

The Star

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Timol – 35 years later

Today is the 35th anniversary of the death of Ahmed Timol, a 29-year-old anti-apartheid activist who fell to his death from the 10th floor of John Vorster Square police station. Timol, arrested five days before at a roadblock, was being interrogated by members of the security branch when he plunged 10 storeys.

Timol's body thudded to the ground on the southern side of John Vorster Square (now the Central Police station), the Commissioner Street side, in the middle of Johannesburg, half a kilometre or less away from the Market Theatre and *The Star* newspaper.

As might have been – and was – predicted at the time, an inquest found that no one was to blame for his death; that Timol committed suicide for a number of reasons, the main one being that, being a so-called “trained” member of the Communist Party and having divulged some information to the police, he opted to die “rather than betray (his) organisation”.

But there was a wealth of evidence then and now that contradicted this farcical and facile finding. The evidence of the policeman who was allegedly “guarding” Timol on that fateful afternoon was suspect and had clearly been rehearsed. The Timol family pathologist found at least 10 lesions and bruises, unrelated to a fall, on Timol's body. Another detainee, arrested at the same time as Timol, had been taken to a room where there was blood and hair on the floor and told to clean it up. He realised, from the hair, that it was Timol's.

On April 30 1996, Hawa, Timol's mother, now dead, appealed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to “find” her son's killers. After all, none of the policemen responsible for arresting Timol or interrogating him – all of whom, except one, are still alive – applied to the TRC for amnesty, nor did they ever testify before the TRC.

TRC investigators began investigating the matter but, for a variety of apparently bureaucratic reasons, nothing ever came of these investigations. Is it not time that the authorities – in this case the National Prosecuting Authority – did something about helping the remaining Timol family achieve closure?

COMMENT

JONATHAN ANCER



Why should a young child have to defend itself against other people's prejudiced ideas?

'Daddy, why is my skin brown?'

Madonna is the King Midas of controversy: whatever she touches turns into a hulla-balloo. Earlier this month she flew into Malawi and a week later, she flew out with her latest celeb accessory – 13-month-old David Banda.

This is just another Material Girl publicity stunt to grab headlines.

Madonna's stunt is a fad and it's unlikely to end well as far as most Africans are concerned – especially David Banda. Which is a shame. Because, as the statistics tell us, we're in enough trouble already.

Three years ago I visited a disused mine village in Mpumalanga. It had been taken over by the Topsy Foundation and was being turned into a sanctuary to accommodate children when the Aids tsunami hits. A village just for orphans! The reality of the crisis hit me in the face like a right jab.

When I met Jean, my partner, about a year ago, she introduced me to Khwezi. They had adopted each other when Khwezi was 5 months old. Her reason for adopting a child was simple: if everyone who can adopt a child adopts a child, then there wouldn't be any orphans.

Jean had been trying to adopt a child for more than a year before she and Khwezi found each other. Not being a world-famous middle-of-the-road pop star, Jean had to fight her way through the Department of Social Welfare's red tape.

When she adopted Khwezi, he had just one cuddly toy. The toy wasn't just a toy; it served a practical function; it propped up his bottle. He never had a human to hold his food, changed his clothes and made sure he was okay, but there were just too many kids to shower each one with love and affection.

It won't be too long before Khwezi, who is now two-and-a-half, wants to know about his “tummy mommy”.

Jean will tell him that his biological mother loved him very much, but just couldn't care for him.

It will take a few more generations before Archbishop Desmond Tutu's vision of a Rainbow Nation is actually realised. It's happening – slowly. The last time I was in Joburg, I spied about half a dozen interracial families at the Zoo Lake. It's happening much slower in smaller places, like Grahamstown. As we trudge down the path to

Rainbownationhood, Kwhezi is going to have to deal with sideways glances and outright stares.

When we walk in town and in supermarkets, I see people trying to work out what's going on. When he toddles two steps behind in the supermarket, some people will ask if he's lost, some will just stare and a few will ask directly.

At a recent dog show in Grahamstown, Khwezi threw a tantrum while we were watching pooches jump through hoops, run across beams and slide down seesaws. “I need a turn, I need a turn,” he wailed. I tried to explain that this obstacle course was just for dogs when a 5-year-old boy looked us up and down. “Is that boy yours?” he asked. I nodded. “But how come he's brown?”

“That's just the way it is,” I shrugged. The little boy understood and a moment later, his confusion forgotten, his attention was back on the jumping dogs.

Adults, though, are not as accepting.

In Pick 'n Pay, a woman at the bread counter couldn't control her astonishment when she saw me and Khwezi stroll past. “Who is he?” she asked.

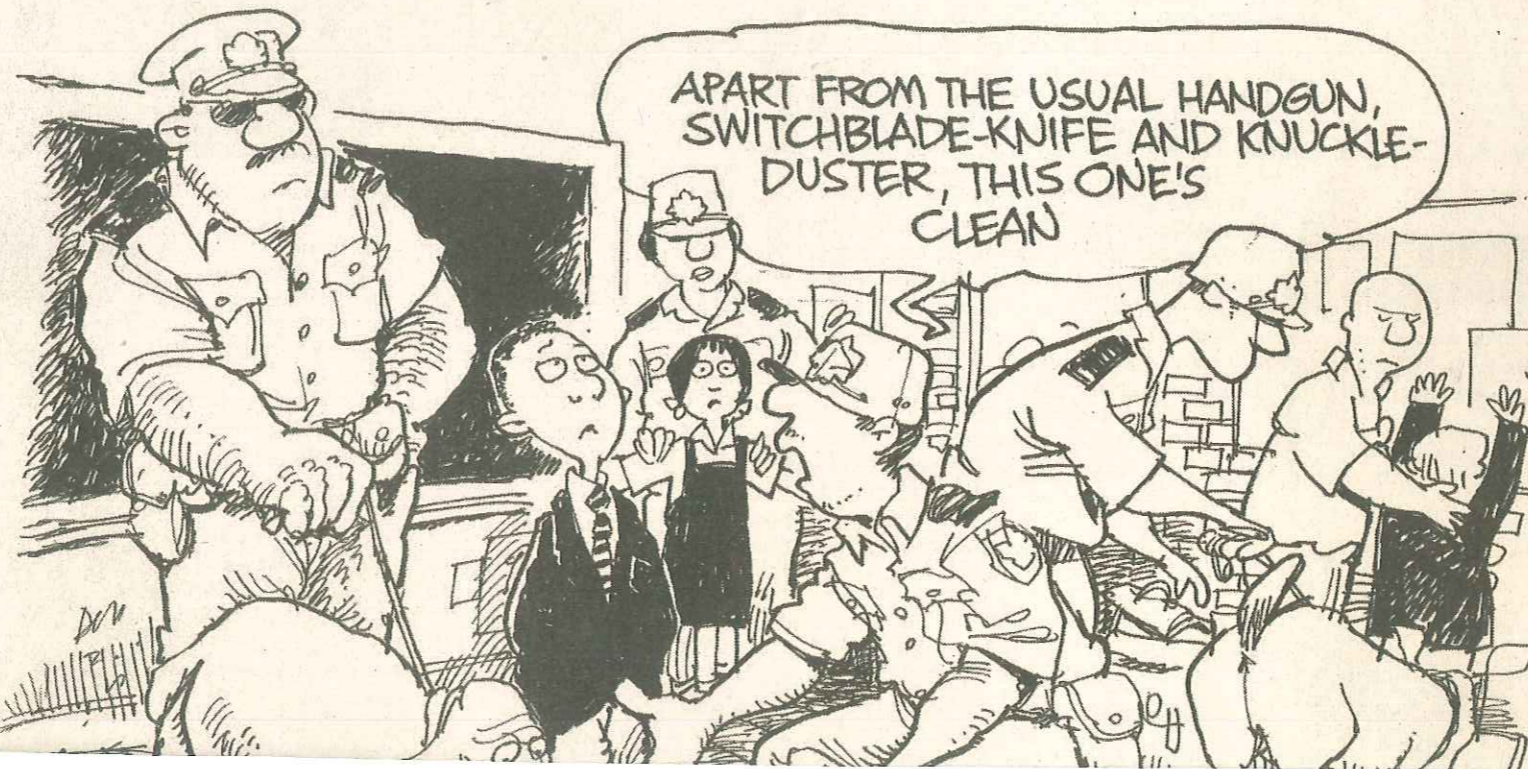
I explained. She shook her head. “He's not yours,” she said. “He is ours!” She addressed Khwezi. “That's not your daddy.”

Khwezi's saucer-like eyes stared at this woman. In that instant, I realised that Khwezi would not only have to confront inner challenges of being adopted but, as we grapple with finding a shared identity that's based on being human (rather than colour), he will grow up doing battle with other people's prejudices.

It's not ideal that Khwezi has been taken out of his community and culture because knowing where you come from is your point of reference. But we don't live in an ideal world. If we did, there wouldn't be Aids or Aids orphans, there wouldn't be racism or poverty; Nicky Boje would be able to turn the ball like Shane Warne and mediocre popstars like Madonna would remain struggling waitresses instead of wealthy, self-serving publicity seekers.

And, in an ideal world, a two-and-a-half-year-old boy won't be told by a stranger that his father is not his father – just because they happen to be different colours.

■ Ancer is editor of Grocott's Mail – a community newspaper in Grahamstown.



I'll pay it when I'm dead ...

LITTLE SPOT

ZENAIDE JONES



I received a threatening letter from the Johannesburg Municipality this week – and was overjoyed.

After I bought a home five years ago, I begged several times to be billed for rates. I went to what the council laughingly calls its “People Centres”, called and wrote, but to no avail. When I heard my neighbour had been sending registered letters for two years asking for an invoice, I gave up.

I'll pay when I'm dead, I thought. This week, a huge bill arrived on my doorstep – including, presumably, interest on the unpaid account – threatening to cut off services (in this case, only refuse removal) if I didn't pay forthwith.

I didn't quibble – I paid it immediately. Then I noticed in a panic that the bill was not in my name. I called Joburg Connect and – behold – the call was