

A SEARCH for Truth

A Search for Truth is a story in several parts by Namibian author and poet Hugh Ellis. Each part conveys a truth in its own right, but the end of the text will make you curious to read more... which you can do in the following issue of Sister Namibia.

By Hugh Ellis



I can hardly tell you what's been going through my mind the past week or so. I'm not normally the emotional type. But some things have happened lately to make me question a whole lot of things that I used to think went without saying.

It all started last Saturday. Maria left the house on one of her crazy ventures. Leaving me all alone the entire day. Not that I'm a sexist or anything, but the least she could have done was to ask me in advance. And maybe prepared a meal. I'm no Jamie Oliver. Thank goodness the twins were with their grandmother that weekend, wouldn't have known what to do with them.

"Just tell me," I yelled after her as she rushed out of the house, "What a consciousness-raising workshop is? And how is it going to put food on our table? You know what? These women's rights are killing us! What about my rights? What about ME?"

I know I shouldn't have said all that but sometimes.... with Maria at home and my mad boss at work, seems like life doesn't live up to the advertisement any more.

Dejected, I dragged myself back into the house, and who should phone right then but Michael? Michael! My old school-friend. Did I want to meet him at Hausiku's Pub round the corner? He could be there in an hour.

Michael was a legend at school, a real guy's guy. Hugely built, best player in the soccer team. The girls loved him. A keen bodybuilder and martial artist, few people dared to question him on the streets. But after school, Michael had struggled. A stint in the army did not go well for him. Then there were rumors that he'd become

a 'security consultant', whatever that may be, in some Middle-Eastern country. No one knew for sure.

So, about 11 or 12 I got to Hausiku's, and there was Michael. At least someone who looked like him. Sure, the muscles were unmistakable. But there was none of that bluster he used to have, none of that old arrogance that had allowed him to dominate a room of people without saying a word.

"Mike!" I greeted him, "How the hell are you? How's the mercenary, er, security business?"

"Please John," he said, "That part of my life is long gone. And I don't miss it a bit. In the long run, problems are not solved through the barrel of a gun. Nor even through a good pair of fists, though I used to think so."

This stopped me short. A few years ago, you wouldn't even have passed a remark about this guy's shoes, lest you got a bloody nose as a result.

"So, uh, what do you do for a living these days, Mike?"

"Well, I've been working odd jobs since I got back from the war zone, but I see my real role as an ambassador for peace. And for equal rights, of course."

"Equal rights?"

"Yeah, for sure. You know, at the end of the day people whom we might think we're 'superior' to, say women, or disabled people, or people with a different religion, want the same things we want: safety, dignity, a chance to fulfill one's dreams."

To be honest, 'peace and equal rights' was the last thing I expected out of this guy. He seemed to sense my misgivings. A silence fell.

"So how's life treating you, John?"

I decided that if he wanted to pontificate about equal rights, I'd tell him exactly where he could get off. So I explained about Maria, and how I felt her increasing desire for independence was pulling our relationship apart. I told him how, meanwhile, I felt that my dead-end job was making me feel less and less of a man.

PAARTONE



Sheena Magenya

“Maria keeps talking about ‘empowerment’”, I said, “but I feel less and less empowered as the days go by.”

“Sounds like the two of you need to engage in a constructive conflict,” Michael said.

“What?”

“These situations represent a chance for the both of you to embark on a ‘search for truth’, to use Mohandas Gandhi’s words. To examine your positions and find points within them that you both agree on and can implement. You may find your two angles of vision ultimately illuminate the same truth.”

“I doubt there’s any room for compromise.”

“Compromise? I wasn’t talking about *compromise* necessarily. With compromise, you both gain a bit of what you want, but you both give up a bit too.

“But I believe there’s another way. What thinkers like Gandhi and Martin Luther King called a ‘third way’ or ‘middle way’. You both examine each other’s views. Find out what truth – however little – your ‘opponent’s’ views contain for you. Together you can then put forward elements of a whole new way of tackling the problem. You find a way more inclusive than either of the two ‘bargaining positions’ you started off with.”

“Let’s talk about Maria’s ‘drive for Independence’ as you call it,” Mike said. “Talk to her about it. Really talk. Find out why she wants to be more independent. What parts of her character she feels are left unexplored by being a housewife, perhaps? How she could help you gain new insights in your work situation? You need to be empowered there as much as she does in the home, perhaps?”

“Perhaps,” I admitted grudgingly.

Mike said maybe Maria could help me with that, perhaps by sharing some of the things she learns in those workshops of hers. Maybe she could help me find meaning outside of work, maybe relate better to the kids. I must say I was taken by it. I asked what other advice he had.

“If you try to resolve conflict peacefully, trust the process,”

Mike said. Don’t give up on it. Treat the other person - and yourself - with respect at all times. And ask for a non-violent solution. Violence is something we must stay away from whenever we can.”

I asked if he’d come back home to tell me more. Already we had half the drunks in the bar just itching to give their comments. He agreed.

From Hausiku’s Pub you go up a small hill; my house is just on the other side. Now, as we walked over the crest of the ridge, we saw the unmistakable shape of a police car. As we got closer, it became clear its lights were flashing, and two burly officers were walking around, clearly waiting impatiently, outside my front door!

What will happen next? Find out in the next issue.

THE MAIN POINTS

If you disagree with someone, examine their views to see what points of truth they may contain for you.

Then, try to come up with a new and more inclusive way forward.

Respect yourself and the other person. Trust the process.

Always ask for a non-violent solution.

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