



Initiatives of Change

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Tools for Change
Caux Lecture 12 August 2009, Ginn Fourie

It is seven o' clock on a hot September morning (2002) and I am driving on the N2 highway. I am thinking about the trauma lectures I'm going to give today. By chance I turn on the radio.

The program is about a book launch, I hear the name Letlapa Mphahlele. I recognize it immediately. My breathing becomes shallow, as I listen to the interview and hear his voice. My friend and fellow researcher Marleen, is going to a book launch today. Is it the same one? In my head I reconfigure my lectures. My foot goes down on the accelerator and I start vying with the minibus taxis.

As soon as I get to my office at the University of Cape Towns' Division of Physiotherapy I phone Marleen.

'What book launch are you going to?' She gives his name, in her clear clipped American accent

'Do you know who Letlapa is?' I ask

'Of course he was a commander of freedom fighters in the struggle.'

'Can you get me a ticket?'

I spend the rest of the morning in the orthopaedic wards of Grootte Schuur Hospital, trying to engage with students and clients, but my mind keeps wandering. 'Focus,' I tell myself, 'postpone your suspense for just a little longer.'

I arrive at the Press Club lunch at the Waterfront promptly. Although I have given myself plenty of time, I am anxious to find the right place and to meet up with Marleen. This is the moment I have been waiting for, I am about to confront the evil that has been lurking out of reach for nine years. I look around at the black men present, trying to figure out which one is Letlapa.

While the waiters hand around food. Marleen tells me she is planning to interview Letlapa for her doctorate on 'forgiveness for perpetrators of political violence.' I try to eat but the food tastes like saltless porridge.

Letlapa Mphahlele is introduced by the publisher of his book called 'Child of this Soil – The Journey of a Freedom Fighter'. A tall black man rises to the podium. He has a serious expression. After thanking everyone for being present, he tells his story of struggle and constant vigilance. As I watch the press attacking him, I am surprised that I actually feel rather sorry for him.

'How could you kill innocent people who had nothing to do with apartheid? You knew the first democratic elections were scheduled for April 1994, why go on a killing spree when Mandela had put so much work into freedom from oppression?' A pack of hyenas attacking a solitary buck.

When they finish I stand and identify myself. 'I am Ginn Fourie, the mother of Lyndi, who was killed at the Heidelberg Tavern on your orders.' He looks startled.

'Did you not trivialize the TRC by withdrawing your amnesty application?'

My heart sinks as I hear anger and reproach in my voice, I thought I had forgiven him.

In a strong clear voice he responds 'You may see it that way, but from my perspective the Truth and Reconciliation Commission trivialised the fact that we were at war by treating my cadres as common criminals. The South African Defence Force, who had committed worse atrocities, remain members of the new Defence Force. Furthermore,' he continues, 'if the TRC were after the truth why were lawyers necessary to tell the applicants what the truth is?' The silence burns my ears. There is nothing more to say.

He heads straight from the podium to where I am standing. The press cameras are flashing. He puts out his hand. Holding his right wrist with his left hand he introduces himself quietly: 'I will be here for a week and I am willing to change any arrangements if you and your family will meet with me.' My heart is pounding so loudly I wonder if he can hear it. I watch his shoulders sag and the face he'd put on for the press dissolve. Is that mist welling in his eyes?

I feel very honoured and grateful to be standing in his beautiful place sharing my personal journey, thank you for the invitation, it so meets my needs to participate in peace building. In the telling of this story, my longing is to bring hope to anyone anywhere who needs comfort and acceptance for who they are as a precious prince or princess of the universe.

Letlapa and I shared our story here on this very platform in the summer of 2004. For those who do not know him and in order to bring Letlapa into our conversation here this evening a video of twenty minutes will now be screened..

VIDEO

Please take a few minutes to silently feel what is in your heart right now.

Thank you, now please turn to the person next to you, starting on my right at the edge of each row. And share with that person in 5 minutes a need which comes to your mind right now – about someone whom you are called to forgive, it may be from yesterday or 30 years ago!

Swap over and hear your partners story in 5 minutes.

Now I would like to share what has been happening more recently on our journey:

Letlapa was elected President of the Pan Africanist Congress in September of 2007. However, due to the resistance of the past President to vacate both his seat in parliament and the allocated dwelling in Cape Town, Letlapa has only just been able to take up his seat in Parliament, following the general election this April. The past president of the PAC had to be evicted from the parliamentary dwelling and has also had to face charges of corruption and fraud, which Letlapa uncovered, resulting in the party being split down the middle. Letlapa had to deal with death- threats last year– but fortunately those have stopped. Having him living part time in Cape Town really assists in our connection on Foundation matters.

I on the other hand, have been preparing for (NQF) National Quality Framework accreditation of the Company with whom I choose to do diversity training. We call it Equality Matters in the Workplace. The implication was that I needed to qualify as an assessor and moderator for the SAQA (SA Quality Assurance) body. The accreditation came through in July this year and so marketing of this training can now begin. Now to integrate into the Equality Matters Training another passion – Conscious Communication.

I started facilitating groups in Conscious Communication since learning and practising Nonviolent Communication, the work of Marshall Rosenberg 5 years ago. I discovered the transforming power of dealing with my, and others, fears and anger empathically. I discovered that fear and anger are important 'designer created' emotions to warn of imminent danger. That the stimulus to anger particularly may be what someone has said or done to me. However the cause of that anger lies within my own unmet needs. When I can surface the needs which may be for 'respect' or 'power within my world', and ask to have that need met, by making a request to enrich my life, transformation takes place in both of us. Here is a recent example:

Husband comes home and shouts: 'You don't care a fig about safety, the garage door is standing wide open again.'

My first thought is that he left it open last week!! And I know I closed it with the remote control... rather than blame and accuse him, I acknowledge to myself that I am hurt by his tone and accusation, and maybe as I put the remote into my handbag it triggered reopening of the door.

Ginn: 'When you say that I don't care about our safety, are you feeling concerned and anxious about my security when you are out and needing the assurance of support in keeping the door closed at all times?'

Husband: 'Yes absolutely and not only our security but all the electronic equipment and things that we treasure!'

Ginn: 'I am happy to support you in that way in future, I think I will have to be more careful with my remote because it may have triggered when I put it in my handbag.'

Husband: Oh OK that makes sense.

Ginn: 'Now can I share with you how I felt when you came in? I was surprised and hurt by what you said and need understanding for what may have happened for me in the circumstances. Would you be willing in future to share what is frustrating you and to enquire what may be happening for me, so that we can negotiate and bring tranquility to our home.'

Hubby: 'OK that sounds reasonable.'

The burden and longing of the LFF (Lyndi Fourie Foundation) remains a high priority. To find funding for a farm for ex-combatants who are still struggling with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and the resulting substance abuse and family dysfunction. The Ministry of Defense has previously stated that they have no funds. Letlapa has discovered that no funding had ever been allocated for ex-combatants. Now, as a result of Letlapa's involvement in the parliamentary committee for ex-combatants, I am trusting that the new budget will contain funds for assisting NGO's with this essential aspect of dealing with our war-mongering past. I also trust that Letlapa's integrity as a human being and as a man of integrity will bring some very important changes to the way that the ANC has treated the PAC with disdain and disrespect.

I sense that I can depend on each of you to hold us in South Africa in your thoughts and hearts. Our longing for justice, equality and peace are more than likely similar to your own, but may be more urgent – for stability in the country depends on it. The strikes and labour union demands are becoming more aggressive and my concern relates to how President Zuma and our government can meet their demands stemming from promises made during electioneering.

I believe that we are all connected, regardless of race, creed, gender or ableness. Lets take with us this evening the power of ONE. To influence the people whom we come into contact with on a daily basis and so contribute to transforming our selves and our world.