

OTP/0114/0109/4

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There was no mention of Maths and Physics. Here I saw another imbalance and decided to major in Maths and Physics. I ~~wqa~~ was particularly reassured in my choice when stunned students told me that no-one had ever majored in these two in the history of Fort Hare.

"What strange majors", the students would say "No one ever passes Maths and Physics here," others warned me, and I thought "that is exactly the reason why I must take Maths and Physics".

Jo Mokwena, my colleague from my earliest days in Fort Hare, opted for the same majors as did also Lancelot Gama, also from St Peters.

Tapes starts with song "How Great Thou art"

The small Eastern Cape Town of Alice, said to be below sea level, serves two educational institutions within its municipal area which are infinitely more famous than itself.. All three, that is Alice and the two institutions, which are within walking distance of one another, are built around the Tyumie River, which runs in a south east L shape bracketing Fort Hare, with Lovedale on the west of the river and the town of Alice on the south of the river. The road from Alice to the Holgsberg Mountains and beyond ran through the Fort Hare campus (I don't know if it still does), dividing it into two parts with, on the right of the road in that order, annex residence for men, Worsley House, the college dining hall, Iona, which is the Presbyterian residence and to the north of Iona, Bedale Hall, the Anglican residence. All the residences are mens residences. To the west of the road where the college assembly hall known as the C .U. an abbreviation for Christian Union Hall, and beyond this blocks of building housing lecture rooms, the administration, science laboratories and the college library. Further west near the banks of the Tyumie River, was the womens residence, known as Elukhanyisweni.

Fort Hare was linked to Alice by a bridge over the Tyumie River and to Lovedale by a wobbling suspension footbridge which offered little assurance that nothing would happen before you reached the other bank, but it had stood the test of thousands of footsteps over the decades.. Some staff members lived in town while others occupied staff houses on the periphery of the campus. My residence was Bedale Hall. This was a double storey L shaped building with a long north south and a shorter east west wing facing west and south respectively. A fairly wide balcony was marked off with a series of arches. The east west balcony ended with some two or three steps leading to the door of the Wardens office which was part of his residence. and opposite the end of the north south balcony was a chapel a few paces from the balcony with its door facing the balcony.

At the back of the building that is on the eastern side were toilets and a disused tennis courts. In the foreground an open space covered with grass sufficiently short to enable one of the residents to use it as a little golf course. I remember Aaron Libone a ~~student~~ medical aid student from St Peters and an aspiring golf player. He would use that little space as his golf course and I often watched him doing all the manoeuvres with legs body and arms and the golf stick before the final swing, which alas had to be controlled so as to avoid driving the golf ball beyond a limited 50 yards or so. ~~Compared to the other residences~~

Compared to the other residences Bedale Hall was relatively new. Until it was built the Anglican students occupied the annexe on the other side of the Methodist residence of Wesley Hall. The warden of the annexe was then Bishop Smythe. He became the first warden of Bedale Hall, and seemed to have got on extraordinarily well with the students. His successor as warden of Bedale Hall was Bishop Ferguson Davey, formerly Bishop of Singapore, who after his retirement was appointed to take charge of this Anglican residence. He welcomed us to Bedale Hall, that is those of us who were new arrivals and we soon got to know him as a most pleasant old man, and his wife, Mrs Ferguson Davey.

In my younger days at Bizana, I knew people around my home. I grew to know people and places further away, but within the district of Bizana. Indeed I regarded myself as pretty well

well travelled within that district. Certainly more than the average boy of my age in my locality. Then I went on to Holy Cross, where I widened my little world, for I was then living in another district - Flagstaff. My fellow students came from all the four districts of Eastern Pondoland, they were Bizana, Lusiksiki, Flagstaff and Tabankulu. There was even one from Umzimkulu, some distance north east of Bizana.

Next came St Peters secondary school where I had been in the company of African students who among them spoke several languages, Sotho, Tswana, Zulu, Afrikaans as well as of course English. A few came from the Cape, some from Natal as well as the Orange Free State, but the majority came from the Witwatersrand and the rest of the Transvaal and so my world was wider still. What was more, until I reached St Peters, the staff at the primary schools I had attended were all Africans. At St Peters the majority of the teachers were European, as we would say in the language of those days. There was also a difference in the range of subjects taught as between the grammar school and St Peters secondary school. Whereas at Holy Cross I had studied Xhosa, English, History, Geography, Arithmetic and Scripture, all compulsory, at St Peters the languages taught were Tswana, Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu, English Afrikaans and Latin. Of these English and one of the vernacular languages as well as Latin were compulsory, then History, Geography, Domestic Science for girls, Physical Science, Scripture and possibly even Hygiene.



Then came Fort Hare. Here my world was wider still. Apart from African students, there were also 'coloured' and Indian students. The students came not only from what was at the time known as the Union of South Africa, but also from the then British Protectorates, known at the time as Bechuanaland, Basotholand, now Botswana and Lesotho respectively and Swaziland as well as from as far north as Uganda. As at St Peters the majority of the teaching staff were European, but the range of subjects taught was much wider. Anthropology, Sociology, Native Administration, English Language and English Literature, Psychology, Philosophy, Bantu languages, Zoology, Botany Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Applied Mathematics, History and so on.

For the first two or three days after our arrival at Fort Hare we were engaged in the business of sorting out our degree courses and deciding on the curriculum. For my Science Degree I would take for the first year, English Applied Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics. For the second year, Chemistry, Maths and Physics and for the third and final year Maths and Physics.

Our first Maths lecture was attended by about 12 students, but at the next lecture the number fell to half. Those who remained were the die hards. The first encounter with the Maths lecturer, Mr Bill Murdoch, explained why we had been warned that no one ever passed maths and the group that decided to abandon the subject said they had sat through some 45 minutes of the lecture and had not understood a word of what Mr Murdoch was trying to say. Bill Murdoch, tall and broad shouldered, slightly stooping forward, with an aggressive booming voice spoke

booming voice spoke English with a particularly strong accent that made it difficult to follow what he was saying. Nor did he wait until you did understand. He scawled our words and figures on the blackboard, rubbing them out before you had copied them down on to your notebook and racing down the blackboard again with his chalk. At the end of that first lesson half of us had learnt nothing and had decided that they could never learn anything and so they dropped maths from their curriculum.. The rest of us including Joe Mokwena, Lancelot Gama, Sostenise Mohgokong, all from St Peters, Rosettenville, Uhklid Khomo, all of us stayed on and soon enough adapted to Bill Murdochs' manner and style. For all the aggressiveness of his voice, he was full of jokes, he was also full of outbursts of temper which cleared completely only a few minutes after. So we got to like him as a person. If his style did not endear mathematics with some of us.

The Physics lecturer was James Davidson. He also had his peculiarities which made physics a difficult subject for most. Somehow he seemed to expect students to follow his lecture as easily as if they already had his qualifications in it. He had an Msc degree in physics. He used the great deal, saying very little by way of explanation. By nature he was not given to talking much. He was noted for being shy, a good rugby player and a frighteningly fast driver. For all that he was very likeable and popular among the students who fondly called him Davi for Davidson.

With Murdoch and Davidson then, it was necessary to put in much work in the lecture room in order to come to terms with the subject of the lecture. What exasperated me about maths in particular was the home work was the home work Mr Murdoch would give us after each lecture.

"Do numbers 1 to 42" he would say and numbers 1 to 42 were all similar questions. If you could do number 1 you could do the rest. It was like being asked to write your name 500 times and Mr Murdoch, short tempered and bad tempered would be furious if you submitted less than the 42 answers called for. The result was that maths took up an inordinate share of my study time without making me a better mathematician. Maths was easy, but it became a drudgery. During my second year I felt I should drop it as a major and replace it with chemistry for the final year. It was most frustrating not to be able to reach wide beyond my limited science degree courses. I was deeply interested in Law, Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology. I had come across books on Economics, and various subjects of which I knew nothing. And which were there for the asking if only I could make the time and I couldn't because of the pressure of my science degree work. I consulted Mr DaRLING of St Peters of my intention to switch to chemistry, but he advised against this and so I kept on with mathematics as one of the two majors.

Mr C P Dent lectured in chemistry. He was a teacher, a tutor who had the ability to place his subject within easy reach of his students. If no one ever passed physics and maths, no one ever failed chemistry. This was not because chemistry was easy, but the subject was in the hands of a master and Mr Dent had a theory which applied to all subjects.. He

would tell his students, as he told us - "What one fool can do, another can". It was a good slogan. No one wants to appear worse than a fool.

Although as a general rule residence for men was allocated according to denomination, students who belonged to none of the three denominations that provided residence were admitted and they could conceivably form the majority at any residence. It was particularly interesting to note that the residential separation of the students on the basis of denominational differences in no way reflected itself on the relations of the student body in general. There was inter residents competition in sport, but it was free of any religious content.

The practice of having denominational residences had its origins in the history of Fort Hare itself, which was established as were virtually all African educational institutions by missionaries. At its formation by missionaries of the Presbyterian Church, in 1917(?) and for decades after, Fort Hare was the only African. Other churches, which ran schools for students preparing for University, had an obligation to help in the provision of accommodation for the students. It seems to have been found convenient that each church assumed responsibility for its own members mainly. In the result we are fortunate that there are not as many small residences as there are denomination in South Africa. Between them Iona was Presbyterian, Wesley House was Methodist, Bedale Hall, Anglican. Each headed by a distinguished church leader and scholar, plus the two non-denominational houses all provided adequate accommodation

for the students of all faiths.

At Bedale Hall it did not matter to me if the student occupying the room next to me was a Roman Catholic a Muslim or Hindu. I did not even bother to ask, nor was there anything to suggest that any of us at Bedale Hall would have had any objection to having his room in Wesley Hall or Iona. Because we found ourselves at Bedale Hall, we liked and were proud of our residence and had no call to wish that we had been accommodated elsewhere. This of course was true of each of the other residences and so one did not have to stay in Bedale Hall to have good and jolly company. But it is a matter of interest to ask whether by 1939 there remained any good reason why denomination should have continued to be one of the criteria for determining residence for Fort Hare male students. Whatever the answer, being at Bedale Hall provided me personally with the facility I had enjoyed both at Holy Cross Mission and at St Peters Secondary School. That was the Chapel. It was helpful having it attached as it was to my residence, because after my encounter with evangelists of what was later called the Full Gospel Church at my home in or around 1930, my religious practice took on a new and more personalised character. I developed a liking for the early morning Holy Communion service which would normally be held in a chapel, which because it was early attracted few people. Often I was the only one attending. But if there was no service, I went to chapel anyway for prayers, if not in the morning, then at any other time during the day.

## TAPE 23

At all these institutions I made regular use of the chapel. At Holy Cross Mission, St John's Kraal had its own chapel, but it was not used for Mass although I used it often enough.

For communion I would walk across the sports field to the main church where the service would be conducted.

At St Peters, the church with two chapels in it, was a stones throw from my room. The Bedale Chapel,, no less than the fact of my being an Anglican and staying in Bedale Halll, was to play a dominant role in the changing fortunes of my career and my future.

The student body assembled thrice a day for meals in the dining hall and once together with staff in the C.U. every morning for prayers before lectures started. That is every morning except Saturday and Sunday. Other points of convergence were the sports ground and also during lectures or general student meetings which would be held in the C.U.

There were at the time not more than 300 students at F ort Hare. It did not take long therefore before every body knew everyone else and I did not have the problems of social adjustment and adaptation which had faced me when I first arrived in Johannesburg five years earlier. Although it was natural for students coming from the same area to see themselves as roughly belonging together, vis a vis students from other areas,

I was not affected by this sense of regionalism, limited though it was, because to the extent that there was any consciousness of the existence of various groupings of home boys as it were, I belonged with every group. Those students, for example who came from what were known as the Northern Provinces, namely the Transvaal, Orange Free State, the then British Protectorates, where amicably referred to as Northerners, and would proudly refer to themselves as such. I belonged with them. Having taken my secondary school education in those areas. But my home was in the Cape Province and in particular

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in the Transkei situated a few miles from the border between the Cape and Natal Provinces. This made me acceptable to the non Northerners. I soon found and made friends in all the residences, but this could not have been peculiar to me only, Fort Hare had a very friendly atmosphere with no hostile cliques of groupings, no divisions among the students on political or any other grounds. Nor was life in any way characterised by tensions between the students and the college authorities, except with respect of the few instances which I will deal with later. A group was formed at Bedale Hall known as the Syndicate, comprising Congress Mbata, whom I found at Fort Hare, but who came from St Peters, Lancelot Gama, who matriculated with me at St Peters and myself.

What brought about The Syndicate, was that meals in the Fort Hare dining hall were very meagre. For those of us who came



from St Peters there was virtually no supper because what was called supper was four remarkably thin slices of bread, taken with a small cup of milk water, the water which would be hot. We decided that there was no point in all of us travelling all the way to Bedale Hall to drink a mouthful of water sweetened with milk and then walk back, so we decided to form ourselves into a group and we would in turns, at supper time let one of us go to collect his slices of bread as well of those of the others and at a convenient time we would make tea for ourselves, buy butter and jam and sit around and have supper that could include some fish or whatever we could add. This went on for a few weeks and became an established routine. We then started to call ourselves The Syndicate.

That Syndicate became increasingly a serious grouping that saw us through Fort Hare into the wider world and its members were then bound by principles and considerations totally unrelated to what you eat in the evening. We were concerned with matters of life, matters of the future, our role in society. The Syndicate grew by the recruitment of two others that fitted into this group very well. So much for the time being of The Syndicate.

Elukaniswene, another group of three, became identifiable. It was not formed on the same basis and had no relations with The Syndicate as such, but three of the women students

were obviously very close friends. I can only remember some of their names. One was Nomoto Pikitcha, later to become Dr Pikitcha, another was Phyllis, who got married and was Mrs Mziedume, she is unhappily now deceased and a third one was Lorna I forget her surname. The thing about this group is that I became very close to it and this would not have been worth mentioning but for the fact that at some stage the three assumed a collective attitude of hostility towards me. I did not know what had gone wrong. They would not greet, they just froze up if they saw me approaching and this went on for a week, then suddenly brightness returned from nowhere. In the meantime, unable to explain this strange conduct, I had decided I would behave as if nothing had happened, whatever was worrying them was not worrying me, and I was not in the slightest affected by this attitude which I regarded as ridiculous. Therefore, if I met them or any one of them, I greeted them as warmly and as cheerful cheerfully as I had always done, making clear however that I was expecting no response, and there was no response. I believe this wore them down and they decided to call off the demonstration, whatever its purpose and motivation had been. All three were very fine people. While Lorna was a little inflammable and therefore to that extent unpredictable, the other two were very highly respected women in the campus.

There was another little tension I could not resolve. Two of my very close friends from St Peters, John Dinalane and Lancelot Gama, could not bear each other. For some reason they disliked each other intensely. Attempts to find out what the problem was failed, as did many attempts to reconcile them, but at all times they each remained very close to me and I to them. They must of course have got over that problem, certainly after they left Fort Hare.

There were two people radically different from each other who, because each of them also stood out in his own way represented something we none of us had, was for that reason a point of reference in the minds of each of us, giving us reason to reflect on where we come from, who we are where we were getting to as individuals and as a society. One of them was an old man who regularly turned up at the campus from across the river where he lived near Lovedale. I do not now recall his name, let us call him Bukas. Mr Bukas was a short man. The first time I saw him approaching in the distance, he looked extraordinarily round about the body and there was something disproportionate in his appearance. When I met him I noticed he was wearing four jackets. The top one did not seem to have been washed in years. These layers of clothing represented his entire possessions. He was clearly wearing more than one pair of trousers. I do not recall if he had a shirt on, what he had on his feet could not bear being called shoes ~~xxxxxxx~~ CLARIFY THE FOLLOWING or a penny one penny to enable him as he explained to buy soap, he seemed to insist on a penny rather than 6 pennies or

anything else. As he left me he went to others collecting pennies. Who was Mr Bukas? We got to know that he was the sole survivor of a tribe that lived one knows not how many decades ago in the Alice area. The members of which were all wiped out by the Bubonic Plague, leaving Mr Bukas the sole survivor. Since then, and I do not recall how old he was then, he lived in dreadful fear of the disease breaking out on him and wiping him out and therefore the last remnant of a tribe that was. He believed fervently that his people were killed by this disease because they did not wash their bodies every day and he was determined to keep clean and therefore to have a daily wash. He also wanted to make sure that where ever he was there in his totality, in his completeness, with everything that was; his body his soul his clothing, his money his soap. The ritual of daily baths was also explained.

Every day in all his completeness, he went to the Tyumie River where he stripped naked. This does not mean he necessarily peeled off his jackets one after another. He could remove them in a heap but be that as it may, he stripped naked, moved up to the waters side with his soap, washed his hands and his arms and his legs and feet and then stooped down to reach the water with both hands. Scooped the water and using both hands threw it over onto his back, but simultaneously quickly moved his body out of the way so that the water did not land on his back. It was presumably not warm enough for the comfort of his back. He repeated this operation several times and then the process of bathing was over and he waited until he was dry before putting on his clothing. This done he was satisfied that for that day he had insured himself against being attacked by this destructive disease.

The case of Bakus was about life outside and beyond the grandeur of University lecture rooms and libraries. It was about the people from whom we had come, to whom we would return after college. It was about not one person who survived, but about the thousands, the hundreds of thousands, the millions who did not survive and the many more who would not. How would we use our learned degrees to rid our country of the tragedies represented in the life of Bakus. Did we care?

Then there was the other point of reference, Mr Raman, of Iona. He was one of the older students both in terms of residence at Fort Hare and his age, being in his middle age. "No time to stand and stare" was his famous motto. The foremost students had crawled out of their beds in the morning Mr Raman was out of the residence carrying his books and walking briskly to disappear among the tuition buildings, as the students were walking leisurely from their residences towards the dining hall for breakfast, he would be seen hurrying down the road from the direction of the tuition building for his breakfast, soon to hurry back to his books and re-emerge in time for the C.U. morning assembly. He did not seem to seek or to have much fellowship with the other students, he spent little time exchanging pleasantries with people and appeared to consider it a nuisance to have to say "Good Morning" or "Good Afternoon" to anyone. In a way

In a way he was something of a closed book himself although he kept so many books open for so long. Nor was Mr Raman in any hurry to leave Fort Hare. He was reported to have accumulated many subjects to his credit in the Humanities over the years. Evidently he had the means to finance his protracted studies and could well have ultimately left Fort Hare with several degrees in his bag. Mr Raman missed no C.U. student general meeting. On these occasions, there would be some issue being debated and that is where Mr Raman appeared in a new personality. He enjoyed debate and no one left the meeting at the end with any doubt but that Mr Raman was there. He seemed to regard these occasions as providing him with the opportunity of delivering to the public what his highly absorbative brain had been busy taking in while others wasted their time standing and staring. At such meetings Mr Raman invariably stood for longer than most staring at the chairman as he poured out his wisdom. Often in disregard of the chairmans concern for time. He would treat his audience to a philosophical discourse that floated high above the clouds ranging over many topics, but saying precious little about the subjects under debate. The point however, was that Mr Raman felt he had something to give and as far as he was concerned he gave it. But whether in the result his contribution took the debate any further was another matter.

Considering the amount of time Mr Raman spent studying and accumulating knowledge, his performance in these debates was an anti-climax and disappointing. This was because he sought to apply his knowledge to the wrong problem.

The fact that we would some day leave Fort Hare wearing gowns, hoods and University caps did not mean we had the answers to any and all questions. During our matriculation years in Johannesburg, as must have been the case elsewhere in the country, Africans were justly proud of those of their people who had managed to obtain university degrees. In fact this achievement was every parents wish for his for his or her son or daughter and those few and there were relatively very few who graduated, were not only objects of admiration, but they themselves often displayed a consciousness of being special in African society, not least because they could claim intellectual superiority over many members of the so called superior master race. And so it was not unusual to see special meetings of graduates, gatherings rather, whose main purpose was the display of their *(comparisons)*



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But the situation would change and by the time I left Fort Hare there would be more demanded of graduates than parading in their gowns. The last time that I would have need of my gown and hood would be on my graduation day.

In the meantime I had come to know and had become very friendly with two students of whom much was to be heard in later years. One was Kaiser Matanzema and the other Nelson Mandela. Both had their homes in the Transkei and were roughly the same age. Both tall and stately were born of Royalty. They were close relations, the one a nephew to the other and both stayed at Wesley House. After leaving Fort Hare both took up law studies, the one in the Transkei the other in Johannesburg. Both qualified as Lawyers. Both became involved in politics and that is the point where their paths parted dramatically and irremediably. Kaiser Matanzema was to become a political disaster for the victims of what became known as apartheid and was a great gift to the strategists for permanent European domination in South Africa. Matanzema's contribution to the consolidation and survival of apartheid was to prove greater than that of any black leader.

Nelson Mandela, on the other hand, was to grow to become the pride of the nation, the man feared by the racists tyrants who ruled the black population in South Africa

Loved and followed by the vast majority of the people of South Africa, he was to become the most famous political prisoner in the world, honoured by countless awards of every kind by Governments, Political and Labour Organisations, Educational Institutions, Local Governments, Cultural Bodies leading personalities and ordinary people across the globe.

My friendship with him was to develop and mature into an enduring partnership that found firm expression in politics, law and life. At Fort Hare none of the two did anything to be

At Fort Hare none of the two did anything to betray the nature of his future role in the country. Matanzema was a capable debator, his general inclination being to challenge the status quo. He was particularly fond of engaging in issues which involved the constitution of the college, regulations, and so on. He had a liking quite clearly for legal questions. Nelson Mandela, famous as an athlete and one of the foremost runners at Fort Hare, was always cautious and calculating in his statements on issues. He was highly respected and had a wide circle of friends at college. He left Fort Hare before I did.

cross  
country

The 2nd World War had in the meantime broken out. The students of my generation had only heard about wars in history, many wars including in particular, World War 1. We had never lived through a period when South Africa was involved in warfare, but now it was.

A General J C Smuts had taken over the Government, defeating his predecessor, General Hertzog, on the question of whether South Africa should join the war or stay out of it. General Hertzog and Dr F S Malan, leader of the Nationalist Party had not forgotten the Anglo-Boer War and could not countenance South Africa fighting on the same side as Britain against Hitlers Germany.

At Holy Cross in the early thirties, Miss Tidmarsh ~~quit~~ our teacher had often told us about the horrors of war, having herself lived through the first World War. She regarded war as a most frightening thing. She could not bear the ~~though~~ thought of another war. This was always evident when she brought to our attention the newspaper reports of German militarisation and the consequent threat of another war. Reading through these reports she panicked. When Britain declared war on Germany on September 1, Miss Tidmarsh was already back in England and I often thought of her now that what she had dreaded had happened.

At Fort Hare we did not feel the impact of the war until some of our lecturers were called up for service. The physics department was affected with Mr Davidson having to leave for the front. He was replaced by a female physicist. By this time we had become well acquainted with Mr Davidsons style and method as a lecturer and were getting along very well with him, so well that we found the new lecturer with her style and method a near disaster.

What was worse, she appeared to be somewhat out of her depth with physics. After a few weeks, it became clear we were not making any headway. We began to view the prospects for our final examinations with very serious misgivings. We had to decide upon one of two courses, either to raise the problem with the Principal, Dr Kerr, or to approach the lecturer and discuss matters with her, we decided on the latter. And so from time to time the class sent a delegation to discuss the syllabus with her and see how it might be better handled. Fortunately the lecturer was always amenable to our suggestions and this helped to improve on what largely remained a worrying problem.

Mr Davidsons absence, and the knowledge that he was wearing a military uniform and carrying a gun somewhere, brought the war into closer focus and we followed it with keener interest. Until the outbreak of the war much had been said and written about the Maginot Line an impregnable system of defenses that secured France against any conceivable future attack by Germany. The French had ensured that no German army, however big, however well equipped could ever cross the Maginot Line and invade France. In fact no German army ever did. But France had not reckoned with Hitlers contempt for International Law and so when the moment of reckoning came from the point of view of Hitlers Germany, the German Army got behind the guns of the Maginot line which faced Germany, by invading and occupying Belgium or Holland CHECK and using them to by pass Frances defenses. That done Hitlers army started folding up the map of France with

amazing speed, one victory following another. Germany seemed set to conquer not only the whole of Europe but the whole world. The point was even reached when Britain stood alone as the saying was at the time.

That was the time when the German airforce was pouring bombs over Great Britain in a determined bid, as Hitler put it, to sink the British Isles. That was Winston Churchills finest hour;

"We shall fight them on the beaches, we shall fight them on the hills etc CHECK QUOTE"~~xxxxxxx~~ We shall never surrender" he declared in a speech that rallied the British people as nothing else could.

When Hitlers offensive was beaten back, Churchill was able to claim for his countrymen:

"Never was so much done by so few for so many"

Within South Africa the Smuts Government had narrowly put the country on a war footing, but was also carrying on an intensive recruiting campaign for the war among every section of the South African population including, notably the Africans. During World War 1 Africans had responded in large numbers when called upon to join as part of the South African army and go abroad to fight a war they felt had nothing to do with them, but there was a promise that in return for their services, if the war was won, their conditions in the country would be improved and their greivances given due attention.

During that war hundreds of Africans danced their way to death on the decks of their ship known as The Mendy when they discovered that the ship was sinking in mid ocean. After it was hit by the Germans and that there was no hope for them. They died most gallantly. That drama became a household story among the Africans kept alive by the reality that although the war was won far from improving, our conditions for Africans worsened. The persistent question, what did the Mendy heroes die for? had not been answered as General Smuts's men went around recruiting for the second war. At my home town of Bizana, as I was told the district magistrate otherwise referred to as the native commissioner, being the government official in charged with the administration of what we called native affairs in the district called a meeting of chiefs, sub chiefs and all able bodied men in the district and informed them about the war, in the course of which he called for volunteers who were required to defend the country against Hitler of Germany who wanted to take over the country and place it under German rule. He urged the people of Bizana to join up and defend their land. Native Commissioners were wont to treat Africans, especially peasants like children, so when it suited them, the peasants too behaved to the commissioner like the children he believed them to be. In the present instance the native commissioner was asking the Africans to fight to defend land of which they had been robbed decades earlier. Land they no longer possessed. Land forcibly taken from them by the white government of South Africa. Why should they help the robbers to keep the land?



Therefore the reply they gave to the native commissioners call was that they had never met this man Hitler, they demanded to know from him personally why he wanted their land. Only then would they decide whether to fight him or not. They therefore asked the native commissioner to write to Hitler to tell him to come to Bizana so that his claim could be considered by the people. To a childish approach by the native commissioner, the people had given a childish reply, but the message was clear. No volunteers.

In June 1940 for the winter holidays, Pumelene Mpumwana, one of the students at Bedale Hall asked me to go with him to his home at Qumbu in the Transkei. His plan was that we would take a train from Alice, stop over at King Williams town where he would pick up his sister and other relatives. We would then proceed by train to East London where he planned to buy a motor vehicle which I would drive for him. Indeed we arrived at East London where he bought a second hand van known as a Black Mariah, which I drove across the Kye River through Umtata to Qumbu. I may say I was a learner driver at best, without even a learners driving license. The vehicle was not in very good condition, the brakes were not working very well and somewhere in the Transkei I ran into a cow, but not much damage was done

MORE DETAIL

While at Qumbu, we attended a meeting called by the native commissioner attended by the

He explained the purpose of the meeting. There was a war on, and the government wanted all able bodied men to join up and fight to defend the country against the Germans.

He emphasised that there was a threat from the Japanese.

Those who joined would be given various assignments, some would guard important installations such as water resevoirs, our station, bridges and so on. Others would be sent u p to the North of the continent where fighting was going on and others would be deployed in other areas of service.

Apart from considerations of the way they were let down after world war 1 the people of Qumbu had a special grievance against the government which must have been shared by people in other districts. This emerged during question time. Two men stood up to ask questions. The first one wanted to know how the people guarding installations would be armed; to which the native commissioner promptly replied that they would be armed each with a shield, a spear and a Knobkerry. The questioner went on ... "And" he said "How is the enemy expected to attack the installations, would he be coming on vehicles, walking or what?" The reply was that he would most likely come by air and drop bombs. To which the quesitioner commented "So if I am there guarding a water resevoir and I see a plane approaching, I am expected to take out my knobkerry and fling it at the plane in an attempt to hit it and bring it down. There was laughing among the people. The

commissioner did not comment.

Another man stood up and asked how the people being sent to North Africa would be armed, would they also carry a shield, a spear and a knobkerry? The commissioner answered that for a person going to North Africa no arms would be provided in this country, but that when he is in North Africa he would be sent a pistol if he needed one. "And so", commented the quesitioner, sarcastically "If I am in North Africa and I see the enemy approaching, I am expected to write a letter to you that moment asking you to post to me my pistol so that I can defend myself against this approaching enemy". The laughing was interrupted by the sight, the spectacle of two very old men who walked one behind the other, both bent double, both supporting themselves on sticks and proceeding to the native commissioners table. Arriving there they said they wanted to join up to defend the country against the Germans and the Japanese. The crowd was audibly amused. Especially when the native commissioner was heard explaining that he thought they were too old to join up as if they did not know.

It was at this point that I heard a man sitting next to me in conversation with another, and he was saying that they start by depriving us of our firearms and now want us to join up and fight with knobkerries. Never, he said. I followed up the comment and it appeared that sometime earlier on the government had called on all those who possessed firearms to have them registered or licensed. Government officials had gone round the people explaining that this was just to regularise the possession of firearms by individuals.

In fact the intention was to enable the government to disarm the people completely for some time later an order was issued calling for the handing in of all firearms and by this time it was known who were in possession of firearms. There was no alternative but to surrender the weapons. There was much bitterness about this, hence the comment about the people being first disarmed or at any rate deprived of their firearms and then asked to join up and fight with spears.

Apart from the opportunity to be present at a recruiting meeting, related to a war that was to change much of the world, my presence at Qumbu exposed me to two experiences which I was never to forget. One of these was that I entered for a driving test and being successful I obtained my first ever driving license. The other experience was infinitely far less pleasant. We had arrived at Mpumwanas country home from East London in the evening and I was allocated one of the huts as my bedroom. In the middle of the night I woke up choking, suffocating, gasping desperately for breath. Something had happened to me. I was fighting for my life. I had to concentrate all my mental and physical energy in the struggle for breath. I had never had this experience and knew of no one who had. Was there something wrong with that room? Was there some invisible thing in the room? What was it? I kept asking myself as the night, pitch dark dragged on interminably. There was no electric light no lantern or candle, or matches in the room. Throughout my eyes were wide open, but I could see absolutely nothing.

I was listening intently for the sound of a human voice, so that I could shout for help, but the only sound was the wheezing and buzzing in my chest as I battled for breath. It took ages before the first hint of dawn began to creep faintly into the room. I stared hard, my eyes rolling round and sweeping the walls, the floor, the roof, to find something whatever it was that had engineered this ferocious attack on me.

As darkness gave way to more light I detected a margin of grey covering the first  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 feet of the wall, suggesting that the wall was given to dampness during the rainy season. In the absence of any other, this was at least a plausible, if quite unsatisfactory explanation. After all it was highly unlikely that this was the first room afflicted with damp walls that I had slept in.

Soon I could make out that the people in the other huts were up and about, I staggered out of the room, barely able to walk 5 paces without having to stop and rest, for to walk meant diverting energy resources essential for the breathing and tended to precipitate a crisis. As I left the room someone saw me and help soon followed. As the morning wore on I improved sufficiently to be able to drive the black Mariah to Umtata to see a Doctor naturally my friend accompanied me. Driving like walking took up energy and worsened my condition. Whenever there was a straight run of the road I took a rest by leaning on the steering wheel of the moving vehicle. The Doctor upon examining me told me I was suffering from asthma.

"Asthma, what is asthma?" I asked I had never heard of the word. The Doctor explained distinguishing asthma, still in my mind spelt Asma from Bronchitis. At my request he spelt the word for me, writing it down on a piece of paper, Asthma. a strange and unpronounceable word, I thought. I was to learn in later years that it was as strange and unpredictable as the condition it described, for I was to learn that it was a condition not a disease that medical science did not know why it occurred. That it did not believe in making appointments, except that its favourite time for launching attack was under cover of darkness while the unsuspecting victim was fast asleep. The doctor was unsure as to what had provoked the attack, but he did say that many people suffered from the ailment and lived through to old age which was reassuring if hard to believe, given the experience I had had. In a search for possible causes I recalled the night we spent in East London on our way from Fort Hare. It was an extremely cold night and we were packed about 8 of us into a small room which could barely take an extra person. Because of the cold weather the door had to be kept shut. Whatever window there was had to be kept closed for the same reason. Someone was trying to light up a Primus stove in readiness for cooking as well as to heat up the room. She would pump the stove then light it and it would burn for a short while and then suddenly blow out, emitting huge heavy fumes of gas which filled the room. Choking, I would leave the room and stand shivering in the bitter cold outside until I felt better after taking in some fresh air. I would then re enter the room. This happened several times that night and for the first time I felt uneasy with my breathing. The fumes were affecting my chest and that

was the day we left of the Transkei

The room in which we were accomodated wad one of hundreds of temporary structures put up by individual families in a part of East London set aside for occupation by Africans, where these structures served the purposes of shelter pending the provision of better housing by the authorities. On reflection I was left in no doubt that it was the night in East London that predisposed me to asthmatic attacks. Indeed for many years after I identified among many unknown ones for my asthma. First low altitudes, in particular the coastal areas. Second exposure in cold weather, resulting in my actually feeling cold and third, fumes or smoke including cigarette smoke. Looking at photographs taken of me immediately before and after the Qumbu attack, I saw two very different people. The one round faced and heavily built, the other bony, groggy and strikingly lean. A public relations agency could have put out an attractive before and after advertisement for his principle. It could go something like this:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

FOR LOSS OF WEIGHT

FOR REALLY RAPID RESULTS

TAKE ASTHMA....

IT'S A MASTER

IT WON'T TAKE LONG "

YOU CAN'T GO WRONG

Before Qumbu I participated in any sport in particular soccer, cricket athletics, tennis, boxing. I could have ~~played~~



played rugby, but I had no enthusiasm for it except as a spectator. By the time I returned to Fort Hare at the end of the June holidays, I had lost my capacity to play soccer, cricket, take part in athletics and of course there was neither tennis or boxing at Fort Hare.

I could not sprint beyond some thirty metres without provoking an asthma attack. In addition for no apparent rhyme or reason, certainly no provocation on my part, I frequently came under violent attacks of asthma which had a negative effect on my being and on my work generally and which added to my frustration with mathematics, a poor physics lecturer served to make my second year degree course unduly heavy.

1940 was however, not entirely without sunshine. For all that I felt about the way that he handled his maths, Bill Murdoch was always the subject of amused comment. "Mr Kumalo (Fict. name)" He would pounce on any of us demanding an answer to a question he had put. He would say this with a loud strong nasal voice, always placing a heavy and aggressive accent on the first syllable of each word. Kumalo gives a wrong answer. "Fool" Murdoch would shout, "you", turning on the student sitting next to Kumalo - wrong answer - "Stupid" he roars back, "You", pointing threateningly at the next one. Wrong answer - "Idiot" and to the next one "you". Wrong answer still. "You came to the wrong Fort"

Fort Hare was one fort, there was another, Fort Beaufort, a small town to the west town of Alice. There was a lunatic asylum near Fort Beaufort. According to Bill Murdoch this student was mad and should have gone to Fort Beaufort instead of going to Fort Hare.

Mr Moahe was one of two students taking a maths course with Mr Murdoch. One morning he was sitting in his class room waiting for Mr Murdoch and the other student. Mr Murdoch came in, walked up to his desk, turned round and looking at Mr Moahe over his spectacles, as he was in the habit doing. He kept quiet for some time, just looking at Mr Moahe and Mr Moahe looking back at him and wondering what was going on. Then Mr Murdoch broke the silence and the tension ; "Where is the other idiot?" he asked. Bill Murdoch was full of this type of joke and even when he became ferocious in class as occasionally he did the incident vanished from his mind as soon as it was over and so we liked Bill Murdoch who like many other lecturers later became a Professor of mathematics.

There were two very prominent and popular African members of the staff at Fort Hare. Professor DDT Jabavu was the first African to be appointed a Professor at Fort Hare. Jocular and sociable and around 60 years of age he was a man of the people. He held a degree in Batchelor of Arts,

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of the London University, which he insisted should always be distinguished from its South African equivalent, such as a BA from the University of South Africa or Cape Town or any other university in South Africa. This was because he was the first African in South Africa to obtain a London University degree and was still the only one at the time of our studies at Fort Hare. The fuss about whether one held a London or South African degree arose from the fact that to qualify for a BBA was very rare for Africans in the first instance largely because they could not afford the cost of university education and for Africans this was not a government responsibility.

Professor ZK Matthews, younger than Professor Jabavu but well into his fifties, held the honour of being the first ~~stu~~ student to graduate from Fort Hare after which he obtained degrees from other universities overseas, including a law degree. I am not sure whether the latter was obtained in South Africa or abroad. He was of a less colourful mode than Professor Jabavu but had an equally friendly disposition. Matthews was profoundly intellectual and well informed. He exercised a tremendous influence among the students.

The two lectured in Bantu languages and native administration respectively, but one of them may have done also social anthropology CHECK. Their subjects were certainly popular among the students.

Music was not among the subjects taught at Fort Hare, nor did it seem to enjoy much popular activity on the part of the

of the students. There were however a few singing groups before our time. There were famous singers such as Will Nkomo and Mr ( ) Jordan. During our days the best singers were Miss Tristy Tsewau later married to Joe Mukwena, himself a very keen singer and Velius Bam, one of the senior students, Mr Bikitche, put together a small college choir and Bedale Hall formed its own double quartet which became pretty well known and more than once broadcast spirituals over the Grahamstown radio station. It also travelled around the Alice area holding concerts.

The members of this group were Joe Mukwena T Mbalo, Kobus Letlaka, Kironde, Sostenise Mokgokong, Vilius Bam and myself. For the purposes of the concerts, Pumelele mentioned earlier was the manager. Mr Pikitches choir and the Bedale Hall Quartet offered me the first opportunity since

since I left Holy Cross of participating in singing. For all the five years I spent at St Peters the choir masters completely ignored me, but it was during my years at Fort Hare that I got something which membership of a thousand choirs at St Peters would never have given me. On my way to Bizana for holidays, I would stop the night at King Williams town to make a train connection on the following day. On one of these occasions while in King WilliamsTown I heard there was to be a concert at a school nearby. I naturally took the opportunity to attend the concert. I sat among the audience and listened to what in my view was a wonderful rendering of the song 'The Sea and its Pearls' by the school choir. The Principal of the school was a Mr Magobiyana and he was conducting the

the choir. At the end of the performance to which I had listened spell bound. I went up to Mr Magobiyana and asked him how he managed to produce such beautiful voices, especially soprano voices. He said to me, "You should aim at producing a resonant sonorous rich voice" three words which stuck in my mind and were to prove invaluable in after years.

#### CASSETTE 14 TAPE 26

I returned to Bizana for the Christmas holidays and spent much time ploughing in the milli fields before visiting Holy Cross to have my asthma attended to as well as to report on the progress of my studies. I hospitalised for observation, during which I was told TB had been diagnosed. Soon after returning to Fort Hare, however, I received word from Dr Drew, the Holy Cross hospital superintendant that the TB diagnosis was an error. Good News. There was more more good news, James Davidson our physics lecturer was back at Fort Hare and would surely see us through our final year. One day in September of that year 1941, the tranquil atmosphere of the Fort Hare campus was shattered when news spread that the college boarding master had brutally assaulted an African woman working under him in the kitchen. He had kicked and beaten her up according to the reports. I knew there were African women helping to prepare and serve our meals and I did not know

the name of any of them or the name or age of the victim of the boarding masters outrage. I did not care to know, none of the students did. She was certainly someones sister or mother or wife, did the boarding master think that she was his slave, not a lady entitled to respect, like all other women? Would he have kicked and beaten up his sister or mother or wife? An agitated student body meeting in twos and threes and more were putting these questions to one another as they demanded immediate disciplinary action by the authorities.

That evening the students assembled at an emergency general meeting in the C.U. and vent their anger and decide on the course of action to be taken. At the end of a prolonged and a heated discussion, the meeting decided on a boycott of lectures which would continue until the college authorities took disciplinary action against the boarding master. The conduct of the boycott, its results and how it ended will be discussed at a later stage.

During the year I had been suffering from asthmatic attacks of varying degrees of severity, but none so inconvenient as the one which occurred during my final Bsc examinations. We had done all the mathematics papers and had started the physics papers, when the attack occurred. This was unfortunate in the extreme and I could feel that I was at much less than my best. ~~xxxx~~ Each attack would normally take about three days before it began to weaken, and so my whole physics effort was undermined.

The upshot of it all was when the results of the exams were announced, Joe Mukwena had obtained a Double First in MathemaTICS and Physics - that was expected, but in my case I had obtained a First class pass in mathematics only and not as owuld have been expected in both Majors. Had I obtained a Double First Class, my future might taken rather a different course. It was practice for science students who obtained a First Class to be awarded a scholarship, a two year one, to take an advanced course at Cape Town University. Joe Mukwena did not take that option, but was instead offered an assistant lectureship at Fort Hare. I would certainly have accepted the offer of a scholarship at the university of Cape Town. In the circumstances however, there was no change in my plans. And the plan was to return to Fort Hare in 1942 to study for the UNIVERsity Education Diploma. A post degree teaching certificate. For that purpose, according to the procdure, I had to find a secondary school which would accept me for practice teaching for 6 weeks, before I began my UED course at Fort Hare. I applied to St Peters scondary school for the purpose of this six weeks practice teaching and was accepted Following the end of the 1941 academic year at Fort Hare I proceeded to Johannesburg and was at St Peters as the new school term opened at the beginning of 1942.

On arrival in Johannesburg, we found there was an enormous interest in the student strike that had taken place at Fort Hare. The protest action was the first of its kind at Fort Hare,

and because of the element of race in the incident which gave rise to it the student action had political implications on a country wide scale and became a subject of interest among parents, firstly and secondly politicians.

Many people that we met were eager to know what had happened and whether as a result of the strike any students had been victimised by the authorities. Among the first people I met was Walter Sisulu. I recall how very interested he was in the developments that had taken place in Fort Hare. I met him several times after this and got to know him very well. Others I met included Dan Tloome then secretary as what was known as The Council For Non European Trade Unions, I recall also Trade Unionists Dan Khoza and Sef Mamporu. These and many others turned out to be involved at the centre of the ~~political~~ struggle against political economic and social injustice in South Africa.

It was this quality which drew me to them and them to me, for I had been involved at the centre of a student protest action against injustice which had political, economic and social implications. Looking back I can see quite clearly that if there was a single event which launched me on the road to ultimate involvement at the heart of South African politics, it was an assault on an African woman by her white employer in a kitchen at Fort Hare.

This makes it desireable that I should recount in greater



detail the events that followed that assault, and in particular how the strike action came to be called off as it ultimately was. As to the teaching during the assigned period of six weeks, I found considerable fulfilment. I enjoyed the exercise and I felt I had got off to a good start as a prospective member of the teaching profession.. This was the more so because of what I considered to be the positive response of the students in the classes at whose expense I was practising. The various staff members who sat in during my lessons were evidently equally satisfied, and at the end of the period I was glad to return to Fort Hare for the theoretical aspect of the teaching diploma.

Among the joys of this exercise was the access I had to a choir, limited though this was. Among the class periods on the school timetable, was one marked singing', which took place once a week for each of the forms 1,2, and 3. I was assigned one of these period, form 2 I think it was. To be back at St Peters conducting a choir however small and junior was most satisfying. In the same classroom for many years Mr Matchupe, the St Peters choir master had trained the school choir while I listened and watched from outside, my voice unwanted. Never mind. While at Fort Hare during my degree course I had taught at a Sunday School which had a role of about 10 kids and amongst other things I made them sing. , At Holy Cross, during one of my holidays from Fort Hare, I had arrived to find that Arch Deacon Father Leary was retiring after many years of missionary work in Eastern Pondoland.

where he operated as Holy Cross as his base, it may even be that he founded the mission CHECK. I proposed a farewell concert in his honour, For the purpose I formed a choir among the nurses of the Holy Cross Hospital, and was allowed to take over the school choir. I composed three songs for the occasion, one for the nurses, and two for the school choir, and of course appointed myself conductor for both choirs. The school choir excelled itself, awakeneing from many years of slumber. Indeed for the first time that year, the Holy Cross Mission school choir took first place in the Annual Schools Singing Competitions. Having completed my assignment I returned to Fort Hare.

It was the practice at the beginning of the year for the resident students of Bedale Hall to elect a Head Student for the residents as well as a committee, a residents committee to help the warden with the administration of the residents as well as liaise between him and the students. These functions were mainly the responsibility of the Head Student acting in consultation with the committee. I found on arrival that the elections had not been held for the year 1942 pending my return. This was extremely unusual, not least because the duties of a Head Student could have been handled by anybody and it was difficult to understand why the elections should be held back for weeks, but I was informed that the reason was that it was proposed to have me elected as Head Student. I felt it was rather a nuisance but did not consider it worth my while to offer any resistance and indeed when the meeting was held I was elected unanimously, together with

with a committee consisting of Mr Kobus, Mr Inre, Mr Ntsu Mokhehle and Mr Rhoda.

I found my task as Head Student wholly unburdensome what with the willing cooperation of everyone involved and relations being very good among the residents and between them and the warden, as well as co operation among the members of the committee. Ocassionally of course there were small hitches of no real consequence which required that the warden should give explanations on matters of complaint to a meeting of the students. This often happened if over some matters raised I failed to reach agreement with him, or upon referring the matter to the committee he led the committee and there was still no satisfactory conclusion reached in that event we would invite him to speak to the students directly and he was ever willing to do so. The only problem was that the Bishop did not believe that his views once they were made should be questioned or otherwise challenged. Every so often, if I was debating an issue with him where we held different views, he would remind me that 50 years previously he would never question or otherwise challenge the decision of his Don in Oxford, England and once he took this view he expected that the matter would be seen by us as being over but we wouldn't be able to convince the students so we would ask him to go and state the position to them in the expectation that he would give them the necessary explanations. This is exactly what he would not do.