

# Spirits of nobility

by Rene de Villiers

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**W**ITHIN A MONTH South Africa has lost three women of exceptional quality and ability. They happened to be of an age were friends of many years standing and they shared one over-riding ideal: dedication to the cause of human achievement.

Two, ELLEN HELLMAN and MONICA WILSON, were anthropologists (and a great deal more); HANSI POLLAK was a sociologist (and much besides). Ellen Hellman and Hansi Pollak found the Institute of Race Relations the vehicle for their labour of love and contributed immeasurably to the work and achievements of that body. Monica Wilson, while in complete sympathy with the ideals of the Institute, made her particular contribution through her writing and the Church.

All three were true scholars to whom propaganda as such was distasteful. They sought the truth and went wherever the quest led them.

All three had to incur occasional wrath of criticism from those who thought the facts could be bent just a little to achieve one or other end.

All three were liberals in the very pure sense of the term: people who believed passionately in liberty and who sought it for all, not only for themselves and their associates.

All three were sustained by their own particular faith, whether this originated in religion or in science. All three were driven, to the very end of their days, by a determination to spread knowledge and improve the quality of life for people of all creeds and colours in all walks of life.

All three, who, in their own way and time had shown remarkable physical courage, whether it was in the outback of Africa or in urban townships, or in ravaged post-war Europe, became victims of crippling illness towards the end of their lives. But they never let up: they never gave in.

Hansi Pollak, I know, used to work to three or four in the morning on her beloved education bursary trusts. Ellen Hellman read proofs and manuscripts for others when she was hardly able to move from one room to another. Monica Wilson kept on writing — and gardening — long after the onset of a terminal illness. They never spared themselves, no matter what the price their efforts exacted in suffering.

Above all, in spite of setbacks and disappointments, yes even disillusionment from time to time, they never lost faith in the ideal of the dignity and potential worth of all men and women.

Blessed is the land that can produce spirits of such nobility.

*With acknowledgements to the Cape Argus and the Sunday Times*

## NORA SMOLLAN

**I**T IS ALWAYS difficult to write about friends who are no longer with us. Nora Smollan is one of them. Not widely known even in her own Transvaal region she was one of those loyal, hard-working, gutsy back-room people who do much within their own limits but get none of the credit and never ask for it either.

She worked at the Temple Emmanuel synagogue employment/advice office (an extension of the Johannesburg Advice office) assisting black domestic workers with their pass problems, trying to find them jobs and educating the "White Madams" that even if the law does not state it, a domestic worker should have certain rights. She loathed the work but her sense of humour kept her going and she used to comment that she was never sure which was the more depressing — the ghastly pass laws or the ghastly "Madams".

For the last two years of her life she continued her work in spite of much pain and the battle to live. She was a gentle, kind and thoughtful woman, tough when she had to be but always fair in her judgements and much respected by her friends and colleagues.

Without the likes of Nora Smollan the Black Sash would cease to exist. She will be sadly missed.

**Robin Harvey**

## ABORTION — *from page 15*

the 'removal of the residue of a pregnancy'. The figures are alarming and indicate the extent to which backstreet abortion has become the dangerous alternative to skilled care for South African women, in particular the poor.

Taking a two year period from 1979 to 1980, a mere 770 women obtained legal abortions. Of them 535 were white and 235 were black. Compare these figures with those of the 66 830 women hospitalised for 'the removal of the residue of a pregnancy' in the same period. Of these, 15 555 were white and 51 275 were black. These figures represent a fraction of the women who have resorted to backstreet abortion.

It is clear that few black women have the time, money or proximity to more than one doctor to comply with the law. It is also clear that maternal health standards in South Africa are at a dangerously low level.

But the effects of uncontrolled fertility and enforced childbirth do not end here. Poverty, malnutrition, and unstable living conditions are part of the fabric of our society. They can only be exacerbated by legislation which denies individuals the basic human right to control their fertility.

The known facts are of sufficient concern, but more research on this legislation is imperative.

**SUGGESTED RESOLUTION. BLACK SASH URGES THE MINISTER OF HEALTH TO APPOINT A JUDICIAL COMMISSION TO EXAMINE THE WORKING OF THE 1975 ABORTION AND STERILISATION ACT.**