

The magazine for ALUMNI and friends of the University of the Witwatersrand
October edition 2025,
Volume 54







36

#### Wits Spaces An urban oasis

From koi to campus cats, bees to blossoms
– discover the wild heart of Wits

Image: Brett Eloff

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# Wits Review

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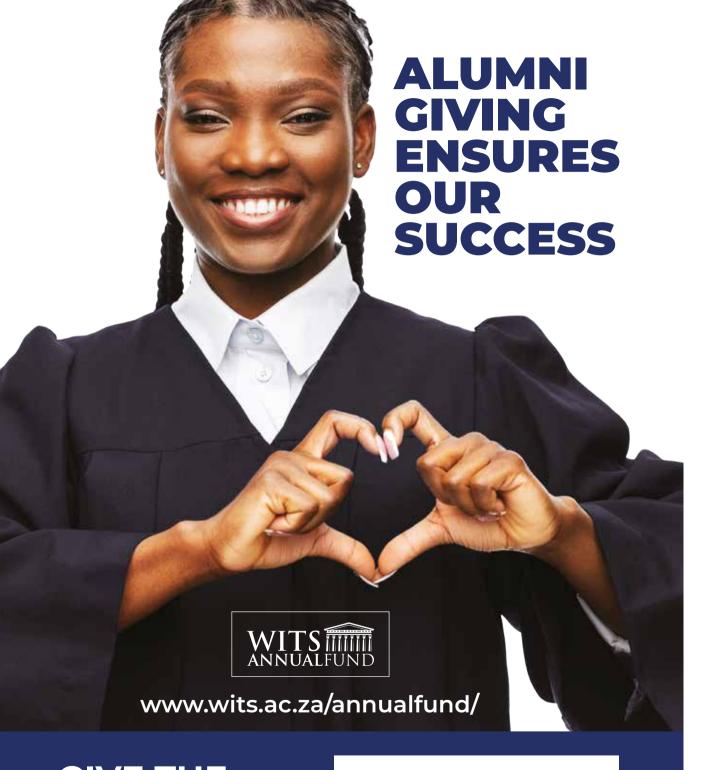
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#### Peter Maher Director of Alumni Relations



# Changing times, Unchanging spirit

recently had the good fortune to meet with wonderful Witsies in Dubai and Dublin, and in conversations with them I became increasingly aware of how the student experience evolves across generations. Alumni reunions are designed to rekindle memories of student life, and in hearing stories from across the decades, it was clear that while the details change, the essence of Wits remains.

Since its founding in 1922, Wits has been more than a collection of lecture halls, libraries, and laboratories. It has been a crucible of transformation – where diverse minds collide, identities are shaped, and lifelong friendships and connections are forged. The protests against apartheid, the Fees Must Fall movement, Parades through the streets of Braamfontein, the heartbreak and euphoria of our student sports teams, all form part of a shared heritage.

For over a century, each generation of Witsies has left its own imprint on the campus landscape. The Greatest Generation and the Silent Generation were the first to arrive, wearing suits and ties and formal dresses, memories of them are forever etched in monochrome. They sang the UMPA, had their spirits lifted by Phineas, and made wacky RAG floats.

They were followed by Baby Boomers whose experience was shaped by apartheid. They experienced tumultuous times but also got to enjoy a music revolution and a hippie culture. In-between protests they sold RAG mags and rocked to the Free People's Concerts.

Generation X came next wearing ripped jeans and doc martens, with Walkman's in their backpacks. They straddled the analogue and digital divide until the Millennials arrived carrying laptops and "digital native" instincts embracing social media, connectivity and collaboration. For them, campus memories include pillow fights on the Library Lawns, the

infamous Engineers' Spring Breakfast, and a new mascot, Kudos the Kudu.

Gen Z, the social justice "born free" generation currently thriving on campus, have elevated multitasking to a lifestyle. They swipe, scroll, and stream their way through lectures, perfectly capable of watching a documentary, posting memes, and writing essays simultaneously. They are immersed in their Wits identity through the Spirit Game and have rediscovered the joy of parading through Braamfontein.

And now, on the horizon, we glimpse Generation Alpha. These are the children who could swipe before they could speak. For them, digital fluency is not an acquired skill but a native language. Smart devices are companions, and virtual environments are as natural as physical classrooms. Their university experience may well blur boundaries between physical lecture hall and augmented reality, between local campus and global network. Their future careers, many of which likely do not yet exist, will unfold at the intersection of human insight and artificial intelligence.

And yet, despite these technological shifts, the essence of Wits endures. Students across the generations have grappled with the same timeless questions of identity and purpose, their role in society, and future ambitions. They delight in the acquisition of knowledge and intellectual discovery, while forging bonds that last a lifetime.

And while each generation views the next with a measure of scepticism, history shows that each one finds its path, adding fresh energy to the chain of human progress. Wits is more than the sum of its buildings or curricula; it is a living continuum of inquiry and imagination. Its legacy endures not only in scholarship, but in the lives of those who carry its spirit forward.

Stay in touch: Please share your news and remember to update your contact details. Please email letters to alumni@wits.ac.za

## Chain of discovery is even longer

Thank you for compiling the Wits Review article "Unsung Heroes" to commemorate the Centenary of the Taung skull, and to point to "the growing awareness to acknowledge everyone including the numerous labourers who contribute to the work of scientists". These labourers include the anonymous mineworkers in Taung who blasted the fossil out of the rock. "Unsung Heroes" celebrates two Wits graduates: Josephine Salmons (BSc 1926, BSc Hons 1926) and Robert Young (DSc honoris causa 1937), who contributed to the "chain of discovery" that led to Raymond Dart's description of the Taung fossil as Australopithecus africanus in Nature

in February 1925.

In February 2025, the South African Journal of Science published a special issue for the centenary of the Taung skull. A dynamic group of authors and editors reflected on the past century in

palaeoanthropology in South Africa, in a changing "socio-political landscape". I was invited to contribute an article about Dart's legacy and how his telling of the story of the Taung skull obscured the contributions of many, and promoted the myth of "one man, one fossil". I drew attention to the role played by, among others, Salmons and Young, stories that I had first highlighted in my book Darwin's Hunch: Science, Race and the Search for Human Origins (Jacana 2016). In both the article and the book, I relied on research in the Raymond Dart Papers in the

Wits University archives. I drew on the writings of many others, including Philip Tobias and Goran Strkalj, and benefited from an interview with Salmons's grandson Craig Elstob. It is satisfying to see the *Wits Review* article acknowledge the role of these Wits alumni, as well as the hidden figures in Taung.

Christa Kuljian (MA 2007) \*See also Our Science, Ourselves, p66

# A unexpected family history



Josephine Salmons (above) and Cecil Jackson got divorced in her later life. She lived in Scottburgh (now KwaZulu-Natal), where she died of cancer at the early age of 47 on 22 April 1950. In 2010, we tracked down her only living best friend, Babs Hampson, who described Josephine as "the kindest, and cleverest helpful person" she had ever known.

Josephine had a daughter, Anne, who married Michael Elstob. She also had a son, Dudley, who never married and went to become an economics professor at Wollongong University in Australia. Josephine's father, Joseph Salmons, and mother, Sarah, lived in St Patricks Road, Houghton. Her parents came to Labannesburg in the middle of the

Anglo Boer War from Newport Pagnel, in the United Kingdom. He bought property in Germiston and the Johannesburg CBD, establishing the mens outfitters and sports shop called Ward & Salmons. They also had a store in Durban.

Joseph came from the family-owned Salmons & Sons who built horse-drawn carriages from 1830-1900 and then did all the bodies and panelling for cars. They sold the business around 1955 to Aston Martin. I only discovered the Salmons – Aston Martin link by chance. When we visited the factory, the director gave us a guided tour and treated us like royalty! Stepping back in time and seeing it all was very special.

Many thanks for your interest in Josephine.

#### Craig Elstob,

Josephine Salmon's grandson

## Franco created an Anti Ugly League

I found the article in the latest *Wits Review* about **Franco Frescura** (BA 1977, MArch 1981, PhD 1986) very interesting. I remember him well, so does my sister. There was one more instance of him causing trouble. Wits went to great trouble to beautify the campus by adding

large clay pots
with beautiful
plants in them.
Franco decided
they were ugly,
and he created
the Anti Ugly
League. They would
go around trashing the pots by
knocking them over and breaking
them. Just very lacking in decorum
and consideration of the cost of

#### **Caroline Christie**

things.

Johannesburg in the middle of the (BSc 1970, BSc Hons 1972, MSc 1983)



LECTURE: SIR JOHN LAZAR

#### Skills to thrive

The 2025 Prof Barry Dwolatzky Memorial Lecture, titled "AI in Africa: Innovation under constraints," was given on 11 August 2025, by **Sir John Lazar** (BSc 1982, BSc Hons 1983), President of the Royal Academy of Engineering. Speaking to the audience at the Wits Anglo-American Digidome, Sir John warned against the tempting nature of AI tools: "These tools are incredibly articulate and persuasive; they're designed to flatter and make you feel good. But, in reality, relying on them is a 'short circuit to laziness and stupidity.'" He stressed that the current focus on technical training in AI isn't enough; we also need to teach "attitudinal skills." Sir John predicted that as the AI revolution continues, "the people who thrive, who benefit, who come through this, are going to be ones who've developed a particular set of attitudinal skills." He urged the audience to embrace the skills exemplified by Prof Dwolatzky: being engaged, curious, deeply empathetic, problem-focused, intellectually rigorous, challenging, and thoroughly sceptical.

#### Wits Briefs

#### Google + MIND = Africa Al boost

Google.org awarded \$1 million to the MIND Institute, led by TIME100 AI 2025 honouree **Professor Benjamin Rosman,** to help drive innovative AI research in Africa. The funding will support breakthroughs in natural and AI, while also strengthening collaboration across research, industry, and policy – and building local talent along the way. **See page 26.** 



#### Ethics meets impact: Mervyn King Centre launched

Mervyn King (BA 1958, BCom 1969, HDipTax 1975, LLD honoris causa 2008) opened the Mervyn King Centre at Wits Business

School on 30 June 2025. It is set to drive bold research on ethics, governance, and eco-friendly business practices that shape a better future. It will feed into the Margo Steel School of Accountancy through its postgraduate diploma qualification in specialised accountancy, integrated thinking and value creation. It's the first of its kind, based on Professor King's thesis laid out in The Chief Value Officer: Accountants Can Save the Planet (Routledge 2016).



#### Summit fires up entrepreneurs

Robbie Brozin (BCom 1984), co-founder of Nando's and member of the WBS Advisory

Board, was the keynote speaker at the first Wits Entrepreneurship Education Summit on 9 September 2025. The summit drew academics and researchers to amplify the impact of entrepreneurial initiatives. "It is up to us, at Wits, to turn the city around, while keeping human dignity at the centre of whatever we do. We need to stand up and be visible. We have a golden moment right now to get things done, to act. This summit marks the beginning of real job creation for Johannesburg, real societal impact and we can't afford to miss the opportunity," he said.







**Above:** The Schonland "family" at Savernake

Schonland was special because of the culture of camaraderie it created



**Above:** Sir Basil Schonland

It was also special because of the culture of camaraderie it created, and nurturing a distinct ethos. This field has always had to have a clear-eyed response to the world around it. Nuclear physics research has never existed in isolation. It's the most political branch of physics, as **Professor Zeblon Vilakazi** (MSc 1994, PhD 1998) calls it, with powerful potential for both good and bad.

This winter, Wits held a reunion for the Schonland "family" at Savernake. The journey back to the period between the late 1950s and the early 2000s meant an afternoon filled with nostalgia and anecdotes. There was laughter remembering how a wad of Prestik sometimes stood in for an emergency mend on high-tech equipment. There were also the terrible oopsies of a bolt accidentally dropped into a spinning turbo molecular pump or a diamond used in research going missing, leaving researchers scrambling on their hands and knees for hours. Tearoom in-jokes were shared and memories of sleeping next to accelerators to ensure experiments didn't go wrong, and lunchtime soccer matches between researchers and security staff, and of course

Joining the gathering were some of the scientists who were part of the very first days of Schonland, including **Don Mingay** (BSc 1957, BSc Hons 1958, PhD 1964) and

its research achievements.

**Harold Annegarn** (BSc 1968, BSc Hons 1969, PhD 1976). Also in attendance was Reverend Frank Chikane, who spent three years at the laboratory as a technician in the late 1970s. He was barred from studying to become a mathematical physicist as a black student under apartheid.

But the reunion was ultimately about remembering why old friendships and workplace bonds can stay close to people's hearts for a lifetime. There was also pause to reflect on the impact of nuclear physics research in the history of the country and what it means in a 2025 context.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute noted in June 2025 that the world is in an increasingly precarious position. Its annual assessment of the state of armaments, disarmament and international security said that as of June 2025 "a dangerous new nuclear arms race is emerging at a time when arms control regimes are severely weakened".

There's a circling back to questions of how science and innovation must adapt, inform and lead in a changing world.

It's a good time to revisit how Schonland came into being, and how it came to an end.

The history of the Wits Physics Department compiled by **Arthur Every** (BSc 1963, BSc Hons 1964, MSc 1965) records that Schonland emerged from the Physics Department in 1958 under the directorship of Friedel Sellschop, who had joined Wits two years earlier.

It was Sellschop who decided on a name change for the nuclear physics department, naming it the Schonland Research Centre as a nod to **Sir Basil Schonland** (DSc honoris causa 1957). Schonland was a Wits luminary whose research included working on lightning and the development of radar technology. The first tests at Wits involved detecting the Northcliff water tower by radar from the top of the Bernard Price building on campus. This 1939 feat was the first radar echo recorded in South Africa.

Schonland served in World War II but as peace time returned he was tasked with establishing the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). He continued to serve as director at the Bernard Price Institute at Wits before taking up a role in 1951 as the first chancellor of Rhodes University. Schonland would later leave South Africa for the UK, but not before recruiting a young Sellschop to be the centre's new director.

Sellschop was one of the youngest professors – at age 27 – in the university's history. Every writes that under Sellschop, the Schonland Research Centre experienced a shift in research and specialisation "in relatively low energy, pure and applied nuclear research, particularly applications of nuclear analytical methods to minerals, materials and the environment."

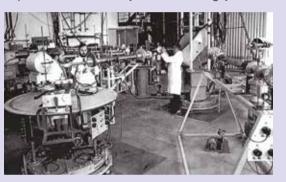
But Every also describes the centre as coming to have "a character of its own". Sellschop, who died in 2002, is remembered for being full of energy, something of a maverick, "hyper intelligent" and having the ability and the guts to bend rules enough when they didn't make sense.

Vilakazi joined Schonland in 1992 and Sellschop was one of his supervisors. One of the first things he noticed was the centre's tearoom culture.

He explains that Sellschop had gained international fame in the 1960s and 1970s and recruited young scientists to join Schonland. "Some of them arrived here from swinging London with long hair and bell bottoms and with this he could change "he culture."

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Wits was a pioneer in South Africa for operating a nuclear accelerator, which was used by the Wits nuclear physics research unit. Wits acquired the accelerator from a Cambridge University-linked lab in 1961 when it was housed in the Nuclear Physics Research Unit (NPRU) which later became the Schonland Research Institute for Nuclear Sciences. It was affectionately called "Phoenix", having been resurrected, or "risen from the ashes" according to former Wits Professor of Experimental Nuclear Physics Dr Don Mingay.



**Above:** The target room assembly of beam lines based on the Phoenix Cockroft Walton taken around 1966. Laurie Hoare, accelerator technician at the 90-degree analysing magnet. Mike Renan is shown next to the (p,gamma) line. This hall was the founding area of charged particle reaction research studies, both static and dynamic at the NPRU.

In 1972, Wits acquired a second-hand **Tandem van de Graaf accelerator** (below) which was originally from Saclay, France, and which is still in use today. The Cambridge 1.2 MV Cockroft Walton accelerator is now on display at the Science Museum in London.



"Schonland was about a time of scientific history in the making. It was also about the belief that science knows no culture, science knows no race. We were all trvina to solve nature's mysteries there"

Professor Zeblon Vilakazi

> Images: Sinethemba Msomi

"Sellschop said the tearoom would be egalitarian. There would not be a tearoom for workers and another for scientists or one for blacks and one for whites," says Vilakazi.

Still under apartheid, Sellschop recruited budding scientists and researchers who were not white, Vilakazi, "just a young black guy from Kathlehong" among them. The ability to change a workplace culture so deliberately in a time of racial segregation by law was significant. Sellschop and Schonland went against the political grain.

In an obituary of Sellschop, Professor Robin Cherry, the late emeritus professor of physics at the University of Cape Town, wrote that Sellschop was up against a National Party that since coming into power in 1948 had moved "government levers of control over the scientific sector – by the late 1950s this shift was essentially complete.

For Friedel, the situation was unpropitious in the extreme. He was considered politically unreliable, too 'international', whereas the prevailing dogma was firmly inward-looking. In particular he had declined to ally himself with the controlling élite when he could have done so easily and had instead taken a post at a suspect 'liberal' institution."

Says Vilakazi: "Sellschop was a hyper energetic and hyper intelligent man. He was also basically a kind of entrepreneur." He was an excellent fundraiser and managed to have the EN Tandem accelerator commissioned in 1973 for Schonland. It remained in use under Wits until the early 2000s.

But by 2005 the university could no longer financially support Schonland and the cost to maintain the accelerator. It ushered in the era of National Research Foundation funding and Schonland was absorbed into the national iThemba LABS, which is still based at Wits.

"Schonland was about a time of scientific history in the making. It was also about the belief that science knows no culture, science knows no race. We were all trying to solve nature's mysteries there," says Vilakazi.

**Professor Mervin Naidoo** (BSc 1992, BSc Hons 1995, PhD 2008), from the School of Physics, was part of the Schonland reunion organising committee. He picks up on this strand of Schonland's history from the 1990s. Naidoo was a student at Wits in the 1980s and came to Schonland a decade after.

He says the world was only just emerging from the Cold War. The tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were marked by the constant threats of nuclear warfare. It was a time of the arms race and the rush to develop nuclear capabilities and to stockpile weapons.

"You had someone like Frank Chikane

who was openly organising as part of the Struggle but on realising South Africa's nuclear weapons capabilities wanted to quickly move away from Schonland. He did not want to be associated with anything that could help develop nuclear weapons for an apartheid state," says Naidoo. Shrouds of secrecy, suspicion and concerns swirled around anything to do with nuclear science in that period.

"Schonland as a nuclear physics research unit was not based on the idea of adding knowledge to nuclear weapon technology, it was a facility using nuclear techniques to study other aspects of materials. But the word 'nuclear' was immediately associated with things like nuclear weapons or the atomic bomb, because it was so much part of everyday conversation or in the news. Of course, there's another part of it, which is applications for nuclear medicine, radiocarbon dating or materials testing," Naidoo says.

As South Africa moved towards becoming a democracy, the country signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and dismantled its nuclear weapons programme. "We as a country stood on the right side of history. In the transformation that we went through we wanted to move away from those kinds of destructive ideas so that we could be proud of our new democracy and not proud of what weapons we had," Naidoo says.



Jack Sellschop, Mary and Prof Zeblon Vilakazi



NETWORKING EVENT

# Real Talk on Money and Adulting

10 JULY 2025

Wits Alumni Relations hosted a practical and inspiring conversation around financial wellness, career development, and the journey of being an adult on 10 July 2025. Guided by Witsies **Rumbi Munyaradzi** (BCom 2008), CEO for mobile wallets at Sasai Fintech, and author of Your Guide to Adulting (pictured left) and **Tshepo Kgapane** (BCom 2015) founder of Youth Money Circle and product lead at WaFunda/ Blackbullion South Africa (pictured right), the event served as a great way for young alumni to gain tips on becoming money savvy.



- 16 October: Vice-Chancellor's Concert at Seabrooke Music Hall
- 16-18 October: Civil Engineering Class of 1975 50th Anniversary Reunion
- 25 October: Arthur Bleksley Lecture in the Wits Anglo American Digital Dome
- 14-15 November: Electrical Engineering Class of 1975 50th Anniversary Reunion

Enquiries: events.alumni@wits.ac.za



Prof Mervin Naidoo, Lebang Matladisha and Eddie Storbeck

Prof Elias Sideras-Haddad, Lebang Matladisha and Trevor Stevens























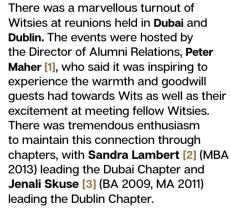
Images: The Photography Co, Dubai



ALUMNI REUNIONS 0

# Dubai and Dublin

**15 AND 18 SEPTEMBER 2025** 



The **Dubai reunion** was held at the Avani Palm View Hotel on 15 September where guests were also addressed by the Head of Communications at Wits, **Shirona Patel [4]**, and in **Dublin** guests at the reunion held at The Spencer Hotel on 18 September, were also addressed by the University's representative in the UK, **Lynda Murray [5]**.















Images: Mark Harrison, Karl Hussey Photography

#### REUNION D

#### Founders' Tea

7 SEPTEMBER 2025

Around 400 guests gathered under Wits' Champion Tree on the Gavin Relly Green on a warm spring morning to celebrate one of the most treasured events on the calendar for the Alumni Relations Office -Founders' Tea. As the guest speaker, former Chief Justice Raymond Zondo [1] presented an overview of the judiciary's positive potential for our democracy and enjoyed the event's atmosphere. "The spirit is wonderful. It's very warm. It's because of the people... everyone is very positive and that connects with the theme of my address."

Among the audience were many familiar faces. The oldest Founders included 91-year-old Sue **Rootenberg [2]** (BA 1954, BAEd 1980, MA Ed 1982) and 99-year-old Dr John Callaghan [3] (MBBCh 1949), who up until recently was still practising as an ENT surgeon at the Medforum Hospital in Tshwane. "It was a privilege to study as this university," he said. He shared his secret to longevity with Alumni Relations: "Keep busy, don't stop doing things you love. Whatever work you do, you must enjoy it."

















BOOK LAUNCH ()

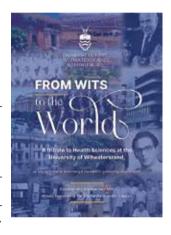


#### Wits to the World

19 JUNE 2025

In 2020, the **Medical School** (now Faculty of Health Sciences) Class of 1960 launched a website in celebration of their Diamond Jubilee. What started as a collection of autobiographical sketches, news, as well as obituaries from the class in the form of newsletters grew into a fabulous e-book. This remarkable collection was launched through an online webinar.

"It is wonderful to think that an idea can generate and germinate such interest. My great hope is that people will stay in touch. My other great hope is that other classes will emulate what we've done and contribute to their alma mater and help current medical students," said Chicagobased Chaim Rosenberg, who originally initiated the project.



The event was

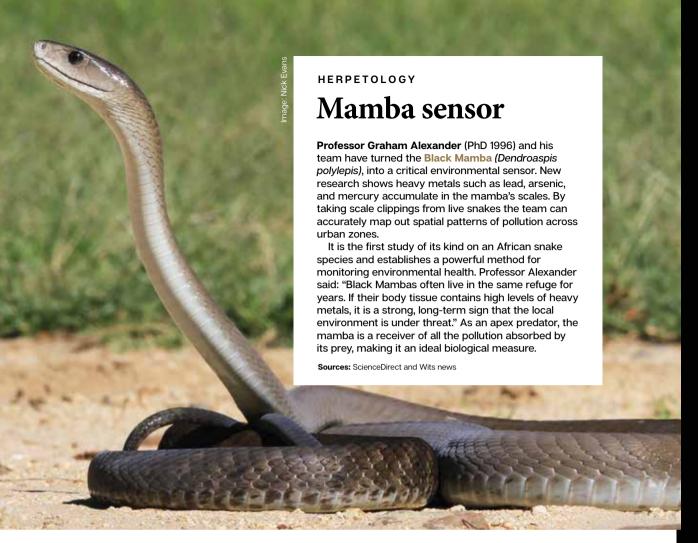
hosted by Geraldine Auerbach from London, who also edited the content. "For many in the class, connecting again with each other after 60 years, were the highlight of their lockdown years," she said.

Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Professor Shabir Madhi (MBBCh 1990, MMed 1999, PhD 2004) said the contents demonstrate that "graduates who come out of Wits remain competitive and highly sought after globally." He shared the latest global rankings, stating that Wits remains in the top 1% of institutions globally. In the discipline of infectious diseases, Wits ranks 20 out of 2 500 institutions. "We're among the top 0.1%. Certain things have changed very much since the 1960s...But I think what we pride ourselves [in] as South Africans, as Wits, is that Wits still gives you the edge," he said.

This e-book showcases the academic growth, scholarly achievements, and the broadening impact of Wits scholars on global thought and society. It serves not only as a rich historical record but also as an inspiring chronicle of how Wits-trained thinkers carried their influence far beyond Johannesburg. ■









**PHARMACOLOGY** 

#### From jab to gel

Kruti Naik (BPharm 2019, MPharm 2023), a PhD candidate at the Wits Advanced Drug Delivery Platform has been developing a microneedle eve patch that could help fight blindness in Africa. A new microneedle patch in the shape of a contact lens, which dissolves when placed in the eye, could replace traditional drops, and transform treatment for millions at risk of blindness. Naik's previous work, published in the journal Drug Delivery and Translational Research, showed that hydrogels are safe, stable and capable of being injected into the eye with fine needles, then releasing medication steadily over weeks. In meticulous lab studies, hydrogels were gentle on tissues and acted as long-lasting drug depots, reducing the need for repeated invasive procedures.

Source: Wits News, Image: Adobe Stock

ONCOLOGY

# Genetic discovery for breast cancer

Researchers from Wits, the Sydney Brenner Institute for Molecular Bioscience, and the South African National Cancer Registry conducted the first genome-wide study of breast cancer in the sub-Saharan population.

Mahtaab Hayat (BSc 2015, BSc Hons 2015, MSc Med 2018, PhD 2023) is the lead author of a new study, published in Nature, which uncovers two new genetic variants linked to breast cancer in black South African women. These genetic variants have not been previously found to be associated with breast cancer in non-African populations. It is a crucial step towards better prevention, earlier detection, and more effective treatments that reflect our population's unique genetic diversity.

Sources: Nature and The Conversation

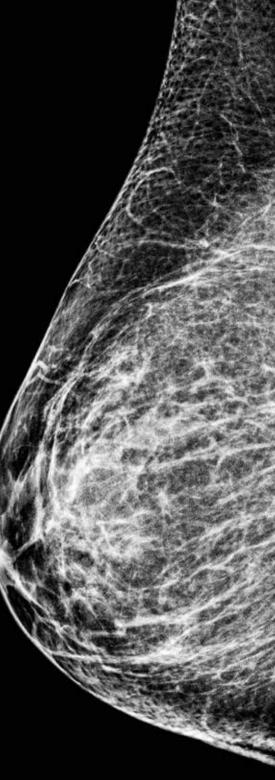
POLLUTION

# Global prize for AI-air tech

Researchers at the Institute for Collider Particle Physics have been awarded the 2025 ODESS Prize by the Pierre Fabre Foundation in France. The prize celebrates their groundbreaking use of particle physics and Al to create a real-time air quality monitoring system. The winning project, led by Professor Bruce Mellado, integrates environmental sensors, communications and artificial intelligence to detect air pollution and related health risks as they happen.

Source: Wits News AQI

Images: Adobe Stock



RESEARCH





### Serge Nitegeka

Renowned artist **Serge Alain Nitegeka** (BA FA 2010) returned to his alma mater for his first solo exhibition at the Wits Art Museum (WAM), titled Black Subjects, presented in the very space that once housed his student studio.

"It's great to be back. It brings back a lot of memories and I've longed to make a body of work that I could exhibit here," he said at opening night of the exhibition in the first week of September.

He said Wits always presented him with experiences he relished, and the institution provided a special place where

he felt both challenged and supported as an artist: "I had lots

of freedom. That's what Wits has given me, in immeasurable ways. There was a freedom to explore, to experiment, the freedom to triumph."

Born in Rwanda in 1983, Nitegeka became a refugee during the 1994 genocide. He completed his schooling in Kenya and began studying at Wits in 2005. Two years later, he received the Robert Hodgins Prize, followed by the prestigious Tollman Award for Visual Arts in 2010. That same year, he was selected for the Dakar Biennale, where he won a Fondation Jean Paul Blachère prize. In 2018, he received the Villa Extraordinary Award for Sculpture, and in 2019, the Grant-Award from the Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation.

Currently he lives in Johannesburg, although he has waited for years to attain valid citizenship in South Africa. He said he has learned to "work with what is at hand" and "make do", an ethos that has shaped his art. His choice of materials are wooden packing crates, charcoal and acrylic paint.

On the evening **Associate Professor David Andrew** (PG Dip Ed 1986, PhD 2011), Nitegeka's former lecturer, remembered Nitegeka's 2006 first-year project in which he used: "A basin, paint-sprayed bucket, firewood – domestic objects that echoed the 'intimate personal affects' he refers to in his more recent work."

Prof Andrew said: "Visitors must move and navigate around beams and objects – adapt to the space. Forced migration is not only a political issue, but a deep personal and embodied experience. It invites us to be meditative and contemplative."

#### On show at WAM until 8 November 2025

**Left above:** Structural Response V: installation shot at WAM **Below:** Displaced Peoples in Situ: Studio Study XVII 2024. Acrylic on wood

Images: Courtesy of the artist, Stevenson and WAM



#### Nyakallo Maleke 🐧 🔾

Nyakallo Maleke (BA FA 2016) was the winner of the 2025 Standard Bank Young Artist Award in the Visual Arts category. The National Arts Festival Artistic committee said her work "expands the conversation around drawing as both a medium and metaphor". She remembered Wits fondly: "A lot of my experimental and conceptual language started there. It offered grounding to think and explore what having a practice entails."



WITSIES WITH THE EDGE

#### Refiloe Masekela

Paediatric pulmonologist based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Professor Refiloe Masekela (MBBCh 1997), was named winner of the 2025 World Lung **Health Award** from the American Thoracic Society in May. Prof Masekela is the academic head of paediatrics and child health as well as president of the SA Thoracic Society. She was recognised for her exemplary achievements in paediatric asthma clinical trials and her creation of the African Chronic Respiratory Disease Observatory CHEST AFRICA. "It is a high honour because it's recognition from colleagues who are top in their field and to receive that standing in the field for one's life's work it's great. It's not been a job, it's been a joy," she said.

#### **Forbes**

Three Witsies are among the **2025 Forbes** Africa 30Under30s list.



Bradley Segal (MBBCh 2021, MSc Eng 2022) is cofounder of Engage Mx, a patient analytics platform, and has a passion for addressing pragmatic solutions for various healthcare challenges. He says: "I ended up graduating from medicine and engineering simultaneously in 2021. My work, combining clinical practice, technological innovation, and systems thinking, positions me to contribute meaningfully to this transformation."



The R&B singer and songwriter, **Elaine** Ndivhuwo Mukheli (BA 2021) known as Elaine, told the magazine: "I've been singing all my life". She started writing music in her first year at Wits and self-released her first EP "Elements" in 2019, which made her the first independent female artist to reach No 1 on the national iTunes and Apple Music chart with "You're the One". She has since joined Columbia Records and released a single called "Progress" this year.



Candice Chirwa (BA 2017, BA Hons 2018, MA 2019) is founder and director of Qrate, a non-profit company focusing on critical skills for young people. She is also unofficially known as "The Minister of Menstruation" for leading education programmes and conversations around the "taboo" topic.



**Professor Beniamin** Rosman (BSc 2007, BSc Hons 2008. BSc Hons 2009), the founding director of Wits' Machine Intelligence and Neural Discovery



\*See more Witsie honours: www.wits.ac.za/sources/alumni-news





2025 EMMY AWARD WINNERS

#### **David Jammy**

US Wits Fund board member and experienced television producer David Jammy (BA 1989, LLB 1996) was among the executive producer winners at the 77th Emmy Awards in the "Outstanding Variety Special (Pre-Recorded)" category for Conan O'Brien: The Kennedy Centre Mark Twain Prize for American Humour" on Netflix. He is a partner in the global production house Done+Dusted and said on Instagram the show was "such a joy to produce, celebrating a giant of comedy".

#### Lesego Vorster 🐧 🗅



Lesego Vorster (BA FA 2013, PDipArt 2016) was the winner of the Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation for Character Design for Kizazi Moto: Generation Fire (Disney+) at the 3rd Annual Children's & Family Emmy Awards. The co-founder of The Hidden Hand Studios says: "My advice for aspiring animators and artists is: Just do it. Believe in yourself and put in the work. Work hard, work smart, support other artists and the universe will see it fit to return the favour a thousand-fold."



FROM THE ARCHIVES

# Plucking and tinkles

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRETT ELOFF

Musicologist, collector and classical music promoter **Hans Georg Adler** (PhD *honoris causa* 1978) came to South Africa as an émigré from Germany in 1933 at the age of 29. His mother, Johanna Nathan, was a distinguished soprano and performed for noted composers such as Johannes Brahms and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Adler was a keen pianist and harpsichordist. A businessman by profession, he was chairman and honorary president of the Johannesburg Royal Society and built a collection of musical documents, letters and miscellanea over the years. His collection of rare keyboard instruments was donated to the University after his death in 1979 and the **Hans Adler Memorial Music Museum** was established in 1980. Today some of the instruments are still on display in the Chris Seabrooke Music Hall building and the music scores and periodicals were incorporated into the University library and archives.

#### **Player Spinet**

John Player was a virginal, spinet and harpsichord maker in London, born in 1634. This instrument is dated at 1741. He was known to have experimented with quarter-tone keys. Only five of the instruments he made, have so far been traced. This spinet has a beautifully inlaid carnation and tulip design. and is encased in walnut wood and already has in miniature the shape of grand pianos to come. It was sold at Sotheby's in 1966.



#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

#### **Travelling Piano**

This curious instrument dates from 1825. Designed and developed for pianists in the days when they had long multiday journeys by stage coach, before railroads. There was an inbuilt mirror to monitor finger movements as well as facial expressions. It was surprisingly simple to use, balanced on knees, even in a bouncing stagecoach!



#### Tympanum, Dulcimer, Hackebrett

Earliest ancestor of the piano, made in Belgium, exquisitely inlaid with ivory roses. Used with beautiful effect in Brahms' Gypsy Songs. It was purchased in 1968.

#### Two-manual Italian Harpsichord

Possibly dating from the late 17th century, this harpsichord was rebuilt by a French instrument maker in the 18th century. The painting on the inside of the lid is believed to be in a Flemish style. The strings in this instrument are plucked by a "quill" when the key is struck. There is a double keyboard with several pedals or "stops".





# RAG QUEENS, E EXPOZĘ2 & **213155E37**

Dr Irwin Manoim (BA 1976, BA Hons 1977, MA 1984, DLitt honoris causa 2013) continues his recollections as former editor of the vibrant student newspaper Wits Student. He became one of the co-founders and former co-editors of the Weekly Mail, which was launched 40 years ago on 14 June 1985.

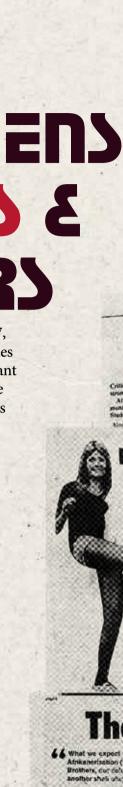
n the 1970 editions of Wits Student, continuing a long-standing tradition, several pages were devoted to photographs (full length and close-up) of wannabe Rag Queen contestants, captioned thus:

Gedinka Bak, BA2

Age 19 Height 5'7.5" Statistics: 36-23-35

Eyes: Green Hair: Blonde Interests: Art and Dressmaking

Gedinka (far right), one of the few who did not list "reading" as her passion, was the eventual winner. An entire back page was devoted to a full-length photograph in her royal regalia. But other young women were not neglected. Every third page would sport a mini-skirted girl leaning casually against a tree while gazing mistily into the distance. "Photographer Ronnie Sitner found 17-year-old Melisande Morrison at the cricket pavilion at 5.00pm. Other than being a Drummie she is a 1st year BA student who intends to teach matric boys English ... for the mathematics department, Melisande measures 34-23-34."



New threat to student editors RAG MUST CHANGE

The Broederbonding Our Education

SECOND CLASS

marks of derogation in any competitive situation in which one group aims to get power over the

facus on liber

DEMOCRACY AND

THE RAG QUEEN

Jp With Mini Skirts









Above: A Wits Student back page devoted to a full-length photograph of Gedinka Bak in her royal regalia, 17-year-old Melisande Morrison, gazing mistily into the distance: Francine Scialom signing the Wits pro-mini skirt petition. 1200 students signed the petition which was a reaction to the Tukkies anti mini skirt campaign Below: A bearded and hideous rag queen on the cover of Wits Student, 24 March 1975

Five years on, the 24 March 1975 edition once again had a rag queen on the cover - but in the nastiest cartoon form, bearded and hideous (left), advertising a centre spread feature by editor Sean Moroney (BA 1975) in which he demolished every pillar of Rag philanthropy (the sexism, the lack of long-term goals, the fear of controversy, the failure to confront the real issues of South Africa). Accompanying his article were the belated confessions of an unnamed Drummie on how, on her first day at university, she was pressured to sign up: "You are instructed to wear the miniest mini-skirt so that your legs may be adequately viewed. Ugh ... and all this for one miserable march through the streets of Johannesburg. You cannot smile, cannot talk, and even if a spider crawls over your face you cannot flinch a muscle. What fun!"

Two pages on, **Dr Jill McIlraith** (BA 1975, MBBCh 1986), head of a newly established feminist group, outlined in sterner terms the fundamentals of seventies feminism, which included the abolition of marriage, the freeing of women from the tyranny of reproduction and a socialist society.

Let us step back and consider the context. The students were largely white,

largely from the northern suburbs (lack of sufficient campus parking was their primary political concern), emerged from the propaganda machine of Christian National Education and sheltered from menaces to public morality by the relentless banning of the mildest of movies, books and magazines. And then they encountered *Wits Student*. Were they shocked? Were their minds blown open? I think a good few minds were.

Here is 1974 editor Tim James (BA 1976) rejecting the impotent overtures of conventional liberal politics. "The true leaders of the South African blacks are not, contrary to popular white opinion, those mealy-mouthed prating puppets declaring with white racists in their 'homeland' demesnes, but are rotting on Robben Island. Brilliant minds - Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki and the likes ... Viable, non-violent black opposition is being crushed again in South Africa and we, by our silence are tacitly giving consent ... we must accept responsibility if other methods are turned to in desperation."

Other than the word "demesnes" (meaning a portion of land; Wits Student loved scholarly show-offism), these sentiments are conventional wisdom in South Africa nowadays. But this article

was written two years before the June 1976 Soweto uprisings, in an era when no newspaper or white politician remembered – yet alone lauded – the likes of the incarcerated terrorist Nelson Mandela. The "Free Mandela" campaign would not happen for 10 more years.

I flipped open the newspapers from my own editorship, 1976. I was astonished to see Winnie Mandela peering out from a front page. I had no memory of it. "Exclusive Interview" the headline bragged - undoubtedly true, no newspaper at the time would have dared publish an interview with the much-banned and house-arrested symbol of forbidden politics. She spoke thoughtfully, showed a close knowledge of contemporary National Party shenanigans, decried the growing polarisation between white and black and urged white students to act as the conscience of white South Africa. How we got away with the interview, I have no idea. Perhaps that edition was banned - bannings of student newspapers were so frequent as to pass unnoticed. Even the censors lost track. One of my editions was banned twice.

Wits Student tended to be something of a family business. Following my own departure, my brother Norman (BA 1980, LLB 1983) and my future wife, Melinda Silverman (BA 1979, BArch 1982, MUD 1997) ran the show in 1979. Their proudest moment was an exposé of Broederbond members on the university council. A book had just appeared, listing the entire membership of the Broederbond. Wits Student leafed through the names and discovered several secret Broeders on the university's highest body. A front-page photograph showed the seated council with the headline "Some of these men have a hand in the university and a foot in the Broederbond". Their faces, hands and feet were circled in white Letraset. My brother was hauled in to see the vice chancellor who told him it was a cheap tabloid story, not worthy of a community of scholars. But no-one disputed the facts.

Over the years, the newspaper

declined in importance: it came out less frequently, it was given out free, it was noticed less. I can think of several reasons. A South African Students Press Union was set up, which published its own newspaper, Saspu National. Produced off campus with the borrowed free labour of moonlighting journalists including myself, it was a student newspaper in name only - rather it was a first attempt to create an "alternative press" in South Africa. A mouthpiece for the much harried "mass democratic movement" and for invisible masters in Lusaka, the paper was sober and professional in style, radical and unyielding in contents and tone, humour-free and, if I may confess this now, dull.

Saspu National elbowed the student press aside, a process that became more apparent in 1985, when the first of a new generation of "alternative" newspapers, the Weekly Mail (now the Mail & Guardian), appeared. I was one of the founders. The lessons I learnt about how to manage and produce a newspaper, using the most rudimentary tools, were ones I first learnt at Wits Student. The Weekly Mail needed strippers to paste up the pages. Naturally, I hired the same stripper we had used on Wits Student. She had the experience, and she could paste on straight. The legacy of Wits Student lived on.







**Above:** Women's Action chairperson Karina Maree, in the newsroom

Image: Paul Laufer

**Below:** A 1976 Wits Student exclusive with Winnie Mandela

### Pond royalty

Coloured varieties of **Koi** (*Cyprinus carpio*) add a sense of calm to the pond outside the John Moffat building on East Campus (left) as well as the Gavin Relly lake (inset).

# A living organism

Wits Review continues its celebration of the urban oasis on our Wits campuses in this second instalment of the "Fauna and Flora" photography series.

Brett Eloff captures close encounters with the wildlife that animates our alma mater.

#### Waddle crew

**Right:** Nine **Egyptian goslings** (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) at dusk as they make their way to the island on the Gavin Relly Green lake to spend the night on West Campus.



1. \Street smart: The spotted thick-knee (Burhinus capensis), also known as the spotted dikkop or Cape thick-knee, gingerly walks on a verge overlooking Empire Road. 2. \Red hot: Krantz aloes (Aloe arborescens) at the Gavin Relly Green 3. \Purr patrol: Cats (Felis catus) warm themselves in the sunshine outside the Genmin Laboratory on West Campus. 4. \Buzz stop: Strelitzia (Strelitzia reginae), captured in front of the Great Hall. 5. \Lily luxe: Arum lilies (Zantedeschia aethiopica) grace the entrance of the historic Outeniqua House of Wits Business School in Parktown.







# WITS SPACES

#### Check mate

African Cotton Stainers (Dysdercus fasciatus) start mating two to six days after their final moult.



### Lemon drop

Commonly known as the African Migrant or African Emigrant, Catopsilia florella is a widespread butterfly species found throughout South Africa.



#### Beehemoth

There are a number of large bees in South Africa that are commonly mistaken for bumblebees. This female large white-headed Carpenter Bee [Xylocopa (Koptortosoma) senior] feasts on the nectar of a ribbon bush (Hypoestes aristata).

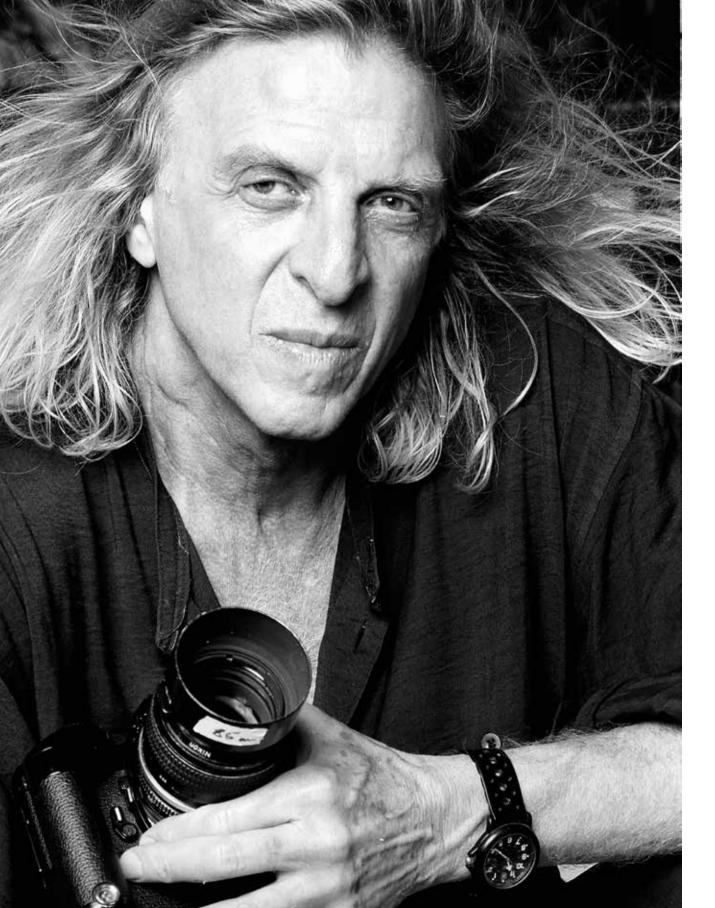
#### **Orange crush**

The Painted Lady butterfly (Vanessa cardui) is a common and widespread species found throughout South Africa.



### Winged whisper

The pioneer white or caper white (Belenois aurota) is a small to medium-sized butterfly of the family Pieridae, that is, the yellows and whites, which is found in South Asia and Africa. In Africa, it is also known as the Brown-veined White, and is well known during summer and autumn when large numbers migrate north-east over the interior.



THE BEST WAY TO GET TO KNOW MEDICAL DOCTOR TURNED PHOTOGRAPHER AND DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER, **NORMAN SEEFF** (MBBCH 1964), IS TO WITNESS HOW HE INTERACTS WITH CELEBRITIES DURING HIS FILMED PHOTOGRAPHY 'SESSIONS'.

BY HEATHER DUGMORE

n 1975 I decided to bring a film crew into one of my photo sessions for the first time – it was an album shoot with Tina and Ike Turner," Norman recalls. "After developing the footage, I was really excited that the emotional depth of the interaction could be captured on film. I knew exactly what I was going to do from then on, and so began my Sessions Project."

As part of this, he has documented over 500 creative celebrities since moving to the United States in 1969. One of them is Alicia Keys.

His approach begins with exploring the artist's inner

process. "When did you know you could sing?" is his first question for Keys. She replies: "I knew I had a voice from a young age."

Norman listens and she continues. "I was about 12 and my grandfather had passed a year prior. I just didn't just want to believe it. I blocked everything out until I went to see the movie *Philadelphia* and it broke me down to the core. That night I went home and sat down at my piano that had always been the divider between the lounge and my bedroom, and just played and said what I felt. I didn't care if it was technically »

correct, I wasn't thinking at all and I wrote this song 'I'm All Alone."

Norman says: "Sing it to me" and Alicia replies: "I can't, it's gone." Then she thinks for a bit, with Norman holding the silence. After a short while there's a flicker of recall in Alicia's expression. "I think it was something like ...," she says. And she starts singing that 12-year-old song: "I sit here all alone and I wonder what is wrong, why are there are so many deaths, so many losses of life, I'm all alone."

When she stops singing Norman says: "So you see, this stuff never disappears, it sits in this beautiful library called your subconscious mind, it's all there, and this is you in that moment, touched by the pain and separation, and the beauty of being able to respond, discovering the future of your voice."

Alicia is delighted, and Norman then skilfully shifts the mood to a playful note: "And then all hell broke loose!" he says. They both laugh.

Through his method he's gained access to people's hearts and creative spontaneity, whether they are artists or entrepreneurs such as Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, whom he photographed in 1984.

"I went to his house to photograph him, and he was sitting on the floor talking about creativity when he suddenly got up, ran out the room and then came back with this Apple Mac, which had not yet been publicly seen. He sat cross-legged on the floor and said 'check this out'. It was the spontaneity of the moment and I got the shot that became the cover of *TIME* magazine, *Rolling Stone* and Steve's autobiography."

Norman's the master of these moments, and 41 years since that shoot his focus on the dynamics of creativity hasn't changed.

Speaking from his three-storey studio home high up in the Hollywood Hills, and now 86, he says: "My creative and physical energy is actually improving. I climb Hollywood Hills every day and my creativity continues to expand. I am excited about life."

Norman was married to South African actress Sue Kiel, now deceased. They had two children: Tai Power Seeff, a photographer, and Shayne, a film editor.

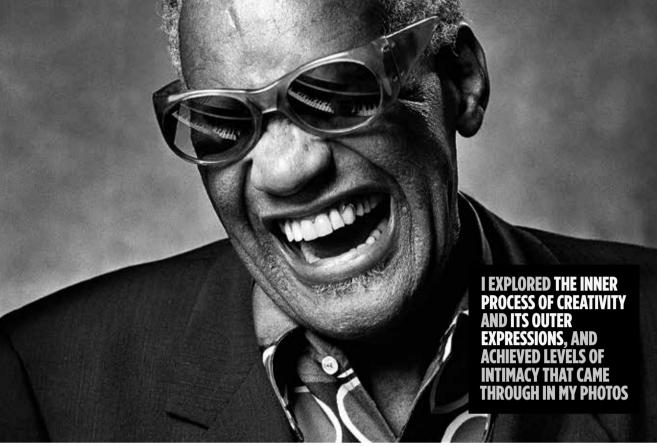
Norman travels widely and when we spoke he had just returned from Monaco, where he led a workshop on the seven stages of the creative process that he has identified and uses in his communication with artists.

"At the foundation of the human condition, all people want to be safe and secure, and accomplish a strong »

**Above:** Joni Mitchell, Ray Charles

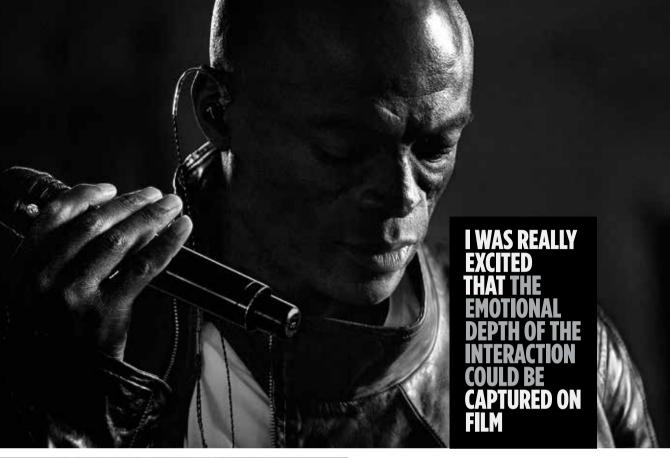
**Below:** Mick Jagger, John Travolta and Steve Martin















**Leftt, clockwise:** Seal, Michael Jackson & Diana Ross, Whitney Houston

sense of self-esteem," he explains. "And in a world of instability and change, we need to draw on the power of creativity to write our own stories and develop an inner safety, security and self-esteem no matter what career we're in. It's essential for change and personal evolution."

#### **FANTASTIC YEARS AT WITS**

Norman studied medicine at Wits to heal people physically and emotionally. "My father was a wonderful medical doctor from the old school who came to your house and brought care as well as empathy.

"My family lived in Yeoville and then Parktown and I went to KES [King Edward VII School]. As a student I lived in Hillbrow, where the Medical School was situated at the time. My years at Wits were fantastic, with incredibly accomplished people there. I also played soccer for Wits. From the age of 17 I played South African national league soccer for Balfour Park.

"When the Wits soccer team, which was then in the third league, asked me to join them I shifted leagues and it was a very fulfilling experience. We didn't have strategists like we now have in sport, so we did it ourselves and created a whole new format of playing soccer, based on how it was being played in Europe. Soccer is chess, moving the players on the field."

While studying medicine and playing soccer he opened an art school at night to teach life drawing. "I was part of an emerging local group of artists and we created a bit of SoHo in Hillbrow. From the age of six I'd been able to draw anatomically accurate figures in three-dimensional spaces. I always had this duality of science and art but I chose to study medicine."

After graduating, he worked at Baragwanath Hospital: "It was an amazing and very challenging place. But at some point I felt we were going round and round. We were involved in medicine that was fixing the physical side, but not healing people emotionally. In my 2000-page physiology textbook there was one paragraph on emotions – the definition was 'emotions are an epi-phenomenon of physical changes in the body', and that was it.

"Increasingly, I was realising the importance of emotions in healing. Health begins with your emotional connection to yourself. It is what makes people feel a sense of vitality, aliveness and hope; it's the source of creativity."

#### IF YOU CAN MAKE IT IN NEW YORK

Norman decided the time had come to set medicine aside and pursue creativity, focusing on photography, and to do this in New York. "The whole conceit of the time was that if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere. It gained you access to the thriving art scene in SoHo, and New York was the centre of major magazines such as *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Time*, *News Weekly* and *Esquire*."

The first year in New York in 1969 was very difficult as he had no work and very little money. "I realised if I was going to survive I needed to find my own voice. I had early access to an emerging New York artist subculture, including Andy Warhol and the new wave artists. When I went to magazines to show my portfolio it was something unique."

His images caught the attention of Bob Cato, one of New York's leading graphic designers, who was also Vice President of Creative Services at Columbia Records. Cato became a mentor and gave Norman his first major photographic assignment, shooting Robbie Robinson and The Band for their album *Stage Fright*. The success of that project launched his career as a "rock" photographer.

"In addition to musicians, I began photographing a wide range of creatives – actors, writers and directors," Norman says. "I explored the inner process of creativity and its outer expressions, and achieved levels of intimacy that came through in my photos."

At the end of 1971 Cato asked him if he would like to become the creative director for United Artists Records in Los Angeles. "It was a company that Charlie Chaplin had created to escape the grip of studios that were suppressing the freedom of artists," Norman explains.

United Artists was "a wonderful family" and within the first year it received five Grammy nominations for film and photography.

#### SUNSET BOULEVARD

"After two years at United Artists I was ready to move on as an independent artist. I opened my studio on Sunset Boulevard, known as Sunset Strip."

He has had shoots with headline artists such as the Rolling Stones, the Eagles, Earth, Wind and Fire, Joni Mitchell, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston and hundreds of the world's most renowned creatives. His album covers frequently became billboards on the Strip. "I perceived billboards as oversized art works that influenced culture at the time," Norman says. "The west coast was the centre of new age activities, and I »



#### MY APPROACH IS ALL ABOUT CREATIVITY AND **HEALING AS A COUNTERPOINT TO VIOLENCE**







Left: Steve Jobs. Tina Turner and KISS Above: Van Halen

was introduced to meditation and alternative healing techniques and expanded my personal exploration of consciousness."

His filmed photography sessions became legendary and in the 1990s he expanded this creative approach to television commercials, becoming an award-winning director for hundreds of commercials for major brands and many Fortune 500 clients.

In the 2000s he began to offer workshops on creativity on an international scale. "I have also started utilising AI, which is a very powerful tool whose application depends on the intentionality of the person using it. I'm putting my full body of work on the inner dynamics of creativity onto an AI platform and I'll be making it public as a way to counter the chaos of accelerating change."

Elaborating on the chaos, he says: "Look at the US. The country is splitting in two – with the possibility of either a nightmare or a dream reality. The old paradigms are breaking down worldwide, but as creative people through the millennia have described, every act of creation is an act of destruction at the same time. You have to 'destroy' the old to create space for the new. In a strange way we are on course for evolutionary change.

"There is a big shift in humanity and it's overlapping into every aspect of human creativity and society. We just have to remember that everything emerges in the mind, in the imagination, and my approach is all about creativity and healing as a counterpoint to violence." ■



https://normanseeff.com/

Images: Courtesy of Norman Seeff

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1800 individual donors have helped the Wits **Annual Fund reach the R17.5-million mark!** 

# IS ALL IT TAKES

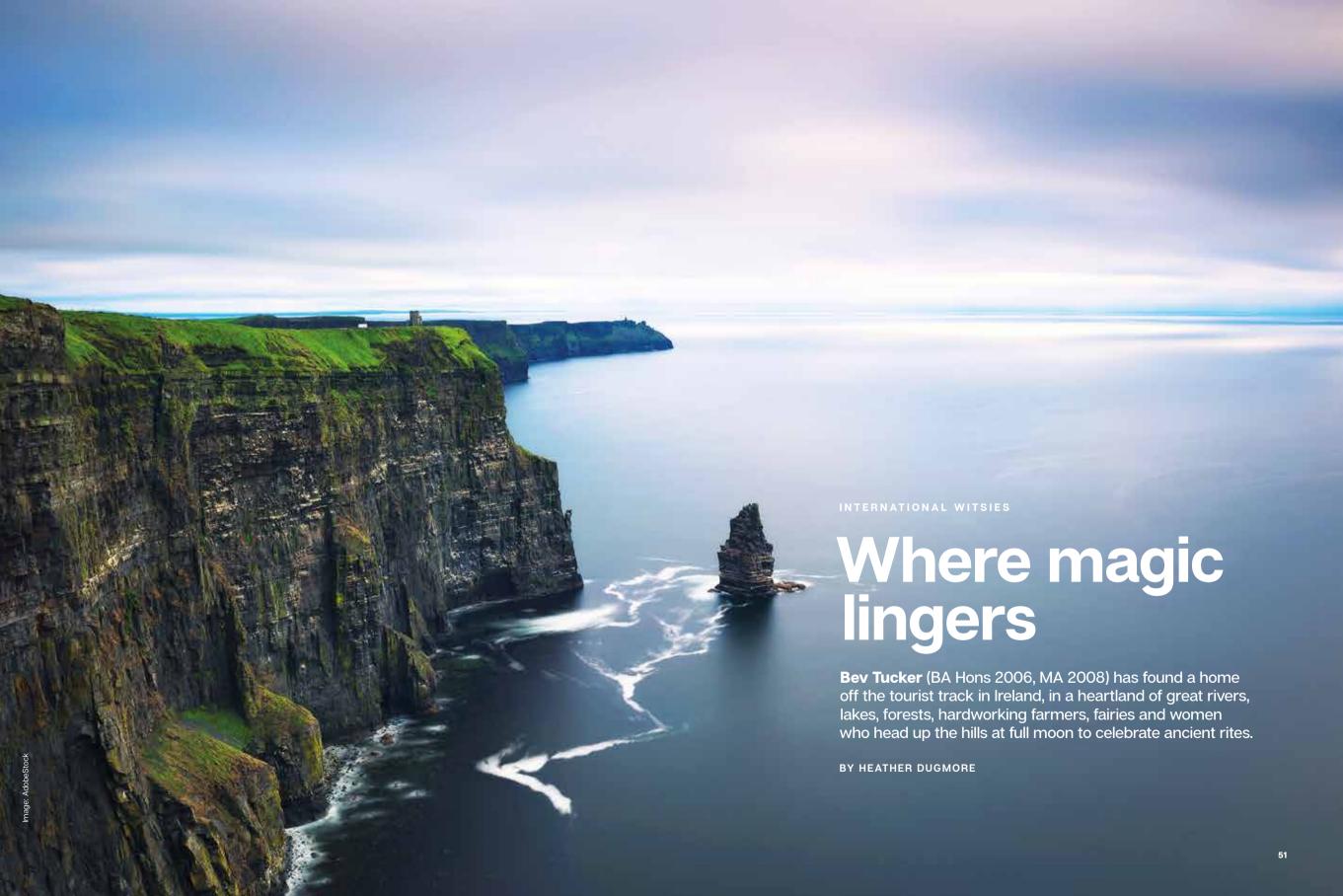
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#### INTERNATIONAL WITSIES



t's the Ireland that tourists seldom see," says Bev, who lives here with her doctor husband William Mulders.

Most tourists, she explains, travel around the edges of Ireland and take tours from Dublin to the West Coast, but in the middle is a large farming landscape, rich with peat bogs. "This is where we live in the tiny village of Castlepollard that I was certain no-one had ever heard of, until I ran into Thomas Pakenham, the 8th Earl of Longford and an eminent historian who wrote the seminal book on the Anglo Boer War. It turned out he lives here too."

#### ONE DARK AFTERNOON

Bev's description of meeting Pakenham is the stuff of Celtic tales: "One dark afternoon I was on my regular walk on the nearby Tullynally Castle estate when I fell into step with another walker hidden under his long coat and a woolly hat that looked a bit like a tea cosy. We got chatting and he started pointing out various oak trees on the avenue and discussing their lineage. I realised I was talking to Tullynally's owner, Pakenham, who is also a tree expert and author of Meetings With Remarkable Trees (Orion 2015). He speaks about the personalities of trees and their power to inspire awe and wonder." They have since had regular conversations about South Africa and about rewilding. "So although we're far away, some little thread from home always finds one," says Bev.

How she and William came to be there, goes like this: William had a rural practice in Qwaqwa in the Free State for many years, and they then built "the most beautiful house in the whole world in Clarens", says Bev who is loaded with design flair, having written about many magnificent places and creative people in her career, including as the co-owner and editor of Lowveld Living for a time.

"But once our home in Clarens was built. Will and I looked at each other and thought 'what are we going to fight about now, or do we just wait to die?' We were ready for a new adventure." When William was offered the job in Ireland, they didn't hesitate.



sitcom in the Irish countryside", as Bev puts it.

William loves being a rural doctor there. "In general though, the problems are not nearly as severe as in rural South Africa," Bev adds.

What the two countries have in common is an active ancient belief system and associated nature rituals. "On the nearby hills there are ancient tombs from the 4th millennium BC, some decorated with megalithic art. Here, I often find flowers or melted candles left by women who go to the hills at full moon and during the festivals of Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane, and Lughnasadh." Bev says. These festivals are part of the traditional spiritual and agricultural cycle that shaped community life.

"There are also fairy trees - the whitethorn trees – that are sacred to many people. There is still a strong undercurrent of magic and old ways to attract good luck that coexist with Christianity. The same women who go to the hills, go to mass on Sundays."

Opposite left: Bev in the woods near her home Above: Bev loves exploring the castles, ruins and wild landscape of Ireland Centre: Fairy trees where women tie ribbons and tokens for good luck Right: The lakes and lochs are one of Bev's photography and swimming

locations

#### INTERNATIONAL WITSIES









#### MERCHANT BANK AND MASTER'S

"From the early 1990s I lived in Joburg. My first job there was for a temp agency and I was assigned to Patrice Motsepe's office, even though I couldn't type at the time, which bemused him. I had to learn fast and landed up working as a PA for Hambros Merchant Bank for a number of years. "I'd always wanted to get a qualification in journalism and I applied as a mature student to do my honours and master's in journalism and media studies part-time at Wits. My master's thesis was on how you can cover your tracks and adapt content on digital media. I had no idea how big digital media would become. "I really enjoyed my time at Wits and loved Franz Krüger's (PhD 2019) classes. He is one of the nicest, most interesting people. When you are a mature student you have a different experience of university, it's not 'oh yay I'm free, now I can party and drink'. I was in my early 30s and everyone in my class was a mature student and we were all working at the same time. "What I love about journalism is it gives you access to people and places that you would never have in any other field of work. Being

curious, this really suits me."

Above: Dublin City street, McDaids traditional Irish pub, Busker in Galway City Opposite above: Large farming landscape in the middle of Ireland where Bev and William live

"The Irish property market today is a witches' brew resulting from the Celtic Tiger and the 2008 crash."

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#### **A WITCHES' BREW**

Living in such a remote area, what surprised Bev was the housing shortage: Ireland has a severe housing crisis, which is rooted way back in history when people didn't own property. The Irish property market today is a witches' brew resulting from the Celtic Tiger, the 2008 crash, and what's colloquially called vulture and cuckoo funds. What is available is being marketed at vastly inflated prices; plus there's a rental affordability crisis, and a growing population. This has led to a whole movement of young Irish people who are packing it in for Canada, America and Australia because they cannot afford to own homes." See also https://youngs. ie/understanding-the-irish-housing-crisisfactors-and-causes/)

She and William rent their Castlepollard home: "We have a lovely two-up, two-down in a converted stable yard in a heritage building, and also a holiday hideaway in the Wicklow mountains close to forests and beaches that I'm almost done revamping."

Living in the middle of the country they have quick access to both coasts as well as the north. "From time to time I nip to Dublin an hour away or to Galway City which is less than a two-hour drive. Galway is a delight: it's an ancient sea port with

picturesque cobbled alleys and a slightly dishevelled boho charm. It's a university town and the gateway to the Gaeltacht (where Gaelic is still the main language) as well as to the Aran Islands, which, from the sea would be the last sight of land until America."

#### CASTLES, RUINS AND WILD LANDSCAPES

Bev says Ireland has some of the most spectacular beaches she has ever seen. She explores the castles, ruins and wild landscape, birdwatching, following the migration of wild swans from Iceland, looking for badgers and foxes, and swimming in the cold freshwater lakes. The natural environment is in her bones.

"In my childhood our family lived in what is now Zimbabwe. During holidays we would go on expeditions to the wildlife reserves in our beloved old Land Rover. These trips sparked my love of wildlife and curiosity about the world. We would eat supper around the campfire at night and recount what we'd seen and done on our father's portable Grundig tape recorder."

#### **WE ARE OUR STORIES**

She has continued the tradition. From

Ireland to Italy, from Cape Town to Tangiers, people tell her their stories and she records them. "Our human experience is formed, understood and connected through the telling of our stories. Individually and collectively we are our

"That's why when you leave your country, you lose a huge part of your identity. People here don't know I've seen lions hunting under a full moon; that giraffe are my people. A big piece of my heart is still in Africa, I miss the bush incredibly and the kinship with the wild."

Workwise, Bev says she still enjoys writing for lifestyle publications, but has also recently completed a postgraduate diploma in digital content creation for business at Ireland's Institute of Art, Design & Technology. "I'm interested in creating digital content that captures the experience of Gen X women – born between the 1960s and 1980s, as I am," she explains.

"They have so much to say, often have their own money, they're adventurous and often quite fearless. But because they are older, they've become invisible to society and, usually, to marketers who are losing out on a huge, lucrative audience."

Producing a book is also something she'd like to do. "People are still avidly buying books with beautiful, powerful visuals. AI

might work to the advantage of high quality traditional publishing and media. People might become so jaded and distrustful of all things digital and be hungry for something they can hold, that they know to be true and that has been fabricated by a human hand."

"Gen X women have so much to say, often have their own money, they're adventurous and often quite fearless."



considerable competition in New York's financial sector from highly qualified American and international peers. Most South Africans are also not from families with hedge funds and we didn't grow up on Wall Street, so we apply ourselves extra hard."

Born in Katlehong, south-east of Johannesburg, he moved with his family to Maseru in Lesotho when he was a child, and he did his schooling there. "My parents are originally from Lesotho," he explains. "My father was in logistics and my mom looked after the home."

In his matric year, George applied to a number of universities in South Africa and internationally, and received a positive response from Jain University in Bangalore, India, which offered him a full scholarship for a four-year BSc degree in aerospace.

"I hadn't considered aerospace as a field of study but I thought 'why not'. I headed over there in 2011 and really enjoyed it," he says. "Jain is very focused academically and we worked extremely hard. The people in Bangalore are also wonderful, very friendly and family oriented and I got to love the food. I still have breyani once a week in New York."

During his undergraduate degree, he started connecting with as many people as possible in aerospace in South Africa. "I got talking to a guy at Denel and he told me about this great academic in aerospace at Wits, Professor Jacob Muthu. I contacted Prof Muthu and he responded immediately and asked me to put all my documents together and send them to him." Prof Muthu didn't have funding at the time, but was expecting some. It came through and George moved to Wits as a full-time master's student from 2016 – 2017.

"Wits was a great place to study and I had a truly inspiring time as we had all the facilities and equipment we needed in the aerospace lab," he says. "I stayed in Braamfontein, sharing a flat with a friend. It was so vibrant there, full of students, and while I didn't have much time to socialise as I'd often be on campus until

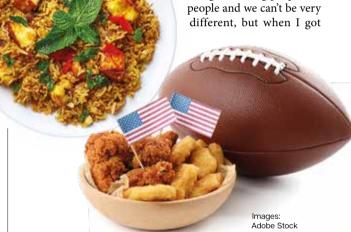
Below: George's favourite things: Breyani, chicken wings and NFL football

Opposite top: Central Park, where George and his family spend a lot of time 8pm, I made good friends. We would get together at places like Kitcheners, but not too often because as students we were always penny-pinching."

During his master's he applied for international scholarships, one of which was Fulbright. "As part of the Fulbright application, I had to do English and mathematics exams, and go for a series of interviews," George explains.

"What was very clear from the interviews is that they focused on the cultural exchange – how, as a South African, you could contribute culturally there and

share about South Africa, and how you would respond to American culture. At the time I found it strange, thinking people are people and we can't be very different, but when I got

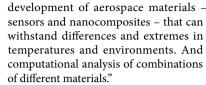


"I want to contribute to rebuilding a strong education system in South Africa and it starts in primary school"

there, I started to understand that culturally we are all very distinct."

Awarded the Fulbright Scholarship for his PhD, he arrived in Michigan in 2018 where Michigan State University hosts the Fulbright initiation programme. They helped him to get organised, such as getting an American bank account and explained what to expect.

"From here I headed to the University of Texas and found my way around – it is well signposted so it wasn't difficult. I settled into my programme and, once again, I had access to incredible faculties and equipment for my PhD in aerospace engineering. My research was on the



Fulbright paid for two years, and he found funding for the rest of his PhD at the UT Arlington Research Institute (UTARI) in Fort Worth, which correlated with his research.

Life in Texas was lonely at first, he explains. "I missed South Africa and South Africans every day," he says. "It takes a lot for any South African to accept you are living outside of South Africa for some time. For me it was quite a battle.

"There were students from all over the world at the university; a lot from India and China and a lot of Americans of course. They didn't socialise like we do in South Africa. I even played a bit of football to be social but straight after the game everyone would return to their rooms. Fortunately, I could communicate with my girlfriend, Kananelo, who is now my wife, who was in South Africa studying IT through UNISA at the time. And by my third and fourth year I had a community of friends at the university and we would go boating and fishing and visit other cities like Houston and Austin."

During his PhD, George decided he wanted to pursue his career in the US, which required changing from aerospace

Above: In Texas, turning on the lab equipment Below: With friends in Bangalore and wife Kananelo at the New York Aquarium





to data science. During this time, Kananelo joined him, they married in 2022 and settled into their apartment in the Upper East Side after he joined Citibank.

"The Upper East Side is less crowded and less touristy than Midtown. We're close to Central Park and we go there a lot, especially as we now have an 18-month-old daughter, whom we named Genesis. I've finally adapted to being here," he smiles.

He's adapted to the extent that he is an avid follower of NBA basketball and NFL football. "I'm still a Chiefs fan though!" he emphasises. "We've made South African and local friends, and with my wife and daughter here, it feels like home. Many of our South African friends are Springbok rugby fans so we get together at each other's homes and watch the games."

The couple also go to Broadway shows, which Kananelo loves. And she's discovered Hispanic grocery stores that sell corn flour for tortillas which she uses to make pap. "The food here tastes more processed but we now have our locals for fresh produce and we go to a place called Costco where we can buy household items in bulk," George explains.

He adds they prefer to eat at home, "but you are lost for choice if you want to eat out and there is so much street food. As I said, I like breyani, and my South African favourite, chicken wings, which are sold everywhere here!"

In addition to his exceptionally demanding positioning, he's working on a "passion project". "My goal is to build a primary school in the Free State, near Lesotho," he says. "I want to contribute to rebuilding a strong education system in South Africa and it starts in primary school.

"Far too many of our kids are saying that school is useless. We have to rectify this and develop a strong culture of education, which is the key to stabilising and developing the country. It's only when you're away from home that you realise how much needs to be done. I grew up with very smart people who haven't had the opportunity I have. So much talent is not being harnessed and we need to turn this around."

# Follow the adventure

Before agreeing to be interviewed, Xan Rice (BCom 1995, BAcc 1996) said he wanted to know whether this feature was about Witsies who had done good or great things in the world. "If so," he said, "I'm definitely not the right person."

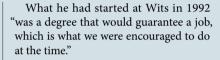
BY HEATHER ut," he then added, "if it's about **DUGMORE** people who have had mildly interesting life journeys, then I'd be more inclined to go ahead, and you can decide if it's interesting enough. If not, I won't be offended." Well, dear reader, please join me on Xan's life journey and let's see what we

make of it, starting with his BCom and BAcc at Wits, followed by his articles at KPMG in Johannesburg, passing the board exam in 1997 and qualifying as a chartered accountant in 1999.

All good, all on track, bursary with KPMG honoured, and then, as he puts it: "Then I was gone. I knew the world was out there and I knew I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in finance but I had wanted to finish what I had started."

Another vivid memory was time spent in the basement of the William Cullen library on East Campus, studying for his BAcc and board exam. "It was very dark, with narrow rows of bookshelves full of books, and at the end of each row was a single desk and single lamp," he says.

"I would spend hours at a time down there, studying in absolute silence. Very few people were there and you wouldn't see them anyway. This was largely before the time of laptops and mobile phones on campus, it was just me and my books and my pencils. And at lunchtime I would emerge and sit on the lawn for a while



#### A LOT OF CRICKET

"Being at Wits was a great time of my life, a good carefree time. I remember details, such as buying cheese rolls and Chelsea buns at the canteen on West Campus, and going to the Bozzoli pavilion on Friday afternoons to drink beer and play Frisbee and soccer.

"I also spent a lot of time playing cricket at Wits. I played for the first team and went to SA universities week for several years. We had really talented players like Richard Snell and Steven Jack, both opening bowlers for South Africa, and numerous other provincial players."



backpacking adventure in South America. "With me was Vanessa (Maytham), now my wife, whom I met at KPMG," says Xan. "As CAs it was easy to find work in London at the time, and we rented a room in a five-room apartment with a single, shared bathroom. The tenants were from around the world ... New Zealand, Switzerland, Italy."

Nine months later they headed for South America, first to Ecuador, where they spent four weeks learning Spanish, and then all the way south to Patagonia in Chile over the next five months. "We travelled on a shoestring, staying for 5 or 10 dollars a night," he recalls. "It was amazing! We hiked in the Andes, Patagonia and Peru and we ventured into the Amazon, which was spectacular - macaws, piranhas and tarantulas (and I'm terrified of spiders).

"We went everywhere in local buses, sometimes 14-hour journeys with chickens and goats and people peeing in pots and then passing them over your head to toss out the window. We had zero responsibility, we didn't know where our next stop was."

When their money ran out, they headed back to London, worked again and headed to India for six weeks, doing the same thing. "The sheer mass of humanity was something extraordinary," he says. "People absolutely everywhere and super friendly, from the vast city of Mumbai to the desert of Rajasthan to the wetlands of Kerala."

#### A FORK IN THE ROAD MOMENT

By this time Vanessa had been offered a permanent job in London and so they returned in 2002 and married two years later. "2002 was a fork in the road moment for me," says Xan. "I was 28 and I knew I had to make a career change – to pursue





"We don't own a five-regord a five-regord a five-regord and lead the mode of the mode opportunity presents itself" someth a five-regord a five

something I was interested in. So I took a five-month journalism course in Essex, where I learnt the basics of writing a story, got a bit of experience doing articles for the local newspapers as part of the course, and learnt shorthand, which was one of the most useful skills I have ever acquired."

Journalism was his change of career choice because from a young age he had always loved reading the newspaper. "At our home in Blairgowrie, *The Star* newspaper would be thrown over the fence every afternoon and I would look at the cricket and English football scores first and then read the news."

Finding a job in journalism was Xan's next quest, and he wrote dozens of letters to local, regional and national newspapers. "I got lucky at *The Times of London*,

a national daily, which was the only reply I received to all my letters. I was offered one day's work experience on the personal finance pages. My accounting

accounting
background
paid dividends and

that one day led to a job there, writing about personal finance."

Newspapers were starting to go online at the time, and the night shift at *The Times* would put the day's news online. "Sometimes I would do a double shift. I really loved being in the newsroom and being a journalist," he says.

#### A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

He worked in London for *The Times* for two years but his goal was to become a foreign correspondent, and in 2004, he and Vanessa set off for Nairobi. Xan became a stringer for *The Times*, followed by *The Guardian*, while also writing long features for magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Granta* and *The Atlantic*.

"I admired the American correspondents, like Paul Salopek who was working for the *LA Times* and whom I met in Nairobi. I remember Paul chatting about a journey around the world on foot called the 'Out of Eden Walk' that he was about to start." Salopek is currently in Japan in year 13 of his walk, which retraces the routes of early humans' migration out of Africa.

Xan's career as a foreign correspondent proved to be successful and they stayed in Nairobi for seven years, and had two children, Kasia and Kaden. Vanessa worked for Oxfam and the Red Cross there while Xan covered everything from war zones to local life. When he was home for a bit, the family would hop into their battered old 4x4 and go to the Maasai Mara, Naivasha and Mount Kenya National Park.

Though Xan's role was primarily to report on East Africa, his work took him across the continent. He went to Namibia to cover the Herero people's claim against the Germans for genocide. He went to Timbuktu twice: first to do a piece on the ancient manuscripts and again in 2013 when Islamist rebels attacked government forces.

#### **A CHEF**

He covered the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, and the disputed election in





Kenya in 2007 when many people were killed. He wrote about the Somali pirates who were seizing ships in the Indian Ocean and taking hostages.

Just before they left Nairobi, he covered the fall of Gaddafi in Libya in 2011. "The mood in Libya was nuts. In Misrata, which was under siege, the only way to get in was on a boat being used to evacuate migrant workers."

In 2012, Xan and his family moved to Lagos for two years when he was offered a full-time post with the *Financial Times*. "Lagos is a mega city with a tremendous energy and millions and millions of people hustling to get by," he explains. "We lived in an apartment in a compound and our children went to an international school and picked up Nigerian accents as most of the learners there were Nigerian."

Two years later they moved back to the UK. Vanessa took up a senior post at Oxfam's head office in Oxford and Xan joined the British political and cultural news magazine, *New Statesman*, where he became the features editor.

After five years he went freelance, writing features for UK and US outlets on everything from true crime to extreme sports.

#### ON THE MOVE AGAIN

In 2019 the Rice family were on the move again, this time to Lyon, France for Vanessa's posting with Interpol. "We live in this big city with lovely weather that is 1.5 hours from the Alps and 2.5 hours from the Mediterranean.

"I wanted to spend more time with the

kids and in order to work from home, I'm now doing corporate writing."

One of the attractions of France was the

opportunity to learn French. "My accent is cringeworthy – much to my children's embarrassment – but I get by, am able to read the newspaper, and I really like the language. The kids are fluent, and I'm envious of the ease with which they pick things up. We go skiing in the Alps and hiking and camping and we are big fans and season ticket holders of the local football team, Olympique Lyonnais. Of course we still totally support the Springboks and the Rugby World Cup is still a sore point for the French."

The kids, who are now teenagers, have never lived in South Africa, but as Xan says, "what is interesting is they say they are South African. It's a big part of their identity and we spend three weeks or so in South Africa every year as we have family all over the country. We also love going to the Kruger National Park – it's a very special place for us – and we've done several long hikes, including the Blyde River Canyon, Swellendam and the Fish River Canyon, in Namibia."

Looking to the future, Xan says, "we never look too far ahead. We don't own a house, we have never put down roots and we go where opportunity presents itself, which we regard as both an adventure and luxury in today's world."

And so dear reader, this is Xan's story so far. I am sure you'll agree this is not just "a mildly interesting life story" as he put it. It's a great story about a rich life lived, about guts, adventure and talent.

Far left: Lagos Above: Xan covered the fall of Gaddafi in Libya in 2011 Below: On assignment in Timbuktu, Mali and in Sanna, Yemen







#### In Time: Walter Oltmann

Edited by Sven Christian

UJ Press, Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture 2024

This monograph is an extension of a project started soon after Walter Oltmann (MA FA 1985, PhD 2018) was awarded the Edoardo Villa Extraordinary Award for Sculpture in 2022. It contains most of the labour-intensive artworks produced as a result and bears out his interest in "manual work and its philosophy". The book has been edited by Sven Christian (MA 2020), a curator at the Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture, and includes a series of conversations with artists who work in a similar manner, including Chris Soal (BA FA 2018) and Usha Seejarim (MA FA 2008).

In an essay, Elizabeth Burroughs writes that our world has become so mechanised that nobody considers "the time, materials, machinery, the mental and physical effort that go into the manufacture of the cloth for a T-shirt and its subsequent fabrication, or into the balletic production of a BMW by a swarm of robots. We purchase the end product without any sense of what it took to create it." Oltmann's work calls for a slower kind of attention. He has mastered manipulating both the two-dimensional through his drawings (pencil, ink and bleach) as well as the three-dimensional through his sculptures (wire). The intricacies of these often provoke the question "how long did it take to make that?" It is not only about the finished form but also about the act of making.

Born in KwaZulu-Natal, Oltmann has lived and worked in Johannesburg since the 1980s. He studied fine art in Pietermaritzburg under Willem Strydom, moving to Wits to pursue his master's, PhD and eventually teaching for 27 years. In 2001, he was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Arts and has held major exhibitions at galleries in South Africa and abroad. His huge World Map (2005-2006) is housed as one of the permanent collections at the entrance to the Wits Origins Centre.

Oltmann has been described by fellow artists as a "quiet, gentle man", who has "the calm of a cloistered monk, his serenity seemingly placing him above the messy concerns of the material world". His fanciful creatures confound all categories. Is it science? Is it art? Is it craft? Is it a man or insect, fragile or hollow? Burroughs writes: "While his intricate and highly resolved worlds are comfortably present in this world, we as viewers may be unnerved, intrigued, delighted, or appalled all at once, or in quick succession."



#### Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot

Text by William Kentridge Edited by Karen Marta

Hauser & Wirth publishers, Jonathan Ball in South Africa 2025

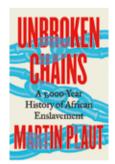


his is a beautifully designed print com-**L** panion to William Kentridge's latest film series. Reimagined through film stills and script excerpts, this volume captures William Kentridge's (BA 1977, DLitt honoris causa 2004) blend of studio play, mark-making, and identity in motion. There are exquisite special features such as tipped-in drawings and transparent interleaves, which bring the artist's studio into the hands of the reader.

#### Unbroken Chains: A 5 000-Year History of African Enslavement

#### **Martin Plaut**

Hurst 2025



artin Plaut's (BA Hons 1977) latest book disrupts the narrative that the history of slavery stems from the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. Instead he reveals that slavery has ravaged African societies since at least 2 500 BCE, from Egypt to the Cape; from Mauritania to Somalia. He argues that Indian Ocean slavery was equally sizeable, and far longer-lived and that historians have neglected Africa's internal practices, too-Ethiopian kingdoms enslaving conquered peoples; the Sokoto Caliphate capturing men and women on a scale matching the US plantations.

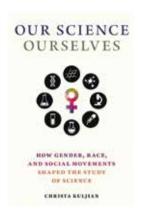
As a senior research fellow as the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, Plaut has reported extensively on Africa for the BBC as Africa

editor, and he's led the Africa programme of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and is an active member of the Royal African Society.

"Overlooked stories of enslavement matter," he writes, stating that the UN and African Union are "too embarrassed to confront leaders still permitting this practice."

Unbroken Chains has been lauded as "an illuminating, powerful read" by reviewers, including the Guardian: "Guilt over slavery and its inheritances rightly grips Europe and America. But this electrifying history of its brutality runs deeper and longer across Africa, still now, still hidden away. This erudite book is an eve-opening revelation and a transfixing read."

BOOKS BOOKS





#### **Our Science Ourselves:**

How Gender, Race and Social Movements Shaped the Study of Science

#### **Christa Kuljian**

University of Massachusetts Press 2024

**T** f scientists were more representative of society in terms of gender, race, and class, would science look different? This has been an abiding question for Christa Kuljian (MA 2007) since her undergraduate years at Harvard College in the 1980s.

In her thesis for her degree in the history of science, she explored how the American medical profession presented women's biology between 1870 and 1920, after formative experiences in a course given by Ruth Hubbard, the first woman at Harvard to hold a tenured professorship in the department of biology.

Kuljian is a research associate at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER). She is the author of two other books, Sanctuary (Jacana 2013) and Darwin's Hunch: Science, Race and the Search for Human Origins (Jacana 2016). In addition to her Wits degree

in creative writing, she has a master's in public affairs from the School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton. In Our Science, Ourselves, she tells the origin story of feminist science studies by focusing on the life histories of six key figures - Ruth Hubbard, Rita Arditti, Evelyn Fox Keller, Evelynn Hammonds, Anne Fausto-Sterling, and Banu Subramaniam. These women were part of a trailblazing network of female scientists in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s who were drawn to the Boston area - to Harvard, MIT, and other universities.

The work offers relevance today by asking questions such as: who is doing science? Who decides on the research questions? Who offers analysis and who benefits? She highlights the need to keep exploring the assumptions that inform scientists' research questions and findings and the need to understand the social context that often shapes them.

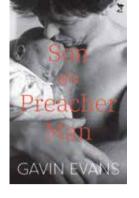
#### Son of a Preacher Man

#### **Gavin Evans**

Jonathan Ball 2025

n the space of a few months, **Dr Gavin Evans** (LLB 1990, PhD 1999) has pub-Lished two books in quick succession. The first is a memoir of his loving, but fraught relationship with his father as a "Jewish-evangelical, talking-in-tongues Anglican bishop". Although he has authored 10 other books, this one was the most challenging because it was so personal. The focus is on the distance between father and son, a rift that began when Evans was 14 and his father beat him with his fists. The memoir also weaves Evans's political past over a decade in the ANC underground. He relays the conflicts with his parents, details his "many failings" and abandoning Christianity. Evans depicts his father as a fair-minded man with passion for social justice. Their relationship healed before his father was diagnosed with motor neurone disease, and he had less than a vear to live.

Evans is a lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London. He was born in London but lived in South Africa for 30 years and was involved in several anti-apartheid organisations and in the ANC. He lives in North London with his wife, the author Margie Orford, and has two daughters and a grandson. He worked as a journalist at the Rand Daily Mail, Business Day, and Weekly Mail, which later became the Mail & Guardian, alongside fellow Witsies Anton Harber (BA 1979, MA 2021), Irwin Manoim (BA 1976, BA Hons 1977, MA 1984, DLitt honoris causa 2013) and John Perlman (BA 1981, BA Hons 1982). More recently he's published work for Aeon, the Conversation and the Guardian. His previous memoir Dancing Shoes Is Dead (Doubleday 2002) was described by the Guardian as "some of the most gripping and intelligent writing" on boxing during apartheid because it combined knowledge of the ring and an "appreciation of its finer points with a complex political and personal hinterland".



# OF HATRED n the second book, Evans explores

"might shock and anger some people, but it is highly recommended reading for evervone"

**GAVIN EVANS** 

#### **Being There:**

Backstories From The Political Front

#### **Tony Leon**

Jonathan Ball 2025

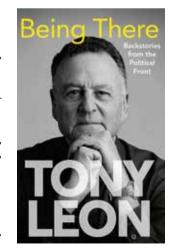
ormer DA leader Tony Leon (BA 1980, LLB 1983) kept a diary during the tense negotiations over the formation of the Government of National Unity in the 1990s and this book forms the backbone of this juicy behind-the-scenes account of the action. His account reflects "how a wrong turn, or too few votes, can change the course of one life."

During the launch of his book, he shared: "In the stories I recount, I go back to personal events and some major political moments, especially my involvement in the formation of the GNU. I recount events

by offering a real look into some back rooms where decisions were made, and explore purpose or a hidden meaning or two, hopefully without too heavy a touch.

"In some cases, recent information has come to light on some famous personalities since I last wrote about them (for example, my reappraisals of FW de Klerk, Nelson Mandela, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Boris Johnson, Arik Sharon and Yasser Arafat).

"I met a lot of rum and extraordinary characters when I 'showed up' while 'being there' hence the book and its title (borrowed from Jerzy Kosinski's great novel)."



#### White Supremacy

#### **Gavin Evans**

Jacana 2025

the roots of white supremacy as an Lideology in the 19th century using Charles Darwin and Francis Galton's racebased theories. He examines the spread of eugenics, the rise of fascism and apartheid, and the reappearance of these ideas in the world today. Evans provides a strong argument with supporting evidence that people can become less racist through exposure to other races, cultures and religions. Reviewers have called White Supremacy "equally challenging and rewarding", stating that it "might shock and anger some people, but it is highly recommended reading for everyone!"

BOOKS



#### The Sinners' Bench

#### **Maren Bodenstein**

Staging Post 2025

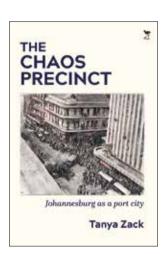
That do we inherit from our parents? This is the lingering question explored in Maren Bodenstein's (MA 2021) memoir about her family and growing up in an austere German Lutheran missionary community in Hermannsburg, KwaZulu-Natal. It is the product of her master's thesis in creative writing at Wits, under the supervision of Terry Kurgan (MA 2016) and reads like a detective story, in which Bodenstein grapples with the past after her mother shares a difficult secret just before she dies. "My mother is a city, a city so familiar, but one in which we all keep getting lost," she writes.

Bodenstein has taught screenwriting and creative writing at the Open Window University in Lusaka and makes a living as an editor, writing coach and gardener. Her first novel *Shooting Snakes* (Modjaji 2012) similarly highlighted how the past affects

the present and future. For this memoir, she has trawled through inherited documents and correspondence to discover a moving love story, which becomes the core of this book. "Their letters fill two lever arch files from which rain scraps of disintegrating paper and pressed flowers." It was a time when the postal service was excellent and "letters arrived within days of being posted...parcels containing cake and hand-knitted articles to her beloved reached him fast and intact."

The character of this austere community, one which went as far as seating those who fell from grace on a specific bench for all the congregants to see, is depicted with humour, and, often, poetically: "How come, when this village has always carried so much hurt and confusion and loneliness and homesickness, all that the church fathers had offered their children was harsh authority, judgment and distance. It's like giving vinegar to a thirsty man."

Michael Titlestad, professor in the department of English at Wits, has said: "I have not read a family memoir with greater enjoyment."



"A rich and thoughtful, and respectful portrait of Johannesburg's global entrepôt"



# The Chaos Precinct: Johannesburg as a Port City

Tanya Zack

Jacana 2025

The focus of this extraordinary book about Johannesburg is the booming makeshift shopping hub in Jeppe Street (renamed Rahima Moosa St) that developed over the past decade without formal planning. It has become the base of large numbers of mostly informal businesses owned by Ethiopian migrants. Municipal officials informally dubbed the area "Chaos Precinct", but traders refer to it as "Jeppe".

**Dr Tanya Zack** (BSc TRP 1986, PhD 2007) is an urban planner and researcher at the Wits School of Architecture, who has lived and worked in Johannesburg. In 2022, she published *Wake Up, This is Joburg* (Duke University Press). Her work has focused on urban regeneration, migration, informal work and urban policy. She first visited the area in 2009. "I was overwhelmed, excited and surprised," she says. "I felt an important and a fundamental shift going on...and that motivated me to start the research journey."

She writes that Johannesburg has all the port-like resources of infrastructure, buildings, logistics and financial mechanisms to connect local and global trading networks. "We think of Johannesburg as a migrant city... this is a place of motion, facilitating the mobility of people, goods and knowledge. Its infrastructure is focused on throughput, not settlement."

Zack's research has given some incredible insight into the economic footprint of this small area, which generated twice the value of Africa's wealthiest shopping mall in 2017. "The annual turnover, only from cross-border shoppers, excluding the South Africans who are also shopping there, at that stage was an estimated R10 billion, which was twice the turnover of Sandton City shopping centre. We're not talking about an economy that should be dismissed and seen as an aggravation to our economy. This is an important and hopeful economic opportunity in the inner city, which we often see as flailing and falling apart," she says.

Zack writes in an accessible manner and shares personal stories of many traders as well as her personal journey over the past decade. She has an optimistic, hopeful perspective: "We are dreamers and pioneers in this city," she says. Reviewers from diverse corners have offered high praise of this book: "A rich and thoughtful, and respectful portrait of Johannesburg's global entrepôt. A landmark study of the city," says fellow Witsie **Jonny Steinberg** (BA 1992, BA Hons 1993, MA 1996), author of *Winnie & Nelson: Portrait of a Marriage* (Jonathan Ball 2023).

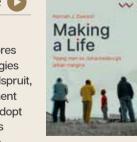
#### **Latest from Wits Press**

#### Making A Life 🗅

#### **Hannah Dawson**

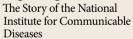
Image: Suzy Bernstein

Making a Life explores the dynamic strategies young men in Zandspruit, an informal settlement in Johannesburg, adopt to survive. It typifies the lives of many in



South Africa. **Dr Hannah Dawson** (BA 2009, BA Hons 2010) is a senior lecturer in the Anthropology and Development Studies department at the University of Johannesburg. She calls for an integrated understanding of all the links between people's lives and their livelihoods in urban settlements.

#### Fighting an Invisible Enemy: 🕟



#### **Barry Schoub**

The founding executive director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), Emeritus



Professor Barry Schoub (MBBCh 1967, DScMed 1992) gives a historical perspective on this invaluable institution that has come to play a crucial role in South Africa's fight against diseases such as pneumonia, polio, haemorrhagic fever, smallpox and COVID-19. The NICD is a global leader in HIV/Aids research and this an excellent insider's view of this flagship organisation.

# In Memoriam

WE FONDLY REMEMBER THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

1920-2025

#### Maurice McGregor

MBBCh 1943, DScMed honoris

Distinguished cardiologist and former dean in the Wits Faculty of Health Sciences between 1984-1987. Dr Maurice McGregor died of complications related to Parkinson's disease at the age 105 on 4 August 2025. Over the years he played multiple roles in clinical cardiology, teaching, and research. A skilled administrator and leader. he served as dean of medicine at McGill University in Canada from 1966 until 1972; he later chaired the Health Technology Assessment Unit at the McGill University Health Centre and was President of the Conseil d'évaluation des technologies de la santé du Québec. He received numerous awards, including the Order of Quebec and the Order of Canada.

McGregor was born on an orange farm in Rustenburg on 24 March 1920, the second child of Frank and Ella (née Mills) McGregor. He matriculated from Michaelhouse and obtained his medical degree in 1943. Fresh out of medical school he served as a medical officer in Italy in World War II. He completed his medical internship after the war and left for England for a post-doctoral residency in cardiology, where he married his wife **Margot Becklake** (MBBCh 1945, DScMed honoris causa 1974). In 1957 the

family emigrated to Montreal when he was recruited by McGill University.

The couple shared a legacy of leadership with Becklake becoming one of the Montreal Chest Institute's "Fab Five" and a globally renowned pioneer of respiratory medicine and epidemiology. She passed away in 2018. McGregor moved up in stature, having more than 180 publications to his credit, and is recognised for his novel and decisive contributions to the understanding of pulmonary hypertension and coronary ischemia.

In 1984, Wits asked him to take on the role of dean of the Faculty

**Below:** McGregor with wife Margot, 2016





of Medicine. He set up a committee to eliminate apartheid practices within the faculty, which met monthly until it was dissolved in July 1991. Among others, it organised a petition signed by 926 faculty members calling for the unification of health services, approaching numerous levels of government. During his tenure, the government repealed the decision that black students needed to obtain ministerial approval to attend "white"universities and the percentage of black students admitted to the medical school rose from 10% to 30%.

### "You can waste life or live it"

Returning to McGill University in 1987 he served as dean of medicine, becoming the inaugural director of a ground-breaking provincial council that evaluated health technologies entering the healthcare market - the first such council in North America. In 2014, the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health created the Dr Maurice McGregor Award. In 2020, in honour of his 100th birthday, McGill announced that its cardiovascular research day would now be known as the Maurice McGregor Cardiovascular Research Day.

On his 101st birthday, McGregor was interviewed by the youngest student at Michaelhouse. Asked what advice he had to share, his reply was simple and concise. "You can waste life or live it," he said.

He is survived by his son **James** (BSc 1973) and daughter Margaret; his grandchildren, great-grandchildren and numerous nephews and nieces.

Sources: McGill Health-e News, Wits archive

1936-2025

#### Costa Gazidis

MBBCh 1962

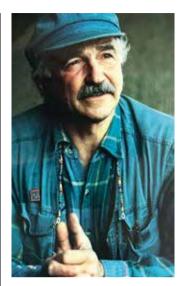
Activist and medic **Costa Gazidis** died in London on 19 March 2025 at the age of 90. He had travelled from his Cape Town home in 2018 to visit family and friends in England but fell ill and never fully recovered.

The son of Greek immigrants, Gazidis was born in Krugersdorp and was initially accepted to study civil engineering but switched to medicine in 1953. At the start of his anatomy year, he was incensed on learning that black students were forbidden to dissect white cadavers. He read Karl Marx's banned *Communist Manifesto* and became convinced of the possibility of an egalitarian future of racial equality and shared wealth.

Once qualified, he worked at the McCord Zulu Hospital in Durban and at Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg. In 1964 he was convicted for being a member of the Communist Party and spent two and a half years in Pretoria Central prison, much in solitary confinement.

After his release in 1966 he was subjected to a banning order. By 1968 his life in South Africa had become so untenable that he relocated with his young family to the UK. In his new home he studied for a diploma in public health before working as an assistant senior medical officer in Portsmouth, as a senior medical officer in Nottingham and then as a senior epidemiologist for the Public Health Laboratory Service in London.

Until the early 1990s he occupied



various positions in community medicine until he returned to South Africa after the fall of apartheid, taking up a post as a public health specialist in Umtata in the Eastern Cape and as a senior lecturer at the University of Transkei Medical School, before working as a community health specialist in East London from 1996 until retirement in 2004.

Soon after his return to South Africa he had begun prescribing AZT to pregnant mothers with HIV/Aids – until he was threatened with imprisonment by the ANC's minister of health. Afterwards he funded the provision of antiretroviral drugs out of his own pocket and formed a charity, the ABBA Trust, to dispense them off hospital premises. Ultimately, his efforts, in conjunction with many others, changed government policy.

Despite his rebellious streak, he was happy and optimistic, and larger-than-life. He is survived by his third wife Janet (née Page), seven children and their families.

**Source:** The Guardian and Medical Class of 1960 archive

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IN MEMORIAM IN MEMORIAM

1941-2025

#### Hans Christian Benecke

BCom 1965

Hans Christian Benecke died at the age of 84 in Johannesburg after a long battle with cancer. He was director of Atlas Organic Fertilizers for decades, "both through good and bad years". As a notable rower during his time at Wits, Benecke was the president of the Wits Boat Club and did much to rebuild its depleted resources. During the Wits 1975 Henley and European tour, he hosted the entire crew at his family home on Lake Konstance in Switzerland.

His charming personality, wicked wit and fantastic memory allowed him to befriend many and catalogue and maintain an extraordinary archive of lives. He loved to reminisce on the glory days of the Club, and its wild adventures.

A tribute was written by a close friend, **Derrick Read** (BA 1965), for his funeral which said: "Hans loved South Africa, the Orange River, the Zambezi, the Vaal. A pioneer, an explorer with a passion for nature and

the beauty around its creation, and the people who lived in those spaces, and coming from a family at the forefront of development in Southern Africa, Hans grew his love for Africa from the deserts of Namibia, and the grasslands and mountains of Zimbabwe, to the diamonds on the banks of the Orange River... The people of those areas meant much to Hans, the local people, the farmers, the tribesmen, he knew them all, respected and



loved them, the salt of the earth. Hans spoke Afrikaans well and admired the faith, strength, and pragmatism of the community, especially the rural farmers and their families."

He is survived by his Michele and three children, Paul, Josephine and Nicholas.

**Sources:** Derrick and Allison Read, Wynand and Landi Dreyer and Benecke family

1944-2025

# Douglas Roy Snaddon

BSc Eng 1965, PhD 1988, MBA 1971



Professor Douglas Roy Snaddon, who served for many years as head of industrial engineering at Wits and held the prestigious Barloworld

Chair of Industrial Engineering, died on 18 August 2025 at the age of 81.

Snaddon taught and inspired many students to love industrial engineering, which he promoted actively in South Africa and outside the country. In 2011, he left Wits to take up the position of professor and director of mechanical engineering at the Polytechnic of Namibia, where he started industrial engineering courses and qualifications in Namibia and encouraged the introduction of industrial engineering in Botswana.

He authored numerous papers and articles, as well as two books related to industrial engineering. He was an Honorary Fellow of the Southern African Institute for Industrial Engineering (SAIIE) and served on the SAIIE Council for many years, as well as president in 1994.

During his retirement, he kept regular contact with the Industrial Engineering Department at Wits, giving the occasional lecture, providing valuable advice to the faculty, and regularly speaking at student evenings and prize-giving ceremonies.

He will be remembered for his incredible energy, drive, enthusiasm, wit, humour, forthrightness, and for not compromising on qualities such as excellence, kindness, generosity. He will be dearly missed by all who knew him, particularly his children: **Susan** (BSc Building 1997), **Collin** (BMus 1995) and **Bruce** (BCom 1998) and his grandchildren.

Sources: SAIIE

1931-2025

# Jack Spence, OBE

BA 1952, BA Hons 1953, LLD *honoris causa* 1997

Professor John Edward "Jack" Spence, OBE distinguished scholar of international relations and diplomacy, passed away peacefully on 17 August 2025 in Ludlow at the age of 94.

Born on 11 June 1931, Spence was the son of a County Durham miner who emigrated to work in the gold mines of Krugersdorp. He was educated at Pretoria Boys High School and completed his Bachelor of Arts and honours degree in history from Wits. His interests shifted from history to political science and he qualified with Bachelor of Science in economics from London School of Economics (LSE) in 1955.

His academic career spanned continents and more than six decades, leaving a lasting mark on the study of politics, diplomacy, and African affairs. Spence began his career at the University of Natal, followed by a Rockefeller junior research fellowship at the LSE. He later taught at University College Swansea, before serving as professor of politics and pro-vice-chancellor at the University of Leicester. In 1991 he became director of Studies at Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs).

His influential works on South Africa and international diplomacy included *Ending Apartheid* (Routledge 2010, with David Welsh). He wrote extensively on South African foreign policy, convened expert study groups on South and Southern Africa, and fostered close collaboration with the South African Institute



He was a remarkable ambassador for Wits who would be seen in London wearing his Wits tie, using his Wits cufflinks, carrying his Wits bag, or all three at once!

of International Affairs. He also edited After Mandela: The 1999 South African Elections (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1999), bringing together a distinguished group of scholars. He received honorary fellowships at several universities, and honorary doctorates, including Wits in 1997. He served as a member of the University's London Committee "during several years of its existence" and, until he was 88, as a managing trustee of the University Appeal Fund — a UK charity acting for the benefit of Wits. He was a remarkable ambassador for Wits

who would be seen in London

wearing his Wits tie, using his Wits cufflinks, carrying his Wits bag, or all three at once!

In 2014, King's College London established the Jack Spence BA Prize in International Relations. He taught, wrote, and supervised students well into his later years, serving as Professor of Diplomacy in the Department of War Studies at King's College from 1997 until his retirement in 2022 at the age of 91.

Beyond his academic and policy contributions, Spence was a generous mentor. He committed time and resources to the next generation. Well into his eighties, he was pivotal to organising visiting research positions for Wits PhD students to spend time at King's. He remained "old school", never learning to type, relying on landlines, and avoiding email. His late wife Sue, who predeceased him in 2021, often fielded calls and messages on his behalf.

He is survived by his daughter, Rachel.

**Sources:** Kings College London, Wits archives and tributes from former

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IN MEMORIAM

1945-2025

#### Lynn Gamsu Freed

BA 1967

South African born author **Lynn Ruth Freed** died of lymphoma at the age of 79 in Sonoma, California on 9 May 2025.

She was the third and youngest daughter of Anne (Moshal) and Harold Derrick Freed, born on 18 July 1945. She captured in fiction and memoir her father, her fiercely ambitious mother, and their theatre company and exuberant household in Durban in the 1950s and 1960s. "The real world of my childhood," she wrote, "was a large subtropical port on the Indian Ocean, with beaches and bush and sugarcane and steaming heat, a strict Anglican girls' school, massive family gatherings on Friday nights and Jewish holidays, and then my parents' theatre world...this world did not exist, not even peripherally, in the literature available to me."

She first went to the United States as a high school exchange student with the American Field Service and shortly after receiving her degree from Wits, she enrolled as a graduate student in English literature at Columbia University and earned her doctorate. She moved to San Francisco in 1970 and lived in Sonoma from 1989 till her death. She was professor emerita of English at the University of California, Davis, where she taught for 15 years. She was also a member of the core faculty of the MFA program at Bennington College and a frequent faculty member at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont.

Her style has been described as "mordant and darkly comic",



"For what is writing, after all, but a bid for the truth? And what is truth if not the life at the very heart of failure?"

exploring her Jewish upbringing during apartheid. She wrote seven novels: Heart Change in 1982, Home Ground in 1986, The Bungalow in 1993, The Mirror in 1997, House of Women in 2002, The Servants' Quarters in 2009, and The Last Laugh in 2019. She published a collection of stories, The Curse of the Appropriate Man, in 2004, and two volumes of essays: Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home (2005) and The Romance of Elsewhere (2017).

In 2002, the American Academy

of Arts and Letters awarded Freed the inaugural Katherine Anne Porter Award in fiction. She received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and The Guggenheim Foundation among others.

She often expressed ambivalence about leaving South Africa and feeling displaced: "I saw my bifurcated life for what it was: as a failure of daring. I had not dared to remain. More than this, I had been a show-off in my leaving. And I was still showing off — leaving there, leaving here — keeping the truth for the writing itself, hiding it away like a criminal. For what is writing, after all, but a bid for the truth? And what is truth if not the life at the very heart of failure?"

She is survived by her daughter, Jessica Gamsu, and her granddaughter, Georgia.

Her first marriage, to Gordon Gamsu, ended in divorce. She was married to Robert Kerwin until his death in 2021.

**Source:** Legacy, The San Francisco Chronicle and The New York Times 1940-2025

#### Jan Peter Reynders

BSc Eng 1965, PhD 1979

Distinguished academic in the field of high voltage engineering and former dean of the Faculty of Engineering, **Professor Jan Peter Reynders**, died on 16 April 2025 at the age of 84.

He earned his PhD in electrical engineering in 1979 and started lecturing in his 20s under Prof Guerino Bozzoli – continuing his relationship with Wits well into his 70s. He pioneered the establishment of the Wits high-voltage laboratory in the 1980s and advanced research in gas-insulated switchgear in South Africa. As part of the Johannesburg Lightning Research Laboratory, founded in 1992, Reynders made significant contributions to

addressing problems caused by lightning on power and telecommunications systems.

His leadership extended to collaborations with high voltage facilities, higher education institutions and industry, earning

him international recognition. As chair of the organising committee, Reynders played a pivotal role in hosting the 16th International Symposium on High Voltage Engineering in South Africa in 2009, a testament to his global stature. He served as president of the South African Institute of Electrical Engineers and was actively involved with Cigré, the International Council on Large Electric Systems, shaping power systems research worldwide.

After his retirement, Reynders became a fully ordained Methodist minister, offering a "non-itinerant,

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non-stipendiary service" – in remote congregations. He was a quiet man, with a gentle sense of humour. "He was never dismissive or flippant, tackling even the smallest tasks with seriousness and attention to detail,"

attendees at his memorial were told. He integrated his faith and science effortlessly and was a specialist at fixing things with his hands – as carpenter and qualified electrician – and passed these skills on.

In his final years, Parkinson's had a devastating impact, but his true character shone through and he became gentler and more peaceful.

Reynders is survived by his wife Joan; sons **David** (BSc Eng 1994, MSc Eng 1999), and **Stephen** (BSc Eng 1996, MSc Eng 2002) and their extended families.

Source: Wits and Reynders family

1950-2025

# Jacqueline Galpin

BSc Hons 1972

Former head of school in the Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science, **Professor Jacqueline Galpin** died on 18 May 2025.

Affectionately known as Jacky, she began her career at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in 1973 before joining the Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science at Wits University in April 1990 as a senior lecturer. She served the department for many years, including a term as

Head of School.

As a lecturer at Wits, she developed several courses, and her research covered both theoretical and applied areas, particularly regression, sampling, small-area estimation,

and official statistics. Although she officially retired from Wits in 2008, Galpin continued to contribute to academia, first as a contract lecturer until 2017 and later as a visiting senior research associate at the University of Johannesburg.

She served on the executive committee of the South African Statistical Association for 21 years, and was elected president and honoured as a fellow in 1998. She played a central role in organising,



and served as managing editor, of the South African Statistical Journal from 1988 to 2005. Galpin was also a council member of the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions and repre-

sented the South African statistical community internationally.

Her passion for advancing statistical literacy, empowering women, and training official statisticians was unwavering. Jacky was known for her warmth, generosity, and tireless support of students and colleagues.

Her husband, Richard, passed away on 29 August 2021.

Sources: Wits news

IN MEMORIAM

1939-2025

#### Robert Pullen

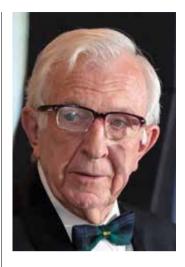
BSc Eng 1961, MSc Eng 1970

Distinguished leader and former president of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering, **Robert Pullen** died on 27 May 2025 at the age of 85.

His career trajectory reflected a unique balance of technical expertise, visionary leadership, and public service. He held senior roles in planning and construction, contributing significantly to iconic national projects and policy-making, including the drafting of South Africa's first major water policy document.

In 1963 he joined the Hydrological Research Unit (HRU) at Wits to work as a research engineer under **Professor Des Midgely** (DSc honoris causa 1986). His research was related to the development of practical methods for addressing flooding. His master's thesis provided a major component of the seminal "Design Flood Determination in South Africa", which became the standard reference for flood analysis and the design of protection works in South Africa.

In 1969 he joined the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, where he held management positions in planning and construction, including that of resident engineer on the Tugela-Vaal inter-basin transfer project for augmenting the supply of water to the Witwatersrand. He made innovative contributions and was also involved in the planning and design of the Drakensberg pumped storage scheme for incorporating hydroelectric power generation.



He left a promising career in public service for private consulting in the water resources field and was a director of SRK Consulting from 1982 to 1985, director of Consultburo from 1985 to 1997 and director of BKS after its merger with Consultburo from 1997 to 2002. He became Deputy CEO of BKS Group in 2002.

In May 2009 he was presented with the National Science and Technology Forum Award in Category C (for activities other than research and its outputs over the last five years or less) for 2008/9 by the Minister of Science and Technology for his contribution to the regulation of the engineering professions and his contribution to civil engineering and environmental practice. In 2013 Wits awarded him a Gold Medal for his "outstanding contribution to the practice of water resources engineering and especially to the wider engineering profession in South Africa".

He will be remembered not only as a brilliant engineer and strategic thinker but as a man of great integrity, humility, and warmth.

Source: Wits archives and SAICE

1937-2025

#### Naomi Livni

MBBCh 1960

**Naomi Livni,** who died aged 87, was a clinical pathologist, and specialist in urological histology in London.

She was born in Johannesburg, the second eldest of six. She matriculated from Parktown Girls High School, excelling in sport and academics. She recalled her initial interest in nuclear physics at Wits: "I was the only person in the queue for nuclear physics - when I approached the desk the gentleman seated there said to me 'we only have two places for students in nuclear physics and you aren't going to get either one of them - so run along little girl'. This was my first [and not the last] encounter with the glass ceiling! I left the room with not much of a clue as to what to do and joined the queue for medicine and was accepted."

Halfway through her first year she met **Leopold "Leon" Kahn** (MBBCh 1960) and they were married two weeks after graduation. Through a serendipitous encounter, she applied for a job advertised at the South African Institute for Medical Research in cytology, which opened up a new career path in histopathology.

The family moved to the UK in 1989, after she accepted a post initially as consultant and then later as head of department at St George's Hospital in Tooting. She later took up a post as head of cytology at Hammersmith, Charing Cross and Chelsea and Westminster hospitals, a position she remained at for 16 years and in which she oversaw many changes. After her \*

retirement in 2008, she took up a position as lead uropathologist at the Royal Marsden Hospital where she worked for the next 6 years: "This was a wonderful time working with many leaders in my field," she shared in 2020.

The last 18 months of her life were difficult as colon cancer, which had been in remission, returned. She said in 2020 that "My incredible husband and my wonderful children have been my greatest champions. My ultimate accolade is that both my sons chose to marry career women."

She is survived by her husband Leon, two sons **David** (BSc 1983) and **Leonard** (MBBCh 1984) – *pictured right*, and their families.

**Source:** Alumni correspondence and medical class of 1960 newsletter



"we only have two places for students in nuclear physics and you aren't going to get either one of them – so run along little girl" Naomi, with sons David (middle) and Leonard (right)

1944-2025

#### Motlatji Anne Letsebe

HDip Advanced Social Practice 1979, MA Social Work 1984, PhD 2002

Scholar activist, feminist researcher and trailblazing social worker, Dr Motlatii Anne Letsebe. died on 16 September 2025 at the age of 81 in Johannesburg. Fondly known as "Mama Anne", she was the first president of the South African Black Social Workers Association and brought a critical voice to social work during and after apartheid. She was a lecturer at Wits for 17 years and went on to join the presidency as the chief director for social sectors in its policy unit in 1998, under Nelson Mandela. Later she served as the deputy director general in the presidency and secretary of the cabinet office under Thabo Mbeki.

She credited Emeritus Professor Ceciel Muller, for opening doors to African students to pursue higher degrees in the field. "She managed to get funding from Anglo

American to establish the Centre of Social Development. We were categorised as employees so that we could receive funding and attend classes in the evening," she said. Mama Anne, who went

on to complete her PhD, was only able to register as a student just before she completed her first qualification.

She often recounted a story from the 1976 uprising in Soweto, in which pupils from Meadowlands High lifted her car and moved it into the street outside from where it had been parked, before the building was set alight. Nothing but her beloved yellow Volkswagen Beetle survived.

At a 2022 reunion at Wits, she recalled the challenges of her job, insisting she was an activist, rather than a politician. She said her role required writing and analytical skills, but most importantly integrity. A statement from the Thabo Mbeki Foundation read: "Being a humble, self-effacing and lovely human being, she never carried herself with any demonstration of self-importance. Her high academic qualifications and experience, her proven mastery of her profession and her unquestionably high standing in society, in addition to the fact that daily she was enveloped by the thought processes and decision making of government at its highest levels, all said that something had to shout out loud - here walks a star!"

**Sources:** Wits, Letsebe family, Thabo Mbeki Foundation, South African Women in Dialogue

1931-2025

#### Sidney Lipworth

BCom 1952, LLB 1954, LLD honoris causa 2003

Distinguished barrister **Sir Maurice Sydney Lipworth,** who enjoyed a wide-ranging career in law, business and the public service, died in London at age 94 on 27 June 2025.

He was born in Johannesburg on 13 May 1931, the son of Isidore Lipworth (originally Lipschitz, of Lithuanian and Latvian descent) and his wife Rae. He was educated at King Edward VII School, where his classmates included Sir Donald Gordon (MBBCh 1960, DEconSc honoris causa 1991) and Sir Mark Weinberg (BCom 1952, LLB 1954, DEconSc honoris causa 1990). He graduated with both business and law degrees from Wits cum laude. He was joint winner of the Alexander Aitken Medal in his commerce class and the Society of Advocates Prize for the best law graduate in his LLB graduating class. He qualified as an attorney in 1955 and was admitted to the bar in 1956, practising as an attorney for eight years.

Lipworth was one of a trio of liberal-minded lawyers who left apartheid South Africa along with Sir Mark and **Lord Joel Joffe** (BCom 1952, LLB 1954, LLD *honoris causa* 2001), the latter having been a defence attorney for Nelson Mandela and other ANC leaders in their 1963-64 "Rivonia" trial on charges of sabotage. Also in their circle was Gordon, who remained in South Africa to build Liberty Life but was later a property tycoon and philanthropist in the UK. Lipworth advised him at Liberty Life in the



Image: Orde Eliaso

1950s before moving to London to join Weinberg in the launch of their insurance business, Abbey Life.

After Abbey Life was acquired in 1970 by the US conglomerate ITT, the trio moved on. With Weinberg as the driving entrepreneur, Lipworth as a shrewd business brain alongside him, and Joffe as the corporate conscience urging them to give profit-shares to charity, they built a new business which evolved from Hambro Life to Allied Hambro and ultimately Allied Dunbar, a constituent of the FTSE 100 index until it was taken over at a rich price by BAT Industries in 1986.

Lipworth was deputy chairman of Allied Dunbar until 1988, when he took on the full-time chairmanship of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for a five-year term. Lipworth was immune to "lobbying or political bullying", one profile noted, and had no truck with "trimming to the fashion of the day". That took him to the chair of the Financial Reporting

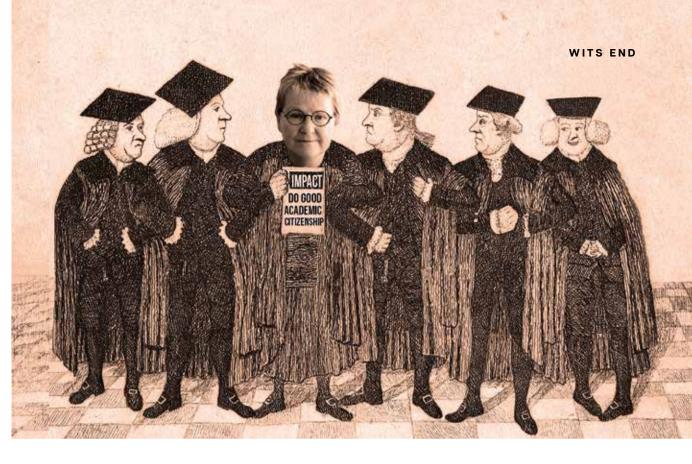
Council, overseeing audit professionals and corporate governance, and he became a powerful voice on other committees and in other boardrooms.

He also chaired the trustees of the Philharmonic Orchestra and gave his support to the Royal Academy, the South Bank Foundation, Sadler's Wells and the Contemporary Dance Trust. For recreation he enjoyed tennis as a member of Queen's Club. He was knighted in 1991 and appointed an honorary QC in 1993.

In 1957 he married Rosa Liwarek, who was introduced through **Arthur Chaskalson** (BCom 1952, LLB 1954, LLD *honoris causa* 1990). She was appointed CBE in 2010 for her own charitable work and together they were significant benefactors of Wits and graciously hosted Wits alumni in their beautiful London home on many occasions. She survives him with a son; another son predeceased him.

Source: The Telegraph and Wits archives

READ MORE: www.wits.ac.za/alumni/obituaries/



#### In ways great and small, seen and unseen, can the impact of an academic's work be fully g(r)asped?

BY CHRIS THURMAN

mpact: it's both the aim and the bane of an academic's existence. The quiet ambition to have some kind of a positive impact – on individuals, on communities, on society at large – is what spurs most people to pursue multiple postgraduate degrees and to risk years of overqualified precarity in the hope of securing a university appointment.

Okay, that ... and a salary. And relentless intellectual curiosity. And conference travel. And trying to gratify an insatiable ego. But mostly, it's the desire to do some good, somehow, for our fellow travellers on this earth.

It's easy with teaching; daily interaction with students gives you a sense of hope and conviction. It can also give you a sense of despair. But the point is that, in ways great and small, seen and unseen, you are having an impact on the lives of present and future generations. Academic citizenship? Less obviously so. Still, sitting

on committees, organising colloquia, volunteering for academic associations or performing any one of hundreds of other thankless non-curricular tasks at least offers the comfort of contributing to a shared and valuable academic project.

Research is trickier. It can take a long time before the impact of scholarship is felt. And even then - can it really be measured? Citation counts, downloads, altmetrics, H-indices, Journal Impact Factors ... are these reliable indicators? Occasionally, major research breakthroughs are kept under wraps for patent reasons, or never fully credited to their originators. A researcher's proudest boast may be having their work quoted at length in a Wikipedia entry. And you can't always anticipate which aspects of your output will be most impactful. You can spend years on a book that only sells a few hundred copies, and sits neglected on library shelves or in digital repositories for years before it starts to pick up some traction. Or you can give a five-minute, off-the-cuff interview on a popular platform and suddenly your soundbites (on topics that may only be tangentially connected to your actual specialisation) go viral.

At least all these forms of impact are still visible. As Large Language Models and other Generative AI tools vacuum up our work into anonymising, blandifying »





Joni

Brenner

Infinity Machines, many scholars are likely to feel that our footprint on whatever passes for public intellectual or scientific discourse is becoming less discernible.

It was with these sobering thoughts in mind that I visited the Origins Centre, there to see exhibitions by two Wits colleagues, the scholar-artists **Joni Brenner** (BA FA 1991, MA FA 1996, PGD HSE 2021) and **Isabel Hofmeyr** (PhD 2021). My ruminations were no doubt spurred by the title of Brenner's show: *Impact*.

While not a retrospective per se, Brenner's exhibition did indicate a trajectory from her early work as a Wits student in the 1990s to her practice as a lecturer in the Wits School of Arts. As a young artist, Brenner pondered the relationship between portraiture and mortality as she gazed out of her studio window over the Braamfontein Cemetery.

This prepared her for a decades-long artistic meditation on the Taung Child: the fossilised skull of a young Australopithecus africanus, the hominin species first described by **Raymond Dart** (DSc honoris causa 1964) in the 1920s. This 2.5 million-year-old object, housed at Wits' Evolutionary Studies Institute, established the university's reputation in the field. Along with Dart there was Robert Broom - later Phillip **Tobias** (BSc 1946, BSc Hons 1947), Ronald J Clarke (PhD 1978), Lee Berger (PhD1994, DSc 2014) ... and, of course, starring roles by Mrs Ples, Little Foot and representatives of species like Homo naledi and Australopithecus sediba. (Now that's impact.)

Brenner has painted and sculpted the Taung skull hundreds of times, and with each iteration she explores a fundamental paradox. The explosions that blew this artefact from its limestone resting place led to a drastic change in our understanding of human evolution; the serendipitous discovery of the Taung Child is to be celebrated. Yet we may pause to reflect on the life and death of this hominid toddler, who may have been killed at the age of three. Brenner's practice thus asks the viewer to "tolerate contradictory forces of creation and destruction" – a contradiction she enacts in her "clay slam" pieces, which explore the violent forces also entailed in "impact".

There were echoes of this duality in Hofmeyr's exhibition, *The Secret Lives of* in the Barnes Road Herbarium, which opened

Plants in the Barnes Road Herbarium, which opened around the time that Brenner's was closing in August. Not content with being an A-rated scientist, an internationally acclaimed literary scholar, an expert on book history and print culture, and a pioneer in Oceanic Humanities for the Global South, Hofmeyr has turned to making art.

Her medium (which developed out of years of research into the circulation of texts and other materials through colonial networks, customs houses, museums, libraries and archives) is termed "botanical

contact printing" or ecoprinting. In her Barnes Road studio – technically an herbarium because it contains preserved botanical specimens – Hofmeyr compresses plant material and fabric or paper together, before boiling or steaming them to transfer an imprint of the leaf.

This technique produces truly striking results. The biochemistry of the plant, invisible to the human eye, is revealed and transformed through ecoprinting into unpredictable textures, shapes and colours (See images top left). "As the plant gives up its last life," notes Hofmeyr of a quirky side-effect of the process, "it creates a 'gasp' around its stem, an ethereal shadowy circle." In *The Secret Lives of Plants*, then, "We witness the death of a leaf in the birth of the image".

And what astonishing images they are. This elegiac beauty, too, is impact.

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