



The **Forgiveness Project** Exhibition, '**The F-Word**', is coming to Crieff from November 13<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> 2007. The 'F-Word' is an exhibition of photographs with accompanying text telling the stories of people involved in astonishing acts of forgiveness. To accompany the exhibition **Ginn Fourie** and **Letlapa Mphahlele** from South Africa will be our special guests during this week. Ginn's daughter, Lyndi, was killed in 1993 by a bomb attack in a bar in Helderberg (near Cape Town). Letlapa Mphahlele was at the time the Director of Operations of Apla (Azanian Peoples Liberation Army) and had ordered this attack. They met and somehow reconciled themselves. Their moving story forms part of the Exhibition and they will be giving a public lecture in Crieff on Friday November 16<sup>th</sup>.

**What?** To quote from Marina Cantacuzino, the founder of the Project:

Forgiveness is an inspiring, complex, exasperating subject, which provokes strong feeling in just about everyone. Having spent all last year collecting stories of reconciliation and forgiveness for an exhibition of words and images which I have created with the photographer Brian Moody, I began to see that for many people we met forgiveness is no soft option, but the ultimate revenge. For many it is a liberating route out of victimhood, a choice, a process, the final victory over those who have done you harm. The exhibition tells some extraordinary stories – stories of victims who have become friends with perpetrators, murderers who have turned their mind to peace building. As I talked to friends, colleagues and strangers about this exhibition, I began to notice two very different reactions. There are those who see forgiveness as an immensely noble and humbling response to atrocity – and those who simply laugh it out of court. For the first group, forgiveness is a value strong enough to put an end to the tit-for-tat settling of scores that has wreaked havoc over generations. But for the second group, forgiveness is just a copout, a weak gesture, which lets the violator off the hook and encourages only further violence. This is why we called the exhibition The F Word. For some people forgiveness is a very dirty word indeed.

More information on the Project and the Exhibition can be found at [www.theforgivenessproject.com](http://www.theforgivenessproject.com). The exhibition and lecture are being organised by Llewellyn Edwards and Steve Logan, both members of the Crieff Seventh-day Adventist Church, however the Project is not explicitly religious and makes efforts to distance itself from any particular religious or political stance.

**Where/When?** The **exhibition** will be hosted in Crieff Adventist Church, Gwydyr Rd, Crieff, PH7 4BS from Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2007. Ginn and Letlapa will address a **public meeting** on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November at 7:30pm, Crieff Parish Church, Strathearn Terrace, Crieff. They will also be available for speaking to schools or other groups during the week.

**Contact?** **Steve Logan**, 01764-650085 or **Llewellyn Edwards**, 01764-652596, or by email at [fword@crieffadventist.org.uk](mailto:fword@crieffadventist.org.uk)

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Any questions?

Phone Steve Logan (01764-650085) or Llewellyn Edwards (01764-652596)

Email [fword@crieffadventist.org.uk](mailto:fword@crieffadventist.org.uk)

Web [www.crieffadventist.org.uk/fp](http://www.crieffadventist.org.uk/fp)

## The story of Ginn Fourie and Letlapa Mphahlele



In 1993 Lyndi Fourie was killed in the Heidelberg Tavern Massacre in Cape Town aged 23. Nine years later, her mother, Ginn Fourie, heard a radio interview with the man who had ordered the attack. Letlapa Mphahlele, the former Director of Operations of Apla (Azanian Peoples Liberation Army), the military wing of the PAC was in Cape Town to promote his biography, *Child of this Soil*. Since then both have been working to further conciliation in South Africa through the Lyndi Fourie Foundation.

### Ginn Fourie

On the evening of 30 December 1993 a hail of AK 47 gunfire ended our daughter's life and dreams. She had no time to debate the reasons for the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress) wanting 'Whites' to suffer as 'Blacks' had suffered under Apartheid, even though she had often wept at the injustices against Blacks.

As parents we struggled to come to terms with our loss. It was a time of deep agony for my husband, myself and our son Anthony. At the funeral my eldest brother, who conducted the service, recommended that the most appropriate Christian response to violence is to absorb it; just as Lyndi's soft body had done on that fateful day.

Within a week of the Heidelberg Massacre, three young men were detained and in November 1994 they stood trial. I sat in the Supreme Court in Cape Town, looking at them in the dock: Humphrey Gqomfa, Vuyisile Madasi and Zola Mabala. As I did so I was confronted by my own feelings of anger and sadness, but somehow I could engender no hate. During the trial I sent a message to them via the interpreter that 'if they are or feel guilty I forgive them'.

However, I also depended on the law to avenge my loss and was relieved when all three were convicted of murder and sent to prison for an average of 25 years each. The Judge described them as puppets who had enacted a violent crime which had been strategised by more cunning and intelligent people than themselves.

Many could not countenance my forgiveness for Lyndi's killers, but as a Christian I cherished the role-model of Christ forgiving his murderers. Since then I have come to understand forgiveness as a process which involves the principled decision to give up ones justifiable right to revenge - for to accept violation is a devaluation of the self.

At the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) Hearing in October 1997 I learnt that Lyndi's killers were likely to be granted amnesty and I did not oppose it. At the conclusion of the Hearings the three young men asked to speak to me. They thanked me and said that they would take my message of forgiveness and hope to their communities and to their graves, whether they received amnesty or not. Then in October 2002 I turned on my car radio and heard an interview with Letlapa Mphahlele – the man who had masterminded the Heidelberg massacre. I knew he had been dodging the public prosecutor and had not applied for amnesty and so with a sense of anger and righteous indignation I took myself down to his book launch. It took some courage to stand up and ask him whether he was trivialising the whole TRC process by not participating. To my surprise he responded in a very positive way. He said he could understand why people might think this but from his perspective the TRC had trivialised the fact that Apla were fighting a just war and why, while his soldiers were being held in prison, had the apartheid defence forces been spared? I hadn't thought of it like this before and tears came to my eyes. Then Letlapa came straight from the podium to where I was sitting and said "I'll do anything if you'll meet with me this week." In that moment I saw remorse in his eyes and body language. It would have been so much easier if he'd been a monster with horns and a tail - if there was something to hate.

People were saying he was unapologetic but I soon discovered that for Letlapa saying 'sorry' is too easy. He needs to build bridges between our communities to bring conciliation. That October he invited me to his home-coming ceremony in Seleteng (Limpopo Province) and asked me to speak at the occasion. It was here that I was able to apologise to his people for the shame and humiliation

which my ancestors had brought on them through slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Vulnerable feelings when expressed to each other have the potential to establish lasting bonds.

Letlapa's name means a man of stone. I feel he has been weathered by a formidable struggle to become a child of this soil. I too am a child of this soil. I know his comrades' bullets killed my daughter and that terrible pain will always be with me, but I have forgiven this man who gave the command. I feel his humanity.

## **Letlapa Mphahlele**

I am an atheist but I believe absolutely in reconciliation, meeting soul to soul, person to person. As human-beings we have to face each other and mend relationships. Meeting Ginn has been a profound and humbling experience for me. From our first meeting in 2002 Ginn understood me and while others couldn't understand why these terrorists were still unapologetic, why they wouldn't talk in glowing terms about the TRC, Ginn said she detected that this person was remorseful. By this time all the charges against me had been withdrawn, but still I did not feel anything inside me. It was only when people extended gifts of forgiveness that the roots of my hearts were shaken and something was restored inside me.

Since meeting Ginn I have had to face the fact that people were killed because of my orders and acknowledge that the people we fought, harmed and caused grief to were never our direct enemies. I believed that terror had to be answered with terror and I authorized high profile massacres on white civilians in the same way that the whites did on us. At the time it seemed the only valid response - but where would it have ended? If my enemy had been cannibals, would I have eaten white flesh? If my enemy had raped black women, would I have raped white women?

I have changed since then and I no longer believe you should meet violence with violence. I now think you can deal with oppression in a more creative way. I believe what Ginn says, that even if violence comes your way 'absorb it'. That is not the coward's way. It's extremely difficult. My mission now is to reach out to those who survived because by meeting together we are able to restore each other's humanity. When Ginn attended my homecoming, she delivered the most moving speech of the day. She stood up and asked for forgiveness from the people on behalf of her ancestors. She also got the loudest applause, louder than I got after nearly two decades in exile.

Some people have decided not to forgive me for what I have done and I understand them. It's not easy to forgive but to those who have forgiven I believe this is the start to rebuilding our communities. This is an intense human mission. People sometimes ask me if I have also killed people face to face. When I am asked this question I never answer - not because I am afraid of speaking the truth but because I believe that every foot soldier who killed at my command is less guilty than me because I authorized the targets. So I exonerate those who pulled the trigger. It is I who should shoulder the blame.



## Additional Biographical Information

**Letlapa Mphahlele**, is currently President of the Pan African Congress and was Director of Operation for its military wing Azanian Peoples Liberation Army (APLA) during Apartheid.

He is a published poet and philosopher. His autobiography, 'A Child of this Soil -the journey of a Freedom Fighter', tells his story of armed struggle and exile. 'Matlalela - The Flood is Coming' is a book of his poignant poetry.

He is currently actively committed to healing and reconciliation work with ex-combatants and victims of violence in all groups in post apartheid South Africa. He was a founding member of the Lyndi Fourie Foundation, Lyndi was killed in an attack which he ordered in December 1993, 4 months before the first free and fair democratic elections in SA.

**Mrs. J A (Ginn) Fourie** trained as a physiotherapist and has practised and enjoyed the profession, culminating in 18 years of teaching at UCT's Faculty of Health Sciences, where she participated in the exciting development of the Problem Based Learning Curriculum Transformation from 2001 until she took early retirement in July 2003.

The Lyndi Fourie Foundation, which was named after her daughter who was killed at the Heidelberg Tavern Massacre in December 1993, has taken her time and passion since then.