

ColdType
Fall 2002

*Stories and
photographs
from South Africa's
Truth and
Reconciliation
Commission*

Good & Evil

Jillian Edelstein

INTRODUCTION / *Jillian Edelstein*

ONE OF THE FIRST EVENTS I ever photographed, while I was still a student at the University of Cape Town, was the demolition of the Crossroads squatter camp by the police in 1977. It was winter. The bulldozers were rolling over the tin shacks and the homeless squatters had made a futile protest by throwing their possessions on to the main road in front of the camp. The police and their dogs were trying to control the angry crowd. This was just one local event which epitomized the increasing repression by the state. It heralded the violent confrontations between the liberation movements and the apartheid regime in the next decade.

I became a press photographer in the Johannesburg area at the beginning of the 1980s. Growing up white in apartheid South Africa entitled one to massive and instant privilege. It led to complicated emotions – among them anger and guilt. Photography was a way, for me, of channelling those emotions. At that time I believed that by pointing a camera at security police, or at Casspirs (armoured personnel carriers) cruising the townships, or by documenting clashes between protectors and riot police I might help to change the situation in our country.

In 1985 I left South Africa to take up a photography course in London. After that, although I went back regularly to visit my family, I watched most of the political events as they unfolded on television. Back in South Africa for my sister's wedding in 1996, I was gripped by the TV footage of the early scenes from the Truth Commission. I promised myself I would return to document the process. Over the next four years I went back and forth between England and South Africa covering the hearings, but I was always aware that it would be impossible to attend every hearing in every small town and every city in every province around the country. I did what I could. I knew the contradictions and the controversies that raged around the Truth Commission right from the start. But nothing prepared me for the emotional world within the community halls and courtrooms in which we observers witnessed the testimonies and confessions of the victims and perpetrators where truth gave way to lies and lies gave way to truth.

I often pondered over why people agreed to be photographed. For the victims, I guessed it might have been because they wanted to reclaim their dignity, their past, or to feel acknowledged for the part they had played. Largely it seemed they were grateful to have had the opportunity to share their experiences and to make public their painful stories. Perhaps this process of being in front of the camera was part of that ritual. It was harder to comprehend why the perpetrators offered themselves up so willingly for a portrait, often proudly, as if they had played some heroic part in South Africa's history.

Wherever I went I came across people dealing with tumultuous emotions. In KwaZulu/Natal, after the hearings into Inkatha-ANC violence, I met Mrs Msweli who showed me the forest where her son had been murdered; it was a strange and difficult thing

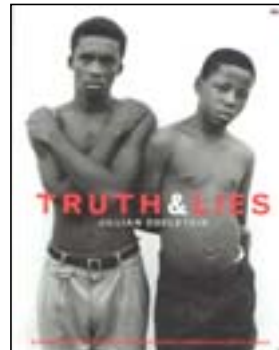
to share that place with her. I felt her generosity and her pain. And I tried to show her dignity and the strength in her suffering.

I failed to persuade a number of 'key players' to be photographed. I had many telephone conversations with Joe Mamasela, a black security policeman who had turned state's witness. He even enticed me to fly from Cape Town to Johannesburg to photograph him. When I arrived his cell phone was switched off. I never reached him again. I faxed innumerable requests to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. She had the knack of responding to them some weeks after I had left town. When I eventually got P. W. Botha on the line he said I should respect his privacy and directed me to the archive which housed his history.

It was strange to come face to face with a man like Dirk Coetzee, whose actions epitomized the atrocities of the apartheid regime, and there he was all smiling and sweet and charming, offering me English Breakfast tea with his gun strapped to his wrist. Good and evil are simple concepts, but they can wear all kinds of disguises.

There are many South Africans who refused to co-operate with the Truth Commission and many who should have been held responsible who will never have to account for their actions. Questions were evaded and the truth distorted. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the ex-President, Willem de Klerk, who, questioned at the TRC hearing into human rights abuses committed by members of the state forces during his term of office, said: 'Can I, before I reply to the question, just make the point that I don't think that one could accept, as the truth and the whole truth and nothing but the truth, each and every statement made by each and every person applying for amnesty.'

The Amnesty Committee's proceedings were extended over and over again. The verdicts remain controversial. The process has finally ended, the offices closed, the staff dispersed. In general, the success of this long term project in South Africa's history remains questionable, but it is hard to think that for many individuals it has not been invaluable. Joyce Mtimkulu, who discovered that her son, Sipiwo, had been shot and detained, poisoned by the security police, released, kidnapped again and finally killed, seemed to speak for many when she told me, after listening to the testimonies of those responsible, 'at least now we know what happened.'



*The text and photographs in this photo essay have been taken from **Truth & Lies** published in England by Granta; in South Africa by M&G; and in the USA by The New Press*

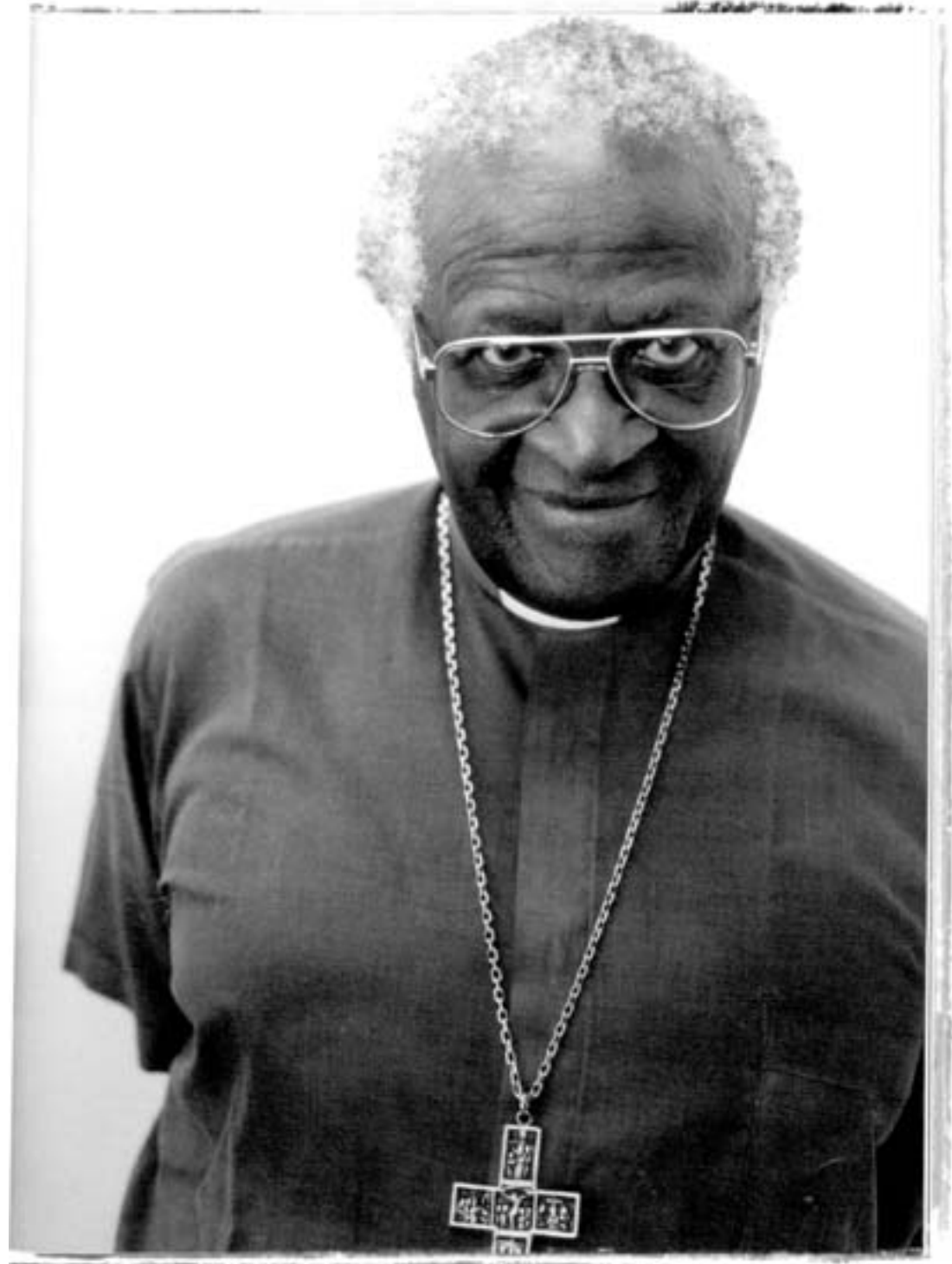
COVER PHOTO

These five policemen confessed to committing 41 murders during the 1980s. From left – Warrant Officer Paul van Vuuren, Brigadier Jack Cronje (commander at Vlakplaas 1983-85), Colonel Roelf Venter, Captain Wouter Mentz and Captain Jacques Hechter. Amnesty hearings, Pretoria 1997.

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU

Chairperson of the Truth Commission, Cape Town, May 1997

Archbishop Tutu, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, was appointed Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by Nelson Mandela in December 1995, with Alex Boraine, a former Progressive Party MP from 1974 to 1986, and founder of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA), as his deputy. Tutu, who was born in 1931, grew up in Sophiatown, a black township outside Johannesburg, and began his working life as a teacher. In 1957 he resigned in protest at the government's policy of inferior education for blacks and decided to join the Church, which he felt 'could be a good way of serving my people.' He was ordained in 1961 and spent the next 15 years working in Britain and South Africa for the World Council of Churches. In 1976 he became Bishop of Lesotho and the following year, at the funeral of the black activist Steve Biko, he preached his fundamental belief in the attainment of freedom by peaceful means. He spoke out consistently against apartheid and often used his powers to calm angry crowds, particularly in the increasingly violent confrontations of the 1980s. He became Bishop of Johannesburg and then, in 1986, Archbishop of Cape Town and head of the Anglican Church in South Africa. He retired as Archbishop in 1995. His work at the head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a natural extension of his faith in a peaceful transition to democracy.



JOYCE SEIPEI & JERRY RICHARDSON

JISS Hall, Mayfair, Johannesburg, December 2, 1997

On 8 May 1996, at the first hearing of the Truth Commission in Durban, Mrs Joyce Mananki Seipei, the mother of Stompie Seipei, testified about the death of her son. Here she describes how she identified his body:

“In 1989 on 30 January, two ministers from Johannesburg Methodist Church arrived ... They told me that they are seeing me in connection with Stompie. They said it was on 29 December in 1988 when Stompie was taken from the Methodist Church together with his friends. They were taken to Mrs Winnie Mandela’s house. They said to me they are still searching for Stompie, they don’t know whether is he alive or is he dead. And they told me that his friends told them that his brain was leaking. On 13 February 1989 they took me ... to Diepkloof Mortuary. That’s where I identified Stompie. His body was decomposed, but your son is your son ... After having been killed he was thrown into the river between New Canada and Soweto. You couldn’t even identify him ... I had a deep look at him. I saw the first sign. I said, ‘I know my son. He doesn’t have hair at the back.’ His eyes were gouged, and I said, ‘This is Stompie.’ ... There are two things that I realized as well that indicated to me, that proved to me that it was Stompie. His white hat was there. I looked at his shoes, a new pair of running shoes. I said, ‘Yes, they are Stompie’s.’ I said, ‘He used to wear size four.’”

Terry February, one of the press liaison officers, has found a room for me in which to set up a studio. The witnesses, who are already prison inmates, are housed in the room behind my studio. It is lunchtime and they are eating ‘bunny chow’ (large loaves of white bread with the interior gouged out and replaced with beef or lamb stew with lots of gristle and potatoes). Terry says he will bring Mrs Seipei, Stompie’s mother, to be photographed. Just before she arrives, Jerry Richardson, handcuffed and wearing a strange Barbie badge, appears. He wants to be photographed with Mrs Seipei. She agrees. A strange silence accompanies the picture-taking. Richardson says the small football that he carries is his good luck charm. When Richardson murdered Stompie Seipei he was the leader of Winnie Mandela’s football club. – From Jillian Edelstein’s diary.



GIDEON JOHANNES NIEUWOUDT (LEFT)

& MIKE BARNARDO (*member of the witness protection team*)

Cape Town, 31 March 1998

Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness movement, died in Pretoria on 12 September 1977. He was beaten into a coma during interrogation by security officers in the Eastern Cape city of Port Elizabeth and then driven, manacled and naked in the back of a police LandRover, over 700 miles to Pretoria. The inquest found that Biko had died of head injuries inflicted over a period of several days during his detention by the security police. In January 1997 five security policemen came forward to confess to the assault that led to Biko's death. One of the five, Gideon Nieuwoudt, was among the most feared security policemen in the Eastern Cape. His application for amnesty was successfully opposed by the Biko family – Biko's widow, Ntsiki, his two sons, Samora and Nkosinathi, and his sister Nbandile Mvovo.

My son Gabriel and my friend Laura have come to visit me at the amnesty hearings in Cape Town. They find me downstairs photographing Gideon Nieuwoudt, the applicant and perpetrator. He asks me whether I would like to join him and his witness protector for a drink tonight in a bar in Belville (the conservative northern suburb of Cape Town). I say I can't. – From Jillian Edelstein's diary.



VLAKPLAAS

The former headquarters of the counter-insurgency unit, March 1998

Vlakplaas was the farm near Pretoria which from the late 1970s served as the base for a special counter-insurgency section of the South African Police. The section was made up of trained 'askaris' – black activists who had been 'turned' to work with the white security forces – who were divided into active units under police command. The units at Vlakplaas were ostensibly set up to maintain law and order, but their members were trained to torture and to kill. Similar units were also set up in Kwazulu/Natal and in the Eastern Cape. Between 1983 and 1993 Vlakplaas operatives were responsible for undercover operations which included the infiltration of ANC organizations and the abduction, torture and murder of thousands of anti-apartheid activists. The bodies of their victims were buried secretly, burned or dumped in the nearby Hennops River. Two of the most infamous commanders at Vlakplaas were Captain Dirk Coetzee (1980-81) and Colonel Eugene de Kock (1985-1993). Also working with the commanders at Vlakplaas was Joe Mamasela, a former ANC undercover agent, who was involved in some of the most brutal Vlakplaas operations.

Coetzee, de Kock and Mamasela gave evidence to the Truth Commission describing the murders they had ordered or committed. Mamasela refused to apply for amnesty, saying he had been a victim of the white security forces, but agreed to co-operate with the Truth Commission and gave evidence behind closed doors.

Coetzee and de Kock, when making their statements to the Truth Commission, refused to take responsibility for their actions, saying they had been obeying orders from senior officers in the South African Police, government ministers, the State Security Council and even the President. Because the existence of covert organizations within the South African Police and the South African Defence Force was never publicly acknowledged, when questioned, most of these senior offices and ministers either refused to come forward or denied all knowledge of what had gone on.

The farm at Vlakplaas is now occupied by an Afrikaner family. The cells for detention and interrogation have been converted into children's bedrooms.



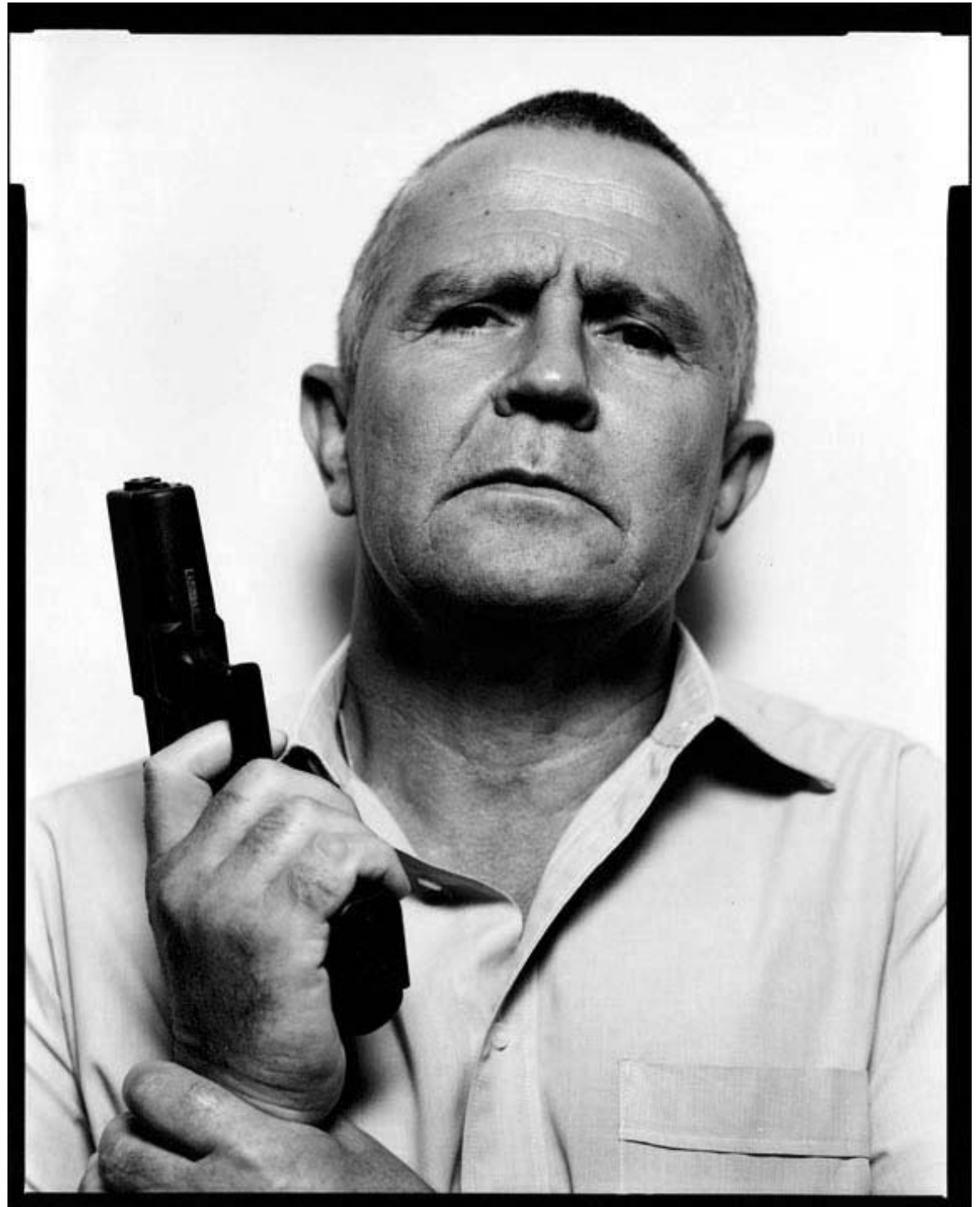
DIRK COETZEE

Pretoria, 26 February 1997

I follow Dirk Coetzee's detailed instructions down Jacaranda-lined Isipingo Street. For a few short weeks every year, this dull brown town is turned purple by a mass of exquisite blossom. My first impression is of how heavily Coetzee has incarcerated himself. His rottweilers are snarling, and the barbed wire around the metal gates glistens in the sunshine. Tea is served in china cups on a floral tray. So civilized, I think, holding my cup and saucer. I notice that wherever Coetzee goes, the leather purse which hangs off his wrist like a little handbag goes with him. 'It contains my gun,' he informs me. 'I take it everywhere, even when I go to the toilet.' – From Jillian Edelstein's diary.

Dirk Coetzee was the first commander of the special 'counter-insurgency' unit at Vlakplaas. He had ordered the deaths of many ANC activists, including Griffiths Mxenge, a human rights lawyer, who was stabbed 40 times at Umlazi Stadium in Durban, and Sizwe Kondile, a young law graduate from the Eastern Cape, who was interrogated and beaten then handed over to Coetzee who had him shot and his body burned. Coetzee's career at Vlakplaas was short-lived. He was demoted first to the narcotics division and then to the flying squad and in 1986 was discharged from the police force. In 1989, prompted by the last-minute confession about the unit at Vlakplaas by one of Coetzee's colleagues, Almond Nofomela, who was attempting to avoid execution on death row for a non-political murder, Coetzee exposed the undercover operations of the SAP in an interview with the journalist Jacques Pauw. For the next three years, Coetzee lived in exile. He returned to South Africa in 1993, and in May 1997 was tried and found guilty for his role in the murder of Griffiths Mxenge. But he had applied to the Truth Commission for amnesty and in August 1997 he was granted amnesty for Mxenge's murder. At the TRC hearing in Durban, Coetzee was asked what he felt about what he had done to the Mxenge family. He said he felt:

"... humiliation, embarrassment and the hopelessness of a pathetic, 'I am sorry for what I have done' ... What else can I offer them? A pathetic nothing, so in all honesty I don't expect the Mxenge family to forgive me, because I don't know how I ever in my life would be able to forgive a man like Dirk Coetzee if he'd done to me what I've done to them."



EUGENE DE KOCK *(centre)*

Amnesty hearings, Pretoria, 1998

Colonel Eugene de Kock, commander at Vlakplaas between 1985 and 1993, was known amongst his colleagues as 'Prime Evil.' He and his group of trained killers were responsible for some of the worst atrocities committed during the apartheid years. He entered the police force in 1968 at 19. Ten years later he joined the Security Branch at Oshakati on the Namibian border and in 1979 became a member of Koevoet, the SAP's counter-insurgency unit responsible for the deaths of hundreds of SWAPO members in South West Africa and Angola. Koevoet employed a 'bounty system' under which its members were paid for those they killed.

De Kock returned to South Africa and joined the unit at Vlakplaas in 1983. As commander he was directly answerable to his superior, Brigadier Willem Schoon. For the next ten years de Kock was in charge of groups of trained askaris and his units carried out numerous killing raids and ambushes of alleged ANC and PAC guerrillas. These included Zwelinzima Nyanda, a former MK commander, in Manzini, who was shot in Swaziland in 1983; Johannes Mabothe, who was blown up with explosives at Penge Mine, Burgerfort, in 1989; nine people who died in Maseru, Lesotho, in 1985; and three ANC activists who were murdered in Mbabane, Swaziland, in June 1986. After this last operation, de Kock drove to the home of Johann Coetzee, the Commissioner of Police, at 5.30 in the morning and reported to him, and to Brigadier Schoon, that the job had been done. In his amnesty hearing, Johann Coetzee denied that he had ordered the raid, but he did not deny the visit:

"As far as I remember ... something like 12 or more members came to the house ... It was the kitchen, my wife made coffee for them, they stood around ... they showed me the documents [which they had taken in the raid] and those people with me in the kitchen I congratulated, I said: 'Chaps, that was a job well done, to bring for instance these documents, to have a shoot-out.' "

De Kock was also responsible for organizing the 1987 bombing of the COSATU headquarters in 1987 and the 1988 bombing of Khotso House, both in Johannesburg. He alleged that the order for the COSATU bombing had come from Prime Minister P. W. Botha.



THOLAKELE NGQULUNGA

*At her husband's grave, Vlakplaas,
March 1998*

Brian Ngqulunga had been deeply disturbed by his work as an askari for the Vlakplaas commanders. According to Joe Mamasela, a fellow askari and friend of Ngqulunga who later gave evidence to the Truth Commission against his former Vlakplaas colleagues, Ngqulunga had been unhinged by the organised murder he had been involved in. Mamasela said: 'It disturbed him. He was a completely devastated person. The whole exposure worked into his mind. He was frail, he drank too much and he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown.' It was after a drunken binge that Ngqulunga went home and shot his pregnant wife three times. She survived and, after the exhumation, she waited, ready to take her husband's remains back to Soshanguve, the family home, for a proper funeral.



PUMLA NDLOVU

Johannesburg, 23 October 1999

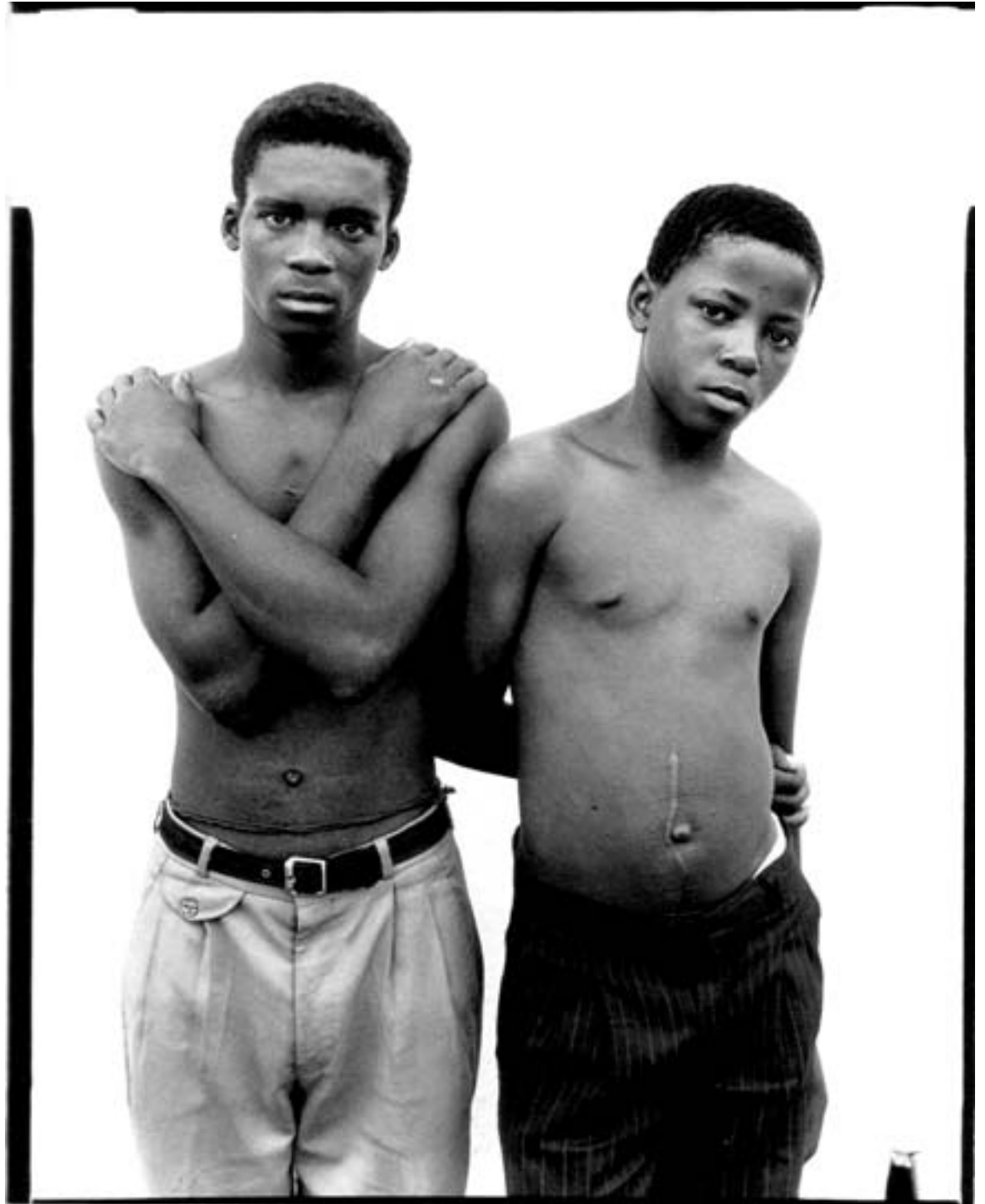
The Truth Commission employed professional ‘comforters’ at the hearings whose job it was to look after those who came to testify, both victims and perpetrators. They were to support them before and after their testimonies. When victims were overcome with emotion because of the stories they were telling, the comforters would use human contact to support them – stroking them, holding them, providing them with tissues to dry their tears and glasses of water to help them recover. Pumla Ndulula had worked for three years as a Truth Commission comforter in Johannesburg and in Pretoria. When asked what her ‘big cases’ had been, she said that she had ‘looked after’ Colonel Eugene de Kock, the security commander at Vlakplaas who became known as ‘Prime Evil.’



THEMBINKOSI TSHABE (left)
AND MXOLISA GOBAZA

Free State Province, March 1997

Mxolisa Gobaza and Thembinkosi Tshabe, two of the youngest victims to appear before the Truth Commission, described how they had been shot and wounded by police while taking part in a Congress of South African Students' (COSAS) demonstration in Venterstad, on the Orange Free State-Eastern Cape border, in 1993. Goboza, who was 11 at the time, described how they had been toyi-toying with a group of students when the police opened fire with pellets and tear gas. Thembinkosi Tshabe, who was 15, explained that he had been shot on the same day. Goboza said that he wanted to be a prison warder when he grew up and Tshabe said he wanted to be a nurse or a social worker.

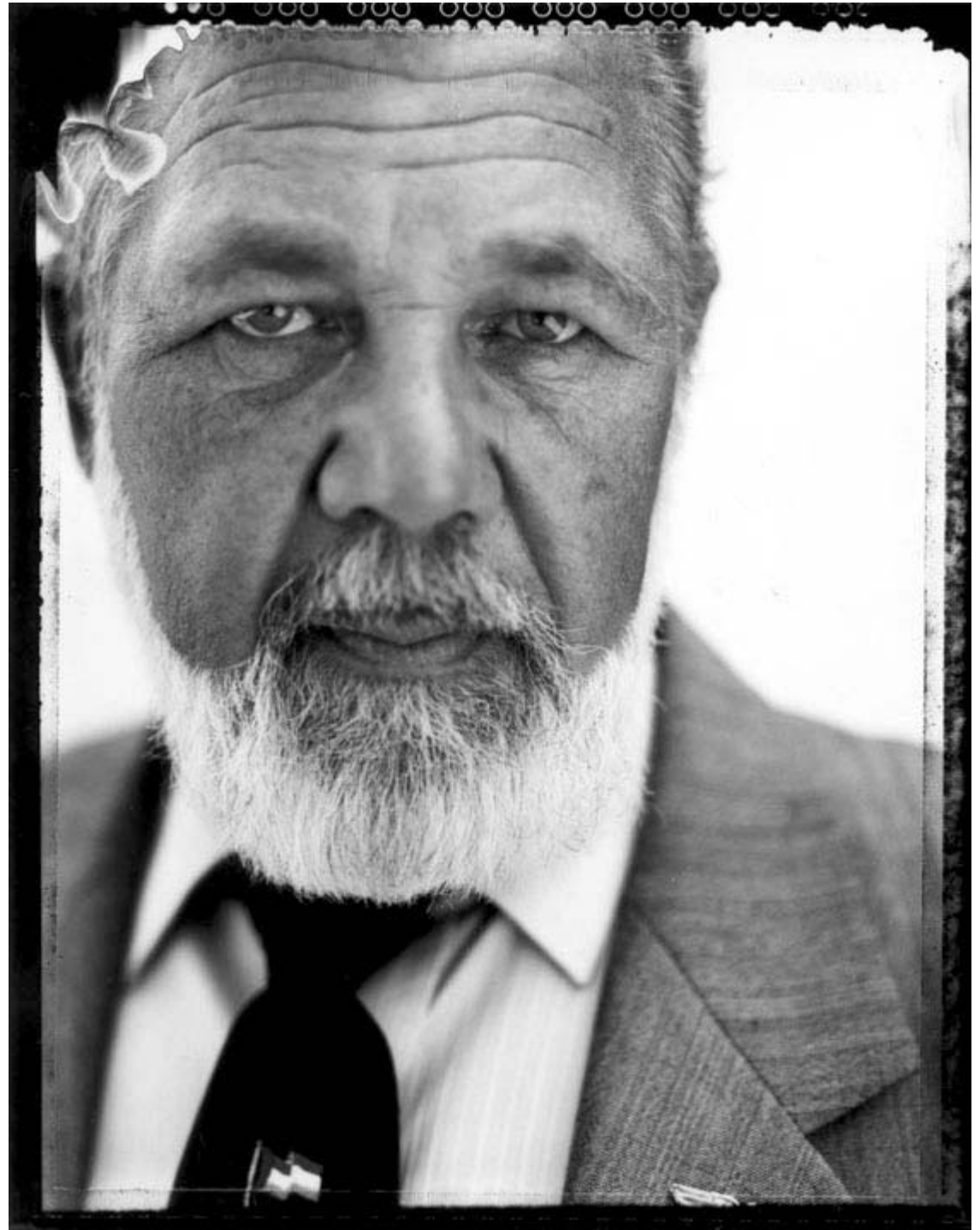


EUGENE TERRE'BLANCHE

Mafeking, Northern Province, 23 September 1998

Anneliese Burgers, Max du Preez and I were having dinner in Melville. We started talking about Eugene Terre'Blanche's hairstyle. Anneliese said, 'You can see he has scraped the long bits over his bald patch. It looks really weird.' I have this conversation in mind as I make the long drive to Mafeking from Johannesburg the following day to attend the amnesty hearings in the capital of the former 'homeland' of Bophuthatswana. A large crowd gathers while I photograph Terre'Blanche. Tension is mounting and tempers begin to flare as a camera crew tries to film over my head. For some reason the hairstyle conversation comes into my head again and I ask Terre'Blanche if he will turn round. (I must have thought it might produce some revealing and hitherto unseen image of Terre'Blanche-long greasy strands scantily covering a bald patch, perhaps.) Quick as a flash he spits out in Afrikaans, 'ek is nie 'n moffie, nie.' Taken aback, I can't follow the logic of the retort. Whatever did he think I might do to him? 'I am not a homosexual.' I will not turn my back on you. – From Jillian Edelstein's diary.

Eugene Terre'Blanche, the leader of South Africa's extreme right party, the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), attended the Truth Commission hearings in Mafeking, in the former 'independent' homeland of Bophuthatswana, in order to oppose the amnesty application of an SAP officer, Ontlametse Bernstein Menyatswe, who had killed three members of the AWB in March 1994. In anticipation of the free elections, and the arrival of what they saw as a 'Communist State', the AWB and the right-wing Freedom Front were called in to maintain Bophuthatswana's 'independence' against the ANC's plans to return it to the South African nation. Hundreds of armed AWB members invaded the homeland and in the fighting that broke out, 45 people died, including the three who were shot in broad daylight. In his statement to the Truth Commission, Bernstein Menyatswe said: 'I killed these men in full view of the members of the media, public and police officers and members of the then Bophuthatswana Defence Force.' He argued that the killing had been politically motivated and he was acting in defence of his people and their right to vote in a national democratic election.



ROGER 'JERRY' RAVEN

Amnesty hearings, Pretoria, September 1988

Roger ('Jerry') Raven was the explosives expert responsible for the letter bombs that killed Ruth First in Maputo, Mozambique, in 1982 and Jeanette Schoon and her six-year-old daughter, Katryn, in Lubango, Angola, in 1984. Both women were staunch supporters of the ANC and were living in exile from South Africa. Ruth First, the wife of Joe Slovo, chief of staff of Umkhonto weSizwe, the military wing of the ANC, and head of the South African Communist Party, was working at the university in Maputo; Jeanette Schoon, who was married to another long-term ANC member, Marius Schoon, had been moved with him to Lubango from their home in Botswana by the ANC for their own safety. The killings were masterminded by Craig Williamson, a SAP double agent who had infiltrated the ANC network and was on good terms with the Schoons. Raven, who was a member of the security branch of the SAP, explained in his amnesty application that he had been trained as part of his job as an intelligence agent and had carried out the manufacturing of the bombs under Williamson's orders. He tried to persuade the commissioners that it was possible for him to have made the Schoon bomb and fitted it into the envelope without noticing who the letter was addressed to and without leaving any fingerprints. He said:

"At the time in 1982 or 1983, I can't remember the date, Craig Williamson instructed me to assemble two IEDs [Improvised Explosive Device] in the form of letter bombs, A4 size. He gave me no indication as to who the targets were. This was the standard operational procedure when it came to 'Need To Know.' Only after the media reports of the death of Ruth First and Jeanette Schoon and her daughter and the congratulations of Craig Williamson, did I suspect that the two IEDs I had constructed were responsible for their deaths."

In his amnesty statement, Raven explained: 'Williamson said that the letter [that killed the Schoons] had been intended for Marius Schoon, but that it served them right.' In September 1998 Brigadier Willem Schoon, a member of the South African security forces, applied for amnesty for the attempted murder of Marius Schoon in Botswana in 1981.



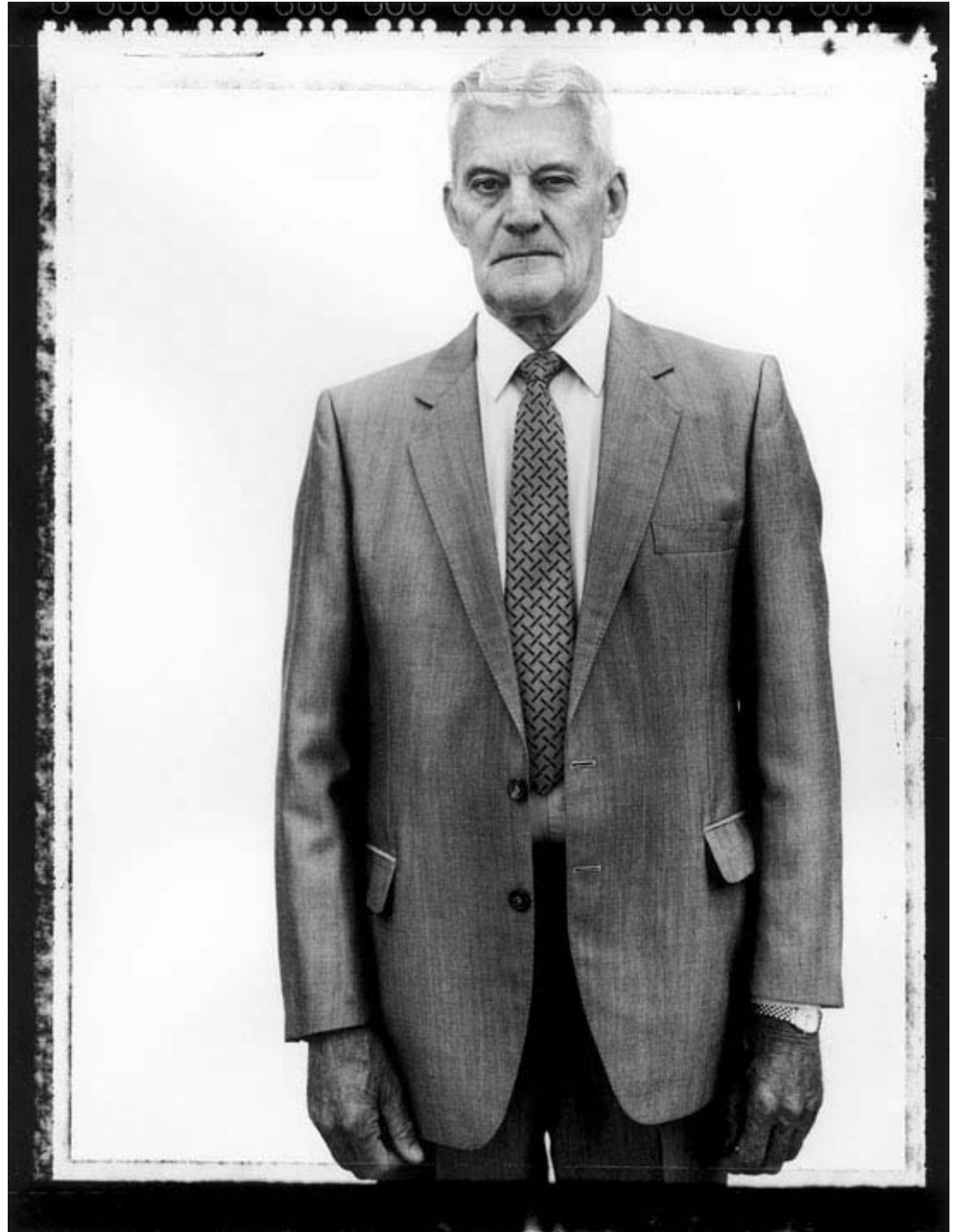
BRIGADIER WILLEM SCHOON

Amnesty hearings, Pretoria, September, 1998

Brigadier Willem Schoon was a former head of C Section, the anti-terrorism unit of the South African Police security branch responsible for liaising with the commanders of the undercover unit at Vlakplaas such as Dirk Coetzee, Jack Cronje and Eugene de Kock. He applied for amnesty for his involvement in numerous cases of murder and abduction, which included the deaths of two ANC activists in 1972, two PAC members in 1981, the attempted murder of Marius Schoon in 1981 and 1982, the abduction of the ANC activist Joe Pilly from Swaziland, where he was living in exile, the death of the human rights lawyer Griffiths Mxenge in 1981 and the deaths of Jeanette and Katryn Schoon in 1984. Brigadier Schoon denied his direct involvement in the murders. He was also implicated in the bombing of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) headquarters in Johannesburg in 1987. In November 1998 he told the amnesty committee in Pretoria:

“I am not a murderous person, although it might look that way. But we were forced to participate in these actions by the circumstances that prevailed at that time.”

He received amnesty and is retired.



CRAIG WILLIAMSON

Amnesty hearings, Pretoria, January 1998

Craig Williamson, known as the ‘apartheid superspy’, was a former police officer who joined military intelligence and headed the Security Branch’s foreign section. He applied to the Truth Commission for amnesty for the murders of Ruth First and Jeanette and Katryn Schoon, and for the bombing of the ANC’s London headquarters in 1982. Williamson had been a double agent since his early twenties. Already a member of the South African Police force, he enrolled in 1972 as a student at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and became heavily involved in anti-apartheid politics. By 1976 he was vice-president of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). He left for Europe in the same year and worked for the International University Exchange Fund (UEF). Jeanette Schoon was also active in student politics and knew Williamson. After 1977, when she and Marius Schoon were banned from South Africa, Williamson stayed with them at least once in their house in Botswana. In 1980 he was recalled to South Africa to head up the military section of the security police in Pretoria. He described to the Truth Commission how he had ‘commissioned’ the letter bomb which killed Ruth First and how, two years later, the order was repeated:

“... early in 1984 I was given an instruction to go to the office of Brigadier Piet Goosen, my group head, and he had with him in a large envelope a communication, a postal item which was I believe an intercepted communication between the ANC in Botswana addressed to Marius and Jeanette Schoon in Lubango, Angola ... [he] asked me if I thought that Jerry, that is Warrant Officer Raven, could make a similar device to that which had been sent to Maputo and which had killed Ruth First to replace the contents of this communication. I told the Brigadier that I would request Jerry to see what he could do.”

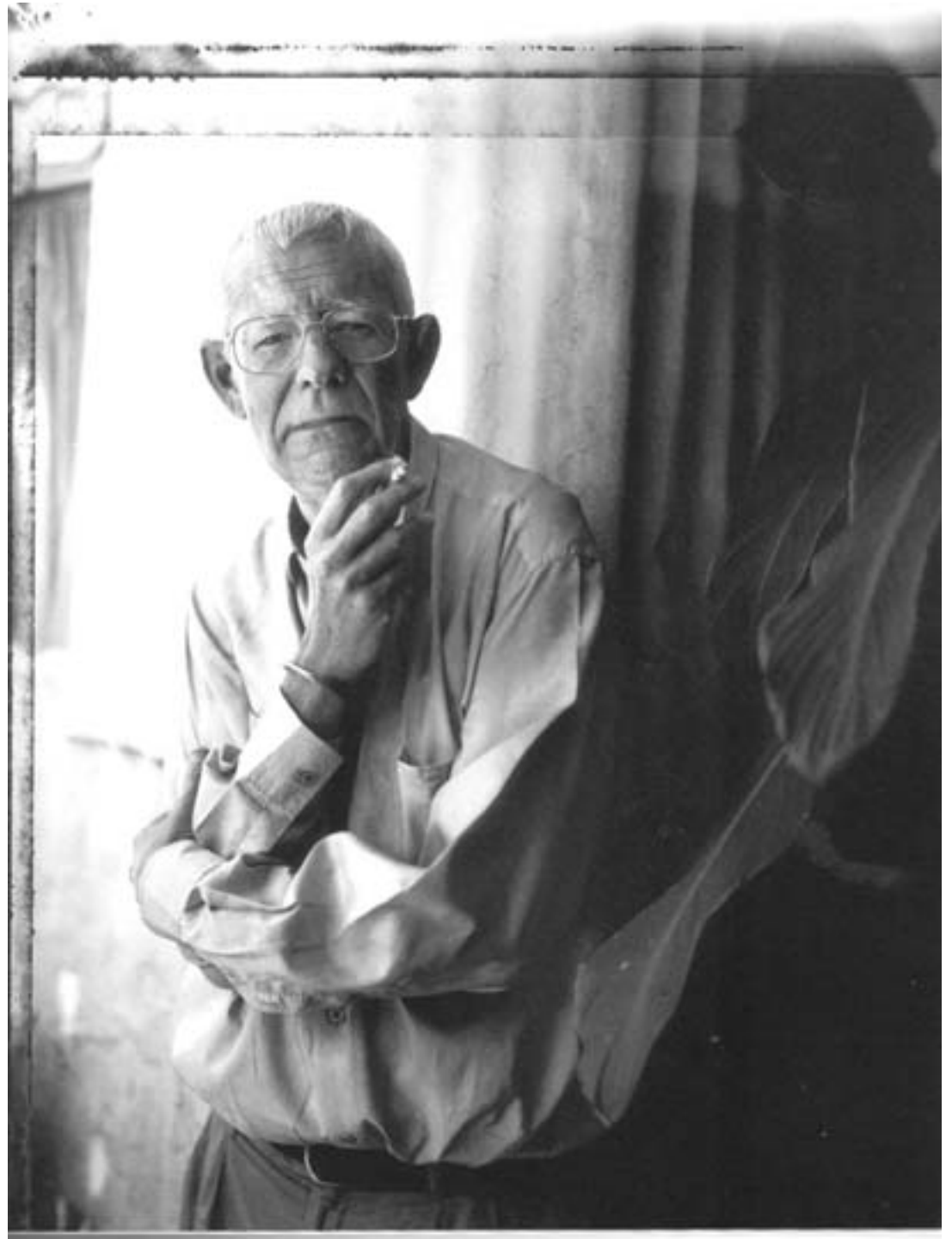
Williamson claimed that when he heard Schoon’s wife and daughter had been killed six months later, it felt as if ‘a cold bucket of water’ had been thrown over him.



MARIUS SCHOON

Johannesburg, 18 January 1998

Marius Schoon was a committed member of the ANC. He and his wife Jeanette were considered high-profile targets by the South African intelligence personnel for several years before they were resettled in Angola by the ANC. There had already been attempts to assassinate Marius Schoon in Botswana in 1981 and 1982, and the letter bomb that had killed his wife and daughter in 1984 was intended for him. At the time, the South African media attributed the bombing to an internal struggle within the ANC. He returned to South Africa at the beginning of the 1990s and worked for the Development Bank. He remarried. When Craig Williamson and Brigadier Willem Schoon applied to the Truth Commission for amnesty for the murder of his wife and daughter, Marius Schoon fought to have it refused. (Brigadier Schoon admitted that he could be related to his intended victim, but he did not consider him family because he was on 'the other side of the fence.') Marius Schoon attended the hearings in Pretoria in September 1998 with his son, Fritz, who was two years old when his mother and sister were killed. Marius Schoon died in February 1999 before hearing the outcome. Williamson, Willem Schoon and Raven were all granted amnesty for the Schoons' death.



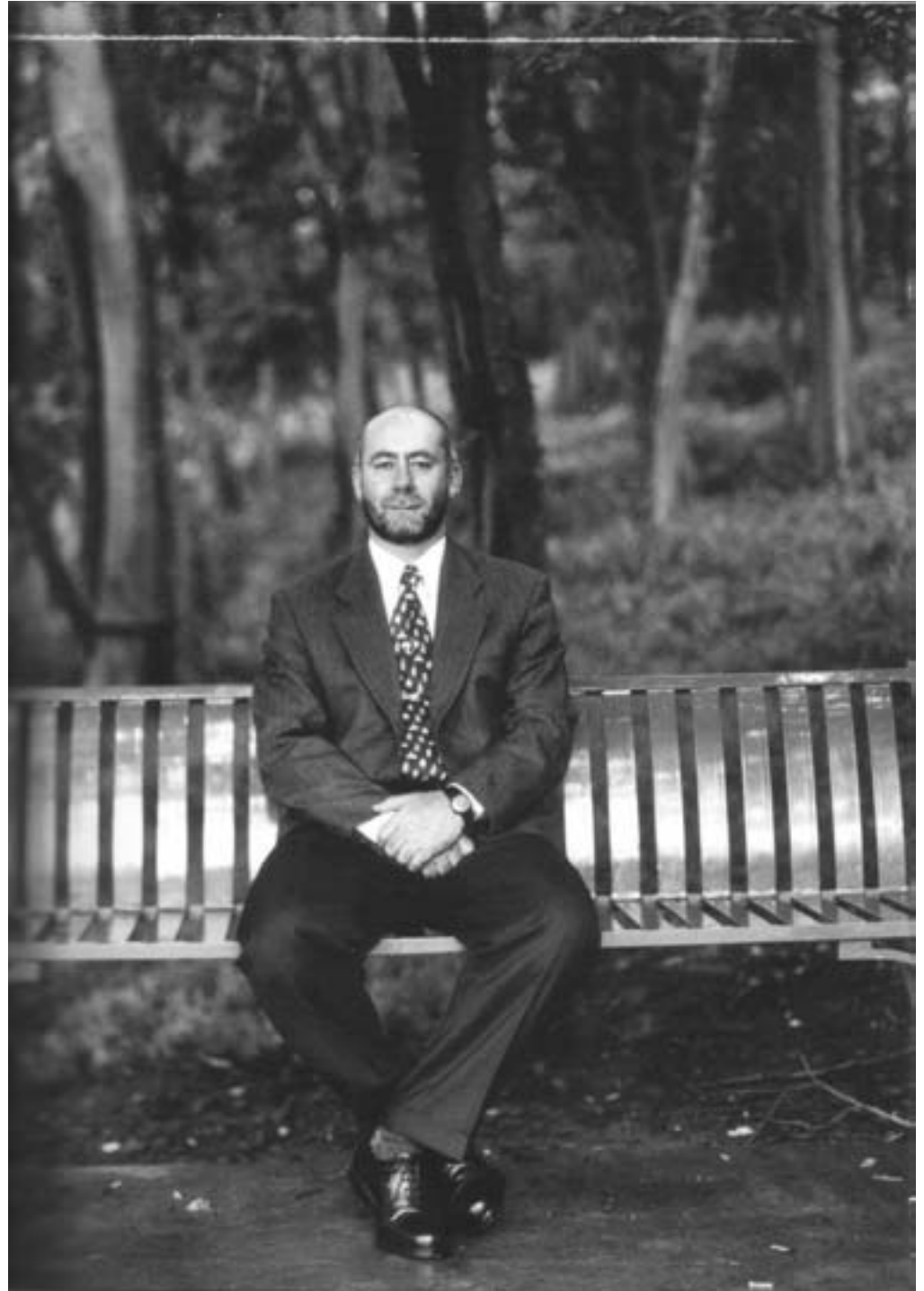
DR WOUTER BASSON

Pretoria, November 2000

I arrange to meet Wouter Basson in a park called Magnolia Dell near his favourite restaurant, Huckleberry's. It's a pretty setting – weeping willow trees and strutting ibises – but there has been a summer shower and the light is poor. Jeffrey, my waiter, says Wouter and his family come to Huckleberry's every Thursday at 5 p.m. 'He likes hake, grilled, and rock shandy.' Wouter arrives promptly. I go to greet him. He comes up close and says in a low voice, 'I hate you. I really hate you.' Why? 'Because I agreed to do this. I am going to disappear you,' he says. 'I will vanish you and your family.' A pause. 'No, only joking.' I picture him in a wizard's hat and think of my family in London as he asks for my address.

– From Jillian Edelstein's diary.

Wouter Basson, an ex-South African Army Brigadier and cardiologist, was the founder and head of 'Project Coast', the Army's secret biological and chemical warfare programme based at Roodeplaats laboratories north of Pretoria between 1981 and 1993. Nicknamed 'Dr Death', he went on trial in Pretoria in October 1999 charged with 61 counts of murder, conspiracy to murder, possession of addictive drugs and fraud. He refused to apply for amnesty but was called to give evidence to the TRC's enquiry into biological and chemical warfare. The TRC heard evidence about the manufacture of 'murder weapons' such as food and cigarettes contaminated with anthrax, milk contaminated with botulinum, poisoned chocolates, poison-infused T-shirts and poison-tipped razor blades. It was alleged that the programme had supplied SADF undercover units with muscle-relaxants which had been administered to SWAPO prisoners of war (they were given overdoses of the drugs and then thrown out of aircraft into the sea) and that research had gone on into mass distribution of a vaccine that would sterilize the black populace and into bacteria that would affect only black people. In 1992 a commission ordered by President de Klerk found Basson guilty of 'unauthorized activities' and forced his early retirement from the army. Basson was re-hired by the ANC government as a cardiologist at Pretoria Academic Hospital. In January 1997 he was arrested for the attempted sale of approximately 100,000 Ecstasy pills. In May 2001, as his trial continued, he was dismissed from his hospital post.



ROBERT McBRIDE

Pretoria, 29 May 1997

Robert McBride applied for amnesty for a number of bombings carried out in his role as unit commander of the ANC's special operations unit. He was responsible for planting a car bomb outside Magoo's Bar on the Durban beachfront on 14 June 1985, which killed three women and left more than 70 people injured. He was sentenced to death three times but released in 1992. In April 1997 he was subpoenaed to appear before the Truth Commission to answer questions about the bombing. Asked whether there had been people in the vicinity of the bar before he left the bomb, he said that he had not been looking out for people, and even if there had been people in the vicinity, it would not have deterred him. He said:

“After the bombing, the thing that shocked me most was seeing the photo of a child whose mother was killed. My immediate reaction was to be obsessed with doing sabotage operations so that I could get rid of apartheid as quickly as possible, because the way I saw it, apartheid was responsible for the tragedy. I'm truly sorry that I caused those three deaths, but this sadness cannot be seen in isolation from the pain and death that apartheid caused to millions of innocent South Africans.”



FATHER MICHAEL LAPSLEY

Cape Town, 16 February 1997

Father Lapsley, a New Zealander, was a pacifist when he arrived at the University of Natal in 1973. 'But,' he explained to the Truth Commission, 'I realized that if you were white and did nothing to change the situation you were actually a functionary of the apartheid government.' He was deported from South Africa in 1976 and went to Lesotho, where he joined the ANC and trained Anglican priests. In 1983 he moved to Zimbabwe, where he was denounced as 'the ANC's chief external ecclesiastical propagandist.' In April 1990, after the release of Nelson Mandela, he received a letter bomb believed to have been sent by a government death squad. He lost an eye and both hands.

"It was a normal warm autumn day ... April ... when I became the focal point of all that is evil. I returned from a series of lectures in Canada. A pile of mail had accumulated on my desk, among others something with an ANC letterhead. The envelope stated that it contained theological magazines. While I was busy on the phone ... I started opening the manila envelope on the coffee table to my side. The first magazine was Afrikaans ... that I put aside, I can't read Afrikaans. The second was in English. I tore off the plastic and opened the magazine ... and that was the mechanism that detonated the bomb ... I felt how I was being blown into the air ... throughout it all I never lost my consciousness ... Someone had to type my name on the manila envelope; somebody made the bomb. I often ask the question: 'What did these people tell their children they did that day?' However, the fact that such a sophisticated bomb found its way through the post to me ... I lay sole responsibility for that with E W. de Klerk. De Klerk knew of the hit squads ... but de Klerk chose to do nothing about it."



POST CHALMERS

10 February 1997

Post Chalmers is a disused and desolate police station off the national road some twenty miles from Cradock. A convenient rural jailhouse. The sign which announces Post Chalmers as a Holiday Farm is the first untruth. Barbed wire runs the course of the property which is scattered with African thorn trees. It was here that brutal tortures and murders took place. The Pebco Three Qwaqwahuli Godolozi, Siphon Hashe and Champion Galela, leaders of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation were murdered. Joe Mamasela, a security policeman at Vlakplaas, told the Truth Commission that the three had been led into an 'animal shed' at post Chalmers where they had been interrogated. He said:

“It was brutal. They were tortured severely. They were brutalised. I strangled them. They were beaten with iron pipes on their heads, kicked and punched. They were killed, they died one by one. I have never seen anything like it in my life. It was blazing hell on earth.”



SINDISWA MOKENTO & NOMONDE CALATA

Widows of two of the Cradock Four, Michausdal Township, Cradock, February 1997

Cradock is a small farming town in the Eastern Cape about 300 miles north of Port Elizabeth. Michausdal and Lingelihle, its two black townships, have a long history of resistance to apartheid. At the beginning of the 1980s Matthew Goniwe, the head of Lingelihle Secondary School, was asked by ANC representatives to organize resistance in the Cradock area. In early 1985 he became a regional executive of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and his role extended to the whole of the Eastern Cape. On 27 June 1985 Goniwe and three other comrades, Fort Calata, Sparrow Mkonto and Siculo Mhlauli, set off to a political meeting in Port Elizabeth. They never returned. Their mutilated bodies were found a week later. Their funeral was the catalyst for the declaration of a partial State of Emergency in the Eastern Cape. Two of their widows, Sindiswa Mkonto and Nomonde Calata, still live in Cradock. In April 1996 Nomonde Calata described to the Truth Commission how she and Nyami had waited for news of their husbands the day after they disappeared:

“We were unhappy and we slept on Friday without knowing what had happened to our husbands ... Some friends said I must go to Nyami. Nyami was always there for me and I was only 20 at the time and I couldn’t handle this ... And when I got there Nyami was crying terribly ... it affected me also ...”
[The TRC transcript noted that Nomonde was crying loudly while the interpreter finished.]

She went on to describe the moment she realized her husband might be dead.

“Usually The Herald was delivered at home ... I looked at the headlines, and one of the children said that he could see that his father’s car was shown in the paper as being burned. At that moment I was trembling because I was afraid of what might have happened to my husband, because I wondered, if his car was burned like this, what might have happened to him?”

In January 1997, six members of the Port Elizabeth security police applied for amnesty for the killing of the Cradock Four. It was refused.



JOSEPHINE MSWELI

Sappi Gum Tree forest, near KwaSokhulu, where her son Simon was murdered, 6 June 1997

Mrs Msweli's family were ANC sympathizers and had been feuding with members of Inkatha. Her house had been burned down and the family had gone into hiding. The Mswelis had repeatedly reported incidents to the police but no action was ever taken against the perpetrators. In 1992 Simon, Mrs Msweli's 24-year-old son, was killed and her grandchildren were kidnapped. Mrs Msweli was accused of rounding up people for the ANC. She was threatened and harassed constantly. In 1995 another of her sons, Moosa, was shot dead by police. She has three sons left. At that time it was well known that the South African Police force in Natal was collaborating with the IFP. Mrs Msweli testified to the Truth Commission in Empangeni, Natal, in November 1996. She said her son Simon and his friend had been kidnapped and taken to the Sappi Gum Tree forest. She said the boys had been abducted by members of the 'stability unit' and the KwaZulu police. One of the commissioners asked her: 'Is that were they were shot?' Mrs Msweli replied:

"They were never shot. I think they were assaulted until they died because we couldn't even identify [Simon]. His eyes had been gouged out. He was never shot. He was tortured. He was violated. He was also mutilated. We could not identify him. I only identified him through his thumb. There was a certain mark on his thumb."

At the end of her testimony, Mrs Msweli was asked what her expectations were from the Truth Commission. She replied:

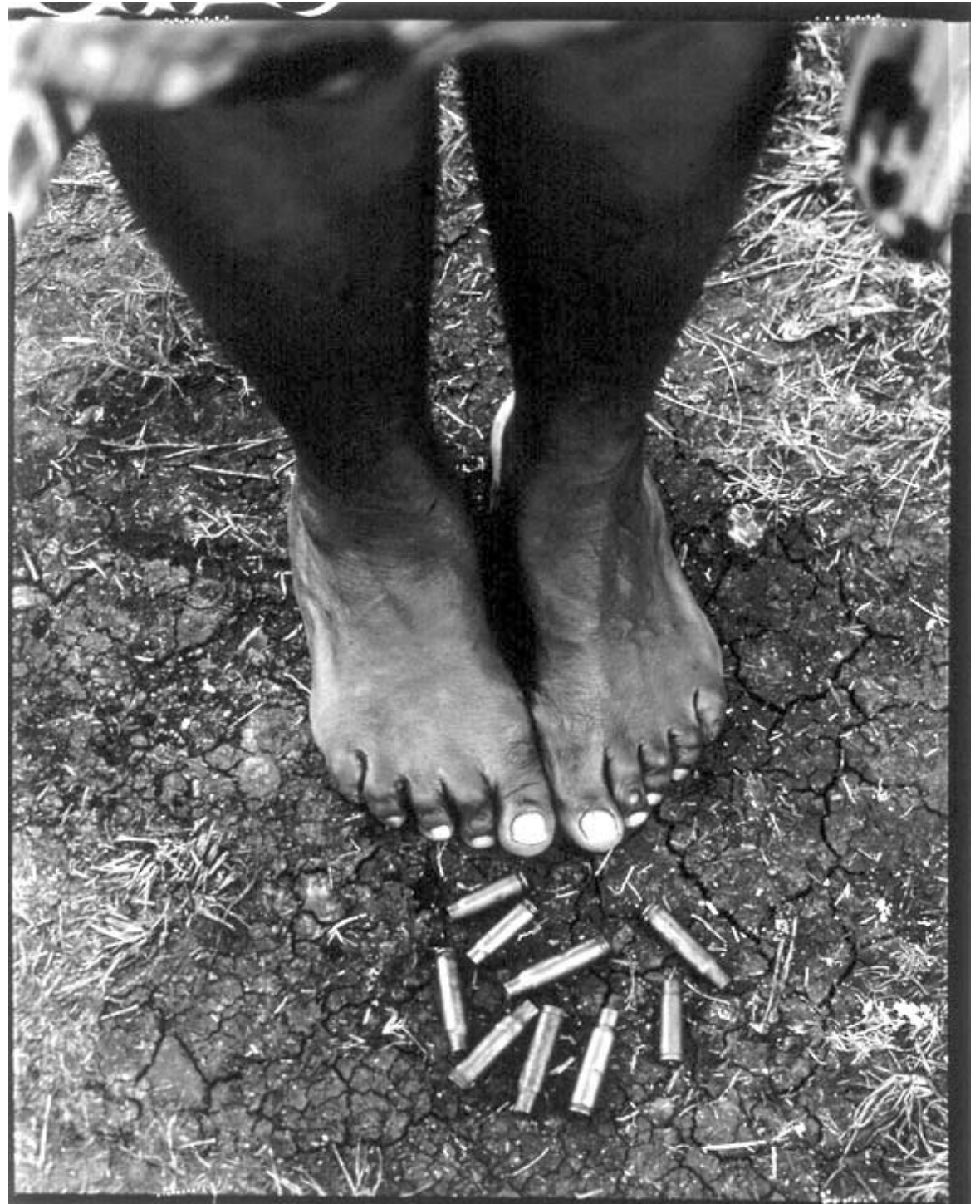
"I want the people who killed my sons to come forward because this is a time for reconciliation. I want to forgive them and I also have a bit of my mind to tell them. I would be happy if they could come before me because I don't have [my] sons today ... I want to speak to them before I forgive them. I want them to tell me who sent them to come and kill my sons. Maybe they are my enemies, maybe they are not. So I want to establish as to who they are and why they did what they did."



MRS MZIMELA

Near Esikhaweni, KwaZulu/Natal, 7 June 1998

Bheki Ntuli, a local trade union official from the Empangeni area in Natal, took me to meet three families who had testified before the Truth Commission. One of them was the Mzimela family. Mrs Mzimela told me that in October 1994 her relatives had gathered at her house for a big party. It had been raining. In the distance she had heard the sound of people singing. Suddenly a group of Inkatha 'impis' – warriors – burst in. They opened fire. Her husband and three other men, including a local cattle herder, her cousin, Lucky, and her nephew, Siphoh, were shot dead. Mrs Mzimela went into her house and emerged with an old Lion matchbox. It contained the bullets she had picked up after the shooting. – From Jillian Edelstein's diary.



DAWIE BOTHA

Undertaker, Vlakplaas, March 1998

One of the immediate results of the Truth Commission hearings was that some of the perpetrators, particularly members of the white security police and the SADF who confessed to the abduction and murder of anti-apartheid activists, disclosed where the bodies of their victims were buried. For the victims' families, many of whom had waited years, not knowing what had happened to their spouses, their parents or their children, this was often the first confirmation that their missing relatives were actually dead. Once the locations were known, exhumations supervised by officials from the TRC took place all over South Africa.

