

## **Herinneringe: Diegene wat my besiel en beïnvloed het**

## **Reminiscences: Those who inspired and influenced me**

### **Editing *Historia* and the legacy of Professor Floors van Jaarsveld**

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In 1980, as an undergraduate at the University of Pretoria, I was introduced to *Historia*. The journal had been administered and edited by the university's History Department since its founding in 1956 by the Historical Association of South Africa to encourage history at school level. After I was appointed as a temporary junior lecturer in the department in 1983, I assisted with the administration of *Historia*. On a photograph of the editorial team, published in the September 1985 issue, my title is given as 'administrative official'. What this grandiose title signified was that I assisted Elrida Bell, the treasurer of the Association, with the banking of subscriptions, the addressing of A5 envelopes, putting journals in envelopes, sealing them and then piling them in bundles of 20 to be tied together with string. I did not cover myself in glory with these menial tasks as I was less than competent in tying the bundles together, and my handwriting was atrocious, resulting in a number of journals being returned as undeliverable. Fortunately for me, Elrida was an easygoing person and I have warm memories of the two of us talking and laughing while busy with our mundane tasks. My final responsibility as the "administrative official" was assisting Heinie Heydenrych to carry the bundles of journals to his car so that he could take them to the post office for bulk posting. Heinie, the editorial secretary, was in charge of the nuts and bolts side of *Historia*, getting it press ready, doing the proofreading, as well as being in charge of book reviews.

Professor Floors van Jaarsveld was the editor; he retired at the end of 1985, and he set the tone and aims of the journal. By the late 1970s, he began using *Historia* to urge renewal and change in Afrikaner historiography. He feared that it had become too stultified and parochial and that it was stifling the interest of young Afrikaners. As part of his aim to modernise and revitalise Afrikaner historiography, *Historia* evolved from a journal for schoolteachers into one for academics. He was convinced that the journal's pursuit of academic excellence would influence teachers, and through them would encourage love and enthusiasm for history amongst their pupils.

I experienced Van Jaarsveld in his shadow years. He was a bruised and sad person, feeling rejected and unappreciated. I spent many hours in his company, listening to his frustrations, hurts, hopes and dreams as a historian. The most fascinating aspect was his views on historians, their works and legacy. He went out of his way to answer my endless queries about his former lecturers and colleagues. For Van Jaarsveld, being an historian was not just a job; it was a calling to be a public intellectual. He loathed those historians who were privileged to have teaching posts at universities, but did not use the opportunity to research and write history. In the age before state subsidies for

publications he was a prolific producer of articles and books. From these encounters, I became aware of what a gifted, complex and flawed man Van Jaarsveld was. He was a volatile mixture of egoism, insecurity, abrasiveness, sensitivity and vulnerability. It was heartbreaking to witness his hurt and frustration in reaction to a critical review of his *Moderne Geskiedskrywing. Opstelle oor 'n Nuwe Benadering tot Geskiedenis*. I will never forget how with an anguished cry he dropped the offending journal into a wastepaper basket.

My lasting impression of Floors van Jaarsveld, however, is not of his flaws, but of his passion and boundless enthusiasm for history, and his high ideals for *Historia*. When invited to join *Historia's* editorial team in 2006 I was inspired to maintain, with my co-editors Alois Mlambo, Pieter de Klerk and Alan Kirkaldy, Van Jaarsveld's vision that by pursuing academic excellence the journal could encourage a love for our subject at school level. Our task was made easier by the fact that Johann Tempelhoff and Lize Kriel, our immediate predecessors as editors, had set high standards. Furthermore, we had the support of the efficient Karina Sevenhuysen in charge of finances and circulation; Alana Bailey and Bridget Theron as copy editors; Boet Stander at V&R printers; and the encouragement of Johan Bergh as president of the Association.

My memories of Van Jaarsveld encouraged some of the innovations the editorial board brought about. His anguished reaction to the critical review of *Moderne Geskiedskrywing*, and his confession that his scathing review of the first volume of *The Oxford History of South Africa* was too harsh, had sensitised me to the subjective nature of reviews, and the limited opportunities for South African historians to secure academic discussions of their works. As a result, we initiated in-depth panel reviews by at least four academics of selected books, hoping that the discussions would provide exposure for these works while stimulating intellectual debate. Van Jaarsveld had also made me aware that young historians, even if they follow different paths, need reminding of the debt they owe to those historians who made their modern way possible. (I was stunned a few years ago to meet two bright young MA students who had never heard of Floors van Jaarsveld.) To remind younger historians that they were standing on the shoulders of their predecessors, many of whom have faded into obscurity, a column was started for historians to discuss those who inspired and influenced them. As part of this process, we also began publishing multiple obituaries of historians.

Following Van Jaarsveld's vision for *Historia*, my dream was of a journal that made history come alive; one that the history teacher in Pofadder was waiting for impatiently as a source of inspiration and encouragement. I do not know whether we achieved the 'Pofadder dream', but without doubt the editorial board made every effort to do so. It was an honour to be part of *Historia's* editorial team between 2006 and 2010.