



Our World Ended...

RESPONSE 2 to LETTER

It was a life without many hassles for a child. Yes, we slept on the floor but there was nothing unusual about that. Nor was it uncommon to hear about or see a gang fight, catch the aroma of dagga when passing men standing on a street corner, or follow the Klopse (the Cape Minstrels to use today's politically correct name), or Christmas choirs.

We had a favourite activity during school holidays: collecting cardboard or bones, which we would sell to scrap dealers for money necessary to finance other childhood pursuits such as buying bruised fruit from the fresh fruit and vegetable vendors. These vendors once had their businesses on Cape Town's Grand Parade where fast food outlets rule today.

If one didn't feel like damaged fruit and the money was good one could always go to the brightly painted bungalows, also now long gone but still fresh in one's memory, to buy a soft-serve ice cream or a pie and samoosas from what was usually a family business.

One could also wander around central Cape Town, talking loudly as one ate and have a roving photographer snap a photo near the Post Office and receive his card. Later one could show up at the Movie Snaps (on the Parade), show your card, produce the required money and get your photograph. It never happened to me, but one could dream about it happening.

Then the letter came. We moved to a place where sandstorms were a new phenomenon, as were using trains, and where we could not hear the foghorn being sounded on misty Cape Town nights. Adults were shellshocked. Powerless to resist, they had to will themselves to start a new life, watching helplessly as gangsters and the thug life lured their children.

Forced removals and the deliberate destruction of communities lie at the heart of the rise of gangs on the Cape Flats.

As I was to discover in my adult years, the body can be forced out of a home, which would be flattened by a bulldozer, but these machines can't crush memories and emotional ties. These bonds might be quiet, but they don't go away. They resurface when least expected. When they come calling they might take the form of a childhood friend's banter, in remembering the City Hall clock announcing that another hour has gone and that a new one has arrived, or family events.

Buildings such as the Moravian Church, St Mark's Anglican Church and mosques escaped the bulldozers. Today they are a reminder of the community that once was District Six. So are the death notices in local newspapers that announce so-and-so, a former resident of District Six, had died.

My Uncle Boy never really left District Six. After a motor vehicle accident he was a different man. He would make his way from Manenberg, where he had been resettled, to the ruins of Vernon Terrace, searching for his home. Police would find him and return him to Manenberg.

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