



PROFESSOR RONALD ALBINO

Born 21.01.1916 – Died 04.05.2009

In the obituary columns of The Mercury on the 11 May 2009, my eyes were caught by this small announcement of a funeral.

I wanted to attend the funeral. Even Vino Reddy knew I wanted to attend, but getting a lift proved too much for me, and I gave up.

I started looking for some material on Albino and found the following in George Bizos's book *Odyssey to Freedom*:

A debate among academic lawyers and medical doctors current at the time of the trial concerned the acceptance of evidence from

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31.01.1916 - 04.05.2009
A Funeral Service for the late Ronald Albino will be held at St Thomas Anglican Church, Musgrave Road on **TUESDAY 12th May 2009 at 2.30pm.** Please send donations in place of flowers to Highway Hospice Association, P.O. Box 28, Westville, 3630.

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people held in detention without trial and obliged to make a statement to the satisfaction of their interrogators. Inevitably, detainees were also threatened with perjury if they later repudiated their statements in court. Prominent among the South Africa academic lawyers involved in this debate were John Dugard and Barend van Niekerk of Wits and Tony Matthews of Natal University.

When we tendered to lead the evidence of professors Danziger and Ronald Albino, psychologists at the universities of Cape Town and Natal, Yutar accused us of attempting 'to make political capital out of the provisions of the ninety-day detention clause.'

(Paragraph 2, page 259 of *Odyssey to Freedom* - George Bizos.)

My audience understood what I was saying. I would refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and speak of political and personal justice and draw attention to the provisions stipulating that every one had the right to full citizenship, the right to vote, the right to be elected to high office. I stressed that everyone had the right to a democratic government with regular elections and a right to equality and dignity, and that when people were deprived of those rights they almost invariably rebelled. I would usually end by quoting Pericles from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, a passage highlighted by professors Tony Matthews and Ronald Albino in an article published in the *South African Law Journal*...

(Paragraph 2, page 433 of *Odyssey to Freedom* - George Bizos.)

I (Phyllis) read for a Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Natal (non European section) at Sastri College from 1955 to 1958 with Psychology I and II forming part of the degree. Both Professors Danziger and Albino were my lecturers. Most of the students were teachers and part-time students then. Sometime we moved to factory premises in Lancers Road, quite close to a pub. We were not allowed into the hallowed halls of City Buildings Commerce Section.

Albino was a non-stop smoker. You just saw a cigarette hanging from his mouth and ash everywhere. I cannot recall an ash-tray. Like his face was attached to the cigarette – how he lit up I cannot remember.

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Then at one lecture, there was something strange and I wondered what? There was no cigarette. Later in the lecture I noticed him pinching out of a snuff box. Me and my big mouth, I blurted out: 'You are snuffing!'

He was embarrassed and said 'I will talk to you after the class.' I did wait after class and he said to me 'how can you do that?' He ended up giving me a lift to my home in Wills Road and just chatting. His lectures I enjoyed.

Much later I was aware that he conducted experiments with his students to inquire into the effects of isolation on detainees under the 90 day laws. He gave evidence in a number of trials and especially the Rivonia trial where his arguments with Yutar, the prosecutor, were carried by our local press.

Christopher Merrit, a journalist attached to *The Witness*, in his email to me dated 19/6/09 said:

From 1985 to 1990 I was part of the detainee support network (Descom/Dacom) in Pietermaritzburg, but was only vaguely aware of Professor Albino. However, I do know that he testified for the defence in Kader Hassim's trial of 1972 about interrogation in detention as a form of duress likely to lead to inadmissible evidence in the form of false statements (this is covered in *Detention and Torture in South Africa* by Don Foster, Dennis Davis and Diane Sandler)

He was also the joint author with Tony Matthews, who was the country's expert on security legislation, of a 1966 paper in the *South African Law Journal* (83: 16-43) entitled "The permanence of the temporary: an examination of the 90-day law and the 180-day detention laws."

He lived till 93 years despite his one-time addiction!

Margaret Daymond, unlike his students and colleagues, was his partner for 37 years. When I was in practice as a lawyer, the statistics read 'out of 4 marriages three ended in the divorce courts.' I am not sure of the present figures, but divorce is high in societies around the world. There are suggestions by celebrity figures that the recession can be dealt

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with, if the parties continue to live together. Difficult for families who have lost their jobs and their homes!

Ronald and Margaret had one of those rare and proud relationships. Albino's fall in December led to his loss of mobility for the next four months. With the help of a nurse, Margaret cared for him until his death on the 4 May 2009.

They were both busy academics (her research is on writing by African women writers) and they took turns in cooking, and were bound by the rule **'he/she who cooks does not wash up.'** He did not like gardening but she did – not those park-like affairs, but shrubs and easy plants. She had planted a herb garden, vital for their cooking ventures. Both loved classical chamber music. He loved and painted to music. She loved music to cook to.

The chaos of academics did not find a place in their home. Both were fussy about order and cleanliness. But it was not 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness?' NO! They were not church-goers. In reference to his funeral, he asked to 'keep it simple.' Their joint bed-making had come to an end and Margaret had lost her cherished partner.

Betty Govinden remembers Ronald as keenly interested in drawing, painting and aesthetics. He held two successful solo exhibitions of his paintings in Durban, in 1987 and 1988. He also exhibited at the Constructa Romantika exhibition in Milan a few years later.

At his funeral, his colleague Phillipa Clark said her goodbyes as follows:

I was fortunate to know Ronald for more than fifty years – as a trusted and valued friend, then as my professor and supervisor when I became what is politely called a mature student and later as a colleague when I joined the staff of the Department of Psychology at the University of Natal. It is on his role as a colleague that I shall focus in this short tribute.

In talking to some of those colleagues whom I was able to contact, including Linda Richter, Shirley Tollman and Anita Craig, a clear theme emerged: that we all owed much of whatever success we had enjoyed to the guidance of Ronald

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and his influence on our thinking. I believe this is a very important part of his legacy.

He also played a critical role in setting high standards and encouraging many students and junior colleagues to further their studies locally or at overseas universities and research institutions. Those who returned and joined the Department as staff continued to benefit from his broad knowledge and insightful analysis of developments in our discipline and in our profession. Tea-time discussions in the staff common room were always stimulating and Friday lunchtime visits to Aldo's could develop into afternoons of riotous debate.

As a former colleague on the technical staff, Pat Daniels, remarked, 'although Ronald was a very clever man he never made you feel that he was looking down on you and he treated everyone as equals.' Others remembered that though he could be a severe critic, it was of the work or the idea and not of the person.

Under his leadership the Department grew significantly in both students and staff numbers and in the number and range of courses offered. Even more importantly it earned a good reputation for sound scholarship and research.

During the apartheid years there were many difficulties to be faced both within the University and in the professional bodies to which psychologists belonged as pressure mounted to force conformity to Government policy.

Ronald took a principled stand against discrimination whether it was on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation. He was prominent in the non-racial South African Psychological Association and internationally he retained the respect of those who knew him.

Linda Richter recalls that even during the academic boycott he was able to arrange for her to spend time with specialists in the UK who were at the cutting edge of a paradigm change in the study of children.

Ronald's own special interests were in the areas of the nature of consciousness, its relation to brain functions and the

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pivotal role played by the development of language. His inclusive approach encompassed both the experimental and the philosophical, the biological and the social.

John Lucas, whom some of you will remember, sent this tribute, **'I knew great kindness from Ronald, but it was as a teacher that he enriched my life enormously. I came from Pretoria to do Honours in Durban because I had heard what an interesting man Ronald was. Twenty years later I left Durban feeling that I had hardly begun to explore the treasures of his mind...** For me his death is not like that of lesser men. I feel like a student at the Grammarian's Funeral: "Our low life was the level's and the night's - He's for the morning."

To end on a lighter note, others will remember some of his idiosyncracies when he was lecturing, such as taking out a bright paisley hanky for a wipe after taking a pinch of snuff, or his endless cups of tepid tea when he was reading or writing. On one earlier occasion, when he used to smoke, he was even seen having two cigarettes sticking out of different sides of his mouth!

However the over-riding sentiments that come across as his colleagues recall their days in the Department are those of admiration and great affection for Ronald, together with recognition and regret that his passing marks the end of an era.

Whites joining the struggle were few and a very treasured addition. Thank you for your contribution to the struggle for democracy in South Africa.

Hamba Kahle Prof.

Phyllis Naidoo
Durban, 8/11/2009