

* * *

“Now, even a mad man can get healed in time. He might be mad for eighteen months and then later he will get healed and he will tell you that, ‘Pieter, you know for a couple of months I was mad and I was doing stuff and what-what-what. But now I am healed, Pieter, as you can see. But a fool doesn't heal, Pieter. A fool is a fool for life. You are a fool for life. You can sleep with many clever. You can mix with them and rub shoulders with people with all the wisdom in the world and you will never get there. Because you are born foolish. You don't heal from being a fool. But a mad man can heal, Pieter.

You know, Pieter I was mad. I don't know if it was witchcraft or a mental disturbance. But I am healed now, Pieter, as I talk. And some people get madnessenyana for a couple of months and then they get healed. Next year he is sick again. But the fact is that as long as he is alive he has a chance to get healed, Chris. You know? But not a fool, Chris! A fool doesn't get healed, *wena*. That is a lifetime career, man! Hahaha. And the funny part is that you don't ask for it. You are just born with it!

So any way it is a curse, Chris. You know you might get back to the bible and curse the day you were born. But if you are whole,

you can change. You can be whatever you want to be whenever you want to be it. Unless you are dead, Chris.”

“Definitely.”

“But now, fool...fool. That is something else again.”

* * *

Chris tells me that he is planning to return to Winterveld on Saturday after work. Donald has managed to set him up with a piece job through the church. It is a small gardening assignment, but it might lead to opportunities.

“I am hard worker. And when it comes to gardening. It is like playing, you know. I am garden-sick, Pieter. That is my sickness. I enjoy it so much. I am a landscaper. I want a place that has no direction and then I can just tell you where to put this plant and that plant.”

“I know you’re a hard worker, Chris. It might be the beginning of good things to come. Because I said, ‘God works in his own mysterious ways.’ Do you trust that or do you take it for granted?” Don asserts.

* * *

“We live to die, Pieter. And without miracles there is no life, Pieter. And by dying it means that we give each other space. Because we were born like that. And we will die like that. Because death is not a new thing.” Christopher states.

“But what I have learned from you...because we have talked a lot about death over our time together...it is around us, and we can’t avoid it. What I have learned from you is that the awareness of death doesn’t take away from life. If anything, it adds urgency. It adds vitality to living.” I observe.

* * *

“Chris, remember when you get to the gate, don’t go to the wide part. Take the narrow one. All the people like the big path, the wide one, because you can go very free. You can even close your eyes. Don’t go to that one, because the destination is destruction. Take the narrow one. Only a few people take it. They see it, but they don’t like it, because it is like the eye of a needle, Chris. But if you take that one you are sure to get to the other side unharmed. But for lack of understanding and knowledge, you will take the wide one.” Donald advises.

“Donald, you know by the time I was working by Centurion. In most of the time when I brought you some stuff at home...”

“Yebo.”

“I used to go in the middle of the night. And always, I take...”

“The narrow one!”

“Exactly.”

“Hahaha.”

“I find myself trembling in the bushes, you know. There is no light there.”

“Exactly. There is nobody there. It is only you.”

“But I see each and everyone in that wide part...”

“In the wide one...”

“And they died there.”

“And tomorrow, you see bloodenyana. You hear stories...”

“And while I am still trembling in the bushes. I just see them over there. Here comes a problem. And I ask myself, ‘If I was there, what would have happened to me?’

“The narrow path works.”

“Because I have taken this narrow path, I survive...”

“Now again, I would like to tell you to not act clever. There is no clever in this world. Whether you are clever or stupid, we all get the same...if the sun shines it shines for all of us. And if it’s raining it is for all of us. So where does our cleverenyana-ness get into that one? Nowhere.”

* * *

Against Colin's instructions, Francis has installed goalposts and crossbars to create a new soccer pitch on land not designated for this purpose. On one end of the field, the goal-line is only about fifteen metres from the nearest shacks. The shelters will be peppered with missed shots, a recipe for disaster. Donald wants nothing to do with the soccer field, because of the upcoming legal proceedings. He doesn't want to give the metro any ammunition to support their argument that the villagers are not complying with the terms of the court order.

"Chris, I think it is going to ail me and I will eventually go out and talk to the guy who did this. It is trouble in the making. I am not one to sit and let stuff happen, Chris. I am hurting inside."

"We should call the peoples on this street and go to that guy. That is the only thing we should do."

"Yes, I will do that Chris." Don sighs.

"And we just have to negotiate with him, 'Hey babba, you know what? Here you have wronged us. And you better come and tear those poles down or otherwise we are going to do it!'"

"Hundred per cent."

"Look, Don, I don't want you to fall into this trap, you by yourself, when most of the time, I am not present. I am absent. If I was here, we could have done it ourselves to tear those poles apart. But this is very awkward."

"Now, I will be tearing them down self and putting them there. And if they put them back again, I will tear them down until we get to fisticuffs. And then the police will be in, because the police want someone to die first before they act. They don't want to stop things."

"Look, Pieter. There is this saying: 'Prevention is better than cure.' But the police don't prevent stuff from happening. Especially when there are guys who know how things will play out."

Even in jail, I remember when I was a leader of the Airforce gang I told the police, "Look, I was moved from one section of the

jail to this one. There is going to be war. So to stop this, take me to the isolation cells! Now!' They said, 'No, don't worry! Hara hara!'

Pieter! People died. The helicopters were there. The jail was burning. And I was sitting there doing my stuff. I was sewing when it went down. Now, they are coming to me. I said, 'What did I tell you? It is less than two days but it is happening.'"

* * *

Christopher is agitated. He is feeling the undertow of politics in the camp, the friction of seeking harmony among people with such diverse interests and backgrounds.

"They'll take me back where I don't want to go. Why, Pieter? Because I've lived this bad life in this jungle. These peoples are fresh. They see this as only a camp with huge houses nearby. But I know this place as a jungle, as a veld, Pieter. There was nothing out here. So now, these peoples have lost their senses. Each and everyone has told himself that 'I am bigger than those peoples.' Of which is wrong! You can't just come from Zimbabwe or from Lesotho or from Malawi and then act big towards us — the peoples who were born here. You see the stuff happening here is very upsetting and if you try to believe them you will think twice. These peoples are not truthful. They are *unbelievable*, because you can see right through them. You can see with your naked eye we are living with the wrong peoples in this camp.

"So why do feel these people are taking you backwards?" I ask.

"It will cost me. Because I will never fold my hands while Donald is getting hurt. Because he is their leader."

* * *

SATURDAY, AUGUST 17, 2013

There is a pile of wooden poles of varying lengths lying next to a stack of large zinc-plates. The material has been donated. Donald will use it bolster his shack. The zinc will provide better protection against the sun and the rain than plastic. He has been labouring since dawn to tear the vinyl tarp from the roof in order to install the beams and the latticework that will support the metal sheeting. It is messy work. With the removal of the roof, the insides of his shack are open to the elements and all of his belongings are covered with a fine layer of dust. George passes him a saw to shorten a vertical strut that will form part of the awning.

I offer a hand, but Don declines my gesture, insisting he works best alone. I decide to tidy up the poles sticking out in odd directions and creating a tripping hazard. George helps. I cut my finger on the sharp edge of the zinc-plates. Tomorrow I must bring gloves. It was almost a year ago that I helped Don repair his shack after the fire. Back then, he was also too proud to accept assistance at first but later conceded. There will come a time.

I am surprised to find George here. He came to Donald in the morning with his tail between his legs after he discovered his shack locked up in the night.

“I will take the thinenyana wires and then the thicker ones. And then I will tie the poles together to make a longer one. Trust me, Pieter. It will be whatever I need it to be. We can always do magic with what we have.”

“Slowly and surely...like the weaver bird.” I add.

“Yes, Pieter! Stick by stick they make a big nest. And it is very comfortable for themselves and their children and the jeri-jeri.”

“Remarkable, indeed.”

“And again, Pieter, as you know, the talk of the town is that me and Georgie are not together. But I want to call them so they can see Georgie working with me. Georgie was always my brother. As

you can see...look at these grey hairs. He didn't buy these. That is wise hair, Pieter. He is big. It is just that he likes to play smallenyana sometimes. That is not my problem. He always will remain a bigger brother. And as long as I am here, I will make sure he knows where he stays and where I am. But who can believe that it is him and me now? Pieter! Let us not dismiss people out of hand. No! Give them a chance to work their problems out.

"No matter who is big or who is small. The question is: 'Are we together?' Yes, we are together. And let me tell you, nobody told Georgie to come here today. Something inside tells him to.

"And remember, I might have many brothers, but you might find none of them get grey hair. That grey hair is a blessing, Pieter. It means that you have lived to your ripe old age. It is not everyone who gets there. We die young."

"How old are you, George?" I ask.

"Sixty-two years old." He replies.

* * *

The day stretches on, the enormity of the task eroding Donald's optimism. He is second-guessing his plan. Although, it is clear that he was correct to raise the roof on one end to create an incline for the summer rains to wash off. But for now, his shack lies gutted to the sky, its ribcage and innards exposed like a fresh kill. I climb up the sidewall to assess the damage. It looks bad. It is amazing how many items Don has accumulated over the years. I can see piles of books, sewing materials, cutlery, cups and dishes, clothing, tools, stereo and sound equipment — the items of living.

* * *

"Pieter, I am good.
I know where I am coming from.
I know where I am going.
I am good."

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 2013

Donald has made progress since the previous day and his cheeriness has returned. He had a restless sleep, tossing as he says “like a boat on stormy water.” But his worries about the renovation seem to be subsiding. He invites me on to the roof to lift the metal sheeting into position so it can be fastened down. He cautions me to watch my step and to ensure I keep my weight centred on the beams. From above, I can see the village sprawling across the field and further in the distance the colossal church, the surrounding houses, the mall, and the cars on de Villabois. There is a fascinating variation in the sizes and shapes of shacks slapped together from salvaged materials: timber, vinyl, brick, metal, asbestos, and plywood. Dust is rising from the soccer field.

We overlap the zinc plating. Don nails the metal sheets to the horizontal poles below, using beer caps as washers. In some cases, he makes several attempts because the beams are crooked and easy to miss. We tack the corners and place two sheets of manufactured wood and a rusted metal box-spring on the roof to prevent the zinc plates from blowing away.

Don is grateful for the assistance. He says help is hard to find in the camp. Many people show up when there is beer to be drunk, but few do so when there is work to be done. Georgie and I are exceptions, as is Peterson who popped by unannounced with a handful of nails for Donald. These were welcome surprises or “small miracles” as Don says.

We crawl around the back of the shack, over the piles of items in plastic bags and through the narrow space in the mesh. I pull down on the tarpaulin so that Donald can close the gap. Wind and water are relentless in their penetration.

* * *

“Your comfort is somebody else’s discomfort.” —Donald

* * *

MONDAY, AUGUST 19, 2013

The players are scrimmaging at one end of the field. The offensive players are in blue. The defenders wear florescent yellow bibs. The ball is kicked back and forth. The unevenness of the ground makes ball control challenging and dribbling is limited to short distances. There are no heroic charges on goal here. Short passes are favoured. Give-and-goes. Trevor is playing forward. He has a characteristic way of running, explosive choppy strides. It is the first time I have seen him in the camp since my return. I wait and watch. The sun drops below the surrounding hills. As the light level diminishes, the risk of catching a ball flush in the face increases. I remain alert to any errant shots on net.

* * *

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21, 2013

I am sitting on the couch with Trevor. It has only been a few days since he returned from a fortnight in Zimbabwe. The living room is similar to when I was here last. I notice that the back of his shack has been closed off completely — the half-wall turned into a full wall. I am glad to see him. I enquire about his life. He tells me things are going well. He finished building an extension to his house in Masvingo after having saved for a year to purchase the necessary bricks, cement, and asbestos roofing. Building materials are more expensive in Zim than they are in South Africa. The renovation has added two more rooms to his house, which will allow his children to have a dedicated area to study. It was a tiring trip. His time was divided between the construction work and visiting his ailing grandmother who suffered a stroke. He tells me that the daily bus ride to the hospital was his only opportunity to sleep, an hour-and-a-half on a bumpy road. There have been other changes as well. Caroline, his youngest daughter started school in

Zimbabwe. She has joined her brother, her thirteen-year-old brother, Cletos and her older sister, Auxcillia who is eight years old. Trevor confides that his father wants him to come home, but he is reluctant to do so, because the income levels are lower there than in South Africa and the cost of living higher. He explains that he has to spend R4800 per year in tuition for his children. It would be a backward move economically.

* * *

THURSDAY, AUGUST 22, 2013

I shove the weather-beaten tarp into the yellow rubbish bag. It will be disposed along with the other trash: howling Benji's smelly sneakers, a broken aquarium, a pair of black trousers torn beyond repair. It is the same plastic underlay that I purchased for Donald after the fire. He was right when he said it would not survive the extreme conditions. It is brittle. It cracks in my hands. We are clearing a pile of scrap plastic and wooden pallets so that we can throw out the relic of a couch in Donald's courtyard. He says the *gogos* will scavenge it for firewood. We carry the rubbish bags and the couch to the illicit football field. "One more barrier to its use," he chuckles. He warns me not to step in the shit.

* * *

"There is this saying about turning the other cheek. But have you ever seen anyone turn the other cheek? No! You slap me once; I stab you twice. There is no turning the other cheek. This tells me that we, as people, are far from where we need to be."

— Donald

* * *

Donald is polishing his work boots, one of many chores to complete in dusk's wavering light. Sibusiwe knocks on the gate and enters. She is a graceful woman, thoughtful in deed and action. In a soft voice she says that last night a group of young men from the village went to the squatter camp on the other side of Woodlands Boulevard to attend a party. While there, they robbed the guests with a gun. According to her, the residents gave chase and surrounded one of the men in the veld before setting the grass alight. He was hospitalised due to the burns. In his pain and contrition, he agreed to divulge the identities of the other perpetrators. She tells Don she will keep him updated. She thanks him and departs.

* * *

"I can't claim to be good, Pieter. No. I can't claim to be a good guy. But one thing that I know is that I am getting to accept me for who I am and again I am not into this...you know, as people, all of us want to be a winner. But now, I am not playing for a win, Pieter. I am just playing for survival. And you know, by survival I am talking about me not sleeping with a hungry stomach."

* * *

"But you are also calmer now than in the past. Do you think you have changed as a person?" I ask.

"Yes, yes. You can say that again. Because I had this funny streak in me that whenever I encounter something that I didn't like I reacted...I had this anger in me. Like I did to Moses the other day. But nowadays he could have gotten away with it if he hadn't pushed it so far. Because most of the time when I get angry I can check myself."

"So what's the difference? Do you have less anger now?"

"Ja, even a lion when it gets old won't do what it once did. You know, jumping! Catching a springbok or kudu in the air and bringing it down. No, it will get tired as time passes and it matures.

And it is going to leave that stuff to the newcomers. And if it sees the newcomers jumping like it once did, it will just shake its head, “Ah, youngsters.” Because it knows before too long they’ll also grow old. But they don’t see it while they’re young. And if you tell them they’ll think you are mad, because they feel strong. They can jump even with their eyes closed. But there will come a time when they’ll think twice and even start to doubt their stance.”

* * *

SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 2013

It is Saturday and I am planning to accompany Don and Chris to Tswaing crater in the afternoon and to the township of Tembisa near Jo’burg in the evening.

It has been a jumble of a morning, experiences stacking and restacking on top of one another. As usual, there were a number of errands to complete before we could make our way to our ultimate destination. There was the early morning pick-up of items in the camp to be taken out to Soshanguve: Christopher’s lawnmower and a new toilet seat for his outhouse. This was followed by a quick and unsuccessful stop at Woodlands mall to look for a replacement plug for Donald’s laptop, which necessitated a subsequent detour to locate the item at a pawnshop run by Nigerians in Marabastad, the epicentre of low-level commerce: decaying buildings with fading signage, metal brokers and recyclers, street vendors and thrift shops, sidewalks packed with people, spilling from rivers of taxis. From there, we headed to Mamelodi so Don could pick up an external hard-drive from his nephew for his beloved music.

* * *

We drive past a park in Soshanguve, a strip of grass between the housing complexes. There are benches and picnic tables. It is a popular hook-up spot for couples. Don and Chris point to a young boy and girl kissing.

“Look at those children. Seven years and they’re just hugging and soen-ing and putting the tongue in mouth.” Donald recoils.

“Ja, they are no more children. They are adults.”

“Ga! Ga! Now if she were my child I would tie her to the back of my car and drag her the whole street. And then if I stop there’s no more meat. It’s only bones. I say, ‘You go to your boyfriend.’”

“Hahaha! What a brother I have. Hahaha!” Chris laughs.

“And boyfriend doesn’t want to see all the bones. He runs away. I catch boyfriend. I drag him. He is all bones. I say, ‘Go to another girlfriend.’ No girl wants to see bones. And that’s when they start to see that father-in-law is a shit, shit, shitter! Not good. And *ja*, that’s the best you can do for child and family and community... I’m playing, Pieter. Ha! You go to jail for that one.”

* * *

“People cry because they need to cry. Not that I am crying everyday, Pieter. But if I have to cry a swimming pool and drown in it then I will. But tears cannot be bought. You can buy all the water in the world and not get tears.”

— Donald on emotion

* * *

It is late afternoon. We continue to the Tswaing crater. Chris says he used to hunt rabbits as a boy in the vicinity of the crater, but he has never seen the massive hole. It lies within a protected area. A footpath skirts the basin. We walk in.

Don is reverent. He’s in awe of the terrible forces unleashed when a meteoroid struck the savannah 200,000 years ago, vaporising a hole over a kilometre in diameter and one hundred metres deep, blasting the bedrock upwards, and razing over a thousand square kilometres of the territory surrounding the point of impact. He says he can feel the power of this place.

“Pieter! This hole was created by the impact. And out of it this! Pieter, something is wrong here! This is wrong. Look, the level of the land was at the top of those trees. So that thing by coming here created all of this. Pieter, no, no, no! That is amazing. No, no, no, man! It doesn’t get to my real understanding. I don’t understand. And I never will.”

* * *

We pick up Chris and Don’s sister, Jo (Johanna), and their niece, Joyce. They are accompanying us to Tembisa where we will spend the night. Donald has made arrangements to visit his stepbrother Mos (Moses) — who he barely knows, because of the decades Don spent in prison. It is his ongoing mission to establish relations with those he left behind, the curse of the black sheep returning to the fold. It will be his first visit to the township. We cut through Pretoria on our way to Johannesburg.

I am growing tired and my patience is threadbare from a day of commuting. The volume-level in the car has increased exponentially with Jo in the backseat. My ears are ringing as she yammers away with Chris, her fevered-pitch close to screaming. She ensures me that she will direct us to Tembisa based on the numerous visits she has made to the township by taxi and train. Darkness falls as we traverse Voortrekker Road in Alberton far off course. We have taken a wrong turn somewhere and I have lost all confidence in the common refrain to “go straight.” Along the way, the brothers were close to blows.

* * *

“Well now, my pretty.” — Tattoo on Donald’s forearm

* * *

I park the vehicle close to the wall, watching to avoid the large boulder at the front of the Toyota. In the field opposite, a group of men hunch over a fire. Streetlights can be seen in the distance. Power lines are also visible. The moon is out. The music is booming from inside the house. I am tense and it takes all of my willpower to appear welcoming and placid as I make my introductions, forgetting strangers' names as soon as I hear them. I can usually remember a face, rarely a name. I am famished. After drinking a quick beer, I accompany Donald and Steven, a family friend, to a take-out joint to buy some spareribs. Calm is returning. While we wait for the food, Steven and I keep an eye on the car. He tells me this is the lokasie. Not all who live here embrace the vision of the rainbow nation. Some would be more than delighted to liberate a white man of his vehicle.

I pull into the narrow entranceway again. A woman with a studded leather jacket and a miniskirt hops on the hood. She is crass. "I like to pose for the camera." She flirts. I feign ignorance and slip away. I have been propositioned a number of times while in South Africa by women equating my whiteness with wealth. I stay alert for other threats.

The setting has all of the ingredients for danger and volatility: alcohol and darkness, thrill-seeking women and excitable men. A stocky young man in a tan jacket makes the mistake of uttering a brazen remark about the "stupid white man," which raises Don's ire. He is quickly escorted off the premises. "If you insult him, you insult me." Donald asserts. Steven threatens, "Leave! Before we eat you alive. We will gouge your eyes out!" As a visitor in the townships, I have grown accustomed to being a spectacle. Mostly, the attention has been positive, but negative encounters are possible, especially if one pushes one's luck. I am thankful when we leave the scene for the more secure setting of Mos's house. The car crawls up the inclined driveway. He locks the large metal gate behind us. "You are home. Be free."

* * *

Barry White is crooning on the hi-fi, his deep baritone filling the living room and lulling us to state of bliss. Christopher is revisiting the journey to Tembisa, the misdirection and the irritability. He apologises for losing his temper. He was close to strangling Donald. The music shifts to Teddy Pendergrass, James Brown, and Christopher's favourite, Brook Benton and then on to house music. The dancing begins.

I step outside to seize a moment of solitude. The surrounding suburb is quiet. The houses are secure behind high brick walls. The lane bends around the corner. The frenzied partying is happening elsewhere — in the neighbourhoods where the fences are made of thin wires rather than bricks. Christopher joins me after a while. We enjoy a cigarette. He confides that one of the reasons he has decided to move out of the camp is to get distance from Donald. He wants to avoid head-butting competitions with his brother.

“Donald is a hard nut to crack. He is hard in his brain. That's why I don't live with him in the camp anymore. Not meaning that I don't feel like being there.

“Why? Because even if he is wrong he doesn't accept so. He still has that jail mind. ‘Ja, I was in jail in for such a long time.’ My big brother is one hard nut to crack. You can't change his mind. And it's whereby I can't live nearby Donald anymore. Because he is Donald and I am Christopher. We are two different peoples. Then we don't go along the very same way.

“Hey, big brother! You're wrong by doing this and that.’

“Eh! Who is the leader here?’

“Eh, I don't give a damn who the leader is here. You are a leader, but a blind leader. Because you don't know everything about life out of jail. This is location. It is not jail. These are two different things. You have to separate them.’

“But he can't separate them. Donald is still living his life like he is in jail. And then it is difficult. You have to differentiate things as a human being. But he doesn't. Like the last time when he was talking about tearing George's shack apart. I disagreed with him.

“Eh, big brother. You are wrong! How could you do this? Do you think you are right?”

“Okay, Mr Know-it-all. How am I wrong?”

“Okay, look front. Look back. Look sideways — left and right. Where are you now? Because out there in our location we have those great leaders and if they do something wrong the community will burn down their big house and their fancy car. So what do you think will happen with your plastic house?”

“So I say, ‘Okay, I quit. Go on with your life, leader. I don’t want to be involved through the right and wrong of what happens to you. If they kill you in front of my eyes, it will pain me greatly. I would rather quit the camp and move away from you. So I will just hear by the peoples or by the news that such a thing has happened to a man named Donald.’

“Donald is enemy number one in the camp. They are selling him out, Pieter. Because he is the only person who thinks he is bigger than anyone else. The only thing I want is for my brother to shut his mouth shut. Let him shut his mouth shut. Then he will have a great life in the camp. But always if people come to him, he feels like he is huge. No, Pieter. It is wrong.”

We go indoors, joining Don and Mos. Our sidebar provides fleeting insight into the complexity of relations between brothers. It makes me think about the awkward association I have with my younger brother who remains a mystery to me.

We stay up till four in the morning, cavorting and ribbing each other. We repeat inside jokes, the coded messages of friendship and shared experience. The declarations to “just go straight, *umalume!*” The Benji impersonations, “Eieeeee, brother!” We fall asleep three abreast in a small bed.

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 2013

It is Sunday morning, the start of a lazy day in Tembisa. People walk by. Some are on their way to the marketplace or the spaza shops, others to church. Some don the characteristic garb of the ZCC. The women wear yellow outfits with green headscarves. The men are decked out in khaki uniforms and black caps. Children are playing in the lane outside. We are sitting in the sunshine reminiscing about the adventures from the day before.

Bongani, the fourteen-year-old son of Mos joins us. He walks silently, brushing his fingers against the wall before gingerly making his way to the ledge where we are sitting. He lost his vision years ago due to a botched operation. He attends a school for the blind during the weekdays, but returns home on the weekends. He is slender and fragile looking. He speaks in a timid voice, barely audible. Occasionally, his lids flutter revealing the milky eyes beneath. I shake his hand. His skin is soft. I wonder what the future will hold for him in a country where even able-bodied men have difficulty finding work. *Will he become another victim of hard economic realities, a beggar with a cardboard sign proclaiming his disability?*

Donald is dismayed by his nephew's predicament. He insists that someone should be held responsible for malpractice. He will investigate. "Push a few buttons," he says. He relaxes his powerful grip to cradle the boy's fingers. They sit together for a long time, the blind boy and the uncle who have never met before today. Don reassures the boy that he can be as successful as any man.

"Look, what happened to you was no mistake. So as long as it chooses you, you get to choose it. You live with whatever you have, because nobody can do better than you. Are you with me? Because nobody can do it better than you. I like you as my nephew. And I will try to be closer to you so we can chat. We can get somewhere

by talking together. I would like that. So don't make other people your gate so that they stand in front of you, Bongani. You are the gate that opens all of the knowledge. We will be together, okay? But I can't succeed for you. I can only succeed for self. That's why I say you have to be you in order to succeed. Only you can do it."

I am touched by his display of sensitivity. It has been fascinating to observe the complexity of the man, to experience the 'betwixt and between' of Donald over an extended period of time. He continues to surprise me. It is a poignant reminder of the layered realities of our being. Beneath our surface are countless permutations of thoughts, emotions, and perspectives. Plasticity is part of our make-up. We are more than one thing. Our inner worlds flex and adjust to the outer worlds, which in turn are shaped by our intentions and actions. The multiple parts of ourselves are channelled and oriented by the stories we tell — with the narrative process structuring and organising our cognition and affect, and by extension our deeds and actions. We live through story. And story lives through us.

* * *

"Chris, we have grown attached to this guy.
And we never asked to be.
Now, we are kind of like a rope, triple-woven."

— Donald on our friendship

* * *

TUESDAY, AUGUST 27, 2013

Benjamin is surveying his garden when I arrive, assessing his next moves; what needs to be pruned, planted or pulled out. He is wearing a bright blue dress shirt. The sleeves are pressed. Around his neck is a lanyard from the dental clinic where he works. His head is covered with a woollen toque, navy in colour with white stripes. He observes that the flowers are starting to bloom. He points to a single red blossom. Soon there will be an explosion of life, a spray of green as the vines reclaim the fence. The weather is on the cusp of spring.

He tells me the municipality demolished several shacks this morning. He rattles off the numbers: 622, 570, 594, 82. Another unit, 726, is slated for destruction in the next couple of days. One of the shelters was torn down, because the occupants reportedly got into a brawl with another resident who later died in hospital. According to the law in the village, if you kill someone you will be asked to leave the camp and your shack will be demolished. I am not sure about the reasons for the other aforementioned shacks being flattened. There seems to be no coherent approach to addressing issues of tenancy in the camp. The police and the security company occasionally undertake raids, but how they determine their targets is unclear, because they often do so without consulting with the executive in the camp. Some shacks get flattened while others with long and well-documented histories of being problematic remain. Some of the most notorious shebeens continue to operate with impunity despite being a major contributor to disorder in the camp. The arrival of unlicensed jukeboxes is the newest expression of this phenomenon. Where there is money, corruption often follows. It is difficult for the Executive Committee to enforce rules when there are inconsistent consequences.

We walk to Donald's shack to inform him of recent developments. Don appears hesitant to come to the gate when he hears Benjamin's voice. There is awkwardness and defensiveness between them — a formality of tone, a stiff and halting interaction. This is most noticeable between Donald and Benjamin, but the unease is also apparent between Donald and Trevor. Both Trevor and Benjamin have confided they have difficulty working with him. They feel there is a lack of space to truly hash out matters, because their concerns are given short shrift. Their grievances echo Christopher's observation that Donald is a hard nut to crack. The truth is likely more complicated. The relationships rarely run in one direction and governance is challenging at the best of times.

* * *

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2013

Trevor's grandmother passed away. He received the call from Zimbabwe yesterday. She was 83-years-old. Her name was Fungai, which means 'remember.' She was the last of his grandparents to go. "She was lovely." He says. "She was the one who guide us."

He has fond memories of visiting her as a child. She would prepare the most wondrous meals: chicken and morogo, pap and gravy. Even if he had already eaten, Trevor would feign hunger in order to savour her food. He recalls the stories she shared about her experiences in the *Second Chimurenga* — the guerrilla war of 1966 through 1979, which led to the end of white-minority rule in Rhodesia. She cooked meals for the comrades in the bush, risking her life for the independence of her country.

Trevor is grateful he was able to spend time with her during his recent visit a couple of weeks ago. She recognised him even as she was drifting in and out of consciousness in the hospital, her eyes shut and darkness closing in. She had almost a hundred grandchildren, but remembered each and everyone. As she said to

Trevor before her death, “I have the book on my heart. I recognise your voice and your name.”

He will not be able to attend her funeral, because he has used up his allotted leave. The burial is scheduled for tomorrow. His uncle, Nelson and his younger brother, Tino, will be going home on behalf of the family living in Woodlane Village. It has been a trying time for his mother. The responsibility for the funeral arrangements has fallen on her. It is the burden of coping with the trials of life when all of her sons and their wives reside in other countries — six sons in South Africa and one in Mozambique.

* * *

THURSDAY, AUGUST 29, 2013

Christopher is returning to Soshanguve tomorrow. He is joining the droves of workers on their month-end migration from their places of employment in Pretoria to the surrounding townships, people queuing for hours to find a spot on crammed taxis.

Family responsibilities are calling. His mother is going home and Chris will be taking over the role of supporting his sister. He also wants to keep an eye on his middle son, Tsepang, the clever and troublesome one. After dropping out, Tsepang has decided to complete his schooling. It will be a long shot because he is 16-years-old, past the age of government-sponsored education. Chris will try to get him enrolled somewhere.

Besides these obligations, Chris is worn out by the drudgery of the camp, the killing of time while he waits for a single day of work on Fridays. He might as well establish a life closer to his family. With the lawnmower I delivered last weekend, he hopes to start a garden service in Soshanguve.

* * *

SATURDAY, AUGUST 31, 2013

Johanna brings out a plate of *droëwors*, dried sausage. She has been tending to us all afternoon, while Don washes his clothes. They have a strong relationship. She is a stabilising force in his life.

“Your fiancée is wonderful woman.” I remark.

“She might not realise it, because we are always on the wrong side of the coin. But I do have big respect for her. Because she is always closer to me than my pants or whatever it is that is closer to a person anyway. She is closer to me. So now, it means if I dream, I dream her. If I live, I live her. Even if we are far apart, trust me, I am really close to her. She is part of me anyway. Because without her, I am not me anyway. And I like that feeling. It makes me feel jeri-jeri. And I must do the jeri-jeri dance for you.”

“Indeed!”

“Pieter, can you tell me why people are trying to make me their uncle and their father and their brother and everything. Why? Hahaha! Why is that, Pieter? Even the ones who are older than me. Ahhh, Pieter, they rob, man! Hahaha! Pieter, that’s robbing in the making! Pieter, I can’t be somebody’s father when I am seventeen years younger than him.”

“God works in mysterious ways, it seems. Haha!” I tease.

“But they do all the time. But only God can do stuff that is so amazing. You know? This is amazing grace and stuff. It is only God, not me. Me, I am just a servant. And I will serve where I am needed whenever the strength allows me, until I am gone on this planet Earth. Because this is part and parcel of what I get to do.”

* * *

“Pieter, you have to live it before you can write about it. If you want to know what it’s like to stay in a shack then you have to stay in a shack. But you did it! It’s the real thing.”

* * *

We are splitting the planks with a spade to feed the campfire. We stack the wood, leaving openings for the free flow of oxygen. A cold front has settled into Gauteng. The chill in the air has increased with the sunset. The warmth is welcome. The sound of house music is juxtaposed with the crackling and sparking of dry pine. The aroma of the burning wood is a sweet reminder of tenting in Canada, of late-night conversations under open skies.

“I realise in life every question has an answer by itself. Not you, worrying self. But stuff solves self.” Donald observes.

“There is a saying, ‘Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution.’ Every question contains an answer.” I add.

“Every action has a reaction.” Donald exclaims.

“But in order to get to some of the answers in life, you have to enter a space of uncertainty and that space calls into question everything you once knew.”

“Yebo.”

“And you have to be fearless enough to face ambiguity. You have to go to places that make your head hurt. But only when you do that...”

“...will you know whether it works or it doesn’t.” Donald interjects. “It goes on and on. It doesn’t stop. It goes on until you get it right. And you can’t fail. You are meant to win. But only by understanding and exploring what we are talking about. But we are afraid of the unknown. That’s why I say human beings are creatures of habit. They need their habitat.”

“But that is what you and Christopher and I have experienced in our own way. All three of us ventured into the unknown together.”

“You can say that again!”

“It was the unknown of becoming friends.”

“And now again, when I am telling people about you they don’t believe. They think there is magic working here. I am not worried about that. Because remember, Pieter, I didn’t plan it. I don’t know how it came about. But when it happened I didn’t doubt it. I just grabbed hold. And you didn’t doubt it. You just went.”

“Yes, we took a leap of faith.”

“It is misunderstood by many people. Even me, sometimes I don’t understand it, but I just try to get to know it. And work towards bettering it. I told you, Pieter, it is impossible. Remember, when we went to Tembisa I was talking to Chris about writing a book and me not being able to do so. Maybe, I can buy a tape recorder and speak my whole life’s story... But that’s a tall order. You know what I am talking about? And all of a sudden here comes, Pieter. Now, what do you think about that?”

“I know. It is remarkable.”

“I can’t even account for it. But this is life! This is what I love about life, Pieter.”

“I never imagined that I would be part of building stories with you. Because I lived with you and we had adventures together that generated new stories.” I concur.

“Exactly! That is something else again. This is what seems amazing to me now. Pieter, this is something really new. This is new page in my life. It is unplanned. It is only that it *is* what it *is*.”

“Donald, I hope you realise it is mutual.”

“Let me put it this way...this experience has taught me humility. Pieter, I am this guy who can get really angry. And angry to hurt — fast, quick — and then get sorry later. But after I met you, I have learned something. You are not teaching me by saying, ‘don’t do this or that,’ but by being you. You are somebody who listens, Pieter.”

* * *

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2013

The children on the road are squealing. It is the first day of spring, a day of revelry and water fights. Some carry buckets.

In the shade of the house where we gather, the chicken makes frantic screeches as it is held upside down. Only moments earlier it was docile. Now it resists the pull on its neck and the long knife. It takes two pairs of hands to prepare it for the pot.

I am in Mpumalanga with Benjamin. We are visiting with his younger sisters who live in a crumbling house owned by his late mother. Next to the shelter, the shell of a new RDP house stands in mid-construction, waiting for the windows to be installed and the bricks to be plastered. Soon the sisters will have a new home, a further anchor to this place.

Benjamin confides that none of his siblings here have sought better opportunities in Pretoria where the work is. They are young and life has been easy for them. They do not know the suffering that will come due to their lack of ambition and preparedness. "They are stuck," he says. Take for example, his nephew George, who dropped out of school and is now twenty-one years of age and jobless. What future does he have?

"You know where the problem is starting from? If you have parents that don't teach you about life then you will have problems. They must know you are going to suffer when you grow big.

"Me, I can tell you that even my parents did not show me the better life. I can say that I have studied for myself. You see? I have seen when I was growing up that my family was poor. Now, I must try to create something for myself that is going to make a better life for me. You see? But if I didn't do like that then also I would be suffering now."

* * *

Benjamin points to the metal shack sitting on the field, a single point in a vast expanse, a new plot awaiting the arrival of neighbours as the subdivision expands to devour the land, an open plain with mountains in the background. A solitary pole stands in anticipation of the coming days when it will share the burden of wires and electricity. The landscape is arid, the colours bleached by the sun.

“To build a house, you will take it easy. It is not easy, but when you are looking you will think it is easy. Because if you have built a house like that you will know that those kids are looking for something to eat when it is getting dark. And early in the morning when they wake up they need something to eat. And you are there and you are a father. What is your work? You see? You are supposed to do something, to pull up your socks and do something if you are a full man. You will do something.”

* * *

“Is Woodlane Village a place for which you have affection?”

“Yes! It is going to be a place of the future. I am creating for other people’s future. Maybe I create for my son also. You see?”

“So you don’t just see the village as only a place to work.”

“Yes. Because when I am looking on that time, I don’t think black people would build such a huge place inside the white people. You see?”

“So you think this is going to be a different place?”

“I can tell you it is just like a history. You see? We are busy building a history.”

“That is something to fight for.”

“Yes, because if you can look, most of the places there is no other place like this. And most of the white people didn’t think that people would come and stay there and maybe after several years they will build them houses.”

“You’re right. You are catching everyone by surprise.”

“Yes. No one would believe the place would be like this. Because that time you never got a chance to relax. You see? Now, you are at home. You are relaxing. You are enjoying. There are people protecting you. But you must relax using your mind. If you are not using your mind, it is going to be difficult, Pieter.”

* * *

It was early evening when I dropped off Benjamin at the village. A thick layer of white smoke was visible on the raised plateau as we approached Woodlands Boulevard on de Villaboys. It draped like a veil over the informal settlement before drifting towards the low-lying areas such as the mall parking lot. It was reminiscent of the postcard shots of Table Mountain, although, this image of campfires seemed to be a commentary on the contrasting lives of neighbouring classes rather than a promotion for tourism.

The pattern of separate development is apparent throughout Tshwane: the opulent hub of Pretoria surrounded by the poorer townships; the locations like Mamelodi with their brick houses and paved roads encircled by the shacks of residents dreaming of permanency; the black settlements near Cullinan squeezed between properties owned by the diamond mines and the white farmers; the Spartan accommodations where Frans, the gardener, stays in my cousin's garage. It is a single room with electricity and a toilet, but no running water. The sink is located in the courtyard outside the million-rand house.

While I load the dishwasher, I can see Frans through the window, rinsing his plates in the dark. The taps share the same plumbing as the kitchen, the laundry room, and the luxurious bathrooms in the house. Only a wall divides us. While I climb into a steaming glass-encased shower, he fills a metal tub to wash.

We are connected yet apart.

* * *

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2013

Piet is visiting at Donald's place. He is a coloured man who speaks *suiwer* Afrikaans. He comes from the Northern Cape and has been working at NG Moreleta church for 19 years. He perches on a piece of firewood, while he regales me with parables.

“*Die derde mikpunt is om die lewe te aanvaar soos dit is.*”

“The third aim is accept things as they are.” I paraphrase.

“Ja.” He chuckles and coughs.

“What are the other targets?”

He pantomimes. He falls sideways off the log. This is the first aim. He lies still, wide-eyed, shaking his head in disbelief. This is the second. Finally, he struggles back to an upright position. This is the third aim.

I laugh, “Okay, in other words sometimes in life you stumble and fall flat on your *gat*. Then you lie there stunned at your misfortune. Then you accept your predicament and get up.”

* * *

There is a churn of people through Donald's courtyard, a handful of characters mixing out of the multitude. Each life is a story, a structuring of experiences, a chronology of events patterned by meaning, surfacing and bubbling forth by intention or happenstance.

The relationships between people in Donald's life are diverse. They emerge and are shaped by the negotiations required to survive and thrive in the ever-changing bazaar of life. Some are stable while others are fluid and episodic, shifting in terms of intimacy, proximity, and degrees of reciprocity. Some are based on loyalty and mutuality while others are more opportunistic. They can be multi-dimensional — friendly one moment and antagonistic the next. The nature of relationships pivots on the fulcrum of social dynamics: differentials in power and status;

agreements and disagreements; competing and shared interests; styles of communication; gossip and jealousies; acts of giving and receiving; experiences of lending and borrowing. All of these factors influence interpersonal relationships and histories.

Donald's enclosure is the staging area for social interactions. Some of his associations predate the existence of the village, tracing back to his life before incarceration and include family, friends, and acquaintances. Others were formed in the intervening years—at worksites or places of residence in Pretoria East and the surrounding townships. They include the people he has met since living in the informal settlement: customers, colleagues, neighbours, fellow leaders, and Canadian researchers.

In some cases, relationships span time and place. For example, Donald knows Georgie through Christopher. Chris and George are associated through the Wingate Country Club where they both caddied more than twenty years ago. George knew Donald's older brother who was murdered out in Zwavelpoort over a girl. Steven and Donald committed home invasions together. Piet works with Donald. On occasion, he torments George who, in turn, harasses Steven. All of them come to Donald to gripe about each other.

The encounters elucidate the shifting contingencies in people's lives and the webs of interdependency that exist among residents in the camp. They hint at the remarkable human ability to create order and structure — belying the myths propagated by the homeowners associations about chaos in the camp. A sense of community has taken hold here. Even the micro-politics of neighbours complaining about neighbours is a positive illustration that processes of conflict resolution are at work in Woodlane Village. In earlier years, these grievances might have been resolved with sticks and stones rather than with words.

* * *

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2013

“This is South Africa.
Nothing comes easy.
And nothing comes cheap.”

— Donald

Donald is retailoring a jean jacket for a pastor at the church. He carefully trims the fabric for the collar before he reattaches it. Sewing is an exercise in planning and patience. He works and reworks the material until it fits. It must be perfect. It is a matter of credibility. A mistake will be permanent and will affect his reputation. “You are only as good as your last job,” he observes.

Tomorrow, I am flying back to Canada. The past five weeks have been a blur. I will miss these encounters, the experiences of living alongside Donald and others in the village. From the vantage point of this courtyard, there is a sense of stories continuing to unfold in time here — a narrative movement that traces forwards and backwards from this moment. A gecko crawls down the exterior of Christopher’s shack, which sits uninhabited. It inches forward, head first, seeking the rays of sunshine. The vines on the fence are turning green. Flies are hovering in the lapa. Summer has arrived in Pretoria.

REFLECTION

* * *

As I think back to my most recent visit to Woodlane Village, I am intrigued by the subtle alterations that occurred to the physical and social landscape while I was away. Both the locality and I changed during my absence. As Geertz (1995:2) notes:

When everything changes, from the small and immediate to the vast and the abstract—the object of study, the world immediately around it, the student, the world immediately around him, and the wider world around them both—there seems to be no place to stand so as to locate just what has altered and how.

The temporality of experience confounds easy description. My initial fieldwork in 2012 was a period of intense exploration and discovery that left my mind and heart racing to organise the rush of stories and relationships. This was followed by my return to Canada to transcribe, draft, and redraft the narrative accounts of Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor. I underwent my own internal transformations. Novelty and immediacy gave way to a deepening of intimacy and understanding. The process of listening to audio-recordings and composing stories drew me back to the village, sound-by-sound, word-by-word, story-by-story. The result was a time warp where I was continually reliving the past while being fully aware that, on the other side of the world, life was going on without me. Geertz (1995:19) captures the challenge of this undertaking when he writes:

The after-the-fact, *ex post*, life-trailing nature of consciousness generally—occurrence first, formulation later on—appears in anthropology as a continual effort to devise systems of discourse that can keep up, more or less, with what, perhaps, is going on (ibid: 19).

When I stepped back into the community in August 2013, I remember being worried about the possibility of an awkward reunion: *What if our relationships were based on novelty, much in the same way that travellers develop intimacy through proximity and the shared experience of newness? Will I be able to re-enter their lives? What will they think of the narrative accounts?*

Travelogue: Part Two documents some of the ongoing changes in our lives, although many of these are too inchoate and complex to convey in text. I am grateful to affirm the enduring nature of our friendships despite my original apprehensions. In many respects, it feels as if I have grown closer to Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor after my most recent visit. The process of sitting down together to negotiate their stories strengthened our relationships. Expressions of our intertwined affection include our travels to unknown terrain in both the emotional and geographical sense: the trips to establish relations with distant relatives and to explore new localities such as Moloto, Tswaing Crater, and Tembisa. We have become, as Donald says, “like a rope, triple-woven.”

The depiction of time is significant in this chronicle. Specific dates are the temporal frame for my experiences rather than the blur of weeks. During my initial period of fieldwork in 2012, the stampede of emotional and sensory experience overran my days. In 2013 I was able to relax and register more of the textures since I was no longer preoccupied with making sense of the broad strokes of this place. Days and isolated events stood out as discrete units of time. That being said, this also created a different level of intensity as I was captivated by the flow of daily life in the camp. During my most recent visit to South Africa, I also found myself accepting my ambivalent feelings towards my homeland. I stopped fighting with history. As a result, I was less encumbered by the internal conflicts that so marked my earlier fieldwork. The presence of my voice is muted in this account, in large part, because I was more present in relational ways. My equanimity facilitated a shift in care and attention.

As a result, the ongoing negotiations of living communally became more apparent to me. *Travelogue: Part Two* reveals some of the ways Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor manage relationships in the settlement while honouring their commitments to family members in the surrounding townships. The delicacy of this balancing act is evident. Donald's interactions with George, for example, provide insights into the power dynamics in the settlement. Impulses to place-make are often set against the ongoing tensions and drama that characterise interpersonal relationships in a community in flux. As Donald, Benjamin, and Trevor convey, demonstrating leadership and good judgment in this context is an ongoing challenge.

As before, an awareness of mortality and the precariousness of life seeps through the account, especially as Donald, Christopher, and Trevor experience personal losses. The death of loved ones is a stark reminder that their affections and memories are connected to other places. The ongoing temporality of experience emerges as a thread that runs across this narrative account, linking past, present, and future as Kerby (1991: 18) says, "The present transcends itself in a continual and unbroken anticipation of the future and retention of the past."

8

EPILOGUE

* * *

I am sitting outside on a blustery September day. The pears are falling from the tree above the picnic table. Sheep are braying in the pasture only metres away. The wires on the electrical fence are oscillating in the wind. Periodically, a truck rumbles by, its suspension and tires straining under the weight of grain. Rachel is in the garden picking raspberries. Harvest time. She is comfortably dressed for a Sunday on the farm. She wears a plaid shirt, grey shorts, and leather sandals. There is dirt on her knees.

I met Rachel at an art gallery in Edmonton shortly after my return from my initial fieldwork. I find it remarkable that I am here in her parental home. I marvel that I gained entry to her life; that she has accepted me with such openness and trust; that two lives can so effortlessly mesh.

It had been an awkward homecoming in 2012. I remember feeling uprooted when I returned to Edmonton. I felt adrift between two worlds. In Woodlane Village, I experienced a heightened awareness — explosions of sights, sounds, and smells that amplified the immediacy of life. But the memories of South Africa faded as I shifted from living in the present to reflecting on the past. If memories and emotions are encoded in the sensory dimensions of people and places, what happens when these landmarks, triggers, and relationships are suddenly absent?

I recall feeling desperate to fill the void. I spent the first three

months reconnecting with old friends and making new ones. I was travelling through the lives of those around me. I was present to their stories, listening attentively but resisting the trajectory of togetherness. My relationship with Rachel unfolded in a slow and tender fashion. Even an open place can have borders. I was seeking a different form of connection. I was trying to make a home.

In hindsight I recognise the psychological impacts of the fieldwork and the yearlong process of integrating my experiences. Relationships splintered while others emerged and deepened. I confirmed that I was a stranger to my family, experiencing the sting of rejection. My perspective on my homeland shape-shifted. Anger and grief eventually morphed into serenity. At times, the swings were so dramatic that previous perspectives and insights seemed alien to me — as if they emerged from another life. Somewhere along the line, I fell in love with the country of my birth despite myself and reclaimed a sense of belonging that transcended the complications of family, history, and race. An academic exercise became deeply personal.

* * *

As I think back to my time in Woodlane Village, I am intrigued by the variegated accounts Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor provided of their life journeys. It is challenging to find the narrative threads that resonate within and across their rich and convoluted stories. Lived in the present tense, our conversations and our daily encounters were coherent and understandable, but the overall experience becomes more abstract as immediacy gives way to memory. Perhaps, this is a problem with language itself — the inability of words to convey the depth of human experience. I find myself clinging to convenient dualities and typologies, which are inadequate to capture the betwixt and between nature of living and place-making. The experience of life defies easy categorisation. I am drawn back to the original questions of inquiry.

* * *

PERFORMING HOME & BELONGING

The conjoined twins of home and belonging are polymorphous notions that bend and twist according to the questions posed and the angle of observation. When we speak of home and belonging we are referencing a plurality of experiences since these concepts have psychological, sociocultural, political, and spatial dimensions (Easthope 2004; Rubenstein 2001; Papastergiadis 1998).

At one level, home and belonging are attached to emotions and cognitions that evoke a sense of rootedness to people and places. They speak to the affective and psychological qualities of safety, comfort, trust, and kinship (Cooper 1995; Tuan 1971). The antithesis of belonging is often characterised as estrangement and isolation from self, from relations, from community, from country, from the world-at-large. In some cases, distance and temporal separation from home is experienced as longing and nostalgia. We can carry idealised notions of home in our heads, pining for places that have ceased to exist outside of memory and imagination (Rubenstein 2001).

There is an element of performativity to home. We create home spaces through our rituals and practises, through the acts of living (Blunt and Dowlin 2006; Miller 1998; Young 1997). Prayer, listening to music, daydreaming, meditating, planting a garden, reading a favourite newspaper, cooking pap can create the impression of home even if we are dislocated in relational and geographical ways. Home spaces can be produced even if we are physically and psychologically in flux. Even a prisoner can conjure up a fleeting sense of home through the exercise of memory and imagination. Familiar sights, sounds, and smells can jolt us. In this way, home is embodied. It is rooted in sensory experience as much as it is in thought and feeling (Basso 1996).

Home and belonging are implicated in our social worlds. Home can be imagined as an orbit around a centre point of relationships (Anthias 2006; Massey 1992). Belonging is the quality

of experience and the nature of interpersonal dynamics within the social sphere. Certain behaviours create and recreate conviviality and comfort. Although opposing experiences of home can also exist. Home can be locus of love and safety as well as animosity and violence. It can be a refuge and a place of danger (Cooper 1995; Hooks 2009; Ralph 2009; Tuan 1971; Vega-Gonzalez 2001; Young 1997). When relationships strain we can be set adrift. We can find ourselves on the outside looking in, the rush of alienation filling the void left by previous associations.

Home spaces are intersubjective. They are co-created. At the social level, home and belonging are infused with cultural attributes: language and customs, systems of belief, and ways of knowing and relating (Dovey 1985; Relph 1976). Belonging is often articulated as being in relationship with others who share a common ancestry and heritage, complementary worldviews or shared experiences. In this way, home and belonging have an institutional basis — the core expression of home being the family, a site of relatedness.

Home and belonging are conditioned and shaped by place — by the material and sensory dimensions of the physical world. Our inner worlds can be written onto the outer world and vice versa. We can feel most ourselves when we are in familiar places: the veld, the mountains, the countryside full of grazing cattle, the towns and cities, the house where we grew up. Each location has unique sensory contours although these qualities can be shared by different places (Basso 1996).

Home and belonging are processes and negotiations rather than outcomes. They are journeys, movements along a trajectory of life. As Ingold (2011: 12) states:

To be sentient...is to open up to a world, to yield to its embrace, and to resonate in one's inner being to its illuminations and reverberations. Bathed in light, submerged in sound and rapt in feeling, the sentient body, at once both perceiver and producer, traces the paths of the world's becoming in the very course of contributing to its ongoing renewal.

Woodlane Village is a site for the interplay of micro-political negotiations, interpersonal dynamics, economic exchanges, and place-making activities — all of which are shaped and interpreted through the lens of individual experience and communicated, transmitted, and refashioned through the stories of living.

* * *

LIVING THROUGH STORY

It became apparent to me early in the inquiry that home and belonging are slippery concepts. Our conversations and relational encounters uncovered layered understandings. A question such as “where is home?” can be answered in multiple ways. Sometimes, Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor described home as a place of birth. Other times, they used the concepts metaphorically to describe their lives and the trajectory of their experiences. Often, our reflections on home and belonging veered from recollections of the past to present-day concerns about the conditions in the camp to free-flowing explorations of life and selfhood, touching on our origins and our changing worlds. My own experience of home was equally in flux. My homecoming was a return to the country of my birth as well as a journey into a warren of personal histories and conflicted relationships overlain by the messy politics of South Africa and Canada.

There is no single storyline that connects our experiences. Each telling of a story is attached to an experience; every story is attached to conversations; every conversation is attached to memories; and every memory is attached to feelings. Our stories unfold as the external world resonates with our inner worlds; as sensory perceptions trigger memories and imaginations; and as personal experiences embody social aspects, connecting individual history to the larger histories of place, and evoking questions of home and belonging. The metaphors of journeying and mapmaking come to mind. Stories are both the *process* of moving

along a life trajectory and the *products* of these lines of flight (Jackson 2002).

There is an impression of floating in a stream of crosscutting and intersecting experiences. While the quicksilver nature of home and belonging posed challenges to the exploration and the representation of these concepts, the magic of stories is their ability to allow contradictions to co-exist without forcing their resolution.

That being said, the narrative inquiry challenged the coherence of these stories, revealing edges that prompted further exploration and new discoveries. Our stories capture the tensions and complexities experienced in the seeking and living of home.

* * *

JOURNEYING, WAYFINDING & MAPMAKING

This inquiry started with a curiosity about how people experienced life in a temporary settlement in the heart of a wealthy suburb in Pretoria. *How did they feel about the camp? Where did they come from? How did they end up here? Where was home for them? Where did they feel a sense of belonging?* These were basic queries that initiated an exploration that crossed various sociocultural, emotional, and physical landscapes.

Through relational encounters and conversations, narrative maps of home and belonging were drawn and redrawn. These maps described the dispersal of home-places over storied landscapes. They also traced the paths of movement across these landscapes and hinted at the forces that shaped these trajectories of home. At times, it felt as if we were sketching the narrative equivalents of figure-ground diagrams that showed the variable relationships between spaces of 'belonging' and spaces of 'not belonging'.²⁹

²⁹ Figure-ground diagrams are traditionally used to show the patterned relationships between built and unbuilt spaces within an urban environment. I am using this as an analogy only.

In our storied landscapes, the spaces of ‘not belonging’ are as important to understanding our overall experiences of home as the spaces of ‘belonging’. They are inseparable. And yet these relationships are not fixed. The patterns can change, leading to changes in the stories we tell — in effect redrawing or retelling our narrative maps of *where home is* and thereby influencing our movements across the landscapes of place, memory, imagination, and experience.

Journeys and homecomings do not occur in a static universe. Conflicted worlds can create conflicted stories and vice versa. In Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, Trevor’s and my stories we identify the internal and external forces that act to displace us. We also describe the strategies we deploy to resist this displacement and to make inhospitable environments more welcoming. It is this process of adaptation that makes defining home and belonging so elusive. Human beings have a remarkable ability to transform alien spaces into home spaces. Home (or elements of home) can be dispersed across our social worlds. Home and belonging can be created and maintained in multiple ways and multiple places. Narrative processes are integral to this capacity. They help us establish our bearings and chart our course, shaping decisions and destinations. If homecomings are journeys then stories are maps. Stories situate us in time and space. They give us a sense of *where we come from, where we are, and where we are heading*.

Our journeys can bring us closer or further away from ‘home’ in the spatial (place/location), social, emotional and/or cultural sense. In some instances, our routes and our aims integrate all of these dimensions. In others, our movements privilege one dimension over another. For example, leaving one’s homeland can be necessary to maintain financial obligations to loved ones. The result is a journey that takes one further away from one dimension of home (place), while bringing one closer in another (relationships). Home is not a set point of departure or a destination as much as it is a process of making adjustments and

corrections to maintain proximity to one or all of the dimensions of home and belonging. Fortier (2003:10) speaks of “motions of attachment”, whereby home is created through movement:

It is lived in motions: the motions of journeying between homes, the motions of hailing ghosts from the past, the motions of leaving or staying put, of ‘moving on’ or ‘going back’, the motions of cutting or adding, the motions of continual re-processing of what home is/was/might have been. But ‘home’ is also re-membered by attaching it, even momentarily, to a place where we strive to *make* home and to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way.

Our narrative accounts speak of life journeys that started in places of origin and then moved outwards to other localities driven by economic and social imperatives. I was born in Bloemfontein before immigrating to Canada in 1976. Donald, Christopher, and Benjamin trace their beginnings to the land in Pretoria East. Home is envisioned as a place of ancestral roots, a place where their umbilical cords were planted at birth, a place where their predecessors are buried in soil that has since been built over. They reference a time before the countryside became the city. Trevor draws a connection to his birthplace in rural Zimbabwe. These imaginaries of home evoke nostalgia, speaking of a bygone era of traditions and values. They recall memories of a time when the cycles of life and death were tied to the same land — where the deceased were wrapped in cowhide and interred in the same ground upon which they were born. Rural life is described as peaceful and neighbourly in comparison to the hard-edged anonymity of the city.

Tensions emerge in our depictions. The centripetal and centrifugal forces of life are exposed. We describe the disruptive influences of urbanisation and globalisation on our home-worlds. Politics and economics compelled us to seek livelihoods away from

our families. Changes in relationships also induced mobility. Orbits and cycles of movement emerged and were reinforced. The following examples highlight some of these life journeys and the dynamics that have influenced the direction of travel.

* * *

TRAJECTORIES OF HOME

1.

Christopher and Donald describe the disruptions that occurred when their father died. Christopher moved to Winterveld with his mother. Donald, in turn, was pushed into a life of crime as a means of supporting his family. These shifts were set against the urbanisation of the land, the transformation of farms into suburbs, and the displacement of people from Pretoria East to the *lokasies*, the euphemistic term for the impoverished black settlements that surround Pretoria. Donald describes the encroachment of roads and houses into the jungle.

A violent home life became the impetus for Christopher to flee the townships to squat in Pretoria East. The bushes became a refuge from an abusive stepfather. The scrubland was a no man's land, a place he could disappear. His movement becomes a form of resistance. He describes leading a double-life as a naughty boy on the streets of Moreleta Park and the good son when visiting the townships. Each place required different rules of engagement. He identifies numerous life events that compelled his move to and from the land in Moreleta Park: the death of his father; leaving the home of his stepfather as a teenager; the termination of his relationship with his wife; seeking refuge after a knife attack; returning to Soshanguve after the suicide of his brother-in-law.

The demarcation between belonging and not belonging was established early in his life. Christopher's stepfather treated him with contempt and authorities harassed him due to his Malawian heritage. The divisions based on race were mirrored in the systems

of influx control (IDs and spot checks) and the banishment of black people to the periphery of Pretoria. Apartheid created a geo-spatial cleavage between places of home and places of work. Blacks are portrayed as cheap labour, as vital to the building and maintenance of the very city where they are unwelcome. In later years, the police and security services amplified the exclusion when they drove squatters off the land at the behest of the municipality. The homeowners associations fomented the hostility by seeking legal injunctions against the metro for their failure to impose a lasting solution on the informal settlement. They frame Woodlane Village as a contagion in an otherwise pristine neighbourhood. The predominately white complexion of suburbia in Pretoria taints the opposition, although this is a class war as much as it is a racial one.

Dualities and tensions emerge in Christopher's description of home-places. The *bosveld* in Moreleta Park is presented as a hideaway and a hunting ground. The cover of the bushes offers freedom from surveillance while also posing risks. A solitary man is vulnerable to gang attack and to the unstable loyalties of accomplices. On this land, Christopher is both predator and prey. At the same time, Soshanguve is also depicted in contradictory ways. The township is a site of community and family, but also a setting for significant emotional and physical betrayals: the infidelity of his wife and his assaults on her; the injuries he sustained when he was attacked by a friend; and the stabbing Chris perpetrated in self-defence and retaliation. There is a tension between the yearning for comfort and the perceptions of threat. Forces pull and push him between the two localities, as he reacts to changing exigencies. Christopher's story is particularly peripatetic.

2.

Donald repeats this double-barrelled description of South Africa. Violence fills his narrative account. It corrodes the association of home with safety and trust. Donald's refrain of good Samaritans being murdered over pennies emphasises this point. The country has changed and ubuntu is no more. Although his comments on

human nature reflect his experiences in prison as much as they are critiques of South Africa. In Donald's stories it is not always easy to distinguish his recollections of the past from his observations of the present. Regardless, there is unsettledness in the accounts of home and belonging, hinting at the fragility and conditionality of these concepts. Life is precarious and so is the order of things.

Donald's connection to home is severed by his incarceration. The result is a series of movements within the penal system — from one unit to another and from one jail to another — that take him further away from loved ones in both the physical and emotional sense. He enters another world with its own set of codes and ciphers. Gang life is a numbers game. The barbaric realities of prison reconfigure his understanding of humanity. They illuminate people's capacity for loyalty/betrayal and creative destruction, while affirming for Donald the larger spiritual forces at play in the universe. Belonging becomes a matter of survival. In the world of prison gangs, blood and brotherhood protects and kills. He discovers in himself the ability to make a home wherever he is. He journeys beyond jail on flights of fancy.

His release from prison triggers a trajectory of reintegration as he reunites with family and redefines his place within society. He is a changing man facing the changing realities of a post-apartheid South Africa. The result is an ongoing process of building and sustaining familial and community connections. It is a homecoming — a tumbling and twisting journey with an identifiable point of departure but no clear destination other than the terminus of mortality. He shares the challenges of living in community with others, the ongoing interpersonal negotiations with strangers, neighbours, and kin. There is ambivalence in his characterisation of Woodlane Village. Donald describes the settlement as a work camp rather than as a home-like environment. Despite this criticism, he is engaged in activities and practises that imbue the camp with the qualities of home. These place-making impulses are set against his efforts to build a life in Mpumalanga where he owns property and feels welcome.

3.

Trevor's journey to Woodlane Village traverses a complex physical and psychosocial landscape. It reaches back to his homeland of Zimbabwe and then crosses the South African wilderness to Woodlane Village. It points to the wayfinding dimension of home as he charts the uncertain territory spanning two worlds. He experiences the classic double bind of the economic migrant who leaves home in order to better provide for those he left behind. There is elasticity to his conceptualisation of home. It stretches to include Masvingo and Pretoria East and the relationships that give emotional resonance to these places. The distinction between a place of dwelling and a home-place blurs, especially as he works to improve the living conditions in Woodlane Village. The proximity of his brothers and their wives makes the settlement feel home-like. At the same time, he is mindful of the responsibilities he has to the family members that remain in Zimbabwe. His life straddles two worlds. If blood is an index of home and belonging then Trevor is anchored to both Masvingo where his parents and children reside and to Woodlane Village where his wife and brothers live. He still longs for his homeland, a feeling made more acute when he is reminded of the cycles of life and death that continue in his absence. His grandmother passed away during my follow-up visit in 2013. He was unable to attend her funeral. I recall his heartache and disappointment. In these moments, home ceases to be an abstraction.

4.

Benjamin's life also spans multiple places as he maintains his obligations to his wife and sons who live in Hammanskraal and to his sisters who live in Mpumalanga. His trajectory of home takes him from Pretoria East to the surrounding black settlements and back. Unlike Donald, Christopher, and Trevor he expresses less ambivalence about staying in Woodlane Village. Pretoria East is a place of birth, but his attachment to this locality is extremely

pragmatic. Living in the camp is part of his overall plan to provide economic stability to his family. Pretoria East is a beating heart, recirculating the lifeblood of relations and resources to and from other home-places such as Hammanskraal and Mpumalanga. Belonging exists within a web of relationships and responsibilities, unfixed from one locality.

5.

My trajectory of home takes me back to the country of my birth. It is a homecoming that is an internal journey as much as it is an external one. My flight path takes me through landscapes of hurt and confusion — provoking queries about the emotional and psychological nature of home. My immigration from South Africa in 1976 set in motion an interior displacement that eventually manifested in a troubled childhood and an ambivalent sense of belonging. My reflections provide insights into the psychic impacts of losing the security of home and the way in which this unrest can be carried forward in life. They also raise provocations about family stories and the challenges of speaking truth to experience. My return to South Africa exposed family orientations and dynamics that shaped my immigration experience and ultimately fed into moments of estrangement — the underpinnings and workings of which have only recently become apparent to me. It hints at the ways belonging is framed within the context of personal stories. My experiences also elucidated the pattern of thinking and ambivalent attachments that have shaped my conceptualisation of home and belonging. My homecoming was a process of rediscovering both the painful and the affirming parts of my narrative and my responsibility as the author of my own unfolding story. It has been a return to the moving target of myself — a process of grieving as well as of rebirth.

* * *

THE PHYSICS OF MOTION

Our narrative accounts speak of a movement from origins that destabilises the notion of home. It is as if the taken-for-granted associations to home — places, emotions, and relationships — have themselves been set in motion, creating patterns of cause and effect that permanently upset previous configurations. In the narrative accounts of Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor these changes correspond with the shift from childhood to manhood. All four participants describe a halcyon period that was disrupted when they had to fend for themselves and their relations. Economic imperatives separated them from home and their families. In a globalised world these pressures are particularly acute. This economic displacement is entrenched in Pretoria because of the absence of affordable housing in the city. But it also reflects an established pattern of men leaving the countryside to work in the mines and the industrial centres in South Africa. Gauteng Province has a particular magnetism, pulling economic migrants from the hinterland and from neighbouring countries. “Hunger is a wanderer. Plenty sits still.”

The result is the paradox of ‘letting go’ in order to ‘hold on.’ Trevor’s migration story illuminates this tension most clearly when he speaks of the sacrifices he had to make in order to leave Zimbabwe for the greener pastures of South Africa. Although, Christopher also speaks of this dynamic when he describes leaving his wife in order to maintain his connection to his children. In his case, the letting go was two-fold. Initially, it was a decision to interrupt the domestic violence to which he was a party by moving back to the bushes. But later, his separation was driven by economic necessity as he says tells his sons:

Hey guys, never mind me. I know you miss me. And I miss you too. But we can't just stay over here, all of us, staring at each other's faces and then no profit. Maybe I will succeed one day. And it's whereby I can come home and do some better stuff as I promised. I feel for you guys. I have to build you a home, a place you will call home. But without working, where will I get the power or the money to do that? There is no chance.

The narrative accounts describe the various push and pull factors that led Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor to Pretoria East and Woodlane Village. Pretoria East may be a magnet, but the countervailing forces of loving people who live elsewhere offset the pull of economic opportunity. The direction of travel is not unidirectional. Home is dispersed geographically. The result is an oscillation of travel as they move back and forth from Woodlane Village to other locations. These journeys and the place-making endeavours that occur in these localities unsettle the fixity and singularity of a place called home.

* * *

DYNAMIC TENSIONS

The narratives provide contradictory descriptions of Woodlane Village, highlighting the tensions and polarisations that shape people's experiences of living in the settlement. Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor reference positive changes in the settlement, charting the dramatic transformations that have occurred from the days of squatting in holes scattered across an open field to the present day of residing in numbered shacks in organised rows. Contingent lives have become more predictable and stable. The conditions in the settlement have improved progressively since the original court ruling. The relationships between the settlement and the surrounding institutions are also

stronger, but there are still pockets of open hostility. The churches have switched from being opponents to allies, although the property owners in Moreleta Park continue to agitate for the relocation of the settlement. They paint a picture of the site as a public health threat and a place of chaos. Shortly after my return to Canada, the homeowners were in court again seeking the removal of the camp. A September 13, 2013 article in Pretoria East Rekord itemises their grievances: the lack of access control; shoddy security at the gates; holes in fences and shortcuts through the fields; refuse piling up at garbage bins; contaminated water flowing from the camp; crime spilling out into the neighbourhoods. Their concerns are not without grounding, but their observations are a decidedly one-sided take on a multi-sided story.

That being said Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor provide contradictory assessments of life in the camp, describing the environment as familiar yet alien; organised yet unruly; a community as well as a no man's land.

In many ways their comments are critiques of the uncertain and conflicted nature of South Africa. The legacy of apartheid and the rise of neoliberalism have created and sustained polarisations, leading to contrasts and displacements. While South Africa has had a democratically elected government since 1994, the decades of racial segregation and the centuries of white control have not only shaped the physical form of the land and its inhabitation, but also the imagination of it (Benningfield 2006). As Donald says:

Here, you will find children who have been raised in holes in the jungle. When they say 'home,' they are referring to this place. And when this land is turned into a suburb and they no longer have a home, they will dig another hole in another jungle. That's how people live.

The dispossessions that occurred during apartheid split the landscape, so that images of home are often "dependent on memory, detached from the contemporary state of the physical

place” (Beningfield 2006: 6). For Donald, Christopher, and Benjamin, the sense of Pretoria East as home is partly a sentimental glimpse of what it long ago ceased to be. As Donald told me during a drive through Moreleta Park:

Look around you, Pieter. It grows to be this town where I don't even know which street to go, but I was born here. Because the jungle, it just crossed that way and that way and that way. Now it is a town, but I don't know which street is which, because it was planned by somebody who didn't even know what the jungle was.

Political and economic realities in South Africa have buttressed the distinctions between the rich and the poor (Foster 2012), between insiders and outsiders, between citizens and foreigners. This fragmentation is visible in the built environment with the gated communities and fortifications, and the dependency on armed security and surveillance (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008). Despite the promises of societal transformation, an economic form of segregation has taken hold with a burgeoning underclass that is increasingly losing the hope of upward mobility.³⁰ As Christopher laments:

There is this slogan from the Bible. It says, 'Knock. Doors will be open. Ask. You will be given.' You know? But it is very hectic when it comes to whereby you knock and doors are not open. You ask. They don't give.

Even the initial court order with its conditions around tenancy reinforces these distinctions. It is ironic that the Court in the interests of defending human rights has replicated the ethos of apartheid with its emphasis on influx control. There is an ongoing

³⁰ For a riveting account of the confluence of poverty and violence in post-apartheid South Africa see the novel “Thirteen Cents” by K. Sello Duiker (2000).

tension around who belongs and who does not, especially as it relates to the occupancy within the settlement and on the land itself. This situation has been exacerbated by the perception that migrants from other African countries are flooding South Africa and stealing jobs. Shadings of xenophobia surface in the narrative accounts. Foreigners and strangers are associated with crime and disorder and with the breakdown of solidarity and reciprocity. As Benjamin observes:

The problem is that we are mixed cultures. I think if it was only South Africans living here then this place would never have been like this. If you try to talk to the people from elsewhere, they don't listen.

The notions of home and belonging are intensely political. Contestations over land — “how it should be inhabited, how cities should develop, how the rural areas should be used and cultivated” — are central to the reimagination and remaking of South Africa (Benningfield 2006: 3). In many ways, there is a tension between the ‘world as it is’ and the ‘world as it ought to be.’ In South Africa, the interests of a prosperous minority continue to be set against those of an impoverished majority. As Benjamin says, “There is no new South Africa. It is the same place. The only difference is that in those days we were supposed to walk on the other side of the street.” This is a ghost of the past. It is contrasted against the promise of the rainbow nation. Woodlane Village is a site for competing visions — a current reality based on privilege and segregation juxtaposed with a preferred future of equity and inclusion. As Donald comments, “Your comfort is somebody else's discomfort.”

The narrative accounts of Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor conjure up these contrasting visions. Each account is a series of memory sketches and imaginations. Some of these vignettes are scathing indictments of the pressures acting against home and belonging such as violence, racism, and jealousies.

Others are visions of future possibilities, hinting at the promise of new ways of being. As bell hooks (1991: 40, 147) says, “Memory need not be a passive reflection, a nostalgic longing for things to be as they once were; it can function as a way of knowing and learning from that past”; it can “illuminate and transform the present.” Benjamin’s conviction that he is “building history” in Woodlane Village speaks to the power of forward-looking stories.

Donald, Benjamin and Trevor maintain a hopeful orientation about the future that is synchronised with the positive developments in the settlement. Living in Woodlane Village has allowed them to maintain a tenuous foothold in Pretoria East — and with that has come a measure of economic stability, which allows them to honour their obligations to distant family.

These aspirations are juxtaposed with the awareness that forces within and outside of the village threaten to upset their stability. The relative safety of the settlement has attracted individuals seeking to exploit the environment for their own personal gain. Entrepreneurs are taking advantage of the unregulated space to run illegal liquor and gambling establishments, which have negative impacts on community dynamics. Criminals are also treating the settlement as a staging area for unlawful activities. The influx of people seeking opportunity has strengthened the perception of transiency and disconnectedness. Donald and Christopher describe how living next to strangers has broken down the feeling of neighbourliness. In their words, “It is God for us all. Every man for himself.” There is a darker side to this greener pasture. As Christopher says:

My family and friends in Soshanguve think, “Oh, Christopher is staying at town. He is living a beautiful life over there.” There is no beautiful life over here. It is like in hell as you can see.

The normalisation of violence is evident in the narrative accounts. Exposure to violence, either through victimisation or vicarious

experience, compels them to be vigilant against perceived threats. My relatives live in a fortified house with multiple alarm systems. Donald resides in compound enclosed by bamboo fencing and wire. He carries a Taser and wants to buy a handgun. Christopher and Trevor stay off the streets at night to avoid trouble — in some cases locking themselves in their shacks. Benjamin relies on dogs to protect his property. Guards and perimeter fencing secure Woodlane Village.

Walls and wires demarcate home spaces. They announce to the world that this area is occupied or owned. As Benjamin observes, “The fence says this is home. It says someone lives here.” Donald mirrors this sentiment when he says, “So you will find I am living in this birdcage. That’s where I am. And I like it in this birdcage, because you can’t just invade it like you want to.”

Partitions provide security, but they also isolate individuals, reinforcing the distinctions between insiders and outsiders. The result is fertile ground for the anonymity and otherness in which violence thrives. Donald supports this point when he says:

In this camp, people are living in groups according to their understandings: me and you here and that one and that one over there. That is how we live and interact. We are in groups. In a way we are a community. But like I told you, we rarely intervene on each other’s behalf. One day you may hear me crying. Will you knock on my door? No.

Donald and Christopher draw a distinction between life in the bushes/settlement and in the townships in part along the dividing line between strangers and acquaintances. The settlement is described as a hostile place because of the absence of networks of support. The term ‘no man’s land’ captures both the liminal nature of the camp as a transitional zone between city and veld and as a place where people do not know each other. This condition of being out of relationship with others is seen as promoting the unruliness in the settlement. Donald and Christopher warn about

the predators who hide during the day and hunt at night. All of the participants mention the difficulties of building agreements among people who come from diverse backgrounds.

At the same time, all of the participants describe instances where victimisation occurs within families and amongst friends and “within circles of intermediate relationships, involving people who are not family or friends but are also not complete strangers.” (CSVSR 2007: 9) For example, high rates of assault and domestic abuse are a concern in the village as they are in other parts of South Africa. In a context of violence, home and belonging are held in a dynamic tension between the yearning for connection/loyalty and the perceptions of threat/distrust. The result is the fraying of the moral and social fabric of home and community, especially as violence becomes normalised. There are jungles and there are the laws of the jungle.

* * *

HOME & PLACE-MAKING

As the previous sections illustrate Woodlane Village is a site of competing visions and realities set within a larger contested landscape. As Beningfeld (2006: 10) writes:

Landscape in South Africa emerges as a way of seeing, understanding, claiming, narrating, representing, and remaking land that is still evolving. It forms part of the contemporary struggle with the transformation and reconceptualization of a place and a series of images which are simultaneously products of past practises and histories and the material which is being negotiated in the imagination and making of an altered landscape.

The informal settlement exists as a transitional zone between prime and marginal space; between perceptions of order and disorder; and between the legacy of segregation and the promise of

integration. It embodies the ongoing race and class struggle in Pretoria East to acquire and preserve the makings of home: *safety; identity; love and affinity; continuity of life and ways of being.*

Advocacy and community upliftment efforts have transformed the settlement from a state of precariousness to one of increasing stability. The formal efforts to enhance living conditions are complemented by the informal place-making activities of residents. The narrative accounts provide rich and nuanced examples of how a sense of community is emerging in Woodlane Village through the practises of living, working, and playing. Donald runs a busy tailoring business and mediates conflicts as the Chair of the Executive Committee. Trevor is nurturing the development of an active football league. Benjamin works tirelessly to address issues in the camp, while tending to his decorative garden. Colin and Denise are continuing to push for the vision of a village as a valued and contributing part of Pretoria East. All of these actions and more are creating structure, predictability, and security within a settlement that was characterised as being rowdy and dangerous.

Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor have created *home-spaces* that provide safety and order, while also facilitating the social and material interactions that create and sustain identity and the continuity of life. I am using the term *home-space* to refer to a site for daily routines and rituals of living — a site with practical, symbolic as well as emotional and aesthetic qualities. It exists somewhere between the sense of ‘being home’ and ‘not being home.’ It is a space that evokes many of the qualities of home, although it may lack some of the attachments such as connection to history and place, cultural affiliations, familial relations, and emotional resonance. It is a *home-in-the-making*, a transitional space that through personal investment, negotiation, and endurance may eventually become a site for home and belonging.

In exploring home and belonging, this narrative inquiry explored the dynamic space between ‘being home’ and ‘not being home’. Many of the apparent contradictions that emerged in our stories came from our attempts to describe our movements

towards and away from places that were *home-like* in some ways and *not home-like* in others. These movements were a form of agency and attempts to create home and belonging in the face of changing circumstances and exigencies outside our control. In some cases, this necessitated emotional and material investments in more than one locality — with individuals making homes and/or home-spaces in more than one setting.

Porteous (1976) repeats this idea when he draws a distinction between the “felt home” where loyalties and emotional attachments reside, and the “euphemistic home,” which is a place of dwelling and necessity rather than one of belonging.

The betwixt and between nature of Woodlane Village and South Africa compels ambivalent attachments and distributed efforts to place-make. Despite the positive developments in the settlement, the spectre of impermanence and change still hangs over the community. Economic realities and uncertainties induce the hedging of bets and the straddling of localities.

Sampson and Gifford (2010) define place-making as the act of seeking out and attributing value to places. It involves how one understands oneself in relation to these places. Seen in this light, home-making is a profound and intimate form of place-making. Making a home is a narrative and imaginative exercise as much as it is a physical and social one. Places become home when they are invested with meaning and feeling.

This echoes the insights of Michel de Certeau who distinguishes space from place. According to de Certeau, place is composed of fixed elements that are stable. For example, a particular landmark can only occupy one location in a city. Space, in contrast, is generated by the way a place is used (or practised). These uses are not fixed, meaning that space is ambiguous, unstable and changeable (Magee 2007). “Space is a practised place” (De Certeau 1984: 117). De Certeau expands on this conceptualisation by bringing forth a textual metaphor to the practice of places. He likens walking in a city to reading. In both cases, meaning is generated in movement. It is through narrative,

the movement between words, that text (place) is transformed into story (space) (Magee 2007). Similarly, it is through narrative (use) that place (Woodlane Village) is transformed into space (story).

1.

Within Woodlane Village, Donald has created a space for domesticity as well as commerce. His stand includes a courtyard surrounded by a bamboo fence where he meets customers and entertains guests, many of whom are connected to his previous life growing up near Wingate Park Country Club. A coniferous tree towers outside the entrance to his enclosure. Donald planted it as a sapling when he relocated to the settlement in 2007. There is a rose bush inside his compound and he recently acquired a pear tree and several other plants that he is nurturing in pots. He feeds the stray cats that seek shelter in his compound.

The courtyard includes a fire pit and a sitting area made of bricks inlaid in a circular pattern. Music is often playing in this space. The soundscape is associated with personal history, relationships, and memories. "Home is where the music is." As Dewey (1934: 236) articulates:

Music having sound as its medium...expresses in a concentrated way the shocks and instabilities, the conflicts and resolutions, that are the dramatic changes enacting upon the more enduring background of nature and human life. The tension and the struggle has its gatherings of energy, its discharges, its attacks and defenses, its mighty warrings and its peaceful meetings, its resistances and resolutions, and out of these things music weaves its web.

During my most recent visit, Donald upgraded the roof of his shack and he is planning to replace the fence with new bamboo. He is also committed to improving the living conditions for his fellow neighbours in the camp. Every night, numerous people knock on

Donald's gate to voice their concerns and to seek his counsel. These relational, material, and symbolic investments signify a commitment on his part to make his immediate surroundings and the camp more home-like.

At the same time, he has renovated his property in Mpumalanga and is saving his money in the hopes of purchasing a vehicle that would allow him to commute from there to his work at the NG Moreleta Church. Outside the gate to his property in Mpumalanga, Donald has planted a white flower to let his ancestors know this is home.

2.

Benjamin and Trevor are supporting households in distant locations while making substantial contributions to the development of the community in Woodlane Village. Trevor's commitment to promoting football as a positive outlet for men in the camp has reduced the cultural rivalries and enhanced solidarity. Benjamin's garden is a symbol of efforts to establish pride of place. As he says:

If I didn't put this garden like this then this place would be very, very bad. I just put the soil there and I just planted the flowers. People must not put rubbish anymore. Because if there is rain you will find it will reek. You see? I try to keep the environment clean. If this street is dirty you couldn't stay here. You couldn't.

Benjamin and Trevor approach their work in the settlement with an ethic of leadership and an eye to the future. They recognise improvements in the living conditions in the settlement, while remaining mindful of the threats to the current order of things. They are both making home-spaces in Woodlane Village while devoting material and emotional resources elsewhere — to their home-places in Hammanskraal and Zimbabwe, respectively.

* * *

HOMEcomings

Much of the anthropological literature on home skirts the emotional heart of this concept, choosing instead to focus on the semantic, ontological, existential, and symbolic representations of home. My inquiry has illuminated how experiences of home are at the core of our most intimate relationships and emotional attachments. These experiences have significant impacts on how we imagine and feel about ourselves, shaping our identities and our life trajectories. The idealisation of home as a site for acceptance and safety can be countered by experiences of conditionality and marginalisation.

Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor describe the shifting emotional conditions that configure their sense of home and set in motion life trajectories. Christopher references a number of betrayals that pushed him to the edges of relationships and led him to living on the margins in Pretoria East. His stories are saturated with trauma and emotional volatility. Donald shares stories of how his prolonged incarceration impacted his connections to family. There is an undertone of grief, loss, and surrender in his narratives. Donald and Christopher speak of the stabilising influence of their mother and of the power of forgiveness to heal relationships and to restore a sense of home. They reference family dynamics of acceptance anchored around faith. Benjamin speaks of a relationship with his first wife that broke apart due to infidelity and redefined his responsibilities as a man and as a father. Trevor reflects on a supportive upbringing that instilled in him the spiritual strength to leave his home in Zimbabwe in order to better provide for his family. My narrative speaks to experiences of displacement and how family conflicts can transform homes into places of ambivalence and uncertainty. All of these stories show home to be a “porous, open intersection of emotions and social relations” (Blunt and Dowlin 2006: 27).

Our stories invoke the notion of *homecomings* — the return to places of origin or to roots after periods of absence. In many ways, homecomings involve a movement in two directions. On one hand, they involve a regressive ‘holding on’ to memories of relationships and localities imbued with emotional significance. On the other hand, they also involve the progressive ‘letting go’ of these attachments: the acceptance of change and the willingness to rediscover the self and home in the present (Joannidis 2012). As such, homecomings entail the bittersweet paradox of recognising that the homes to which we return are forever lost — “highlighting a disjuncture between ‘home’ as dream and ‘home’ as actually experienced” (Ní Laoire 2008: 37). Life is a series of small deaths and rebirths. Everything flows and nothing abides. As Ní Laoire (2008: 46) states:

This involves a destabilisation of the very notion of home as static and foundational, as a place one leaves and either forgets or later returns to. It means that home loses its fixed and foundational character and becomes re-imagined in terms of mobility and transformation. Home is not the same place you left, or the place you thought you left. Not only does the place itself change constantly, but imaginings of the place and what it means are reproduced. This disrupts the linear or circular narrative of ‘home-leaving followed by homecoming’.

Seen in this light, homecomings are a form of positive disintegration. The loss of previous ways of being and the mourning of these losses opens up the possibility for regeneration and the creation of new home-places. Our orientation to our homecomings is critical as we author our stories — and as we honour not only the telling and living, but also the retelling and reliving of our experiences (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). “To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live these events in

passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination" (Jackson 2002: 15).

In my case the inquiry has torn open wounds in my own narrative, creating opportunities for healing. My experiences of home have been tension-filled and these dynamics are mirrored in my inner life. My childhood imprinted a set of rules for belonging and an understanding of myself that placed home slightly out of reach. The rules were simple: belonging is uncertain and conditional; home is a place where I am welcome one moment and unwelcome the next; best to monitor my behaviour and remain vigilant for emotional threats.

Even as children we author our own stories, cobbling together understandings of ourselves through our interactions with others. In extreme circumstances we can internalise conflicts, contradictions, and reflected hostilities, creating and reinforcing patterns of thought and attachments, which impose conditions around the notion of belonging. My return to South Africa illuminated my marginalising narrative of home and belonging — a story patterned by earlier experiences and then sustained through repetition, rumination, and re-enactment.

* * *

BELONGING & STORIES TO LIVE BY

In everyday life, we are so actively engaged in confirming and reaffirming our sense of belonging that we are unaware of the ongoing negotiations required to do so (Lattanzi Shutika 2011). Often, it is only the unanticipated transgressions that reveal the spaces, places, and identities to which we do not belong and to which we cannot gain access and full participation (ibid). As Anthias (2008: 8) says, the imaginings of belonging "disguise the fissures, the losses, the absences, the borders within them."

If home is a storied place then belonging is tied to our ability to express and understand the narratives that bind us in communion with others. But some stories threaten these bonds. There are

narratives we cannot tell, even when they are consciously known to us. As Trevor reminds me: “There are stories we don’t cherish.” Some stories get pushed under because of pain, shame, denial, and self-interest. Some stories are silenced, because their telling would incur social death.

There is a tension between belonging and not belonging. ‘Belonging’ implies a state of inclusion and affiliation; ‘not belonging’ is a matter of realising that this state is arbitrary and based on the exclusion of specific identities and histories (Martin and Mohanty 1986). This presupposes the presence of boundaries that are constructed through social interactions and the practises of living. “Boundaries are the point where group similarities end and differences begin” (Southerton 2002: 173). Belonging in a group therefore requires ‘boundary work’ — the ongoing creation, negotiation, and maintenance of the normative and symbolic frameworks that define ‘us’ in relation to ‘them’ (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992; Jenkins 1996).

The narrative accounts provide numerous examples of dynamics and conditions that circumscribe identities and sustain distinctions between ‘who belongs’ and ‘who doesn’t belong’. In narrative inquiry these constructions of identity are referred to as “stories to live by” (Clandinin 2013).³¹ Donald recounts the bullying in the church where he works and how these experiences parallel those of prison life. The following excerpt illustrates how everyday encounters shape how he imagines his place in the world:

And now today at church somebody started this funny talk again. Now I find out lately by the third-person that no...this is no longer about people getting cross with me. This is kind of like pressing my buttons, because I can see by their looks, by the way they act.

³¹ This refers to the narratives people construct and tell themselves to define who they are for themselves and for others (McAdams et al 2006).

This has happened before. You know in jail many times I found people making jokes about our place where we stayed in Winterveld by our young sister.

“Hey, hey! You know in Winterveld? In Winterveld you find somebody sitting in a Kombi with his hands hanging out like he is driving. Haha! He is not driving. It’s a toilet.”

Now this is a joke by *place*. And I know it is pointed at me. They are just too scared to ridicule me directly. I have broken bones for that. All the people laugh.

“I am not *Winterveld*. I am *Donald*...so you might...”

They might laugh as best they can but one of these guys might just make a wrong funny move...then I get to break their bones. But now I am seeing the same behaviour at the church. But I think, God willing, Pieter, I am just going to be patient as best as I can be and ignore these things. Because I am not going to be the joke out there everyday.

As illustrated above, experiences of home and belonging are bound up with identity. “Identity involves individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labelling, myths of origin and myths of destiny with associated strategies and identifications.” (Anthias 2008:8). The notion of belonging, in turn, is associated with the experiences and practices of creating and maintaining social bonds. Home is the expression of these two concepts within a place or a locality.

Differentials in power and privilege shape the dynamics inclusion and exclusion, reinforcing the patterns of mobility and fixity, the push and pull factors of migration. Homes can be preserved, obliterated, overwritten, and recreated. The built environment can reinforce social and cultural divides — from the micro-political configurations of the family home with its gendered spaces to the macro-political design of cities and territories.

In Woodlane Village, belonging is being contested, in part, along dividing lines of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Within the camp, the mixture of ethnicities has contributed to tensions over belonging with many of the South African residents considering their

neighbours from other countries to be interlopers. This is a narrative that reflects the larger discourse on illegal immigration in South Africa. As Christopher says:

You can't just come from Zimbabwe or from Lesotho or from Malawi and then act big towards us — the peoples who were born here. You see the stuff happening here is very upsetting and if you try to believe them you will think twice. These peoples are not truthful. They are *unbelievable*, because you can see right through them. You can see with your naked eye we are living with the wrong peoples in this camp.

The insider/outsider discourse also extends to the framing of the settlement as a whole and draws on historical patterns of race and class relations. The symbolic representation of Woodlane Village as an encampment cordoned off from surrounding neighbours and juxtaposed against the hulking mass of the adjacent NG Moreleta Church sends a powerful message of separateness. Opponents refer to the place as *Plastic View*, reinforcing the negative perceptions of the camp as a haven for squatters and criminals and hence justifying the exclusion and expulsion of the people living there. In contrast, the Dredges and other advocates refer to the settlement as a *village*, invoking positive connotations of the vibrancy and diversity of life and the integration of the community within Pretoria East.

In each instance, definitions of belonging correspond to arbitrary determinations of who has a right to occupy the land (Bohlin 1998). As Vertovec (2001: 578) summarises:

Each habitat or locality represents a range of identity-conditioning factors: these include histories and stereotypes of local belonging and exclusion, geographies of cultural difference and class/ethnic segregation, racialised socio-economic hierarchies, degree and type of collective mobilisation, access to and nature of resources, and perceptions and regulations surrounding rights and duties.

I am compelled again by the metaphor of figure-ground diagrams.³² The narrative maps of Woodlane Village include spaces of ‘belonging’ that are contiguous to spaces of ‘not belonging.’ The figure and the ground are connected *and* separated by the boundaries between them. As Cohen (1985: 120) explains:

By definition, the boundary marks the beginning and the end of a community...boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished.

It is tempting to freeze the narrative accounts of home and belonging in a black-and-white past, but to do so overlooks the possibilities that emerge from friction. As Heidegger (1971: 356) says, “A boundary is not that at which something stops but...is that from which something begins its presencing.”

New meanings emerge in the dynamic spaces between people, places, and things — in the interstices between the private and the public; between experience and imagination; between the psyche and the social (Bhabha 1994). At the edge of every frame is a borderland (Jackson 2002). It is a terrain where internal and external ways of knowing rub against each other, where recursive and discursive processes of storytelling move across the boundaries of sociality, temporality, and locality. It is an intersubjective territory where “singular selves are simultaneously part of a commonality, sole but also several, not only islands, but part of the main” (Jackson 1998: 6).

³² In figure-ground diagrams, buildings are depicted in black (solids) and open spaces in white (voids). The solids define the voids and in doing so emphasise their existence as objects unto themselves. The open spaces are as much a part of the overall design as the buildings whose shapes define them. This is a useful visual tool for seeing the co-existence of the parts and the whole. I used figure-ground diagrams as an analogy only.

* * *

BORDERS & MARGINS

Woodlane Village challenges the historical pattern of exclusion in Pretoria East with the black working class commuting from the outlying townships to supply labour to the city. Everyday, the buses and trains are bursting with men and women, many of whom travel great distances to get to places of employment. They are kept at the periphery of urban life, relegated to “slipping in and out of the city at dawn and dusk” (Beningfield 2006: 209). Although the racial dimension is less pronounced since the demise of apartheid, the spatial expression of inequality continues (Abdi 2011; Naidoo 2011; Omomowo 2011).

Woodlane Village defies the ghettoization that pushes the poor out of sight and out of mind. The presence of the settlement in the heart of suburbia is a provocation that questions the politics of belonging. “Post-apartheid South Africa has given a new centrality to the figure of the migrant and that of the stranger in particular” (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008: 23). They are perceived as threats to safety and security and therefore warrant surveillance and the use of physical and symbolic force. The narrative accounts confront these representations by shattering the anonymity and stereotypes of otherness. They bring voice to the margins, challenging the presumption of separateness, and in doing so thrust the concerns of the periphery into the heart of the debate over home and belonging. These agitations do not surface in the comfortable middle of suburban life; they are emerging at the edges, at the places of friction. As bell hooks (1991) identifies, the margin is a site for openness and resistance. It is a place that offers “one the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (150). It is contrasted with the centre or the middle, which is seen as a place of race and class domination (Walker 1999).

Inquiring into home and belonging provokes reflection on the larger context in which these concepts are lived and expressed. It has become apparent to me that for Donald, Christopher, and Benjamin home and belonging exist at the intersection of the various forces that have shaped this country and the nature of communities. When they speak of home and belonging they are referencing an overall experience of living that has been profoundly impacted by historical processes of social dislocation, dispossession, and institutionalised violence and racism and more recently by socioeconomics and mass immigration. Their stories describe not only their experiences of home and belonging but also the forces that confound their efforts to live out these notions.

The trajectory of their experiences is mapped on to the historical changes that have occurred within Pretoria East. Ancestral lands and traditional ways of being were displaced by agriculture. Residents were relocated to the outlying townships and homelands during apartheid. Farms were replaced by suburban development. The vacant field became a squatter ground. The squatter ground became an informal settlement. And the informal settlement is slowly becoming a community. With each of these transformations, the experience of home and belonging is also shifting and morphing as people adjust to changing exigencies.

Woodlane Village is a borderland, a mixing place that disrupts the status quo. It is a third space, a transitional zone where counter-narratives and hybrid understandings emerge. It reminds us that apartness is a fiction. The 'us' and 'them' are always connected along boundaries of difference. Even during the height of apartheid, the homelands and the township and the city were associated; each was shaped by the movement of people and ideas across and between these localities. To treat the parts as disconnected is to overlook the migrations, the flux and flows, and the translocation that have created and continue to create South Africa. As Nancy (2000:185) argues, "The world is a multiplicity of

worlds, and its unity is the mutual sharing and exposition of all its worlds — within this world.”

Recognising the intersubjective nature of the relationships that span these spaces is key to understanding the ways in which Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor describe home. Seeing the informal settlement as connected to the suburb and by extension to the city, the townships, and the hinterlands opens up new possibilities for imagining home and belonging. Doing so acknowledges the perpetual churn of people between these spaces, a pattern reinforced by the spatial design of cities and regions in South Africa. It helps us see the dispersal of home-places over storied landscapes as patterns in their own rights — as changing configurations of home and belonging that span time and space rather than as evidence of brokenness. For many people, the notion of home as being anchored in one place and in one set of conditions is fictitious. Home and belonging represent the complex interplay of processes of emplacement and displacement, of locations and dislocations over a lifetime. For many of the current residents of Woodlane Village, the settlement may never become a home in an all-encompassing sense, but it may become a place where they can experience belonging and from where they can sustain meaningful connections to other places they call home.

But this will require further shifts in the positions and orientations of those implicated in the future of the village. Points of resistance and differing perspectives need to be explored and prejudices overcome. As Kelly (1997) states, “truth is multiple—and always ever partial.” It is important to realise that the place-making experiences of individuals living in the settlement are entangled with those of their neighbours both in the camp and in the surrounding areas. At the community-level, the process of emplacement and belonging is shared. As Lattanzi Shutika (2011:15) argues, belonging is “constituted through human connections to the places one inhabits” and is influenced by the shared experiences of newcomers and longer-term residents. Local

contexts shift with the introduction of migrants, making destinations ‘new’ for newcomers and established inhabitants alike (ibid). Currently, the homeowners are opposing the place-making efforts of the residents of Woodlane Village, because of perceived threats to their quality of life and their senses of home. Donald, Christopher, Trevor, and Benjamin expressed similar misgivings about strangers in the camp.

In a polarised environment, such as Pretoria East, entering ‘third spaces’ between opposing viewpoints is key to negotiating belonging in more inclusive ways. A third space implies a state of liminality — a dialogical space where new identities, ways of collaborating and hybrid understandings emerge. To cross into the third space is to enter the unknown, to suspend judgments, to allow emerging perspectives to challenge preconceived notions of others and ourselves. To do so is to abandon the fantasy of solid ground and of fixed points of reference, to step into a landscape where the interplay of subject and object blur the convenient dichotomies we use to situate ourselves in the world. As Jackson (2007: 23) says:

Human existence makes its appearance in the indeterminate or potential space between actors, confounding our original intentions, eclipsing our supposed identities, leading us to do things that we did not think we had it in us to do, and obliging us to constantly rethink the very notion of who we are.

The narrative accounts evoke the crosscutting and intercutting nature of experience and the sense of cascading, colliding, merging, and morphing storylines. The accounts reflect individual life trajectories, which are influenced and inflected by the larger political, social, and cultural forces. Individual stories of home and identity emerge in relation to larger stories and discourses. As Kerby (1991:16) observes, “Experience is at once *part* and *whole*.”

But if as Judith Butler argues “identity is the stylised repetition of acts through time” rather than a reified and stable sense of self, then the possibility exists for the emergence of multiple identities and multiple forms of home and belonging. Our narrative accounts provide insights into how identities are patterned, echoed, reflected, and internalised — and how the stories we tell ourselves can both entrench these notions as well as create openings for new imaginations of self.

* * *

THE SPACE OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The inquiry created opportunities for Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, Trevor, and me to explore the connection between our ‘private’ and ‘public’ worlds. Narrative inquiry became the vehicle for us to share our hopes and struggles and to navigate the complicated terrain between our heads and our hearts. As Arendt (1958) has pointed out, storytelling is an important strategy for transforming private issues into public meanings and for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances.

Although, the inquiry process was not intended to be therapeutic, it did create safe spaces for individuals to make sense of living in the informal settlement — some of which included personal suffering and loss. This was possible, because the participants and I were guided by relational ethics, which called forth close attention and care (Clandinin 2013). At its best, the process facilitated a deep mixing of spirits and understandings as Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor and I sought to create sense and meaning — to translate experiences into stories (Duvall and Béres 2011) and to inquire more deeply into experiences. The connection between hope and storytelling is well-articulated by Brueggemann (1987) in his analysis of the Exodus narrative. According to him, movement towards hope involves three progressive stages. The first is the expression of a “critique of

ideology” which involves the social criticism of established power — in the case of the Exodus story, the oppressive rule of the Egyptians over the Israelites. The second stage is the “public processing of pain”, as he observes:

Social criticism and exposure of the dominant ideology are important. They, however, only give insight, and insight never liberated anyone. They do not give power or authority to make a move of withdrawal or delegitimation. Such power and authority to move in the face of imperial definitions of reality come from the *public processing of pain*. By “public processing” I refer to an intentional and communal act of expressing grievance, which is unheard of and risky under such an absolutist regime (16).

The third and final stage in this transformation is that the public outcry and processing of pain leads to the release of “new social imagination.” As Brueggemann (1987:18) says: “The cry of pain begins the formation of a countercommunity around an alternate perception of reality. The only source of such a countercommunity is to trust one’s pain and to trust the pain of one’s neighbour which is very much like our own.” Or as Jackson (2002: 63) says:

By relating our stories to others in ways and in contexts that enable them to play a part in determining the narrative and ethical shape that will be given to our particular experience, we avoid fetishizing this as something inward and unique.

Overwhelming experiences reshape one’s life, creating existential breaches that need to be repaired in order to maintain coherence. Through inquiring into experiences, we rework reality to make it bearable. It is through attending to our lives through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space that we are able to integrate our pasts into the present and imagine a future. As Linde (1993,

98) points out, “Narrative is one of the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity.”

Storytelling becomes a fundamental means to emotional engagement and a path to critical reflection and human liberation. As individuals consider a new framing of taken-for-granted experiences they are able to inquire into their own phenomenological assumptions. As Rappaport (1995: 805) argues:

If narratives are understood as resources...we are led to ask questions such as: Who controls these resources?" Which stories are considered to be true? Which stories are legitimated and by whom? Why are some stories rejected and others valued? Who has the right to tell another person's story? If narratives are understood as resources, we are able to see that who controls that resource, that is who gives stories social value, is at the heart of a tension between freedom and social control, oppression and liberation, and empowerment versus disenfranchisement.

In terms of personal significance, the narrative inquiry process was transformative. Exploring my own experiences and my disrupted relationship to my homeland allowed to me to rearticulate my place in the world. It also allowed me to gain new insight into the experiences that have shaped my sense of belonging. With this new perspective, in turn, has come an increased confidence in imagining and enacting alternative storylines. As Aoki (1994: 10) explains: “Whenever I write a story, I not only produce a narrative but I’m reproducing myself. The very narrating acts upon me, and I’m changing.” The inquiry process created the conditions necessary for me to acknowledge and reintegrate my experiences of displacement — to grieve, to forgive, and to come home. Donald and Christopher shared with me that they underwent a similar reorientation. Our conversations contributed to an enhanced clarity on our personal experiences and our life journeys. At the same time, I was aware that the lives of Donald, Benjamin,

Christopher, and Trevor, much like my own, are always in the midst and are always becoming (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

These shifts are attributable in large part to the ethical responsibilities that underpinned the inquiry and the transactional and relational nature of the practice of thinking and living in narrative ways (Clandinin and Caine 2013). As Donald shared with me in our time together, “there is a story in our story,” alluding to the deepening obligations, respect, and trust that formed the foundation of our relationship and will continue to shape our interactions into the future. Our lives have become interwoven — and in the warp and weft of our commitments and our shared experiences we have fashioned the enduring fabric of friendship. I am reminded of Okri (1997: 46):

We live by stories. We also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, we are also living the stories we planted — knowingly or unknowingly — in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.

In terms of social impacts, the inquiry elucidated the rich and multifaceted experiences of people in Woodlane Village. Despite the scale of the challenge of informal settlements and squatter camps in South Africa, there is a paucity of research that inquires into how people make sense of life in these marginal spaces. The experiences of economic refugees have also received little attention. Even the Dredges have admitted in earlier conversations that, despite their personal commitments to community upliftment, they have not had the opportunity to explore in any real depth the experiences of settlement dwellers. This is a significant oversight given the ever-present border skirmishes over public and private land in Moreleta Park and in other urban settings in South Africa (Bohlin 1998).

By exploring the experiences of home and belonging of residents of Woodlane Village, key insights emerged around the boundary between public and private space; around how the urban environment is mapped out and regulated; and around the processes of home-making for those who have no proper place. These understandings are of critical importance to urban centres in South Africa as they cope with the influx of migrants from the hinterlands and from other countries.

The narrative accounts make visible the complex means by which individuals create home and belonging. In doing so, they unfixed the notion of home by showing the fluid and dynamic ways in which these concepts are lived, relived, told, and retold. For Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor, home is both “mobile and sedentary” (Ralph and Staeheli 2011: 525). They also illustrated how the imprint of history on the social and the built environment in South Africa continues to reinforce dislocations and a dispersed sense of home. The result has been a pattern of migration sustained by the ongoing separation of places of home from places of work. From a practical perspective these insights beckon the development of housing policies that acknowledge the flow of people within and between home-places as well as the active nature of place-making. As Ralph and Staeheli (*ibid*) observe:

Home is like an accordion, in that it both stretches to expand outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed people in their proximate and immediate locales and social relations.

In the South African context this challenges us to recognise the imbrication of the township, the squatter camp, and the city — and to not treat them as isolated agglomerations. It also compels us to consider place-making as a shared process that involves both newcomers and longer-term residents. Inclusion requires ongoing conversations between neighbours and stakeholders in order to

dispel myths and to work across the boundaries of difference. Paradoxically, borderlands represent zones of friction as well as of creative potential. As Jackson explains (2007:231):

We can only reach an understanding of what is held in common by deeply entering into another local moral world, living in it, speaking its language, sustaining a conversation with it over time.

But more importantly, the research re-inserted the narratives and experiences of individuals existing under these conditions into a discourse that is obscured by the sheer enormity of the challenges facing South Africa. This is a significant achievement given the tendency of bureaucratic and governmental institutions to reduce individuals to numbers, categories, and abstractions — and in doing so, insulate themselves from the true impacts of indifference and ineptitude. As Jackson (1998: 25) argues, “The view from afar gives us no purchase on human reality unless it is complemented and compared with a view from within.” In Woodland Village, the “view from within” is rooted in embodied experiences of home and belonging of Donald, Christopher, Benjamin, and Trevor.

9

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