

The UKZN Griot Of Campuses and Communication

One of my correspondents wrote me on reading my second column, "Of Entrances and Exits": "Hot stuff. Just remember not to become another [name of well-known professor]. I do this by loving Africa for what is loveable about it, shrugging off the rest. And every year I make the same New Year's resolution: I will not become a grumpy old white man."

WORDS: KEYAN G TOMASELLI

Well, now that's a take on columnists who tend to be grumpy no matter their complexion, age or gender. So, let me this time offer an ungrumpy fairy story.

Once upon a time UKZN was three separate institutions. That's why I still feel like a visitor when I go to Edgewood and Westville. Come to think of it, after 26 years I still feel like a tourist in Durban. Having finally learned its road system, then along came the sign man who changed many of the street names. Now I am lost again – but I'm not grumpy – just bemused.

Pietermaritzburg, where I never worked, still seems to be in the far reaches of Empire. It's a lovely place I go to participate in statutory meetings. Some folks there may feel the same way about coming to Durban – but with a different impression of crowds, noise and cars. Where the Westville campus and parts of Medical School

are where I would shoot my next starkly alienating, concrete-laden feature film, *Escape From Durban*, PMB would provide the pastoral setting for a theme of peaceful uncluttered English-gentility with prancing horses. A little like the TV series, *Midsomer Murders*, where the endless killing off of English country villagers is done so genteelly that it hardly makes the international news.

How to create a sense of common purpose in a University with five campuses in two cities is the question for the fairy godmother. UKZN hides a dark secret. We don't know each other that well. For example, when we take our graduate media students to the national annual conference they are astonished to encounter media students from the other campus. UKZN students interact momentarily in far flung venues but less so at UKZN itself. In Humanities, the annual Graduate Conference held at HC offers one way for students to connect, but the

friction of distance impedes. The bus that trundles (during the day) between HC and Westville inexplicably excludes PMB.

So, what can the fairy godmother's magic wand do to help intercampus interaction? The magic mushroom bus is one option. But this would cause pollution, reduce student throughput and cause yet more carnage on the N3. Or, students could be provided coffee shops with intergalactic gates through which they would travel instantly between sites. (A project for the Trekkies in the Physics programme perhaps?) In the US and Australia, coffee franchises dot campuses to encourage staff and students to create intellectually-driven wireless-served micro/macro public spheres. Even the libraries sport coffee counters, to enhance the desire to remain on campus and to read while absorbing information and bean aromas, and of course, ensuring that students stay awake.

At HC, the coffee shop does anything but. Our international students are amazed at the ceaseless noise, smoking and partying that goes on in spaces where debate, studying and reading should be occurring. Alternatively, at HC students shuffle along like lost pods robotically sms-ing on their cell phones. They impede pedestrian traffic and cause more congestion in already overcrowded corridors. Crabbing sideways right shoulder-down they do not carry books any more, thumbs tapping away, oblivious of anyone else. Is this a dark Orwellian fairy tale?

Maybe the bus idea is of a past modernist age? Maybe the once seminal idea/space of the public sphere where constructive political and intellectual debate occurs has run its course? Maybe there's nothing left but electrons in cyberspace? Are we trapped in the intergalactic gate – one of our own making? Is this really a fairy tale? What happened to the



grumpy old man? He's out there somewhere reading a book, or writing a coherent sentence, and looking for real students hoping to live happily ever after in a cellphone-free zone. I am now found. I am happy in my new uncluttered and unbureaucratized liminal Never Never-land where once upon a time academics used to live, work and generate knowledge that actually counted while not actually being counted.

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Sudoku

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ALUMNI REMEMBER THE '60s at film screening

Alumni, staff and friends of UKZN gathered at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at the Howard College campus on July 29 for a special cocktail function and screening of the film, *RFK in the Land of Apartheid – A Ripple of Hope* directed by Tami Gold and Larry Shore. The screening was part of the 31st Durban International Film Festival.

WORDS & PHOTO: LUNGA MEMELA

KwaZulu-Natal-based graduates of 1964-1969 were invited by Corporate Relations Division's Alumni Affairs Office to attend the event as part of the film was filmed on the Howard College campus in 1966. A number of the graduates who attended the screening had actually attended the RFK speech on the Howard College campus.

Drawing comparisons between the US Civil Rights Movement and South Africa's struggle for freedom, the film tells the story of how a visit by US Senator, Robert Kennedy (RFK) in 1966 sent a ripple of



Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, Professor Renuka Vithal and Deputy Director at the Centre for Creative Arts, Mrs Monica Rorvik at the screening of *RFK in the Land of Apartheid*.

hope across the land in the midst of one of the most oppressive periods of apartheid. It includes extracts from a presentation at

the former University of Natal which has become one of the most often-quoted speeches against apartheid and injustice.

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