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**FAREWELL TO  
COMRADE  
MINNIE GOOL**

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## **FAREWELL TO COMRADE MINNIE GOOL**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2005, in Cape Town, a 97 year old woman breathed her last thereby departing permanently from the world of the living. Before doing so she thanked her son-in-law, Dr. A.Q. Surve and his wife Daria (her daughter) for all that they had done for her. She was conscious until the very end. As somebody put it: She would have walked to her grave if she could. Despite her advanced age, her death surprised all those who knew her.

That person was Comrade Amina Gool popularly known as Minnie and also variously called Mrs. Fredericks or Miss Gool or Mrs. Friedrichs, widely known, respected and loved. Her age notwithstanding, she will be sorely missed by a large number of persons who were her close relatives and the very wide circle of friends and acquaintances.

Comrade Minnie was by any standard a most remarkable person. It is, therefore, proper that the type of person she was and the contribution she made to society be recorded and retained for those who come after us.

### **BACKGROUND**

Comrade Minnie was the youngest of the children of Mr. Yusuf Gool and Mrs. Wagieda Gool of Cape Town.

Mr. Yusuf Gool was a very prosperous merchant in Cape Town and was considered to be a person of note and his hospitality had become legendary. This attracted persons of the reputation and status of Mahatma Gandhi to his palatial mansion. He was generous in matters of charity and was politically active in the mould and style of Indian merchant class politics of petitions and deputations. Both he and his son, Dr. A.H. Gool loyally served Gandhi who in turn made no bones about the fact that he was a loyal servant of British Imperialism.

Mr. Yusuf Gool was from India, while his wife came from the Malay community. Comrade Minnie and her siblings were born and reared as members of the Indian/Malay Community of Cape Town. But from the very beginning there was something different about this family. Both Mr. and Mrs. Gool placed great store in the education of their children, especially their daughters. In those days the girls from the Malay/Indian community were exposed to a few years of school and then it was

confinement to the house until marriage. With the children of Mr. Yusuf and Mrs. Wagieda Gool it was quite different:

- The eldest, Miss Mariam Gool, became a practising midwife who could be seen striding through the streets of District Six at all hours of night and day to be at the side of the mother-to-be.
- Miss Gadija Gool married Advocate Christopher. Cape Town's loss became Durban's great gain. Mrs. Christopher's contribution to the Indian Community has become legendary. She "introduced the concept of voluntary social work and personified it for most of her life." She was the heart and soul of the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society for thirty years.<sup>1</sup>
- Miss Janab Gool (known by all as Jane Gool) and younger sister Zubeida made history by being the first female members of the Malay/Indian community to enrol and study at the University of Fort Hare. They made further history by becoming the first female teachers from the Malay/Indian Community in secular schools.
- Jane Gool became a Marxist revolutionary in the mid 1930s by forming/ joining the Spartacus Club and the Workers' Party of South Africa. She fled into exile in 1963 and returned to South Africa only in 1990 to bury her husband, comrade and collaborator, I.B. Tabata.

## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MAKING OF HER PERSONALITY

While Comrade Minnie was still in high school, her father lost his wealth. There was the Great Depression. Mr. Gool was known to be soft on tenants who did not pay their rent due to him. Likewise he did not hound dealers who purchased goods from him and did not pay. For the sake of completeness it must be mentioned that Mr. Gool had a strong propensity for gambling and is reputed to have lost a fortune on horses which did not appreciate why they had to win for him.

Already in her late teens, Comrade Minnie had to find employment to assist in providing for the family's living requirements.

Comrade Minnie in her mid twenties was a strikingly attractive young person, articulate and forceful. She was the product of Cape Town, the most exciting and interesting place in South Africa in the early and mid 1930s. There was an intellectual ferment with many political cross currents. She was also a product of what one may call a unique

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<sup>1</sup> "Activist devoted her life to the destitute" by Chris Barron – Sunday Times 1/7/01

institution – the open house kept by her brother Dr. A.H. Gool<sup>2</sup> to intellectuals, artists, musicians and most importantly the radical intelligentsia. It was a meeting place where there were incessant debates and discussions on all matters of importance.

Comrade Minnie was a part of this community both as a witness and a participant. She was able to learn a great deal on a wide variety of subjects from this community of intellectuals.

It was at the house of Dr. A.H. Gool that she met her future husband, Hans Friedrichs, a German Jew who came to South Africa to escape fascism and anti-semitism. Ray Alexander, Stalinist and trade unionist, claims that she took Mr. Hans Friedrichs to the house of Dr A.H. Gool where he met Comrade Minnie.<sup>3</sup>

Just older than Comrade Minnie was her brother Dr. Goolam Gool, charismatic leader of the so-called Coloured and Malay communities, orator, leading theoretician and revolutionary thinker and strategist. He, too, became a Marxist revolutionary in the mid thirties and helped to form and joined the Spartacus Club and the Workers Party of South Africa. He was the elected vice president of the Non European Unity Movement and the Chairman of the National Anti-Coloured Affairs Department. His untimely illness and death in 1962 deprived the oppressed people of South Africa of a committed revolutionary leader, thinker and activist.

Comrade Minnie being the youngest in her family was strongly attached to Dr. A.H. Gool on a personal and social level. Hans Friedrichs was a member of the Communist Party and that, no doubt, had some bearing on his relationship with Comrade Minnie and their subsequent marriage. But she was also attracted to the ideas expounded by her sister Jane Gool, her brother Dr. Goolam Gool and IB Tabata. But more on that later.

The debates and discussions at Dr A.H. Gool's house were a reflection of what was taking place in Cape Town. This part of the country found a large influx of European Jews who like Hans Friedrichs sought to escape Hitlerite anti-semitism and fascism. A significant percentage were themselves radicals or at least well versed in radical politics.

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<sup>2</sup> BY this time he had seen through Gandhi's politics and withdrew from active politics.

<sup>3</sup> "CUTTING THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN" Edited by Immanuel Suttner – Interview with Ray Alexander Footnote 7 on page 36 and then on page 40.

There were regular public meetings at which the leading radical intellectuals of the day enthralled audiences with revolutionary, challenging and stimulating ideas.

The intellectual atmosphere was saturated with revolutionary ideas concerning the nature of society, which was best in the interests of humanity. Capitalism was totally discredited. The Great Depression with its catastrophic effects on the world economy was the culmination of a series of economic slumps. There were the wars generated by capitalism; the exploitation of the toiling masses; the gross inequality in the sharing of wealth socially produced but appropriated by individuals resulting in the concentration of extreme wealth in the hands of the few and extreme poverty for the majority.

Capitalism had no defenders. The face of the radicalised intellectuals was turned firmly towards socialism, the first major step towards a classless society where none would go hungry or homeless or sick without succour. It was the vision of a socialist society which would bring out the best in human beings which galvanized the young intellectuals into passionate commitment to strive and struggle and sacrifice.

“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven!”<sup>4</sup>

The political climate of the 1930s became so entrenched and left such deep impressions that, writing in 1991, almost sixty years later, Professor Linda Chisholm stated:

“The political culture of the Western Cape, so any writer or visitor to the city of Cape Town and beyond will attest, is so distinctive from that characterising the rest of the country. Wherever one stands on the organised political spectrum, it is distinctive for its combativeness, its intellectual assertiveness and its critical disposition.”<sup>5</sup>

Comrade Minnie Gool was a product of that climate, atmosphere and environment. In whatever she said or did thereafter, she carried with her

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<sup>4</sup> By William Wordsworth expressing his enthusiasm for the French Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> **Transformation** 15 (1991) “The educational Traditions and Legacies of the Non-European Unity Movement, 1943-1986” by Linda Chisholm

until her death her belief in socialism, the prevailing scientific ideas, values and lessons she imbibed in those days.

## THE REVULSION AGAINST STALINISM

In joining the Communist Party, Comrade Minnie made history. The overwhelming probabilities are that she was part of a very small band of black females in the Western Cape who joined the Communist Party. The other pertinent observation is that few from the oppressed community from that part of the country joined the Communist Party. The Communist Party held no attraction for members of the oppressed community in the Western Cape.

During the latter half of the decade of the thirties, news about the horrors of the Stalinist purges had begun to reach the outside world. It was as if the revolution had gone mad and had set about devouring its own. No sane person or a person with a modicum of integrity would have believed the absolutely incredible accusations against tried and tested Bolsheviks.

Add to the purges the criminally opportunistic and unprincipled positions and policies adopted by Stalin and his henchmen in most Communist Parties all over the world in numerous instances. The most suicidal and destructive was the directive to the Communist Parties by Stalin to consider social democracy and not fascism to be the principal enemy. The Communist Party of South Africa being the most servile Communist Party in the world to Stalin followed that and subsequent directives slavishly.

The case against Stalinism was presented by the non- Stalinist Marxists with such devastating logic and eloquence that apart from a few, no member of the oppressed community in the Western Cape would have wanted to have any relationship with the Communist Party except when it was utterly and absolutely unavoidable.

Comrade Minnie, by nature a strong humanist would not have failed to be revulsed by Stalinism. To that we must add the impact of her very close relationship with her sister Jane Gool and brother Dr. Goolam Gool and their comrade IB Tabata. The latter three together with their comrades like Dora and JG Taylor were uncompromising in their opposition to Stalinism. Their star in the revolutionary struggle was on

the rise. They won the admiration of struggle veteran Claire Goodlatte<sup>6</sup> who gave invaluable advice as follows to the new generation of revolutionaries:

“Very few people can match up with their ideas. Concentrate rather on sharpening your ideological weapons than on idolising or idealising people. There are neither gods nor beasts, neither devils nor angels in the movement. There are just ordinary human beings, with the weakness and strength, the foibles and feelings of ordinary human beings. Nothing more and nothing less.”

Being married to a committed Stalinist and having a close relationship with avowed anti- Stalinists was a recipe for marital strife. Comrade Minnie was a principled person and would not accede to her husband’s demand that their house be closed to those anti-Stalinists who were close to her. This no doubt contributed in some measure to the breakup of her marriage.

Being the youngest of her strong willed siblings, Comrade Minnie followed in their footsteps. She was young; she was articulate, she was courageous and she spoke her mind. For example being pregnant with her elder child did not stop her from mounting the political platform and shouting her contempt for Royalty. She called the King of England a parasite, for which she was arrested for *lese-majesty*, a crime consisting of an offence against the sovereign.

Taking into account all the circumstances of her life, Comrade Minnie took the inevitable road of leaving the Communist party and threw in her lot with the Unity Movement which she served in one way or another for the rest of her entire life.

## REMEMBERING OUR MOTHER BY NINA HASSIM AND DARIA SURVE

“Her relationship to the movement was one of loyalty and service. Her home was open; there was always food and bed for her comrades. No one came through the door without being offered something to eat or drink. Little did they know that at times we ourselves had very little or that she had borrowed to

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<sup>6</sup> One of the leading founders of the Workers’ Party of South Africa and the Editor of its journal “The Spark”



feed us. We lived in two small rooms. The sitting room was Nina's bedroom from which she was regularly ejected to make way for others. Daria often had to sleep at Aunty Margie's (Miss Mariam Gool) house to make room for visitors who had come for political meetings. Leading officials from the Cape African Teachers Association who came for the historic conference which culminated in the formation of the Cape Teachers Federal Council, stayed at our home as did some of the delegates from the eastern Cape who had come to the Seventh Conference of the Non European Unity Movement in 1951. Great friendships were forged because of her kindness.

Our mother unstintingly gave her time and energy to the Unity Movement. She was a general factotum and fund-raiser. Fund raising was not a simple matter of approaching wealthy people for funds. One had to be creative, as she was. Though a talented cook, she never really liked to cook. But for the Movement, she spent endless hours cooking and baking and then selling the products of her labour. When called upon to do so she raised funds for the All African Convention and even got the students of the Cape Peninsula Students Union to ride a float procession advertising a fund-raising fete.

Similarly, she conceived the idea of hiring a cinema and showing films which were not shown to blacks. It was a resounding success. On one occasion she hired and showed a full-length ballet film. The shows were sold out each time and were gala affairs which attracted people across the political divide which was unusual for those times when disagreements were quite heated.

While on the subject of films, it must be stated that our mother had acting ability. When necessary, she could drop inhibitions. She was a skilled raconteur and as children we would prefer her made-up stories to those in books. For fund raising, she once dressed and performed as a fortune teller. She took part in several plays, especially those with political themes. In 1973, she was given a major part as an aged witch in the film "The House of the Living Dead." According to the film reviewer of the magazine "DRUM":

“Apart from Dia, a major role is taken by Amina Gool who plays an aged witch with frightening effect.”<sup>7</sup>

Her interest in films had spin-offs for us. Often she would recommend interesting and exciting films like Marcel Carne’s masterpiece “The Children of Paradise”.

#### HER HUMANITY AND GENEROSITY

Her generosity to people caused friction between mother and daughters especially when we were living in straitened circumstances. After our father left home and we had very little she could still be generous - to a fault. *It was the defining feature of her life!*

She was kind to the “bergies”, a community of homeless people who lived on the slopes of Table Mountain. Many of them were alcoholics and eked a hand to mouth living by doing odd jobs, stealing and begging. The “bergies” knew that our mother would not refuse them water and the gate of our house was kept open to allow them access to water. In return they never stole from us.

She gave money and worldly possessions away as they had no real hold on her life. When she died we were shocked at how she had pared down her possessions. Sometimes she gave things away to people who we felt did not deserve or need them. On a few occasions she asked us for things which she gave away even though we had wanted her to have them.

She was a loving sister. Her brothers were recipients of loving concern and care. She had to leave school so that she could work for her brother Dr. A.H Gool. This was the time when her father had lost all his wealth.

Later in life she used to leave us at home in order to take care of her eldest brother who went through terrible highs and lows which we now realise were a mood disorder.

When Dr. Goolam Gool went through his hard times, our mother took him in and saw to his needs.

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<sup>7</sup> DRUM, May 8 1973, page 47

She had a major role in the upbringing of all five of her grandchildren. She spent long hours and months with them during their childhood, imparting to them her special love and tenderness to soften the harshness of life.

When both Kader and Nina were detained under the Terrorism Act, she left her practice in Cape Town and came to Pietermaritzburg to take care of her two grandchildren. When Kader was sentenced to imprisonment, she gave up her practice so as to be with the children and Nina. Pietermaritzburg became her second home where she spent stretches of many months at a time.

As the grandchildren grew and with that the pains, they always found a friend and a sympathetic ear, not to mention an open purse.

She maintained throughout their lives a warm and friendly relationship with her brothers and sisters, save to some extent for our aunt Timmie. The latter had become very religious and lived in a world of her own. Though her relationship with Timmie was not one of companion/friendship, the respect for an elder sister was never absent. When Timmie was without a job it was our mother who gave her job to her in their eldest brothers' surgery notwithstanding the fact that she had us to look after and Timmie was a spinster. It also showed how her brother cared for her because although he was dismayed at what she had done without even consulting him, he did not thwart her. Our mother never got into an argument with any of her siblings. Even when they were wrong, she gave way. It was strange to see a strong willed person with a sharp and ready tongue behave in this way. But it was her way of showing respect for her elders.

When her sister Jane Gool returned from a thirty year exile to settle in Cape Town, our mother eased her life back home. When she became ill and was dying, our mother looked after her every day until the end.

#### NOT ONLY HUMAN BEINGS

Her care and compassion was not limited to human beings. She extended those attributes to animals. She had a German Shepherd

called Mickey when Nina was a child. Mickey was so well trained that he could be left alone with Nina as her protector. In Pietermaritzburg, she was so loved by our dogs that when she went off to Cape Town and returned after several months, the dogs would howl incessantly for her attention. In her later years, she lived alone in one section of a property in Athlone which were the consulting rooms for her son-in-law, Dr. Surve. She had a huge dog, which she had saved from euthanasia, but which she had to keep tied on a running chain. When visiting her there, we gave this creature a wide berth. There was an occasion at night when there was heavy rain and the drainage being poor or non-existent, the yard where the dog was tied began flooding. Our mother untied the animal, which then began to romp around her, an 80 plus year old woman in the rain like a puppy, barking happily.

Our mother was also a dedicated gardener. She would spend a small fortune in obtaining the correct compost or manure, fertilizer and the like. It gave her great pleasure and she spent endless hours tending to her plants. She got marvelous results which she enjoyed showing visitors who rarely left empty-handed. It would either be fruit, vegetable or flowers. Her gardening was not a haphazard affair. She went about it in a scientific manner. She dutifully read all the articles on gardening in the newspapers. She telephoned helplines for advice and in the course of time she became quite knowledgeable about horticulture.

#### AS A MOTHER

Our mother was always a devoted and loving mother. When Nina was four years old, our mother who had not acquired qualifications to earn a living, decided to do midwifery. She had to do the course in Johannesburg at the Bridgman Memorial Hospital, which meant separation from her husband and daughter.

When after the birth of Daria, our father left home, we entered a period of financial austerity when it became difficult to make ends meet. Our mother was for all practical purposes a single mother having to rear two daughters. Money from our father for our maintenance was not always forthcoming.

Yet our mother was wonderfully generous to us. Nina still has a copy of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" given to her by our

mother in 1947 when times were hard. We still have no idea where she got the money to buy the book.

Daily we come across things that she had either made for us or had given us. After her death the most touching event for Nina was to find the sock darning that she had asked her for during her last meeting with mummy. It was placed in a pretty bag with a note bearing Nina's name.

Our mother had the gambling streak. She never did reveal the amount of her losses or how much she had won. But when she did win we had a wonderful carefree time with little treats. There was a time when Nina was in Standard Seven and there was no money for her textbooks. Our mother's visit to the racecourse saved the day. The horse "Sostrum" had won and there was money to purchase secondhand textbooks from one of the bookshops in Long Street.

On another occasion she hired a horse and carriage to take us for a ride. She would take us for supper to cafes and we regarded such outings as treats.

We have distinct memories of her winnings at the racecourse taking place in the nick of time to meet financial obligations.

In her old age when she could no longer go to the races, she still craved the flutter of her heart and found that in the casinos. No matter how stiff or sore her body was, she regained her youth and sprightliness and would move around happily and effortlessly.

We grew up in a home where the most advanced and radical ideas of the day abounded. These ideas came from our mother and from our Aunt Jane and Uncle Goolam. Concepts like non-racialism, socialism, democracy, imperialism, non-collaboration, herrenvolkism had become part of our body of knowledge in the process of our growing. They helped shape and fashion what we are today.

As a struggling single parent it was her principal obligation to provide the means for our education in high school and beyond. To fulfill this obligation she toiled unceasingly. It must be stated that her sisters and her eldest brother gave assistance but the obligation and responsibility remained hers throughout.

That obligation and responsibility she carried out fully."

REMEMBERING MRS. FREDERICKS BY DR NEVILLE  
ALEXANDER

“Few people have had such a lasting impact on my life as the late Mrs Fredericks, the name I always used for Minnie Gool because of my own conservative upbringing and ingrained respect for her. I was not the only one to do so. Indeed, a whole generation of us, born in the mid to late 1930s, cut our political teeth in or near Mrs Fredericks’s presence and came to see her as a kind of mother figure to the youth in the “Tabata” faction of the Non-European Unity Movement during the later 1950s and the early 1960s.

The outstanding features of Minnie’s being were for me (and for many others) her tremendous courage, her flaming passion, her inspiring activism and unerring, penetrating and single-minded, almost visionary, focus on the task to be accomplished, her seemingly bottomless generosity and hospitality, her capacity for genuine love for people. As a “country bumpkin” from Cradock, in the Eastern Cape, whose command of the English language was always somewhat suspect, these character traits constituted a kind of comfort zone. “Nurse”, as the people of District 6 invariably referred to her, was always prepared to listen to our naïve stories of glory and disappointment. She had the human touch which other more well known political figures in the Unity Movement also had in large measure but never had the time to demonstrate, except in rare moments of personal or organizational crisis. Somehow, Minnie, in spite of heavy familial and professional responsibilities always found the time to indulge us, to make us feel special and worthy of being listened to with seriousness. In retrospect, I have no doubt that she must have laughed slyly to herself at the thought that we fancied that our stereotypical juvenile and youthful “problems” were somehow different and more important than any other young person’s, merely because we were involved in formal political struggle. If she did, she certainly never let on and to this day, I thank her for having smoothed my transition from juvenility to manhood by simply allowing me to tell her about my political and, often, also my personal understandings of life and society.

She was above all an inspiration to the young men and women, girls and boys, who came together in 1956-57 to form the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU) amid much controversy between the factions of the Unity Movement about whether or not it was "reactionary" to form such a students' association. I know that she was as much inspired by our spontaneous and naïve commitment to mass organization and mass struggle as we were by her mature activism and controlled passion. She had much of Goolam Gool's penchant for the dramatic, even the melodramatic, and this impressed us as youngsters no end. Together with Mrs Brecker, Mrs Jardine, Mrs Fataar, and many others, she formed the Parents' Committee of the CPSU and many were the times that we called on the committee to assist with fundraising or to give advice on organizational matters or to mediate useful contacts for mundane but essential matters such as the printing and distribution of our Newsletter. In this way and in many other ways, they helped us to remove the grit from the lubricating medium of our youthful organizational machinery. Many of these parents, besides being proud of the political commitment of their children and young relatives, were happy that these young people were finding constructive outlets for all their pent-up energy and social and even academic frustrations that derived directly from the political and culturally repressive apartheid policies.

The high point of this trajectory was undoubtedly the day we took over the streets of District 6 with a procession that had as its theme the Great French Revolution, ending with the showing of the great Soviet film *Trio Ballets* in the National Theatre in William Street. It was one of the first and also one of the most successful demonstrations of the power of cultural political agitation in the mode of Bertolt Brecht and the expressionists of the 1930s in Germany. For the first time in more than a decade, we saw an entire community coming out in open and proud support of their children, the student and worker youth, the new generation of our "Students' Song", which was modeled on the Song of the Komsomol and which we sang with great gusto at the drop of a hat. And Mrs Fredericks was the coordinating brain and heart behind this great spectacle, an event that has remained with me as an epiphanic moment in my life.

Like us, Mrs Fredericks was determined to see to it that the CPSU, within the Unity Movement context, maintained its autonomy in its sphere of operations, even though it was taken for granted that we would consult the leadership of the Movement if any major policy crises were to arise. On this score, I recall vividly how I.B. Tabata told me and a few other young CPSU members that we need not come to them on every point of interpretation, since he was more than satisfied that we understood the politics of the Movement and that we would do the right thing. For a while, there was some tension between “Milan Street” (where I.B and Jane Gool held court, as it were) and Balmoral Street, where Minnie was Queen. The tension was never about policy but rather about priorities and methods. Minnie’s natural exhibitionism, in the best sense of that word, galvanized us youngsters and we trooped after her on numerous occasions to go and extort “donations” (liberatory taxes, as we understood these forays) from shopkeepers and department stores. Some of these approaches were not quite orthodox but they appealed to us and, in retrospect I have to say, we should have done much more of that kind of thing. Minnie’s boldness and her realization that the youth had much to offer and should, therefore, not be constrained in respect of the ways in which they wanted to express themselves politically and organizationally, positioned her very close to our hearts. Her stories about the years she spent in the Communist Party of South Africa and about all the personalities that shaped the liberation struggle in South Africa were a fund of knowledge and experience that, at that time, we were unable to get anywhere else. There was a strange, but in the circumstances an understandable, reticence on the part of the political leadership to speak freely, or at all, about the radical roots and history of the Non-European Unity Movement. However, we knew without any doubt that it was in the works of people like Tabata, Van Schoor, Jane and Goolam Gool, Kies, and others that we would find the intellectual and political weaponry with which we would have to fight against the challenges of the *herrenvolk* generally, and the liberals in particular.

My close association with Minnie Gool was all too short in terms of time, but as an experience, it has endured all of my life hitherto. And, I know that this is true of my contemporaries, many of whom speak with unqualified admiration and love of her



and of the inspirational manner in which she touched our lives. We took her political commitment and her total living out of her ideas of social justice and equality completely for granted. Her closeness to the working class and the modest dignity that she displayed in all interactions with them and with us, the young students sprung from that class and from the upwardly mobile radical middle class, came to inform my entire orientation to South African political organization. If the Unity Movement provided the taproot of theory and paradigmatic clarity, it was the likes of Minnie Gool and Johnny Gomas who helped me to get rooted deeply and widely in the matrix of the working people.

My last two meetings with Minnie shortly before her death, which was unexpected in spite of her advanced age, because she continued to radiate wellness and happiness until the last, will stay with me as moments of the most profound joy and satisfaction. All her most endearing qualities rose to the surface and the manner in which she spoke about her children and her life, her grandchildren and her “extended (political) family”, showed very clearly that she continued to believe in a future of socialist equality and opportunity for all, the one goal that had shone as a lodestar throughout her life.

With her, a great chunk of our tradition and of the most admirable aspects of the history of the Left in South Africa has passed on. It is important that we try to put on record as much of that tradition and keep showing up as many of the aspects of that history as we can. Otherwise, falsification and the invention of spurious traditions will continue to distort what actually happened.

December 2005”

## HER OTHER LIKES AND INTERESTS

Comrade Minnie was an accomplished bridge and scrabble player. She invariably lit up a social occasion for those purposes. Not only did she make a point of learning all those trick words hardly ever used in ordinary life, like “id” or “xi”, she reveled in working towards a “bingo”, i.e. a seven letter word. Likewise in bridge, the crowning glory of playing was bidding and attaining a “grand slam”. She played for the bingo and the grand slam. It was the thrill, the success in getting the

bingo or grand slam that justified the time and effort, not the winning. Invariably that style of playing won her both admiration and envy.

She was also an “addict” to the word puzzle called “Words” which fortunately was available both in Pietermaritzburg through the “Natal Witness” and in Cape Town through the “Cape Times”. The reader is given nine letters of the alphabet with which to make a nine-letter word plus as many words of not less than four letters using a particular alphabet nominated by the puzzle designer. She tackled this puzzle with fanatical regularity. She had the patience and determination to work the puzzle. Very few were the times when the puzzle got the better of her.

### LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

Comrade Minnie was totally free of any affectation or snobbery. She blended in well with the community in which she lived and got on famously with neighbours. Both in District Six and in Bonteheuwel she was known as “Nurse”. In District Six, being the daughter of “Nurse” or her visitor got one immunity from the ruffian elements. Husbands would come in the middle of the night because of suspected imminent birth. She would scold them if they had not paid or had not made prior arrangements. All the while we would get her uniform and veil ready and then pull her dress over her. She would then be off to her patient no matter what the time or how bad the weather. Even in that forsaken place, Bonteheuwel, the location with hollow bricks houses for so – called Coloured people, she became well known and loved. Nina was once on holiday there and got utterly lost due to having missed the bus stop or having taken the wrong bus. The driver was in no mood to help and she must have become quite frantic when a woman asked her if she was the Nurse’s daughter and showed her the way back to our mother’s house.

In Pietermaritzburg, which became a second home to her, she developed deep and enduring friendships. The fact that the cultural milieu was quite different from that which existed in Cape Town did not matter. This proves the point that regardless of cultural, religious or racial differences strong bonds can develop between people. The ingredients of courtesy, politeness, acts of kindness, mutual respect, friendship in speech and deed and a reciprocal exchange of gifts succeed universally in developing bonds. Comrade Minnie had these ingredients in abundance. Hence her wide circles of friends.

In Pietermaritzburg she was known by all as OUMA. When news of her death spread, her friends mourned her passing as a loss of a dear member of the community.

## A COURAGEOUS PERSON

Members of the Gool family, especially the women, were known to be persons of courage and fiery temper and some of their exploits are worth recounting:

- Mrs. Gadija Christopher left the relatively safe urban environment of Cape Town when she married Albert Christopher. She followed him to Greenwood Park an undeveloped suburb in Durban. There she had to contend with the dense subtropical vegetation infested with the deadly black mambas. Within a short time she acquired the reputation of a fearless mamba killer. She killed in self-defence - of her self and those close to her against one the very few serpents which attacked in aggression rather than in defence.
- In 1963, Jane Gool gave a public venting to her anger and disgust at the conduct of one Jaja Wachuku, a Nigerian who was the chairman of the Committee of Nine or the Liberation Committee formed by the OAU to render assistance to liberation movements in Africa. Wachuku being primed by the ANC conducted himself in a manner, which blatantly violated the freedom of speech while the leader of the Unity Movement delegation, IB Tabata, was in the process of presenting the Unity Movement's Memorandum. Jane Gool accused Wachuku of not allowing Tabata the right to present the Unity Movement case and demanded that he cease that conduct. Wachuku's moronic response was that if Jane Gool had been a man he would have challenged her to a fight!<sup>8</sup>
- Comrade Minnie was a fearless person in both her personal life and political contribution. We in South Africa first caught sight of the famous Memorandum referred to above when Comrade Minnie returned from her visit to her sister Jane and brother-in-law Tabata. She had concealed the Memorandum by sewing it in her cape. Let us be clear that it was an exceptionally brave thing to do during those days when torture was legalised through the notorious 90 day (in truth indefinite detention) law. It was also the time when the whole country came to learn with horror about the death of Babla Saloojee, a member of the Transvaal Indian Congress. He plunged to his death

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<sup>8</sup> Wachuku met his Moses in one of those numerous coups in Nigeria. He was killed.

from a multi-storied building while in detention in the custody of the much feared arch-torturer Swanepoel, aka The Rooi Rus!

- When she had to leave the safety of her house in Balmoral Street nestled in a known neighbourhood and next to the houses occupied by her eldest brother and sister and move to the location Bonteheuwel, members of her family feared for her safety and well being and sought to dissuade her from setting up home there. Comrade Minnie nonetheless went ahead because she needed to work and settled down comfortably in the location. Soon enough she made a large number of friends and well wishers.
- Her frequent trips to various African countries to visit her sister Jane Gool and brother-in-law Tabata made her an ideal courier between the leadership in exile and those functioning at home. She must have led a charmed life because not once was she apprehended or detained by the security police.
- Like her sister, Miss Mariam Gool who was a midwife, Comrade Minnie plodded on foot through the streets of District Six at all hours of night and day, through the very harsh wet winter weather of Cape Town and often in the company of men who were strangers to her.

Her work and profession literally awarded her the freedom of District Six in that she did not feel threatened on a single occasion by the numerous gangsters – killers, rapists, extortionists, racketeers and other anti-social elements living and functioning there.

“Nurse” was inviolable!

- At the age of 88. Comrade Minnie decided to see a bit more of the world. No insurance company was willing to give her insurance. They did not think that she would return except in a coffin. She went to England and from there by ferry to France and by motor transport to Hungary. She returned thoroughly exhilarated.

## LAST DAYS

In many respects she was a very fortunate person. Her frugal lifestyle and simple eating habits held her in good stead. Not that she eschewed delicacies. She looked forward to some “zing” (her word) in life, including for the palate, but she did not develop a craving for such things. She was not averse to physical labour and effort whether it be long walks instead of a bus or taxi, all aspects of gardening activity,

house cleaning. Suffering from osteo-arthritis made her conscious of the need for regular exercising and this she did in one form or another.

When in March 1997 she reached 97, one would not have been surprised if there had been some degree of senility and affliction of conditions of old age which precipitate death. **Remarkably, there was none of that.** Physically she slowed down, but she attended to her own needs with little or no help.

Her mind remained fully functional, sharp and alert. An indication of her state of mind can be gleaned from excerpts of letters written by her during months before her death and which we reproduce below:

“Thank you for the memory of Tim. (Tribute to Tim Pillay in Apdusa Views) I remember him well. Maliga too – she was here with you and co. for some conference too. Rustum, my brother’s son died last week – but as you so rightly say life goes on; the ticking of the clock does not stop.’ (16/4/05)

“..to say thank you for all your effort to keep me informed – I do pass it on – knowledge must be shared to be fruitful – not so? I am suffering from something called laissez faire! I sit and can’t or won’t move – I do read however and at night I say: Why didn’t you do this, that or the other. Then I hear what x,y z has been doing – then I say : Not bad at all doing nothing – old girl! (18/5/05)

“Just enjoying the literature. Neville came one Sunday after Alie died and I asked why? Is he afraid that I’ll pop off without saying goodbye. He said no and left me some literature too. ***So nice being literated at my age.*** (our emphasis)

Topping all this I am enjoying the tennis too. There were the American women – two Darkies nogal – the William sisters. Last season the Roosians (!) came and held up the trophies. The Brits go gaga when their folk go on to the courts and soon their spirits and sounds are whipped into moans as their champions are trounced and beaten.

I am told via the grapevine that there is a toenadering of all lefties. Time too – fragmented little groups belie the bottom line “Unity”.

Its just cold here – you can have no idea what it does to coldies like me and Daria. We eat, we watch tennis and shiver thro it all, guzzling all the time too.

Enjoyed Mark’s “Peek”<sup>9</sup> – language one can understand.”<sup>10</sup>

The contents of the excerpts shows a person with a fully functional mind, a person at peace with herself and doing full justice to all that life was offering. Her political sense of responsibility never ceased for as long as she was alive. Hence on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 2005, she attended the gathering at the Livingstone High School where tributes were paid to the late Comrade Alie Fataar. The absence of the unity of the LEFT is expressed by her as a concern and hence approval of the meeting of the left groups to unite. When she was well into her nineties, she made it her duty to attend as many of the marches and demonstrations as she could against imperialist aggression and militaristic Israeli treatment of Palestinians.

It is not often that one mourns the passing of a person close to 100 years old as leaving a gap or a hole in the group of activists. Usually death is praised for the mercy shown by putting an end to the misery endured by a person ravaged by all the accompanying ills of the aged, worst of all being advanced senility.

Notwithstanding her age, her friends, comrades and family consider her death to be untimely. She was so alive; she was able to give so much; she remained a fully conscious social being interacting with people in a manner, which enriched their lives. She still had so much to give! Hence the grief and mourning for the loss.

Comrade Minnie travelled a long journey, starting off as the youngest child of a prosperous businessman and being born and brought up in a world where she lacked nothing. Life had many

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<sup>9</sup> “A Tourist Peek into Cuban Socialism” by Mark Arsiradam (Apdusa Views May 2005)

<sup>10</sup> The last letter is undated but the mention of the death of Alie Fataar (9/6/05) and other facts would place the letter in the latter part of June 2005..

twists and turns including being a single mother battling to make ends meet. The opposite extremes of life did not alter the essential being in her. She lived through it all with gusto. What she could not buy, she made. Like those exquisite patchwork quilts, which are so pleasing to the eye.

Her journey took her through two world wars. It took her through the Russian Revolution and the large number of revolutions that followed. She took her stand with the Republican government of Spain against the fascist Franco. She served the Unity Movement in one way or another for over 60 years. She was witness to the marvelous achievements of humanity in the various fields of science and technology including the travel into space. She saw her children grow into adulthood and had the pleasure of taking part in the raising of her grandchildren. She saw the demise of the hated apartheid system and birth of a non-racial democracy.

Her life was full, varied, colourful and fulfilling. Like everything else, that journey had to come to an end as it did on the 15 August 2005. In our grief, we were also grateful that the passage from the state of living to the state of death was swift and with the minimum of discomfort.

She deserved no less.

#### FAREWELL:

Eddie Roux, well known for his “Time Longer Than Rope” and “S.P.Bunting” was very attached to his mother who by his account was a remarkable woman. When she died, she was given a “rationalist”, i.e. a non-religious funeral. In his funeral oration, Eddie Roux, inter alia, read out an excerpt from the writings of the famous Roman philosopher, Lucretius. We believe that piece to be appropriate for this tribute:

“ Rest assured that we have nothing to fear in death. One who no longer is cannot suffer, or differ in any way from one who has never been born, when once this mortal life has been usurped by death the immortal.

The old is always thrust aside to make way for the new, and one thing must be built out of the wreck of another...Bygone generations have taken your road and those to come will take it no less. So one thing will never cease to spring from another. To none is life given in freehold; to all on lease...This is a mirror that Nature holds up to us, in which we may see the time that shall be after we are dead. Is there anything in the sight that is more restful than the soundest sleep?"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Eddie and Win Roux: "REBEL PITY" Penguin Books 1972 page 264