South Africa, and indeed the world, has lost a dynamic and prominent occupational therapist in Vivyan Alers. She had a degree in social work, and a Bachelors and a Masters degree in occupational therapy. She belonged to the World Psychodrama Association and trained in psychodrama and the Therapeutic Spiral in the UK, Jerusalem and in France. She was also highly trained and an expert in the theories of Sensory Integration and was a progressive leader in the South African Institute of Sensory Integration (SAISI).

As a clinician she had her own practice in the paediatric field and, typical of her generous nature and activist leanings, she took her expertise in psychodrama, trauma and bereavement counseling into disadvantaged communities where violent crimes are rife and the availability of such expertise is minimal. It was here that she developed her own NPO in the deprived township of Ivory Park, a poverty stricken township near Johannesburg.

She was a popular lecturer in occupational therapy at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and, together with Rose Crouch, advocated for the commencement of a coursework Masters in Group work at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal.

Viv was co-editor with Rose Crouch of the last three out of five editions of “Occupational Therapy in Psychiatry and Mental Health”, an internationally respected textbook. Active in the latter years of Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group (OTARG) conferences, and with a passionate love for Africa, Viv’s determination to chronicl the unique role of OT in Africa was realised when in 2010 as principle editor, she produced the book “Occupational Therapy: An African Perspective,” which is used extensively by OTs in Africa today.

Viv was a much loved, larger than life, and truly fun-to-be-with person whose infectious laugh and humour made her great company at a party but equally, was the passionate gentle and loyal friend that would listen intently to the concerns of her colleagues and the oppressed. Many close friends have all lost a kindred and vivacious spirit that enriched their lives with her creativity, generosity and overwhelming presence. Many individuals in need of support globally, have benefited from her collaboration, teamwork and joint productivity.

Apart from her deep conviction for the essential contribution of OT to the health and wellness of humanity, Viv was a talented artist, and an excellent gardener (especially indigenous African gardening). She loved animals, had particular passion for bull terriers and horses, and rode very well.

Her husband Ian, and two children Luke and Cindy were the centre of her life. The children married and the family grew with the additions of a daughter and son-in-law Nicole and Ian, and then grandchildren, Kate, Chloe, Isabel and Alexander. It is thus in one sense a compounded tragedy that her life was so prematurely taken when she was at such a contented and happy place within it. But from another viewpoint, her death at such a time of occupational fulfilment and emotional contentment can also be viewed as a blessing in that she died in such a happy space within her life journey.

The OT halls will echo with the sounds of your laughter, and vibrate with the passion that your activist soul and conviction brought to those of us who sit in boxes and fear to get out of them. We will miss you deeply dear Vivyan.

Robin Joubert and Rose Crouch
July 2018