

CLOSURE AND SUMMARY
UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
DEPARTMENT 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

MARION FOURIE (Class of 1975)

Soos ons almal al weet, kom alle goeie dinge tot 'n einde. So ook hierdie verrigtinge om die Departement Arbeidsterapie se 50ste bestaansjaar te vier.



50 years – half a century – is a long, long time. 50 years of anything deserves to be celebrated. It is a very special achievement. Just think of 50 years of marriage – something which few couples achieve – as you well know, it is designated the **golden** wedding anniversary.

50 years carries with it a sense of commitment and sustainability; 50 years speaks of something which is enduring. And somehow, those who have been around longer than others attach a rather sentimental significance to achieving milestones of this nature



Such a milestone prompts us to reflect on the past, the present and the future. Now there are different kinds of reflection – all of which are important. If the scenes at the cocktail function and dinner were anything to gauge by, all have enjoyed the opportunity to renew bonds with erstwhile lecturers, classmates and colleagues.

Reflecting on the past

On Thursday evening, both Mss Betty Strydom and Susan Beukes informed us about this Department's early history and development over the past 50 years.



We thank Mrs Strydom, the inaugural Head of Department, for getting this Stellenbosch occupational therapy show on the road and, even more specially, for being present at this celebratory event.

Susan Beukes truly qualifies as the Department's official historian, having been involved in student training at Stellenbosch University for an astonishing 40 years.

We are indeed privileged to have Mrs Anne O'Shea and Prof Ruth Watson in our midst – both past Heads of this Department. I sincerely hope that they will both consider putting pen to paper to detail some of their experiences for the Department's archives.

My own involvement in the planning of these celebrations, coupled with the fact that my beloved daughter joined the ranks of first-year University of Stellenbosch students this year, has prompted me to reflect on the past somewhat more intently than would normally be the case.

Without wishing to overwhelm, I share with you just a few thoughts and insights which have come to me during this process.

Certainly, new students at the University of Stellenbosch today have a very different experience to that which many of us had to endure. The University has an extensive program aimed at welcoming first-years and assisting them to integrate into the student body.



In my own memory, that first week as a proper roinek, far away from home, in the unknown Stellenbosch is as long as the 4 years of study which followed it.

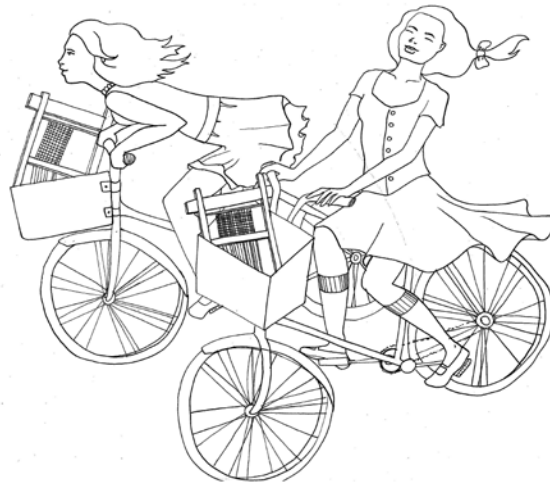


Of course there were times when we had some fun, but my overriding experience of initiation was one of indignity and humiliation. It had little, if anything, to recommend it and is thankfully a thing of the past.



This photo of the very first class of OT students – a group which included Estelle Shipman (who addressed us yesterday) and Alma van Hoogstraten (who worked at Tygerberg Hospital for many years) – just tickled me pink. Not only have uniforms and hair styles changed quite dramatically, but hats are fortunately no longer compulsory for staff members. Mind you, considering the events of recent weeks – specifically the televising of the royal weddings – perhaps hats will make a comeback at formal University functions – who knows?

Modes of transport in Stellenbosch have changed little since the early days. I understand Estelle and Alma were often seen on their bicycles en route to their weaving classes.



Getting back to the issue of dress code, I recall my own horror when I registered at Maties and discovered that slax or trousers of any sort were forbidden. Apart from wearing a dress to school and church, I had never worn a dress elsewhere (and still don't to this day). My mother had to produce a range of "little numbers" before she could put me on the train to Stellenbosch. Our uniforms for clinical practice were a little shorter than those of the class of '61, but wait for it were teamed with neat little shorts in order to preserve our modesty! Overalls were standard attire for practical activity classes.

50 years later, the first year class of 2011 just show how much the dress code has changed.



They are a glorious, colourful collection of individuals!

And then, just the other day, as I walked down the passage to the OT department, I saw this sign on one of the lecture room doors.



In my day lecture room signs only referred to drinking and eating. In this respect, it seems, we had a lot more freedom!



Now if Mrs Strydom was the first member of staff appointed to this department, and while there were many others who followed, it is perhaps fitting that I mention the newest member of staff, Prof Lana van Niekerk.



Obviously she is still on probation. She will have to put in some major time before she can **truly** stake a claim to “belonging” in the University of Stellenbosch OT fraternity.

We are nevertheless very excited about having her with us and about the work that she has specifically been appointed to do – developing research capacity and output. We welcome her warmly.

Turning to the present, there are many blessings and successes of which the Stellenbosch OT Department can be proud. The 25 graduates who presented papers at this celebratory event – showcasing their work – are a representative sample of what the department has produced.

We need to thank them for their contribution in this regard.

So what does the present, as exemplified by these presenters, tell us about the current state of affairs of occupational therapy emanating from this Department?

- **Diversity**

Slowly but surely the demographic profile of students and graduates is becoming more representative of the people of this wonderful country of ours.

It is something of a disappointment to me that we had no male presenters on this occasion. The first male student, Nico van der Heever, graduated as early as 1984 and there have been 4 male graduates since.

- **Professional ethos**

Close attention to the papers which have been presented reveals clearly that occupational therapy's ethos – the innermost and distinctive features of our profession according to Pelouquin – has endured over the years.

I believe that our ability to better articulate the central concepts, beliefs and values of occupational therapy has led to increased recognition and appreciation of the value of our expertise and interventions.

- **Occupational perspective**

In my mind, our profession's refocusing on the centrality of occupation as our core business, is the most exciting development which has occurred in my professional lifetime.

A number of presentations have focused on occupation, the view of man as an occupational being and how ill-health **and** other factors can impact on the ability to perform everyday occupations.

- **Practice arenas**

The presentations inform us that, while not abandoning traditional health practice domains, occupational therapists are now working in a wide range of areas. Mrs Strydom, did you ever imagine that occupational therapists would ply their trade in prisons, factories, high schools or the wild Kalahari for that matter?

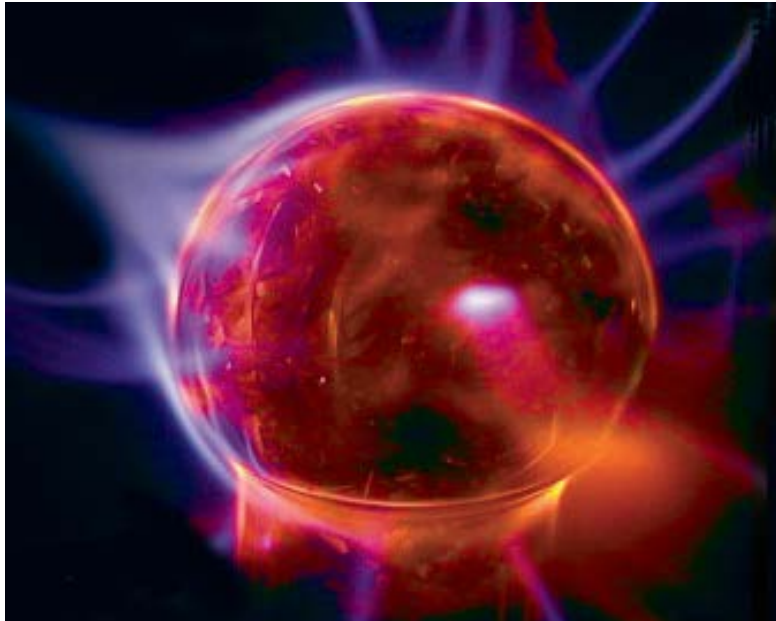
The work that occupational therapists are doing in communities – both urban and rural – as well as in the promotion of health and wellness, is particularly exciting and encouraging.

- **Research focus**

The increased focus on research which has been evident in the papers presented during this event, is heartening. It attests not only to the commitment of practitioners to lifelong learning, but to the desire to better understand the challenges faced by the people we serve, how and why occupational therapy makes a difference and the outcomes which can be expected if we apply our skills and expertise in particular ways.

I am sure many more highlights could be extrapolated from the presentations we have heard which inform us about the present. Suffice to say : Occupational therapy is alive and well at the University of Stellenbosch!

And what of the future?



While this is always a bit of a murky business, my crystal ball predicts a bright and strong future, including :

- Continued training of entry-grade occupational therapists who are competent and confident.
- Training of OT specialists
- Extension of service delivery
- Increased access to funding for research
- Increased contribution to the body of occupational therapy knowledge via post-graduate research.
- Increased visibility of occupational therapy
- Greater acknowledgement of and respect for occupational therapy.

Exciting prospects indeed!

While thinking about the future, it occurred to me that it would be wonderful if we, as a group representing Stellenbosch occupational therapy graduates, could somehow contribute to the future at our alma mater as a collective.

Our colleague, and my friend, Esther Bedeker kept popping into my mind and became the trigger for the challenge which I would like to put to you today.



The venue in which we have enjoyed the past few days, and in which students of various disciplines are taught every day, is, in many respects, inaccessible for anyone who uses a wheelchair to get about.

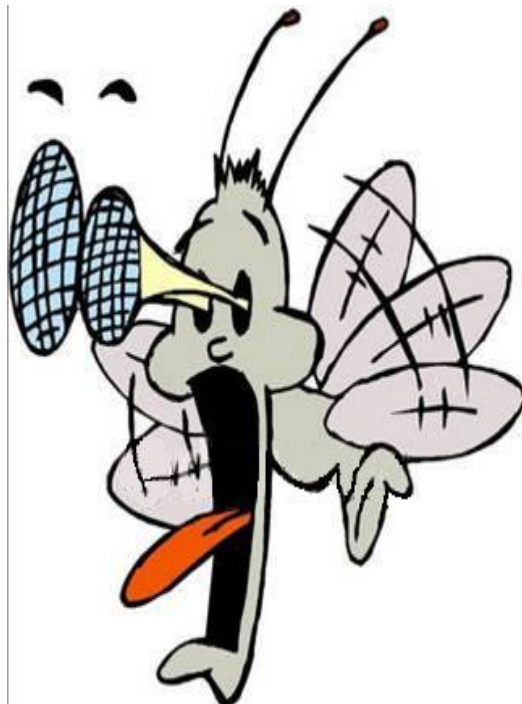
There is something of an irony in the fact that the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons which recognised the fact that disabled persons were entitled to the same political and civil rights as others, was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1975 – the very year in which Esther began her studies in occupational therapy at this University.

Is it not disturbing, 36 years later, that a venue such as this teaching block remains largely inaccessible to people with disabilities?

With apologies to those who have seen me use this analogy before, I would liken this venue to a rhinoceros – a huge, thick skinned challenge, one which is not easily moved.

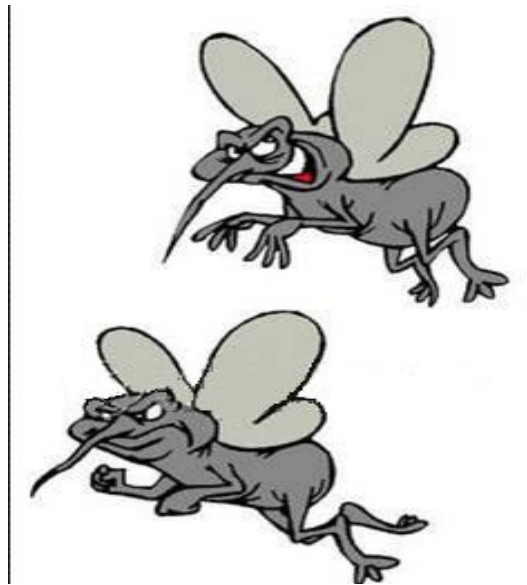


You and I, by comparison, are mere mosquitos.



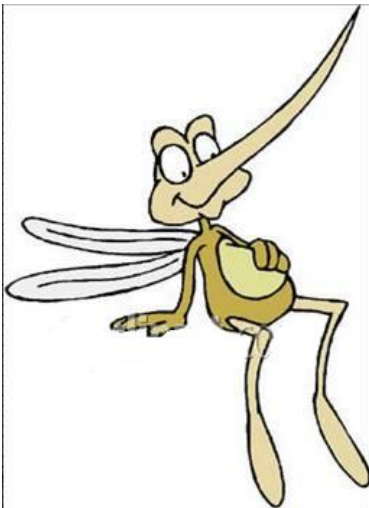
Now we all know that mosquitos have the capability of being very annoying. I am sure you don't need to be reminded about that intensely irritating, high pitched buzz that seems to make itself present just as you are trying to fall asleep.

I know for a fact that various mosquitos – in their individual or staff capacities – have made representations to the powers that be in the past about access concerns at this campus.



Sadly, their appeals – certainly in terms of this, the main teaching block – have only had limited success.

And so, I ask : What kind of a mosquito are you?



OR



Would you care to join me to form a “mizzie mass”, a swarm of mosquitos which collectively may make sufficient noise to penetrate the ear and hearing of the rhino and make it turn tail?



I have taken the liberty of formulating a statement for submission to the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, and perhaps even, if you so wish, to the Rector of the University. It reads as follows :

We, the undersigned occupational therapy graduates and staff (past and present) of the University of Stellenbosch wish to draw your attention to the following matter.

While attending the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the Department of Occupational Therapy, we noted that the Faculty of Health Science main teaching block, in which students of various disciplines are taught each and every day, is not fully accessible or user friendly to wheelchair users.

- Full participation in the basic units of society - family, social groups and community (including places of learning) – is the essence of human experience. The right to equality of opportunity for such participation is set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and should apply to all people, including those with disabilities.
- The rights of disabled people are enshrined in The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

We acknowledge the efforts of the University in improving accessibility of certain of its facilities for disabled students and staff members, but wish to urge the University to do more in this regard.

It is our earnest request, as a collective of concerned alumni – representing classes from 1961 (when the Department of Occupational Therapy was established) right through to the present – that the Faculty undertakes to investigate and address this issue as a matter of urgency.

Could we please get some kind of indication of support for this action from the audience – perhaps by show of hands.

Thank you. I appeal to each of you to sign the statement as you exit the lecture theatre just now. Numbers are important if we are to be taken seriously. Perhaps, in this way, **we** can really make a contribution to the **future**.



I trust that you have thoroughly enjoyed the academic and social programs which have made up this 50th celebration. I certainly have.

Ek bedank graag vir Susan en haar span vir die beplanning en bestuur van hierdie wonderlike byeenkoms – dit terwyl julle normale akademiese verpligtinge voortgegaan het. Susan, I am sure I speak for all in wishing the Department continued success for the next 50 years. May the Department and occupational therapy at our University flourish and develop to achieve its full potential.

The Rector, Prof Bothma, when welcoming first-year students and their parents at the beginning of the year, reminded me of a great but simple truth :

EENKEER 'N MATIE, ALTYD 'N MATIE!