Introduction
The Years Before

I was supposed to be a man by the time I turned 21, by anyone's reckoning. By the apartheid regime's reckoning, I was also old enough to be tortured. Looking back, I can recognize the boy I was. The eldest of my grandchildren is now approaching this age, and I would never want to see her or the others – or indeed anyone else – having to face any such ordeal. At the time my home was in Johannesburg, only some thirty miles from Pretoria, where I was thrown into a world that few would believe existed, populated by creatures from the darkest places, creatures of the night, some in uniform. I was there for fifty-five days, and never went home again. This Introduction has been written with the support and participation of my brothers and sister. We had an eventful and curious childhood, which was capped by my detention. We were all affected by the events described below, and our bonds continue to see us through.

I start with my father's father Harry, our grandfather whom we knew as Oupa. His stories went back to his youth in Lithuania, nearly as far back in his life as the story of imprisonment reaches in mine. We loved his stories. They were recounted in a Yiddish accent in a deep, slow voice, and were given in great deliberation with big hand gestures for emphasis. On the margins of memory, and confirmed by family photographs that remain a delight, was the experience of my brother Colin and me being scooped up by him, and each of us put on one of his big knees. At a crucial moment, to make his point or to let us hear exactly how Red Riding Hood or The Three Bears or The Three Little Pigs made calls on their own grandparents, or were called on by the wolf, he would break into Yiddish. The wolf would say, '*Kinderlekh, kinderlekh, loz mir arayn*' [Little children, little children, let me come in]. These were the only Yiddish words some of us knew. Oupa told of the ice and snow of Lithuania. We had never seen ice or snow. He told of losing one of his galoshes in a deep snow fall. We wanted to know what galoshes really looked like – they sounded like such strange foot garments. And we wanted to know what a wolf sounded

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like. He would lift his head up and howl like a wolf was supposed to do, and we would copy him. They would send flour from their mill in their hometown of Keidan to the nearby city of Kovno, and to keep the wolves at bay in winter, they would put a strong man on the back of the sled with a stick. We would want to know how big the stick was, and he would show us with outstretched arms. We were accustomed to the story's repetition, and would stretch out our own arms, anticipating his gestures. There was another favourite story about a place he called the Belgian Congo. A certain Mr McDougal went there to see the gorillas and pygmies in a big truck with very high wheels. We heard the story so often that we would raise our hands as he came to the account of just how big the wheels were. He would pause and ask us to show him how big the wheels were, how big the gorillas were and how small the pygmies were.

Immigration controllers today would call our Oupa an 'unaccompanied minor'. Aged fifteen and alone, he sailed from the Baltic coast via England and arrived in Cape Town in 1901 after three weeks at sea, surviving on rye bread and pickled cucumbers, and arriving with only one shilling and sixpence in his pocket. As he was getting off the ship, the cannon at the harbour fort sounded noon, the daily time signal. Alarmed that the Boer War had come to Cape Town, he turned around to get back on board. But his uncle was waiting on the quayside, and he called out to reassure him. He had family who had already settled there, so he had a place in their home and went to school in District Six, where he learnt English. He later moved up to Johannesburg with them, where he founded a business selling paraffin to the claim hunters on the mines. When he died sixty-four years later, he left a widow, five children, thirteen grandchildren, and a thriving oil company. Four more grandchildren were born in the years that followed. Three have passed away, and the remaining fourteen of us are living in Canada, South Africa, the UK and the USA; and in the next generation we have cousins who have moved to Australia and Israel.

I come from a long line of storytellers – at least, I am in the third generation of storytellers known to us. The stories of those who lived before our grandparents' generation lie in the silence of unmarked graves. They perished in 1941, almost to a person. I have visited these killing fields outside Lithuania's towns and villages where the Jewish population – three-quarters of a million people – were gunned down by the *Einsatzgruppen*, the killing arm of the Nazi SS, assisted by Lithuanian collaborators. Our Oupa lost his entire family there, with the exception of one sister who survived, and one baby who was a hidden child. We do not even know how to calculate their numbers (Oshry 1995; Lerer-Cohen and Issroff 2002; Levinsonas 2006). My four grandparents were only 'spared' because they or their parents had taken the adventurous option of emigration two generations earlier, when threats against Jews in the Russian Empire sparked a mass migration. So, in the eyes of those left behind early in the twentieth century, our grandparents went to a remote place called 'The

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Cape' situated in the South Atlantic at the bottom of Africa. After the Boer War there was extensive settlement on the goldfields, and Johannesburg and the other Reef towns grew on the proceeds. My parents were born there, as I was, and my three siblings.

The stories are passed on to this day by our Uncle Ivan, Oupa's youngest child, who is now in his eighties. Along with our father and other uncles – Uncle Issie, my father's older brother, and Uncle Charles, husband of my father's younger sister – they are in the second generation of storytellers. Ivan's own stock of stories took a turn in the direction of modernity, along with his interest in jazz and architecture. One of his greatest was about 'Jack and the Pulsating Chicken Liver Orchards', but its title is all I can recall. Our father's stories had his own unique humour, and his greatest tale was about Fifi Matzpanis (Fifi Marzipan) from Vladivostock. We loved the sounds of the words, the French and Yiddish in one great name, and a place so far away that it was on the wrong side of the world where everything was back to front. Fifi would emerge as a figure in his many accounts of impossible events and strange people. My sister even had a doll with her name, which her children – now adults – know all about.

I was named after my mother's father, John Romm. He died in a farm accident three years before I was born. He was still driving himself around his farm in a horse and cart at the age of 77, but by then he was deaf and he did not hear an approaching train on the line that went nearby. His startled horse bolted and overturned the cart, and he did not survive. He came from Rokishik, another Lithuanian town, and moved to the Cape after first settling in Baltimore, Maryland, where the rest of his family had made their home. We never learnt why he left them there but we grew up knowing that, as the youngest of twelve, he had a large family in the USA, and we continue our connection with this family association.[1] He trained as a bookkeeper in Baltimore and must have done well enough in the Cape to buy a highveld farm at Syferbult, just outside Krugersdorp, during the last years of the Transvaal republic. He was a Bundist, the follower of an association of Jewish socialists in Eastern Europe and Russia. His life was informed by these values, and they were passed on to us by my mother. During the Anglo-Boer War he hid his farm horses in their living room to show empty stables to the 'Khakies', the British soldiers, who would have requisitioned them for military use. He made them available instead to the Boers, the underdogs in the conflict, whom he supported, but when the Union of South Africa was declared in 1910, he joined the protest against the restriction of citizenship to whites only.

His first wife and child both died in childbirth. Later, during a reclusive life on his farm, he and my grandmother, Annie Adelson who we later called Babela, befriended each other when he brought milking cows into town to the kosher dairy that she ran with her family in Krugersdorp. They had orig-

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inally been family acquaintances in Lithuania. On marrying, they settled on his farm, and their only child, my mother, was born there. They were known as *Afrikaanse Jode*, Jewish Afrikaners, and they spoke Yiddish in the home and Afrikaans on the farm, which was named after my mother in her honour. Ruthville became a visiting place for friends and family from Johannesburg, many of whom had radical views. My mother was given her name because she was born on the Jewish festival of Shavuot (The Giving of the Law), when we read the Book of Ruth in synagogue. Decades later, when I visited the farm with my mother and her cousin to track our history, we found elderly staff who recognized her and still remembered my grandfather. They called him '*Die Baie Ou Jood*' (the very old Jew), and said he looked after everyone, black and white, English and Afrikaans. When Colin and I were little, my parents took us there for weekends, and on arriving, we would jump out of the car and run into the arms of his widow, my grandmother, who lived alone. She would scoop us up and embrace us with love and warmth, calling us 'Babela, babela, babela' – 'little baby' in Yiddish. She became known to us as 'Babela', and we still refer to her that way. When the farm was sold, she came to live with us and brought Yiddish and her exuberant love into our Johannesburg home. She was very present in our lives, but my mother was jealous of her mother's exuberance and sometimes there was trouble. When we later moved to Swaziland, we left her in a residential hotel in Orange Grove. Despite having devoted family nearby, she did not get over our departure, and died one year later.

Fifty years ago, the world of my childhood was in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg where most of the Jewish population lived. The year was filled with family occasions and religious festivals when we gathered in one another's homes or on the verandas of our gardens. Most other children knew no one from outside these circles except for the people called 'servants' who lived in outhouses behind our homes. We were unusual because my mother came from a farming world beyond; and my father had been to the war 'up North', where he had learnt Italian. He also spoke Afrikaans and isiZulu. They had an adventurous spirit and a moral concern that set us apart from many of the other families we knew; and they took a genuine interest in the welfare of our domestic servants whose bounty we lived on, though we knew little about them as human beings.

The suburban gardens were full of exotic trees – jacaranda, oak, pin oak, liquid amber, flame trees, camphor, syringa and blue gum – in full leaf through the summer when afternoon storms filled the sky with black clouds. Today these suburban gardens are the continent's largest human-made forest, planted with indigenous and unfamiliar trees that provide homes to birds drawn from far and wide – it even has its own microclimate. Thunder and lightning accompanied the downpours that filled the air with the smell of rain on dry earth. In winter the trees were bare, and everything was scorched brown by drought and cold. Winter skies on the highveld are a bright cobalt blue that I have found

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nowhere else. They bleed into sunsets coloured crimson by the mine dust. I was told that when I was little, if we were out driving beyond our suburban sanctuary and saw a mine dump – mine dumps used to be everywhere, mountains of pale orange sand along with slag heaps and pitheads, and one of them had a drive-in cinema on its flat top – I would get upset if someone in the car said 'there's a mine dump' and I would challenge them. No, I would say, 'it's *my* dump'. Over the years these mine dumps disappeared in stages as they were consumed by more advanced refining techniques that extracted further gold from even the spent ore.

We had no idea what mines were. We never heard the hooters sending people to work at dawn or signalling '*tjaila*' (Time out!) in the evenings. We knew nothing about the hundreds of thousands of men coming by train and railway bus from all over Southern Africa to work underground on contracts that allowed them home for just a few weeks a year. Their destinations were the gold mines of the East and West Rand and the coal mines of the eastern Transvaal that run from Witbank to Breyton. We did not feel the tremors of the underground explosions as they blasted ore out of the rock and, as children, we knew nothing of miners' phthisis and tuberculosis. We did not know that from the equator south, our city was known amongst black people as 'Egoli', the Place of Gold. The region was responsible for more than half the world's gold at the time, and, more recently, for coal, uranium and platinum. Miners lived in hostels as virtual prisoners and worked in shifts that ran round the clock. Their proprietors traded shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange during the day, and in the evenings they went home to their families in the northern suburbs (Van Onselen 1982; Mandy 1984; Wheatcroft 1986; Sampson 1987).

Our suburban world ended where our father's parents, Oupa Harry and Granny Janie, lived above the ridge in Yeoville, near the synagogue that we called 'shul'. We were at their home on Friday nights and went to shul on Saturday mornings. Following our move to Swaziland, I went to live with them for a year to prepare for my bar mitzvah and returned to the primary school that I had previously left. Their home in Regent Street was a family landmark – important and mysterious. You could hide beneath the hydrangeas in the front garden, climb the jacaranda tree in the side garden where you could pick soft fruit, and in the back garden the fig tree produced a crop that fed everyone, even the birds. It is still there, but is now in the grounds of a block of flats. Back then, the toilet did not flush easily, the fridge made very strange noises, and every internal and outside door had to be locked every night and then unlocked by my grandfather in the morning. My school was nearby and, as well as the secular curriculum, I had regular lessons in Hebrew, Torah, Scriptures and Liturgy. As the bar mitzvah came closer, I had private lessons to learn how to read the Torah in shul for the occasion, and when the event came I was ready for it and was proud to do honour to my parents and family. My

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grandparents were gentle and loving, but remote, and, as the only child in their home, I had a lonely year and missed my Swaziland family. Their big dog Ben adopted me in the absence of his missing master, my Uncle Ivan, and we were inseparable. Friday night was the week's highpoint. I enjoyed a place of honour participating with my grandmother in the ritual lighting of the candles at sunset. There was serenity in her reverence for the prayers, and she was calm and gracious when we walked to shul. As we approached, we could hear the choir begin to sing the psalms that open the service, followed by a beautiful melody for the song that welcomes the Sabbath as a bride. My grandmother's faith was deep, grounding and beautiful, and was passed to me without any open sign of conveyance – I can feel it to this day.

Sometimes my father's older brother Israel, whom we knew as Uncle Issie, would attend with us for Friday night services, and then I would have a seating companion in the men's area, and he would guide me through the prayers. It was always a comfort, and this bond with him was to become a safeguard in the years to come when relations between my parents and my uncle broke down. We had opposing political views, but the catalyst for the break had to do with the inheritance due to us as a family on the death of our grandfather. Issie was the executor of our grandfather's will, but despite us living through serious financial strain, he stood in the way of its distribution for some five years. He became mayor of Johannesburg the year before my detention, but by then our families were not on speaking terms and the divide between us became a chasm on my arrest. Years later he did try to reach out to me across the divide, and on the rare and occasional visits that I could make to Johannesburg after deportation, he would make a point of taking me to the synagogue of his and my father's childhood, the old Jeppe Shul, which he would open for occasional services with fellow congregants. Whenever he visited London with his wife, our Auntie Phyllis, they would make a point of taking me out. In these later years the bond between him and my father was restored, and Uncle Issie, Auntie Phyllis and their daughters Elaine, Sandra and Jill showed my father a lot of kindness, befriending him and his partner Thelma. In these later years Issie's conduct with each of us – me and my siblings – was as might be expected of a benevolent uncle. The original enterprise that Oupa had established and run with his two sons, Issie and my father, was called the Pacific Oil Company. Thanks to Issie, Oupa's desk from Pacific Oil was passed on to my father during his latter years in Joburg. It became Thelma's desk during her lifetime and, now with me, is the desk on which I have written this book.

Going back to those early years, the whole extended family would arrive for the Friday night meal – aunts, uncles and especially cousins. My father was the middle of five children, with an older and younger brother and an older and younger sister, and in those years we were close as a family. I had the room

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that belonged to my Uncle Ivan, the youngest of them, who was away in Israel. After everyone else left, the Friday night candles, the 'Shabbes lights', would burn themselves out through the night in a quiet corner and I would go and sit by them on my own, which I found to be a hallowed time.

Years earlier, on the way up Munro Drive, we could look back from the car going up Houghton Ridge to see the suburbs spread out for miles towards Pretoria. At the viewing point we would sometimes be taken out of the car to look back – our parents took delight in introducing us to what we could see. From here the suburban lights twinkled into the distance in winter, and in summer the houses and their tree-filled gardens stretched as far as we could see. At the top of Munro Drive was the ridge of white water, the Witwatersrand, where gold was discovered in 1886. It sparked one of the world's great gold rushes and, like other such events of the time, it brought immigrants from far and wide. This one had a character of its own based on the extraordinary underground reserves and the ruthless ingenuity of Britain's colonial policies that turned indigenous populations into mining and industrial labour. Jews from a small locality in Lithuania came in numbers, some in flight from persecution and others as economic migrants, and they settled in the cities and country towns. The original population of white settlers, the Afrikaners, were subjected to two wars of conquest by the British Empire and were then turned into the Union's policemen. When their National Party won the election in 1948, they took matters into their own hands and created the apartheid government. Going south beyond Yeoville, through Hillbrow and into town, the street names tell of the opening phases of the gold rush: Twist, Quartz, Claim, Banket, Nugget and End streets. Its British overlords were known as the Randlords in their day, and many of the other streets, suburbs and districts of the city were named accordingly – Empire Road, Harrow Road, Houghton, Oxford Road, Munro Drive, Rosebank and Yeoville (Thompson 2000).[2]

South-western townships – hence 'Soweto' – stands on the periphery of Johannesburg, providing homes to a black population once as large as the rest of the city areas combined. Closer to our home, on the edge of the northern suburbs, was Alexandra township, housing a black population who serviced the white homes and industries of the area. We only saw it from a distance – it was known then as the Dark City because it had no public lighting. Its streets then were untarred and rutted, and only some of its houses had basic utilities – water, electricity and sewerage. It had its own shanty town on the Far East Bank where people made homes of corrugated iron and plywood boards, some of which would tumble into the river valley in heavy rain. Its layout, like nearby Tembisa and other such townships, shows how apartheid's planners – the inheritors of Britain's original policies – gave a squared-off place to labour. They are defined rectangles with industries and houses for whites outside all their margins. Today the street names are different, and reflect the new spirit of

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our times – Lenin Drive, Thoko Ngoma, Aldo Magano. 'Alex' was reached by travelling north along Louis Botha Avenue, beyond our dentist and the Doll's House – a roadside eating house and one of our favourite places – and then to the Pretoria main road, the M11, which still stands as the township's western boundary. I travelled on this road in the back of a police car on the day of my arrest as we went to Pretoria.

As the first-born generation of local whites, my parents lived in compliance with the order of the many apartheid practices they inherited, but they stood in opposition to the principles and policies on which they were based. The combination of high principle and emotional neglect on which we were raised created confusion, especially as the principles – including family loyalty – were contradicted by their neglect. They could be remote and absent, and neither of them found children's need easy. We had better and more loving relations with them when we were older and needed them less. As children we were reliant on family, friends and neighbours and, following the death of our maternal grandmother Babela in 1960, we were especially reliant on our domestics. Boarding school later provided our parents with a way out of the problems they faced over the care they could not give us, and there I became a parental child looking out for my younger brothers. I had already left for university by the time my sister arrived at the boarding school. Our first farm was sold in 1967, and for several years our family home was relocated to Johannesburg. Our parents then re-established themselves on a new farm in Swaziland where my mother remained, long after all the children had left.

Our parents were married in 1947, the year after my father returned from service in the Italian campaign in the Second World War. They spent the first year of their marriage in a political campaign against the impending government of the newly formed National Party – an alliance of fascists and Afrikaans nationalists who won the election just three months after my birth. Despite this setback, for the rest of their lives my parents remained in opposition through different kinds of activity. Before marrying, my mother played the piano at meetings of the Congress movement, organized by the Communist Party. At unguarded moments she could break into song and 'The Internationale' would emerge. She had a network of associations kept 'under cover' during my childhood, some of whom emerged as open-hearted new friends when I arrived in London as a refugee aged twenty-one. My parents contributed to feeding schemes for black people, and my mother became a member of the Black Sash, a non-violent movement of white women that was organized to resist apartheid. I would see her going out to attend street demonstrations wearing her black sash. I was unaware of all she did, but later learnt that they had brought cases of injustice to the attention of their MPs and kept vigils outside Parliament and government offices. Like other members, she was vilified by some in our Jewish community. Over dinner I would hear her telling my father

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about the catcalls and verbal abuse, such as 'kafferboeties' and 'nigger-lovers', with which they were attacked in public by apartheid's supporters.

There are links between my arrest and my parents' and grandparents' grounded sense of humanity. They were not colour-conscious like others of their generations. My parents spoke their minds and eventually acted on their principles and got away from apartheid by moving out of Johannesburg just before my eleventh birthday. I spent the following years in Swaziland, which was then a small British protectorate on South Africa's border, where my parents went farming.

Our move took us out of the world of privilege and prestige in which the rest of our Joburg family lived, and from then on our lives were troubled by emotional and financial insecurity. We were cherished by the place itself – our farm – and we have many good memories of its beauty, simplicity and fertility. It was called Mawawa, the siSwati name for the hadeda ibis that nested on both dams and by the river. The call of these birds as they came and went at sunset and dawn still evokes the daily passage of time. The farm was bordered on one side by a mountain and on another by the Great Usuthu River, which we could hear at night from our house. Despite its modesty, our home was a loving oasis two miles off the main road, the last homestead on a challenging dirt track, surrounded by trees – fruiting mulberry and flowering bauhinia – that brought an abundance of birdlife. We had no electricity, and the phone shared a party line with others. All the amenities were basic, but the sense of home was vivid and welcoming. We all have memories of lighting the mantles of the gas lamps in the evenings as the birdcalls outside grew silent, and it darkened to the night sounds of frogs and insects. The bookshelf on one side of the living room took up the whole wall, and on the other side of the same room, separated by our dining-room table, was the piano where we would gather to sing while my father played. As adults all four of us have created homely environments in our living spaces that bear some correspondence to our Mawawa home, especially in our gardens and in our love for the natural world. The Persian carpet we played on as children is still with me, and so is the dining-room table.

Following agricultural plans laid out by government research, my father and his team of workers planted ten thousand orange trees based on an irrigation system that fed the farming valley of Malkerns. The research was flawed, however, as the climatic conditions did not produce export-quality fruit and we had to fall back on cash crops. The Swazi people we lived amongst were kind and genial. Some lived in tribal areas over the river and came to work on a daily or weekly basis, and others had longer-stay homes in what was known as 'the compound'. Its facilities and living conditions were a grave indictment of my parents' liberal values. My father suffered from two serious lapses in his health, which added to the strain, and while I was away in the USA the farm was sold. I returned to find my mother back in Johannesburg and living in a rented

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flat with my siblings, who were attending local schools. My father worked to re-establish himself in Swaziland and in time he was successful with a new enterprise, a new and more modest farm and a new and inviting home. The strain between my parents was always worrying, however, and their marriage broke up in the year after my detention, at which point my father returned to life in Johannesburg and my mother remained in Swaziland. She was to live there for most of the next two decades.

Within a year of Janet and me arriving in the UK, David and Marian came to live with me in Brighton, where I had made a home while studying at Sussex University. Colin joined us a little later. As a family of uprooted siblings, we made our way as best we could. Life was never easy in those years, but I had already been 'trained' as a parental child and, though not always successful, I did what I could to look after my siblings – and, in the case of Marian at least, see to their education. David later returned to South Africa, where he has a flourishing life and, with his partner Felicity, a distinguished ceramic studio in Swellendam with an international reputation. Colin and Marian have also made their way in the UK on admirable terms. Colin works with his wife Simone in a London-based company restoring old stone and wood, and refurbishing homes. He has two grown-up daughters and three grandchildren. Marian is an educational psychologist with a PhD, and a distinguished career in local authority services and private practice; she lives in Norwich with her husband Peter, who is a consultant surgeon in the NHS. They have three grown-up children: one son and two daughters. She served as the president of the Norwich Hebrew Congregation and is currently the city's sheriff.

In the 1970s, my father returned to Johannesburg, where he established a settled life with a new partner, Rose Kay, and their relationship lasted nearly two decades. He worked first in business, and then he joined the much-loved partner of his later years, Thelma Carson, in a landscape and gardening company that she renamed Archie's Plants. On his death, the Johannesburg evening paper, *The Star*, published an obituary to him in their gardening section. My mother, who remained single for the rest of her life, went into agricultural business in Swaziland until her health failed, and she then retired to join us in the UK. In her first business, Swazifresh, she worked with the government to provide agencies for Swazi farmers just coming out of subsistence agriculture to help to market their produce. It did not fare well while she had a health crisis, but she started again in a second enterprise to provide food for the newly liberated country of Mozambique after the Frelimo government had taken charge in 1974. From a small office in Swaziland – now an intermediary country on the border of free Africa – she created a company that imported fresh produce from the Johannesburg food markets and exported it to Maputo, the newly named capital of Mozambique. She called on her background familiarity with the highveld farmers of the Transvaal – ultra-white, ultra-right and mostly Afri-

kaans – to convince them she could secure new markets for their produce in black Africa. She drew on political credentials, through my own story, to convince the new Frelimo government – black revolutionaries who had won a colonial war against the Portuguese – of her good faith. As an intermediary marketing agent who could be trusted by both warring parties of a major conflict, she brought South African meat and potatoes through Swaziland to feed people in the southern part of Mozambique, and we remain very proud of her legacy.

As different as my parents were, they shared deep-rooted interests in poetry, classical music and the natural world to which they introduced us, and they both looked towards a future for justice in South Africa. When my mother passed away in 2003, we placed an inscription on her tombstone in the Western Cemetery in Cheshunt, outside London, taken from the opening and closing verses of a poem she would often recite, even while living in the UK during her later years:

> Cast the window wider, sonny;
> Let me see the veld
> Rolling grandly to the sunset
> Where the mountains melt,
> With the sharp horizon round it,
> Like a silver belt.
> . . .
> There's a spot I know of, sonny,
> Yonder by the stream;
> Bushes handy for the fire,
> Water for the team.
> By the old home outspan, sonny,
> Let me lie and dream.
> —'The Veld' (P. Gibbon, in Crouch [1908] 2018: 65–66)[3]

My father died five years earlier and is buried amongst the rest of our family in Westpark Cemetery Johannesburg, where his tombstone has an inscription from Wordsworth:

> Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth . . .
> —'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (Wordsworth 2006: 243)

It also has a poetry inscription from his partner Thelma – twenty years later she was buried nearby – with lines from a verse we were unable to source at the time. These lines were finally traced by Berghahn Books' editorial assistant Mykelin Higham to Oscar Hijuelos's *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, and we extend our grateful thanks to her.

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Love is the sunlight of the soul
Water for the flowers of the heart
And the sweet-scented wind
Of the morning of life.
(Hijuelos 1989)

Going back to Johannesburg in the 1950s, the domestic servants of my childhood years are remembered for their special qualities, but most regrettably I cannot recall all their family names or places of origin. Paul Moesethle, Frieda, Martha and Rosie were like family members as they contributed to our lives in vital ways, but we knew little about theirs. There were others too – Augusta in the earlier years and Sergeant later on. I would have been about four when our father and Paul, our gardener, laid a concrete driveway at our house in Greenside. I slipped and cut my knee while playing in the rubble. It must have been a serious injury for I still have the scar. While recovering I had a recurring dream, and it still colours the landscape of childhood. The Johannesburg zoo was nearby, and we could hear the lions roar at night. In my dream a lion was on the loose. My father was standing guard inside the front door of the house with the pistol from his bedside cabinet, with Paul standing guard inside the back door with an assegai, a sharp-tipped spear. My mother and my baby brother Colin were protected in the inside bedroom, but I was stuck outside on one of the concrete strips, where my sore knee was stopping me from moving and I could not get back to safety. The lion was getting closer and I could hear it roar. There was a glare on the concrete, and everything was the stark grim yellow of rocks at Westpark Cemetery on the road going west – the same khaki yellow as the police uniforms.

There were always bad dreams. I would often go to my parents' bedroom in the night to tell them I had had a bad dream, and they would put me in bed between them. Sometimes in a dream the 'machayanis' and the 'tokoloshes' would come. Machayanis lived down the plug hole of the bath. Our nanny Frieda could only get us out of the bath by pulling the plug and waiting for the gurgling sound of the water running out to create enough fear to get us to jump into her arms. If we did not get out quickly enough, the machayanis would jump out of the plug hole and get us. The tokoloshes – evil spirits who threatened our servants in their bare concrete rooms in the backyard – were even more dangerous. They were always lurking, so the servants had to put their beds high up on bricks. When we were allowed to visit them in their rooms, they had to help us to jump to safety on their beds before the tokoloshes underneath could get us.

As children we were safe in the embrace of our families and servants, but nothing could protect us from the sense of threat that these servants faced every day. The lions on the loose wore khaki uniforms with gold buckles that said: SAP – South African Police. I knew their threat, both through our servants'

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fear and our parents' sometimes hopeless attempts to protect them. These 'lions on the loose' were Afrikaners with brown leather belts around their waists and over their shoulders. Each one had a gun in his holster. Their caps came low over their faces, and their arrival in police vans spelt trouble. We would see the vans on the road and they often had prisoners in open cages on the back. The crest worn on police caps and lapels had a lion above a shield supported by a springbok and a gemsbok which was also emblazoned on the country's passports and drivers' licences. Our later move to Swaziland allowed us to get British passports and Swaziland licences, and to refuse any use of the apartheid government's insignia. I never carried a South African identity card or passport, and to this day its detail, like the republic's original flag, 'Die Driekleur' (the tricolour), has the same nauseating effect on me as a swastika.

Paul first came to work for us in the garden before my memory begins. He must have been in his late teens when he arrived. Frieda, who worked in the kitchen and looked after the children, was older and took a motherly interest in him. In the yard they would chat to each other in their own language, Setswana, but when in the house they talked to each other only in English. That must have been the protocol. Sometimes when Frieda was unavailable to do the cooking, Paul would come inside to work in the kitchen, and later she would tease him for doing women's work. I do not know what became of Frieda, but Paul was with us for the next ten years. He even moved out with us when we left Johannesburg for Swaziland. He became our father's 'right handyman', as he called him, on the farm we moved to in what was still a British protectorate. He wore a hat like our father and, like him, smoked a pipe. Once we were settled in Swaziland he did not stay long. Our beloved dog Tigger was killed in a car accident on the drive outside the farmhouse soon after Paul returned to Joburg. My siblings remember the immediate days after Paul's going as a major loss. I was away at boarding school at the time, and returned for a weekend to find Paul gone and Tigger dead. Paul told us he wanted to go back to his own people so we 'passed him on' to our good friends who lived in Joburg, as white families did with their servants. He worked for them for much of the rest of his life, and I would sometimes see him when visiting them 'in town', which is what we called Joburg. There was always a bond between us. It was upsetting to see him get older at double the rate of the people he worked for. Age took its toll on the lives of our servants in very physical terms. I would often wonder if he knew what had become of me in the years that followed, especially while I was in prison.

Paul was a vital person with a laughing, mischievous way. He was always industriously working on one thing or another. When I was five, we moved from our first house in Greenside to a larger one in Oaklands; it had a big garden that our parents filled with flowers, so Paul had a lot of work to do! He introduced me to Setswana names for the birds and insects in our garden and

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I learnt to tell the difference between those shongololos – millipedes – that were inquisitive and those he called stupid: inquisitive ones wriggled when you picked them up, and stupid ones just lay there doing nothing. In our garden we were visited occasionally by a hamerkop – a large ground-feeding bird that scoured the flowerbeds for grubs and insects, and especially for shongololos. Its Afrikaans name means 'hammerhead', and Paul would have called it 'mmamasiloanokê' in Setswana. Zulu and Swazi people call it 'thekwane' or 'impundulu', which translates as 'the lightning bird' in English. Mythology about it has generated a whole literature.[4] The large crest on the back of its neck gives it a unique appearance, and although it is now widely found in Joburg, along with many other species not previously found there, it was rare at the time. Paul told me the bird could bring lightning and so we had to be careful not to upset it. I would watch it foraging and wonder how it changed the weather, but heeded his advice and never dared to approach it. Paul knew little English when he came to work for us but he learnt quickly and was soon teaching me long words like 'inquisitive'.

He became an expert in everything, even in the kitchen, where I would watch him making mint or parsley sauce by chopping up the leaves that he had collected from our vegetable garden and simmering them in a pan. Sometimes I would go outside with him and Frieda while they had their lunch, and I would also sit with them in their own kitchen, which was a little room in the backyard between their bedrooms. It was served by a cast-iron stove for which they chopped the wood in the yard. After preparing our greens in our kitchen, they would sit down in theirs to a meal of bare slices of white bread and sweet tea. When I asked my parents why they had bread with nothing on, I was told that that was what they preferred. Our parents were liberal employers, unlike the parents of many of my friends. In one grand house on Houghton Ridge the servants had to save the used tea bags of their 'master' and 'madam', as they were only permitted to use second-hand bags for themselves. Their 'master' was an engineer who designed some of Joburg's tallest buildings and their 'madam' had a regal presence in Jewish affairs and university life – they wanted for nothing. Second-hand tea bags were amongst the many details of the servants' daily lives that kept them in an abject position, as bare slices of bread did to ours.

Aged about five, I dislodged a brick that must have been loose, in the porch wall. The span of this memoir is marked out between this first story of a brick and the later story about a brick I was forced to stand on during interrogation. Paul was standing below the first brick, and it fell directly onto his forehead – an alarming accident. He was hurt and, looking up at me in anger, he held the brick up at me and said he would report me to my mother. I could see the bump bleeding – it came up like an egg on his shiny black forehead. I ran away to hide behind my mother's dressing table in their bedroom which is where she found me. With blazing eyes and a flare of rage, she beat me with my father's ties and

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belts that she pulled at random from the cupboard. I do not remember the physical injuries, but her blazing eyes and uncontrollable rage were dreadful. The nightmare of those blazing eyes would return to haunt me when I was in prison years later, and I had nightmares that my mother was peering in rage through the 'eye in the door', the peephole through which the guards scanned us when doing their inspections. At the time I injured him, Paul was the one who consoled me when I later went to join him in the garden. He was raking up leaves on the lawn and had put a record on my little black gramophone, and together we sang with the chorus, 'We'll catch a fox and put him in a box, and then we'll let him go.' Soon after that, together with a group of other little boys, I climbed up the trellis that now stood over the concrete strips of the driveway. I was the youngest, and when the time came to end our game and go in for dinner, I was the only one who could not get down. The others disappeared, and I was left alone and crying. Frieda found me and, looking up at me from below, she called my mother. Eventually Paul was sent for, and he climbed up quickly. Standing on the trellis frame, he picked me up and, with one arm firmly around my waist, he climbed down and put me into my mother's arms.

One day Paul was missing. I must have been seven. My parents explained that he had been to Warmbaths north of Pretoria. We visited there regularly with my maternal grandmother, Babela. There was a resort hotel built close to a series of natural hot springs. Paul's family lived there in a township in the veld and I knew that he visited them, but this time he did not return. After some days a letter arrived that upset my parents. He had written to them from jail. I had seen black people handcuffed to black policemen dragged down the street to jail. I imagined jail was even worse than the machayanis. My parents went into Paul's room with Frieda to search for his pass, and when they found it one of them drove off to collect him from the jail in town called The Fort. It was built into the side of a small mountain on the Rand, close to Hospital Hill – a dreadful place that we would try to look into as we drove past. The whole area is now the site of the country's new Constitutional Court. It took them a whole day to get him out, and seeing them return was one of the first great shocks of my life. Paul's face was so bruised that he could hardly open his eyes. My mother and Frieda took care of him and put gentian violet on his many lacerations. Frieda started wailing as soon as she saw him, and covered her face with her apron. Then, while tending to him, she made many loud exclamations in Setswana. Our GP, Doctor Willie, came by to do a house call and I heard him tell my mother that there appeared to be no damage to Paul's skull, but without an X-ray he could not be sure. I thought a skull was a ghostly thing, like the machayanis – I only saw skulls on the pirate flags of the ghost train at the funfair. Skulls had crossed bones beneath, and I was alarmed to be told that Paul had a skull inside his head. It was just as troubling to then be told that I also had a skull inside my head. I tried to find where it was but all I could feel was

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my head and face. Years later when I was in Pretoria Local Prison – 'The Hanging Jail' – and realized that the comforting songs in the evenings were coming from condemned men before their execution, I could only half allow myself to consider what it meant to have your head pulled off your spine by a noose.

Paul made a full recovery and then resumed his normal working routines. But he was subdued and quiet, and did not play much. When I could muster the courage, I asked him what had happened. He told me that he had forgotten to take his pass with him when he visited his family in Warmbaths. He had left it in his room at our home. There was a police search at the station when he got off the returning bus. They called on everyone disembarking to produce their passes, and arrested him when they found he did not have one. I asked him what it meant to be arrested and he showed me his wrists and the bleeding bruises that the handcuffs had made. When I was arrested fourteen years later there were no handcuffs and there was only moderate physical violence, but they had other methods for whites. When the police took Paul to the jail, he tried to talk to the chief policeman to say that he did have a pass but had accidentally left it at the house where he worked. He tried to tell them our phone number or get permission to make a call. The policeman got angry when he repeated the number, and he told me with a chuckle that he behaved like an 'inquisitive one' and would not keep still. They beat him, but still he would not stop asking for a phone call – so they beat him again. They were going to send him to another jail on a farm a long way off where he would have to dig potatoes for a month and then go back to his 'tribal' home near Warmbaths. He managed to get a paper and pen from one of the other prisoners, wrote a note to my parents and gave it to another prisoner who was about to be released. He posted it to us, and that was how they came to bail him out (Carlson 1973, Johnstone 1976).

I asked Paul what a pass was, and he showed me – a little brown book with writing in it. He showed me his name and the name of the place where he was born, near Warmbaths, where he was allowed to live freely, without a pass. Then he showed me where it said 'Influx Control', and explained that it said he could work in Johannesburg at our address, which was written into the pass – 9 Meyer Street, Oaklands, Johannesburg. My parents later told me that all black people had to have passes to live in Johannesburg. They were against the government that made this law, and thought it was terrible. They took a case against the police for Paul's injuries, but the police claimed that other prisoners had done this to him. Much of this was beyond me at the time but I did understand Paul's account of how the country's prime minister – the man he called 'The Big Boss', J.G. Strijdom – had a car that did not need an engine because there was a team of black people in harnesses who had to pull it along, like oxen. At that time, we were still travelling west to my grandmother Babela's farm in the Magaliesberg, where we would see the ox wagon pulled by many pairs of oxen. It made a grinding noise as it went down the road, groaning un-

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der a heavy load of mielies – maize cobs. Paul told me that a policeman with a big whip walked beside the team of people who pulled the prime minister. I had seen the man with the long whip beside the ox wagon. When I later asked my parents about this, they told me the prime minister was indeed a terrible man, but his car did have an engine and black people did not have to pull it. They reassured me that no one, not even the police, could whip black people – but Paul told me they did, and said I should keep it a secret.

Our holidays were spent on Cape beaches, celebrated worldwide for their beauty. When I was eight, we were near the end of our summer stay at a resort called Hermanus where friends in a beach party near our own – they came from the same Johannesburg suburb – passed on news that our home had been burgled. We had no phone in our rented accommodation so were otherwise out of touch. I was not sure what a burglary was. In a confusion between buglers and burglars, I wondered why strangers had come to play bugles in our home while we were away. In Johannesburg one road into town took us past a boys' secondary school – it was my Uncle Ivan's – and at certain times of the day you could see a cadet band marching up and down the playground to the tunes of their buglers. My mother told me in the years that followed that, when even younger, I would call them 'the tootle-toos' and would wonder if that was where the war was. At three or four I had thought my father had been to war across the school playground from which you could hear bugles and see target practice with rifles.

My parents' irritability towards my questions on the beach that day – about buglers and burglars – left me at a loss. We returned immediately and, after the long two-day drive home, we found the place ransacked. I accompanied my father to the local police station where he filed the incident report. Standing beside him at the public enquiry desk where he was speaking to a big white policeman, I could look under the fold-up, fold-down counter and saw a black urchin in rags lying on his back on the floor under the feet of another, much younger white policeman, who wore big boots. The sight was hidden to an adult's view, so my father had no knowledge of what I was seeing until the child began to scream. He howled in pain and terror as the big man trampled up and down on his little body. My father was speaking in Afrikaans to the older policeman at the desk, which I did not understand at the time. He had come in vexed by the burglary, but I saw him startled by the sounds of the child's distress. There was more conversation and then I saw the little boy being bundled out of the area and taken to some nameless place in the anterooms of the police station while he made the most dreadful cries. When we later came out and I asked my father what had been going on, he told me they had caught someone like the burglars who had stolen from our house. But I could not understand why the policeman had walked on him! My father explained that this policeman's boss, the older one he had been talking to, had told the younger officer

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to stop hurting the little boy and take him to the police cells. Years later he revealed the truth: the station commander had instructed his young colleague in Afrikaans to make sure he had '*die kaffertjie*' (the little kaffir) out of sight and sound before he 'questioned' him further.

My abhorrence for these people associated the image of a child under the feet of his tormentor with the colour of the policemen's uniform and the sound of Afrikaans. Events like these, of which I later learnt there were many, informed my parents' decision to leave the country, and we emigrated to Swaziland soon after. The price we paid for living on a farm was a boarding school in the capital Mbabane, twenty-seven miles from the farming valley we lived in. The school had been established by the Church of England but was now in government hands and was attended by the children of Swaziland's civil servants, British expatriates and local farmers. We were all white. It had an august religious name, St Mark's, and a motto, Nisi Dominus, 'except the Lord', the words that introduce Psalm 127, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it'. Life in the boys' dormitories was more like *Lord of the Flies* than anything inspired by the better values of the Bible. The boys lived out their parents' colonial regimentation and brutality. We had to line up for everything, and shoes and clothes, hair and hands were all closely scrutinized by teams of prefects, supervised in turn by the masters. Meals were preceded by grace, 'For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly grateful', and then we would sit down to steal one another's bread, butter and jam, and go outside afterwards to settle scores with our fists. With a few cherished exceptions – people I have gratitude and regard for to this day – my teachers were the rejects of old educational orders in South Africa, the UK and its toppling colonies who washed up here. They did little to attend to children's pastoral needs. Cruel sport was made of the vulnerable, the odd ones out, or even those who just did not like sport. With my two younger brothers we were the only Jews in the school, and the only Jews many of the children had ever met. They did not know what to make of our identity or our name, which was distorted into many humiliating variants. There was a serious bully at work amongst a gang of others, and sometimes we would find the label off a bottle of HP Sauce plastered onto our places before meals. It was some time before we discovered what this was intended to mean – 'Hebrew Pig'. I learnt to fight and box, and gave as good as I got, but the battles left many scars, some of which are still with me. I did my best to protect my brothers, but we were all exposed to this abuse and there was not much we could do about any of it.

Swaziland (known now as Eswatini) was Britain's last African colony. The year 1968, in the dying days of empire, saw the Union flag come down for almost the last time in Africa at the Somhlolo Stadium beneath the beautiful Mdzimba mountains, and we were there to celebrate. By now David and Mar-

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ian were enrolled at Waterford Kamhlaba School, the first multiracial establishment in Southern Africa, and they participated in the school choir that won the award to sing for broadcast the new national anthem, *Nkulunkulu Mnikati wetibusiso temaSwati*.[5] Its music and its lyrics are full of beautiful promise – they thank God for bestowing blessings on the Swazi and their country. Today, tragically, the country has the highest HIV rate in the world, with an epidemic compounded by TB. Dual testing and retroviral programmes are making headway, and the advancing mortality rate has recently been stabilized.

We had a flagpole at my own school where, just three years before independence, I had been responsible for playing the Last Post on a bugle when we took the Union flag down in the evenings. The strange irony that put this responsibility in the hands of one of the school's only Jews was not lost on the other boys, some of whom continued to refer to us with scorn as 'Jewboys'. The insults continued to hurt us and we still talk about it. But momentous events were under way. The colonial order still held sway in the mind-sets of people living inside its fabric throughout Southern Africa, strained as it was. My immediate family was different and, like other people of conscience, they were ahead of their time by generations. Those of us with outlooks like ours lived isolated and sometimes ostracized lives. But the Freedom Charter was shaped during the mid-1950s, and then in February 1960 the visiting British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, delivered his famous 'wind of change' speech to the South African Parliament. He made clear that South Africa's policy of apartheid would not enjoy Britain's further support and, within a month, popular movements representing the non-white population brought matters to a head in campaigns calling for the defiance of unjust laws, focused on the pass laws. In March, the police opened fire on a crowd of unarmed protesters in Sharpeville. The massacre was a defining watershed. The government declared a State of Emergency, banned the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and arrested their leaders.

Later in the year the ANC president, Albert Luthuli, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but he was only allowed out to receive it one year later. By the time he did so in 1961, South Africa had declared itself a republic, and the ANC initiated the armed struggle on 16 December, a date sacred to Afrikaners, on which they annually commemorated their 'covenant' with God. Elsewhere in the world that year, the UN General Assembly condemned apartheid, the trial of Adolf Eichmann took place in Israel, and the cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin was the first to orbit the earth. In 1962 Mandela was arrested, the Rivonia Trial began in 1963 and Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech was delivered in 1964. The Beatles' career was just beginning and Bob Dylan's epic song, 'The Times They Are a-Changin'', was released on an album in 1964 to 'soon shake your windows and rattle your walls'. The cultural fixtures and values of the

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world order were under radical change, but the South African regime, standing firm at one of its focal points, resisted progress of any kind.

There was a corresponding catalyst on our own domestic front in the mid-1960s. It followed historical events in Lithuania during the Holocaust. Yehuda Ronder was the sole survivor of the Jewish community of Keidan – a population of nearly four thousand men, women and children – who perished in 1941. He passed on a report about my grandfather's youngest brother Tzodik, the leader of this community, who died as a hero when he killed at least two of their murderers before they killed him. The story's outline reached our community in 1949 with the Johannesburg visit of Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, one of the few rabbinic survivors of the genocide. My brother Colin was born soon after Oshry's visit, and was named in Tzodik's honour. Oshry later published a Yiddish account of the genocide, now translated into English (Oshry 1995), in which Ronder's testimony describing the massacre gives a vivid account of Tzodik's stand (Chrust [1977] 2018: 234). During the most alarming days of my detention, when I thought they would kill me in the cell, I was sustained by Tzodik's story and I have described this in Days 24–32. I have visited these killing fields in Lithuania and have given talks and published papers about what befell our family during this first phase of the Holocaust, before the development of gas chambers (Schlapobersky 2002, 2017).

Our Oupa helped Rachel, the youngest of his siblings and the only one in Lithuania to survive the Holocaust, to come and visit us in South Africa in 1963–64. Before the war she had married and left the family home in Keidan to settle with her husband in Kovna (Kaunas). When the Nazis arrived early in July 1941, they were impounded in the ghetto, along with her older brother Eliahu, and his wife and their baby Rivka, who was just one year old. Rachel smuggled herself out of the ghetto and took Rivka with her in an empty potato sack to place her with a Lithuanian family before she herself was later reimpounded. The Lithuanians raised Rivka for the next two years as a hidden child and then abandoned her to a local orphanage (Shlapobersky-Strichman 2011: 231–40). Rivka's parents and Rachel's husband perished but Rivka and Rachel survived. In 1945, Rachel was liberated by the Russians from Stutthof, a concentration camp north of Berlin. She made her way back to find all her family dead except for Rivka. Her account of these appalling events is given in *The Keidan Memorial Book* (Chrust [1977] 2018: 236). They were killed in numbers we can only guess at – thirty, sixty, eighty? She found Rivka in the orphanage, adopted her and raised her as her own. She remarried with a survivor from Vilna, and they settled in Israel in 1958. Rivka was by then a well-educated student and attended the Technion in Haifa where she graduated as an engineer, going on to become a leading member of her profession. They have remained in Haifa where her husband is a distinguished business executive and they now have three children and five grandchildren.

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Rachel's visit to us in South Africa was an epic event. Our parents went to Johannesburg to meet her and participate in a series of family gatherings arranged in her honour. I met her myself, briefly – a dignified, solemn woman with an appearance and bearing much like Oupa. I cherish the photograph that Ivan gave us of his father and Rachel together. At one of these gatherings Rachel recounted these events of the 1940s. Oupa went into shock on hearing the full account, and was to live for only one more year. My father reported on how, at some point during the course of Rachel's visit, he had turned to his siblings and appealed to them – in the light of what they had heard from her – to consider their own positions under apartheid. He took no satisfaction in describing how his sister's husband, a barrister at the Johannesburg bar, had said: 'Archie, how can you compare the Jews with the *schwarzes* (blacks)?' My father replied: 'You know, during the action we saw in Italy during the war, we were stuck on the Gothic Line in the Apennines in the winter of 1944 and heard news about the liberation of Auschwitz on the BBC. We were taking many German prisoners as the line was crumbling and, with my Yiddish fluency, I served as our unit's translator. The prisoners thought I was a British soldier who spoke a strange German. I would say, "We've heard about Auschwitz and know that you've been doing similar things elsewhere. We've interviewed many Italian Jews whose families you've sent to concentration camps. How could you do such things?" And their reply? Just like yours! "How can you compare Jews with human beings?"' For once the QC was stumped for an argument (Shimoni 2003).[6]

Did this make them question their values? Probably, but it was only with my own arrest six years later that our Johannesburg family took real account of how unsafe everyone is in a police state. My uncle the barrister later provided my parents with undercover legal guidance when they were struggling to get me out of prison. I understand that in the later years of the struggle another of my uncles provided shelter for ANC members in hiding. Between my deportation in 1969 and the country's first democratic government in 1994, life in exile over the decades meant that I had no exposure to changes in the value positions of my many younger relatives. But it has been heartening to discover that my own contribution to the struggle is as acknowledged and honoured amongst the younger generations of our family in South Africa as it is amongst those raised in the UK.

During my last year at boarding school in 1965, I came into a deserted dormitory one evening, when the other boys were still away in the dining hall, to find movement inside and was startled to see a little Swazi boy, who was just as startled. He jumped out of the window and I realized as he fled that a team of children had been pilfering our things. I gave chase, shouting as I went. He ran up the hill into the path of other schoolboys coming down. When I called out, they also gave chase, so he ran in another direction. Eventually I brought him

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down with a rugby tackle that tore our clothes – his and mine – as we tumbled down the dirt road.

When I seized him, I was disconcerted by his trembling body and, still under an adrenaline rush, I held him to me tightly as he tried to break away. Then I realized how hard his heart was beating and how much terror he suffered at being held. Others had by then caught up with us. No one wanted to hurt him, but not knowing what to do we took him to the schoolmaster's house. By then one of the other pilfering children had been brought in too. The master packed us into his car and drove us down to the police station in Mbabane. We – the white children who had caught these blacks – were vocal in our indignation and called for them to be charged.

The station commander – a big black man – spoke to them in siSwati in a stern but kindly manner. I could understand some of the exchange and was startled by his geniality and his shift in perspective from a law enforcer to someone concerned for its transgressors. He pointed out to us that they were dressed in rags. 'These children are very poor,' he said, 'they are homeless and have no adults in their lives to care for them. They are probably also hungry.' They were trembling and responded to his questions in monosyllables and with averted eyes. Although they looked eight or nine years old we were surprised to learn that they were in fact teenagers, so only a little younger than ourselves but half our size. When the commander wanted to know what they had stolen we went back to the dormitory with our schoolmaster to do an inventory and returned to report that nothing was missing. So, at this point they had nothing in their possession, nothing was found missing and nothing was found on their pathway of flight. The commander said they could be prosecuted for trespass but not for theft, though he preferred to put them in the care of a social worker. We had no idea what a social worker was or would do. I was to become a social worker myself, years later. But, at that time, we were indignant that they would not receive their due punishment – by contrast, our schoolmasters would have given us six cuts with a cane for a much lesser trespass. We returned, the children remained with the commander, and we heard nothing further.

This was the last incident to separate me from the white supremacy of my upbringing. Although I had few internal resources to appreciate what had happened, the moment of capture – feeling this child's frightened, beating heart – shifted me from the position of being a white bringing force to bear against black delinquency, to having an identification with these lost and frightened children.

I left school with a scholarship to study medicine at the University of Cape Town, where I began in 1966. I had grown up fascinated by the biological sciences and was inspired by my mother's first cousin, Alec Folb, to become a doctor like him. At UCT I was befriended by student leaders who were bringing people together to oppose apartheid, but I gave priority to my studies, got

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absorbed in my subjects and struggled to survive the rough culture of College House, the men's dormitory in which I had the misfortune to be placed. News soon arrived of another scholarship awarded by the American Field Service – a student exchange programme – to go to the USA. After completing the first half of the year at UCT, I left to spend the next year in Scarsdale, Westchester County, New York. I lived with a local family and attended a state school with standards above those of my university's first year. The country was bitterly divided, and racial and political conflict would soon set it ablaze. The Vietnam War was raging, and the civil rights movement was breaking new ground in the Deep South. Boys in my school year were being drafted for military service, and the bombing of Hanoi had just begun. The year turned into more of a political education than an academic one, and exposure to an outstanding teacher gave me the confidence to begin writing.

I returned to university in Cape Town where I led a double life – reimmersed in basic sciences at medical school and, at the same time, uplifted by the student movement that was enrolling young people all over the world. I soon fell foul of the right-wing culture of people in my hall of residence, who turned on me violently, especially as I had previously played a part in inviting Robert Kennedy to deliver the annual Day of Affirmation lecture in 1966. I describe these violent events in Day 4. I got depressed, found it hard to study, withdrew from the course and moved up to Johannesburg to enrol for a degree in psychology at the University of Witwatersrand the following year. I had a successful first year studying psychology, literature and especially philosophy, in which I became deeply immersed. In the second year my curriculum included history and isiZulu, and I was halfway through this when I was arrested and deported.

In January 1968 at the beginning of my second year at 'Wits', I wrote a poem to both honour and question the launch of Apollo 8. I contrasted this triumph with the recent death of a baby girl whose mother worked as a maid for the family I was in lodgings with. Julie Nkosi looked after the kitchen and did the cleaning and laundry. She lived in one of the poky backrooms in their yard, like most black domestics, but her real home was in Alexandra township where her mother and sister looked after her two-year-old baby, along with other children in their family. Her husband was working elsewhere on a contract that kept him away from the family for most of the year. She had hidden the fact that she was a mother to protect her terms of employment. The pass laws only allowed those coming from Alexandra to work in white areas if they had no family responsibilities. Having grown up in Swaziland I had some command of siSwati, the country's language, closely related to isiZulu in which we would often chat when they were out. I was studying isiZulu at university and she would help me with the language. She also knew that I had friends in the township and trusted me with worry about her baby who lived there with her mother. She needed money to meet the cost of antibiotics and, when I succeeded in per-

suading her to disclose this to the family, they refused to help with the treatment cost, as they said she was not even supposed to have a baby. I raised funds on a loan from friends, but it was too late, and the baby died.

For some days Julie did not turn up for work, and then very early one morning when she did return, she found she was locked out. She woke me in the dark by tapping on my window from the outside to have me let her in. She was grieving, and her head was covered in a blanket. I woke the family to appeal for their help, but they refused to assist with the funeral expenses and, once more, I secured what I could on a loan from family friends. Later I drove into Alex on my motor scooter to Julie's family home, where I found them all sitting around in mourning, and I put the funds in the hands of Julie's parents. She was sitting in a corner hooded by a blanket. They had not yet been able to get news to her husband, the baby's father, who was working on a contract somewhere far away. I left my lodgings, and later wrote a poem to the dead child and the moon, a fragment of which opens this memoir. Julie had no such option. She needed the job, so she stayed on and I never saw her again. I hope she had other children, that she raised her family in Alexandra and that they saw deliverance from the terms of apartheid.

During my short spell at Wits I joined the South African Volunteer Service (SAVS), a student organization that raised money and recruited suitably qualified students to build schools in rural areas during university vacations. My first assignment involved leading a work camp to build a school in a remote part of Swaziland, which was something like going home. By then I had been befriended by a number of black students whom I invited to join us. We recruited some twenty white university students – men and women – and were joined by other volunteers on the site, most of whom came through the Quaker movement. We were housed in thatched huts in the village, dug an open latrine for ourselves and bathed in a nearby stream – men at one site and women at another. The villagers brought us clean water daily, and we cooked over an open fire. It was a cold winter in the mountains and it sometimes frosted overnight. We had several engineering students on the site who took charge of the build, following a pre-planned layout ordered and paid for in advance. People rotated through membership of the different teams – digging, cooking, offloading steel girders and breeze blocks, and later mixing and casting concrete and supporting the bricklayers who were laying breeze blocks. We had some wonderful singers and guitar players in the project, and evenings round the fire at night were musical and convivial. Our build was successful in the three weeks available and, lying in the mountains north-west of Mbabane, the school is still standing in the village of Makwana.

I had come across two of the blacks who joined us on the project, Ezekiel Mokone and Milner Moroke, when they visited the university common rooms. I was introduced to the third, Mongane Wally Serote, by Bill Ainslie, an art

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teacher who, with his wife, opened their home to writers and artists. Wally was an aspiring writer who, without any university education, was better read in literature than anyone else I knew. By then I was a committed participant in a writers' workshop with Lionel Abrahams, one of the country's leading writers, and I would often present my poetry there. When Lionel passed away in 2004, I sent an epitaph to his widow in which I described how he had taught me to read and write for a second time. I introduced Wally to this group, and we would arrive on my motor scooter and later leave under their inspiration to go away and work on our respective writing projects. I saw Wally fashion poems that have become landmarks in the new South African literature. Our bond was both a friendship and a writers' alliance. We hid some of his work, and mine, in a wardrobe in my home, together with a stock of his political literature for which I provided safekeeping, at a time when police raids in Alexandra township had created new threats. When I was arrested and the police raided my own home, its secrets were not discovered. Like our friendship, they were safeguarded through our respective interrogations. The poetry in his voice, like his central role in the struggle, has inspired generations. I have watched with pride and respect as schools and universities build their teaching curriculum in South Africa on new foundations laid by his own poetry and novels, and by the literature of many others (Serote 1978a and 1978b).

I conclude this Introduction with a poem by Serote that he wrote while on a Fulbright Scholarship at Columbia University in New York in 1975, five years after enduring nine months of solitary confinement. He published it in his 1978 anthology, *Behold Mama, Flowers*.

When Lights Go Out
Mongane Wally Serote
(for some who are in South African jails)[7]

1
it is with the shadows of night
when the sun comes and goes
the moon comes and goes
that we ask, in weary voices, which fall into
the depth of the gulf:
how does it feel to be you
to be watching and waiting
to feel the heavy weight of every minute come
followed by another

and nothing
even everything written in blood
says nothing about how we could wake up tomorrow
and build a day

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2
your eyelids shut, if they ever do,
and the memories of those you knew, flood behind
the darkness of closed eyelids
spiralling into patterns of pain
and you alone know
that once there were hopes
that once the footsteps of the people sounded on the
horizon
and now
silence strides across the sky
where the sun sets, proclaiming a wish to rest

3
can we tell you
the children of a long hour a long day a long
night
that hope never befriends fools
yes
time, in absolute eloquence, can erase our faces
remember Sharpeville?
in those days, violence and disaster were articulate
and now
today you watch and wait

4
so one day hope begins to walk again
it whispers
about the twisted corpses that we saw
sprawled across the streets on this knowledgeable earth
the tears
the blood
the memory
and the knowledge, which was born by every heavy
minute that we carried
across a wilderness, where there were no paths
where screams echoed, as if never to stop
it is when there is no hope, that hope begins to walk
again
yet
like we said
hope never befriends fools

5
since we have eyes to see
ears

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and fingers to touch
only if we know how, can we harness time –
can you hear the footsteps
New York 1975 (Serote 1978a: 69–70)

Notes

1. The B'nai Avraham and Yehuda Laib Family Association (BAYL) publishes an annual newsletter in Baltimore called *The Bulletin*, which records the life of this now extended family association. BAYL is due to celebrate the 120th anniversary of its foundation in May 2021. Retrieved May 2020 from https://bayl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BAYL-Bulletin-Vol.-74-Sept.-2020.pdf.
2. Sources for the many historical references in this book will be found in Thompson 2000.
3. Lionel Abrahams helped me to track this poem down and find its provenance and publication (see Gibbon 2008) by introducing me to Malcolm Hacksley, the then director of the National English Literary Museum in South Africa. My grateful thanks to both of them.
4. Retrieved May 2020 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lightning_bird.
5. Swazi National Anthem. Retrieved May 2020 from https://youtu.be/iR3B4bYmpBI..
6. Gideon Shimoni provides the most comprehensive and authoritative study of the Jewish community in South Africa, its relationship with the Afrikaner government and its opposition to and complicity with apartheid.
7. A range of Serote's publications in poetry and prose is given in the references. He is the recipient of a number of literary awards including the Ingrid Jonker Poetry Prize in South Africa for his first anthology, *Yakhal'Inkomo: The Cry of Cattle at the Slaughter: Poetry*, in 1973; the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 1993; and the Pablo Neruda Award from the Chilean Government in 2004. His Fulbright Award took him to Columbia University New York in 1975, and he remained in exile working for the African National Congress until 1990, when legislation banning the liberation movements was repealed. As a Member of Parliament he served as Chair of the parliamentary select committee for arts and culture and then as Chief Executive Officer of Freedom Park, a national heritage site in Pretoria, opened in 2007. Retrieved May 2020 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongane_Wally_Serote.

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