

***Fifth EXTRACT from:*** (16 pages)  
***'I STILL CLIMB TREES'***  
***by Drummond Marais***

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During my 1981 Christmas family reunion in Pretoria, I not only enjoyed festive celebrations with my parents and my sibling. I also paid many visits to the theatre in both Pretoria and Johannesburg. There were some truly inspirational productions on at that time, as well as a fair amount of mediocrity. I was particularly uplifted by the presentation of "EVITA" at Johannesburg's Civic Theatre. However a major production, such as that was, still proved to contain varying degrees of dubious artistic acumen. Of course the same can apply to any large metropolis, anywhere in the world. And with my innate sense for creative criticism hard at work, I began to formulate an important life-altering decision. From my fairly elevated opinion of my own artistic abilities at that time, I could see that there were many dubiously talented people at work within the so-called entertainment industry. I reminded myself that they were all regarded as professional performers, being paid to do what they were doing. It was pretty obvious to me that some of them did not deserve payment at all.

So I decided that before it was too late, I would make a second attempt at pursuing a professional acting career. After all it was an unfulfilled childhood dream of mine. I had long-since discounted my professional acting experiences in London during the seventies. Any minor achievements there had been hampered by my confused emotional state of mind. I was now in my thirty-second year and although it was a far from ideal age to be altering my career-course and entering a still-mystifying industry, I was determined to have one last crack at it.

Kevin seemingly handled my departure from his life with aplomb. I think he somehow understood my essential need to pursue this dream, and perhaps he too had already begun to feel that our relationship lacked future potential? For the umpteenth time in my life, I once again gathered together my meagre earthly possessions and headed towards the future. Fortunately I had secured the services of a theatrical agent in advance of my arrival in Johannesburg, and Penny Charteris became my artistic promoter and career guide for the next few years. I shall forever be grateful to her for having shown a blind faith in my then unproven artistic abilities. I realised that she was taking a certain risk with an unknown quantity such as me, but presumed that she intuitively sensed my eagerness to work and my willingness to start right at the bottom again.

And that is exactly what was required of me. Once again I humbly began to attend endless auditions, at which I received curious stares from the more established members of the acting fraternity. Of course my age and total lack of a localised track record was against me from the start. Actors in my age bracket had already been functioning as professionals for almost a decade since graduating from their respective universities and drama schools. These people were a known commodity, with some of them already claiming a certain amount of national fame. And I was the unknown 'dark horse'. It soon became evident to me that a few of my peers were actually threatened by my presence, and thereby I frequently found it difficult to socially break through the self-defensive barriers they had built up between us.

I did however find work, despite the sociological odds stacked against me. Much to my personal relief, 1982 became a very productive year for me. By the end of that first year as a struggling Johannesburg actor, I had a Shakespearean play, a Jerry Herman musical, a Simon Gray television drama, and also a featured role in a television commercial under my belt. All of which assisted in legitimising my presence within an established peer group, as well as launching my subsequently highly productive career, which now spans two and a half decades.

The Shakespearean play was entitled "EGYPT IN EASTCHEAP" and was specially written for matric students of the original play "ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA". It comprised a play-within-a-play, with the character of Shakespeare busily writing his famous Egyptian epic whilst sitting in a tavern in Eastcheap. The legendary Elizabethan actor Richard Burbage

appears and plays out Antony's important scenes, with Doll a mere serving-wench playing out Cleo's lines. All of which is witnessed and scathingly commented upon by none other than Ben Jonson. A most inspired and truly educative piece of theatre that the small cast and I toured around the provinces, performed at the Grahamstown Schools' Festival, and finally closed with a short run at the Market Theatre. I played the arrogant Richard Burbage with flamboyant verve and gusto, appearing opposite the accomplished actress Penny Smith, with whom I also fell briefly 'in love'. Proof of my method-acting technique for truthful persona-development on stage? The notable character-actor, Joey Wishnia, played Bill Shakespeare, and even more memorable for me was the direction of the play by a young Sarah Roberts. At our first rehearsal, Sarah and I had immediately unlocked an inexplicable bonding of our souls. It is within a glorious glow of nostalgia that I now recall her insightful direction of that play, and more specifically of me. I must honestly state that I have seldom again experienced such a fine theatre director. Whilst I have continued to act, Sarah has gone on to become one of South Africa's most sought-after theatre designers. But I still secretly long for her to direct me again, as actors are ever in search of inspirational directors. Perhaps somewhere in the unforeseen future? Meanwhile our friendship, much like our individual careers, has experienced the necessary highs and lows which develop inner strengths and constitute the trust and understanding upon which soul-bonding continues to survive and grow after many years together. We provide a form of soul-continuity for each other. We both happen to be governed by the astrological sign of Libra that equips us with an even deeper understanding of one another's deficits and credits. Sarah remains one of the few close confidantes in my life; I am grateful for her friendship and I love her very much.

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*"Never idealise others. They will never live up to your expectation."*

*(Leo Busaglia – 1924-1998)*

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My next notable achievement that year was being cast as Ito, the Japanese butler, in the Brickhill/Burke production of "MAME". Whilst still in Rhodesia, I had seen one of their lavishly extravagant "FOLLIES" presentations and knew that this multitalented duo would teach me a great

deal about show business. As it happened, they were to teach me more about human nature than the business I loved so much, and unfortunately most of what I learned came through negative experience. The rehearsal process was a grueling one reminiscent of military structures. Of course I accepted that high discipline would be necessary in order to mount a production of “MAME’s” proportions, but I found the hierarchical system within the Brickhill/Burke Company most daunting. There were far too many internal power-struggles at play, which naturally flowed over into the rehearsal rooms. And for my sins I found myself unwittingly placed in a position of ‘enemy’ to those in power. You see having adopted socialist principles for quite some time, and likewise having shown more than a passing interest in the workings of the then actor’s union S.A.F.T.U., it was requested that I become the union representative on this particular production. I had accepted this role without fully understanding its negative implications. For I had not anticipated that Louis Burke, artistic director and co-founder of the company, would be such a dictatorial megalomaniac.

Whilst sharing the above thoughts, I am well aware of the libelous possibilities I am likely to encounter, but I remind myself of the ‘freedom of expression’ aspects to our present South African Constitution. I am presently reporting my personal observations of life situations, which obviously reflect only my perspectives on any given subject. However I have every individual’s right to express such opinions, together with whatever truth and honesty I may choose to employ.

Suffice it to say that Louis Burke became my nemesis. For a start, I found it difficult to admire his methods for theatre direction. He employed a ‘copy-cat’ principle in which every actor was obliged to emulate Louis’ personal interpretation of their specific role in the play and there was no room for individual creative input. And Mr.Burke’s repetitive tantrums and hysterical outbursts in the rehearsal room, when things were not going his way, were for me far too reminiscent of my own mother’s megalomania displays of so long ago. However, when this man focussed his verbal abuse upon his wife Joan, who also happened to be the ‘star’ of the show, my inner rage mounted.

It had taken me quite a while to get over my starry-eyed and distanced adoration of Miss Joan Brickhill. She had long-since been acknowledged as one of South Africa’s very few theatrical ‘stars’, with just cause I believe. Joan is one of the few women I have ever known to possess an inherently

graceful nobility. She epitomises glamour and more importantly, a legendary 'ladyship' stature. A true aristocrat, yet one with warmth and genuine caring for others. And during our many months together whilst working on "MAME", I was privileged to be recipient of her supportive love and friendship. But as we gradually grew closer, I was also given insight into aspects of the pain suppressed within this hard working, inhumanly- driven, yet still most generous woman. Even then I intuitively knew that her husband was responsible for most of her undisclosed pain.

Today I proudly claim an intimate friendship with Joan Brickhill. However, for some years after the closure of "MAME" we seldom met other than at theatrical first nights or occasional social events at which our interaction necessarily adopted a polite social superficiality. It was only one special winter evening, some six or seven years ago, that our souls finally connected intimately, cutting through all previous social visages. For a few years prior to this momentous evening, I had made a point of inviting Joan to attend my annual birthday celebrations and she had often reciprocated with invitations for me to escort her to various social functions. And it was after one such function that she invited me into her warm sitting room for a late nightcap. The hypnotically roaring fire in the grate suddenly became an esoteric catalyst for the meeting of our individual souls. We talked long into the next morning and since then our friendship has grown and blossomed much like Joan's beautiful garden. Whilst recently having to cope with greatly debilitating ill health, this wonderful woman, who possesses admirable resources of inner strength, determination and spirituality, continues to provide me with a role-model of human excellence. I value her presence in my life and love her dearly.

I now find it quite extraordinary to claim the two long-standing friendships of Joan and Sarah, both of which were initiated during my first year in Johannesburg, and now boast longevity of over twenty years. Thereby, I must also acknowledge that Fate, Synchronicity and Serendipity have ever been my closest companions. And to these invaluable friendships which were given birth in 1982, I need to add my meeting with the man who would become my lover, partner, father, brother, friend and confidante for the following seventeen years of my life. Cecil Hannaway, my Sagittarian 'gift' from the Universe.

Cecil and I had met rather dubiously within weeks of my arrival in Johannesburg. We had both been separately 'cruising' for casual sex at an

infamous pick-up spot in a northern suburb's shopping mall. After our initial sexual encounter, we had stayed in touch and had frequently met to enjoy mutually satisfying sex-activities. He was still a married man at the time so our sessions together were fairly limited. At first I was confused by the openness he professed to claim with his wife regarding his gay proclivities, for she willingly allowed him the freedom of one night per week to explore his sexual inclinations. This was obviously a concept which was tangential to my own personal experiences thus far but I managed to overcome personal judgement on the issue by reminding myself that the present scenario suited my sexual needs admirably. I felt no guilt at all as the choice to be with me was his and the permission to do so was hers.

Soon, though, our meetings became much more regular. There would be long romantic phone conversations and unexpected visits from him during his workdays. At the time he was employed as public relations officer for Cuthberts, a job which entailed a great deal of travel but also allowed for freedom of movement during office hours, of which Cecil took full advantage. We had both been hit by cupid's arrows and soon began to verbalise our intimate feelings of love for one another. He was a most inventive and artful lover; gently sensual yet commandingly masculine. Our sex together was harmoniously passionate. It was as if our separate bodies had been designed to co-join, for we physically fitted together so well. His dark-haired rugged appearance was, for me, maleness personified and the knowing smile that infrequently creased his lined and tanned Latin face was irresistibly sexy. What I also found most attractive was Cecil's continuous encouragement of my mission to 'make-it' in my current theatrical pursuits. This sensitive older man became my emotional support system, overnight. Without ever having seen me perform on stage, he blindly believed in my talents that naturally paid dividends upon my occasionally insecure ego. He was also more than generous when it came to financial matters, often spoiling me with love-tokens and expensive gifts. I remember wonderfully romantic dinners at exclusive restaurants and one night in particular when a waiter arrived at our table with our finally chosen desserts, only for me to discover a beautiful silver ring hidden inside mine, which my lover had obviously prearranged. Of course his career route thus far had ensured financial security for him and allowed him to indulge his illicit lover in whatever fanciful manner he chose. But more importantly, each gift became a declaration of his love for me and for the first time in my life I reveled in such adoring attentions. This man wooed me unashamedly and I lapped it up. I am suddenly reminded that my dearest Cecil was the first person ever

to send me flowers on an opening night. This occurred, much to my delight and much to the envy of my leading lady, when “EGYPT IN EASTCHEAP” had opened for its short run at the Market Theatre earlier that year. And it became a meaningful tradition that he perpetuated throughout our fourteen incredible years together.

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*“Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.”*

*( Kahlil Gibran – 1883-1931 )*

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“How are you feeling, my boy?” Cess asks, with empathy filling his rugged face. Through the unbearable abdominal pain, I attempt a brave smile and answer: “Not too bad...definitely better than yesterday.” “That’s great!” he smiles back at me and takes one of my hands into his. “We’ll soon have you out of here and back on that stage, hey?” “I hope so,” I reply, “...and speaking of which, I got a message from Mr.Burke today enquiring as to when they might expect me back at dress-rehearsals...Fuckin’ hell! It’s only been three days since they cut me open!” “He’s all heart, that guy!” my lover counters with a chuckle. “Tell me about it...” I begin, then suddenly, “Oh shit!” as a searing pain, like a jagged knife, cuts out all thoughts of Louis. “Oh, babe, what can I do for you?” Cess whispers as he leans over me. “I just wish I could pee!” I manage. “Could you help me to the loo?...I’d better have another try at it,” and I carefully manoeuvre my stiffened body into an upright position while Cecil slides his arm under me and slowly lifts me from the bed.

Our progress to the toilet down the corridor is slow and in an attempt to distract me, my lover continues talking: “Look Drum, I’ve been thinking...There’s no way I can allow you to go back to that awful flat...alone, once the hospital releases you. So I’ve spoken to Gina and we’ve agreed that you should come to our place to recuperate...” “What?!” I exclaim, doubling my internal body-torment. “You can’t be serious!”

But Cecil was deadly serious.

It had been during a hectic dance practice in the final stages of “MAME” rehearsals that I had suddenly collapsed in agony. Having habitually suffered from intense bouts of indigestion or constipation, I assumed that the abdominal-pelvic pain I was experiencing stemmed from just such a source. However Keith Galloway, our brilliant choreographer, had other thoughts. He suspected it might be a hernia problem and once I had been shuttled off to an emergency consultation with Joan’s personal abdominal specialist, which had naturally been at Louis’ insistence, Keith’s suspicions were confirmed. The doctor immediately booked me into the Kenridge, a private hospital, where he would operate upon my perforated hernia the very next day.

The patterns of the above incident demand detailed accounting, for many reasons. You see when I found myself obliged to hand over the control and future functioning of my body to the theatre management that employed me, and then later the medical 'experts' who would invade my body, I naively assumed those controlling powers would take full responsibility for the final outcome. Louis’ initial insistence that I consult with a ‘Joan's abdominal specialist’, had led me to believe that the management would in some way contribute towards the fees demanded by such a specialist; apart from the enormous added costs of being hospitalised in an elitist private institution. Under normal circumstances, a financially challenged actor like myself would not have even considered attending a 'specialist' because of the anticipated, predictable high cost of such services. Well I was to be horribly disappointed, for after surgery there was never any mention of monetary assistance. In fact throughout my painful ordeal I received merely one get-well card from my ‘concerned’ employers followed by several persistent messages enquiring about my proposed return to work, enquiries that closely resembled psychologically directed threats! My insensitive employer's emotional blackmailing tactics interrupted an imperative post-surgical recuperation period, which subsequently resulted in a further rupturing of the hernia some weeks later. This then necessitated my wearing an uncomfortable leather truss throughout the three-month run of that production and the whole hernia-incident justifiably left a very bitter taste in my mouth.



It is most unfortunate that my life experience can provide far too many similar examples of uncaring, unsympathetic and sometimes downright inhuman behaviour by theatrical managements in South Africa. Surely there is no place for such insensitivity within the creatively sensitive realms of the performing arts? Or am I once again guilty of naivete to so hopefully assume that our theatre industry should comprise a creative 'brotherhood' of caring human beings? And whilst dealing with this most unsettling topic, I feel obliged to jump ahead of time once again in order to provide another example of it.

In 1999 I had the privilege of playing Mr. Mushnick in Janice Honeyman's overly lavish production of "THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS" which ran for many months at Johannesburg's Civic Theatre. Working with the multitalented cast of young energetic performers was an adrenal shot-in-the-arm for this forty-nine-year-old! The exuberance and versatility of young Fem Belling and the inspirational originality of Debbie Racusin's choreography are memorable theatrical highlights for me. Unfortunately large casts habitually provide a breeding ground for opportunistic viruses during the course of any long-running show, and this production was no exception. Sickly young performers were falling about me like flies. Fortunately the management had predicted such inevitability and the stand-by 'understudy' system was effectively put into place without hampering the continuance of eight performances per week. Sad to say that during the final weeks, my own ageing body succumbed to a particular virus and after a few warnings in the direction of the said management, I finally had to claim a sick leave-of-absence. I knew that my warnings had given them time to ensure a suitable rehearsal process for my understudy and with an aching body but a clear conscience, I had headed for my healing bed.

To my amazement, and a matter of hours before my understudy was due to perform, I received a panic phone-call from the director who insisted that I perform my contractual responsibilities again that night. I reminded her that I was very ill and actually speaking to her from my sick-bed, to which she reacted with little sympathy but instead reminded me that I was "an old trooper" and regardless of bad health, could not possibly let the show down. She further stated that they would have to cancel that evening's performance if I was unwilling to appear. And that was the moment I decided to take a stand for all emotionally abused actors throughout the history of theatre. This was my response:

*“I am very surprised that you of all people, having once been a performer yourself, should now even consider using such emotional blackmailing tactics on me. There has been no question regarding the employment of standbys for any of the sick younger members of cast, so why should the same principle not apply to me, the oldest member of cast? So I am very sorry, but I refuse to succumb to your unethical manipulation now. I am aware that I have already performed beyond the call of duty. My illness worsened with every recent performance I gave, this past week, but I also kept warning your management that I would eventually have to stay at home. And if my understudy is not equipped to perform my role tonight, I can only remind you that is your fault not mine....I will return to the show, with a doctor’s letter, when I am well enough to do so. Goodnight!”*

The outcome of my telephonic ‘speech’ was this: the performance had to be cancelled because my understudy was ill-prepared; and the director in question has subsequently found it impossible to treat me with anything but mild civility ever since. This person's actions provide me with further confirmation that the majority of South African managements possess an innate fear of confrontation, especially when it hails from their employees. A fearfulness which I suspect to be inspired by their personal insecurities or perhaps even private acknowledgement of their own personal unethical practices at work? However, with reference to the above incident, I have experienced a much deeper disappointment than the purely obvious. For you see, some twenty-odd years ago whilst working together in “MAME”, I had mistakenly identified the above-mentioned woman as a potential friend. How very wrong one can be on occasion!

But let us now return to the year 1982. I was released from the Kenridge and swiftly transported to my lover’s Bryanston house, for recuperation after that hernia ordeal. The contrast between Cecil’s tastefully decorated home, set upon a sprawling park-like landscape, and the tiny flat in Hillbrow which I had shared for many months with a fellow ‘struggling actor’, was immense. However, my awe for these new surroundings was further challenged when Cess informed me that he and I would be sharing the large guest bedroom. I was speechless. My life had truly been taken out of my control. But somehow realising that I was now caught up in a series of events that were governed by a Universal energy-flow, I succumbed. My first priority appeared to be the restoration of good health, the reclaiming of a fully functioning body, and to return to my work in “MAME” as soon as

possible. Once all of that had been achieved, I would be able to sit down and ponder my personal circumstances again.

I stayed away from work for only a few days before Louis Burke's insistent calls became impossible to ignore, but during that short recovery period I quickly acquainted myself with the third member of the Hannaway household. It was impossible for me not to like Gina, Cecil's wife. A diminutive blue-eyed blonde, almost reminiscent of my own ex-wife. She had a charmingly lilting Irish accent and we spent long hours together, talking about our individual lives. She apparently harboured no particular bitterness towards her spouse's sexual proclivities, yet I sensed an element of desperation within her. It was her continuous appeasement of him, through which she obviously hoped to retain her marital status. She was doing whatever she felt necessary in order to achieve that, no matter how much it might compromise her own principles or ethic code.

However, we soon became a most compatible threesome. Our weekends were spent shopping together, doing loads of team-laundry, gardening in the afternoons and dining out at night. A successful if rather strange *trois menage* if ever there was one. And we only parted when it was time for bed; she to hers and us to ours. I remember inviting my former flat-mate, Peter Holden, out to the house one weekend and as we two struggling-actors gossiped about show business, whilst lazing around Cecil's vast swimming pool, Peter suddenly quipped: "Well doll! You've certainly landed with your arse in the butter!"

And how right my friend was. Peter and I had met soon after my arrival in Johannesburg, at some audition or other, and had quickly discovered our mutual need for accommodation. Of course we were both pretty penniless at the time, but Fate provided us with the necessary opportunities to source and secure a small rented flat in Hillbrow. It consisted of two rooms, one of which contained a closet-sized kitchenette whilst the other had an en suite bathroom. Peter had opted for the one with the bath, fully accepting that his bedroom would also inconveniently have to serve as our entrance hallway. My room was slightly more private but would necessarily have to play host to mealtime invasions, the food-smelling remains of which permeated my bed linen appallingly. However, we were most grateful for a cheap roof above our heads and the lack of furnishings in no way diminished the primitive simplicity of our cramped surroundings, for

there was literally only enough space upon the floor of either room for our cheap foam mattresses to lie!

Anyway, we enjoyed our short-lived period of co-habitation. Great fun was had in that flat and our sometimes hysterical laughter caused much consternation amongst the other flat-dwellers in our block. Our mutual homosexuality was a major contributing factor to our overnight friendship and we therefore accompanied each other to the various 'queer' establishments in the Hillbrow vicinity. Naturally enough, neither of us could then afford a car. But I recall us spending hour upon hour, standing on busy street corners in Hillbrow, studying the passing parade whilst blurting bitchy comments, but ever intent upon honing our skills for human observation so that we might later reference it for future character portrayals. For we were both determined to have fulfilling acting careers. And like most young theatrical aspirants, we drank a great deal. Apart from our regular walks up to the infamous gay bar, "The Skyline", we kept cheap red 'plonk' in our flat at all times. Often that wine would replace customary meals. It is a wonder that we maintained our health at all, but at least the wine provided us with long periods of undisturbed sleep.

Peter remained a dear friend of mine for the rest of his life, a life that prematurely ended some ten years later. His sudden and unexpected demise only echoed his impetuous zest for life whilst living it, and I fondly remember the joy he brought into mine. And although I missed his frequent presence for some years after his soul had departed this plane, I now accept that his inimitable *joie de vivre* gave his soul the life-fulfillment it had originally requested of him. Rest in peace my dear friend.

As an aspirant young actor, Peter had not only envied my new living circumstances within Cecil's Bryanston home. He was outspokenly envious that, after so few months of our both fighting for an *entrée* into established theatrical *enclaves*, I was already employed in a major Brickhill/Burke production and had also landed a leading role in an S.A.B.C. Television drama. Unfortunately for him, his own career took a while longer to get off the ground. However, without taking my advantaged opportunities for granted, I was far from revelling in my then so-called success. For my working environments were fraught with the emotional tensions and neuroses of other people.

Once “MAME” had opened to critical acclaim, Mr. Burke’s domineering attentions were soon distracted from our production by external interests that necessitated a great deal of overseas travel, more often than not to America. Apart from negotiating future business deals there, rumour has it that he was also constantly negotiating an extra-marital affair, which in itself soon became overtly common knowledge when he callously began to flaunt this *liaison* publicly, much to his wife’s increasing emotional distress. I would breathe a sigh of relief with his every departure from Johannesburg, although I could not altogether ignore the 'watch dogs' he left in his stead. They comprised equally power-hungry 'prefects' whose job it was to ensure that the show’s high standards were maintained. A practical solution, without doubt, but one that demands maturity and self-discipline within any such 'prefect', sans personal ego! Now many pages ago I shared the fact that I was granted similar powers of prefecture during my final year at high school. I loathed wielding that power over lesser mortals and thereby have never fully understood or empathised with those who apparently get their 'kicks' from it. The consistent upholding of any position of authority definitely demands a certain temperament. Louis’ prefects appeared to revel in every minute of their assumed power-base! Needless to say that whenever I was subject to their sub-lieutenant tactics, I refused to subserviently succumb by accepting their bitchy discipline tactics, the way most other cast members seemed to do. My evolved levels of self-esteem would never again allow irrational abuse from others. And within the Brickhill/Burke scenario I knew that my integrity as a professional was beyond doubt or question.

Whilst on the subject of professional ethics and integrity, I wish to share another example of Mr. Burke’s general lack of such qualities. It occurred during the rushed preparation of Miss Brickhill’s understudy for her inevitable replacement of the title role. Miss Erica Rodgers, a talented and well-established actress in her own right, had been contracted to standby for the role of Mame from our first day of rehearsal. I sympathised with her patient non-activity, merely observing that long and intensive rehearsal process, with never an opportunity to actively participate. From that first day, Joan had shown signs of her pending and debilitating ill health and within a few weeks of the show’s opening, it was decided that Erica would play a certain number of performances every week thereafter.

And after an amazingly impressive dress and technical run-through, the first and last rehearsal Erica Rodgers ever had with the full company, Louis Burke stood at the foot of the stage and proceeded to lambaste our

'replacement' leading lady. He criticised virtually everything she had just achieved and ended his note-session with an unnecessarily despicable remark:

“Let’s face it, Erica...you'll never make it in musical comedy!” and he turned his back on her and exited the auditorium. There was a stunned silence on stage, for the whole company had been embarrassingly privy to his diatribe. Erica herself bravely broke that silence with:

“Well fuck you too, Louis!” and I instantly initiated a supportive round of applause from the company.

As it turned out, however, I was one of the very few members of cast who maintained emotional support to a rather isolated Erica through her subsequent performances. It was as if two opposing camps, albeit numbers of great imbalance, had been instituted. One was either 'for' Erica Rodgers or 'against' her! And the flames of such attitudes were fanned from within managerial levels too. Backstage gossip abounded with bitchy remarks about Joan’s understudy, many of which were actually shared with Joan herself, which must have caused her immeasurable discomfort. The thoughtless stupidity of humans can be so terribly damaging and because of my habitual siding with the ‘underdog’ or the ‘outcast’ in any given situation, I soon found myself defending Miss Rodgers in a demonstratively outspoken manner. I am reminded of a relevant and pathetically silly incident wherein focus became fixated upon Joan’s extravagantly glamorous wardrobe for this role. Once Erica was doing regular performances, I began to overhear titters and twitters about the understudy’s despoiling of these beautiful costumes with her foul sweat and body-odours. For heaven’s sake, the woman perspired whilst working so hard, like most other human being might do. So what? At first I was taken aback by such childish comments until the full horror struck me that this issue was being seriously considered by the management. Adding further insult to Erica’s personal injuries, a completely new wardrobe was created for her but one that obviously smacked of second-grade. It was the final stamp of confirmation that Miss Rodgers was a second-class-citizen within the hierarchical ranking of that cancerous company structure.

I do however retain a few fond memories of “MAME” for despite the odds against it, I did manage to experience some moments of inexplicable theatre 'magic' at work. Fortuitously I was included in the extravagantly staged main production-number, disguised as an anonymous character-*persona* and one that demanded a very quick costume and make-up

transformation from my previous appearance as Ito, the Japanese butler. For those few minutes of every performance, I momentarily became a member of the chorus, soaring above those adrenaline-filled waves of standing ovations that inevitably accompanied the climax of act one. Generally I thoroughly enjoyed my interpretation of the loveable, quirky and highly energetic Ito, especially whilst playing opposite the charismatic performance-energies of Miss Brickhill herself. But all in all, I welcomed the final closure of that show with a certain amount of relief. At the end of the day, my so-called 'big break' possibly only succeeded in breaking all prior illusions of my formerly starry-eyed expectations.

Concurrent with my negative experiences of "MAME", I began to acclimatise myself to another altogether contrasting yet likewise frequently irritating *genre* within our entertainment 'industry'. Television! Or as I nowadays refer to it, 'terrible-vision'! With a deficit within my experiential knowledge of on-camera performances thus far, I initially felt myself a complete novice and recognised that I still had a great deal to learn and assimilate with regards this particular medium. So I willingly watched, listened and applied every fresh concept that came my way. For my first meaningful television appearance, I was privileged enough to be cast opposite one of the most gifted young South African actresses at that time, Dorothy Ann Gould. I was already an avid admirer of her work having seen many of her previous performances on stage and television. And within days of the commencement of filming Simon Gray's fascinating television drama, "A MAN IN A SIDECAR", Dottie and I became private *confidantes*. My unashamedly gay status allowed us to instantly dismiss any potential for the contextual sexual innuendo that invariably develops between male and female leading actors. We spent hour upon hour, off-camera, sharing deeply private intimacies which not only influenced our on-screen portrayals but laid foundations for a friendship which would last for quite some years thereafter.

I played the role of Gerald Dunlop, a confused pseudo-intellectual Englishman, caught up in a disastrous marriage to Dotties' superior-intellectual character, Edith. Apart from the triangular love relationship, which includes the Dunlops and a third party by the name of Tommy, who was played by Andre Jacobs, I naturally enough identified myself with one of my character's specific idiosyncrasies. For the Gerald character is quite obviously a closeted homosexual. Strangely enough, this particular sub-textual fact within the tele-play provided a lot of off-screen tension to the

overall production. "SIDECAR" provided a certain Peter Goldsmid with his debut in adult-drama direction, with him having previously concentrated his creative energies within children's television. And during our preparatory rehearsal period it became obvious to me that apart from his understandable insecurities with regards his first major project, insecurities that often manifested as a pedantic preciousness, Peter was visibly discomforted by the atmosphere of latent homosexuality within the script. In fact, now that I review it, I remind myself that the issue of sexuality had already cropped up at my first audition for this role. I clearly remember Peter saying: "This role contain subtle undertones of homosexuality...which we'll be avoiding of course!" he had flushed with embarrassment before continuing: "But then, you're not gay...are you?" With sensibly stored experiential knowledge of this bigoted human race of ours, coupled with survival instinct, and certainly not forgetting my desperate desire to land this leading role, I survived that uncomfortable moment by lying!

"Of course not." I had dryly answered, with just a hint of the offended-male-ego within my voice in order to appease his now dubious masculinity. Mr.Goldsmid's obvious relief was tangible!

This was my first indication that homophobia existed within the assumedly liberated environment of the entertainment industry. I was horrified to say the least. I had never been aware of homophobia during my forays into show business in England. Was this another reflection of the prejudicial indoctrination of apartheid South Africa, where even creative artists subscribed to brainwashed bigotry? And was I going to be obliged to continually lie about my sexual identity in order to secure any future employment as an actor? This was surely an unnatural and dichotomous concept, for show business has always naturally abounded with a high percentage of homosexual artistes. Everyone knows that. But allow me to confirm that Mr.Goldsmid's suspected homophobia at that time was not the last evidence of such prejudicial thinking to come my way professionally.

After filming had begun, and only once I had assured myself that we already had enough footage 'in-the-can' to forbid any cast changes, I proceeded to come out of my temporary self-imposed closet, much to Mr.Goldsmid's horror. And although my on-screen characterisation remained consistent to everything I had done previously, all of which had been accepted and often applauded by our director, suddenly I was recipient to after-take 'notes' which smacked of sexual bigotry. I was now being informed that my character was far too 'gay'. And although I attempted to



laugh the whole thing off, I was even more disconcerted to then receive 'notes' from the senior producer of our film, Mr. Roy Sergeant, who clearly indicated his disapproval of any depiction of my character's homosexuality at all. This was the final straw for me. Had these people not read the script? The not-so-subtle 'gay' issue in this play was more than obvious to the actors involved, so how could it now be ignored. I am still unsure about the reasoning behind Mr. Sergeant's opinions on this matter. Was he merely playing it safe in order to satisfy the S.A.B.C.'s blinkered and moralistic attitudes at that time? Or was he merely expressing his own internal homophobia? Perhaps this is a good time to state the dreadful fact that cancerous homophobic attitudes have been known to inadvertently rear their bigoted little heads even within the ranks of the homosexual sub-culture itself. How pitiful that is.