

## REMEMBRANCE EVENT

Stellenbosch University (SU) hosted a remembrance and community engagement event at the Tygerberg campus on Heritage Day (Friday 24 September 2021) where the community of Tiervlei shared their stories about Hardekraaltjie cemetery.

At the event **Prof Nico Koopman**, SU's Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel, said that we engage in the universal human practice to 're-member' together. "Again a member, always a member, we re-member the past on this day, the people of the past, the practices of the past, the places of the past, the pleasures and joys of the past, the pains and hurts of the past. We re-member the past, we resist amnesia and forgetfulness and together we embrace memory and healing. But on this day, we also re-member the people of the present, the practices of the present, the places of the present, and also the pains and joys of the present. We resist apathy and inactivity and together we embrace attention pain that leads to action.

"We re-member the future, the people yet to come, the practices that we want to see in the future, the places we want to see in the future, the pleasures and joys of the future, the pains and hurts of the future. Yes, we re-member the future, we therefore resist doom and gloom. Together we embrace hope and expectation, we embrace imagination and innovation.

"We are together at this specific site that calls for memory, that calls for imagination, that calls for attention pain and action. We want to journey forward together as partners that consist of various role-players, the University, the Faculty, the community, governmental bodies, municipality, provincial government and national heritage agencies. On this journey we want community participation that guides us. We want an accompanying research process so that together we develop, through narratives, stories, scientific work – all together we can develop a comprehensive, historical, scientific and medical narrative for this site. We want to seek ways, together, to commemorate this site as a space where restitution and healing of memories is advanced. As a site from where restorative practices are activated and enacted, as a site where new possibilities are imagined and strived for. Over the next few years we want to strengthen the foundation for this joint journey of the various role-players.

"We want to be a humble, highly teachable partner on this journey."

**Prof Aslam Fataar**, who acted as programme director for the event, emphasised that the event is not the start of the process as it has never stopped. "It is a new, more productive phase of a process that has not been productive and inclusive. We are now moving the process forward to discover and rediscover our humanisation. It is a process of re-humanisation.

Several role-players and community leaders shared their experiences and memories at the event.

**Mr James (Kosie) Trump** pointed out the inadequacy of restitution after 1994 and highlighted the deep hurt and suffering that people suffered under apartheid.

**Mr Daniël Dietrich** related how he started doing research on exactly where the cemetery was, including at the archive. Dietrich, whose aunt and grandfather were buried at Hardekraaltjie, recited a moving poem he wrote, while **Mr Bennie Parring** said that he had had two older brothers who also had been buried at Hardekraaltjie and that he had visited the site with his parents. He also visited the area to cut wood and recalled how people had been buried there being transported on a donkey cart from the church.

**Rev Daniel (Piet) Bester** started working in the area in 1962. He expressed concern about the future and especially whether young people will be interested in what will happen there. "Not only bones are buried here, but also pain. Pain does not disappear in a day." He added that "our zeal" could be a monument to the young people of the future. "There should be something here that will remind our people of yesterday, of the day before yesterday and of another day and that they will say 'thank you very much for what you did'."

**Ms Erica Jacobs'** parents arrived in the area in the 1940s. In her career, she tried to see how there could be investment in the community of Ravensmead so that children from that community could also study at SU. "The unfortunate thing is that this generation upon generation of pain means that many of our children do

not finish school, which means that they do not have the opportunity that many children had who came to Stellenbosch. I do not ask, I say, that much can be done in terms of community building.” She added that even in those days there had been an upper town and a lower town. Now there is no longer an upper town. “Our community has become impoverished. Over the past ten years, there has been so much sadness among the families that I am aware of. At least three to four children or young people are being shot every weekend. So I ask that this process should not only be an ‘occasion’, but that there will be long-term investment in the community of Ravensmead.”

**Mr Johannes Sebastiaan** thanked community members for their input in the process and also stressed the importance of leaving something behind for those who still have to come.

**Pastor George (Assie) Filander** requested that a sign be erected so that future communities will know what had happened here. He added that he was pleased that the matter was being attended to and that it would not only stop at speeches. “These are tears that lie here. Here lie footprints of time in the sand. Families were buried here.”

**Dr Leslie van Rooi**, Senior Director: Social Impact and Transformation, responded by saying that something should be set up here as a result from the conversations – so that people can enter the campus to remember something. “We also want to know more about what happened here, who had been buried here, how the story around the cemetery played out, what happened after the construction of the hospital, how it came about that some of the people who had been buried here were reinterred. We also want to look for opportunities to make amends and make amends with the hospital and PRASA.” He admitted that the investment in schools did not seem to be sufficient. “And we need to work with schools and the community to see what more can be done. There are children from Ravensmead who have achieved great success in their studies at the University, but of course we want to be able to do more.”

**Dr Therese Fish**, vice-dean of Clinical Services and Social Impact in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, echoed the need to gather information and document it for generations to come – that they will know where they come from.

**Prof Jimmy Volmink**, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, related how Mr Diederichs, who worked as a security guard at the Faculty, informed him of Hardekraaltjie and that some of his family members were buried there and that he was unsure what happened to their remains.

“Over the course of a number of years we have approached different people in the University, the archives in the City of Cape Town. We’ve managed to get little pieces of information, but not the full picture and we still don’t have the full picture, but I did promise him and we are so pleased today that we are able to take the next big step to really looking more carefully, more comprehensively, to what happened here.”

The most important partner is the Tiervlei community. “We stand by the principle that we do ‘nothing about us without us’.

“We want to understand better, and you as the community can help us understand better. We want to reclaim what has been lost, we want to preserve and we want to restore, together.”

**Mr Chefferino Fortuin**, a community leader who is researching the history of Tiervlei, said that it was a nice gesture from the University to appropriately hold the occasion on Heritage Day, and to recognise community members who had family members buried in the area and to start a process. “As a community, we look forward to working hand in hand with the University to finally erect a monument here in memory of our families and a past that had been difficult and sometimes ruthless towards our families and community. We also realise there are difficult questions – such as the remains – that have to be answered. We appreciate the gesture of the University that speaks of transparency and openness not to rewrite history, but to supplement it. Our past is part of the history of the area.”

**END**