



## Wiseman Derrick Khuzwayo

Wiseman and I were studying the same course LLB Law for three years although we only became friends towards the end of the first year. Prior to that I just knew of him as a 'Union Hack' and Broad Left (Communist Party) activist. He spoke at student union meetings and stood for union elections so there was usually a poster of him wherever one looked in the union building. I remember at that time thinking he was a rather charismatic and very emphatic speaker but somewhat aloof as an individual. I later discovered this was due to shyness and a feeling of not quite being accepted for who he was in a largely white community - which was hardly surprising given the way in which the Apartheid regime in white controlled South Africa had treated him. At this point in time Wiseman had a very strong black SA accent and since his native tongue was Zulu, he could absent mindedly wander into another language which made him, shall we say, 'complicated' to follow occasionally! This didn't last long though and as his mastery of colloquial British English developed, so did his confidence (and his swearing!) [Just as an aside, I'm proud to say I left Hull with a Law degree and also a Masters in Zulu profanity thanks to him, and even if I could remember it now I would hesitate to write it

down. His language could be atrocious but his timing was always impeccable and his delivery absolutely hilarious!]

My recollections of how Wiseman came to England are a bit blurry to say the least but his exile had its roots in SASO (South African Students Organization founded by Steve Biko). In the early/mid 70s there had been an increase in more violent activity than previously by the black activists, and at this time Wiseman was a Law student at Durban University. Like the ANC, SASO was a banned organization, and to the dismay of Mandela and other leading cadres imprisoned on Robben Island at the time, the younger activists including Patrick 'Terror' Lekota were stepping up the struggle and attacking various institutions.

Wiseman was one such student and he and others were implicated in arson attack on Durban university. I know not what he said to the authorities when he was arrested but he never denied his involvement to me. His explanation was simple. The ANC had tried and exhausted all peaceful means of protest and now felt compelled to increase the discomfort levied on the Praetoria govt by acts of social unrest, but targeting property not people.

I do know he was severely beaten whilst in custody having seen the marks on his skin, and he also had a very slight limp when I knew him This was caused by being hung upside down in a police cell and beaten on the soles of his feet. When he regaled us with these awful stories it left us in a quandary a) because they were truly shocking and pitiable and beyond any of our experience or comprehension and b) more so because he frequently made them very funny! He would refer to the torture sessions as 'Ironing' i.e. a thug policeman would run at him with an iron bar (while he was suspended from the ceiling) and shout ' Boy! I am going to blahddy iron you kaffa!) and then Wiseman would adopt the brutal Afrikaner role and act out the beating of himself. When we asked how he reacted he'd fix us with a stare and say 'Hey, how would YOU react? I screamed -It was fucking SORE!' I'm sure it was and I'm also certain it caused lasting damage to his feet which used to be very painful in the cold wet winters in Hull.

There's now a gap in information about how he came to be released or escaped, but I do know he found sponsorship for a South African Student scholarship through the auspices of the Liberal Democrat Peer Lord Avebury and this is how he found himself in 1979, re-starting his Law Degree at Hull University.

When he came to Hull the first thing Wiseman did was throw himself into the political scene and made sure he opened his mouth as much and as often as he could to educate a bunch of predominantly white/middleclass kids about what was going on in his country. Speaking strictly for myself, the most I knew was that Apartheid was an ugly regime, there had been a terrible massacre of black civilians by the police in Sharpeville in 1960 and now we students avoided banking with Barclays bank (investors in SA) or buying Outspan oranges. A dismal lack of awareness I admit, but he set about sorting that out in our second year.

Wiseman was extremely bright and having already started a degree he was far and away ahead of most of us on the course both in his knowledge and analytical abilities. I rarely recall seeing him at lectures but he would borrow notes from people before a tutorial, scan read them quickly, (usually in the Union bar over a pint of lager) and that

would do for him. His power of retention was quite remarkable and I for one, thoroughly resented how little work he needed to do to get by quite well. It was never his intention to practice Law and he was much happier writing articles for the student newspaper *Hullfire*, and lounging around with the politicians, arguing and setting them straight. At this point I should mention that Wiseman had two key phrases with which we were all familiar and they were "It's truuuuue!" (when making a contentious assertion). And "Hey Noooooo!" when he disagreed with any point in contention. These were his hallmark sayings and basically prefaced, emphasised, or concluded every assertion or objection he ever made. He was renowned and loved for them!

One very strange thing happened in our second year which didn't strike me as particularly odd at the time but does today. Wiseman suddenly obtained a book called "The Struggle is my Life" by Nelson Mandela, which was later incorporated in his memoirs in the "Long walk to Freedom". I say it was strange because Mandela at that time was imprisoned on Robben Island and permitted no contact with the outside world, so I have no idea how these memoirs found their way out of there. Nor can I recollect how Wiseman came by the book, but it was properly bound and published and he was also mentioned by name in it and was terribly excited! I remember reading it and trying to share in Wiseman's excitement but the prospect of Mandela being released in 1980 seemed very slim indeed. I have no idea what became of that early book or of the publishers, but when Mandela released the "Long Walk to Freedom" Wiseman's name no longer appeared in that chapter (to my indignation).

Apart from student politics and journalism, Wiseman liked a drink or eight. I remember many hilarious nights gathered around a piano with his best friend Noel Khumalo (a Music student at Hull) while Noel (known affectionately by Wiseman as 'The Swazi' because yep- he was from Swaziland) would play and Wiseman would sing and dance and he'd do so with complete abandon, oblivious to the fact that he was entirely tone deaf and couldn't dance! Doubtless the alcohol assisted his delusion that he could, but I as a witness to the event beg to differ! After one such session Wiseman and I were staggering home to May Street, propping each other up when we came across roadworks just past Newlands Avenue. Wiseman then proceeded to fall into a fairly deep hole in the pavement. He was screaming with laughter at his pratfall, but I was not so amused at trying to haul him out. After a few attempts, I suggested flagging down a passing cop car, to which he replied "Cathy don't you dare! I'm a drunk black guy down a hole. They will simply beat me in further!" He found the whole thing hilarious. Eventually two equally pissed students arrived and helped get him out, but it was a testament to how drunk we were that we managed to get home in one piece because the next day Wiseman found out he'd sprained his ankle quite badly and we spent a hungover afternoon in the Hull Infirmary while they sorted him out and bandaged him up. He never did thank me!

As a proud and staunch left winger, Wiseman was obviously against any form of racism or sexism, -at least he *thought* he was. I remember him coming home one night with a black eye and cut lip because he'd got into a fight with another black student. Since he was usually a peace loving a gentle soul I enquired as to the cause of the fight to which he answered "The stupid bastard called me 'The Bishop' and I knocked his lights out!" Apparently his antagonist was a Zimbabwean guy, and at this time Rhodesia had just become Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe (yes him!) and everyone was celebrating. Bishop Abel Muzorewa was seen by a lot of the exiled black African students as having

**‘sold out’ the black community in the Lancaster Agreement to hand power back from Ian Smith’s Government to the black majority. Muzorewa was thought to have made too many concessions and was thus a figure of contempt and ridicule amongst many black African activists. Naturally Wiseman took extreme exception to the soubriquet of ‘The bishop’ and thereafter decided that ALL black Zimbabwean students ‘were thick and stupid’. No amount of reasoning would shift him from this position.**

**And so to the casual sexism. Although he would intellectually profess Feminism as a worthy cause, it was fairly clear to me that in actual life, Wiseman had no intention of embracing it. I remember being invited by him to Sunday lunch at Nick Hardwick’s house with Mike Craven and others. Little did I know at this point was that the students took it in turns to cook lunch and that on this occasion it was in fact Wiseman’s turn. So I discovered that in fact he’d invited me to do the cooking while he and Nick and Mike drank wine and banged on about left wing politics in the sitting room while they waited for food to be produced. I recall summoning him into the kitchen to help peel spuds where he was a bloody inept nuisance and a completely useless article, and when I asked had he never used a potato peeler before he replied, ‘ Fuck no! At home this is women’s work’! I don’t know if he changed in later life, maybe he did, but in those days his ‘Feminism’ was lip service only!**

**While all the above is true, it doesn’t paint an accurate picture of Wiseman at all. The other facets to his character were much more becoming. He was simply the kindest most generous man you could wish to meet. Living on a student scholarship wouldn’t have been easy for the most frugal of people and he was certainly not one. Added to which he had to stretch his grant to cover holidays when most of us were back home being freely fed by dotting parents. Wiseman however, was always first to the bar to buy drinks and would always help out a friend in need. I remember dragging him into town once to get a pair of shoes because his only pair were worn through. He sat on the bus scowling like a sulky child and wondering aloud how many pints of beer and packets of fags these ‘blahddy shoes’ were going to set him back. What he didn’t know was that my Dad (with whom he got on famously) had sent £15 to get him a present from my folks for Christmas, so when the money was produced for the shoes he was thrilled to bits, but then insisted on buying me dinner and drinks which probably cost far more than the shoes had. This was typical of him though, and he was equally as generous with his time and friendship. If you had a problem -real or imagined, Wiseman would be there for you for as long as it took to solve it, or at least see things from a comedy perspective! From his own point of view he was frequently sad and homesick for South Africa and his family and friends there. One of his favourite things to do when he felt like this was to play Neil Diamond’s Greatest Hits while sitting on my bed enveloped in the duvet with a couple of cans and a packet of fags. He’d then croon along tunelessly to ‘Sweet Caroline’ and ‘I am I said’ and various other terrible Diamond songs until he felt better. I grumbled at him once and asked him why he didn’t use his own damn duvet. He said ‘I like yours better, it smells of woman’s perfume and reminds me of being held by my mother.’ I felt so mean and thoughtless because he rarely spoke of how much he missed his family, particularly his Mum. At this point in time 1981 we were just graduating and his friends were dispersing to various post- graduate things and to different cities and he was feeling very depressed and anxious about his future.**

**London 1982**

As luck would have it in the end most of us moved down to London the following year. I had to do Bar exams and Wiseman found various temp jobs on Fleet street with newspapers which suited him. I think though he was very unhappy at this time and his drinking was becoming problematic. I sent him messages when possible and we met a few times but he was clearly fed up and wishing to return to South Africa. I moved back to Liverpool in 1982 to practice Law and keeping in touch became very difficult but I do recall his sheer delight when the Attenborough film 'Cry Freedom' released in the late 80s. Wiseman had always been a huge fan of Steve Biko, and when this film about his life and death at the hands of the SA police came out to huge acclaim, he said he finally felt hope for South Africa and that the end of Apartheid was homing into sight. His favourite part of that film was when the news editor of the Daily Dispatch, Donald Woods was escaping to Lesotho assisted by an old man who gave him a battered car. Wiseman would ring me up quoting the old man "The Boers will shit themselves! Kruger [chief of police] will shit himself! Pik Botha will shit himself!" and he'd be in hysterics laughing at the thought of Donald Woods giving the finger to the Apartheid regime! So was I.

On 11<sup>th</sup> February 1990 Nelson Mandela was finally released from prison after 27 years and Wiseman was utterly ecstatic and now felt able to return to his homeland without living in fear of his life. I remember sending him a record by Labi Siffre called 'Something inside so strong' which he loved and he'd phone me many times with it blaring in the background and him singing (again tunelessly) along to it. A group of his old friends from Hull university clubbed together a fund to buy his ticket home and tide him over for a while when he arrived and organised a farewell leaving dinner for him in London which to my eternal dismay I couldn't attend due to illness, but all his other friends were there and I believe it was a great success.

This really concludes most of my recollections of Wiseman because although we tried to keep in touch by phone at first, eventually contact faded away. I got the impression that life was difficult for him initially and he found settling back harder than he'd anticipated and was still drinking heavily. I do know that he made serious attempts to quit the booze and I hope he was eventually successful in doing so. My last attempts to contact him via Facebook (this January) were not replied to and I suspect he was just too ill at that point. I was delighted to learn that he'd married and had 6 children, there was such a great amount of love and loyalty in his heart and I will always treasure the friendship we had. My sincerest condolences go to his wife Anna and to his children too. He was a remarkable man, clever funny and kind and brave beyond words. He will be sadly missed.

Cathy Harper Hull University 1978-81

