

Martin Wittenberg Eulogy

By Rae Voges

Dear Ben, Ali, Nozipho. Dear family and friends of Martin.

2 Months ago, on the 1st June, we said farewell to our mother Monika. In remembering Martin- as the youngest sister 8 yrs his junior-, I cannot but remember our mother too.

My mother always said: "Every mother thinks her geese are swan", then in German: Meine sind es aber auch! Loosely translated: but mine really are swans!"

She knew a mother should not have favourites, but we sisters knew Martin was her favourite. Martin had a certain charm and wit, as well as a sparkle in his eye, which could melt my mother like butter, and she would proceed to bake the cookies for the digs and do all the laundry. He was her "blue-eyed boy" and she fought fire and brimstone for him, especially during his activist days and later detention.

My mother had read somewhere that if you fed a baby carrots, it helps with intelligence, so she fed Martin so much carrot puree that he broke out orange. That he was blessed with an impressive IQ is undeniable- whether the carrots had anything to do with it....

When Martin was interviewed by a TV crew on his fantastic matric results, the journalist assumed he had inherited his intelligence from our father, but our mother interjected: "the maths genius he got from me!"

I most definitely did not inherit the maths genius, or perhaps my mother had stopped feeding carrot puree to baby no 4; so I sat with this mixture of awe at this brilliant brother, whose achievements were unattainable for mortals, and frustration that I couldn't get him at a game of scrabble; and when I finally could trump him at an argument, I felt great indeed. Our relationship became deeper the year he was forced to live at home under house arrest 1987-1988. I had a group of friends at school- all rebel, anti-establishment, kinda group- and Martin enjoyed their company. We bonded over teenage topics; love, music (Bob Marley, Dire Straits, Johnny Clegg), gossip(he liked gossip).

He was my caring, creative big brother.

Then he got arrested out the house. I got dragged along to my mothers' fiery fights with the Brigadier, to allow me 17 year old to visit for his birthday. Needless to say denied- because it would be too traumatising, (and he is

also a father...) After his release it took a while for that witty, sparkly brother to come back.

He met Christina Scott while she was staying in his room at my parents' house with the infant Nozipho whom she was hoping to adopt. I experienced Christina as just as witty, and remember Martin saying after a feisty debate: "Christina you think in headlines- I think in footnotes!"

I was unable to be at Martin and Christinas wedding, as Jurgen and I had left for Europe straight after our wedding January 1994. When we came back Ali had been born and the family lived in Jo'burg. We had our own children, and then Martin's family moved to Cape Town. When we would see each other, the children were the centre of attention. In all our later contacts, always his pride for his kids took centre stage. In our family opinion you were his greatest achievement. Then the marriage started to break, and Martin wasn't the greatest communicator. When we phoned it would be me talking and hear the odd: "uh huh- mmh, that's great.." He was better face-to-face, so when he started

calling more during his illness, I knew he was not as well as he made out. He spoke more with Onkel Dankwart who has always been the family go-to uncle for difficult, mostly medical situations. So only his children saw how hard it was for him to fight this. He was intensely private and independent and that made him the fighter he was throughout his life, and in his illness. When we saw each other in June, he said that when the Dr told him he was a palliative case in November, he knew this intellectually not emotionally, and when the deterioration happened he was not prepared for it. We are thankful he hasd this time.

When our kids were small we enjoyed Harry Potter books and could have long conversations on it. So in the words of Albus Dumbledore: "To the well-organized mind, death s but the next great adventure."

And to those of us left behind, another Dumbledore quote: "You think the dead we have loved truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever on times of great trouble?" may this be a comfort to us going forward.

Rest in Peace Big Brother.

