

# Give us another day

Joan Grover

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*Mrs Grover is vice-chairman of Cape Western. She has been deeply involved in the situation at Crossroads*

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**J**'UST another day for squatters' read the CAPE TIMES headline of December 25, 1978, referring to Christmas at Crossroads. Those of us who have been closely involved with the Crossroads community were thankful to know that there *was* in fact another day for the families living there and to know that they would be able to worship together as Christian families everywhere were doing.

National and international attention has been focused on Crossroads since the notorious raids of September 1978, but the problems of the people there are not new to the Athlone Advice Office. Hundreds of residents have visited the office, been interviewed, advised and helped wherever possible. Legal aid has been provided for those people charged under Influx Control or Illegal Squatting legislation. Workers and interpreters have attended courts and kept accurate records of day-to-day proceedings.

After two big raids on the camp during September, workers battled to compile accurate lists of those arrested in order to arrange for their defence. This proved to be an enormous task: approximately 900 people were arrested, the names had to be listed in alphabetical order, many people reported missing were reported more than once by anxious friends and relatives. Some- and this made the lists longer than ever. However, they were completed and delivered to the courts on the days following the raids, when every effort was made by the attorneys to defend the large number of people appearing in court.

During the last few months the Advice Office has visited Crossroads regularly and workers have counselled a steady stream of residents on each occasion. This was done at the request of the residents themselves, who found the journey to Mowbray to be expensive and time-consuming. It was soon known that the office was operating in the area, and any Sash member visiting the camp at any time was liable to be asked for advice. The milkman in his white coat, delivering milk to the Crossroads houses, stopped his bicycle and handed a much worn passbook through my car window. 'The Advice Office will be here on Friday', I said, and off he went.

From the Advice Office, representations have been made to the authorities of the Departments of Plural Relations and of Justice. Letters to the English and Afrikaans press have been written by many Sash members, to create an aware-

ness in the minds of readers concerning the difficulties and problems facing this law-abiding community.

Often Advice Office cases go on for months, reaching no successful conclusion, but, encouragingly, some end like this one, reported in THE CAPE TIMES of December 28, 1978.

'A Supreme Court judge condemned the way in which a 14-year-old Crossroads youth was convicted and sentenced in the Bantu Affairs Commissioner's court in Langa, in September, on an alleged pass offence.

'Mr Justice P. Schock ordered that the conviction and sentence be set aside and the youth's fine be repaid... it was clear that the youth had been denied a fair trial.'

Much that has been done to play a supportive role in the Crossroads situation has been done in collaboration with other organisations and individuals, and, of course, always in consultation with, and at the request of, the Crossroads people themselves.

We have accepted invitations sent to all Capetonians to special church services, we have attended the prayer vigil held in one of the local churches, and joyously celebrated with the men, women and children at the opening of the two schools, Nxolo (meaning 'Peace') and Sizamile (meaning 'We have tried').

When it was reported that as part of the harassment by Police and BAAB officials, women were being arrested when fetching water from one of the eight taps serving the camp, it was decided that these taps should be watched as much as possible. Individuals spent hours in their cars, watching and waiting, and the women fetching water waved and smiled, feeling perhaps a certain sense of security while we were there. It is interesting to note that we witnessed no arrests, and after a while this particular form of harassment stopped. However, members did see arrests being made at bus stops, and to avoid people being 'picked up' on their way to hospitals, clinics, etc., lifts were given whenever possible.

Transport has been arranged on other occasions. The school choirs performing in surrounding towns needed to get there. The players performing in the Crossroads play at The Space theatre in November were taken to Cape Town. On many occasions people were taken backwards and forwards to court, and sometimes to prisons to look for missing relatives.





*Black Sash facsimile of Crossroads interior, displayed at Progfed fête, Johannesburg*

Members helped to staff the Crossroads photographic and pictorial exhibition, which was on show at various large shopping centres around the Peninsula for some weeks during the spring. Signatures for the 'Save Crossroads' petition (signed by over 35 000 people in the Western Cape) were also needed, and hours were spent collecting these.

Calls for help have been varied and unexpected. We have not known what to 'expect next' During the second big raid on September 14, we had an urgent request from the women of Crossroads. 'Please bring us soup, we have been up all night', they said.

They had been up all night, the children particularly were tired and hungry, and another raid was feared. 'They may come again,' they said, dazed and shocked after a night of terror. So we took them soup in containers — all sizes and shapes, buckets, Tupperware, and anything we could muster in such a short time. So together with the women, the mothers and wives of Crossroads we heard ourselves saying, 'Children first, and only one contained for each family please' This was no mere 'do-gooders' handout, we had attempted to respond to a call from people in need.

Perhaps the importance of our involvement has actually been human contact made with ordinary men, women and children, whom we have

got to know as people, as fellow South Africans. We have often felt frustrated at not being able to do more, and on many occasions not knowing what to do. I felt like this on returning from yet another meeting. I had some shopping to do and went to a nearby supermarket. Inside I was greeted by Mr M., smiling broadly. 'My wife is also here,' he said, 'she would like to greet you, and the children, see, there they are at the counter'. Yes, there we were, a Crossroads family and a Sash member, linked in a bond quite outside the experience of the other Friday afternoon shoppers.

Often the simple act of giving a lift to someone has meant a deeper involvement, a deeper awareness. Many of us have felt that we have learnt a great deal: how to handle a hospital situation, how to apply for a pass extension in special circumstances, how to apply for a maintenance order, where to go and what to do and whom to see. We have made it our job to learn our rights too, and the member who 'helplessly' witnessed the separation of a three-week-old breast-fed baby from its mother outside a court, will not refrain from taking necessary action when faced with a similar situation in future.

What is the future for the people of Crossroads and what does the New Year hold for them?

Only time will tell.

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'We know how to protect whites. We are not interested in black people.'

*Mr Arrie Paulus, chief secretary of the SA Mineworker's Union*

Mr Willem Botha died of a bullet wound in the head in a Sasolburg police cell, but the police couldn't be blamed, a magistrate ruled yesterday.

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