

Hope



It can be difficult to stay positive in a country like ours.

We are living under the constant fear of becoming a victim (hopefully a survivor) of violent crime. Our shopping centres are raided by armed gangs on a daily basis and our homes have become *de facto* jails. Every day the media report more violent robberies, rapes, corruption and white collar crime involving millions of Rands. There are waves of strikes by dissatisfied workers (yes, even doctors), escalating electricity tariffs as a result of some years of mismanagement, swine flu epidemics, high interest rates (compared to the rest of the world), and inflation eroding our hard-earned income. What is left of our income we have to share with the government and criminals, leaving us with an extremely dissatisfied feeling that we earn far too little for what efforts we put in. The scary thing is that we (survivors) are becoming used to this and you may even say “immune” to it, some say even complacent!

Some compatriots are however leaving the country, in their thousands, leaving behind property and money they cannot legally take with them, and their stories and footsteps. They take with them scarce skills so desperately needed to build our country and improve the desperate poverty affecting more than half our people. They leave because they feel unsafe, unwanted and because they have better career prospects in other countries. And yes, some leave because they feel threatened and experience discrimination based on their skin colour. Can one really blame a 40 year old professional with years of experience if he leaves the country if he is too “pale and male” to be considered for promotion, even if essential service delivery posts are being kept vacant because suitable black candidates cannot be found. It is hopeless one may say; power drunk politicians are forever driving populist agendas and the voters believe their empty promises each time, simply because of their “struggle” credentials. Yes, it is again “Cry, the Beloved Country” stuff (*with apology to Alan Paton*).

And then I recently went to a gala evening on behalf of the Tygerberg Children’s Hospital (in Tygerberg Hospital), in the Cape Town City Hall. I did not look forward to that evening, as we had to go out in the

middle of winter and park on the Parade in the city centre, a place notorious for dirt, car theft and mugging. When we arrived we found that the parade was under total reconstruction. The area was bathed in the light of huge overhead spotlights and I noticed several security guards with dogs. We felt safe and started to relax. Some of our tax money was being well spent I felt.

But what followed blew me completely “out of my socks”. We were welcomed by a vigorous and charming Bishop Desmond Tutu, the patron of the hospital. He told us what a wonderful country we have, and how touched he was to see the “young Afrikaner doctors from Stellenbosch University” caring for the black premature babies, some the size of his hand. We are setting an example for the rest of the world. He lamented that we should use all the skills we have in this country (did I hear him saying that people should be allowed to work and promoted irrespective of skin colour?). And then to prove his point, we were entertained by the talent of the young people of Cape Town. The multi-racial, rainbow nation (*à la Tutu*) choirs of the Tygerberg Children’s Choir (<http://www.tcc.co.za>) and Ulutsha Lonke: The South African Youth Choir (<http://www.sayc.co.za>) treated us to a heart-gripping display of passion and singing talent, and an awesome performance by Chris Chameleon. Before my eyes the raw potential of South Africa was laid bare, bristling with promise. Tutu spoke of hope and used the example of the hospital and the choirs to illustrate why he has such high hopes for our country.

I left the City Hall with a new spring in my step and I thanked the security guard (a white woman with a dog) and made my small donation to her with a smile. She was thankful and I wondered if she had had a meal earlier that night. There is hope for our country, but it is up to us to make it work, we family doctors, clergy, children, teachers, choir masters and security guards. Let us take back our beloved country!

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Editor

