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SNOWMASS  
at Aspen  
renew

## DIGGING UP THE DEAD

*Some people in South Africa wanted to know what happened under apartheid so badly that they were prepared to grant amnesty to the regime's worst culprits simply to learn the truth. Was it worth it?*

BY MICHAEL IGNATIEFF

IT is dark when I reach Nason Ndwandwe's suburban house, in Durban's Umlazi township. Nason is sitting on a low bench in his garage, with blackened engine parts scattered at his feet. He lights the first of many cigarettes, and we drink Crown beer, and he talks in a soft voice about his daughter, Phila. In a yellowed photograph he shows me of three girls in a high-school chemistry class, she is the remarkable one, with close-cropped hair, high cheekbones, shining brown skin, a distinctive thin, oval face, and a sharply intelligent gaze. She is about fifteen in the photograph. In the Zulu and Xhosa languages, *phila*—pronounced "pila"—means life.

Looking back now, Nason must wonder whether he ever really knew her. He had no idea that she had got involved in politics. In 1986, when she was at the university, studying to be a dental technician, the police put her on trial for a bombing near Durban a year earlier. She was acquitted, but not before they tried to get her to turn state's evidence. She refused; and on her acquittal she fled north to join the Spear of the Nation—Umkhonto we Sizwe, the African National Congress's guerrillas—which maintained bases across the border in Swaziland. After that, Nason heard more or less nothing—just a brief letter with a photograph of her squeezing her face up to an infant son.

In February, 1990, Nelson Mandela strode out of prison, and the comrades in Swaziland began returning home. Nason's daughter was not among them. He began hearing rumors that she had been seen in Zimbabwe, and also in Cape Town, using a new name and living with a new lover. Nason began to think that if she was alive there could be only one reason that she hadn't come home. There were guerrillas who had been turned, by torture or inducement, into accomplices of the

apartheid regime: they had spied on activists in the townships, lured them to rendezvous with the police, and then participated in killings. They were known as *askaris*—Swahili for "guides." Apartheid could not have functioned without these *askaris*: black-on-black betrayal provided the information upon which the whole police system depended. Once you became an *askari*, there was no way back home.

Nason Ndwandwe wasn't politically active himself. As a biochemist with Lever Brothers, he couldn't afford to be. But the possibility that his daughter had betrayed her people was worse than the thought that she might be dead. In 1995, the Mandela government appointed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to establish the truth about the apartheid regime. No truth was more painful or divisive than the story of the *askaris*. In the spring of 1996, Nason Ndwandwe applied to the Durban office of the Truth Commission to find out what had happened to his daughter.

For a year he heard nothing.

NASON NDWANDWE'S application joined a pile of evidence and testimony that investigators at the Truth Commission offices kept sifting through in the hope of finding a pattern. An earlier investigation, led by Justice Richard Goldstone, had produced evidence of a police hit squad operating in the Durban area. The Transvaal attorney general's office had followed up on the Goldstone investigation with one of its own, but no indictments were forthcoming. As the Truth Commission investigators dug deeper into the files, they noticed that the names of some policemen—from the same hit squad—kept recurring: Andy Taylor, Hentie Botha, J. A. Vorster, Sam Du Preez, Laurie Werman, and Cassie van der Westhuizen.

Stephanie Miller knew these names.

She had been a member of Black Sash, a women's human-rights organization, in the nineteen-eighties, and policemen used to call her at home, threatening her with arrest and prosecution unless she stopped working with black people. Menacing talk wasn't likely to have much effect on someone as cool and businesslike as Stephanie Miller. Now she was working as an investigator for the Truth Commission. There were never enough resources or investigators to cope with the flood of requests like Nason Ndwandwe's, but the Truth Commission did have the authority to offer legal amnesty in return for full disclosure. If perpetrators could prove that they had a political motive, acted under direct orders, carried out the orders in a proportional manner (i.e., weren't sadists), and made full disclosure of their actions, they could be amnestied. Even if they failed to get amnesty, the confessions given by them at the hearing could not be used in a subsequent prosecution.

In the constitutional negotiations of 1993, the outgoing white regime, in the manner of Latin-American juntas, had held out for a blanket amnesty; Mandela and the A.N.C. refused. The compromise reached—a compromise that averted civil war and made a peaceful transition possible—was amnesty on a case-by-case basis, in return for full disclosure. A deadline, extended several times, was laid down for applications. More than seven thousand people—mostly police, but also guerrillas from the liberation movements—eventually applied for amnesty. In essence, victims of apartheid were asked to put aside their claims for retributive justice—for punishment and vengeance—in return for getting the truth. Nason Ndwandwe doesn't like amnesty. Stephanie Miller doesn't like it much, either. But it has proved the only bait capable of luring perpetrators onto the hook.

Throughout 1996, most perpetrators

Stephanie Miller

to the Truth Commission



*Joyce Mtimkulu believes that her son was poisoned in police custody in 1981. She holds the hair that he lost after his ordeal.*

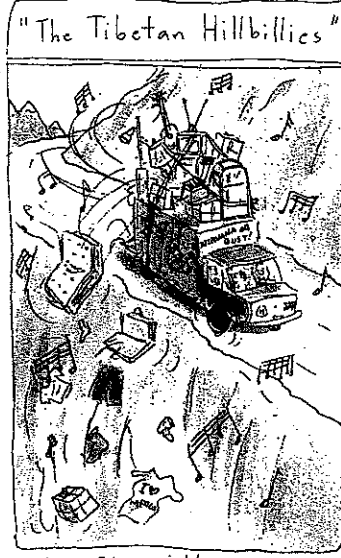
# MORE TIBET FILMS



Family's search for meaning equals high jinks aplenty.



Things get slightly hairy for an American abroad.



Jed Clampett and Co. learn about a different kind of "hill."

(P. Clu?)

refused to take the bait, gambling that there wouldn't be enough evidence to prosecute them. Late in the year, Stephanie Miller decided to apply a little pressure of her own. From friends in the police force she obtained the unlisted numbers of the hit-squad policemen and began to call them the way they used to call her. She would ring them at home—most were still serving officers; one had been suspended but was on full pay—and let slip a few bits of information from the files, linking them to murders they might have thought she hadn't known about. She told them that amnesty was the only way they could avoid prosecution and jail. At first, the ploy didn't seem to work. "They were polite and put down the phone," she recalls. But after one call to Laurie Wasserman, she later learned from his girlfriend, he had ripped the bedroom door off its hinges.

On December 13, 1996, just before the amnesty deadline expired, Wasserman and the others filed applications with the Truth Commission. In Afrikaans legalese, they disclosed a trail of murder, intimidation, torture, and counter-terrorist violence stretching back to the mid-nineteen-eighties. They had abducted A.N.C. activists, shot them, and then blown up the bodies to make it appear that they had died while carrying explosives. Using askaris, the group had lured activists to meetings, driven them into areas of the townships

controlled by political rivals of the A.N.C., and had then executed them to make it appear that they had died in black-on-black factional fighting. The killings were casual and lacked discrimination. Sometimes the police couldn't even remember the names of the people whom they had picked up in the dark, shot in the head, and thrown on some garbage dump.

Under questioning by Stephanie Miller and other Truth Commission investigators, they indicated that they knew where they had buried some of their victims. Because Andy Taylor, the commanding officer, was receiving treatment for cancer, it was not until March 12, 1997, that a convoy of forensic pathologists, investigators, five perpetrators and their lawyers, a local police video unit, and half a dozen workmen in overalls set out on a ninety-minute car journey westward from Durban to an abandoned dairy farm near Pietermaritzburg.

On a grainy police video of the exhumation you can see the perpetrators strolling among the pines and casually pointing out where they thought the investigators should dig. At a depth of fifty centimetres, the investigators found beer-bottle tops and cigarette butts; then they came to white lime scattered across reddish clay soil; at about a metre, they uncovered a femur. As a forensic pathologist's brush swept away the next layer of dirt, they

found a skeleton, lying with its knees drawn up to its chest, its hands held up as if protecting its face, and the jawbone open as if death had come in the middle of a scream.

The perpetrators displayed little emotion as their work was uncovered. On succeeding days, two more skeletons were revealed. Carefully, the bones were removed from the site and re-assembled on white sheets at a morgue in Pietermaritzburg.

A few days after the discovery of the bodies, members of the Truth Commission called Nason Ndwan-dwe into the Durban

offices and then travelled with him and his wife to the morgue. A camera crew from South African television was there. On a tape you can see Nason and his wife standing on one side of the mortuary window as an orderly wearing yellow gloves wheels a steel gurney into view. On the gurney is a white plastic sheet tied in knots. The orderly unties the knots and then holds up a dirt-encrusted skull. When he tips it forward, toward Nason, a neat finger-size hole is visible in the center of the skull. The jawbone is split in two where the slug exited, smashing the victim's mouth open.

In the video you can also see the price of truth: Mrs. Ndwandwe falters, steps back, and puts her head in her hands. Nason comforts her, his face empty and drawn. But he does not take his eyes off the skull. He knows that it is Phila's—the high cheekbones are unmistakable.

They had not simply killed her. They had stripped her naked at some time prior to her execution. No clothing was found on the skeleton except a black plastic bag, which she appeared to have been wearing around her midsection as she knelt in the grave. The men who did this to Nason's daughter now held her final secret.

The policemen freely admitted killing her, but they denied having tortured her. Stephanie Miller, who has questioned the officers many times, thinks that she was

The price of truth... is the no drugs in her's... smashes skull

The (page 10) 1/10

tortured. "They don't want us to believe that they acted in an inhuman manner," Miller explains. "Killing is an act of war. They killed willingly. Torture is less acceptable. With this particular group, they didn't seem to deny killings at all. What they denied was what happened up to the killing."

The perpetrators admitted that they had wanted to turn Phila, who, they say, in August of 1988, two months before her death, had led a series of grenade attacks on police stations in the Transvaal which claimed the lives of three policemen. The perpetrators said that they had interrogated her in the abandoned farmhouse, had locked her in the dairy, and had taken her out into the woods and made her kneel in her grave before they shot her through the top of her head. She was twenty-three years old. After her death, they acknowledged, they had deliberately spread misinformation about her through their informers in the townships to the effect that she had been turned, that she had gone to Zimbabwe or had begun a new life in Cape Town. But, they said, she had not broken—had not betrayed any of her comrades. "She was braver than the men had been," they told Stephanie Miller. Thus it was that from the mouths of those who had abused and killed his daughter Nason Ndwandwe learned that she had never been an *askari*. From these men he recovered her honor.

When the television people came to interview him about the discovery of Phila's remains, Nason said that he still had one question to ask. What had happened to Phila's child, his grandson? He would have been only a few months old when his mother disappeared. Was he still alive? Did anyone know?

A week later, a man walked up Nason's driveway holding the hand of a boy of nine with high cheekbones and a distinctive oval face. The child's name was Thabang, and the man was his father. "He looked exactly like Phila," Nason says of the child. His face fills with pleasure as he remembers. "Oh, we had a party," he told me.

Earlier this year, at a ceremony in the Currie's Fountain football stadium, in Durban, the guerrillas who died at the farm outside Pietermaritzburg, to-

gether with two others, whose bodies had been uncovered at another site, were honored with a state funeral. The coffins, painted in the A.N.C. colors of black, green, and yellow, were carried into the stadium by the guerrillas' comrades while the crowd filling the stands chanted songs of struggle. Nelson Mandela himself came from Johannesburg for the ceremony, and from the podium he spoke of how the Truth Commission had stripped away the shroud of dishonor that had covered victims and perpetrators alike. At the end, Phila's son was led up to the podium by his grandfather, and a medal was pinned on the boy's blue jacket. For Nason Ndwandwe, that moment took away nine years of shame. In the television footage, Thabang looks around him wide-eyed as the truth sinks in. "The way he stood up there receiving a medal for his mother," Nason recalls. "Well, nobody had to tell him what happened."

THE memorial service took place months ago. President Mandela has been and gone. Nason sits in his garage, drinking beer and brooding over what happened. He says, in a hoarse whisper, "Phila has not been accepted into the fold of the ancestors." He has talked to the ancestors to seek their advice. They say that the manner in which she died—

so far from home, in such barbarous circumstances, among strangers—means that she cannot come home to her resting place among them. "I must cleanse her," he says. He must wash the blood from her bones to make her acceptable to the ancestors. Then he must stand before the ancestors and plead, "Please accept her." Until then, she is wandering alone, above us somewhere, in the humid Durban night.

The next morning, with a television crew from the BBC's "Correspondent" series following at a distance, Nason Ndwandwe and three members of his family set off on the journey to the abandoned farm. Roof tiles have crashed into the remains of the farm buildings. One room holds a set of rusting bedsprings, and rusting stanchions in the doorframes of other rooms show them to have once been makeshift cells. There isn't another house for several miles. Pastures slope gently down to a river and then up the other side. Longhorns are grazing in the distance. The farm is the kind of place—empty enough, lonely enough—to absorb a scream.

Firewood gatherers from a nearby village have stripped all the lower branches from pines in the grove, and the trees look denuded as Nason and his family move among them, across the recently turned



"That was an incredible nap!"

soil, now overgrown with weeds. He finds the spot—he has been here before—and the family bow their heads. He dips into a plastic shopping bag and takes out a leafy branch from a tree in his garden and lays it on the ground. Then he bows his head and speaks to the ancestors in the Zulu language. The words are whispered, brief, matter-of-fact. After a moment, the members of the family begin singing "Amen, amen," in low, quavering voices, rocking slightly from side to side. Then they walk back to their cars, drive away down the farm track, and disappear in the heat shimmer.

They will visit every place to which Phila's bones were taken, including the Pietermaritzburg morgue and her new grave, so that her spirit can be gathered up from these places. While this is being done, Nason will keep silent. When they all get back to Umlazi, they will slaughter a goat in his back yard, and a crate of beer will be brought out. Then Nason will resume speaking, and will celebrate the safe return of Phila's spirit to the ancestors.

Nason hasn't set eyes on the men who killed his daughter. Their hearing for amnesty will not take place until next year. He doesn't know what he will do when he sees them. There was a time when he wanted to take an axe to them. Now he wants to sit down with them and look them in the eye. There is still truth to discover: which *askari* it was, in those camps in Swaziland, whom Phila had trusted so deeply that she followed him to the rendezvous that led to her death. If the policemen will reveal that last segment of the truth, Nason might have it in himself to forgive them.

JOYCE MTINKULU has cast her eyes on the men who murdered her son. Every day for a week in late September, she sat on the stage of Centenary Hall, in Port Elizabeth, as her lawyers grilled two East Cape policemen, Nic van Rensburg and Gideon Nieuwoudt, sitting twenty feet away. In 1982, the two men had denied having anything to do with her son's disappearance; fifteen years later, they applied for amnesty for their part in his murder. (Two other officers have also requested amnesty in the case.) It does not appear to be repentance that has brought them here to Centenary Hall but fear of prosecution. Joyce is a fierce woman of sixty-one, with a scornful laugh for all the lies that these men—through their law-

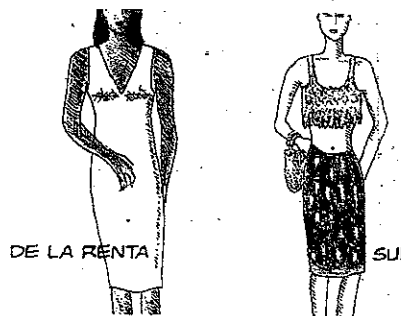
A SPRING PREVIEW  
BY MICHAEL ROBERTS

## KNEE PROBLEMS

"It looks so fresh," Bill Blass says of his new, longer-line suit for spring. With its prison-governess skirt ending well below the knee, this sober outfit—essential for that select lunchtime banquet on the sunny side of Cell Block H—is indeed fresh in heralding a plunge into lower hemlines. Goodbye, then, to this season's thigh-high eighties-revival micro-minis, and hello to next season's elongated, matronly outfits from the New York contingent of international designers. Mature and adult—fashion euphemisms for aging and frumpy—are now likely to become buzzwords of chic. Think gray. Think dowdy. Think Norman Bates's mother.

At Oscar de la Renta and Isaac Mizrahi, attenuated uptown suits and over-the-knee dresses are the news; for the terminally hip downtown designer Marc Jacobs, it's below-the-knee organza skirts. Anna Sui, on the other hand, has opted for a knee-length perkiness, using Indian saris from her bohemian busload of springtime inspirations—a pileup of Brigitte Bardot, the Duchess of Windsor, surf punk, urban tribalism, Asian bric-a-brac, and psychedelic prints. Rifat Ozbek, in his first New York show, shares Sui's thing for cross-cultural references (surf girls meet Haitians on a voodoo binge), but next to her he comes across as practically a minimalist. Geoffrey Beene is toying nostalgically with ballerina-length hostess skirts; Wynn is having a creative moment with droopy pink nylon; Michael Kors has cropped his trousers ("This length thing is much more about pants"); Ralph Lauren has given his knee-length, calf-length, and in-between-length collection a thirties boudoir look; and Calvin Klein is focussing on the ankle with billowing silk parachute dresses, which, for reasons best known to him, end in drawstring hems.

As for sex, which was all over the European catwalks: Daryl K is putting gynecologically suggestive inserts in her long-line dresses. Spooky has a tarty longer look called Punk Marilyn. And John Bartlett calls his synthetic-gold pencil skirt Fetish, though he could just as readily have called it Mistake. —M.R.



yers—have told her. But now she hopes that they will tell the truth, for it is a condition of amnesty. She stares at them across the stage, listening through earphones as their answers, delivered in Afrikaans, are translated into her native Xhosa. Five hundred-odd spectators, nearly all of them township people, sit in the hall listening to every word.

The cop named van Rensburg wears glasses; he has a snub nose, and a deep furrow down the middle of his forehead; his mouth is small and tight, and when he talks he says as little as he can. Nieuwoudt has long sideburns and a face shaped like a spade; his teeth are spaced wide apart, and when he occasionally smiles or smirks you see that the upper row is broken and twisted. He keeps his answers short—"Yes, Your Honor," "No, Your Honor"—staring past Joyce Mtimkulu's unrelenting gaze.

There have been some Truth Commission hearings during which perpetrators have spoken directly to victims, to confess or to seek forgiveness. There have been moments of catharsis when the tortured could ask their torturers to demonstrate, one more time, before a disbelieving audience, exactly how they'd placed a wet sack over the victims' heads so that they would choke. In those hearings, it was as if both victim and torturer had to live out their shame in public in order to put it behind them. In another hearing, a husband who had lost his wife asked the men who had killed her to look him in the eye and ask for forgiveness. And they did. But here in Port Elizabeth the eyes of victim and perpetrator do not meet.

LIKE Nason Ndwandwe, Joyce Mtimkulu must now wonder whether she ever really knew her son, Siphiso. She cannot explain why, as a teen-ager, Siphiso became the one who led the boycotts, marches, and demonstrations against the regime's attempt, begun in 1976, to force black children to take their lessons in the hated language of Afrikaans. From school boycotts, Siphiso, still in his teens, moved into the A.N.C., distributing anti-Republic Day pamphlets. In April of 1981, the police broke up an anti-Republic Day demonstration in the market square in the Port Elizabeth township of Kwazakele, where the Mtimkulus live. They cornered Siphiso in an alley off Daku Street. They told him to come out, and when he did they shot him in the arm. When he regained con-

sciousness, he was being beaten in the local police station. For the next six months, he was held in various detention centers in the Port Elizabeth area, including the notorious sixth floor of the Sanlam Building, a grimy former insurance-company headquarters, where, while traffic on an overpass below drowned out the noise, the police would beat up local activists. In 1977, they had knocked Steve Biko's head against a radiator in Room 619 of the Sanlam, and he had died of his injuries. Activists who survived a visit to the Sanlam say that the kicking began as soon as they got you into the elevator. The black cops had to show especial keenness to their white masters. Black hands were nearly always holding you when the police forced a wet towel over your nose and mouth until you choked and lost consciousness. Black hands were nearly always holding you when the police plunged your head into a bath until you choked and nearly drowned.

Siphiso Mtimkulu endured six months of this kind of treatment. Once, he told his mother, Nieuwoudt took him out to Jeffrey's Bay. The beaches are particularly beautiful there, windswept and remote. The cops rammed a hood over Siphiso's head and chained his hands behind his back, so that, as he sat on the rocks, he knew he was on the beach only from the sound of the waves and the spray that chilled him to the core. He could smell a *braai*—Afrikaans for barbecue—nearby. When the cops had finished with their spareribs, they tossed the bones at his feet.

They were the lords of the Eastern Cape, those policemen. They held the townships in terror, and even now when Joyce talks about Gideon Nieuwoudt she lowers her voice to a whisper. It is not a whisper of fear so much as awe at his malignity.

There had been a time when the South African police just shot people—they did so at Sharpeville in 1960—and left them to die in the dust for all the world to see. But then the world turned South Africa

into a pariah, and the black community refused to be intimidated, and the regime began experimenting with tortures—like the wet towel—appropriate to a human-rights age, to a time when, even in South Africa, the police couldn't afford to release prisoners with marks on their bodies.

Just before Siphiso was released, in October, 1981, the police began feeding him up with meals brought in from outside—and cooked, they said, by the policemen's wives. He ate the meals, but after he was released he rapidly became ill—so ill, Joyce remembers, that he had to crawl to the bathroom to vomit. Then his hair began to come out in tufts. Joyce still has that curly black hair in a plastic bag. When she takes the hair out of the bag, she points to the dried portions of his scalp that are still sticking to it. A toxicologist at Groote Schuur Hospital, in Cape Town, figured out that Siphiso had been poisoned with thallium, an odorless, tasteless substance used to poison rats. The poisoning left Siphiso partly paralyzed. "These Boers have finished me," he told his mother.

When Siphiso was released from hospital, in January of 1982, and flew back to Port Elizabeth, his friends were there to greet him and take him off the plane in a wheelchair. By then, the papers were filled with allegations that the police had poisoned him. There are photographs in Joyce's album of a smiling Siphiso, in his wheelchair, addressing crowded meetings of students. Also, in December of 1981, he had made an unusual move: he filed suit against the police alleging torture. Three months later, he filed another suit, alleging poisoning.

On April 14, 1982, Siphiso and his friend Topsy Madaka set out in Madaka's Mazda for him to get a checkup at a local hospital and then to meet a woman at the Holiday Inn in downtown Port Elizabeth. A few days later, the police came to the Mtimkulus' tiny four-room house and told Joyce and her husband, Siphiso, that they had found Madaka's car abandoned at a crossing point into neighboring Lesotho. Siphiso and Topsy, they said, had escaped to join the A.N.C. For a time, Joyce believed the story; she even went to Lesotho herself, accompanied by some local white activists, to see whether she could find him.

Joyce is bitter about how the police maliciously kept her hopes alive. Behind it all was Nieuwoudt. She swears that he





once came to her house himself, disguised as a Methodist preacher, wearing a dog collar and with a Bible in his hand.

In 1990, when Nelson Mandela was freed, the exiles came home. It was then, while everyone else was celebrating the birth of a new South Africa, that Joyce finally had to admit that her son must be dead. Soon afterward, renegade members of police hit squads began confessing their part in the dirty war of the nineteen-eighties.

In April, 1996, the Truth Commission held human-rights hearings in Port Elizabeth to enable victims to testify. Joyce Mtimkulu went to a packed hall in the East London section, to testify in the presence of Bishop Desmond Tutu. Lawyers for the police filed injunctions preventing her from taking the stand. When they told her she could not testify, the shock was so great that she fainted and had to be helped from the hall. Siphosiso Mtimkulu, tears streaming down his face.

When Joyce finally did get the opportunity to testify, later that year, she made it clear that the truth that mattered to her had to be very extensive and very precise, the kind of truth that gives a person closure: "Where did they take him? Who handed him over to them? What did they do to him? Where did they leave the bones of my child?" But it was not until the last available moment, in mid-December of 1996, when Nieuwoudt and van Rensburg finally applied for amnesty, that Joyce began to get the answers.

Now, in the September amnesty hearings, she is face to face with them at last, and she hears them tell the story in their own words. She learns that while she was in the Emanuel Church in Kwazakale, being told how she must persevere and endure the bondage of the Pharaoh, they were going to churches on the other side of town, which told them that apartheid belonged to the eternal order of things. Siphosiso had said that he was fighting so that blacks and whites could live in the same nice brick houses. Nieuwoudt and van Rensburg had been told they were fighting a "total onslaught" from Communists, and that such a fight is not conducted by Queensberry rules, with one arm tied behind your back.

Nieuwoudt and van Rensburg now testify that they began planning Siphosiso's murder two days after he lodged his second lawsuit; they had considered rearresting him and deporting him but had rejected such options because—the poisoning hav-



*Drew*

*"I'm glad we won, and I hope that someday we'll have a university that our football team can be proud of."*

ing made him into a martyr—another arrest would spark riots in the townships. Informers in Topsy Madaka's circle tipped them off that the two young men were heading for the Holiday Inn. The police stopped Topsy's car and, after getting in, told them to drive east. Along the way, Nieuwoudt told them to stop, to buy a jerrican of gasoline, and he put it in the trunk. Then they drove for an hour or so to a deserted police station called Post Chalmers, in the middle of the countryside. Now, as Joyce listens intently through her headphones, van Rensburg's lawyer leads him through his testimony, revealing the truth in laconic Afrikaans:

Was the plan to eliminate the two deceased there?

Yes.

Did you carry the two deceased outside?

Yes.

Did you then shoot Siphosiso Mtimkulu?

Correct.

What did you do with the corpses?

We placed them on the firewood.

Then you poured gasoline on them?

Yes.

Was the fire lit for the purposes of burning the corpses?

Yes.

Did it burn for approximately 6 hours?

Yes.

Did you then take the remains, place them in a garbage bag and dispose of them in the Fish River?

Yes.

As the crowd in the hall hears this, it makes a sound like a rising surge of the sea. Joyce, who has been accompanied by Siphosiso's two children, begins to weep. Truth Commission assistants stroke her shoulders. The police watch Joyce crying. There is no expression on their faces. One of the defense lawyers is heard to mutter in Afrikaans on an open microphone, as he watches the family break down, "Fifteen years later, and now they are fucking crying for the first time."

WHEN Nieuwoudt takes the stand, hastily scrawled posters are being waved in the hall. They are held up toward the police and they say "No amnesty for liars" and "Tell us the truth." The pre-



siding commissioner, Justice Andrew Wilson, asks for them to be lowered. Slowly and unwillingly, the crowd puts the posters down.

Nieuwoudt confesses that he shot Topsy Madaka with a single bullet from his service revolver. He admits that he spent six hours turning the bones of Topsy and Siphwo over in the fire so that they would be burned to ash. He says that he was the one who scooped the cold ash into a garbage bag and dumped it in the Fish River. But he denies torturing anyone. A thin smirk crosses his lips. "It was the strategy of some detainees after they were released to claim that they had been tortured in order to prove that they had not been informers," he says. Suddenly, one of Joyce's grandchildren, sitting twenty feet from Nieuwoudt, leaps to her feet, runs forward, and shouts, "You are dogs and liars! Why do you not tell the truth?" As security-staff members from the Truth Commission lead her back to her seat, Nieuwoudt watches her go, his face empty and indifferent.

The hearings last for five days. To the end, Nieuwoudt and van Rensburg deny any role in Mtimkulu's poisoning, and refuse to admit that they tortured him. If the catharsis promised by the Truth

Commission depends on the exchange of forgiveness for contrition, of absolution for apology, no catharsis occurs. As the hearings draw to a close, there is one statement that seems to infuriate Joyce more than any other—a contention by Nieuwoudt that he gave her son sleeping tablets before shooting him. She explodes, crying out, "That is not the truth! I am sure Nieuwoudt wanted him to know 'I am going to kill you now.' They are still telling lies. Siphwo suffered before he died. I know this."

ONE evening, I spend some time with three of the amnesty commissioners, in the Kruger Guest House, in the suburbs of Port Elizabeth, an enclave of doiled gentility where they take refuge every night after the hearings. Chris de Jager is an Afrikaner politician in his late fifties, with the thin, ruddy face of a farmer. It pains him—and angers him, too—that the policemen keep saying they did what they did in his name, in the defense of the Afrikaner people. He had known that there were hit squads, he says, but he had never imagined their extent, the sheer number of people killed. And, concerning the stories of bodies being burned and bones

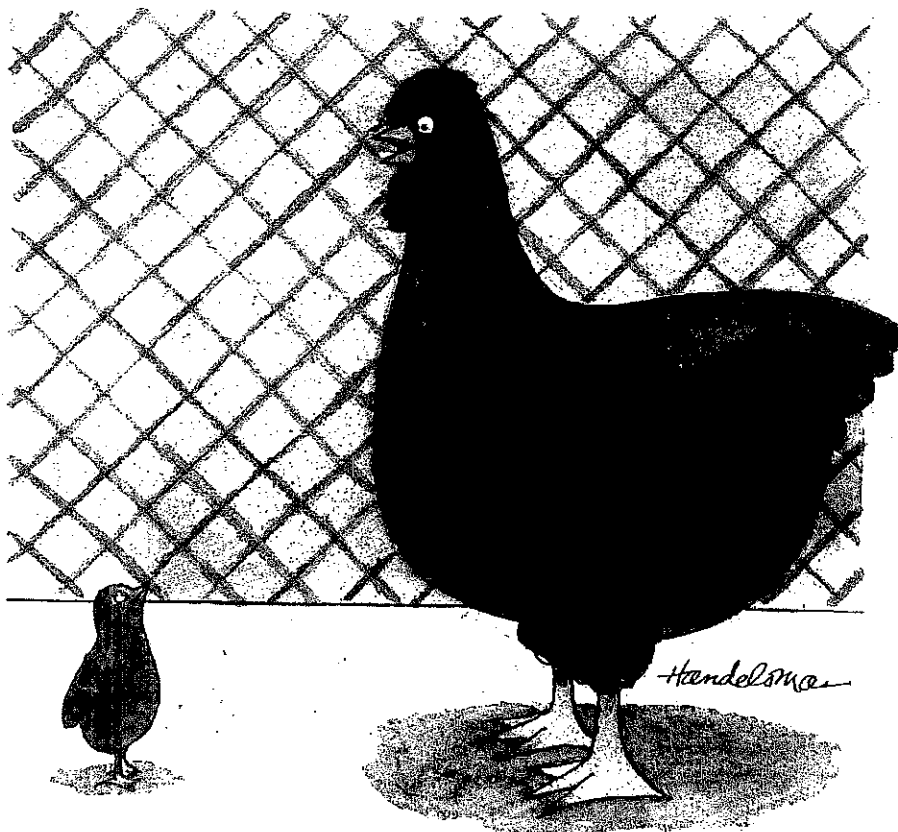
being crushed and dumped in rivers, he says, "The way some of the killings were done really shocked me."

Andrew Wilson, a bluff liberal Supreme Court Justice, knows that the hearings, during which the crowd dances around the hall at recess, and people shout abuse at the perpetrators, are not normal courtroom procedure. The hearings are a ritual of empowerment, in which people who, in Desmond Tutu's words, were "treated like rubbish" all their lives get to be treated like citizens. Wilson knows that they have waited fifty years, in some cases, for this moment, and he lets them have their say. But the hearings never degenerate into mob justice: when he tells people to put their posters away and sit down, they do. There is discipline here—a complicity between the judges and a huge crowd to keep the proceedings fair, even to the perpetrators.

Finally, there is Ntsiki Sandi, a small, burly Xhosa lawyer in his twenties, with a background in human-rights law. The hearings that shook him were in the white areas up north, where black activists sought amnesty for killing white farmers. The farmers would see a car by the side of the road with a wheel off, and they would stop to help, and then they would be killed. "It made me mad that people would be tricked like this," he says. He, like de Jager, has come a considerable distance from old certainties.

The three commissioners travel the country together, hearing cases, sleeping in guesthouses that Sandi wouldn't have been allowed to set foot in a decade ago. Despite the fact that de Jager will tell you, in an idle moment, that the separate development of races might not have been a bad idea and could have had a future if it hadn't been forced on the blacks, the commissioners manage to hammer out unanimous amnesty agreements.

But the case of Nieuwoudt and van Rensburg will test their unanimity. Sandi seems to see it as a pure and simple police coverup. They poisoned an activist; when he survived and threatened to blow their cover, they killed him. Nothing political in that, he says, nothing that meets the amnesty criterion. And, because they won't admit to the poisoning, they haven't met the full-disclosure criterion, either. The commissioners don't announce their decision at the hearings: it will come out as a writ-



*"Even more dangerous than crossing the road is being undercooked."*

## FATHER'S OLD BLUE CARDIGAN

Now it hangs on the back of the kitchen chair  
where I always sit, as it did  
on the back of the kitchen chair where he always sat.

I put it on whenever I come in,  
as he did, stamping  
the snow from his boots.

I put it on and sit in the dark.  
He would not have done this.  
Coldness comes paring down from the moonbone in the sky.

His laws were a secret.  
But I remember the moment at which I knew  
he was going mad inside his laws.

He was standing at the turn of the driveway when I arrived.  
He had on the blue cardigan with the buttons done up all  
the way to the top.  
Not only because it was a hot July afternoon

but the look on his face—  
as a small child who has been dressed by some aunt early  
in the morning  
for a long trip

on cold trains and windy platforms  
will sit very straight at the edge of his seat  
while the shadows like long fingers

over the haystacks that sweep past  
keep shocking him  
because he is riding backwards.

—ANNE CARSON

ten judgment, sometime before Christmas.

The reality is that, when you trade amnesty for truth, murderers get away with murder. Sometimes that reality makes Joyce Mtinkulu ill with rage. She might have been willing to forgive her son's killers, but their effrontery—Nieuwoudt's smirks, the lawyer's comments under his breath, the injunctions preventing her testimony, the perpetrators' refusal to say one word of regret—is beginning to make her long for punishment. At the Kruger Guest House, Ntsiki Sandi nods, and says, "Yes, I understand that feeling of revulsion." But de Jager shakes his head, and says, "People who committed these crimes would never have come forward and told the truth unless there was an incentive." Wilson

agrees: "Policemen who knew they were almost entirely safe did come forward."

**A**MNESTY may be necessary simply because apartheid managed to cover the traces of most of its crimes. Its style of repression became ever more secretive, so that white South Africans like Chris de Jager wouldn't know what was preserving their suburban villas and lush walled gardens, and so that the international community, which denounced apartheid in the abstract, wouldn't have any idea just how much killing was done. In the repression that is characteristic of a human-rights era, such killing must be secret. It must be hidden. In this context, truth becomes a kind of justice.

Watching a society struggle with the

mechanisms of amnesty changes what one thinks about justice. It is associated with punishment; with putting people behind bars. But it can also mean something else: truth and moral reparation, the restitching together of a moral world, where sons and daughters do not disappear in the night, where evildoers eventually face the consequences of what they have done.

The hearings in Centenary Hall make one aware of how much human beings need to believe that they belong to a moral order. What propels Joyce Mtinkulu and Nason Ndwandwe and the hundreds of families, both black and white, to come before the Truth Commission is the impulse to create a public realm where truth is truth and lies are lies, where actions are held accountable, where the state is held to certain standards. In South Africa, that is perhaps the deepest yearning of all, after decades of infamy.

A moral order is too large and impalpable an aim to be achieved by any commission. Perhaps, at the beginning, the men and women of the Truth Commission thought they could draw a line under the past and turn to a clean page. But veterans of the process are now coming to terms with the fact that their work will never be over. Violence insinuated itself into the heart of the country's institutions, into each race's loyalty to its own. It will take generations to eliminate that violence, but at least now there is some measure of shared truth about it. It is just as well, perhaps, that South Africans have learned enough truth from the commission to never entirely trust their policemen—and each other—again.

The Truth Commission draws to a close next summer, when it issues its final report. Those who took part—the judges, the investigators, many of the victims—feel that they have helped the country heal itself. Not all the hidden graves have been found; not all the hidden injuries have been exposed. But eventually the pursuit of justice, truth, and reparation—the reckoning with the past—must give way to a reckoning with the future. Nason Ndwandwe may never know who betrayed his daughter, and he may ultimately decide that he does not want to know; there have been enough revenge killings of *askaris* as it is. Joyce Mtinkulu came to the end of the hearings in Port Elizabeth and, neither happy nor reconciled, sighed, "It's over." She knows that her son's bones will never be recovered. ♦