

The Story of Linda and Peter Biehl: Private Loss and Public Forgiveness

Representing our daughter, Amy, we participated and gave testimony at the amnesty hearing for the four young men who murdered her. Recognizing the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa's healing process, we did not oppose the Amnesty Committee's decision to grant them their freedom. We believe, as did our daughter, in the importance of democratic elections in South Africa. The amnesty hearings were but one condition in making them a reality. We grieve our loss, yet forgiveness has freed us. We can honor our daughter, we can remain true to her convictions, and we can carry on her work. Our narrative describes and explains our experience, the media and others' response to our decisions, and the meaning this has had to us and the members of our family: Kim, 31; Molly, 27; and Zach, 20.

by
Peter and Linda Biehl

Peter and Linda Biehl,
the Amy Biehl Foundation.



AMNESTY COMMITTEE
PO Box 3162
Cape Town

Prologue

We had expected the letter. From the day Amy's killers were sentenced to eighteen years in prison for murder and public violence, we had known amnesty applications were probable.

Still, the timing of the letter was interesting. Perhaps we

search each event for the ironies, but the fax arrived from Cape Town on April 22nd: one day after Linda's birthday and four days before what might have been Amy's thirtieth. But irony was quickly lost in the plain reality of the words. Below is the letter-fax from the Amnesty Committee of South Africa's truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Tel: (021) 24 5161
Fax: (021) 23 3280

Dear Mr and Mrs P. Biehl

The Amnesty Committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has received an application for amnesty from Mongesi Manquina in respect of the murder of your daughter, Amy Biehl.

The hearing will commence in the week of 19 May 1997 to 25 May 1997 in Cape Town. We are hereby informing of such dates to enable us to accommodate you should you wish to attend the hearing. Kindly advise us urgently as to a date suitable to yourselves within the aforementioned week to facilitate the necessary arrangements.

You shall be formally notified once we have heard from you by return facsimile.

We look forward to hearing from you.

With our kind wishes hereby extended.

Yours sincerely,

ROBIN BRINK
EVIDENCE LEADER

We knew Manquina's application would be joined by the other three. That was a foregone conclusion. But the others had until May 10, 1997, in which to apply. That was the official cut-off date for amnesty applications.

We were advised by John Allen of Archbishop Tutu's office that the four applicants would present themselves in a single hearing. Given the immediate proximity of the proposed May 19th hearing week, counsel for the applicants could easily appear and request a postponement to provide adequate preparation time. We could make a very long and expensive trip for nothing. This seemed unreasonable and unfair.

Upon consideration of our request that the hearing be re-scheduled to coincide with our planned visit to Cape Town in late June and July, the Amnesty Committee agreed to re-set the hearing for July 8-9, 1997. We were thankful to be spared the expense and probable frustration of an early trip and were grateful for some additional time in which to prepare our statement for the hearing.

There was no question of our participation in the hearing. Amy had informed us four years earlier that the Truth and Reconciliation process was a key pre-negotiated condition upon which free elections for all South Africans could be granted by the National Party—in power at the time. More importantly, a procedure for granting of amnesty in forgiveness of politically di-

rected crimes was essential to the pro-apartheid regime before it could open the ballot boxes to the certainty of Black majority rule.

Amy had said that Nelson Mandela and his African National Congress (ANC) colleagues had refused to accept a blanket amnesty provision and had compromised on case-by-case amnesty, earned on the merits of the evidence presented, against a rigorous standard for proof.



Given this background insight and Amy's passionate efforts to gain free and democratic elections for all South Africans, we could not ignore the Amnesty Committee process. Our failure to appear and participate in the hearing could be interpreted as displaying a lack of respect for a healing process, honorably negotiated and now publicly and unequivocally championed by President Mandella, Archbishop Tutu and other respected South Africans.

We knew we must participate in the process and, believing in it, that we could not oppose amnesty if it were granted on the merits. We were certain Amy would concur.

News of the hearing schedule spread quickly. So did our indication to the Amnesty Committee that we would not retain legal counsel or oppose amnesty, if granted.

Media representatives from South Africa and throughout the United States began telephoning us with their inevitable inquiries. On a small scale, it was reminiscent of the media blitz in the early hours and days following Amy's death.

Always, the questions: "... but, aren't you angry?" or "... you mean you are prepared to forgive your daughter's killers?" It reminded Linda of the days in 1993 when producers from the television tabloid news "magazines" and popular "talk" shows would telephone her looking for an indication that she might like to appear on camera and get "mad." Linda was always so calm, rational, and unsensational that the producers or "talent" people never called back.

Once again, we succeeded in boring the reporters with our peaceful resolve in our decision not to oppose the amnesty applications from Amy's killers. Generally, the reporters were not equipped with backgrounds which would enable them to understand our position. So they covered the story and went on to the next one.

The *Houston Chronicle*, however, sent South African reporter Tony Freemantle, who had written an award-winning feature piece on truth commissions in 1996. Tony spent an

entire day with us in our home. He understood our attitude and the basis for it—although he conceded that he might not be capable of it, himself. His front-page piece for the *Chronicle* ran on Sunday, May 11th—one day after the cut-off date for amnesty applications to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was also Mother's Day (irony again), but Linda didn't seem to notice.

Freemantle's piece was informed and insightful. People told us they found it helpful in understanding our position because it was placed in a well-researched context. This is testimony to the utility of good journalism.

Our preparation for Cape Town really centered around our desire to arrange a meaningful experience for the Kendall family of St. Louis, who would be traveling with us for the first ten days of the trip. The Kendalls have become very important in the educational outreach activities of the Amy Biehl Foundation in the United States and—on their first visit to South Africa—we wanted them to experience vividly the joys and sorrows of life in the townships and informal settlements, to see the contrast with Cape Town's beaches and riches. We wanted them to see what Amy saw. Moreover, as friends, we wanted them to see some of the work we are doing in the Western Cape and to meet some of the people and organizations who are contributing to the building of the new South Africa.

We kept telling ourselves that we would prepare a written statement for presentation at the amnesty hearing. We wanted to be certain of our word choice. Every word must be just right.

Former Ambassador, Princeton Lyman, who had officially informed Linda of Amy's death from Pretoria in 1993, volunteered to review and comment on our prepared statement before our departure. He never had the opportunity to be of service.

When we boarded our flight on June 26, we had no written statement.

We knew our feelings—what was in our hearts and in our heads.

In so many ways, we had been prepared for this event. For years, we had taken our kids to Sunday school. For years, we had taught Sunday school classes in Christian ethics. Standing at the kitchen telephone, moments after learning of Amy's death, Linda recalls fielding a constant stream of telephone calls and visitors thinking the words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

While we have never been serious readers of the Bible, few words could be more appropriate in considering the circumstances of Amy's death. Her friends tried to tell Amy's killers that she was a "comrade" in their struggle. But try reasoning with an angry mob in the heat of battle. It was too late. Amy's killers saw only a white person.

Amy had prepared us for this. On the subject of black violence against White South Africans, Amy repeatedly admonished us to remember that the frustrated and angry Black youth "... are only doing what has been done to them by generations of white oppressors."

Moreover, Amy's admonition that "...when Black South Africans die in the struggle, only numbers are reported—but when white people die, they get complete obituaries with names, families, pets, and everything," was ringing in our ears.

Her dismay at this indignity had been prophetic in the case of her own death in South Africa's struggle. We knew how Amy would feel about the media blitz which had followed her death. After all, she had confided to friends that—in the event of her death—she wanted the same impersonal press treatment accorded her Black colleagues in the struggle.

So... prepared by our own personal background experiences and by our daughter's words in the years and days before her death, there were never any questions about our position. It was a time for humility—a time for forgiveness.

In the end, we knew the words would come. So, armed with Amy's words and a few related materials, we departed for Cape Town.

We were not expecting the international media attention which greeted our arrival in Cape Town. There were television cameras and newspaper reporters present when we

entered the international passenger terminal at the airport. While loading our luggage into a van, a man approached to say, simply, "... I am a resident of Cape Town and I want to thank you for what you are doing."

Within minutes of arrival in our hotel room, the telephone rang. It was a reporter for the *London Times* in the hotel lobby and requesting an interview—on the spot, if we didn't mind. We hadn't begun to unpack our bags.

Everywhere we went in Cape Town, the reporters followed us. It was the pending Amnesty Committee hearing that was fueling their engines. More than this, however, it was the fact that we were not opposing the amnesty applications which was the "story."

It was interesting to us that our acceptance of South Africa's truth and reconciliation process should be so curious—so "newsworthy." What should be so strange about this in a country where reconciliation and forgiving is national policy, rooted in centuries of southern African tradition?

Befitting the almost-comic character of all of this media attention, during a rooftop interview on July 7 for live broadcast to the U.S. for CBS television's morning news, Linda's answer to the first question posed to us was suddenly interrupted when some unknown technician introduced an Afrikaans cartoon show on-air in our place. The producer's shouting through our earphones from New York did nothing to restore our live hook-up. A

\$20,000 satellite booking was, therefore, unceremoniously ended.

We found ourselves wondering why a major news network would go through so much effort and expense to ask us why we would not oppose four amnesty applications in a hearing room the following morning.

On the morning of July 8, we were met at the hotel by our Amnesty Committee Briefer, Paul Haupt. A very professional young psychologist, Paul was assigned to us to be certain we understood the process, to help us anticipate the graphic testimony which would be given with respect to Amy's murder, and to ensure that we were holding up under the pressure.

Our calm seemed to surprise Haupt and—more than once—we teased him with offers to serve as *his* Briefer. He accompanied us as we walked the few blocks to the Amnesty Committee's hearing room—surrounded, as we walked, by television camera and sound crews.

The press of reporters on the sidewalk at 106 Adderty Street was fierce as we passed through lobby security and entered an elevator. We were fairly certain the reporters and camera crews would pin us against elevator walls and trample us.

Through it all, we kept our focus and assured the press that we would do our communicating in the hearing room and at a press conference when the hearing had concluded. During that elevator ride to the Amnesty Committee offices, I felt Amy

was close to us—understanding what we were experiencing and encouraging us to rise to the occasion.

In the months and years since Amy's death, we have reflected from time to time on the adage which suggests that "... a child shall lead you," and we can only say that our daughter has led us through some very challenging times—growing into young adulthood and, now, in a country half way around the world. But—in the midst of the lights, cameras, microphones, questions, jostling, and noise—we knew precisely where we were going and why we were there. Amy had prepared us well for this experience. Now... if we could just hold up our end of the equation.

The quiet of the judge's offices near the hearing room was welcome and we could see the three judges and two lawyers who comprised the Amnesty Committee wolfing down some tea and pastries during the recess which preceded our hearing. With a backlog of more than 5000 cases and an entire nation of hearing rooms to reach, these judges must have precious little time in life's small pleasures and many miles between sleeps.

The quiet freeze-frame was broken by a small and silent procession of eight figures who appeared suddenly in the corridor leading to the hearing room. In an instant, we shared a narrow hallway with four inconspicuously armed security men... and with four of Amy's killers.

They were in street clothes. No handcuffs. They

appeared a bit uneasy and surprised to encounter us. It was my first time encountering them. Linda had already experienced the Supreme Court trial and had watched three of them carefully on several occasions.

I was within inches of my daughter's killers and—somehow—I was in control of my emotions. In retrospect, I know Amy's hand was on my shoulder at that moment. Linda has said that she doesn't feel anger when she sees Amy's killers, only a sort of profound sadness—a void. I know now what she means. She has described the feeling exactly.

Media representatives were permitted in the crowded hearing room for fifteen minutes before we entered. The families of the four applicants were brought to us in a steady stream—one after another. "We're parents too ..." we said to them. We wanted the parents to know that we could understand a bit of what they might be thinking and that if their sons should be fortunate enough to win amnesty, we expected them to be responsible parents and to be accountable for the behavior of their sons. Accountability is an important aspect of forgiveness. Amnesty demands accountability in order to establish balance and equity in the equation.

The statements of the four amnesty applicants were read into the record by their two attorneys—retained as counsel by the Pan African Congress (PAC) on whose behalf the applicants claimed to be acting when

they attacked Amy. The statements were carefully prepared to meet the tests for amnesty: a political motive was established for the murder, a confession was made to the act of murder, and an apology was offered to Amy's parents and family.

To hear these statements read into the record by attorneys—rather than by the applicants—established distance be-



Peter and Linda Biehl

tween the applicants and us, even though they were seated barely ten feet away.

For me, it created an almost abstract quality to the statements. Although they were quite graphic in their recounting of the act, and although the words tore at me inside, I felt somehow removed and empty of emotion.

By contrast, the statements were very real to the parents and families of the applicants. At least one parent left the room when her son's confession to stabbing Amy in the

heart was read. The four applicants had denied participation in Amy's murder during their Supreme Court trial. I am certain that parents were hoping—somehow—that words of confession would not have to be spoken. Hearing the words must have been very difficult.

I believe the experience in the hearing room must have been more difficult for the applicants' parents than for us. We felt liberated in our position and free from guilt. We were confident that we were completely consistent with Amy's expectations of us.

We had spent part of a day in our hotel room drafting our statement. It came naturally and—in the end—it was really a matter of who would deliver which portions. It seemed right that Linda, as Amy's mother and the one most responsible for her character development, should present Amy to those in the hearing room, and I would articulate our support of the truth and reconciliation process and our rationale for not opposing amnesty.

Statement by Peter Biehl

"Thank you Mr. Chairman, members of the Amnesty Committee, for taking a few moments to hear our statement.

We come to South Africa as Amy came, in a spirit of committed friendship, and, make no mistake about it, extending a hand of friendship in a society which has been systematically polarized for decades is hard work at times. But Amy was al-

ways about friendship, about getting along, about the collective strength of caring individuals and their ability to pull together to make a difference, even to transform corrupt nation states.

In her valedictory high school graduation speech in 1985, Amy quoted biologist Lewis Thomas on the importance of collective thinking. Thomas said:

"The drive to be useful is encoded in our genes, but when we gather in very large numbers, as in the modern nation state, we seem capable of levels of folly and self-destruction to be found nowhere else in all of nature."

But he continues,

"...if we keep at it and keep alive we are in for one surprise after another. We can build structures for human society never seen before, thoughts never thought before, music never heard before."

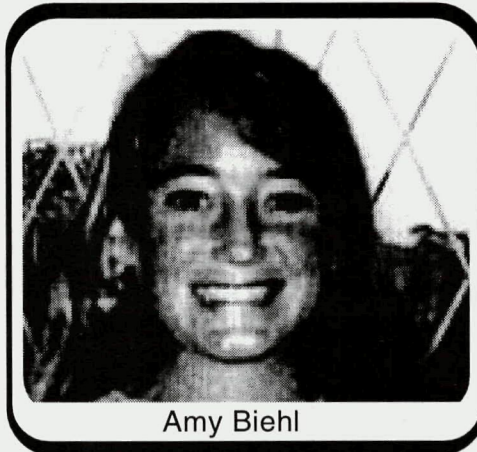
This was Amy at age 18. This was Amy on the day she died. She wanted South Africans to join hands to sing music never heard before, and she knew this would be a difficult journey.

On 21 June 1993, just two months before she died, Amy wrote in a letter to the *Cape Times* Editor:

"Racism in South Africa has been a painful experience for Blacks and Whites and reconciliation may be equally painful. However,

the most important vehicle toward reconciliation is open and honest dialogue."

Amy would have embraced your truth and reconciliation process. We are present this morning to honour it and to offer our sincere friendship. We are all here in a sense to consider and to value a committed human life which was taken without opportunity for dialogue. When this process is concluded we must link arms and move forward together.



Amy Biehl

Who, then, is Amy Biehl? Amy was one of our four children. Her sisters are Kim, who is now 31, Molly 27, and her brother Zach, aged 20. We are very proud of all of our children and their accomplishments. But because Amy was killed in South Africa, because our lives have now become forever linked to South Africa, we are here to share a little of Amy with you.

Amy was a bright, attractive child. She loved competitive sports such as swimming, diving, gymnastics, among others. She played the flute, the guitar. She studied ballet. She

was a focused student from the very beginning, always striving for straight A's. I'm going to read a page from Amy's high school journal so in her own words you can get a glimpse of her. This is Monday, October 3rd, 1983. She was 16.

"I have had more homework this year than I have ever had before. In lots of ways this has helped me because I have been forced to get organized and really dig in. But I have also been forced to stay up until 11:30 or 12:00 each night making me very cranky during the day. One thing that worries me is whether or not I will be able to keep this rigorous schedule up and still keep straight A's. Every night after school I have some activity to attend be it diving, band, flute or something else and starting in November I'll be swimming every day. I hate it when people say you should cut down your schedule, you're too busy, because I have already cut out several other activities. I'm kind of addicted to exercise and get very bored if I am not constantly busy. School is very important to me but being active and well-rounded are necessary for me to be happy. I want to have a 4.0, but I also want to be an award-winning drum major, first chair flute, a State champion diver, as far as I am concerned why can't I. I think I will be able to make it through this year. I am a very hard worker at everything I

do, and as long as I know what I want I can get it. Besides, getting a 90% on a Chemistry test makes staying up all night worth it".

Upon high school graduation she went to Stanford University. It was her dream to do that. At Stanford she evolved as a serious student and she began to focus her academic work on the Southern Africa region. Her love of Nelson Mandela as a symbol of what was happening in South Africa grew.

After her 1989 Stanford graduation she made her first trip to Africa. I am going to read the Statement of Purpose she compiled for her Ph.D. programme to bring her forward to August 1993. And she wrote this the summer of 1993 shortly before her murder.

Statement of Purpose-Amy Biehl

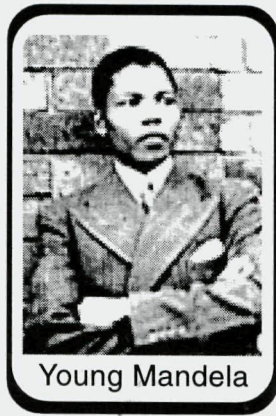
My purpose in applying for graduate study is to complete a Ph.D. in Political Science. Within the field I intend to focus on recent democratic transitions in Southern Africa building on my previous research and practical working experience in this area.

In September 1989 I received a degree in International Relations emphasizing Third World development and Africa from Stanford University.

I completed a departmental Honours thesis on American Foreign Policy in South Africa entitled, "Ches-

ter Crocker and the Negotiations for Namibian Independence: the role of the individual in recent American Foreign Policy."

In May 1989, I subsequently received a Bowman Undergraduate scholarship to continue my research in Namibia from July to September 1989. My paper



Young Mandela

assessing the pre-election environment in Namibia was subsequently used at Stanford in its Modern African History course.

In September 1990, after a year of work for a Democratic Congressman on Capitol Hill, I began work at the Washington-based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, NDI. NDI represents the Democratic Party internationally and conducts political development programmes in emerging democracies. With NDI, I worked in Namibia, South Africa, Burundi, Congo, Guyana, Surinam, and Zambia along with former President Jimmy Carter.

I wrote briefing papers on six African countries for Democratic Party chairman Ron Brown and coordinated a visit by the Prime Minister of Namibia to the 1992 Democratic National Convention. I also wrote an article on NDI's approach to democratization in Africa published in an international journal.

Based on my undergraduate research experience and my work at NDI, I developed a proposal to research the participation of women in South Africa's transition for which I received a 1992/93 aFulbright Scholarship.

I am currently based in Cape Town affiliated with the Community Law Centre at the University of the Western Cape, directed by Advocate Abdullah Omar.

I am working with Bridget Mabandla, senior researcher at the Community Law Centre. At the Community Law Centre I have undertaken the following projects: researching comparative structures for women in decision-making, analyzing the constitutional proposals and technical committee reports currently being debated with regard to women and gender; locating women with various political organizations and coalitions, and assessing the impact of women within these organizations with respect to evolving transitional structures.

I have written an occasional paper for the Community Law Centre focusing on structure for women in political decision-making, and a chapter on women in the transition for an upcoming book to be published in the United States. I have co-authored articles published in the *Weekly Mail*, the *Argus*, *Democracy in Action* and *Femina*. At the completion of my grant, I will present a paper entitled *Women in a*

Democratic South Africa: from Transition to Transformation.

I could go on but this was basically what she was doing, and what she intended to do was to pursue a Ph.D. in Political Science, to teach and study about politics and particularly African politics.

Who is Amy to South Africa and what is her legacy here?

Linda and I were struck by photos which appeared immediately after Amy's death in the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers around the world which showed Amy as a freedom fighter, and in subsequently reading President Mandela's autobiography, *A Long Walk to Freedom*, and determining how President Mandela and his colleagues value the role of freedom fighting. We were struck when on June 1st, 1996, in Los Angeles, California, at a dinner to honour Chinese dissidents and freedom fighters from Tianamen Square, Amy was presented the Spirit of Tianamen Square Award, posthumously, for her reputation and track record as a freedom fighter in many countries on the continent of Africa.

We think in view of the importance of freedom fighting in our world, this is a precious legacy of Amy for us. We think Amy's legacy in South Africa, additionally, is as a catalyst and perhaps her death represented a turning point in things in this country with specific regard to the violence which was occurring at the time.

We received literally hundreds of letters from South

African citizens and I would read you just briefly from one which had to do with Amy as a catalyst in terms of the violence at the time.

This is from an Eric van Vyver of George, South Africa:

"Dear Mr and Mrs Biehl

Sometimes during one's lifetime something happens which is so unbelievably terrible and so very, very sad that one is left without words to convey the deep sympathy felt for family and loved ones. Your daughter's death has left millions of my country-people feeling this way.

I am, however, completely convinced that August 25th 1993 will always be remembered as the day on which South Africa came to realise that we are leaning into an abyss of total self-destruction. Then Amy died and an entire nation took a step back. I hope and know that this will comfort you and please believe that what I am saying is true."

Amy's legacy is also as an advocate of human rights, an empowerer of women and children. Our beautiful women of Mosaic who are seated here today and yesterday are tangible evidence of Amy's legacy in South Africa. These women of courage work round the clock every day in the townships and informal settlements empowering and counseling women and children and enabling them to assume roles in the prevention of violence in their communities. Linda and I are very proud

of Mosaic and we can think of no more beautiful evidence of Amy's continuing legacy in your beautiful country.

Additionally, Amy's friend and colleague, Rhoda Kadalie, has now assumed the post, an important post in the Human Rights Commission. Amy would be very proud of that and very proud of Rhoda's and the Commission's continuing work to preserve human rights.

I will read to you briefly from a letter we received from Minister Dullah Omar dated on the 25th of August 1993:

"Everyone who knew Amy will bear witness that she worked untiringly in the gender research project to ensure that the issue of women's rights was prioritized on the agenda for a political settlement in South Africa. She was thus also highly regarded by all her colleagues and peers, both in Cape Town and indeed everywhere in the country for her diligence and commitment to the issue of women's rights.

We want to say to you that your beloved Amy became one of us in her spirited commitment to justice and reconciliation in South Africa. Amy's passing is not just a loss to the Community Law Centre, or University community, it is a loss for all committed democrats in this country.

Despite the fact that Amy was often very busy, she managed to prepare a briefing paper or two for me. This

is how I got to know Amy, always willing to help. I will therefore personally miss her a great deal."

Finally, Amy's legacy to South Africa is as a friend. I will read just quickly from a letter we received dated August 27, 1993, from Randy Erentzen at the Centre for Development Studies.

"When Amy left my office on Wednesday she said to me, "Hey, if I don't see you, thanks for everything." The next time I saw her I was removing her jewelry from her dead body. I shuddered for a moment as I put the blood-stained bangles and rings into my pocket and I thanked her silently for being my friend.

I write to thank you and the rest of your family for giving Amy to us. I want you to know that she was a most sensitive and wonderful human being.

When I first encouraged her to come to South Africa to study and when I wrote the recommendations for Amy to receive the Fulbright Scholarship, and when I introduced her to my colleagues at the University, I knew I was doing so for somebody I really believed in.

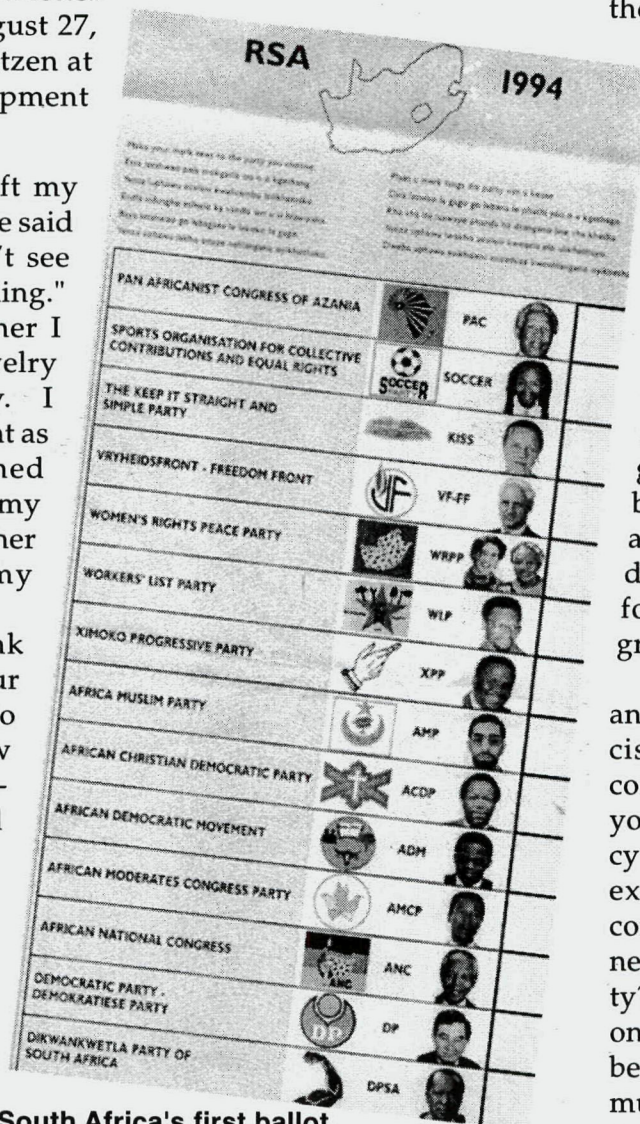
Together we traveled through South Africa helping to prepare our people for the country's first ever democratic elections. She danced with us late

at night in the townships. Amy was so full of the rhythm of life. She danced better than many Africans and was greatly envied for her ability to imbibe so much of the culture, traditions and history of our people.

cess. We recognize that if this process had not been a pre-negotiated condition, your democratic free elections could not possibly have occurred. Therefore, and believing as Amy did in the absolute importance of those democratic elections occurring, we unabashedly support the process which we recognize to be unprecedented in contemporary human history.

At the same time, we say to you that it's your process, not ours. We cannot, therefore, oppose amnesty if it is granted on the merits. In the truest sense it is for the community of South Africa to forgive its own and this has its basis in traditions of ubuntu and other principles of human dignity. Amnesty is clearly not for Linda and Peter Biehl to grant.

You face a challenging and extraordinarily difficult decision. How do you value a committed life? What value do you place on Amy and her legacy in South Africa? How do you exercise responsibility to the community in granting forgiveness in the granting of amnesty? How are we preparing prisoners, such as these young men before us, to re-enter the community as a benefit to the community, acknowledging that the vast majority of South Africa's prisoners are under 30 years of age? Acknowledging as we do that there's massive unemployment in the marginalized community; acknowledging that the recidivism rate is roughly 95%. So how do we, as friends, link arms and do something? There



South Africa's first ballot.

Amy's death has brought home once again the potential beauty of this country to which she eventually gave her life."

Now, in closing, a few comments. We have the highest respect for your Truth and Reconciliation Commission pro-

are clear needs for prisoner rehabilitation in our country as well as here. There are clear needs for literacy training and education, and there are clear needs for the development of targeted job skill training. We, as the Amy Biehl Foundation, are willing to do our part as catalysts for social progress. All anyone need do is ask.

Are you, the community of South Africa, prepared to do your part? In her 21 June 1993 letter to the *Cape Times* editor, Amy quoted the closing lines of a poem, "Victoria West," written by one of your local poets. We would close our statement with these incredible words:

"They told their story to the children. They taught their vows to the children, that we shall never do to them what they did to us."

Thank you for listening."

□ □ □

When we finished our presentation, Linda and I knew we had done the right thing. We had remembered Amy and her dreams for South Africa. We had spoken for her, in her absence, and we could hold our heads up and move on with life.

Epilogue

The call came at 1:00 in the morning. Tuesday, July 28, 1998. We had been home from Cape Town only one day.

Amnesty had been announced. It was 10:00 AM in Cape Town and Amy's four killers were walking from their prisons into the embraces of family and friends. While we were still on the telephone, our fax whirred to life and the Amnesty Committee's official pronouncement began to appear.

When we hung up the telephone, we were suddenly

CA" interview. That day, our voice mail collected 34 messages—most of them from media representatives and producers. That night, Linda and I walked the streets of New York and found a small, friendly French restaurant we remembered.

We were tired, but we were at peace with ourselves. We slept soundly—if briefly—that night.



After the trial with the young mens' parents.

missing Amy very much. By 1:30 AM, telephone calls were coming in from South Africa's media. At 7:30 that evening, we closed our door behind the last American television crew. At some part in that long and frenetic day, we telephoned our children to inform and prepare them.

The next morning, a CNN live telephone interview at 6:25—and within an hour, on a flight from Palm Springs to New York for Thursday morning's "GOOD MORNING AMERI-

Many people have expressed disbelief and "amazement" at our support for the truth and reconciliation process and at our forgiving attitude.

To us, forgiveness is opening the door to a full and productive life. We can honor Amy, can be true to her convictions, and can carry on with her work and with ours. Forgiving is liberating. By contrast, it seems to us that hatred consumes tremendous energy—negative energy—and robs peo-

ple of their productivity. Hatred, in the end, is a totally self-ish behavior.

The real burden in forgiveness falls to those who are forgiven and to those who are closest to them. Our statement—released to the press on the morning amnesty was announced—speaks to this point, among others.

**Statement by
Linda and Peter Biehl:**

"Amy was drawn to South Africa as a student and she admired the vision of Nelson Mandela of a 'Rainbow Nation'. It is this vision of forgiveness and reconciliation that we have honored.

As Amy's parents, we have worked with and learned about many South Africans. We have shared South Africa's pain. We must never forget people who lost their lives in the struggle. We must honor them in discovering new approaches—non-violent partnerships—to create the South Africa with Nelson Mandela that Amy and those who perished dreamed of—a new, multi-racial, democratic nation.

We are concerned, therefore, about the violence which still exists and which surely will escalate as the 1999 elections approach. Amy was one of many killed in the violent political climate preceding the 1994 elections. Unfortunately, we are seeing today similar power struggles occurring throughout communities and the country. Violence remains the order of the day in promoting certain politi-

cal agendas. Violence and fear are never hallmarks of a democratic way of life.

We are keenly aware, as we work with people of disadvantaged communities, of the need for change in the lives of South Africa's marginalized people. We have experienced our own small struggles in trying to complete projects in partnership with many community groups. Obstacles abound. Community requests are made, partnerships are formed, but implementation is slow. Regardless of the roadblocks or the minefields, we shall continue, within our limits, to work in partnership with people who are wonderfully inspired to help themselves. We are working on violence prevention projects throughout the Cape Flats and hope to encourage and motivate other people to do the same thing. We have enjoyed many positive experiences with great partners and highly recommend this type of service to South Africa.

It is important to stress that *every* life is significant. Amy's life and death received much publicity. As Amy's parents, we have experienced great pain—but we are not alone. Working through the pain has not been easy, but we have learned so much about South Africa's pain while on our personal journey.

The amnesty process has been a unique experience for individuals and for South Africa as a nation. Decisions made are not to be taken lightly. If amnesty is granted to individuals who have been imprisoned, it is es-

sential for families and communities to support these individuals upon their release. In the cases of the four amnesty applicants in Amy's murder, we hope they will receive the support necessary to live productive lives in a non-violent atmosphere. In fact, we hope the spirits of Amy and of those like her will be a force in their new lives.

Again, we encourage all stakeholders to accelerate their pace toward cooperation; to be instruments of change in the marginalized communities; to advance holistic approaches to violence reduction and prevention.

We thank those partners who have helped and supported us thus far, and we pledge to work hard with the South African people to continue the all-important nation-building process. We will do all we can to help fulfill the vision of your free, rainbow nation—a vision which Amy shared with you.

We have been asked repeatedly whether the amnesty process has brought us "closure." We reply that we have never sought closure and have no desire to close the book on Amy.

The Chilean playwright/poet/human rights activist, Ariel Dorfman, responded profoundly to our question on closure in Cape Town in July, 1997:

I think closure happens when you have the body. When the person who hurt that, body asks for forgiveness, repents for

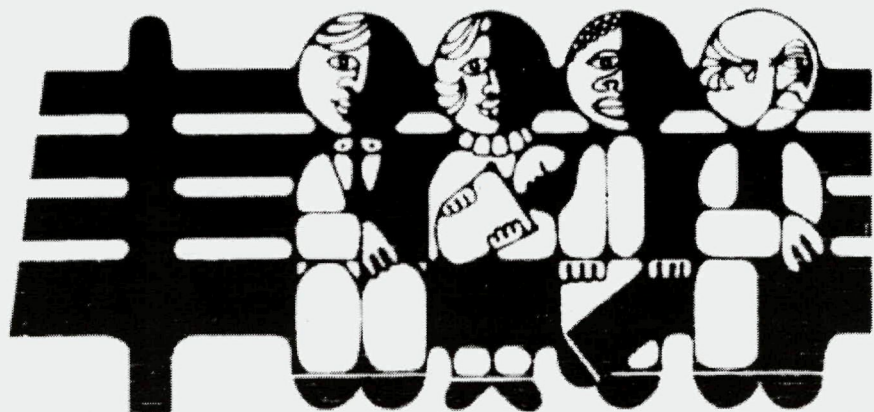
having done that and says they will not do it again. That is a form of closure. I think... I think... closure happens that because those bodies disappeared or were hurt because of all the damage done, the results rather than being held are a step towards paradise. In the sense that though every death is terrible, a death in vain is much more terrible than a death that led to a community resolving its problems. I would say closure particularly happens when every person in that community is able to take that person home with them

and make that person part of their home and part of their lives.

On the other hand, I feel we should not lie about closure—we should not see closure for its own sake or seek closure as the solution to all problems. Because I do believe there are pains we should not pretend do not exist. I'm sorry to put this as bluntly as I am doing, but even all the closure in the world cannot return Amy Biehl. I mourn for it, I grieve for it. I do think we have to deal with the ambiguity of existence. It is difficult to deal with. The

Truth and Reconciliation-Committee is being asked to deal with all those things—it is being asked to do more than it can possibly do. It cannot offer closure. Each person will find his own form of closure. Closure is satisfactory—it's a haven—but closure also means to close, and close is the opposite of life. Life opens. So, at times we have to live with those wounds and those openings and there is no alternative because we cannot save the basic mystery of life. And that life is entangled with death in a tremendous way.

To which we reply,
"AMEN!" □



John Morrell

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