Free State Bar

Contributed by **Amelia Swanepoel**

WELCOMING OF JUDGE GREYLING-COETZER

On 5 March 2026 the Free State Bar had the privilege of welcoming Judge Greyling-Coetzer, following her appointment on 1 December 2025 to the Free State Division of the High Court.

Judge Greyling-Coetzer is no stranger to the Free State Bar, having completed her pupillage with the Society. She was admitted as an advocate in 2010, after which she joined the Johannesburg Society of Advocates and subsequently the Mpumalanga Society of Advocates.

In her address, Judge Greyling-Coetzer paid tribute to members of the Free State Bar who played an important role in the early stages of her career. She also expressed her sincere appreciation for the support and guidance she received from the Free State Bar throughout her professional journey.

EXTRACT FROM THE SPEECH OF JUDGE GREYLING COETZER

"Let me start by thanking the Free State Bar for hosting this evening. The Bar has always had a reputation not only for quality of advocates, but also for its warmth and camaraderie; and tonight is yet another example of that generosity of spirit …

The members of the Free State Bar taught me important lessons, some legal, and some practical. Recalling some – 'always read the file properly before going into hysteria' – wisdom of Snellenburg SC; 'never underestimate a well-prepared opponent' (according to Van Rhyn SC) …

But there is something very special about returning to where it all started. To return to serve in the Free State Division feels very much like a full-circle moment and to enjoy the support of the members of the Free State Bar in achieving same is most appreciated."

NEW MEMBERS

Since January 2026, the FS Bar has welcomed five members after they successfully completed their pupillage and were admitted as advocates. All five members got off to a flying start and faced the challenges and opportunities of being an advocate head-on. The FS Bar wishes these members success in their careers. May they reach the heights they aim to achieve.

Sitting, left to right Felicia Mashiya and Ilze Strydom.
Standing, left to right Mamello Nteo, Triston Cantor and Nkululeko Xaba.

SERVING ON THE BENCH

To serve on the Bench is not only a privilege, but also an honour. During the first term of this year, Sehapi Motloung SC was honoured with an invitation to serve as acting judge in the Free State Division of the High Court.

IN MEMORIAM HENCO DE LA REY SC

On 10 May 2026, the Free State Bar received the sad news that Henco de la Rey SC passed away after a short illness.

He was not only a member of the bar council, but also a well-liked member of the Society. The FS Bar commemorated Henco de la Rey SC on 18 May 2026. He was remembered for his calmness, integrity and a jurist with an analytical and crisp mind. His door was always open to any member who needed assistance or guidance.

Neil Snellenburg SC rendered a eulogy, while Stanley Reinders spoke as a friend and Amelia Swanepoel as a previous pupil. In honouring Henco, the tributes were kept brief and to the point, as he would have preferred. In a moving ceremony that followed, Henco's name was removed from the list of advocates in the foyer of our chambers and a farewell by other senior counsel.

MEMORIAL
HENDRIK "HENCO" EMANUEL DE LA REY SC

by **Neil Snellenburg SC**

I will interchangeably refer to De La Rey SC and Henco. I beg your indulgence if I get a bit emotional. I will do my best not to.

I don't have the time, nor the words to pay proper homage to De La Rey SC nor to describe fully Henco's contribution to the Free State Bar, as member, colleague, friend and at bar council level as well as to the jurisprudence and the law in general. Suffice to say, Henco was a true counsel who had the respect of his peers.

Henco leaves behind the love of his life, his wife Ilse, his son Henri, his mother Ella, his sister Ancha and his brother Andre. Henco and Ilse's love, their marriage, was destined; it was written in the fabric of time, as I will touch upon. I had the privilege of speaking to Ilse, Henri and Ella, unfortunately, as it goes, in the worst possible circumstances. Our love and our thoughts remain with them; we carry them in our prayers.

The are two sayings, one in Afrikaans and the other a well-known African saying, both equally apposite to Henco:

The first comes from a poem authored by Jan F.E. Cilliers in the early 1900s paying homage to General Christiaan Rudolph De Wet, also a son of the Free State, and a revered general in the Anglo Boer War at the turn of the century. It may as well have been written for Henco De La Rey SC:

"Stil, broers, daar gaan 'n man verby,
hy groet, en dis verlaas.
Daar's nog maar één soos hy;
bekyk hom goed."

The direct translation in English is as follows:

"Hush, brothers, a man passes by,
he greets, and it is for the last time.
There is but one like him;
Observe him well."

Second: "Uwile umthi omkhulu" in isiXhosa and isiZulu. It means "'n Groot boom het geval," in Afrikaans, translating to "the [a] great tree has fallen" in English.

De La Rey SC was born in Welkom on 12 July 1966. He would turn have turned 60 this year. He matriculated at the Goudveld High School in Welkom in 1984, whereafter he obtained both his Baccalaureus Legum Civilium (BLC) as well as Baccalareus Legum (LLB) respectively on 16 August 1988 and 3 April 1990 at the University of Pretoria (more commonly known as Tukkies).

He met his wife to be, Ilse, who was busy with her B-Mus degree for the first time whilst studying at Tukkies, although they were at that stage only friends, acquaintances.

During 1990 De La Rey SC did his articles at Kloppers & De la Rey, Welkom, following in the footsteps of his late father, Dolf. His articles were interrupted by compulsory military conscription, whereafter he continued his articles at Tim du Toit Inc, Pretoria from 1991 to 1993. At that time Ilse worked as an airhostess.

De La Rey SC was admitted as attorney of the High Court on 18 May 1993. Ilse had in the meantime left Pretoria. She was transferred to Cape Town, without Henco knowing.

During 1993 Henco practised as Professional Assistant (PA) at Tim du Toit Inc, Pretoria. During 1994 he moved to Cape Town where he practiced as PA at Visagie Vos & Partners, and during that year, would you believe, he and Ilse ran into each other and reconnected in the Cape.

Ilse tells me that Henco decided to go backpacking for a month in Europe; on my calculations this would have been during 1995. Ilse, still an airhostess, arranged to work on the flight Henco took to Europe. When Henco returned from Europe in April 1995 he asked Ilse to marry him. They were married in July 1995, and they had a love that endured; a great marriage, ended prematurely.

During 1996, De La Rey SC became a partner at De La Rey Attorneys, Bellville where he practiced until 2000.

De La Rey SC was called to the Bar during 2000. He was admitted as advocate of the High Court of South Africa in the Western Cape Division on 11 February 2000 and after completing his pupillage he commenced practice at the Cape Society of Advocates where he practised for 17 years until August 2017.

I first met Henco in 2017 during his interview with the bar council when he applied to become an ordinary member of the Free State Bar.

Henco took chambers at our Bar on 1 December 2017. He received his letters patent from the President of the Republic of South Africa on 26 March 2025.

He was appointed as formal mentor to Lesaoane Walter Mohale and Amelia Swanepoel. Swanepoel is in practice as member at our Bar.

De La Rey SC was first elected to the bar council in 2022, after which he served several terms, including the 2025/2026 term. This is a testament to his leadership and the trust the members of our Bar placed in him.

I had the privilege and pleasure of serving with De La Rey SC during all his terms on the bar council. Henco always listened to the different views, considered them and then gave his input – straightforward, well-reasoned, stripped of unnecessary verbiage and, even during the most robust debate, always with empathy. He was never afraid to make the right decision.

Henco had his acting debut as a judge in 2025.

An English lord chancellor once said: "I like my judges to be gentlemen; if they also know a little law, so much the better".

What the lord chancellor in fact conveyed was the importance of a judge's temperament. De La Rey SC was not only a gentleman, but he had a wealth of legal knowledge and acumen.

De La Rey SC was a true jurist, and while he specialised in delictual law during the latter part of his practice, he was well-versed in all branches of the law. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word, as everybody here who knew him can attest. He acquitted his obligations as a judge during his acting stint with aplomb.

Henco was an invaluable part of our Bar. He quickly became a friend to many of us, a valued and respected colleague and a mentor to others.

When I asked Henco's son, Henri, what the first thing was that came to mind when he thought about his dad, he said he was an honorable man. No matter how difficult the times or challenges, his dad would always choose the right path over the easy one, setting an example of how a good father and husband should act.

At the end of it all, our children are our only true legacy. What a beautiful testimony to a truly great man. I personally cannot think of a finer tribute.

Henco lived by that code. Like me, he believed in the Bar and in the future of our juniors. The stronger the junior Bar, the healthier the Bar.

In the rich tradition of the Bar, one never had to ask Henco to attend any event or function, even at his own personal cost. He was always there, even if he could only stay for the formal part.

"HE IS AND WILL BE PROFOUNDLY MISSED, BUT HENCO WILL ALWAYS LIVE ON IN OUR MEMORIES, OUR HEARTS, AND OUR ACTIONS."

Leadership is more often than not a heavy cross to bear, never more so because the right choice is frequently the least popular choice. Henco, living by his code, always strived to make the right choice, whether it was popular or not. Yet, he always had empathy and kindness. He was a true leader who played a pivotal role in his own right in our Bar's development.

De La Rey SC's attributes, standing and measure as counsel were recognised by his peers when he was unanimously recommended for senior counsel honours, which were ultimately conferred on him. Not every advocate wants to become silk, and that is perfectly alright – it is a personal choice. Henco wanted the challenge, and he deservedly became senior counsel.

On a personal level, I have – not had – the deepest respect for Henco as a person, as counsel, as a friend and as a colleague.

He was a beacon of strength when storms raged, able to calm rising tempers without much ado. Henco would assist without complaint or excuse no matter how busy he was. He approached problems in a practical and realistic manner, but always with empathy and kindness.

He was honourable, ethical and principled – he would never compromise his ethics, his reputation, or his values for anyone – and he was dependable.

I had the privilege of having Henco appear before me whilst acting. He was a formidable counsel with the ability to identify the core issues and get straight to the point.

He will always be part of our family and our Bar, and so are you, Ilse and Henri. We are here for you whenever you need us.

Henco fought bravely, with dignity, to the end against an invisible foe. He departed this world for ethereal peace in the presence and security of his loved ones at his home.

De La Rey SC has made his last argument; his voice is silent, his chamber door closed.

He is and will be profoundly missed, but Henco will always live on in our memories, our hearts and our actions.

I pay tribute to a husband, a father, a friend, a colleague, an eminent senior counsel, a valued and loved member of the Free State Society of Advocates and the legal community at large.

Rest in Peace, Henco; you are respected and loved. A