

*"It's not: 'lest we forget'
.....but rather that we understand why we actively remember!"
Ethel Kriger, a friend.*

*"The past was always there,
lived inside of you,
and it helped to make you who you were.
But it had to be placed in perspective.
The past cannot dominate the future."*

Barbara Taylor Bradford, writer.

SKN 29.0

We remember!
Our memory to counter racism,
exclusion and authoritarian rule!
June 2016.
Horst Kleinschmidt.

Second gathering of the Schmelen-Kleinschmidt-Uirab-Bam family.



Charles Otto Uirab, family biographer, oral history expert par excellence and our guide during the Fransfontein gathering.

In the shade of the Mopani tree between three Uirap family homes in Fransfontein, we discussed and listened. For three days there was no place more agreeable to be. The adjacent *kookskerm*, with its huge tripods on open fires, attended to by young and old, provided for wonderful bodily sustenance. Communication happened in Damara (family of Namaqua), Afrikaans, Oshiwambo, English and German.

A midnight thunderstorm provided a great spectacle and welcome cool air, but when it was over the ground was virtually as dry as the day before and the heat intense and unrelenting.

Fransfontein is home to the small Swartbooi community in northern Namibia. The gravel road from Khorixas to Kamanjap takes one through Fransfontein. From Thursday 7 to 10 April, around 140 relatives came from the Kuiseb delta, Grootfontein, Tsumeb, Windhoek, Cape Town, Cologne and London. Those present were descendants of the Chief Swartbooi, the Sabata Swartboois, the Kleinschmidts and the Bam's. The missionary couple Hinrich and Zara Schmelen and their children provide the key to what connects us all. All of us have a genetic link that takes us back to these ancestors two centuries ago. As family histories go, this is no big deal, but in our instance, there is much more to it. Zara was of Khoi (or possibly Orlam) origin, and Hinrich's roots lie in Europe. By meeting and discussing, we bridged, once more, the social divide and historical barrier the past created through racial stigma and political dogma. Despite political freedom and democracy in 1990 in Namibia, and 1994 in South Africa, some barriers and prejudices persist to this day.

Our gathering is a reminder and a statement! We challenge Namibian and South African society still trapped in racial thinking! In particular, we have a message to vast numbers of 'whites' that deny their slave or Khoi blood relatives, whether created through wedlock or outside of wedlock. Our family experience tells us that silence and denial about the past has to be turned into telling, listening and acknowledgement before we, as a family and as nations, can move forward.

In Fransfontein our family met for the second time. In September 2014, we met in Komaggas, in the Northern Cape of South Africa. (See reports on this at www.horstkleinschmidt.co.za and go to: Newsletters and see SKN23 and SKN24.)

By being together, we created the space to listen and to be heard across the divide that shaped us on both sides. It was right for those of us who are (now mostly) the children of those who caused the pain, to listen to the woundedness of those pained. That is one side of the journey. The other is to acknowledge what we were taught and educated into as 'whites' and what our fathers may have done to assert or enforce apartheid. The task we set

ourselves is a dialogue. For one side to listen or speak remains incomplete without the other similarly listening and speaking.

We believe we offer a new milestone for reconciliation. We recognise that our actions do not yet deal with aspects of justice and restitution. The journey is neither simple nor quick. In isiZulu and isiXhosa there is a single word that encapsulates what we seek to achieve: Masibuyisane! It is the act of walking toward each other after a dispute or a separation and to create a new beginning.

The Fransfontein programme included:

- A visit to **Twyfelfontein** (doubtful fountain), the place of 6000-year-old rock-engravings by early San and then Khoi people. They called the place /Ui-/Ais which - *jumping waterhole*. It was as a place of worship and where to conduct rituals. In the main, these are rock engravings as opposed to painted rock art of more recent times. A son of the Uirabs, trained as an interpreter, acted as our personal guide. UNESCO approved Twyfelfontein as Namibia's first World Heritage Site in 2007. I urge those interested to Google 'Twyfelfontein'.



- Then a visit to the nearby **Petrified Forest** – an ice-age glacier brought these gigantic tree trunks, now petrified, from Central Africa into the place that is today hot and arid.



- We were given an educational walk-about in Fransfontein. Charles Otto Uirab explained why the Swartboois settled in Fransfontein when their original place, Rehoboth, had to be abandoned in 1864. Missionary Kleinschmidt was their teacher at the time and he and his family fled Rehoboth with his congregation because of the violent attack of Jonker Afrikaner and his men. A visit to the Fransfontein graveyard provided several intriguing historic insights. (See separate essay: Fransfontein stories on web site)



- An invitation by descendants of the Bam's to a meal at Bampos and to their community graveyard (adjacent to Fransfontein), led to more family connections and stories. (See more in Fransfontein stories on the web site).

- One evening in the open, under the Mopani tree, with projector and screen, Kenneth Makatees and I spoke to a picture presentation we called 'Gwarretjie'. It provides a closer look at the history of Southern Africa and how one family is entangled with that history. (See the presentation on the web site).

On Sunday morning a thanks-giving service was held in the Fransfontein Lutheran Church. One of the congregants wrote afterwards: "For me the church service was the highlight. When Horst, and Otto walked up to the front, hand in hand, I had to fight back the tears. I have been showing the photo, of the front of the church, to all my work colleagues and anyone else who is interested".

Another wrote: "It was a wonderful gathering. I am so grateful for the reunion. It is very important that one knows ones roots.

This is how Charles Otto Uirab sums up the proceedings: "In Komaggas (the family gathering in September 2014) I made the following remark at our (family) Truth and Reconciliation session, 'We, the descendants of Ludwig Kleinschmidt will not beg anybody to be accepted as family, because we did not ask for Ludwig Junior to be born'. Now, at the gathering in Fransfontein my heart was filled with happiness and love when we received our white

nephews and nieces; there was no bad feeling or doubt. The Lord is busy showing everybody that He is Almighty. Peace, peace and peace again ... with hearts full of love, in Jesus Name! Amen.

It was a beautiful and happy gathering. The highlights were the gathering under the tree between the three houses of the /Uirab family, descendants from the Kleinschmidt arm of the Schmelen Tree, and also when we, the members of the Schmelen family tree gathered at the altar at the church. Tears of happiness flowed from some family members ... it was history in the making. Unity makes us strong. Jesus is our Savior. Amen.”

Our Fransfontein hosts were:



Bisey and Wilhencia Uirab



Kaphadi and Dr David Uirab



Manda, daughter Julieth and Charles Otto Uirab

Our efforts we trust, contribute to healing and creating a new identity that embraces rather than divides. We urge other families, religious and cultural bodies to emulate our example. We stand ready to assist those who might initially be daunted by the prospect. We are convinced that nationhood, after colonial and apartheid rule, demands more than for national leaders to call for reconciliation. Ours is a grass roots initiative that can be repeated elsewhere, hundreds and thousands of times!

No one inspired us more than Nelson Mandela. In his book *Long Walk to Freedom* he wrote:

“The Oppressor and the Oppressed Must Both be Liberated

I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even in the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished. It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked

behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case... We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning."

The question many in Fransfontein asked was: But what actually connects us? How are we related? What are the genetic, the marriage and extra-marital connections? In a two-page Powerpoint presentation (on my web site), I try to provide a simple and abridged pictorial 'Tree' that takes us through 200 years and six generations from Zara and Hinrich Schmelen to the present day. My apologies to any of you who I excluded! I also had to exclude the generations before Zara and Hinrich and exclude the present generation of children and grandchildren. My limited IT knowledge stopped me from building a bigger picture Tree.

The Dream of a Fransfontein museum.

Charles Otto Uirab has a dream. He has taken first steps to realising this dream. In Fransfontein, a main tourist artery, he has purchased a piece of land and had plans drawn for a museum that will capture the rich history of the Swartboois and the wider family of Zara and Hinrich Schmelen.

Committing to paper oral history and re-writing the history handed down by both German and South African colonial views is a huge task. We can all play a part in helping Charles Otto realise his dream!

PS: Remnants of old order thinking in Namibia.

Alicja Beksinska a medical student in the UK, Immo Kleinschmidt's daughter, posted the comment below on Tripadvisor (a holiday website) after she and her father stayed a night at Bambatsi Lodge, before they reached Fransfontein. Their experience goes to show that the old white establishment, like in South Africa, refuses to adapt or learn, twenty-four years after independence! In the example described below, it turns out, that Immo's and thus my grandparents, and the grandparents of owner-managers of Bambatsi were best of friends when they lived in Otjimbingue and Karibib in the early part of the 20th century.

Alicja wrote this on Tripadvisor where Bambatsi Lodge is advertised: *"Racist ideology served with your dinner"*

At this guest farm you have your evening meal sitting at the same table with the owners Inge and Gerald, who engage you in conversation. This would be all very well, if it wasn't for their shockingly racist views about their fellow Namibians, which they make no attempt at keeping to themselves. We found this deeply offensive and thought we should warn potential visitors that they would have their dinner with people whose attitudes remain rooted in a racist ideology that held sway in Namibia's troubled pre-independence history. An unpleasant surprise after 26 years of Namibian independence. And by the way, if you are vegetarian, expect to be interrogated about why you are not eating meat. Although the farm is in a beautiful location, we would not go back again. Stayed April 2016, travelled with family.

To further see and read about the Fransfontein family gathering please go to:

www.horstkleinschmidt.co.za.

On the title page, you will find four pieces that expand on this story:

1. An abridged family tree in pictures which explains what links us all and binds us into one family.
2. SKN 2. Fransfontein stories.
3. SKN 3. Gwarretjie – the presentation of Kenneth Makatees and myself during the family gathering. Despite the amount of detail contained, this is work in progress. Parts of it require correction or improvement, and the story remains incomplete.
4. Pictures of the gathering and the surrounding area we visited.

Kind regards to all, especially the family who made the trip to Fransfontein to continue us on our journey.

Horst Kleinschmidt