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noseweek

71

SEPTEMBER 2005



**St John's
thuggery:
who's lying?**

**Taking Liberty: how the assurer shafted loyal staff GM food rammed
down our throats Why the Afrikaans press lacks balls over rugby**





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noseweek

SEPTEMBER 2005

ISSUE 71



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Pat on the Jack

The last two *noseweek* covers have been great. You've definitely got the right guy in Dr Jack.

Jonathan Shapiro (Zapiro)
Cape Town

Pulped fiction

I was upset to read "Pulped Fiction" concerning Sir Bob Hepple QC FBA in *nose69*. Issues concerning truth and suppression in the media in

The point at issue, according to your article, is that "Johnson said (wrongly)" that in his previous incarnation as a South African in the 1960s, Hepple had "agreed to testify for the prosecution [at the Rivonia trial]".

Let me give my recollection of the perception among my colleagues from those days.

During the Rivonia Trial I was editor in Johannesburg of the underground newspaper of

committee – Bram Fischer, Ivan Schermbrucker and Eli Weinberg – two of whom (Fischer and Schermbrucker) had had responsibilities relating to Umkhonto. Denis Goldberg, a leading member and an accused in the Rivonia Trial serving a life sentence, was also a fellow prisoner, as was David Kitson, then serving a 20-year sentence for his membership of the high command. So too was your col-

Hepple responds

I am surprised that Paul Trewhela did not contact me for my side of the story before writing to you. I should be glad to send him an offprint of "Rivonia: The Story of Accused No.11", which I wrote in 1964 (and which was recently published in UCT's *Social Dynamics* vol.30, summer 2004).

It was false and defamatory for Mr Johnson to accuse me of treachery and/or betrayal of my comrades in the Rivonia Trial. Shortly before the first indictment was quashed, the prosecution announced that I was being released and that they intended to call me as a state witness. I immediately contacted Bram Fischer and with his help and that of other comrades I escaped from South Africa. The circumstances in which I made a statement to the security police under the pressure of solitary confinement, psychological abuse and continuous interrogation, were well-known to my fellow-accused and to their legal advisers.

Both during my detention and after my release., they were never left in any doubt that I had no intention of testifying for the state. Had I been called to the witness box I would have refused to testify. The lucky chance of being released allowed me to leave the country and, so avoid being called as a witness. Walter Sisulu wrote to me, shortly before he was sentenced in 1964, to say that the description of me as a traitor "certainly did not reflect my views about you." More recently, Ahmed Kathrada, another co-accused, stated: "Advocate Hepple has been a worthy friend and comrade, and I had no reason to doubt his integrity."

In a personal letter to me Mr RW Johnson has offered his sincere apologies and has stated that he "was obviously completely wrong".

I should add, in view of Mr Trewhela's hearsay allegations, that I have no knowledge whatsoever of Mr Nandhagopal Naidoo or of the circumstances of his trial or release.

Paul Trewhela
Aylesbury, England

Bob Hepple
Cambridge, England

RW Johnson has offered his sincere apologies and has stated that he 'was obviously wrong'

South Africa are never an easy matter.

Sir Bob has clout. He was formerly Dean and Head of Law at University College London. In addition he is Emeritus Master of Clare College and Emeritus Professor of Law at the University of Cambridge, England. He is a Barrister at Blackstone Chambers, London.

It was upsetting to read that the book *South Africa: The First Man, The Last Nation* by my friend RW Johnson has been withdrawn from bookshops and pulped, following an out-of-court settlement on behalf of Sir Bob QC.

Umkhonto we Sizwe, *Freedom Fighter*. Arrests in July 1964 finished off the newspaper after only three issues. My liaison with the Umkhonto High Command was through Hilda Bernstein, whose husband Rusty was one of the accused in the Rivonia Trial. A separate agency headed by Norma Kitson, printed the newspaper. Norma's husband David was a member of the second tier of the high command.

I later served two years in Pretoria Prisons (1965-67) following my conviction as a member of the SACP. Among my prison colleagues were three members of the central

umnist, Harold Strachan.

Fellow prisoners and I believed that Bob Hepple had left South Africa under a cloud. Having been arrested in connection with the Rivonia trial, the perception was that he was spirited out of the country by the underground apparatus of the ANC/SACP in order to avoid his giving evidence for the prosecution in one or more political trials.

Subsequent to his marriage in London to my sister Beverley, Nandhagopal Naidoo told me that he too had left the country illegally, after the prosecution case against him evaporated when Hepple left the country. Naidoo was accused of having received military training abroad as a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

It should not be difficult to recover the records of the prosecution case against Naidoo, and the prosecution records relating to the Rivonia trialists should also be available for study. This would settle the issue of what Bob Hepple did or did not undertake in relation to the prosecution of political trials in South Africa during the period 1963-65.

The suppression of Johnson's book is extremely serious. It was one of very few books written by an informed South African with a proven record of hostility to the apartheid regime while still critical of the practice and history of the ANC and the SACP.

Gus



Frankenworld

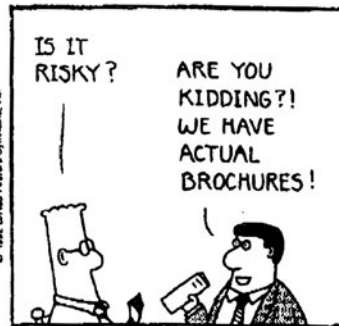
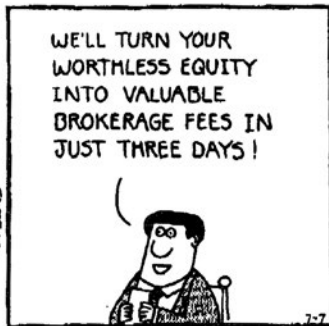
Your articles "Frankenflora" (*nose68*) and "Weeds for the world" (*nose69*) put forward a compelling point-of-view – a view that epitomises those who wish to keep the world more-or-less exactly as it is/was. I call it the preservationist approach.

Conservationists, on the other hand, try and manage the world to allow for continuing evolutionary changes – who knows, maybe the "Frankenflora" is just one such example!

People have been responsible for plant introductions globally for perhaps the last 10,000 years. There is reason to speculate that our classic African monospecific baobab is in fact a "manuport" from Madagascar. Many plants we once considered "indigenous" are most certainly aliens – both in the sense of "Frankenflora", and because they are manuports that have naturalised.

There are now other points-of-view emerging that take into account changes that we, *Homo sapiens var "technocratensis"* have vastly accelerated, putting the evolutionary clock into overwind – and *there is no going back*. Change is being forced on us globally and we need to embrace and digest some of the huge implications of modern discoveries and technological advances.

We are tasked with having to deal with a world that is verging on the Anthropocene – an epoch in the Earth's evolutionary history when the predicted sixth global extinction *will* occur (the last being the dinosaurs some 65 million years ago): a future global extinction of a kind and magnitude previously unknown in the Earth's geological history – and one created by the activities of a single species, *Homo sapiens*.



I couldn't resist sending you this cartoon after seeing Mr Nose bugging the life insurance industry (*nose70*). I have maintained for years – since Life Illustrations were first shown up as pure fantasy – that insurers should not be allowed to illustrate at any higher level than the average of their last five, maybe 10 years' actual performance.

When you recall that Liberty, for one, had on more than one occasion to put in money simply to meet the policy guaranteed minimum value, it makes sense to pin them down.

Henry Tours

Morningside, Sandton



The saga continues on page 7 – Ed.

I fear the preservationists are tied too tightly to the now obsolete concept of protected area conservation to have noticed.

There are far too few people able to recognise the harm we are doing to the planet and who are aware of the impending disaster! There is no "protected area". Small incidents of genetic mixing may be fun to highlight, but there are much bigger global issues for noseweek to fry.

Eugene Moll

Biodiversity & Conservation Biology Dept,
University of the Western Cape



Hey, all we did was discover another one of those curious and delightful ironies of life. And, in passing, prick the earnest rectitude with which Kirstenbosch and the Botanical Society seek to make a buck. Serious as the issues you raise no doubt are, humour is as essential for the survival of the species – even if it is only padkos for the journey to Doomsday. Try some. – Ed.

Rough diamonds

I much appreciated your reports on the lot of the Botswana bushmen. In *nose69*

you refer briefly to BBC World Affairs editor John Simpson's comment on the situation.

Your readers should know that Simpson's weekly column appears on the BBC's website – the world's most widely read news site. And that he, too, has now declared that he believes, despite the denials of De Beers and the Botswana government, that the Bushmen were evicted from the Central Kalahari because of diamonds.

"I used not to believe that this was the real cause, but now I have changed my mind," he says in his column. "Somehow, it is too much of a coincidence that so much wealth lies under the land of so few Bushmen."

JB

Durban



The full text of Simpson's column on the Bushmen can be found at: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4480883.stm – Ed

Bitter potatoes

Your Kenyan report about GM sweet potatoes (*nose70*) gives an idea of the power of Monsanto. Paying bribes is a small price for eventual control of a market. Once you have control

you can manipulate the price of seed. That way you control the level of earnings of entire populations, keeping them perpetually in debt and unable to participate freely in the market.

As to sustainable development, a number of these multinationals' claims are false. When they're accepted by governments after bribes or whatever, bang goes the genetic diversity that has allowed for millennia of successful cultivation. If one specific type of crop falls prey to bug or disease or drought, then another in a neighbouring area would prove resistant, therefore allowing the populations a chance to survive.

Leslie-Ann Bickle

Stompneus Bay



See "Rammed down our throats" on page 22. – Ed.

Praise be

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Chris D Binington

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Insurance-speak

MOST readers and I continue to have a good laugh every time we read the exchange, transcribed by Mr Nose in our last issue, between forensic investigator Dr David Klatzow and Lerato Mametse, the spokesperson for the Life Offices Association. Ms Mametse defends the indefensible with such dauntless ingenuity, wit and patience that you have to laugh.

The life insurance industry has long been notorious for its shady marketing techniques – and has been the butt of many jokes on that account. But the consequences of those shady marketing ploys, for their pensioner customers (and more particularly their widows and orphans) are no joke at all. Further enriching the rich (as epitomised by the insurance companies' own spectacularly wealthy executives) at the expense of gullible but well-intentioned clients and their widows and orphans, must surely represent one of the uglier faces of Capitalism.

This has become so obvious of late that even the mainstream media have been driven – reluctantly, because insurers are big advertisers – to give the issue some critical attention. Not unexpectedly, the industry has not welcomed that attention.

In this issue Mr Nose presents us with another riveting transcript, this time of Dr Klatzow's sometimes heated discussion with Francois Marais, actuary, head of Sanlam's New Products division, and co-ordinator of the LOA's committees.

The LOA has recently aggressively advertised its introduction of a new code of conduct for policy quotations, which stipulates that projections of annual investment returns used in marketing insurance "products" must be based on a "low" inflation rate of 4% and a "high" inflation rate of 10%. All very worthy, since previously the industry had used a "high" rate of 15% which, they now acknowledge, caused clients to have "unrealistic expectations".

The current controversy surrounds a confidential email Mr Marais sent to colleagues on an LOA committee in which he proposed that the industry should "quietly" at the end of the year "up" the "high" rate again to 12%. With, presumably, much the same effect that the previous high rate had on clients.

Mr Marais dismisses the controversy as "scandal mongering" by the media. He wants us to believe his use of the word "quietly" was innocent, since, he says, the change he proposed was "technical" and "of little consequence" – and therefore "not worth a song-and-dance".

Bruce Cameron doesn't believe him. Nor does Alec Hogg. David Klatzow finds it hard to believe him. So do we.

Currently inflation is running at about 3.5%.

It hasn't been above 5% for years. It would seem that the industry is already pushing its luck using a "high" projected earnings rate of 10%. Why, then, the wish to raise it to 11% or 12% – if not for reasons that you would rather keep quiet about?

Mr Marais has himself demonstrated how the system works in an article entitled *The New Code on Policy Quotations*, published in the August edition of *Cover*, a magazine for the insurance industry.

The problem, claims Marais in his article, is that the projections of policies sold in the late 80s and through the 90s were based on high inflation rates: in that period they averaged 15%. As inflation came down in the mid 90s, investment returns also came down. "The industry did not emphasise enough that high bonus rates in the 80s and 90s were largely the result of high inflation" (and not of the investment skills of the insurance companies).

"The [previously used] high nominal projected rates ... were wrongly understood to be a realistic expectation of the future," he claims in the article.

But how else were clients supposed to see the projections so elaborately illustrated in the sales brochures?

However, "to avoid a repetition of past mistakes," says Marais in *Cover*, "it is very important to stress the point that [the rate in] the new code on policy quotations is only a planning tool and is not intended to provide accurate projections of expected future values."

Now, how, we ask, is a client to use the projection as a planning tool if it doesn't provide a fair indication of future values? Surely this is more of the sophistry the assurance industry uses to cover its tracks?

Sorry, Mr Marais, maybe you've been in the industry too long to notice. You've simply added a new dimension to that old dictum about the road to Hell being paved with good intentions: the optimistic projections that the life insurance industry continues to use to seduce its clients, continue to ensure that far too many pensioners find themselves in hellish circumstances.

Oilgate

WE RARELY have the occasion – or the inclination? – to compliment colleagues on other publications. But the spectacular – and, ultimately, brave – Oilgate exposé by our friends at the *Mail & Guardian* has to be such an occasion. Congratulations!

And there's much more to the story yet; issues that are life-threatening to our democracy. Watch this space.

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Mr Nose puts it about



Putting from the rough

Could it be that behind that famous façade of cool intellectualism, our revered President has a heart? Mr Nose ponders this hypothesis following Mr Mbeki's recent outburst when he declared it was time to put a stop to "pro-rich" housing developments, gated communities and golf estates while the poor are relegated to distant semi-developed dumps.

Could it be that Our Dear Leader is as perturbed as Mr Nose about the goings-on at Huddle Park (*nose66*), where the Islandsite syndicate, which includes friends Peter Malungane's Peu Group and Cyril Ramaphosa's Shanduka – with backing from all the usual suspects, including Investec and Standard Bank – are proposing to kick the local yokels and 300 young black aspirant golfers off the long-established public greens to make way for a R1.6 billion golf estate, its 151 strictly private hectares crammed with 860 luxury homes for the mega rich?

Huddle Park, in Johannesburg's Linksfield, is the established home of Johann Rupert's SA Golf Development Board. The Islandsite proposal makes no provision for the black youngsters to remain there, declaring it will build "appropriate" facilities for them near Alexandra and in Soweto [*where they belong* – Ed.].

The test for whether El Presidente's muscle is equal to his mouth: can he persuade Gauteng premier Mbhazima Shilowa that another exclusive enclave will do nothing but widen the gap between rich and poor? He might tell comrade Sam that there are already more than enough (boring and under-utilised) golf estates catering for the stupid-rich – and plenty of exclusive hectares to cater for the golfing rich at neighbouring Royal Johannesburg Golf Club. Huddle Park should, instead, become a beacon of hope: a pleasing but low-cost development with homes that are affordable to ordinary folk – now there's a challenge for Investec and Standard Bank! – with a golf course to remain open to the public, including world-class facilities for JR's golfers-in-training.

Just a thought.

Trust me, I'm a broker

Eavesdropping on forensic scientist Dr David Klatzow's telephone conversations has become Mr Nose's latest hobby. Last month he eavesdropped on Klatzow's knockabout discussion with Lerato Mametse, spokeswoman for the Life Offices Association, about an email inadvertently sent out to the media.

Dr Klatzow followed this with a call to Gerhard Joubert, who Ms Mametse had assured him was the "best person to speak to" about the matter and who, she was sure, would welcome Klatzow's call.

It went:

Dr Klatzow: Hi, Mr Joubert, my name is David Klatzow, how are you?

Gerhard Joubert: I have nothing to say to you. *Plunk! Beep.. beep... bee Cep...*

With that out of the way, Klatzow decided to call the author of the controversial email himself, Sanlam actuary and head of new products Francois Marais:

Dr Klatzow: Hi, Mr Marais, my name is David Klatzow, how are you?

Francois Marais: Very well. Yourself? **Very well thank you. Mr Marais, I am investigating problems in the personal investment industry. I work for a company called Queensberry Investigators. Apparently you sit on the Life Offices Association.**

Ja. Umm ... The LOA has a Board consisting of the CEO's of all the life insurance companies. Anything they want done, they dish out to sub-committees. I'm convenor of the sub-committees.

Okay. Now there was an article in Personal Finance by Bruce Cameron called "Life assurers hit from all sides".

Ja.

It says, I quote: 'The Life Offices Association emailed a statement to the media on its plans to provide you with more accurate information about the costs of your policy and how life companies will illustrate future performance, but a confidential email was attached. The email said that the way in which performance is illustrated should be quietly altered later in the year to make projected performance look better.

Obviously it was not supposed to get into the Press. I phoned the LOA and they said to me that you were the man who made that suggestion. Is that correct?

Absolutely.

Do you not think that it was dishonest?

Not at all. There is no "quietly changing" these figures. They can only be changed at the AGM, which is an open meeting. **Is Cameron not telling us the truth?**

No.

Well, that's what he's written and when I phoned the LOA, they told me that that correctly reflected your report.

It does not. I've got a copy of the email, I've got a copy of Bruce Cameron's article. I think this is really a "storm in a teacup". It was an internal email and I didn't really put much thought into it and the whole idea of using the word 'quietly', umm ... at the moment we are putting out advertisements about changes to the Code on Policy Quotations, telling people what it looks like and how it works. I thought that we should change some of the figures - they are really of no big consequence, but if we want to change them, we would have to go to the AGM with a proposal from our sub-committee, and then it will have to be voted on there. I .. I .. happened **To next page...**

Maak a Scaife, bru!

Mr Nose hears – from the usual scurrilous sources – that FNB's one-time favourite son, Peter "Sugarcane" Scaife has been barred by the Russian authorities from setting foot in that country.

Russian law allows the authorities to bar foreigners who commit "disrespectful or unfriendly actions".

Would that cover, Mr Nose wonders, the kind of "special offshore services" to the super-wealthy that Scaife was so good at providing, first as Durban, then as Johannesburg-based head of international banking at FNB during the 1980's? And which made him just the man for the job to direct Ansbachers when that criminal operation was eagerly inherited from the Irish?

From previous page... to use the word 'quietly', which seems to have created all this uproar ... I actually meant that we won't make a big 'song and dance' of it, we will just change it for future policies. It doesn't affect anybody.

But in fact, that is not true.

It is true, it doesn't affect anybody.

I'll tell you why I say it's not true. Part of the problem with these policies is that the brokers are focusing people's attention on the projected performance figures. They are arousing unreasonable expectations in the policyholders. Policyholders, by and large, are complaining that the true measure of the policies is no way near the performance that was suggested to them by the projected performance figures.

If they do that, they are not using the quotations correctly.

Now what this email seems to say is that, while the LOA has "plans to provide you with more accurate information about the costs of your policy and how life companies will illustrate future performance (with lower, more realistic figures)", the way in which performance is illustrated should be quietly altered later in the year (by making use of higher more optimistic figures, as the industry did in the past) to make projected performance look better.

That's wrong.

That is the quote from Bruce Cameron. Is he lying? Is that wrong?

I say he doesn't have it quite right, but I'm afraid if I say that and you're looking for a scandal, you're going to write "Bruce Cameron is lying" and ...

Put it in your own words what I must say about Bruce Cameron ...

... that's not quite accurate. The whole email correspondence is on the LOA website so you can get it there.

... so that I've got it straight from the horse's mouth?

I've already told you, about the word "quietly". Anything that happens at the AGM, the public will know about. Do you accept that?

I don't know: you tell me.

If you're going to doubt everything that I say, then I have no interest in talking to you.

I don't know it as a fact, but I accept what you tell me. Don't get aggressive, I'm just trying to find out the truth, Okay?

The email says "... we may have to wait for the AGM at the end of the year. At least we can consider it now and, if we agree, then quietly change it at the end of the year." Why "quietly"?

I didn't mean anything by it. I didn't really think deeply what I meant....

You and I are both educated adults. People don't use words for no reason. "Quietly" has a very specific meaning.

I didn't mean anything sinister by it. I don't know on what grounds you would doubt my integrity. I don't have a problem with anybody that I know, about my own integrity. I never want to do anything that I would not want to see published on the front page of any newspaper.

Okay.

"Quietly" was just ... we don't put ads in the paper about everything that we do. We happen to be advertising CPQ and trying to show all the changes at the moment. That's why we're trying to explain this now. If we later change one of the details that is not very consequential, one could ask oneself: "Do we need to advertise it again, now that we've changed this tiny detail, or do we just

change it?" That was all that I meant by it.

Let me put to you the spin Bruce Cameron's put on it. He says right now (because of public pressure) you guys have changed it to show more realistic figures - but you're going to up those figures again later in the year without telling anybody.

That's wrong.

Is that wrong?

That part "to make the projected performance look better" is not true.

Why alter the figures then?

Well, David, all I can say is: read everything that's on the LOA website, read the explanation that was provided by the LOA.

I've got it in front of me.

Notice the specific part.

I've read this. "Quietly" has a very specific meaning in this context in English: it is "skempies", "sluiperig", "under the table". That's what the implication is of what Bruce Cameron has written.

I seem not to get through to you, so I'm not...

Okay, I don't just roll over at the first blush, but all I want to know is why someone, obviously intelligent, uses a word he then claims has no meaning in a sentence where the implication is quite clear.

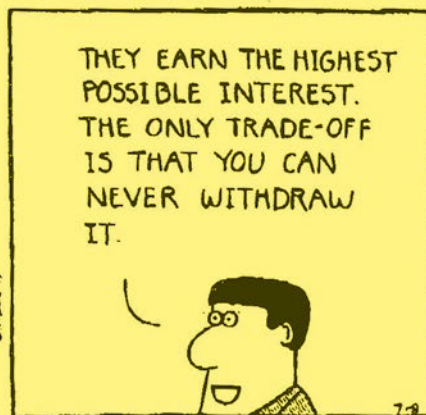
I disagree with you. [I meant] "without making a big hoo-hah out of it" - because it is not a big issue.

It is a big issue because this is one of the...

If you think it's a big issue then you don't understand the whole situation.

No, no. I think I am starting to understand. My understanding is that many of the brokers are mis-selling these policies.

You're saying that; I'm not saying that. I'm telling you what I'm starting to see from the





correspondence crossing my desk. I'm starting to see that people have been promised performances on their policies...

That's not true...

...which is way out-of-line.

Well, if you see that, you don't understand the situation...

Ja, I do. I'm telling you what hundreds of people are telling me in letters they've written to me. You can't say that there's no promise. I know for a fact that many of the brokers ... in fact, one of the clients tape-recorded a conversation between the broker and himself. He said: "We were brainwashed by the company to tell you that". You have a vested interest, Mr Marais, in selling these policies and you are in the industry side of things. You are taking a pasting in the press at the moment – not you, personally – but the industry. Liberty Life has come out saying "it's time we cleaned up our act and we're now cleaning up our act". If there's nothing to clean up, why clean it up? Bruce Cameron is having a go at you weekly. Now, either everybody's wrong and you're right, or there's a problem. That's why I've taken the trouble to phone you to ask you what you mean and I must tell you upfront, you say to me that you used the word "quietly" perfectly innocently. Here there is no innocent way of using it.

I will quote you many examples where "quietly" has no sinister meaning. Of course, you can say, "He sat in the Church quietly praying"...

Yes.

...but that's not in the context in which you used it. "He snuck into the building quietly with his jummy and a knife" has got a totally different meaning to "He sat in the Church quietly praying". Taken in the context in which you use it, it has a sinister meaning.

Well, that's unfortunate. I made a big mistake.

Why did you want to change it at the end of the year?

The AGM is at the end of the year.

So you're going to change it to reflect better performance.

With that part, I disagree totally. That was Bruce Cameron's take on it.

Have you challenged Bruce Cameron on that?

No.

Because it's created an exceptionally negative view of your industry with, not only the public, not only me, but with the Financial Services Board, too. They found this most unacceptable.

To whom did they say that?

To me.

Who at the FSB?

Never mind, that's what was said to me and I got a copy of this email from somebody at the FSB.

I know the people at the FSB very well and I would like to Was it Mr Njani, Mike Codren, who was it that sent it to you?

I'm not telling you. It was faxed to me by someone at the FSB who was disturbed by the content of the email.

If they're disturbed, they're not well-informed.

Bruce Cameron is misinformed, I'm misinformed, the FSB is misinformed ... everybody's wrong except you.

You're being sarcastic.

No. I'm having difficulty with that.

I'm asking you for your view on this before I make public statements about it and if you wish to give them to me, you're welcome. I'll quote you accurately. I will do my best to see that the truth is told. If you wish to fence with me, I'll quote that as well. You are in a position of fiduciary care towards the public and I need to be convinced that you are fulfilling that role. I'm not convinced by your email and I'm not convinced by your explanation.

Like I said, I've told you the truth, I've got no other defence.

You're a senior member of Sanlam, maybe you should avoid using language like that in future.

That I can certainly do, but I've used it...

Yes, well you have and you're going to have to live with the consequences, particularly in the climate of what is happening – Momentum losing money hand over fist, Old Mutual losing money for their clients hand over fist, Sanlam losing money hand over fist; in the climate of that people are starting to distrust brokers.

All I can say is what I told you.

"Take it or leave it" is what you're saying?

Ja, and if you doubt my integrity, I really don't have much interest in talking to you any further.

You shouldn't use the word "quietly" in an inflammatory document, if you're that sensitive. It implies dishonesty.

If you understand the context correctly – there's no real room for dishonesty anyway. But I asked the LOA lady, "would you call it honest?"; she said "No".

"Would you call it dishonest?."

"No, I wouldn't call it dishonest."

I said, "Well, what is it?", and she got a little tongue-tied. Would you call it honest?

Yes, it's honest.

Ok, well then I must quote you as believing that it's honest.

Could we just get back to the question of my integrity, for a moment, please?

Any time.

If you doubt it, please call Bruce Cameron. He knows me very well. Ask him for his opinion of my integrity.

No, but what I'm going to say is that you say that Bruce Cameron got that quote wrong.

The last part of that sentence is wrong.

"Confidential emails were attached to the statement." That's true!

"The email said that the way in which performance is illustrated should be quietly altered later in the year..." That's true!

"... to make projected performance look better." That's NOT true! That part was not said by me.

Then I'll quote you as exactly saying that.

I wouldn't tell Bruce Cameron that he's lying, because it's just the way he wrote. Either it's true or it's not true. Sometimes it can be half true, but this particular one, there's no room for half-truths.

Nothing is black and white

Did you listen to the programme on Radio Sonder Grense last week?

No.

Where comment was made that these policies have been mis-sold and that the guaranteed values are worthless...

I read about that nonsense. Ja.

I must tell you that it accords exactly with what's coming across my desk. People are being sold policies and Bruce Cameron makes a very valid point that the high rate of lapses and surrenders indicates that these policies are being sold to people on a false basis. Okay?

David, when do you intend writing and where...

Whenever I get a chance to write it and whenever I get a chance to say it.

This is really old news now. Alec Hogg [also] tried to make a big story out of it.

This is really scandal stuff.

Is he also mistaken? Alex Hogg?

It's tabloid stuff. They try to make scandal where there's no real scandal.

Can I quote you on that: that it is a distortion ... of the truth?

Please don't. I'm not really comfortable talking to you.

My job is to help people out there who do not have the ability to do what I'm doing.

Tell me, do you believe me or not?

What I believe is irrelevant. It's what the public out there believes.

Well, the public out there tend to believe what newspapers tell them. If you say that you believe me then that would be the end of the story.

Well, we'll put your exact words into whichever publication this goes into. We'll use your own words and you'll be happy in the end.

Well, I'm happy if the truth is told.

Yes. ☑

School of hard knocks

Lessons from a headmaster ready to trash a girl's reputation to protect his boys

THE DAY that changed Wayde Baker's life – and that of quite a few others – started with brunch at the Bryanston Country Club in Johannesburg's northern suburbs. Champagne toasts were drunk and the handsome dark-haired 18-year-old delivered a shy but moving tribute to his sister Bronwyn at this, her 21st birthday party.

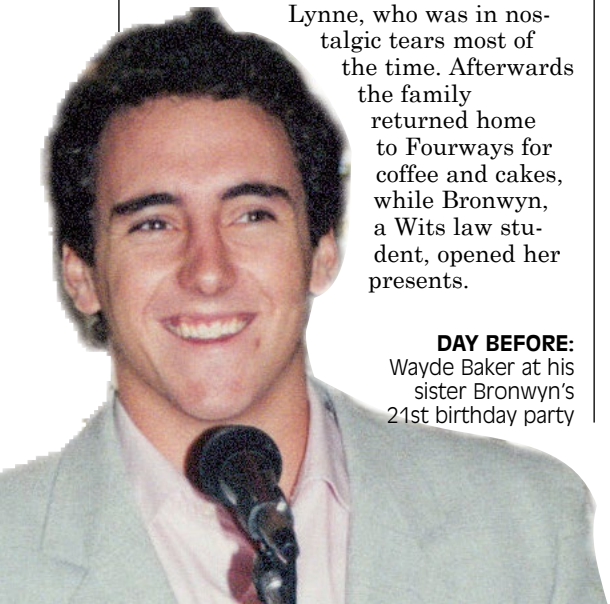
Hours later, the former St Stithian's College pupil was on a drip in hospital, his face shattered after being savagely beaten up at another birthday celebration, in the equally posh suburb of Houghton. His upper and lower jaws were broken; so were both cheekbones and his chin. His nose was destroyed; some teeth shattered...

Wayde's attackers, it is claimed in court papers, included six 17-year-old members of the St John's College water polo team. St John's is one of South Africa's most prestigious and expensive private schools (tuition, before extras: R47,700 pa).

Last summer the Anglican Church school's famed water polo team won 80 of its 81 games, as well as the National Tournament, hosted by Cape Town school SACS, for the second year running. The tightly-bonded group have played together for years and know each other's every move, both in and out of the water.

The Bryanston Country Club brunch was a stylish affair organized by Wayde's single mother, Lynne, who was in nostalgic tears most of the time. Afterwards the family returned home to Fourways for coffee and cakes, while Bronwyn, a Wits law student, opened her presents.

DAY BEFORE: Wayde Baker at his sister Bronwyn's 21st birthday party



A St Stithian's schoolboy is suing six St John's College matric pupils for R724,000 after they allegedly called in a teenage 'hitman' to work him over at *that party*. *noseweek* reconstructs the night of violence at the house of former KPMG senior partner John Louw – and probes the old-boy cover-up that followed

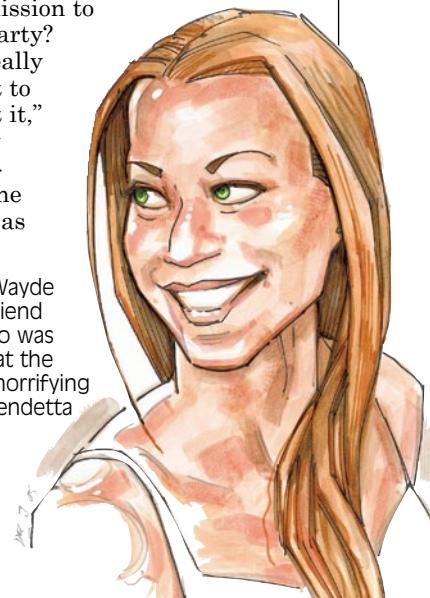
UNDERNEATH THE ARCHES: St John's, where Joburg's upper crust send their sons

The Houghton do was a very different kind of jol – an estimated 350 boozing adolescents had taken over the residence of Mr and Mrs John Louw, who had gone away leaving their son Nick to throw open the place for a joint 18th birthday party for himself and his St John's schoolmate, Jason Booij.

Did Nick have his parents' permission to hold the party?

"Look, I really don't want to chat about it," says Louw in the evasive style he developed as

THE FACE: Wayde Baker's girlfriend Ali Leary, who was unwittingly at the centre of a horrifying schoolboy vendetta



curator of failed Saambou Bank. (He left KPMG last year to join a small empowerment company called Umbono Financial Services.)

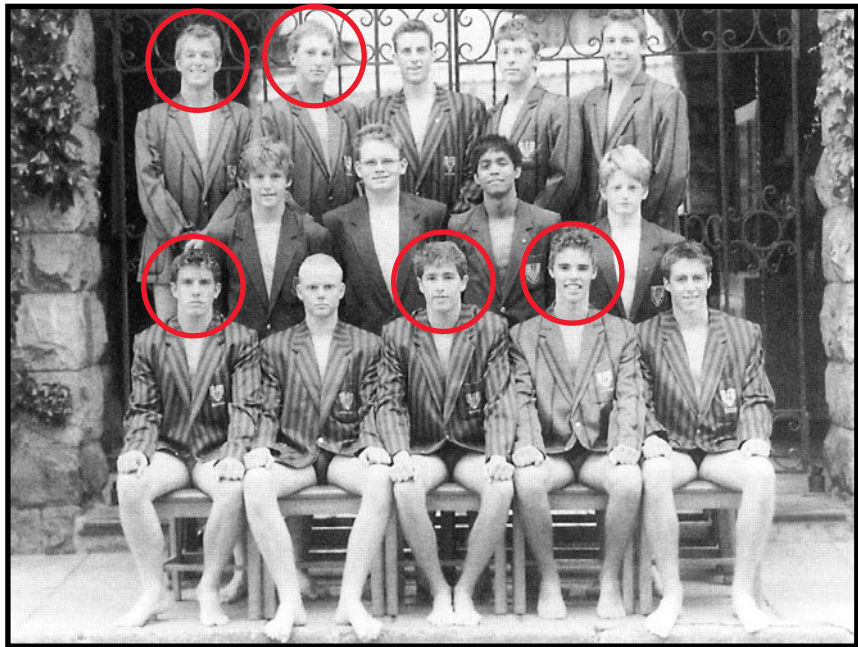
St John's headmaster Roger Cameron has told *Fairlady* magazine that the (there unnamed) parents had "decided to go away, leaving about 350 kids to party". Mrs Louw, speaking on condition of anonymity to *Fairlady*, maintained there was "one adult on the premises".

The truth about what happened at No. 5, 16th Avenue Houghton on the Saturday night of April 2 depends on whom you talk to. Or rather, who you want to stay on the good side of.

According to headmaster Cameron, Wayde received just one punch, delivered by a boy from Edenvale High. There was the possibility, he says, that one St John's boy kicked Wayde, but that was the only involvement of his pupils. Any other facial injuries sustained by Wayde were caused by Wayde himself when he fell face-first on the pavement.

Maxillofacial surgeon Nilesh Daya, who carried out the first operation to rebuild Wayde's face, does not agree. "From my experience the injuries sustained by Baker were as a result of repeated blows to the face and facial regions and were not consistent with a fall," Dr Daya states in an affidavit he signed as *noseweek* went to press.

Neither did the police, who subsequently arrested four boys in connection with the incident. Three were 17-year-old matric year pupils from St John's: Brian Dudley, Richard Gunn and a surgeon's son we cannot name since he is not 18 until the end of this year. The fourth was pony-tailed



HIT PARADE: Members of the St John's polo team against whom Wayde's mother, Lynne Baker, is claiming damages (ringed from left), top row: Jason Booij and Nicholas Louw; bottom row: Richard Gunn, Brian Dudley and Angus Henderson

Wesley Wiegand, an 18-year-old from the "wrong side of the tracks", who attended Edenvale High School.

All were charged with assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm to Wayde. On July 9, at Hillbrow magistrate's court, charges were withdrawn against Gunn and the surgeon's son. This leaves just Wiegand and St John's Dudley to face trial, which is scheduled to start after the matric exams, on December 5. Johannesburg's director of public prosecutions Charin de Beer announced on July 8: "At this juncture there is insufficient evidence to warrant a criminal prosecution against anyone else."

Wayde and his mother Lynne Baker claim that there has been a massive

cover-up. Mrs Baker has filed papers in Johannesburg High Court claiming damages totalling R724,000 from six St John's boys, plus Wesley Wiegand.

All but one of the St John's boys are now 18. Court papers name them as Richard Gunn, Brian Dudley, Angus Henderson, Nicholas Louw, Jason Booij and the surgeon's son.

They have impressive, if in some cases, sad, pedigrees. Gunn's parents are divorced. His mother Collette lives in Parkview; his engineer father Andrew Gunn left Johannesburg some eight years ago and now lives with his new wife in the Western Cape, where they own the magnificent Iona wine estate at Elgin.

Dudley's parents are also divorced.

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His mother lives in the US while his extremely wealthy father Frank Dudley, chairman of geo-technical contract company Franki Africa, is to be found with his new wife in a sumptuous Illovo property with high ceilings, marble floors and staircase – and a butler. The property, described as one of the finest in Johannesburg, is presently on the market for R12million.

The minor boy's surgeon father works in a Netcare hospital.

Henderson is the son of Old Johannian Blair Henderson, who sits on the St John's Council. He's financial director of Roll on Labels and the family lives in Houghton.

As mentioned, Louw is the son of John Louw, while Booij lives with his mother in Atholl.

Wesley Wiegand and his single mother, Wanda, are to be found in modest circumstances in Norwood,

brunette beauty of 18 who attends St John's sister school, Roedean. Her father Patrick Leary is a senior corporate banker with Absa. Wayde describes Ali as "flipping gorgeous", but their two-year relationship as "kind of on and off lately".

Wayde, who won honours in water polo at St Stithians, knew Angus and Brian; they had played water polo together as members of the province's Gauteng Colts. But Wayde says he had become "a bit peeved" at their interest in and intentions towards Ali. "I'd warned them many times before that – it was an on-going thing."

In August last year he encountered the pair at the Cool Runnings reggae bar in Melville.

St John's headmaster Roger Cameron has claimed that

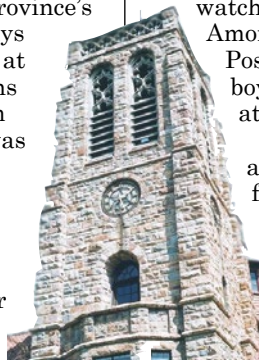
Wayde maintains that no blows were struck. "I just confronted Angus and Brian, it was like a push and shove thing in the street outside Cool Runnings," he says.

So, to April 2: after Bronwyn had opened her birthday presents, she and Wayde went to Grand Slam, a sports bar in nearby Witkoppen Road. They had "a few beers" with friends and watched a rugby match on TV.

Among these friends was Charles Post, a 22-year-old Saints old boy now studying psychology at Unisa.

From Grand Slam, Wayde and Charles went to Charles's family home in Sandhurst, where they spent the evening "chilling".

Wayde's girlfriend Ali, then 17, had been picked up straight from



Wayde was just holding his face. There was quite a bit of blood. I didn't know how serious it was till I saw how much pain he was in

where Mrs Wiegand has a small hair-dressing business attached to their home.

Wayde Baker, now 19, is the son of former St Stithians head boy Brent Baker, a mechanical engineer. Wayde's parents divorced when their son was three. His mother Lynne, a former history and English teacher at Rosebank Convent, works for a small estate agency handling corporate rentals and sales.

Before we come to the party in Houghton it is necessary to explain the background of bad blood between Wayde Baker and two of the boys from St John's, Angus Henderson and Brian Dudley.

Wayde's girlfriend is Alesandra ("Ali") Leary, a green-eyed, light

on this occasion Wayde and seven of his friends assaulted three St John's boys, that it had been reported to the police at the time – and, most importantly, that this incident explained why Wayde was not welcome at the Houghton bash this April.

Recently the unnamed father of one of the St John's boys (it was Blair Henderson, influential old boy and member of the college Council) told the *Sunday Times Metro* supplement that Wayde gave his son Angus a "big klap" that night in Melville, which resulted in a black eye and cut lip. The *Sunday Times* stated: "Metro has been able to confirm that in August last year a complaint of assault against Baker was made to the [Rosebank] police by the family of a St John's boy."

Was it? Last month Lynne Baker obtained a written statement from the police area commissioner's office. The cops could only dig up a report that had been made at Rosebank police station on 10 August 2004 about "a fight between schoolboys". Wayde Baker's name did not feature in the report, says the statement, "and there has never been a case opened against Wayde Baker".

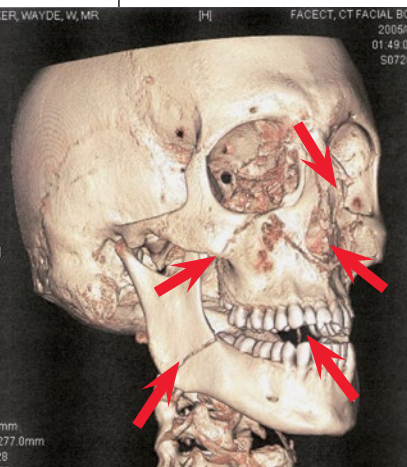
the brunch; she was going out with her friend Gemma. In the course of the evening Wayde called her on her cellphone "to see how she was doing. Ali said she was at this party and they were going somewhere else in a taxi," says Wayde. "I said I'd pick her up and take her wherever she wanted to go."

What happened next is important. Ali passed her phone to a party guest who is another member of the St John's water polo team, Chris Brown (front row, extreme right in the team photograph), who gave Wayde directions to the Louw residence.

Wayde and Charles drove to Houghton in Charles' dark blue BMW 318i. On the way Wayde made a brief call to his mother to tell her where he was going and to confirm directions.

When they arrived they parked in the street and walked up the short drive and through the open gate to the party in the garden at the back of the house. They didn't know it, but Ali and Gemma were waiting in the street and if they hadn't missed each other what followed would never have happened.

Within minutes of arriving, Wayde received a call on his cell from his mother, checking whether he had



BROKEN: Wayde Baker's CT scan shows the damage done to his face

found the place. Vodacom cellphone records show that Mrs Baker made this call at exactly 9.55 pm.

"Wayde was not drunk, as has been suggested," she says. "He never answers the phone when he's had a lot to drink, because he knows how anti I am. We had a perfectly coherent conversation."

In the background Mrs Baker could hear "this terrible noise. I could hear them chanting 'Wayde! Wayde! Wayde!' I thought it was just kids fooling around. I didn't know that they had already started to surround him. Then he said: 'I've got to go mom' and the phone went dead."

Says Wayde: "I remember them coming at us and swearing at us. They said we were not welcome and we must leave. Charles said 'I think we'd better leave'.

"As we were walking out they were pushing us from behind. There were lots of them, pushing us all over the show. When we got out of the gate I got hit by something. I was hit in the mouth first shot.

"I thought it was a bottle. I felt things breaking; it was probably my teeth. That's all I can remember until I got into the hospital."

Charles, who combines his university psychology studies with coaching rugby at St David's Marist College says: "We weren't drunk and Wayde wasn't carrying a weapon, which has been claimed.

"Some guys came up, saw Wayde and said: 'what the hell are you doing here?'. Then one of the guys disappeared and came back with some more guys. One of them had a hockey stick.

I said to Wayde, 'We'd better get out of here'.

"We started walking out. The group kept on getting larger and they kept shouting and pushing us from behind. We got outside the gate, on the main road going down to my car, when one of the guys ran up and hit Wayde with something. I don't know exactly what it was.

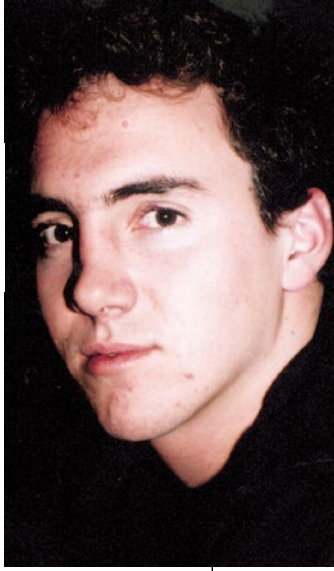
"Wayde was standing next to me on my right. I just saw him through the corner of my eye get hit with something in the face. He just dropped to the ground and that's when other guys started to climb into him. There were probably 20 or so guys. The one with the hockey stick was there.

"They were kicking him while he was on the floor. It was a frenzied attack, one of those things that just happen so quickly. They were definitely kicking him. They were shouting and screaming. One of the guys was up in my face the whole time, swearing and screaming at me.

"I was just trying to stop the guys from climbing into Wayde. I was just trying to stop them and get Wayde into the car and away. Then one of the guys - I've been told his name is Chris Brown, he was actually from St John's as well - helped me get Wayde up and he helped me stop the guys, because they were all climbing into him [Wayde] and stuff.

"Ali and her friend Gemma and this guy from St John's helped me get Wayde in the car. Eventually I got in as well. Wayde was in front. He was just holding his face. There was quite a bit of blood. I didn't know how serious it was till I saw how much pain he

BLACK DAYS: Following the vicious attack on him, Wayde Baker has been unable to pursue his university studies



was in. I just put my headlights on and rushed to the hospital. As I was pulling out, they were all banging on the back of my car. Next day I saw a dent behind the one door. It's still there."

Charles did not know any of the attackers by name. But when three St John's boys took part in an identity parade at Hillbrow police station on July 7, Charles was able to pick out all three. "They were the main guys I remember," he says. "One was the blond oke with the hockey stick."

The "blond oke" was the surgeon's son; the other two were Brian Dudley and Richard Gunn.

An email sent to St John's parents 12 days after the incident, signed by headmaster Roger Cameron and chairman of college council Michael Spicer (former head of corporate affairs at Anglo American), informed them that evidence had been collected from a "fairly wide-ranging" internal investigation, which had interviewed boys and girls from a number of schools, including St John's, who attended the party.

Declared Cameron and Spicer: "It is worth emphasizing that this is based on clear and consistent statements"

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from "a number of reliable witnesses". The "evidence" showed that a boy who was not a pupil of St John's hit Wayne with a fist, knocking him out. When he was on the ground it appears he was kicked by one St John's boy. (The puncher was Wesley Wiegand; the alleged kicker a boy named Stephen Michaels.)

Cameron concludes: "It is clear from the statements made by the boys that the three St John's boys arrested by the police are not guilty of hitting or kicking Wayde. The boys who were arrested were those who had been named by the girlfriend [Ali], who was allegedly drunk and hysterical and who has subsequently admitted that she did not know who hit Wayde, and apologized in an sms to one of the St John's boys for naming them."

What actually happened, according to Mrs Baker, was that Ali sent an apology by sms to Richard Gunn, who she lashed out at when she was attempting to reach the unconscious Wayde. Gunn threatened to have her charged with assault, hence her apology. Her statement remains in the police docket.

A phone call brought news of the incident to Ali's parents, Patrick and Francesca Leary, who were at the Pavarotti concert in Midrand. They rushed to Sandton Clinic. Patrick Leary says that Ali was certainly sober when they arrived there at about 11.30pm.

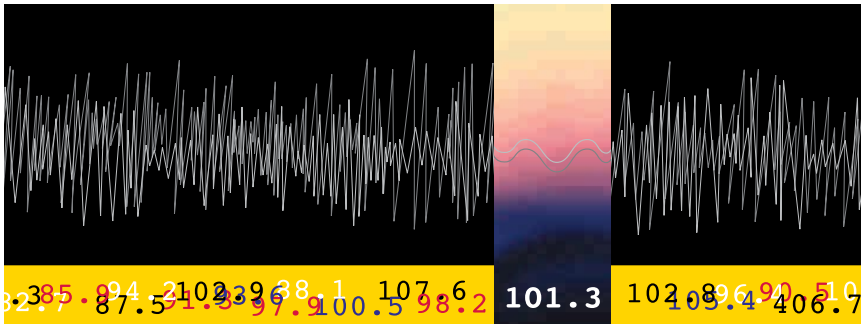
According to Leary, when he later confronted Cameron about his allegation that his daughter was drunk, the headmaster told him, "I heard it from St John's boys who were there. Quite frankly I said that in my email in order that one of the side effects would be that she would be discredited as a witness."

On reading the Cameron/Spicer email, Lynne Baker wrote to Cameron requesting him to hand over the statements obtained in his investigation to the police. There was no response. Finally a letter arrived from St John's attorney, Tim Gordon-Grant of Bowman Gilfillan.

This contained the surprising admission that no statements had been taken at all during the school's internal investigation! Even more extraordinarily, the letter goes on to say, "Certain rough notes were made and handed to the headmaster. The headmaster is unable to find these notes despite diligent search."

Charles Post says that Ali did not seem drunk to him, although she was certainly hysterical.

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He brought the injured Wayde, and Ali, to Sandton Clinic, where the boy was put on a drip. That same night he was moved to Sunninghill hospital, where, the following day, he underwent a five hour operation conducted by Dr Daya, the maxillofacial surgeon. Titanium plates were inserted in his cheeks and his jaws were wired. After three days his mother took him home so she could give him "proper" food, albeit liquidized and drunk through a straw. Wayde has also lost five upper front teeth.

In June an ear, nose and throat specialist, working with a plastic surgeon, rebuilt Wayde's nose.

Two days after the party, an email arrived at Lynne Baker's office. It said, "Mrs Baker, 20 people were involved in this attack." We know the name of the boy who sent this message. He is not from St John's. His parents are desperately worried about their son's safety for coming forward.

The statement he subsequently made describes the attack on Wayde as "a feeding frenzy". At least 20 boys were

and said, 'I'm very sorry about what my son did to your son'," says Mrs Baker. "I had to try and be calm, because I wanted to get as much information as I could. But I was also very angry.

"She said, 'My son punched your son once. But he never did all the damage that was done; that was done by the other boys'."

According to Mrs Baker, Mrs Wiegand went on to say that she was a single mother, with no money, and then cried: "They're going to lay all the blame on Wesley!"

Wesley then came on the phone: "Mrs Baker, it's Wesley speaking. I punched your son."

Mrs Baker says she asked Wesley: "Why did you punch my son when you didn't know him?"

"Because I was phoned and asked to come to the party for the prime purpose of beating up your son. And now they're going to blame it all on me," he said.

(Mrs Baker believes that

Angus Henderson, Jason Booij, Stephen Michaels, Simon Fourie and the surgeon's son – all from St John's.

"I wrote the names down in my diary as he spoke them," says Mrs Baker.

"I told Wesley, 'I can't condone what you've done, but I thank you for coming forward. But it's not good enough to tell me; you've got to go and tell the police'.

"Wesley said he would and asked, 'What about if I turn state witness?'"

"I told him he must discuss that with the police."

Mrs Baker says she asked Wesley why they wanted to beat up her son, and that Wesley told her, "It was jealousy over Ali and Wayde's relationship and jealousy about Wayde's good looks. That's why they went for his face."

"Why did they phone you?" she asked Wesley.

"Because I come from the wrong side of the tracks and I'm a fighter," he replied.

Mrs Baker says that Wesley was very polite and



I climbed on his back and punched him in the face and he fell. Then the others laid in. They used cricket wickets and bottles

involved. He calls it a horror attack and says that Wayde didn't have a chance. After Charles had rushed Wayde off to hospital this witness says that Richard Gunn, Brian Dudley and the surgeon's son rejoined the party, bragging about what they had done. "I hit him", "I did this", "I wish I'd done more".

Of her mystery witness, Lynne Baker says, "It was wonderful: one boy out of all those boys who's had the honesty and the conscience to come forward."

The biggest break of all, however, came on the evening of Thursday April 7, five days after the party, as Lynne Baker sat in her lounge with Wayde and two of his old St Stithians classmates, Duncan Alexander (former deputy head boy who now plays cricket for Somerset West) and Nelio Jardim.

It was a call on her cellphone from Wanda Wiegand, mother of Wesley, who had been given the number by the police. The mothers had never spoken before. "She started crying on the phone

after Chris Brown gave Wayde telephone directions to the party, word quickly got out that he was on the way. Hence the phone call to summon tough guy Wesley. Unfortunately Mrs Baker forgot to ask Wesley who had phoned him).

Mrs Baker says Wesley told her that he had been on his way to a club in Rivonia when "they phoned me on my cellphone and asked me to make a special turn to the party."

"They said, 'There's a guy coming that we want you to beat up.'"

Describing his part in the fracas, Wesley told Mrs Baker, "I climbed on his back and punched him in the face from the side and he fell. Then the others laid into him. They used cricket wickets and bottles."

"I asked him how many boys took part in the attack," says Mrs Baker. "He said at least 15." At Mrs Baker's request Wesley then named seven of them as Richard Gunn, Brian Dudley,

sorry for what he had done.

"I wish I'd never woken up that morning," he told her.

"He started to cry on the telephone. I was crying. His mother was crying."

The following morning Mrs Wiegand called again, at 6 am. "She was even more hysterical," says Mrs Baker. "She said she hadn't even got money for bail."

Wesley handed himself in at Norwood police station. However, he made no statement to investigating officer Sgt Gerber about any of the above. He was charged and bailed at Hillbrow magistrate's court for R2000.

Lynne Baker wanted to cite all seven of the boys named by Wesley in her R724,000 civil action. But she had to settle for just five – plus Wesley himself. Stephen Michaels and Simon Fourie were omitted because she couldn't find their addresses – and St John's refused to assist.

When *noseweek* spoke **To page 19**

Liberty Lies

TAKE ONE: It's late September 1995. Meeting in the Liberty boardroom are the executive of Liberty's Individual Business Division (IBD): Yves D'Halluin, Gavin Came, Gill Bogie, James Skuse and Hershel Meyers. The successful introduction of a new computer program will soon make the company's Marketing Technology Support and New Business departments redundant. The IBD executive decides to close them down.

TAKE TWO: Back in the same boardroom, but now it's 31 October 1995, and this is a meeting of the Management Committee of Liberty's Board, chaired by then-MD, Alan Romanis. Yves D'Halluin is reporting to Mancom on the decision taken by his executive to close down the two departments.

(The minutes of the meeting later record, *inter alia*:

"YD'H explained that some 300 jobs in New Business Administration and MTS would become redundant, mostly during the first part of 1996. New assignments will be available for about 50. Industrial action and possibly a strike cannot be ruled out. Sixty five percent of the jobs affected are occupied by non-whites. [*The relevance of the latter piece of information? They are, apparently, more prone to the aforementioned "industrial action". - Ed.*] The roll-out plan is in preparation."

"YD'H would prefer to exhibit generosity in the necessary cash settlements...."

"It is vital that IBD executive members give consistent messages. Furthermore, although affected members of staff had previously been forewarned of this inevitable step [*this statement later conceded to be a lie - Ed.*], ManCom members and their secretaries were asked to respect the absolute confidentiality of this matter.

"No announcements or widespread discussions of these moves are to be made without the prior approval of A[lan] R[omanis]."

TAKE THREE: The staff at Liberty Life's

Liberty Life is a master at hiding costly facts from its clients, for which it has recently come under fire by the Pension Funds Adjudicator. It now emerges that the life assurer has much the same attitude to its employees. Liberty's determination to fib, even under oath in court, has cost 23 of their retrenched employees millions in lost income – and 10 years of misery

Cape Town office had been working tirelessly to get the insurance giant's hot new software package, Blue Print up and running. It was 13 October 1995, the massive project was almost complete, and the company had invited them to a celebratory function at the Waalberg Hotel in central Cape Town.

The tables were piled with delicious

eats and drinks ... but first, a speech and vote of thanks from management: Gill Bogie, sporting a bright red jacket, introduced herself as the new manager of the New Business department, where most of those present were employed. It had been the job of the department to capture all new clients' details onto Liberty's computer system. This was all about to change. For many months they had been working frantically to help set up a new computer program that would act as the interface between Liberty and its brokers, allowing the brokers to enter the client details themselves.

Introductions over, Bogie applauded Liberty and all the fabulous profit it was making (four billion rand of new business that year, with profits up by 54%). She then cheerfully asked the staff if they had any further suggestions on improving the system, adding in passing that "New Business will become redundant once Blue Print becomes operative".

A slip of the tongue.

Ferza Dramat, section head of New Business and a Liberty employee for 15 years, was stunned as the penny dropped. She watched in amazement as colleagues gave Bogie suggestions on how to make Blue Print more effective. Manager John Evans, too, listened in amazement – until he could stand it no longer and loudly asked: "Do you guys realise you might lose your jobs?". A chill fell over the crowd. The snacks were left untouched. Bogie tried to recover herself, assuring her audience that "Liberty is not in the retrenchment field", implying that staff would be redeployed to other departments.

But, as we know, Liberty's top executives, including Bogie, had already taken the decision to retrench them. Management had also decided to hide the fact until they were sure Blue Print was running faultlessly. Ever prudent, they didn't want their loyal staff leaving with the job half done!

A month earlier, Shariefa Martin, New Business supervisor in Cape Town – she'd been with Liberty for 20 years – had heard rumours of an impending

closure of the department. She'd called her boss, who spoke to his boss, Larry Jacques, to find out what was going on. The word that came back down the line from Jacques was "nonsense!" – nothing was closing.

Finally, on 5 November, Martin was asked to make a special trip to the office to attend a staff forum on the issue. Hosting the forum was Wendy Van Gool, of Liberty's human resources department. All she had to say was that she'd "hear" their questions, and get back to them with answers later. (In fact Van Gool knew the answers without having to hear the questions, but she was part of a spin team set up by the division's executive of Yves D'Hallion, Gavin Came, Gill Bogie, James Skuse and Hershel Meyers to create the illusion of consultation – required in terms of labour law.)

Shariefia Martin and Ferza Dramat decided to take matters in hand. They approached Saccawu (The SA

had happened. They were immediately advised by Saccawu not to sign anything and to go into the meetings in pairs, stronger staff members with weaker ones – fearing intimidation. The tactic worked, and Liberty abandoned the process.

By March the staff were locked out of their offices, having been advised in a memo from Jacques that their "daily attendance was no longer necessary". On March 31 an internal company envelope arrived at the Cape Town office from Human Resources in Johannesburg. It contained just their unemployment insurance fund cards.

ACTION: assisted by Saccawu lawyer Manchise Katane, 23 of the retrenched employees (who had over 200 years of service to the company between them) took Liberty to the Industrial Court. In their request for further particulars for trial, they requested copies of the minutes of Liberty's ManCom meetings for the period 1 October 1995 to 31 May

Esau was not allowed to leave the room until she signed a form accepting the retrenchment offer (thus denying her any right to complain afterwards)

Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union) for support. They and their colleagues wanted to join the union but Liberty refused to deduct union fees from their salaries, saying they did not recognise the union (a lie: Liberty's Johannesburg staff belonged to Saccawu).

Martin wrote letters to Liberty's management asking for clarification of their job status, noting every phone call made to them. It was over four months before she heard anything.

In February 1996, the affected employees were asked to appear, individually, at the Liberty offices in Durban and Cape Town, to "talk about their retrenchment". Anusha Esau, of the Durban office, was the first to go into the meeting with Larry Jacques and Wendy van Gool. Esau was told she was not allowed to leave the room until she signed a form accepting the retrenchment offer (thus denying her any right to complain afterwards). She was given two weeks' retrenchment pay for every year worked, and no option of redeployment. She exited the room and told her waiting colleagues what

1996. Liberty refused to comply.

The leading of evidence began on 7 April 1997 – a year after their retrenchment. Liberty had still not produced its minutes. Liberty's labour lawyer, Riaan du Plessis chose to call no directors and senior executives as witnesses, instead bringing line managers to the hearing as witnesses. The reason was obvious: they knew nothing, or very little, of the decision making process that led to the retrenchments. One of those called was Hilton Sacks, Assistant General Manager of Marketing Technology Support (previously known as Customer Services).

Sacks told the court: "I think that we have always operated in an open manner, where staff members are able to put any questions to any executive. I don't think that Liberty Life deliberately hides information, no." Sitting in court listening to his evidence was at least one Liberty executive who knew this was a lie: Andre Vermaak, the company's group human resources manager had been at the meeting where the decision was made to

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retrench 250-odd employees – without the legally required prior consultation. He also knew of the decision to keep the retrenchment plan secret.

And yet Vermaak was quite content to let Sacks attempt to lead the court astray.

On 27 August 1997 the employees asked the court to order Liberty to produce its management committee minutes for the relevant period. Liberty opposed the application, shamelessly declaring, under oath, that the minutes “are not relevant to the issues” in the case. They went further, claiming the minutes were “legally privileged”. Adding insult to perjury, Liberty even accused its ex-employees of “abusing the process of the court” by bringing the application!

Despite Liberty’s best efforts at dishonesty, on 1 October 1997, the court ordered the life assurer to produce the minutes. Liberty still refused – and took the issue on appeal to the Labour Appeal Court, dragging the matter out for a further eight months. But, come the appeal hearing, it took the Labour Appeal Court only a week to dismiss Liberty’s case.

So, in the first week of June 1998, the employees got to see Liberty’s incriminating Mancom minutes for the first time.

In one stroke it became clear that Liberty had known it had no legitimate defence from day one – and that it had without doubt itself been abusing the legal process.

By then, however, there was only one Liberty witness still due to testify who could be confronted with the nasty can of worms. That last witness was André

Vermaak, Liberty’s group human resources manager.

Lawyers look after their own: first off there was a frantic runaround to explain away how Liberty’s legal team had come to settle and file – and argue – all those perjured affidavits. So Vermaak was required to begin his evidence with the (unlikely) declaration that Liberty’s affidavits had been drawn up without legal advice and without a lawyer in sight. (*Liberty apparently employs incompetent lawyers who are prepared to present and argue affidavits without first having checked their veracity.* – Ed.) That was just the beginning of Vermaak’s humiliation.

The Industrial Court, on 30 September 1999, instructed Liberty to pay the applicants the salaries due to them for the years 1996 to 1999, as well as to reinstate 12 of the 23 who wished to return to the company – entitling them to salary payments from the day they were locked out to date.

Liberty was unrepentant. Instead of doing so, it appealed to the Labour Court to have the judgment overturned. In due course, Liberty lost the appeal.

Why stop now? Liberty appealed again, this time to the High Court.

Just before the High Court hearing, Katane, the Saccawu briefed lawyer, disappeared with the R70,000 paid to him by Saccawu for his fee and that of advocate Colin Kahanowitz. As a result, Martin found herself facing the judge on her own. “It was the scariest day of my life,” she told *noseweek*. But she did well – and Liberty lost again. Finally, six years later, in October 2004, Liberty agreed to pay

the compensation it had been ordered to pay – but now it refused to pay any interest, despite the five-year delay. So off to arbitration they all went about the interest. Again time passed.

Earlier this year the arbitrator found in favour of the staff.

Surely, one would think, Liberty would sensibly – if not decently – now, finally, concede defeat? They haven’t. They’re still arguing – and holding on to all the money their ex-staff members are owed – by now eight years of salary and benefits (including retrenchment pay for those years), less any income they have earned elsewhere during that time, plus interest. Three have been unemployed since 1996.

It appears Liberty is clean out of smart actuaries, at any rate it has no-one able to accurately calculate what it should pay its retrenched staff in terms of the court order. So far they’ve proposed a figure based only on the employees’ 1996 salaries, allowing for none of the standard annual increases. In addition, the proposed payment makes no provision for pension contributions, insurance policies, and all the other benefits the staff were receiving at the time of their retrenchment. It does not include interest for the full period.

Eight years of anxiety later, we calculate that Liberty owes its 23 ex-employees together about R5 million, with another R5 million for legal fees. It also owes the public an explanation.

A question for our readers to ponder: if a company is so determined to lie and to cheat its own loyal employees of long standing, why would it not lie and cheat its clients? **W**

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Why is Britain planning to train Sudanese government spies after a UN Security Council report called for their prosecution for war crimes?

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School of hard knocks

From page 15 to Wesley's mother, Wanda Wiegand, she denied that her son confessed to Mrs Baker. "I only phoned her 'cos she wanted Wesley to become her state witness and the lawyer wouldn't allow it," says Mrs Wiegand. "Quite frankly, what Mrs Baker says is very untrue. Quite frankly, the truth is going to come out and then I'll give everybody my story. I have a huge story to tell."

Which of the mothers is to be believed? Mrs Baker says phone records will show that the April 7 call from Mrs Wiegand and Wesley lasted at least 20 minutes. A long time for Mrs Wiegand simply to refuse a request that Wesley turn state witness? And had Mrs Baker made such a request, surely she would have been making the call, not receiving it?

If you accept Mrs Baker's account of Mrs Wiegand's cry of poverty, then Mrs Wiegand must soon afterwards have found a benefactor, because a day later she had the money to pay Wesley's bail – and hire an attorney.

Criminal lawyer Paul Leisher has been hired to defend Wesley at his trial in December. "There are numerous contradictory versions as to what really

happened," Leisher has told *noseweek*. "When Wesley hit him [Wayde] it certainly wasn't in the circumstances that they are proposing. We're talking about an entire different scenario here.

"Wesley didn't attack anyone. This guy [Wayde] was drunk. He came in there with a baton. He challenged Wesley – and that's the situation. Nobody's made mention of the fact that this boy [Wayde] was drunk out of his mind. Nobody's made mention of the fact that he was highly aggressive. Nobody's made mention of the fact that he walked into this party as a gatecrasher, knowing that most of those guys there didn't like him, challenging everyone that he will bash them all up.

"And when he gets a hiding, nobody knows who did what. The mother's the main instigator here; she's painted her son lily-white. She will refuse to accept what really happened. And when I show what really happened, at the trial, we'll soon see what she has to say about it. That's when the truth will come out."

Which is roughly how St John's tells it.

So what's Wayde Baker doing now? The B.Com marketing degree course he had started at RAU in February proved impossible after the incident. Memory lapses, plus counselling and all the med-

ical and dental appointments put him far behind, so he's dropped out until next year. At present he's working as a supervisor to two young St Stithian's boys in Bryanston.

His civil case claim lists maxilla-facial surgery costs of R66,000; nose reconstruction R38,000; dental implants, braces and caps R170,000; psychological counselling R30,000; loss of university tuition fees and income R120,000; and damages for humiliation, degradation, pain and suffering, including permanent disability R300,000.

Last month an anonymous letter created by stencil arrived for Lynne Baker in the post. It reads: "We are very sorry we never came forward as witnesses for the attack on Wayde because we were scared of what could happen to us when we saw what they did to Wayde can you imagine what they would do to us if they were convicted..."

There have also been some middle-of-the night calls to Mrs Baker's cellphone. "Back off St John's," rasped a 1am male caller. Private detectives traced a second, made at 2am from a callbox in Killarney Mall: "When Wayde's better we're going to do it all over again." ■

Next issue: The amazing 'Amnesty for Honesty' proposal.

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Why the Afrikaans press hasn't the balls

Some newspapers have been reluctant to expose the misconduct of rugby supremo Brian van Rooyen.

Deon Basson sets out the reasons

IN JUNE 1995 South Africa's rugby supremo Louis Luyt disregarded pay TV channel M-Net, and negotiated a \$550m TV rights agreement with Australia's NewsCorp on behalf of southern hemisphere rugby nations South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

M-Net's offspring, Supersport, later had to negotiate a deal with NewsCorp to get the rights to broadcast rugby in Africa. For that privilege it had to pay a hefty premium; fully 42% of the cost of the rights that NewsCorp initially acquired was paid by Supersport.

It's important to remember that M-Net and Supersport are owned by the so-called "mainstream" newspaper publishers. In 1995 they were Naspers, Perskor, Argus Holdings and Times Media. Since then major rationalisation in the industry has left only two major publishing houses – Naspers and Johnnic Communications (Johncom) – as shareholders of M-Net and Supersport.

Directly and indirectly Naspers owns about 60% of M-Net and Supersport; Johnnic owns about 38%.

Rugby is an extremely important

part of Supersport's line-up. In 1995 Supersport earned profits of R12.9m on a modest revenue of R35.8m. By 1999 this had grown to profits of R35.8m on a revenue of R512m. And in 2003, the last reporting period before delisting along with M-Net, profits leapt to R88m on revenue of R961m.

Certainly rugby has contributed hugely to the commercial success of the sports channel.

When Luyt excluded M-Net in 1995, and did his deal with NewsCorp, there was a huge outcry. M-Net took Luyt to court but lost. For the rest of Luyt's

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tenure until 1998 he had an enemy in Supersport and its then CE Russell McMillan.

In 1997 Koos Bekker, previously MD of M-Net, became MD of Naspers. Under Bekker, exploring synergies between TV and print became a priority.

Visible evidence of this was when Big Brother was first televised in 2001. Naspers' Afrikaans daily newspapers published reams of promotional copy about the reality TV show. This was an early warning signal of what was to follow later with rugby.

After Luyt's controversial departure from Saru (South African Rugby Union) in 1998, Supersport and the rugby union were able to build a cosy relationship. Today that relationship may be considered a strategic partnership in which Supersport and other major sponsors provide the money, and Saru provides the product.

Supersport even holds a direct stake in three rugby franchises: the Sharks, the Free State Cheetahs and Griqualand West, although they are not hugely profitable and were, at least initially, acquired to get more influence in rugby.

In December 2003 Luyt's successor Silas Nkanuna was outvoted as president of Saru, and Luyt's former son-in-law Rian Oberholzer was sacked as chief executive. Brian van Rooyen succeeded Nkanuna. As it happened, the TV rights agreement was up for renegotiation the following year. Supersport certainly had no intention of losing out again as it had done in 1995. This time around it is rumoured that Supersport got a much better deal although details were not disclosed.

News coverage of boardroom infighting and poor management practices at Saru had been part of the rugby drama for many years. During Van Rooyen's tenure this didn't change. In fact, various senior members of Saru's executive resigned in protest against his authoritarian management style.

But unlike Luyt, Van Rooyen seemed to enjoy an unprecedented degree of protection against criticism by Supersport and Naspers dailies *Beeld* and *Die Burger*. All of these have virtually ignored reports and allegations of poor management practices by Van Rooyen.

This despite of a series of dossiers providing solid evidence of serious misconduct on Van Rooyen's part.

First there's the dossier compiled by former SA Rugby Board chairman Theunie Lategan and deputy-president André Markgraaff, handed in at a meeting of Saru's president's council in May.

It outlined wide-ranging poor corporate governance, authoritarian decision-making, poor disclosure and corrupt practices by Van Rooyen. Almost all the allegations were proven to be correct in a recent report by advocate Jan Heunis and attorney Adrie Brand. Heunis and Brand were appointed by the union's president's council to investigate Lategan and Markgraaff's allegations as part of an attempt to stop interference by government.

Among other things, Heunis and Brand point out that Van Rooyen continues to work out of his office at Labat, the private company he owns, but that the union is now paying Labat R1m a year for the office space. In addition they report that Van Rooyen has frequently ignored the proper procedures for the signing of contracts, doing so without the approval of the board and management committee. Why, one wonders, would he do so?

Having studied these reports and taking into account Van Rooyen's history as chief executive and chairman of Labat, where he destroyed value on an unprecedented scale – I believe he's unfit to run any public organisation in SA, let alone one of such size and importance to the SA public as Saru.

But accounts of the contents of the dossiers published by *Beeld* and *Die Burger* have been uncritical and sketchy, and Naspers daily newspaper editors continue to take a gentle approach to Van Rooyen's misconduct. *Beeld* has even dismissed Van Rooyen's misdemeanours as being "of a less serious nature".

True, Supersport appears to have made an abrupt about-turn recently when André Markgraaff, having resigned as Van Rooyen's deputy, was allowed to openly express his views about Van Rooyen's corrupt practices on Supersport's Boots and All programme.

But a TV-chat show comes and goes. Putting the story on the record in black and white, for people to read and think about is a different matter and Naspers daily newspapers have still not, at the time of going to press, properly informed their readers of the contents of Heunis and Brand's report. Obviously Naspers is sensitive to public perceptions about corruption in rugby and the impact this might have on Supersport's strategic relationship with the rugby fraternity and its profitability. But the Van Rooyen story will not die. How are the Naspers controlled daily newspapers going to explain their lack of editorial vigour when the day of reckoning arrives? **■**

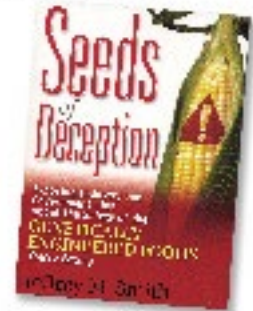
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Rammed down our throats

noseweek: What motivated you to write *'Seeds of Deception'*?

Jeffrey Smith: In addition to having the inside scoop on many of the dangers of GM foods, I was also aware of several scandalous stories about the biotech industry that would make good reading. Scientists were offered bribes or threatened. Evidence was stolen. Data was omitted or distorted. Government employees who complained were harassed, stripped of responsibilities, or fired. Laboratory rats fed a GM crop developed stomach lesions and seven of the 40 died within two weeks. The crop was approved. When a top scientist tried to alert the public about other alarming discoveries, he lost his job and was silenced with threats of a lawsuit. The warnings of US government scientists were ignored and denied by the Food and Drug Administration, whose policy chief was a former attorney, and later vice president, for Monsanto. A University of California professor claimed he was threatened by a senior Mexican government official who allegedly implied, "We know where your children go to school," trying to get him to withdraw an incriminating paper from publication. And news reports about GMOs were cancelled due to threats from Monsanto's attorneys.

I figured that these stories alone would be fascinating to readers. So I weaved the science and facts about the technology into the stories, and the book became the international bestseller on the topic.

Jeffrey Smith, author of *Seeds of Deception*, the best-selling book on genetic engineering, spills the beans to *noseweek* about the hidden dangers in the foods we eat and the way massive seed and agrichemical corporations such as Monsanto are manipulating governments and science to foist their questionable products on us. South Africa (along with Brazil and India) is one of Monsanto's key targets

What is your interest in Africa?

Many senior African officials I have met at various international conferences have confided that they have been pressurised by the US government and biotech companies, and have little access to the type of information that I have documented. I hope to pierce the biotech myths that advocates propagate, so that the public and Africa's leaders can make decisions based on facts, not spin.

Scientists representing the biotech industry claim that GM foods have been extensively tested and are safe. They say that anti-GM campaigners like you are unscientific and base their arguments on emotion. Can you comment?

A recently published linguistic analysis of biotech advocates concludes what many of us have observed for years. Using unscientific, emotional, and even irrational arguments, GM proponents attack critics as unscientific, emotional and irrational. In reality, critics demand more science, not less. We demand facts, not PR hype.

There are many ways in which a GM food could create toxins, allergens, carcinogens, or nutritional problems. The process of inserting a gene into a DNA can dramatically disrupt the normal genes. One study showed that as many as 5% of the natural genes changed their levels of expression when a single gene was inserted. Genes can get turned off or deleted, switched on permanently, scrambled, duplicated, or relocated. Gene insertion coupled with growing cells from tissue culture, creates hundreds or thousands of mutations throughout the genome. On top of all this, the inserted gene can get mutated, truncated, or blended with the crop's natural gene code. And it appears that the inserted genes get rearranged over time as well. Any of these changes can create serious problems in themselves, or set in motion a chain of reactions that can lead to problems.

Tragically, the studies conducted on GM crops are not designed to identify the vast majority of possible problems. When scientists understand the dangers involved with GM technology and then discover what studies are actually conducted, they're shocked. They realize

Jeffrey Smith has studied the issues around genetic modification for nearly 10 years. He has lectured on the subject, consulted with a nonprofit group trying to get GM foods labelled, run for US Congress to raise the public awareness about the issues, worked as the vice president for marketing communications at a genetically modified organism (GMO) detection laboratory, and has extensively interviewed scientists and experts worldwide. Over the past two years, he has toured more than 150 cities on five continents, debated with scientists, testified before various government committees, and interviewed activists, scientists, politicians, and farmers. He collaborates with numerous scientists on a monthly syndicated column and is preparing material for two more books on GMOs.



the extent to which consumers are being used as guinea pigs, just so the biotech industry doesn't have to spend the money doing the proper research. There are fewer than 20 peer-reviewed animal-feeding safety studies. And many of these are industry-funded and clearly rigged to avoid finding problems. No, GM crops are not adequately tested for safety. Part of my work is to bring that to the public's attention.

In 'Seeds of Deception' you cite a study by a leading expert on genetic modification, Dr Arpad Pusztai, which showed that a strain of GM potatoes retarded the growth of rats and damaged their immune systems. But is there any evidence of GM foods harming humans?

First of all, let's summarize the evidence collected from animals. Pusztai's government-funded study demonstrated that rats fed a GM potato developed potentially pre-cancerous cell growth, damaged immune systems, partial atrophy of the liver, and inhibited development of their brains, livers and testicles. Rats fed a GM tomato developed stomach lesions, and seven of 40 died within two weeks. Mice fed GM maize had problems with blood cell formation as well as kidney and liver lesions. Those fed GM soy had problems with liver cell formation, and the livers of rats fed GM canola were heavier. Pigs fed GM maize on several Midwest farms developed false pregnancies, sterility, or gave birth to bags of water. Twelve cows fed GM maize in Germany died mysteriously. And twice the number of chickens died when fed GM maize compared to those fed natural maize.

Remarkably, there have been no human clinical feeding trials, and no post market surveillance of possible health effects in humans. The UK's Food Standards Agency had asked supermarket executives for the purchasing data from the 20 million consumers using loyalty cards, so they could see if those eating GM had higher rates of cancer, birth defects, or childhood allergies. When the study was made public, the embarrassed government cancelled their plans.

Soon after GM soy was introduced to the UK, soy allergies skyrocketed by 50%. Without follow-up tests, we can't be sure if genetic engineering was the cause, but there are plenty of ways in which genetic manipulation can boost allergies. For example, the most common allergen in soy is called trypsin inhibitor. GM soy contains significantly more of this compared with natural soy.

I have also documented how one

epidemic in the 1980s was caused by a brand of the food supplement L-tryptophan, which had been created through genetic modification. The disease killed about 100 Americans and caused sickness or disability in about 5,000-10,000 others. The Food and Drug Administration withheld information from Congress and the public, in an apparent attempt to protect the biotech industry.

If GM foods do affect the human immune system, what are their potential risks in South Africa where we have a high incidence of HIV/AIDS?

If the foods were creating health problems in the population, it might take years or decades before we identified

symptoms to serious diseases. Certainly it could worsen existing diseases or create complications. Since no human studies are conducted, however, we don't know. It's best just to avoid eating GM products.

Critics of Monsanto demonise the company, but it has publicly pledged itself to the principles of 'dialogue, transparency, sharing, sharing in benefits, and respect'. Doesn't this indicate that their heart is in the right place?

Actions speak louder than words. Consider just a few of the facts about this company:

In 2005, Monsanto paid a \$1.5 million fine to the US justice department for giving bribes and questionable pay-



On May 23, 2003, President Bush proposed an Initiative to End Hunger in Africa

using genetically modified (GM) foods. He also blamed Europe's "unfounded, unscientific fears" of these foods for hindering efforts to end hunger. Bush was convinced that GM foods held the key to greater yields, expanded US exports, and a better world. His rhetoric was not new. It had been passed on from president to president, and delivered to the American people through regular news reports and industry advertisement.

The message was part of a master plan that had been crafted by corporations determined to control the world's food supply. This was made clear at a biotech industry conference in January 1999, where a representative from Arthur Anderson Consulting Group explained how his company had helped Monsanto

create that plan. First, they asked Monsanto what their ideal future looked like in 15 to 20 years. Monsanto executives described a world with 100% of all commercial seeds genetically modified and patented. Anderson Consulting then worked backward from that goal, and developed the strategy and tactics to achieve it. They presented Monsanto with the steps and procedures needed to obtain a place of industry dominance in a world in which natural seeds were virtually extinct.

Integral to the plan was Monsanto's influence in government, whose role was to promote the technology worldwide and to help get the foods into the marketplace quickly, before resistance could get in the way. A biotech consultant later said, 'The hope of the industry is that over time, the market is so flooded that there's nothing you can do about it. You just sort of surrender'.

From: *Seeds of Deception* by Jeffrey Smith

the cause. The L-tryptophan epidemic provides a chilling example. The only reason that doctors were able to identify that an epidemic was occurring, was because the new disease had three simultaneous characteristics: it was rare, acute, and fast acting. Even then it took years to discover and was nearly missed entirely.

If GM foods affect the immune system, which has been shown in animal models, there are numerous ways that could manifest in humans, from mild

ments to at least 140 Indonesian officials, trying to get their cotton approved without an environmental impact study.

Six government scientists testified before the Canadian Senate that a Monsanto official offered them a bribe of \$1-2 million, if they approved the company's GM bovine growth hormone (rbGH) without further study.

Legal threats from Monsanto resulted in the cancellation of a TV news series about rbGH, the cancellation of a book critical of Monsanto, and the shredding

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of 14,000 issues of a magazine dedicated to exposing Monsanto.

Monsanto's PR firm created the so-called "Dairy Coalition" in order to pressure major US newspapers to withdraw stories critical of rbGH.

Documents that were stolen from the FDA showed that when Monsanto researchers wanted to show that rbGH didn't interfere with fertility, they allegedly added cows to the study that were pregnant, prior to injection.

Other researchers supporting rbGH had pasteurized milk 120 times longer than normal and even spiked the milk with huge amounts of powdered hormone, to try to claim that pasteurization destroyed the hormone.

Monsanto omitted incriminating data altogether from their 1996 published study on GM soybeans. When it was later recovered by an investigator, it showed that GM soy contained significantly lower levels of protein and other nutrients, and toasted GM soy meal contained nearly twice the amount of a lectin that may block the body's ability to assimilate other nutrients. Furthermore, the toasted GM soy contained as much as seven times the amount of trypsin inhibitor, a major soy allergen. Monsanto named their study, "The composition of glyphosate-tolerant soybean seeds is equivalent to that of conventional soybeans."

In the feeding portion of the same study, they fed mature animals instead of the more sensitive young ones, diluted their GM soy with non-GM protein 10- or 12-fold, used too much protein, and never weighed the organs or examined them under a microscope. These and other flaws have made it the subject of peer-reviewed critiques, which exposed how GM food studies are designed in such a way as to overlook detection of even significant problems.

In July 1999, independent researchers published a study showing that GM soy contains 12-14% less cancer-fighting phytoestrogens. Monsanto responded with its own study, concluding that soy's phytoestrogen levels vary too much to even carry out a statistical analysis. Researchers failed to disclose, however, that they had instructed the laboratory to use an obsolete method of detection – one that had been prone to highly variable results.

Documents made public from a lawsuit revealed that FDA policy on GM foods was deceitful. The policy claimed that the agency was not aware of any meaningful or uniform differences between GM and non-GM foods, and therefore did not require any safety

studies. The disclosed memos showed, however, that the overwhelming consensus among the FDA's own scientists was that GM crops were significantly different, and that they urged their superiors to require long term safety testing due to the possible presence of unpredictable toxins, allergens and new diseases. The person in charge of policy at the FDA who apparently ignored the scientists was Monsanto's former attorney. He later became Monsanto's vice president.

One FDA scientist arbitrarily increased the allowable levels of antibiotics in milk 100-fold, in order to facilitate the approval of Monsanto's rbGH. She had just arrived at the FDA from Monsanto.

Monsanto consistently reported increased yields on GM soy, canola and cotton, whereas independent studies show decreases. For example, scientists published a study demonstrating a nearly 80% increase in Indian cotton yields based only on test plot data supplied to them by Monsanto. In May, 2005, however, a study by the government of Andhra Pradesh found a decrease of about 18%. When they told Monsanto to pay about US\$10 million compensation to the farmers, the corporation refused and was kicked out of the state altogether.

Monsanto has a long history of wrongdoings. They had claimed PCBs were safe, DDT was safe, Agent Orange was safe. They were wrong. In fact, court documents revealed that the company withheld evidence about the safety of their PCBs to the residents of the town that was being poisoned by their factory. On February 22, 2002, a court found Monsanto guilty of negligence, wantonness, suppression of the truth, nuisance, trespass, and outrage. Outrage, according to Alabama law, usually requires conduct "so outrageous in character and extreme in degree as to go beyond all possible bounds of decency so as to be regarded as atrocious and utterly intolerable in civilized society."

Monsanto's detractors criticise the fact that the company has patented seeds and other genetic material. Surely they are entitled to protect their intellectual property, just like any other inventor?

There is enormous controversy about patents on life. Further, many believe that patenting genes is more about discovery than invention, and is therefore privatizing what should remain in the public commons. It's also interesting how Monsanto chooses to enforce its patents. They have sued 150 farmers in North America and received more than



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\$15 million in judgments. In one case, they sued a farmer who had the company's seeds blow onto his land from a nearby farm and by passing trucks.

Have Monsanto ever tried to silence you?

Because my book is now influencing policy in many regions, I occasionally hear criticism from biotech advocates who try to dismiss the book as a whole. They don't challenge specific details, however, since the book is carefully documented and has been through a thorough review by many senior scientists.

The website www.health24.com says that 'there are exhaustive tests to ensure that any genetic change in a foodstuff does not increase the allergenicity of the food.' If GM food is as questionable as you say, why have US regulatory authorities allowed products that contain GM material onto supermarket shelves?

The FDA's own scientist Carl Johnson wrote in a memo, "Are we asking the crop developer to prove that food from his crop is non-allergenic? This seems like an impossible task." It is impossible to guarantee that a GM crop isn't an allergen. People tend to develop allergies after being exposed to a substance over time. But the proteins newly introduced into GM crops typically come from bacteria and have never before existed in the human diet.

The World Health Organization developed a list of criteria designed to minimize the likelihood that a foreign protein from a GM crop will be allergenic. Unfortunately, the GM soy, maize, and papaya already on the market fail those criteria.

In addition, the process of gene insertion can disrupt the DNA and increase a known allergen or create a new unknown allergen.

Not only is there no comprehensive allergy testing before GM foods are released, remarkably there is no post market surveillance. When it was revealed that soy allergies skyrocketed by 50% after GM soy was introduced into the UK, it's simply amazing that no follow up studies were conducted to see if GM soy was more allergenic.

You are clearly concerned about the way GM foods are being developed and marketed, but do you think the technology has any potential benefits?

The current technology used in GM crops on the market is based on science that is 40 years old. Many of the key assumptions used as the basis for

safety claims have been overturned. We know very little about how the DNA functions, and our paradigms are being shifted every few months with new discoveries. I am not against DNA research. And perhaps in the future we can safely manipulate genes for crops or food. But at this stage, it is irresponsible to feed the products of this infant science to millions of people or release them into the environment where they can never be recalled.

My focus, by the way, is not on medical uses of biotechnology, which has an entirely different equation of risk versus benefit.

South Africa has authorized the growing of GM maize for human consumption. Do you know the nature of this modification? What is its intended outcome?

The primary trait added to GM corn is the insertion of a gene that creates the Bt-toxin, which is a pesticide. The industry claims that Bt is safe, since it has been used in an organic pesticide for years. This is utter nonsense.

The GM Bt-toxin is engineered to be far more toxic than the natural spray

We are the only country in the world where a GM staple food has been authorized. How will this affect people where 80-90% of their diet consists of maize meal and fresh maize on the cob?

The GM Bt-toxin in maize is hundreds or even a thousand times more concentrated than the spray

The spray degrades in the sunlight in a few days, but the GM variety is produced by every cell of the maize, around the clock, and eaten by the consumer.

Mice exposed to Bt-toxin developed an immune response equal to that of cholera toxin, developed a greater susceptibility to allergies, and developed abnormal and excessive cell growth in their small intestines. Farm workers exposed to even the low dose Bt spray showed evidence of allergic sensitivity, and blood tests showed an immune response. Preliminary evidence found that thirty-nine Philipinos living next to a Bt maize field developed skin, intestinal, and respiratory reactions while the maize was pollinating. Tests of their blood also showed an immune response to the Bt. The only human feeding study ever conducted showed that genes inserted into GM soy actually transferred into gut bacteria. Imagine if the gene that produces the Bt-toxin were to transfer from the maize we eat into our gut bacteria. It could theoretically transform our intestinal flora into living pesticide factories.

In the US, we eat only 3-5% of our

caloric intake as maize. I dread to think what might happen to those eating GM maize as the majority of their diet. Some farmers who fed 100% GM corn to their livestock had catastrophes. Twelve cows died on a German farm. And about 25 farmers in North America say their pigs became sterile or had false pregnancies, or gave birth to bags of water.

In the US, GM potatoes were withdrawn from the market due to consumer pressure, but in South Africa the Agricultural Research Council with additional funding from USAID are fast-tracking GM potatoes, ostensibly to benefit resource-poor small farmers. Will GM crops benefit Africa's poor and starving?

The US decided to fast track GM food in 1992, because the Council on Competitiveness identified it as a promising area for increasing US exports and gaining control over the lucrative food supply. USAID has been trying to implement the US agenda in Africa, and many believe that they consciously use contamination as a means to promote acceptance of GM. In fact, University of Washington professor Phil Bereano reported in the *Seattle Times* in 2002 that Emmy Simmons, assistant administrator of USAID, "said to me after the cameras stopped rolling on a vigorous debate we had on South African TV, 'In four years, enough GE [genetically engineered] crops will have been planted in South Africa that the pollen will have contaminated the entire continent.'"

There are many safe, sustainable, and life-supporting technologies that can benefit Africa's poor and starving. Perhaps genetic engineering technology will progress to the point someday that it can also be a worthy candidate. But in its current version, I say, "Run away."

There is an interesting feature about GM potatoes that makes them potentially more dangerous than most other GM crops. We know that the process of gene insertion combined with tissue culture typically results in hundreds or thousands of mutations throughout the genome. Many of these mutations can be corrected through the process of outcrossing – mating the GM crop with non-GM crops. Potatoes are not propagated through outcrossing, and the massive number of mutations created from the transformation process may theoretically remain intact in the GM potatoes on the market. Scientists typically don't identify the genome-wide mutations before putting GM crops onto the market. It's a form of gambling with every bite.

South Africa, along with the US, is one of the very few countries in the world that allow the use of genetically engineered recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH) on its dairy cows. Is drinking milk from cows injected with rBGH safe?

There are a few known differences between milk from cows injected with rBGH and natural milk. Typically, rBGH milk has more pus, due to increased infections, more antibiotics, used to treat the infections, and more bovine growth hormone.

The hormone level that most critics are concerned about, however, is insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1). Natural milk contains IGF-1. Milk drinkers increase their levels of IGF-1. Studies suggest that pre-menopausal women under 50 with high levels of IGF-1 are seven times more likely to develop breast cancer. Men are four times more likely to develop prostate cancer. IGF-1 is also implicated in lung and colon cancer. Milk from cows treated with rBGH has significantly higher levels of IGF-1. (No comprehensive study has yet evaluated a direct link between rBGH and human cancer.)

might have this foreign protein being created inside of your intestines.

The promoter, which is inserted into soy to activate the foreign gene, also transfers to gut bacteria, and may switch on one of the bacterium's genes at random. And this could create a problem.

These are only a few of the reasons why people should just say no to GM soy.

Science is supposedly objective, yet many university academics defend the use of GM crops while others condemn their introduction vigorously. Why?

What may come as a shock to people is the extent to which science is no longer independent and objective. Studies show that the source of funds has a lot to do with the research outcome. Industry-funded studies favour industry's products. Many scientists admit to making changes in their findings to suit funders. In the field of plant biotech, practically all jobs are funded directly or indirectly by industry. We know of many examples of scientist who lost their jobs, or were threatened or penalized, after expressing concerns about GM products. Attacks on scientists can

Science is no longer independent and objective. Studies show that the source of funds has a lot to do with the research outcome

Up to 30% of the soya grown in SA is GM. Soya is used as a protein source by many poor people and in infant formulas. It is also routinely fed to prisoners and mineworkers. What are the implications?

In addition to all that was said above, we know that:

GM soy has sections of its DNA that were scrambled during the gene insertion process. These might result in the creation of toxins, allergens, anti-nutrients, etc.

We know that the inserted gene appears to be unstable and can rearrange over time. This means that it will create a protein that was never intended or tested, and may be a toxin, etc.

The protein it was designed to create has two sections that are identical to known allergens, and therefore might cause dangerous allergic reactions.

Since the inserted gene transfers to gut bacteria, even if you stop eating GM soy for the rest of your life, you still

get quite vicious. As a result, those scientists who still dare to challenge biotechnology are often of retirement age and feel less vulnerable.

So called independent panels and committees are often stacked with industry representatives. This is part of the industry's plan, as revealed in leaked documents. They have been remarkably successful at this.

As the technology flounders, revealing how unsafe and unpredictable it is, the industry promotes their biotech myths more vigorously. It appears that they are trying to prop up the image of the technology so they can recoup their investment before the public and the regulators figure out what's really going on. ■

■ *Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies About the Safety of Genetically Engineered Foods by Jeffrey Smith is published by Yes! Books. His website is at www.seedsofdeception.com*

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Dubya's watching you

Filters, that purportedly stop spam, are intercepting emails you send to your friends with any political message the US administration doesn't like

A MYSTERY AGENCY of the United States government is secretly imposing political censorship on private communications – worldwide – in the guise of “filtering spam” from regular email.

The latest threat to our freedom of expression and communication was discovered, by chance, by a dissident Israeli academic now based at London University.

As we all know, the problem of spam (unwanted email, some of it distasteful or noxious) has reached enormous proportions and has become not only a nuisance, but—by clogging the email system—a serious headache to internet service providers (ISPs) and a real danger to free email communications.

All ISPs are nowadays inundated with gigantic quantities of spam addressed to their clients. In order to overcome this overload, ISPs are using programs devised to filter out spam, so that they are able to block it before it reaches you, the user.

These filters are of two kinds. The more benign kind sends the suspected spam mail item to a “quarantine” (usually managed by a commercial company, not by the ISP itself), where you, the addressee, can, if you wish, inspect it (via an internet browser such as Netscape or Explorer) and release the false positives (the items incorrectly identified as spam by the filter program), for delivery to your in-box as originally intended by the sender. You can also delete the remaining real spam; or, if you don't, the manager of the quarantine will delete it after a few days. This is the kind of filter that is used by the ISP at the University of London, where Moshe Machover is an emeritus professor in King's College. The commercial firm that manages the filtering is Spam Manager, based in the US.

The less benign form of filtering entails the ISP simply blocking the suspected spam message and dumping it into a “black hole” (cyberspace's virtual Guantanamo Bay). You, the addressee, cannot get it released by any simple procedure. You don't even get to know that it has been blocked, (unless you are informed by the sender, who may get a “bounce” notice saying that the intended addressee has not received the message). IT mega-giant America On Line (AOL) uses this kind of filtering. If AOL is your ISP, this is how some of the email addressed to you gets blocked, without your even knowing about it.

In May, shortly after King's College's ISP started to use Spam Manager to filter its email traffic, Professor Machover noticed something rather disturbing: quite consistently, the false positives that he found in his quarantine box at the Spam Manager website were messages or newsletters sent to him by human rights and peace groups. It appeared that these groups (or something in the materials they were sending him) had been classified by the filter as “offensive”, resulting in their email being quarantined as “spam”.

The most outrageous instance was a newsletter sent to him by Amnesty International. (He is a subscriber.) The message, whose subject line was “One year after Abu Ghraib, torture continues” and was dated 29 April 2005, was quarantined by Spam Manager as “suspected spam”! Other cases included newsletters sent to him by Israeli peace/human-rights groups, and by a journalists' club based in London (established in 2003 to support those journalists, cameramen and photographers throughout the world who risk their lives in the course of their work).

Machover then noticed another strange thing. He often forwards material concerning human rights, especially

in connection with the Middle East, to friends. When he forwarded some of the newsletters from the human rights and peace groups mentioned above – messages he had released from the Spam Manager quarantine – he promptly received a “bounce” notice from AOL, telling him that those of his friends who have AOL as their ISP had not received his messages, as they were classified as “spam”. (These friends were themselves told nothing by AOL; he had to inform them of this.)

It appeared that these human rights and peace groups—or something included in their messages – had been put on a blacklist used by both Spam Manager and AOL. Moreover, the reason for blacklisting was evidently political.

One of his friends who happened to use AOL had had a similar experience: researcher Charles Pottins had read a piece by Uri Avneri, titled “Open Letter to Bar Ilan University”, published by Israeli human rights group Gush Shalom – and decided to forward it on to a number of colleagues. In several cases – all on university servers – the message was bounced back to him, having been rejected as spam.

He then learned from Moshe Machover that he, too, had had the same message bounced.

Reports Pottins: “I tried to find out from my internet server, AOL, what was going on, but have, to date, not received any explanation from them.”

Pottins and Machover then tried an experiment: they copied the same article, but this time deleting the Gush Shalom website address, which had been included as a clickable link in the message, and sent it to people from whose servers it had previously been bounced back. Result: it got through. Then they put the website address back – and the message was bounced!

What was blacklisted in this case was

not the email address of the original sender, nor the main text of the message, but the URL (internet address) of Gush Shalom's website.

"After some frustrating email exchanges with the person in charge of my internet service provider," says Machover, "I had a face-to-face meeting with two of the very senior people in that unit.

"They confirmed that not only Spam Manager and AOL, but other ISP spam

the US's largest cable and high-speed internet companies, was blocking and deleting email addressed to its subscribers, emanating from certain People Link accounts.

"After much investigation we further discovered that the block was being imposed on any email that contained the URL for the After Downing Street website," says Alfredo Lopez, director of People Link. The After Downing Street site is the work of a coalition

and coalitions working on this issue across the country," says Lopez.

After much pressure by coalition leaders, the block was removed – but the software that automatically imposed the block and the policies leading to it are still very much in place.

Once an item gets blacklisted, it is very hard indeed to get it "whitelisted". "Apparently, you have to provide impossibly stringent guarantees for the future good behaviour of, say, the

Human rights and peace groups had been put on a blacklist ... and the reason for blacklisting was political

filters, worldwide, use the same blacklist, which is US-based. It transpired that the US administration has applied pressure on all concerned to use that US-based blacklist, which is fed into a program that automatically filters and defines as spam any message containing a blacklisted item."

Apparently, the blacklist consists of "offensive" email addresses, URLs, words and phrases. Most of these are politically neutral and their inclusion is at least generally acceptable.

But the blacklist evidently also contains items whose inclusion is politically motivated. "The two senior people whom I met were unable to tell me what exact criteria are used for blacklisting: apparently this is a Great Commercial Secret, which is a sealed book even to them."

They also confirmed that it would be possible for some malicious person (or, more likely, group of persons), motivated by political hostility, to complain to their ISP that, say, some website contains "offensive" material, thereby causing the URL of this website to be secretly added to the blacklist.

"Or – even more disturbing – Big Bushy Brother himself can order an item to be blacklisted. Undoubtedly, this is used to stifle and muzzle "inconvenient" political discourse, mainly concerned with the violation of human rights and displaying disrespect to BBB," said Machover in May.

It took only two months for his suspicions to be proven correct.

In mid-July, People Link, a US internet service provider that caters for human rights and other dissident groups, discovered that Comcast, one of

seeking the impeachment of George Bush for misleading the American people on the Iraq war (as was revealed in the Downing Street memo). The site gets over a million hits a day, making it the most popular and successful site hosted by People Link. (Those interested can go to www.afterdowningstreet.org).

"This email block, about which Comcast never informed us, caused major disruptions in the coalition's work and that of many organisations

owner of the blacklisted URL. Might as well forget it, I was told – but not in so many words, of course," says Machover.

What can you do about this outrage? First of all, make it widely known. Evil triumphs when decent people stay silent. Second, choose an ISP that does not simply dump "suspected spam" addressed to you. Third, if you get a bounce message telling you that a message you sent has been blocked as spam, let the addressee know about it – and tell *noseweek*. ■



"The dip in sales seems to coincide with the decision to eliminate the sales staff."

Racy saints and toucans



Brazil can give South Africa a good run for its money in terms of exotic wildlife, crime levels and racial definitions (they have the refinement of two shades of white)

NOSEARK SKIPPED last issue because a key member of the team went off to a big international conservation biology conference in Brasilia, the over-designed Modernist capital of Brazil. The event was one of those semi-organised affairs where thousands of delegates fly thousands of miles spewing thousands of kilos of greenhouse gases from their planes to spew thousands more clouds of hot air at thousands of other delegates incarcerated in uncomfortable lecture theatres.

Actually, one shouldn't be so cynical. Incredible examples of conservation in action were showcased and impressive presentations by many South Africans showed that we are among the world's best at looking after the planet's wild species.

Before and after having our brains addled by eight parallel sessions of speakers, some of us even managed to experience some of Brazil's extraordinary wildlife. Being an avid birder, your correspondent was thrilled to have landed in a country with more than 1700 species!

The first bird to be ticked off on our list was the Burrowing Owl – common in the ultra-wide traffic islands of Brasilia's counter-intuitive highway system. These brick-high critters stand around all day at the entrances of their burrows looking cute and more than a little bored. At night they hawk insects from lamp-posts, appearing like the winged silhouettes of decapitated Smurfs.

The national park on the city limits turned up a Toco Toucan, an extraordinary creature whose oversized bill

appears made of PVC, covered in a multi-hued custom spraypaint job. Also seen there was a Red-legged Seriema (perhaps best described as a miniature blue-eyed, pink-limbed Secretary Bird) that displayed absolutely no fear of humans and wandered around us in a self-absorbed daze, and a Crested Caracara, an odd bird of prey that at first glance seemed to be a predatory turkey-parrot.

Brazil's best birds have to be its hummingbirds. These sub-10 gram flying jewels have decided that buzzing around like hyperactive insects at several thousand r.p.m. is way more fun than being regular avians. Their wings move so fast that they're invisible, and they go from flying at brain-boggling speeds to hovering on the spot in fractions of fractions of a second. Their energy output is so high that a few jars of them should be able to power Germiston. (That's a hint for Eskom's research department, for when the pebble-bed modular reactor project finally falls apart.)

The vegetation around Brasilia bears an uncanny resemblance to the broad-leaved savannas of southern Angola or central Zimbabwe. The trees, although unrelated to African ones, are extraordinarily similar to ours,

down to the detailing of the bark and the form of the leaves. Back in Gondwanan times we were joined to what is now South America. Our soils are similar, as are the climatic conditions, so it's not surprising that the veg-

etation should turn out the same. What was surprising was that our savanna ecosystems evolved in the presence of large, ecosystem-engineering herbivores like elephant and buffalo. Brazil is devoid of such animals. The biggest mammal we saw was a monkey stealing rubbish from a bin.

A local biologist later told us that South America had indeed hosted large woolly mammoths and gigantic ground sloths that filled much the same role as our elephants – that is until a few thousand years ago, when the First Peoples of South America, aka Amerindians, moved in from North America and wiped them out completely. (Oops. There goes the theory that all "indigenous" people are automatically nature conservationists.)

Some of the most interesting Brazilian wildlife was seen in the vast megalopolis of Sao Paulo during an unplanned trip extension courtesy of SAA's striking cabin staff. After kicking up a fuss at the prospect of being incarcerated in an airport hotel for three days, a strikingly beautiful non-striking SAA manager, Valeria, agreed to refund any taxi bills NoseArk might run up during our enforced stay. As a result, within three days we had seen enough of this city of 18 million souls (and large enough to make Hong Kong look like Port Nolloth) to know that, relatively speaking, Jo'burg doesn't have a crime problem.

Sao Paulo has something like 30 kidnappings a day. Folks who are rich enough drive bulletproof cars (there are hundreds) or take one of the 400 helicopters that ply the city's skies to work. Security guards, dressed like am-dram Mafiosi, are everywhere in the slightly wealthier parts. Ear-reconstructing plastic surgeons do great business. (If you've been kidnapped, your family gets sent a Polaroid of you, with a bit of your ear to encourage them to pay up.) Given



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the craziness of the city, it's no wonder that many of its citizens are devout Catholics, and in amongst the hundreds of 70s-style high-rises are some beautiful churches.

The Brazilian brand of Catholicism celebrates a Hindu-scale pantheon of saints, and doesn't shy away from gore. Most churches should be at least PG-rated. Bleeding Christ figures preside over a diverse (and often equally frightfully mutilated) collection of saints and martyrs available to answer the diverse needs of the passing faithful, hundreds of whom light candles and earnestly mumble their requests into clasped hands before their chosen intercessor. Most popular seemed to be Santo Antonio, explained to me as being the saint of lost things and lost causes. "My mother prays to him when she's looking for parking," deadpanned one of our travelling party.

Surrounding the big churches in Sao Paolo are Catholic shops stuffed to the rafters with rows and rows of luridly painted plastic or plaster statues of every saint imaginable. In Brazil, as in post-Apartheid South Africa, you can't get away from race. Only whites appear to qualify for sainthood - except for the ever-present token affirmative action candidate, Santo Benedicto, who is portrayed as a balding black man in earthen robes staring forlornly into the middle distance while cradling an angelic white baby.

Brazilians, we discovered, are also particularly race conscious in the mortal realm, although less so among the younger generations. Brazilian race categories parallel South African ones. Generally speaking, the darker you are



the poorer you are, and the lighter, the wealthier, although we saw plenty of blond kids in shanty towns and dark men in business suits. "Black" is variable, and often means anyone who isn't "white". The only significant difference concerns the category "Indian". It doesn't mean "from India" like it does in SA, but refers to native First Peoples. One doesn't see many of them and, to most Brazilians, they seem to exist in the realm of fairy tales. Thanks to the genocidal tendencies of Brazil's European colonisers, there are hardly any left.

There are two flavours of honky: "white" (what most North Americans would call Hispanic, i.e. dark hair and Mediterranean skin), and "very white" (what most South Africans would call white i.e. pale skin and a tendency to be blond). "Very white" people are generally foreigners (gringos) and are a prized catch for the gorgeous men and women that populate the country's nightclubs. When one of our Sao Paolo friends took this writer to see her family home her grandmother enthusiastically grabbed his pale cheeks and congratulated the woman on bringing home a "very white" man.

"My grandmother would kill me if I ever brought home a black boyfriend", she later told me - although some of her "white" friends had crossed the colour line.

The Santo Benedicto figurine your lily-white correspondent brought home seems unmoved by the news that racial prejudice is slowly fading. Ben's also not saying where he got the baby. **■**

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Puzzling prizes

A **BIG BRIT** fish in the tannic little wine-writing pond, Jancis Robinson, once gratefully remarked in an essay on the pleasures of her job that when people invite her to dinner they generally offer the best wine they have. This is clearly another exemplification of the cruel truth that unto those that have shall be given – really, the high expectations should be on her!

Unfortunately, there are also less gratifying people around when it comes to entertaining wine-writers (certainly the small-fry). The most dangerous are the proud discoverers of some little-known and desperate co-op. They tend to disguise the meanness that really prompts their offering by stressing either its rarity (“I bet you’ve never heard of this!”), or the sublimity that would waste its aromas on the desert air were it not for curious connoisseurs like themselves.

To make things worse, if they think you fancy yourself as an “expert”, they will require you to taste it “blind” (with the label covered) and then to guess that it’s a fine bordeaux from a great vintage. (And if you oblige for reasons of incompetence or mere politeness, you have little choice but to continue sipping appreciatively.)

Too frequently, these appalling people are encouraged by some or other wine judges giving their Dreckberg Dry Red a gold medal. I shuddered on reading a recent letter to *Wine* magazine sneering at producers of expensive “fine wines” who decline to submit them to competitive blind tastings. The canny correspondent smugly says he will leave such wines to those concerned merely with image: he will look out for “those rare gems with 4 to 5 Star quality at 2 Star prices”.

I wish him luck, and his guests fortitude. I don’t doubt that such gems exist (still less do I think that all expensive wines are good) – but a coincidence of genuinely high quality and cheapness tends to be of limited duration once discovered. Mostly I’m worried about the

Tim James hits the bottle



widespread belief in the virtues of blind-tasting competitions – even beyond those people who make a lot of money out of running and/or reporting on them.

The same issue of *Wine* mag carried ammunition usable on both sides of the argument. The Shiraz Challenge it reported on involved five judges and 180 wines. First, the former did a preliminarily sifting through of the latter – a formidable task even for the most experienced of judges (and this team was pretty lightweight apart from chair Michael Fridjhon). On Day 2 the judges retasted those wines which, as the magazine pompously puts it, they had identified as being “worthy of more detailed examination”.

The results were grist to any letter-writer’s mill. The Cape’s best-reputed and/or most expensive shirazes were scattered across the results, mostly pretty far from the top. The five-starred winner – Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2003 – was a new, top-level wine from a decently but modestly reputed winery. Famous (and pricey) examples like Boekenhoutskloof and De Trafford got three stars, significantly behind some no doubt pleasant cheapies.

But the real cause for derision (or for triumphant, parsimonious iconoclasm) came with the list of wines which

weren’t thought good enough to even be considered in the final line-up: there lurked many of the wines which, locally and internationally, are establishing the Cape’s reputation for good shiraz: amongst them Columella, The Foundry, Homtini, Vergelegen, Luddite, Simonsig Merindol (last year’s winner).

Frankly, the results of this competition must strike most well-informed wine-lovers as, on the whole, nonsense and worth much less than the glossy paper they were printed on. A not untypical blind-tasting result, the sceptic might shrug.

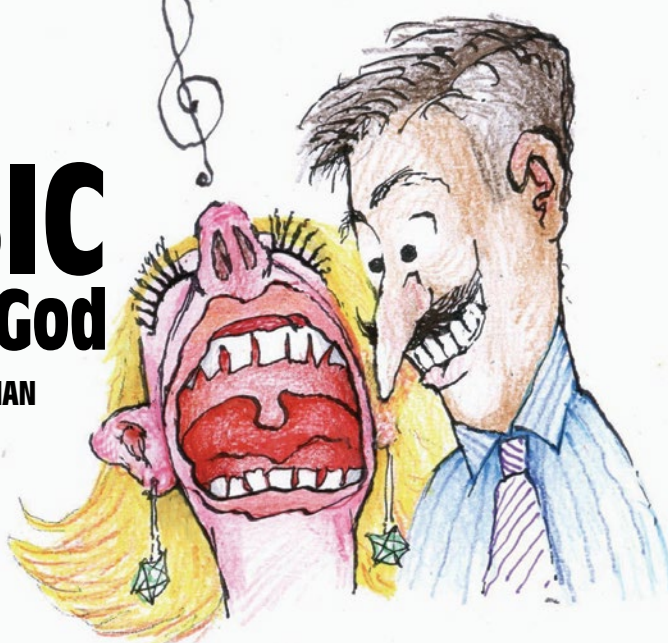
There are, of course, also problems when judges know the wines they’re tasting. But apart from avoiding the absurd conditions and contradictions of mass competitions, the difficult task of assessment is helped by understanding where a wine comes from, what it is trying to achieve, how previous vintages have developed, etc. As someone who judges occasionally in smaller, well-run competitions, and also does “sighted” ratings for, amongst others, the Platter Guide, I am always willing to defend my judgements in the latter situation, but not those I make in the former.

We expect restaurant and film critics – for example – to sufficiently put aside (or to usefully deploy) their prejudices when making judgements. Why not wine judges? How would we value the averaged-out ratings of a panel of film critics who had watched, in quick succession, dozens of film clips without knowing anything of their contexts of production and expected consumption?

Returning to the dangers of generous and knowledgeable hosts, I will share an anti-Utopian fantasy: on a visit to London, I invite myself to dinner with the great Jancis Robinson (on the strength of a little acquaintance and an ongoing laconic email correspondence). There I am, beaming and greedily expectant. But, says Jancis: “Here’s a treat! a bottle of chardonnay that must be really good – it beat dozens of great burgundies and got a Grand Gold Medal at a competition in Reykjavik....” **W**

MUSIC Gift of God

BY HAROLD STRACHAN



ON SUNDAY mornings Pietermaritzburg would slowly crank up its metabolism, like an old crocodile soaking up energy from the sun, until at about ten o'clock or so the City Hall bells would suddenly bust out in folk song: God Bless the Prince of Wales, they would chime, and Wheer Tell Me Wheer has Ma Hielan' Laddie Gone? The Bluebells of Scotland. English pieces too, of course, and plenty Irish. The green grass of Killarney. All sorts, genuine songs of the genuine folk, not the Tiekiedraai of your Afrikaner, Lord love you no, nor native stuff which was okay for concertinas and things but, you know, nothing you could actually SING, nor play on the City Hall bells. Natives sing it, they're all terribly musical it goes without saying, and get such reward from singing, that's why they don't need the vote, but their songs are all about cows and grazing and things way out in Zululand somewhere.

Nobody ever actually saw the old bloke who played the bells. We kids supposed he must be bloody old, he'd roll up his ancient sleeves and kick and pull at a whole lot of levers and cranks until he was properly clapped then put on his ancient jacket over his braces and bugger off at eleven.

At eleven the kitchen boys would appear. The breakfast dishes were washed and the boys' day-off begun. Off in an X-outsize blue cotton shirt with the removable collar removed and a tight waistcoat and canvas tennis shoes. Cow's-tail hair plumes tied below the knee, a shiny mouth-organ on a long shiny chain looped around the neck and a plywood guitar on another loop, of beads. Beads all about the neck too. The small song could well have been about cows on remote hills, I suppose; it went with the small plucky music, but my guess on such a sparkling silent Sunday morn was that it would be about love. Pietermaritzburg, City of Love and Light. City of Song. Now and then a vast car with ribbons up front and recently married people inside would blast past and blow its horn in imbecile glee, oth-

Natives are
terribly musical
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singing – that's
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need the vote

erwise all was so whispering quiet you could hear bees buzzing. And the small Zulu music, that's all.

By eleven a.m. Wattie and I with the last of our acne and nice new WW2 Air Force moustaches would have gone through an entire cultural cycle: six hours of that type of night-club dancing called Sex on the Hoof, at a place called the Blue Moon, falling out of love as the sun rose and we could see the lady, cleansing body and spirit with cold water and caffeine, and making our way to a rehearsal of Gilbert and Sullivan's Gondoliers, there to fall in love all over again once a week with the true pretties of the chorus. In full daylight. We couldn't read music, but who doesn't know the choons? The pheromones flowed, the spirit soared, sometimes the body too, if one wasn't careful, this wasn't the Moon, hey?

ALAS, THE evanescence of it all.... The Gondoliers disappeared with the Tide of History. But Handel's Messiah was coming up, along with the same pretties.... Sundays in the City Hall, when the bells had done.

Well, this was more than choons, of course, but Wattie and I we reckoned with our experience we could get along watching the lips of the pretties and listening up close, better any day than staring at a whole lot of notes on paper. Next to me was a healthy happy girl called Melody Meyer, no less, with good full lips and a nice wide mouth for studying. Some pompous old poep would keep us all going at roughly the same speed and made sure we were all more or less on the same page on his little lectern there.

I thought it all too grand, and PMB loved it, the loud bits especially. But no, says P.O.Poep, stupid old Pom, we're all singing like South Africans with our mouths shut. Open wide, let it flow! he cries. I want to see your vulvas vibrating! But vhat aboutt the chentlemen? says Herrn Doktor Schnabel who comes all the way from New Hanover for his love of G.F. Handel. All I hef is an uvula.

Yes, EVERYBODY, please, says Old Poep. So we all open wide and give it hell and I'm staring down Melody's cakehole to see her vulva vibrating as we get to the bit that goes

And His name shall be call-ed Wonderful,

Counsellor, the Mighty GA-A-ARD, and imagining how nice if she were to bite me one day, when O. Poep taps his baton and cries WATCH the BATON, Mr Strachan! Then sarcastically: You stare so at Miss Meyer, how would you realise if I had perhaps suddenly stopped the music? Because that's when her mouth would shut, say I. **W**

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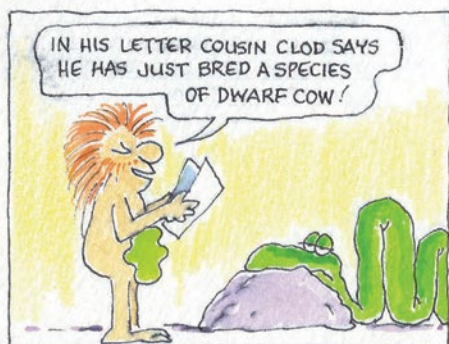
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