



DURBAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2017

Last year my report started off on a sombre note because we lost three stalwart members in Joan Law, Bob Youngleson and Hugh Thompson. Fortunately, we were spared similar ordeals this year. All in all I think it is fair to say that it has been a successful year and I have pleasure in highlighting the actual events that took place.

We kicked off the 2017 year with the Annual General Meeting that was held on Monday the 13 February 2017 and we were addressed by Dr Adriana Marais. Now Adriana matriculated from St John's College in Pietermaritzburg and then went on to our University. She got her doctorate in Physics *summa cum laude* which means that she aspired to academic heights that the rest of us could only dream of! She has been shortlisted for one of the 100 people to go to Mars. She gave an absolutely spell bounding address pointing out how Rover the robotic machine that was already installed in Mars is busy collecting up the necessary water and oxygen to store pending the arrival of humans. Now that she is down to one of the last 100 there is a chance that she would be one of those to go and with her impeccable academic credentials she must surely stand a chance. If she does make that stupendous journey, I did say in appreciation to her that those of us who are 70+ years hope to be able to live long enough to see this happen. It will surely be one of mankind's huge turning points. It will be particularly fitting if one of our own alumni was to go. The question was posed which would be on anybody's minds: what about getting back and what about this huge leap into this unknown? She countered that by saying that her original forefathers came out as French Huguenots from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and they had no idea where they were going or whether they'd ever get back. A very brave statement by a very brave girl!

After that we did something far more down to earth because we toured the iconic Lion Match Factory. This has been a rejuvenation of that entire area and it was interesting to see exactly how tastefully it is all being done. The Lion Match Factory has been developed largely by the JT Ross Group and they managed to arrange a tour. We were lucky to have a guide in Robyn Renzow who took us all through the various aspects of this unique development. Also, we were addressed by Dean Jay who was the architect responsible for the development. It is particularly pleasing that the façade with the lion right in front has been preserved. Thereafter the JT Ross Group served us with very delicious tea in the local restaurant, The Boiler Room.

After that we were addressed by Matthew Willman who is an internationally recognised photographic artist. In fact, he qualified at our sister institution, the Durban University of Technology. He has had commissions to photograph very distinguished people like US Presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter and a whole host of South African celebrities like Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Apart from that, he has photographed 12 Presidents and eight Nobel Laureates. What was however particularly interesting was his relationship with the late great Nelson Mandela. He developed into the official photographer for our former President and he has put together a wonderfully narrated "A Life Less Ordinary". Also he has put together a book "We called him Madiba". This was a very inspiring address and our thanks go to Matthew for his time. In fact he is a very busy person because I think the day after he addressed us he was off to Barcelona.

From that we descended into the world of Magic. We were addressed by one of us Mahommed Moorad who is popularly known as Mo Magic but in fact he started life as an Engineer. He qualified with a BSc in Electronic Engineering and he worked in the industry for six years but then resigned to follow his passion of entertaining with the Art of Magic. He had us absolutely entranced. He was right in front of us and we all watched him like a hawk and we could not understand how he could turn a one dollar bill which he exhibited right in front of us into a 100 dollar bill a moment later! He said that

being an Engineer was to be invaluable for his later career in magic. Obviously, the university background for him was particularly important in being able to pursue two very lucrative careers! He is a most distinguished member of our Association and our thanks go to Mahommed for his scintillating address.

We have to be ecologically aware as people who have had the benefit of tertiary education. In this vein we invited Richard Boone to come and address us. Richard works for the eThekweni Municipality and he is the Manager of the Biodiversity Planning Unit. It is pleasing to note that there are people in the Municipality who are sensitive to the ecological challenges that face humanity in general and the eThekweni Municipality in particular. His talk was entitled "The importance and history of the Durban Metropolitan Open Space System". This again was an outstanding address and it certainly opened our eyes to what is actually being achieved by people who care for the environment. He again is a distinguished alumni and I must thank him on behalf of our Association for his very interesting address.

From there we migrated at the end of November to Ladysmith for a tour of that historical town and also for Spioenkop where that momentous and tragic battle took place. This was arranged by Denis O'Leary and my thanks must go to him for his hard work. There were 12 of us and we were led by Shane Spargo who is a qualified tourist guide and is passionate about his subject. There was an interesting development in that half of the attendees were new members and I hope that we will see much more of them in the future.

Shane took us through Ladysmith with fine detail on the Friday. At the end of the day we were all exhausted and staggered off to our respective B&B's! The next day started with the tour of Platrand from one end to the other and again we had these stupendous views over the Ladysmith and the hills beyond. From there we all migrated Spioenkop. It was a beautiful day and again we had superlative views and could literally see forever. Unless of course the one view was blocked by the rampart of the Drakensberg on the westerly side! He explained the battle in meticulous detail and for once I understood the tragedy that evolved for the British when there were three commands at various stages on the top of that hill! We must also thank the Ladysmith Historical Society because on the Friday evening they entertained us at their monthly meeting and we were treated to a visual feast of the battlefields taken by one of their members from a microlight. Our thanks go to Shane and also to Denis for arranging it.

The final outing of the year is the Christmas lunch. We have since 2015 been having it at the Durban Country Club. Not only have they done us proud, but of course the big advantage is easy accessibility and lots of parking. While the Durban Club also did us proud, there was the logistical nightmare in trying to get there on time and trying to find parking!

This then concludes my address and in closing, I must thank members of the committee for their stalwart work during the year. Nomcebo Msweli has been ever efficient. You never have to ask her to do anything because she is always one jump ahead. She also has an eye for the finer detail. Rosemarie von der Meden has still been able to cater for our functions and we have to thank her very sincerely. All she has is the company of a little dachshund dog when she travels down from her home in the Midlands at Howick. She says that she likes doing it because it's a memorial for her late husband Eric von der Meden who was Chairman for many years. I must also thank Denis O'Leary because he has kept us solvent. It is nice to know that someone has the finer points of finances at his fingertips. Finn Christensen has also been a tower of strength at all times.

I think it has been regarded as an interesting and successful year. We look forward with enthusiasm to 2018 and the adventures that will unfold!



ROBIN RALFE
PRESIDENT