

ADOPT THE NEW WAY: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE OF UBUNTU

Debbie Wybrow

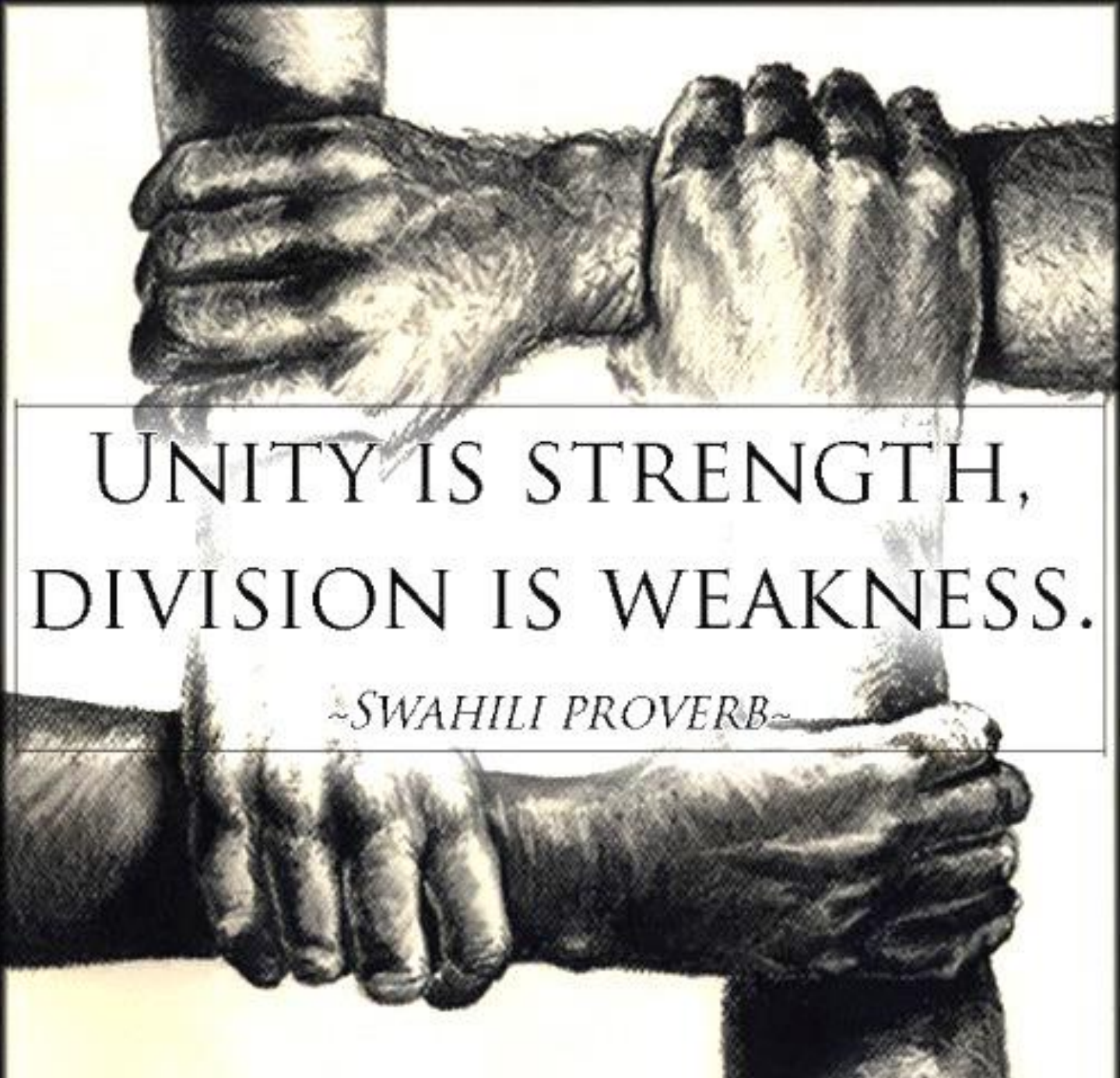
NCFA, Washington D.C, 2018

MANDELA'S FIRST ADDRESS TO U.S CONGRESS 1990







A close-up photograph of two dark-skinned hands clasped together in a firm grip. The hands are positioned horizontally, with fingers interlaced. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the skin and the strength of the grip. The background is a plain, light color.

UNITY IS STRENGTH,
DIVISION IS WEAKNESS.

~SWAHILI PROVERB~



Ubuntu is complex...

- Still alive and thriving! *Bonn*
- Multidimensional *Bonn*
- Based on traditional values *Saule*
- Transmitted generationally through story-telling *Kamwangamulu*

Ubuntu is ...

- African humanism *Cowley*
- Prioritising human beings in everything we do *Vilikazi*
- Positively promoting common good *Sindane*
- A social love story rooted in brotherhood *Aristide*

African & Western Worldviews

African

“I am because you are, we are because you are
(*Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*)

“A person depends on others to be a person”
(*Motho ke motho ka bangwe*)

Western/ Cartesian

“I think therefore I am”
(*Cogito ergo Sum*)

Nguni

“A king is a king because of his subjects”
(Inkosi Inkosi Ngabantu)

“A man’s skirt is tanned and sown in a gathering of other men”
(Injobo ithungelwa chandla)

“One hand washes the other”
(Izadla ziyagezana)

Shangaan

“One finger cannot pick up a grain”

(Rintiho rinwe a ri nusi hove)

“In order to receive, the hand must stretch and give”

(Xandla famba xandla vuya)

Xhosa

“No genius is so clever that he can lick his own back”

(Akukho qili lino kuzikhoth 'emhlana)



SA's child violence time bomb



KZN father sentenced to 2 life terms for rape of daughter, 13



Mother, boyfriend face attempted murder charges after video of 4-year-old's beating surfaces on social media





DistrictMail

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TWO BABIES DUMPED IN BINS

ubuntu is absent whenever ~ interests of others
elevated above the child's adoption is not no.1 for
adoptable children ~ bureaucracy ~ politics ~
personal whim ~ ignorance ~ selfishness ~ leadership
lacks courage, compassion ~ differently-abled left
behind ~ patriarchy ~ gender discrimination ~
culture or tradition justifies harm ~ birth mothers
ostracized ~ no safe options for crisis pregnancies ~
unsafe abandonment ~ criminal sanctions ~
adoptable children remain institutionalised

Reunification - the ultimate panacea?

- Should only be an option where:-
 - Problems leading to removal have been resolved
 - Eligibility of caregivers has been verified
 - Child is carefully transitioned
 - Placement is properly monitored.

... Ubuntu is absent each and every time that adoption is written off as “un-African”...

Changing the narrative for SA's children

DEBBIE WYBROW

Imagine a world where children are cherished, mentored, protected. A world where no "Suzi" is ever abandoned again...

Our community reached out as one to make things better: from the initial response team, to the caring nurses; cuddles to envelop her in her early days; clothes to keep her warm – and now a safe home, temporarily, while the Wandisa Child Protection Team seeks the best long-term solution for her – and the legal process unfolds. One little girl: a miracle, a star in the making.

And yet, within days of this story of hope, another baby binned. This time, it was too late. Frozen, forever three months old... RIP. "Little Lwandle".

It's hard when there's a name and a face. But more manageable, somehow, when the issue is concretised, confined. The weight of the limitless is paralysing.

TS Eliot opined that "human-kind cannot bear very much reality". Which is why, as a proud South African, I felt overwhelmed and decidedly unpatriotic at a recent Colorado conference when I spoke of the scars etched into the underbelly of South African society... the scars of our children who have been neglected, institutionalised, abused.

Explaining how we have failed our most vulnerable was not easy... Apartheid's unequal distribution of basic resources has left seven out of 10 children living below the poverty line. HIV/Aids and unspeakable violence have destroyed the family unit. In many institutions, sexual abuse comes standard.

I shared my experiences of girls shamed for being victims of rape, substance abuse blurring boundaries, moms hiding pregnancies, community members castigating...

I told of how birth parents struggle to find help when they can literally no longer carry their little ones, of the criminal sanction that accompanies even safe abandonment, how after counselling and consent – or courts terminating rights where parents fail to act as parents – birth parents are tracked down, publicly humiliated.

I spoke, too, of being challenged by decision-makers who insist that children physically abused to the point of permanent disability be "reunited" with perpetrators; who see parents of a different colour or culture as imposters, cutting adopted children off from their

culture.

It was even harder to explain our societal breakdown because those professionals know that South African children have exceptional legal rights, undergirded by our benchmark constitution and upheld by our independent judiciary.

So why this disconnect between what should be – and what is? Why does the number of adoptable children who could benefit from family care rise each year?

Why is scant provision made for permanency for children with challenges, who are left lagging further behind? What happens when they age out of the system?

And as more screened families formally offer "forever homes", including to children with special challenges, why is the number of adoptions declining?

We can speak to different outcomes, to changed narratives, legends in the making.

My husband, Brad, and I have witnessed the extensive transformation in hundreds of children's lives through adoption, including children institutionalised because it was thought they would never walk or talk, or had no meaningful role to play in the world.

As Wybrow-Oliver Attorneys, Brad and I travel throughout South Africa to advocate for children.

We spearhead intersectoral teams streamlining the medical, legal and migration complexities inherent in each child's matter at the intersect of justice, social development, home affairs and international relations.

For a healthy society, each story must begin with the children

Our passion is serving children with extraordinary challenges. Our greatest reward? Sharing their milestones – and seeing them shine.

We are also founders and directors of Wandisa NPC, a designated child protection organisation providing a full range of statutory services to children.

Our phenomenal social workers, with Rosemary de Kock at the helm, give their all to prioritise and protect orphaned, abandoned or institutionalised little people.

Wandisa counsels birth parents in crisis, finds temporary safe care homes for children, facilitates reunification where this is best for the child, and equips adoptive



■ The Wybrow-Oliver and Wandisa Teams at Chelsea Village in Somerset West this week, standing, from left, Cliffie Swanepoel, Michelle Basson, Rosemary de Kock, Brad Oliver, Nontando Magxala and Debbie Wybrow. Seated, from left, are Renate Gutzmann, Juanay Russell and Michelle Myburgh.

parents.

In the past year, 17 children were adopted into South African families. Another 20 children for whom no suitable local options existed, were placed through Hague Working Agreements into the USA, the Netherlands and France. Each international family spends up to six weeks right here in the Helderberg, transitioning into the next chapter of their life story.

Many return with extended family to celebrate their connection with us and their homeland.

Ours is an incredible community where time and resources are poured into projects for early education, uniforms, meals, shelters...

But the crisis we face is unprecedented. There are thousands more "Suzis", symptoms of deep fault lines. To react is not enough. We must continue plugging those widening gaps, yet somehow find the fortitude to develop a new South African narrative.

Max du Preez recently described civil society's pushback against what is wrong as one of our nation's saving graces. We need your help. This is much bigger than us. The future of this country depends on our combined proactivity.

Holistic strategy, multiplication of funding to put the right infrastructure in place, replication of professional teams to maximise intervention, research using relevant key indicators, education and

advocacy are good starting blocks.

Because to end up with a healthy society of functioning adults, each story must begin with the children.

Let's endorse courageous leaders promoting "Right2Family Campaigns", who, instead of dismissing it as "unAfrican", see adoption as the primary protection mechanism for adoptable children.

Every child's first 1 000 days must be protected. Nurture should be the hallmark of childhood. Neglect and deprivation leave permanent scars: no child deserves the neural pruning of institutionalisation nor the sexual exploitation inherent in many facilities.

Institutions should be closed when doors to adoption are open.

Lawyers, social workers, medical practitioners, child care workers, those in training and already in the field, must be educated to circle out to vulnerable children. Let's identify 0-5 year olds with no family options; assess their physical and emotional needs; begin with therapy, remediation, medication where necessary.

Reverse flow adoptions are the best way forward – we start with the child's specific needs – and find the family that can best serve that child.

Empirical research is critical: key indicators measuring significance and true prosperity in each child's outcome can gauge success and refine strategy.

We must boldly use our constitution to implement children's rights, especially those to family life and dignity despite disability.

The Human Rights Commission, the Public Protector and Parliament should demand explanations from those who are failing our children. And Home Affairs – we cannot help children who do not have proper documentation.

Hundreds remain at risk, for years unable to access family care or essential services. Implement systemic changes that have been proposed, streamline your processes and play your part in protecting our children.

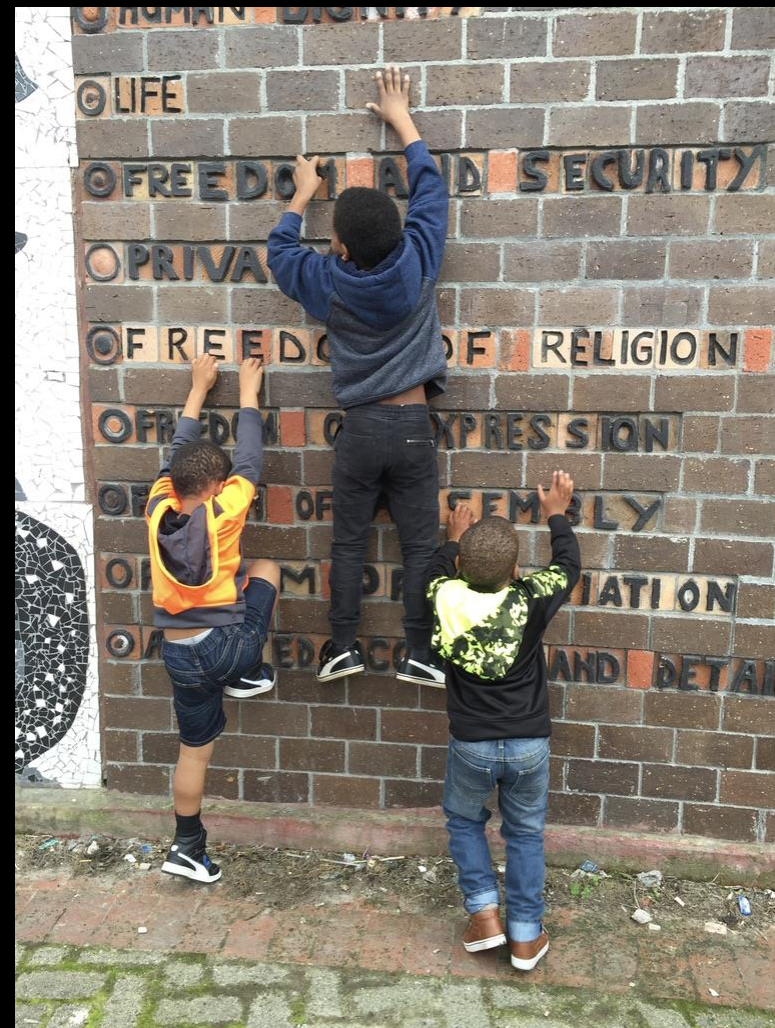
Responsible media advocacy should continue to showcase the triumphs of those who have overcome disadvantage – and shine the spotlight on those who hinder their progress.

I have many stories to tell. But if we write adoption off as being unAfrican and xenophobically ignore helping hands from beyond our immediate precincts, we will leave no legacy of Ubuntu in the global village.

Storytelling is in our blood. We can rewrite the narrative if we find every child a family in which to star. And then we will be inspired by their tales of transformation – and our children's children will in turn have stories to pass on, too.

● This is a series of articles to appear, related to "Baby Suzi".











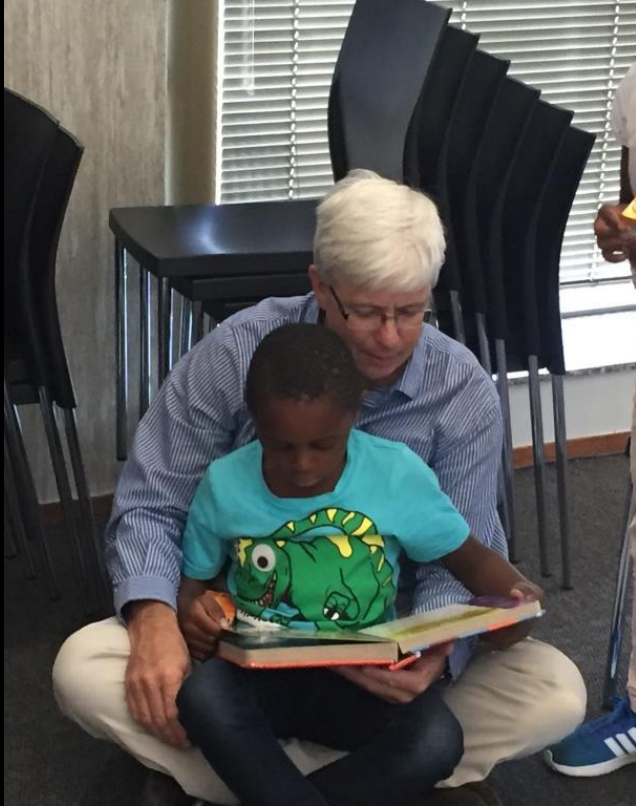


















**Safe Babies • Safe Place
Safe Haven**



Only When Staff are Present



The Orphan Trains

As New York's population swelled, thousands of poor children and youth journeyed west in hopes of a better life.



Jacob Riis photograph of boys sleeping on the porch of a tenement building in New York City, 1890s. The Granger Collection, New York

A very different type of passenger rode the trains westward beginning in 1853. A charity organization, the Children's Aid Society, transported over 100,000 young people — the great majority boys 14- to 17-years-old, about half of whom were orphans — from New York City to families in the West. This social experiment was the origin of foster care in the United States.

Thousands of New York children worked in the city's streets. They scavenged for cast off coal and scrap metal, ran errands, blacked boots, and sold newspapers, matches, and flowers. They were the children of immigrant, unskilled native, and free black workers who, by economic necessity, settled in the city's poorest, most densely populated wards. Although social reformers and newspapers publicized sensational stories of children who toiled to support

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CAPE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

Wake up, little Suzi, wake up

CAROLYN FROST

At first it sounded like a cellphone ring, coming from the green municipal bin outside Checkers on Main Road, Somerset West, as Cedric Titus walked by.

He stopped, uncertain at first, and then looked inside the small circular opening, and saw only a plastic bag. And then it moved.

Cedric forced the lid off the bin, and plucked out the little bundle, and tore open the two bags. "The first thing I saw was the tiniest hand, and then a face, and I shouted 'It's a baby'," he told me.

In a series of decidedly fortunate events, I happened to be driving by that very moment, to drop off a passenger, Precious, at Somerset Oaks, a block away. Precious, looking out of my car window, said: "That man just pulled a baby out of the rubbish bin".

I stopped, leapt out of my car with a racing heart, and urgently, "Is she alive?"

As if to answer for herself, her eyes opened, just a little, and her fingers curled around Cedric's finger, as he held her close. Within seconds, others gathered around, expressing shock and consternation, disbelief and offers of help.

"I've got her," said Cedric, and indeed he had. This big, gentle man, arms covered in tattoos, skulls on his T-shirt incongruously the backdrop for this fragile little being, was exuding an energy of protection like a warrior, cast into this unexpected role of rescuer.

Someone said they had called the police, so instantly I called Sandy Immelman, from Helderberg Baby Saver, and told her: "There's a live baby here, it looks close to newborn, please come," and she said calmly "I'm on my way, and I'll call the ambulance".

I'd gotten to know Sandy through her wonderful work with Masikhule, a Helderberg NGO devoted towards empowering women and children,

and also because of her role with Helderberg Baby Saver, which had been launched in the area a couple of years ago, as a safe option for babies to be left when mothers faced dire circumstances, and may be considering abandoning, or ending the life of, their infant.

The irony? The Helderberg Baby Saver was less than a block away, a facility with a chute connected to a 24-hour manned monitor, which alerts volunteers to pick up cast-aways, with no fear of reprisal for whomever (man, woman or child), perhaps faced a terrible choice.

Back to the drama unfolding on this busy, noisy street corner.

Inconceivable, I thought, that the tiny wail had been heard, miraculous. Kristy Spies, one of the first passersby, said: "I'm still nursing my own child, so I have milk; shall I put her to my breast?"

Continued on page 4



■ Cedric Titus holds little "Baby October" after rescuing her from a municipal bin.



■ Pictured, from left, are concerned passerby Shelly Hendry; "biker hero" Cedric Titus (cradling "Baby October/Suzi"); Sandy Immelman, from Helderberg Baby Saver; and Kristy Spies, who also offered to nurse the infant, while everyone was waiting for more help to arrive.

'Every tomorrow a vision of hope'

From page 1

Another quick call to Sandy, who was en route, confirmed that "no, not advisable if she seems otherwise okay". Kristy then felt the baby's fontanel, and said she didn't seem dehydrated, and that her colour was good.

It was a surreal stage for this human drama, and as we waited for the experts and authorities in these matters, we all talked.

Cedric said: "It crossed my mind that people may think I'm a bin picker, but I didn't care, and just forced the lid off."

"Then when I'd torn off the two plastic bags, I thought I may have to resuscitate her, and was worried because she was so incredibly delicate."

Later on Friday evening, when he spoke more at length, he told me a bit more about himself, which only reinforced my sense that there were forces at work here, beyond our ken, that it was this good man who walked by, quite spontaneously, and who was attuned sufficiently to the slight sounds, that alerted him to her grave distress.

"I once revived a man, who had drowned, and was lying face down on the beach, so I had an idea of what to do now, should it be necessary. But then I saw she was breathing okay. I've never held anything this small before," he said in a voice still awed, humbled, hours later.

At the time, we all offered to take turns at holding her, but he refused to relinquish her, and when the police arrived, he climbed into the patrol van on the front seat between them, holding her close, now wrapped in my shawl (the towel he found around her was damp, and she had a little white babygrow on).

The ambulance met them all at the Somerset West police station, and took Cedric and the baby up to Helderberg Hospital.

"I loved that everyone was waiting for us when we arrived, and surrounded us, saying 'Is that the child?' in great excitement, practically ignoring all the

other patients," he laughed.

The paramedic told him that the baby was less than three days old, given the state of her umbilical cord. Cedric added, in a more hushed tone: "The paramedic said she could only have been in the bags for a couple of minutes, and would have suffocated very soon."

At the hospital they said "you're the child's oupa now," and the social worker told him "You're the Friday the 13th biker angel hero," he told me.

Biking is Cedric's passion, and he was undertaken by once breaking his leg, and later breaking his back, and returned to the saddle when he recovered.

"I was born with my umbilical cord wrapped around my neck seven times, and once my aunt, a hospital matron, had to give me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation when I severely burned as a child," he said, so this is clearly a man who has little fear, an abundance of courage, and powerful determination.

"It had also crossed my mind that it may have been a bomb in the bin. I was working as a porter at Christian Barnard Hospital when the Planet Hollywood bomb detonated, and saw the two Canadian children who were brought in on a gurney, so badly injured," he recalled.

But something overrode that initial fear, and provisionally, he opened the bin on this sweltering Friday October 15, and a little girl was given a second chance at life.

"I told the social worker, who listed her name as 'Baby October' that they should call her Suzi, because of my love of bikes," he shared.

"And if it wasn't for Danie Olivier's big heart to consider me for a post here at DMS and to take a chance on me, I wouldn't have been there for Little Suzi."

"And I thanked him for that, when he thanked me for saving Suzi's life," he added.

Cedric also told me about his mother, who lives with him. She suffered a stroke, and he cares

for her. "Mom had a very rough night on Thursday, and I almost felt too tired for work, but went in anyway. I'm so, so glad I did."

Later on Friday evening, when we chatted again on the phone, he said he was still shaking, and the best thing was to go for a ride on his bike to the ocean.

"So many emotions were running through me: nervousness, stress, concern, confusion. I knew, when that bag moved, 'This is real', and the awesome responsibility."

"Mother" Karma works in strange ways, one, leading to another for the good of others in the end," he told me. We ended our conversation with Cedric sharing his favourite poem, by classical Sanskrit poet Kalidasa:

*Yesterday is but a dream,
Tomorrow is only a vision.
But today well lived makes every
yesterday a dream of happiness, and
every tomorrow a vision of hope."*

And on Saturday morning, when I walked to the nearby greenbelt with my dogs, and watched the first rays illuminate the peaks of the Helderberg Mountain, I found myself filled with such a sense of grace, and started sing (to the surprise of Mr Murphy and Phoebe), "Here comes the sun, little darling ('Suzi'), here comes the sun..."

Who knows what possible circumstances prevailed: pain, regret, indifference, agony, duress, or who was responsible for this terrible, sad act. That is for the authorities to try and establish.

All I do know, is that I give great, heartfelt thanks for a guy called Cedric. And then I then trotted out a happy version of "Wake up, little Suzi" – hey, baby girl, your life has just begun...

● Bolander will be running a series of articles on highlighting Helderberg Baby Saver and related NGOs in the basin. Anyone who wants to make a contribution of baby supplies, can call Monique at 082 775 0683, or for questions or information relating to abandonment, call Wandisa at 079 063 4144.























