

to love George as a colleague and friend. From time to time he involved me in one or other of his varied and unconventional extracurricular causes – e.g. establishing Saheti, a project that really seemed outrageous at the time. I earnestly cautioned him that, as he knew only too well, the Greek community was notoriously conservative, if not downright pro-government, and it was madness to launch a frankly colour- and gender-blind Greek-language school. Today, of course, the Saheti schools stand as a monument to George Bizos’s folly.

Then again, at the height of the crisis in 1987, with townships in flames while Casspirs rolled, George commandeered me into acting as go-between and witness to an oral and deniable agreement between him and the Minister of Justice and Prisons which entailed George secretly flying to Lusaka as emissary from his client in Pollsmoor prison about talks about talks. I thought he was mad and told him so. Once again I was wrong: talks there were – and here we are.

One day I arrived home to find George and a posse from Sharpeville waiting in my study. They had devised a plan to offer the government a confidential settlement: if the Sharpeville Six’s death sentences were to be commuted, they on behalf of the community would guarantee an end to unrest in their township. Preposterous, I thought, but an indirect approach was made and, whether coincidentally or otherwise, shortly thereafter the sentences were indeed commuted and civic peace prevailed in the township.

George never mentioned the matter again. He never claimed credit for innumerable such acts of compassion. He was a great advocate and an untiring protagonist for the meek.



“Just George”

by Kameshni Pillay SC

I met George in January 1997 when I began as a candidate attorney at the Legal Resources Centre in Johannesburg. George was one of the reasons I wanted to work at the LRC and of course I was in awe of him and coveted the opportunity to work with him.

When I finally met George in person, I was bowled over by how approachable he was. He effortlessly exuded charm and warmth, and was clearly not immune to the starry-eyed adoration heaped on him by new trainees. I remember struggling to call him “George”. In desperation, I even offered to call him “Uncle George”. He simply laughed it off and insisted that he was “just George”.

Over 20 years later, I find myself repeating many of the basic advocacy rules George drummed into us as trainees. I remember a rare moment of having to face George’s wrath for giving him a superficial summary of the relief sought by an applicant in an advocacy training exercise. George was not impressed. I was mortified. He insisted that I break down and analyse every word used in the applicant’s prayers. It

was a lesson well learnt. To this day, I hear George’s voice in my head each time I read a notice of motion for the first time.

Apart from his willingness to teach, the thing that endeared George to me the most was his fierce commitment to fight for the underdog. I once approached him to travel to Vryburg Magistrates’ Court with some of us in order to represent students charged with sedition for being involved in anti-racism protests. George initially expressed doubts about the long trip, and the possibility of an extended trial in the magistrates’ court. At the last minute, he agreed to lead the team. As things turned out, George was received as a long-lost son in Vryburg. Even the prosecutor was star-struck! He sheepishly withdrew all the charges against our clients and George happily spent the remainder of the morning signing autographs and posing for pictures. “Just George” indeed!

As I look back at time spent with George, I can only but feel gratitude for the wonderful memories with an incredible human being. Hamba kahle George! Gone but never ever forgotten.