

**Coffee with Silo**  
and the Quest for Meaning in Life

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## Coffee with Silo

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Robinson, 45, has for over 20 years been an activist in the Humanist Movement which was founded by the Argentine writer and thinker, Silo, to promote personal and social change through active nonviolence. He is currently the international spokesperson for the organisation World without Wars and Violence and a member of the Global Council of Abolition 2000, a network of more than 2,000 anti-nuclear organisations. In addition, he is one of the co-directors of Pressenza, International Press Agency and a trustee of Footsteps for Africa, a UK-based charity which builds schools and medical facilities in Kenya.

When he's not trying to change the world, he enjoys visiting friends in different countries, playing squash, watching sport on TV (especially anything Olympic), drinking instant coffee, and occasionally cooking for friends: desserts are his favourite.

To fund this lifestyle, he works as an IT consultant for telecommunication companies.

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## Introduction

It was only a few weeks ago that I was sitting in a plane returning home to Budapest from Paris where I'd been for a weekend meeting of colleagues from Pressenza. Normally I'm very sleepy in planes. There's something about them that sends me to sleep even before take-off. But this time I wasn't. I was engrossed in a book which had a handwritten greeting from the author.

The book was "Silo: the Master of our Times", to give it the title in English, and the author, Pía Figueroa, has been a friend of mine for over 20 years and I received the special message partly for this and partly because I was in the middle of translating the text into an English language version which is about to be published as I write these words. The message in the book says, "For Tony, with so much gratitude for your patience and work in translating these stories which are also our common history, our friendship and our future projects, with Peace, Force and Joy!"

So, I was on the plane, not sleeping and instead avidly reading the stories in Spanish and I spent the whole flight with my nose in the book. In one moment the captain announced that we were about to land in five minutes time and I hadn't finished it yet but I had just finished one chapter and I wanted another short one to

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read before touching down. I looked at the index and chose, “The Last Time We Ate Together”.

It’s a beautiful description of Pía’s last meal with Silo accompanied by other close friends. The story recounts how the author couldn’t understand the point of the meal until the last moments of putting on her coat and leaving the restaurant. Then she realises that the point of the meal was to act as a final goodbye to the friends present and when saying her own goodbye to Silo she had the opportunity to say thank you for everything.

It’s a very lovely story which moved me a great deal when I read it as we were coming in to land. I could imagine very well the author’s emotion at this farewell, and it resonated with me, partly because I never got the opportunity myself to say goodbye to the person who has affected my life more than any other person living or dead—maybe with the exception of my parents who are the reason I’m here now.

Filled with these emotions of my own gratitude and a joy for having encountered Silo, something very strange started to happen.

My head started to fill with all the scenes of my life that have been affected by what I’ve learned over the 24 years since I first came across a strange political group by the name of the Humanist Party which transformed my life for ever in the space of about 48 hours in January 1989.

The plane taxied slowly to its parking space and during this time I could see in my head the times I met Silo personally, the experiences I had in the Humanist Movement and the Humanist Party over all those years, the countless trips to Africa building networks of activists, the experiences in my personal life where I was able to decide what to do based on a coherent philosophical and spiritual framework, the people I have met, the things I have learnt and the places I’ve been. In short, I

started to see the chapters of my own book almost writing themselves before my very eyes.

It was a hot day, and I wanted to get home quickly, so I took a taxi from the airport and the images kept on flowing and flowing. So much of my life has developed precisely as a result of the decision taken by an Argentinean thinker, author, philosopher, comedian and, let’s be honest, eccentric to stand up in the mountains near Aconcagua in 1969 and invite people to “carry peace within you and carry it to others”.

For days I was pestered by these images and I can take a hint when I get one, especially if the same hint persists for days. So, I opened a document on my computer and started to write down the chapter headings. I was still in the middle of the translation of the book that started this whole mental stream and I was determined to finish it before moving on to other projects, so I dared not put more than chapter headings to act as a reminder for later.

Now here I am, Pía’s book is translated and the images of my own experiences have returned to haunt my imagination and so I’ll write them down.

I sit here now writing this introduction and I’m thinking to myself, “What is the intention of this book? Why would anyone read it?” And I think the answer is that the intention is to put in writing my experiences in case someone, anyone, even one person finds them interesting and possibly useful. But if no one finds these experiences personally useful, then I write this book so that my closest friends can know me better.

This book will try to explain my experience with Universalist Humanism. The philosophy and spirituality cannot be easily described. Silo himself wrote copious amounts of text on the subject and gave talks and conferences over more than 40 years, but there is only so much you can learn from a text or even from a video. Universalist Humanism, let’s call it Siloism, has to be lived. And

I've lived it. It has guided nearly every decision I've made since 1989—especially the most important ones. And maybe this attempt to write it down will be a practical guide of how to live a Siloist life, at least of how to try to live one, and this will show how it has been useful to me.

With the world in such a terrible state and deteriorating every day, increasing numbers of people are suffering like never before. Maybe this book can be helpful for those suffering people who are looking for an alternative set of values by which to live their lives. Maybe some of my experiences show that there is something interesting to this lifestyle I've chosen which, although it's been degraded by the System because it's not materialistic, it's not interested in money and it doesn't give a damn about celebrity, is a lifestyle that's led me at least to happiness, joy, love and spiritual awakening.

So this book then becomes a review, just like you might read a restaurant review before going there to eat. If you're trying to decide what kind of life to live and you're investigating various religions, spiritual currents, nihilism, drugs, etc., this is a personal review of Siloism. Clearly it's not complete and is totally subjective, but nevertheless maybe it gives a few insights.

Of course, this book may do none of the things I intend it to do and in this case I hope it's amusing enough to make the reader smile at some of the extraordinary things that have happened to me.

Mikebuda Park of Study and Reflection, Hungary  
2013

## Acknowledgements

There are too many people to thank for all the good that I've experienced in my life but I highlight a few here.

Thanks to my lovely Mum, Brenda, for the life she gave me and the extraordinary sacrifices she made.

Thanks to my sister, Tarnya, for all the laughter.

Thanks to Jon, Silvia, Pía, Dario and Danny for orientating me towards the right path.

And, of course, thanks to Silo who, in the most improbable way imaginable, took a naïve, confused and aimless boy from the English countryside on a journey around the world and around the mind in pursuit of a Purpose: To Humanise the Earth.

## About Silo

Silo [pronounced See-lo], nom de plume of Mario Rodriguez Cobos, was born in Mendoza, Argentina in 1938, died in the nearby town of Chacras de Coria in 2010 and dedicated his life to creating the conditions necessary in the world for the appearance of a new human society based on the principles of nonviolence through a methodology of simultaneous personal and social transformation. His work led directly to the development of a philosophical current known as Universalist Humanism, the creation of a global Humanist Movement which promoted it and the associated creation of numerous organisations working in many fields of human endeavour. His spirituality is expressed in the book published in 2002 called *Silo's Message* and communities of Siloists meet around the world to deepen their own experiences with different states of consciousness and access to "The Profound". Fifty Parks of Study and Reflection, the physical home of The School that he resurrected, can be found distributed across five continents and are open to the public and to anyone in search of a quiet place to meditate and seek inspiration.

## The Doctrine of Awakening, Nonviolence and Brotherhood

*We say that man thinks in one way, feels in another way and acts in yet another. So, all the time he lives without harmony and operates with violence in the world of other men.*

*The chaos of humanity is the simple reflection of internal disharmony.*

*So, although he doesn't want to; man acts differently to how he feels, he feels differently to how he thinks and he thinks differently to how he acts.*

*So, he is not responsible for his errors because he knows not what he does. He is profoundly asleep and his greatest illusion is to believe that he is awake.*

*We propagate the doctrine of awakening, nonviolence and brotherhood among people.*

*We act for the internal and external liberation of mankind.*

*We say:*

*Let's never respond to violence with violence.*

*Let the races become brothers for ever, making a single humanity.*



*Let God and another life beyond death be sought in the sleeping depths of oneself: in those depths full of unknown forces and immense powers.*

*Let all action be peaceful: physical nonviolence; economic nonviolence; racial nonviolence and religious nonviolence.*

*Let our permanent tasks be: to awaken every day more harmonised in our thoughts, feelings and actions and at the same time awaken this in others through the teaching and practice of this, the most humble and simple of doctrines.*

*Let's save mankind from vengeance, preparing the path for the new humanity that is already approaching.*

*Silo – 1964*

## Childhood

First, I suppose I should introduce myself or at least tell you, the reader, who I think I am. We'll start with my background.

I was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1968 on a small island off the coast of France called Guernsey. It's a tiny place but very pretty with its coastline of sandy beaches and rocky cliffs. It's also a tax haven which means that it's full of obscenely wealthy people these days. Nearly everyone there either works in the financial or tourist industries. At least it was like that the last time I was there.

My origins are slightly untraditional but it was the sixties after all. My 24 year old mother, Brenda, dated my father shortly after a divorce from her first husband: a short-lived marriage that was a big disappointment to her. Mum had lived on the island since she was 16, before that she grew up and went to school on the outskirts of London. On moving to the island, at first she lived with her parents and then faced life alone after they both died within a period of six years of arriving to what was meant to be their dream retirement home.

Brenda was not particularly gifted academically, or at least her academic ability was not encouraged or valued in a post-war generation which was still very much

divided along class lines and had very different expectations for girls and boys. What she lacked in brain power she made up for in determination though. She knew that there was no one to look after her if she didn't do it herself and she became fiercely independent. Whenever she got herself into trouble things would have to be really bad before she asked anyone else for help. This quality has been passed onto both me and my sister.

My father, David, is a different story. His family had lived on the island for generations even before it became famous as a tax haven and the little I know about my father's side of the family seems to involve vague stories of resistance to the German occupying forces during the Second World War. My Grandfather, Jim, on my father's side also died before I was born and my Grandmother died when I was twenty years old.

David was 21 when he unexpectedly had fatherhood thrust upon him. It was certainly not a planned event and he wasn't interested in taking on the joint responsibilities of being a husband and father. He was fairly obsessed with go-karts at the time, there was a track on the island and he used to compete fairly successfully. In fact my mum and dad met through go-karting because her first husband also liked to play around in toy cars. When I first met David at the age of 11 he was making a living from tourists who wanted to try it out.

Now Guernsey is a small place, only a few thousand people lived there in 1968<sup>1</sup>. Everyone knew everyone else and each other's business. Having a baby and keeping the identity of the father a secret was unthinkable, but this is precisely what Brenda managed to do. Of course, despite it being the sixties and with a younger generation all over the increasingly liberal West apparently obsessed

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 1971 census the population of the island was 51,351

with sex, it was still an extremely conservative time and unmarried mothers were not approved of.

Perhaps if my maternal grandparents had still been alive things might have been different, but that wasn't the case, and instead my young, unmarried mother with no family to speak of found life difficult, to put it mildly.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, Brenda never regretted this son she gave birth to. This baby might have been an accident but from the moment she realised she wasn't alone, she wanted it, she loved this baby and would have done anything for it.

After recovering from the birth, jobs were difficult for her to find, as were friends who had the time and patience to look after her baby boy and after a little under two years of life as a single mum Brenda made the decision to leave the island and seek a better life in England. There were more opportunities there and a welfare state that could help out in times of trouble. She'd recently been contacted by relatives in the UK and went to live near them, near the cathedral city of Lincoln in the east of the country.

My first memories go back to the time of moving from Guernsey to England. I remember having to sleep in a cot one night and I don't think I'd ever slept in one before and I clearly objected to having to sleep in this mini "prison cell" as I remember the experience of being upset behind the bars. Mum tells me that this was the night we left our home because we had to stay in a hotel for the night on the neighbouring island of Jersey on the journey to England by boat.

Brenda found a job as a waitress in a club and started to build a new life for us. We lived in a room above the club but we didn't stay there very long though because by the age of three, mum and I were living in a caravan in a town called Sleaford and it's here that she fell in love

with husband number two and my sister, Tarnya, came into the picture.

She's lovely now, but back then I probably didn't think so because having a baby sister must have been a terrible shock to a five-year-old boy who was used to having the full attention of his one parent and now had to put up with that attention divided into three. Unfortunately things very quickly started to go wrong with husband two whose surname I had been legally given to make things less complicated and which I still carry to this day. He had no qualifications, could barely read because of dyslexia and couldn't keep a job, but to my mum he was charming and extremely good-looking and she put up with his crap of drinking too much and sleeping with other women. At times he was violent and in the summer of 1979 he smacked her in the face giving her a black-eye after having spent two nights away from home and just like Donna Summer and Barbara Streisand sang it that very same year, she said, "Enough is enough" and left him.

It was a terrible time for us though because mum really was alone. She lost contact with the extended family because they couldn't stand her husband and she had very few friends because with his inability to keep a job we moved to different towns once or twice a year and so it was difficult to establish roots. We spent one afternoon in a shelter for battered women and their children before an acquaintance from a network of similarly affected single women came and rescued her, and so the three of us shared a small house with this woman, Angie, and her three kids. This was not fun at all! It was at least two months before the husband was forced out of the house we lived in at the time of the violence and we could go back there.

This period of five years of my life was very difficult personally since the moment she got married to the

moment she got divorced for the second time. My mum's husband was very unpleasant to me and you can be guaranteed that in any dispute between me and my baby sister it was always me that got a smack for it. I hated going home and in this condition I channelled all my energy into school.

I was good at it too. I mostly found it very easy, I was bright and wanted to learn. I excelled in all the tests they gave and in nearly all activities except for football, which I wasn't very good at, possibly because there was no father figure to encourage me to do it. I loved looking at maps in the atlas and whenever I could get hold of an encyclopaedia I would read it avidly. When I left my primary school at the age of ten they gave me a silver cup for being the best boy in the year! I became enthralled by anything international: the Olympics, the football World Cup, sport in general, the Eurovision Song Contest, the United Nations; anything with different countries fascinated me.

Mum finally got rid of my sister's father when I was ten and life got easier. She rented a house in the small market town of Oakham where I went to school, mum got a job as a housekeeper in the boarding school in the town which meant that she had holidays the same time as me and my sister and life went by mostly without incident.

When I was 11 mum took her family for the first and last time on a holiday. This was my first time on an aeroplane (the next time would be when I flew for the first time to Chile!) We went back to Guernsey because despite the difficulties of her last year living there in 1970, she still had very fond memories of the place and then while we were there—I think more on a whim than anything pre-meditated—she decided to take me to see my Dad. It was a very strange meeting at the go-kart track, partly because we hadn't ever seen each other, but

partly because mum hadn't warned him beforehand that we were coming and he was shocked and then terrified that someone would see me and realise that I was his son. Still, no one in Guernsey apart from two or three very discreet people knew that David was the father of Brenda's son.

Back in Oakham, life continued in this sleepy country town. It was a very conservative place. There was one black family, one Chinese family that managed the Chinese restaurant and one Indian family that managed the Indian restaurant and that was the full extent of multi-culturalism in Oakham. I adopted the values of the place without thinking too much about it: Conservatism (these were the days of Thatcher), patriotism, racism, homophobia, hard work and getting a good job.

But what kind of job? I had no idea. When I was very young I thought I'd like to be a teacher, probably because teachers were nice to me as I never made their lives difficult. Then when I was about 14 years old my mum started dating a man from the RAF camp nearby and he took me to the military base where he worked as an air-traffic controller. I got quite fascinated by it, even going so far as enrolling in the local air-cadets which I soon started to hate because of the ridiculous rules and discipline they insisted upon.

Nevertheless there was a possibility that the Air Force would give me money to study until the age of 18 so I applied for a job with them but I failed to get in because I confessed on the application form that I used to suffer from asthma and so I didn't make it into the military on medical grounds. So I left secondary education at the normal age of 16 after doing quite well in my exams with 4 A grades, 3 Bs and 3 Cs. With nothing better to do, and a parent willing to support me, I went into higher education and did two more years. Having got my A grades in

maths and science, I studied these subjects and did very well at them.

Again, I had no idea what I wanted to do at the end of all this and people were starting to talk about university, but I had no idea in my head about this. I didn't know anyone who'd been and certainly it wasn't anything that people in our family had done before. Then one day I was called into the Head Master's office along with about ten other people and he asked us if any of us had considered applying to Oxford or Cambridge? Something like this had never occurred to me. I hadn't even thought about applying to university and here they were talking about the best universities in the world. My mum always supported Cambridge every year when the BBC showed the Boat Race, a rowing race over four miles on the River Thames, but apart from that I didn't know anything about that world.

The school then organised for a few of us to go and see the two cities and visit a couple of the colleges. It was all very exciting and I started to be interested. My studying was easy and I was getting constant A-grades in all my exams so I suspected I might be good enough to get in.

But what was interesting is the way an element of my behaviour started to make itself apparent. It works a bit like this: if you tell me I'm good at something, if you flatter me, I'll work hard at something. If you tell me I'm bad at something, I lose interest and give up. It's a characteristic that still operates today and those who know me well take advantage of it.

I applied to Cambridge in the end, partly because of the parental support in the Boat Race, partly I quite liked the town when I went there, but mainly because a Chemistry course in Cambridge required three years and the equivalent course in Oxford required four. I went for the interview for which I had to buy a suit: some hideous grey and shiny eighties-style one. I remember they asked me

about sport in my general interview and being obsessed with the Olympics, having just spent one of the previous summers watching the games from Los Angeles, I felt like I sailed through it. Then in the science interview they asked me about the physics behind different kinds of squash balls<sup>2</sup>. I had no idea about it, but apparently I could speak coherently enough that they decided to give me an offer to join the college. Either that or they had to give me an offer to fulfil their internal quotas to have balanced numbers of students coming from poor and rich backgrounds, and maybe it was clear to them that I was going to sail through my exams.

They set me the highest targets in my exams which I duly achieved and so on an autumnal day in October 1987 I arrived at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. Yet something had happened over the summer months that completely distracted me and two weeks after arriving at college I left and I wasn't entirely sure I'd ever go back.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a scale according to how much the ball will bounce.

## Music and drama

I lived my teenage years to an eighties soundtrack. I fortunately missed out on the punk movement of the seventies and the only decent music to come out of that decade as far as I was concerned was ABBA and the Bee Gees! Whereas it had the feeling that every song ever written in the eighties was brilliant. Music was vitally important to all of us as teenagers. The new charts were released on Tuesday lunchtime and someone would have a transistor radio around which we would gather and find out what was Number One. In those days if a song made it to the top it usually stayed there for a while because it was great quality music and not the product of marketing companies and talent shows of today.

I started off being into Adam and the Ants who were a bit harder than ABBA. I moved onto artists such as Nik Kershaw and Howard Jones, the epitome of eighties pop, before maturing into the legends that are U2 and Simple Minds.

Music was important not only because it was nice to listen to but it felt like it was a real force for good. Whereas music of the sixties and seventies showed the clear clash of generations which drives history forward, music of the eighties was less confrontational and instead wanted to engage in social change and move people's atti-

tudes. These were the times of Live Aid, global concerts in aid of Amnesty International and solidarity with Nelson Mandela and the anti-apartheid movement.

Back in Oakham though, I was just a teenager trying to have some fun with my friends and doing well at school. It must have been around 1986 that mum started dating a chef called Eddie. He was at first a very nice guy for my mum. He had two children younger than me and my sister and he had a small house on the other side of the road from where we lived. One day, every teenage boy's dream came true when it was decided that the three youngest kids and two adults would live in our house and I would live alone on the other side of the street. I already had a part-time job and now my own place: independence at the age of 17.

It wasn't a great house. There wasn't any hot water as I remember and the toilet was outside and in the winter the pipes would freeze, so I went across the road frequently for food and use of the bathroom facilities but it was my kingdom and I could do what I wanted!

But something happened and Eddie started behaving badly. I think he was having an affair with someone, and basically he started to get a bit too big for his boots and I objected to some of the things he said. One day I felt like he was trying to take credit for my academic success and it was too much for my pride to bear and I decided it was time to find my real father...

When I thought about it later, it perfectly echoed a story line that was happening at the time in a popular UK soap opera, *Eastenders*, set in East London around the dramatic lives of the members of dysfunctional families. A young woman appeared in the story and started looking for one of the other cast members who was in fact her mother in the storyline.

I'm not sure if this planted the seed in my mind but the fact is that I knew my dad's name and I knew where

he lived and I went to the local library which for some reason had all of the phone books for the entire country and in the Guernsey book I found him. There was only one entry with his name and I assumed it must be his phone number I was writing down on my piece of paper.

This is what I knew about my father, information provided by my mother from what she knew from the one remaining friend she had in Guernsey: he owned a hotel and a go-kart track and he was married. I remember it was a summer's evening after I had finished my exams that would get me into university. It was fairly early and I dialled the number.

I will say now that this was probably the most scary, stupid and thoughtless thing I've ever done in my life. I had not thought this through at all. I had no idea what the consequences of such a phone call would be. The phone number I had was at the address of the hotel so I called:

"Hello, Sunny View Guesthouse [not the real name], how can I help you?" said a female voice down the line.

"Hello, I'd like to speak to David Smith [not his real name], please." I replied to the receptionist.

"I'm sorry, he's not here right now. Would you like to leave a message?"

"No, it's ok. I'll call back later. Just tell him it's Tony, a long lost friend."

"Ok. He should be back after 9pm. I'll tell him you rang."

I waited until 9pm and called back. This time a man answered the phone.

"Hello Sunny View Guesthouse, how can I help you?" said a male voice down the line.

"Hello, I'd like to speak to David Smith please." I replied.

"Speaking. How can I help?"

"You'd better sit down."

"Why?"

“This is your son, Tony, Brenda’s son.”

Silence on the line...

“Err, can I take your phone number, I’m going to have to call you back later...”

I gave my number and hung up wondering what that meant.

It must have been about 11:30pm when the phone rang and I was still up and in my mum’s house waiting for the call. Everyone else was in bed.

I don’t remember too much about the next conversation, the fact of the matter is that the woman I’d spoken to earlier wasn’t a receptionist at his hotel but his wife. She was a very intuitive woman and realised that something unusual was happening and so when my call came later, she made sure that she wasn’t next to the phone so that David would have to answer it and so that she could watch his reaction. Apparently he went white, sat down, wrote my number down, hung up the phone and started shaking and quoting Numbers 32:23, “Be sure your sins will find you out!” He confessed everything to her. He told her about his affair with my mum, he told her about me, he had already told her about seeing my mum at the track when I was eleven (“an old friend came to the track today and brought her son with her”), but he confessed that the boy was his. Ironically and an indication of the power of her intuition she had replied after my visit as an eleven year old, “Does he look like you?” To which David had replied, “Don’t be silly!” Possibly a little bit too vehemently.

Somehow on this tiny island, after my mum moved to England, he got married to someone who used to work with my mum, with this poor woman not even remotely suspecting that he had a son with someone else. David’s family never said a word and let her live blissfully unaware of this big secret.

Furthermore David and Lilly (not her real name) had

a son together. I had a brother! He was fifteen and I had no idea.

The noise in our living room must have disturbed my mum upstairs but in any case she must have known what was going on because I can’t imagine that I wouldn’t have told her what I was doing. She would never have stopped me from doing it, even if she knew that it was a bad idea, because there are some forces that are too strong to stop; such as a wilful teenager. So mum came down to find out what was happening.

“Mum, I’m speaking to my dad,” I said. “Do you want to say hello.”

I don’t think she did really want to say hello, but she thought it might be important to me. I handed her the phone.

“Hello David, how are you?”

“You bitch!” screamed a hysterical female voice so loudly that I could hear without the phone to my ear and the phone went dead.

And then I knew that maybe this hadn’t been the best plan I’d ever made.

## A year in Guernsey

Well past midnight, the phone started to ring once more and very apprehensively I answered to hear my new-found dad wanting to speak to me about what had happened earlier. He explained about the 18-year cover up to his wife and although she was devastated she decided that she needed to see me, so they invited me to the island two weeks before I was due to arrive in Cambridge. I took a train and then a ferry and went for a week. It was a strange experience because the person I got on best with was Lilly. I think I was experiencing an empathy that perhaps would have been better experienced before I made the first phone call to Guernsey, but in any case she was lovely to me and wanted to know everything about me and my life.

I also made a great relationship with my brother; with my father on the other hand it was more difficult. Why did I need a father? Now that I'd met him I realised that I'd done very well without one until now. It was difficult for me to even say the word "dad" and very quickly I stopped. Yet something was happening to me which I didn't recognise or understand.

The last day of the week together we spent in England because my brother was following in the family tradition and competing in go-karts. We stayed the night in

London with their friends, the next day, Sunday, was race day and in the evening they would drive me home.

I still don't understand why, but I woke up on Sunday morning and immediately started crying. I was totally overwhelmed with strange emotions. I spent all day trying to control myself without anyone seeing that I was behaving weirdly, but in one moment I went with David for something to drink and I broke down. He was relieved. He thought I didn't like him. But I didn't know what I was feeling. All I knew was that I couldn't stop crying.

They drove me to Oakham and when they were leaving I started again and then all three of us were crying like babies. Some very deep emotions had been moved in me and in them and I didn't know what to do. The next two weeks were very difficult, even on the first night Lilly called and was clearly moved by what was happening. I couldn't think about anything apart from this new family.

My mum was very disturbed by all of this but was powerless to do anything about it and obviously feared for her own place in my affections.

In the end she drove me to Cambridge partly to make sure that I really went, but as great as the place was I couldn't concentrate and after two weeks I went to see my tutor and told him the story and he suggested that I take a year off and go and resolve what needed resolving and come back the following year. I jumped at the chance. The content of my chemistry, geology, crystallography and maths lectures had been so shockingly difficult that I doubted if I was good enough to go to university. Two days later, David came and collected me and drove me to Guernsey to spend a year there.

At the beginning, things were great; they were selling the hotel and moving into a new house. So there was lots to do. I found a job working in a merchant bank and David had a second car that I could use. But something



unfortunate happened because David was developing a business in Birmingham on the mainland and he started to spend long periods away from home.

I was with Lilly every day and it was clear that she wasn't psychologically well and not coping at all with the stress. She started to see a counsellor who tried to help but the counsellor didn't do anything other than listen and agree what a shit my father had been to her. Lilly had no tools to deal with what she was experiencing and here was I, a permanent reminder of the disaster her life had turned into. She started to hate me and I can't honestly say that I blame her for it.

The process of growing bitterness and resentment was not a linear process. There were moments of beauty where she treated me like her own son but there were moments when she distrusted my motives completely. Of course she saw me as a threat to her son. Suddenly in her eyes she was imagining his inheritance divided in half. She convinced herself that my mum had driven me to make the phone call in revenge for the way David abandoned her. She poisoned my mind with evil stories about my own mother and what she said she knew of her 19 years previously. She also had a memory like an elephant. Storing away in her memory every word I ever uttered, she would manipulate my words, twist their context and quote them back to me in any way that suited the way she wanted to portray my intentions.

The situation was so bad that one day I just felt like I had no alternative other than to leave home. I just left the house one Sunday afternoon. I had a bicycle and somehow I ended up at the house of one of the managers of the bank who took pity on me and I stayed with him and his wife for a few weeks until David next came back to the island and negotiated a family peace agreement. Lilly didn't hide anything though so at least it was easy

to know when she was having a bad day and I could keep a low profile.

Despite this rollercoaster of an experience in Guernsey, it was during this time that my idealism was starting to form, precisely as a result of Lilly. Her family came from the industrial city of Stoke-on-Trent. Today it is probably most famous for its links to the pottery industry with such companies as Royal Doulton and Wedgwood being internationally famous names in expensive tableware. It also had a very important coal-mining industry and Lilly's family was a mining family and they had suffered very badly during the miner's strike of 1984-85.

Lilly was staunchly anti-Thatcher and although by that time I considered myself more of a Liberal<sup>3</sup>, in no way did I have any leftist leanings because these were still the days of the Soviet Empire and the horrifying violence with which they suppressed their people. I thought that nuclear weapons were essential to global security and generally I believed everything I heard on the BBC.

Lilly told me exactly how the mining community had been devastated by Thatcher, how the Conservatives were destroying people's lives, how the rich were getting richer at the expense of increasing numbers of poor people. For a boy from the leafier parts of the more wealthy side of the country this was all a revelation.

One day my brother was competing in a go-kart race in the North of England and I went with him and my dad to the UK for the weekend. We stayed with Lilly's family and her mum was even more forthright in her views than Lilly!

In those days there was a Friday night talk show on TV. The format was the same every week. The show had a controversial subject and they would bring on experts,

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<sup>3</sup> A small political party in the 1970s and 80s which promoted human rights and freedoms more than other parties.

opinion-formers, politicians, religious representatives and ordinary men and women related to the theme, all of whom had different—sometimes violently different—opinions. It was basically a verbal boxing match with people trying to convince everyone else that their opinion was right: right for themselves, for others and usually right for the country and the world! It was normally quite entertaining.

That week the theme was healthcare and it was one of the many times when the government was trying to increase privatisation in the UK health system and turn its internal mechanisms into a kind of competitive business. In one moment Lilly's mum just screamed at the TV something like, "Health care is not a business it's a human right!"

And I knew she was right. It was like a light went on inside my head. We were human beings, we could put people on the moon, yet individuals and companies were earning huge amounts of money and storing this money in tax havens like the one I lived in precisely to avoid paying tax that should be directed to public services. Yes, the world could be a fair place to live in and I knew I didn't have to be realistic, being idealistic was better.

My interest in human rights was properly ignited on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 1988 when my idols, Simple Minds, put their full support behind Nelson Mandela in the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday tribute concert in Wembley which I watched every moment of live on TV. I then bought tickets to go and see the Amnesty International concert called "Human Rights Now" with Sting, Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel and others that took place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1988 also in London. Sting's performance of "They Dance Alone" about the disappeared of Chile and Argentina during the military dictatorships affected me greatly. My idealism was starting to grow and take shape even without having a way to express it.

Before this though I was doing well in the bank in Guernsey and in one moment I was actually thinking of not going back to University. The bank was small and great to work for and I was doing all kinds of exciting stuff thanks to the fact that I had not yet developed a clear ideological position which leaves me horrified now when I think back. I was buying and selling millions of dollars' worth of shares, transferring currencies to all the world's major financial markets, producing financial reports, entering all the data into the computer system and I even got to visit the bank's stock of gold sovereigns and diamonds in the vaults. On top of this they would send me out to buy the tea and coffee and do the filing because, after all, I was the office junior!

But this budding idealism and success at work didn't help me at home back in Guernsey. I had agreed with the bank that they would sponsor me through university and I would come back and work for them after I finished. I was seeing a longer term future on Guernsey. Then just towards the end it all blew up again...

One evening I was at home and David had left a copy of his latest company accounts lying on the table in the lounge and not understanding very well anything about accountancy I wanted to see how this report related to the stuff I did at work. I picked up the report and started to look at the numbers. In this moment Lilly walked in and went ballistic at me.

"I knew it! You're only interested in David's money! Your mum sent you here to see how much you can get!" she screamed.

It was too much for me to take. I couldn't be polite any more.

"I don't want any of your stupid<sup>4</sup> money!" I screamed back.

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<sup>4</sup> I may have used a swear word here...

And it was true, with a degree from Cambridge University and a career in banking ahead of me, I was fairly sure that my earning power was much greater than David's and I wouldn't need his money. Plus the independence I learned from my mum meant that taking someone else's money was the last thing on my mind.

Fortunately I only had a few more days left before going to Cambridge for the second time and all my stuff was packed. I put my remaining clothes in a suitcase and walked out for the last time. I stayed for two more days at a work colleague's place and then left the island for good.

A week later I was at university and about to embark on the biggest adventure of my life because it's here that I met the Humanist Movement and the works of Silo and so the nascent idealism that had recently started to form within me could find an outlet.

This adventure has taken me around the world. It's taken me to the highest positions of responsibility in our movement, I've attended events all around the world and I've visited presidents, celebrities and diplomats in the United Nations all in the cause of peace and nonviolence. It has led me to live in different countries, to have close friends in dozens of cities around the world in all continents and it's also an adventure which has transformed who I am and made me who I am today, allowing me to live a life where contradiction is reduced to a minimum, where my suffering is diminished and where I can honestly say that my life is a happy one.

## Florence

My university career started well. There was a great difference from one year previously, not only because I had, in fact, resolved some things that needed resolving concerning my new family but also because being one year older and having a little more experience in the world I felt distinctly mature compared to those who had gone straight to college.

Furthermore, I didn't find the lectures as terrifying this time, despite the fact that in the year since I'd last picked up a maths or science book I'd managed to forget a lot of things. My lack of fear was due mainly to establishing a way of working that makes the education system a bit of a joke: if it doesn't make sense, don't worry, just learn large chunks of text by heart for repetition in exams. This had worked very well in the essays I'd had to write in my exams to get into university and I just applied the same technique here. Understanding took a secondary role to the ability to remember. You don't understand the concept behind bonding- and anti-bonding-orbitals in organic chemistry? Relax, just know that they exist and learn the formula.

It's a fact that Cambridge University is wasted on its students! The town is stuffed with magnificent architecture, a river bank which enjoys World Heritage status,

museums overflowing with interesting exhibitions, colleges and chapels which boast priceless works of art, and a cultural life which is the envy of the world, yet students spend their time mostly asleep in their rooms, attending the few lectures they feel like attending, and the rest of the time they can be found in the college bar.

I was no different. I soon made friends in college, decided that where ever possible I would take the easier modules of my chosen subjects, and generally settled into a comfortable life. I dedicated hours to the noble pursuits of pinball and table-football. The publicly-funded education system paid for my tuition fees and because I came from a poor background I also got money from the government to pay for my accommodation, books and food. On this money I could also afford to get drunk at least three times a week, four times if I ate less. In Cambridge, I lived in college on the main campus in the centre of town. All the first year and third year students did so, whereas second years lived in a more remote apartment block a kilometre or so away or, if there was no room, they found other accommodation in the town.

Within two days I'd made friends with a wide diversity of people from across the UK and also from other countries. Within hours I was questioning all the remaining xenophobic, countryside values that I hadn't yet lost. I also knew intuitively that I could never go back to my previous life in Oakham (population 6000).

I was a bit of a fish-out-of-water at Cambridge though. My college was full of young people from wealthy backgrounds and stable families, academically brilliant, cultured and seemingly confident. Some of them had parents and grand-parents who'd been to the same college. They were the complete opposite of me, and I really did feel that they'd accepted me as a student here out of pity. Whereas I'd been the best academic performer in my year in my previous school, here I was distinctly

average. I'd never been on a foreign holiday, apart from a school trip to France when I was twelve. I was rubbish at all forms of sport. I felt that I had nothing to offer Cambridge. It was quite sobering.

Everyone was aware that second year accommodation was based around groups of four people sharing apartments in the off-site block so everyone organised themselves almost sub-consciously into groups very quickly. I made great friends with three people living in my building: Stuart from the North of England, Jonathan from the West and Dan from London. All from private schools.

After the revelation of Lilly's left-wing attitudes, Dan was another revelation for me. He came from a very wealthy background, he'd attended one of the most famous private schools in London and to me he was very cosmopolitan. He was also a bit gothic and into music I didn't care for too much. He'd even tried drugs! But I was attracted by his laid-back manner, his confidence and his life experiences. He made me feel very provincial and unworldly but he was very kind and easy to get on with. He also had opinions that impressed me and on his wall he hung a small framed poster.

The poster had a symbol of a Mobius strip with the letters H and P and underneath it was written five points:

- Equality of all Human Beings
- Freedom of Choice
- Non-discrimination
- Cooperative Economy
- Nonviolence

I was very impressed by these principles and although I'd never really heard of cooperative economics before, on the face of it the idea was interesting to me. We never spoke about what this poster was, though.

One day, another outlandish character appeared in Dan's room. His name was Owen and he'd come from London to visit for the night. I understood that Owen was connected to this poster on Dan's wall and despite being even stranger than Dan in terms of appearance, he was also kind of fascinating, with a very interesting behaviour towards others.

I don't know how it happened but when our first term ended Dan said to me, "Look, I'm going to Florence for a few days to a congress of the Humanist Party. Would you like to come?"

My first reaction was, "What's the Humanist Party?" My second reaction was, "I don't have a passport!" The other problem of course was money. There was no way I could afford a flight and hotel accommodation.

Dan explained to me that he was a member of the Humanist Party, a small political party that had just been born in many countries around the world and that it was having its first ever congress in Florence. I asked him about the points on the poster on his wall and I decided that there was nothing there that I objected to. He also told me about the international aspects of this party and what clinched it for me was that the HP was adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as part of its founding documents. That was enough. If Amnesty International were launching a political party, this would be it.

However, on the negative side, a congress didn't exactly sound like very much fun, but Dan told me that if it was boring and rubbish then we'd just go and look around the city which he told me was very historic and beautiful. I'm afraid I had no idea and I'd never even heard about the Renaissance!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This is also another terrible part of the UK education system: the teaching of history is appalling. During our early years in the UK we learnt about a succession of medieval kings and queens. Then

To get round the money problems, Dan assured me that there was a bus going from London for the cost of £40 and that we wouldn't pay for a hotel, we would instead take our sleeping bags and sleep on the hotel-room floor of one of his friends who was also going.

Finally, not even the passport was a problem, because the UK was part of the EEC which included Italy and all the countries in between and I could go to the Post Office, fill in a form and they could issue me with a permit to travel to other EEC countries and Switzerland. The bus was leaving London on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, so I went to stay in London with Dan for a New Year's Eve party and we would travel together to Florence on the bus.

Dan lived in Highgate, a very wealthy neighbourhood of North London which is most famous for the graveyard where Karl Marx is buried. At that time it was also one of the very few places in London to have a Humanist Party office, (which went by the strangely foreign name of "locale") although a better description would be a workshop. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1989 Dan took me to the locale to meet others going to Florence and to help in some of the preparations. It was a cold evening to go out,

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we spent a year learning that Great Britain almost single-handedly won the First and Second World Wars (with a small contribution from the USA right at the end), then after learning about pre-historic mankind we studied the history of invasions of Great Britain: Romans, Angles, Saxons, Vikings and finally Normans and William the Conqueror, before finishing with the Economy of the Middle Ages. The fact that at this same moment of history the Renaissance was exploding in Italy and transforming the world, the fact that later on revolutions took place in France and Russia, that the founding fathers of the USA were writing a Constitution, the fact that the UK itself had pioneered human right with the Magna Carta, the fact that science, technology and medicine were extending life expectancy, the fact that human beings were constantly breaking the boundaries of knowledge stretching back to the times of ancient Egypt and classical Greece—all of this was totally ignored in our history lessons.

but the locale was only two minutes' walk from Dan's house so we went to see what was going on.

A stranger bunch of people I had never met before! There was Owen who I'd met previously in Cambridge and a number of others who were going to be on the bus with us, plus Jon, the owner of the locale who lived in the flat above with his controversially Argentinean<sup>6</sup> girlfriend, Silvia.

Everyone was making T-shirts using silk-screen technology which I'd never seen before. The T-shirts were white with two words printed in bright orange letters "Humanist International" surrounded by what looked at first sight like flames. T-shirts were hanging up and drying, others were being made by hand, and others were being put in bags ready for transporting to Italy. It was an attempt to raise funds for HP activities in the UK. I took off my black leather jacket and started to help with folding up T-shirts and I put them in the plastic bags in such a way that the design could be seen clearly. I thought it might make selling them easier. Owen said to me, "That's great! Did you use to work in a laundry?"

"What a strange guy!" I thought to myself. "Who are these people?"

Jon, an architect, and Silvia, a doctor, were very respectable people though, even if they did have slightly bizarre friends. They told me a few details about the Humanist International—as much as they thought I needed to know, no doubt—and the programme. My first suspicions that this was not quite what it seemed, though, started to be raised when they told me about the "Homage to Galileo" that would happen on Saturday morning. What the hell was this? I had only ever heard the word "homage" in the context of the Three Wise Men

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6 It was only six years previously that the UK had been at war with Argentina.

paying homage to the baby Jesus. Was there something religious going on here?

Of course, this was all part of the context of the times. The Media was full of stories of cults and sects; from the Moonies and their mass weddings, to the suicide pacts in the Guyana jungle and the Scientologists who tried to convince everyone that they had personality problems that could only be resolved through handing over large sums of cash.

Was this a sect I was getting involved with? Dan didn't seem to have any doubts. He condemned all negative thoughts to the action of the "System" – a fairly paranoid concept, I thought at the time. But anyway, I knew Dan and trusted him and I was confident that the worst thing that could happen would be that we'd have a lousy weekend in Italy and at least I would have been somewhere slightly exotic over the Christmas break. So, at 10am on Thursday morning we were standing outside Euston Station ready to board our bus for the 30-hour<sup>7</sup> journey to Tuscany<sup>8</sup>.

The bus journey itself was uneventful, although everyone was strange compared to conservative-me, we mostly chatted and slept. There were people from all over the UK and many Icelanders. From time to time we got out for a border control or for something to eat. We took a ferry from Dover, we drove through France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland, before arriving at the Italian border. It was in the days before Euros and the Schengen Agreement so sometimes we had to show

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7 The great thing about Europe of course is the relatively short distances. When six months later the humanist Green International met in Rio de Janeiro, some South American friends spent five days in a bus to get there: one way!

8 Today of course you could make the same journey on a budget airline for probably the same cost of £40 despite the action of inflation over 24 years.

our papers and if we were hungry, we had to change money into Francs, Marks or Lira. I had my first culture shock when Italian border police boarded the bus to check our papers with guns hanging in their belts. I'd never seen a hand gun before—British police didn't have them—and it was quite discomfoting.

It was dark when we arrived in Florence and my first impression was of an incredibly chaotic city. Car drivers had no respect for anyone else. They drove like crazy people and they parked cars wherever they wanted. We were fairly exhausted from the trip but there was a place where people were planning to meet in the centre of the city, so we went into the hotel, found the room where we were to sleep, dumped our stuff on the floor and headed out. We were hungry, so before anything else we popped into a fast food place and bought real Italian pizza. Yet another revelation to broaden my gastronomically pitiful life experience! Replete with mozzarella, tomato and salami we started to walk towards the designated point on the map.

Suddenly we saw two noisy youths running in our direction. "Umanisti?" they enquired in a state of ecstasy. And when it was confirmed that we were indeed "Humanists", even if I wasn't yet sure the label applied to me, they put a piece of cheap orange material around our necks by way of a makeshift scarf, gave us a big hug and went running up the road looking for others.

The rest of the evening is a bit of a blur. I remember we were in some square or other. There were a number of cafés around the edge and a church in the middle, so this probably describes any one of a thousand squares in Florence. And here were converging hundreds of people and it was like an enormous orange had exploded because everyone was wearing it. There were friends meeting friends after a long time not seeing each other, there were new friendships being made, people were enquir-

ing about which countries they came from and which council they were in. I had no idea what this last enquiry meant, but Dan informed me that we were in council Beta. "What is this organisation?" I wondered.

The atmosphere was incredible. People were kissing each other's cheeks in greeting (we certainly didn't do this in my country) and hugging all night. In one moment there was some kind of dancing going on with people holding their neighbours hands and running around in circles and in another moment shouts of "paz, fuerza y alegria" started. I had no idea of the significance of the chant, but after the words had been translated (peace, force and joy) and I knew how to pronounce it, I started to join in with everyone else.

The whole experience was kind of exhilarating. Here were hundreds, if not thousands of people from all around the world celebrating the launch of a political party fighting for the ideals that I held so dear. It was a powerful sensation of finding one's true family, of correctly finding one's tribe, of feeling at home, safe.

The next day we went to this strange-sounding "homage" and hundreds of people were outside a church listening to some guy<sup>9</sup> speak in Italian denouncing the deaths and torture of those who were willing to speak the truth in the face of religious oppression. There was also a call to apply a new kind of Hippocratic Oath to all scientists, not just to doctors. This oath would commit scientists to apply their work to human development and to effectively prohibit the science behind death and destruction. So the "homage" was in fact no more than a "tribute" or a "memorial" and I had my first experience of what I considered to be a doubtful translation from Spanish to English.

The homage was also followed rapidly by more pizza

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9 Salvatore Puledda with whom I later became good friends.

and a change of location to arrive at a basketball stadium where the Congress was to take place.

We arrived in good time and found seats from where to watch the proceedings. The atmosphere became more and more electric, euphoria was oozing from the crowd and the feeling was incredible. People from different countries were going around greeting each other, looking for friends, making new friends and swapping souvenirs. I later regretted swapping my T-shirt, one of those made in Highgate which I bought, with a tiny Indian guy whose T-shirt I could barely squeeze into, but it was all part of the atmosphere.

The two hosts started the proceedings, “We’re here today to celebrate the first Humanist International Congress.” And the crowd erupted. “Greetings to all humanists of the world from the city of historical humanism: Florence. To start with we’d like to welcome all our friends who have come from:” and then a long list of countries was read out and all around the stadium various parts of the crowd would explode into cheers as their country was mentioned. The largest cheers were reserved for Spain and, of course, Italy as these two countries had mobilised the most people. It was breath taking, my hair stood on end. I was submerged in an incredible joy that I still feel today when watching the fragments of video on my computer.

This was what I wanted: people around the world joining together in a just cause, fighting for a better world without violence and with great humour and love, not in a violent way as so many historical struggles have been. This was my people, this is where I wanted to be and in that moment I fell totally in love with whatever it was that was being expressed here.

The congress went on with its interesting bits, such as the short speeches by several humanists, and its less interesting bits, such as the speech by the Zambian

ambassador whose presence I couldn’t quite understand because of that country’s one-party state system. But then that Zambian Government soon came to an end after humanists, including Silo himself, were invited to visit Kaunda. The day was incredible. We stayed there until late at night dancing and celebrating, and noticeably without any alcohol—another strange thing for me. I lost Dan. I don’t know where he got to and I didn’t care. I didn’t feel alone. How could anyone feel at home with their family of thousands of people around them?

The next day we headed back to London. By Monday night I was back in the UK and my mum came to collect me from the bus station in the city nearest to where we lived. But I had changed from when she’d last seen me at Christmas. I was now dressed in orange. Mum definitely thought I’d been inducted into a cult and looked at me suspiciously, but I didn’t care. I had huge flags in my hands that I’d taken as souvenirs from Florence and I was flying. What people thought about me didn’t concern me at all.

I was convinced that within six months we’d have formed the Party across the country and would sweep to power at the next election.

This was common sense, it was logical, it was obvious. All it needed was people to take this message into the world like I was committed to do. The future was assured, Humanising the Earth would be easy...



## Humanise the Earth!

When I first joined the Movement there were few books written by Silo that were still in circulation at that time. In general Silo was a prolific writer, he started in the late fifties with his first book “Imbeciles” and moved onto more esoteric matters in the sixties. Gurdjieff was a particularly strong reference and even in the notes of one of the last conversations he had with friends before he died he was still talking about elements in “Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson”.

The seventies in general were dedicated to the establishment of a body of material that I hope one day will be recognised as Siloist Psychology. The eighties were more connected to the formation of organisations that could project Siloism into the world and the books produced accompanied this process. It was in the nineties when he wrote most of the works that formed his official opus gathered into two volumes: Collected Works 1 and 2.

There were other books circulating in 1990 though that were produced by Silo, essentially, but that had been attributed to other authors, such as the book of Self-Liberation compiled by Luis Ammann on the basis of research which Silo coordinated in Corfu in 1975.

But back then, most commonly what circulated were

Silo’s speeches<sup>10</sup> and of course inspiring (for me) documents from the foundation of the Humanist Party<sup>11</sup>.

The one book of Silo’s, and the one most widely used by Siloists at the time, which I considered to be essentially our Bible, was called Humanise the Earth. My first copy was a homemade edition printed on an old dot matrix printer from a text document typed on an old Atari computer. Holes had been punched down the left hand margin and it was wire bound. For a cover it had an image of Silo in black and red standing by the hermitage he lived in for six months near Aconcagua and an open fire as I recall. On top of that to finish it off was a piece of clear, strong plastic. Sadly and foolishly I lent this precious copy to someone who then never returned it because I never saw her again.

If you are someone unfamiliar with Siloism and have never read Humanise the Earth then possibly before reading any of my other recommendations, with the exception of The Healing of Suffering, you should read it. It is a work in three parts, each of which is totally different in its content and style and very much reflects the different moments in which Silo wrote them.

The first part: The Inner Look, is very much a journey to discover the meaning in life through meditation. In this book Silo sets the tone for everything else that is to come later. Written in 1972 it reflects a spiritual journey also. It shows how the meaning of life can be discovered through meditation, it provides principles (not commandments) by which one can live in order to experience

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<sup>10</sup> All of my favourites can be found in the compilation called ‘Silo Speaks’ which has been published in English and is available at [www.silo.net](http://www.silo.net)

<sup>11</sup> I highly recommend all the founding documents adopted at the first Humanist International congress in Florence, which can be found at <http://www.internationalhumanistparty.org/en/views/official>

increasing unity (a feeling of oneness which leads to happiness) and to leave behind the effects of contradiction (which leads to suffering and violence). Finally it describes a simple process of connecting with an internal energy called The Force.

Experience of this Force, Silo contends, is the basis of all spirituality and religious practices. It has not been properly understood and has even been abused by those in positions of power to manipulate the masses and the credulous. By seeking for ourselves, but with others, the simplicity of the experience, without intermediary priests and gurus, and by understanding deeply its connection to the theme of transcendence, we will be able to discover that there is meaning in life.

This part of the book resonated very little with me at first and it was only twelve years later during a retreat specifically designed to go deeper into the subject of the Force that The Inner Look would have any impact on me. I was highly suspicious of anything spiritual, staunchly anti-religious and completely atheist and I actually considered, and still maintain, that organised religion is a source of tremendous evil in the world and any civilised society should make it illegal. But then again a truly civilised society wouldn't engage in such superstitious and mythological nonsense so there would be no need for such legislation.

The third and by far the shortest part of the book: The Human Landscape, was written in 1988 and it is clear that Silo's thinking is by that time directed to political ideas and a revolution in the organisation of human society. It deals with issues such as the Law, the State, Education and History. It's interesting, but I felt that his political manifesto was much better expressed in the founding documents of the Humanist Party: the Declaration of Principles and the Thesis (which as it only extends over

three pages is not such a daunting document as it sounds and is magisterial).

This leaves us with the second part of the book written in 1981: The Internal Landscape and I don't think Siloists give it the recognition it deserves.

It is an outstanding piece of writing which, after the difficulties of content and style of parts one and three is a wonderful way of seeing the world and it transformed my view of life.

The beauty of the Humanist Party was precisely that it was more than a party. Its symbol: the Mobius strip, symbolically represents the idea of simultaneous personal and social transformation. What is the point of voting for the good guys if you go home and punch your partner and scream at the kids? What good does it do to go to church and pray and then go to work and treat your colleagues like slaves? The world is too full of hypocrites who say one thing and then do something else.

Silo, in this part of the book starts off with the simplest of reflections:

*Here is my question: As life goes by, is it happiness or suffering that grows within you? Do not ask that I define these words, answer instead according to what you feel. Though you may be wise and powerful, if happiness and liberty do not grow in you and in those around you, I will reject your example.*

*Accept instead, my proposal: follow the model of that which is being born, not that which takes the path towards death. Leap over your suffering, and it will not be the abyss but life that grows within you. There is no passion, idea or human deed that is not linked to the abyss. Therefore, let us turn to the only thing that deserves our attention: the abyss and that which overcomes it.*

He goes on to deal with subjects such as the nature of reality and the different surroundings we move in. These surroundings Silo refers to as "Landscapes" and he refers

to the internal landscape (everything inside me), the external landscape (the surroundings I move around in personally) and the human landscape (the set of landscapes that is what we could call human society). He also explains how the landscape is a structure that includes the observer: a different observer sees a different landscape.

I had never read anything so insightful and so wise.

*All worlds you aspire to, all justice you demand, all love you search for, all human beings you would follow or destroy are also within you. Everything that changes within you will change your direction in the landscape you inhabit. Thus if you have need of something new, you must surpass the old that dominates within you.*

*And how will you do this? Begin by realising that even if you change your location you carry your internal landscape with you.*

So change doesn't come from outside, it comes from within.

On the theme of beliefs he points out with total genius:

*There, in the heart of your beliefs, lies the key to what you do. So powerful is your fascination with what you believe that you affirm its reality, even though it exists only in your mind.*

I have lost count of the number of times I've been able to decipher what someone truly believes by observing what they do rather than listening to what they say, especially in relationships.

The book is packed with nuggets of truth such as these on themes of: valid action (meaningful actions), faith, to give and receive, and many more.

What struck me most strongly though was the chapter that returns to the themes expressed in *The Healing of*

Suffering. In "Pain, Suffering and Meaning in Life" he poetically writes:

*If perhaps you imagine yourself to be a fleeting meteorite that has lost its brilliance upon falling to Earth, you will accept that pain and suffering are simply the nature of things. But if you believe you have been thrown into this world to fulfil the mission of humanising it, you will be thankful to those who have come before you, who have built with great labour the steps that allow you to continue the ascent.*

*Namer of a thousand names, maker of meanings, transformer of the world, your parents and the parents of your parents continue in you. You are not a fallen star but a brilliant arrow flying towards the heavens. You are the meaning of the world, and when you clarify your meaning you illuminate the Earth. When you lose your meaning, the Earth becomes darkened and the abyss opens.*

*I will tell you the meaning of your life here: it is to Humanise the Earth. And what does it mean to Humanise the Earth? It is to surpass pain and suffering; it is to learn without limits; it is to love the reality you build.*

*I cannot ask you to go further, but neither should it offend if I declare, "Love the reality you build and not even death will halt your flight!"*

*You will not fulfil your mission if you do not apply your energies to vanquishing pain and suffering in those around you. And if through your action they in turn take up the task of humanising the world, you will have opened their destiny towards a new life.*

Suddenly everything became clear to me. The only thing that had value in life was overcoming pain and suffering in myself and those around me. I took it as my purpose in life and it has been working ever since.

## First steps

Maybe everyone has this experience when they first get involved with this movement, but for me the first steps felt truly magical. It's hard to describe because it was a mood, an atmosphere within me that was working very strongly. Now as I look back, I wonder if it was somehow connected to the magical experience of being in Cambridge (which is a bit like Hogwarts), or of being so young, something intangible like the music of the times or just of being alive. But I think it was something stronger than that because the magic was most intense when I was with other humanists.

Once back at University, Dan and I made a plan to start telling people about our experiences in Florence and the impact they had had on us and of course we proposed to ourselves to immediately form the first base council. Dan was still very much my reference because I knew very little. I had been told about the organisation structure of the movement behind the party though and the democratic way of building self-replicating groups of ten people. I was a bit disappointed that no one invited me to join, if I'm honest.

But something inexplicable started to happen, although we put up posters and spoke to our friends, hardly anyone showed the slightest bit of interest in our

proposal to form the Humanist Party. Of our four, Stuart showed some interest, but Jonathan wanted nothing to do with it. He thought we were mad. The same blank expression of, "What on Earth are you talking about?" appeared every time I raised the subject with anyone.

In these days there were monthly meetings of the Humanist Party National Council in London. Dan didn't want to go so I asked him if he would mind if I went and he readily agreed. My first meeting in the Highgate locale was in February so I went and met again some of those who had been on our bus to Florence. There were representatives from Manchester, Glasgow and different parts of London. The agenda included how to grow the Party at the base and the European Elections that were coming in June of that year.

I'd never been in such organisation meetings before and I felt very naïve and inexperienced. There was a language problem also because humanists expressed themselves differently. It was clear that there was a set of codes, a common language that was not an everyday language. Jon asked in one moment, "What's your image of building the Humanist Party in Cambridge?"

I didn't know what he meant. What was an image? I knew what it meant in terms of a physical picture or a photograph, but not in terms of an image in my head. It became clear that there was a whole psychology behind this party and the slogan that I'd seen, "The Humanist Party: something more than a Party", was quite true.

The meetings weren't so great, but I took the opportunity to stay over with Jon and Silvia and it was the moments after the meeting that fascinated me most. While Jon and Owen would spend hours writing the meeting minutes and typing them into the Atari computer which all humanists were using at the time, I would sit and chat to Silvia who I found captivating. She had an incredible story of being imprisoned because of

trade union activity in Argentina and fleeing the dictatorship and she'd known of the Movement since the early 1970s. She would spend hours talking about its history and extraordinary foundations.

She told me stories of how the Movement spread around the world, anecdotes such as the 16-year-old Pía Figueroa whose father had her abducted by the Chilean Police while she was participating in a retreat with other Siloists, how her father persecuted the Movement and how years later, realising his fears were groundless and that the Movement was perfectly within its rights to push for social change, he helped in the legalisation of the HP in Chile during the times of the military dictatorship.

I would sit by the gas fire wide-eyed listening to all the stories that Silvia could remember and introducing me to the different aspects of Siloist philosophy and the different characters in the Movement.

Jon was also another great source of inspiration for me. When he'd finished making notes with Owen he would spend hours explaining to me how invidious the system we live in actually is. He opened my eyes to how narrow our view of politics was and how the myth of the value of money was poisoning everything around us including our personal relationships. Jon's animation and indignation finally killed off the remaining parts of my conservatism.

As time went by though and as my environment was deaf to the common sense proposals of the Humanist Party I had a growing sensation that I was abnormal. How could it be that what for me was so clear and so obvious was impossible for others to grasp? What was wrong with me?

I also learnt the humanist response when dealing with other people who didn't agree with our proposals: don't try to convince anyone. I found this strange at first but Jon explained that it's not interesting to convince anyone of anything. If someone has a firmly held belief which

cannot be changed in a civilised conversation it's pointless to get into an argument over it. Apart from the fact that the person trying to convince is getting tense, the other party is also. Once communication turns unpleasant the internal register is of violence. (Here was another term, register, that I'd never heard before in this context.)

The appropriate attitude in front of someone with firmly held beliefs is to leave them to those beliefs. Sometimes someone who holds strong beliefs needs a big shock to their lives in order to question them and see things in a different way. Jon explained, "It's not their moment." It totally transformed the way I communicated about humanist matters.

It also happened that I didn't find myself particularly qualified to answer people's questions or sometimes I didn't have the answers. "But human beings are violent by nature," some would say and I didn't know what to say at first.

"What would you have done about Hitler?" others would ask when I proposed nonviolence. Again, I had no answer the first time, but I learnt to relax in these situations and reply that I wasn't trying to convince anyone of anything, that these were my beliefs, that maybe they were even wrong, but that to me they were coherent.

As the summer approached, I disconnected from London because of the approaching university exams and Florence was becoming a distant memory until the summer holiday arrived and I was working in a hotel in Cambridge.

I don't know how they found me, because I wasn't on the college campus anymore but one day I got a phone call from Owen. "Tony, what are you doing on Saturday? We'd like to meet you to talk about the Humanist Movement." Without a second thought I took the train to London to meet in Hammersmith, West London at a McDonald's restaurant, of all places!

Jon's team were on the street, stopping people and trying to talk to them about humanism. I was fairly horrified by this because I knew that if anyone had tried to stop me on the street I would have immediately been suspicious and would have walked straight past.

As I arrived someone had been stopped and was interested by what was being proposed so he was taken inside for a cup of tea and an introductory meeting given by Jon. I was invited to listen in to hear what was being said. I didn't need an introductory meeting, I already knew I wanted to join, but Silvia thought it important to hear it properly from Jon.

Jon started to give explanations about the background, the philosophy, the actions organised by the movement in the world and the organisation structure. In one moment the new street contact (a fairly gothic kind of guy as I remember) exclaimed, "I've heard of you guys before! You're part of that sect!" He stood up and almost ran outside into the street such was his haste to get away.

Jon and Silvia were mortified by this and what they were imagining was happening in my head, but I didn't care. Silvia had already explained how the Movement was persecuted by the most conservative sectors of the Catholic Church in Latin America and how this persecution had followed us around the world and became vocal every time we started doing something interesting in the social field such as forming a political party in 40 countries at the same time. And in any case, I'd been to Florence, if this was a sect then it was my sect and I wanted to be in it.

At the end of the contact operation, Jon told me about the recent trip to Rio de Janeiro where virtually all of his team had gone for the Congress of the Green International. I was totally jealous. There was no way I could have afforded to go but I hadn't even known about it. It sounded like it had been just as impressive as the Florence

congress and they also explained that Silo had given new orientation. Whereas until June the idea had been to dedicate forces towards the growth of the Humanist Party and the sister Green Party, now the focus would be on building the organisational structure of the Movement. I was invited to join as a Group Delegate<sup>12</sup>!

I didn't think twice. I joined straight away and I was asked to help build the Movement. I said, "Ok, but I don't know how." To which Jon less-than-helpfully replied, "It's ok, we don't know either!"

I was given two documents to study: the Norms and the Theory of Organisation. In reality they are dry explanations of how the Movement was structured and how it operated, but I thought they were fascinating. The Norms especially, which were basically a kind of statute for how one participated and was promoted through the organisational levels, inspired me, as ridiculous as it sounds.

What particularly impressed me was the idea that promotion was dependent on the work that one did in building the movement. If you didn't build a group you weren't promoted and you didn't get to participate in the meetings of people of a higher level. It was a totally democratic way of working. No one was promoted because of money, family connections, sexual favours or many of the other ways that people are promoted in organisations throughout the rest of the world.

And building a team was a voluntary role, no one had to do it. You did it if you wanted to. You did it if you understood that the only way that the world was going to change was by going out there and changing it yourself. More than that you needed a number of people to replicate the work you were doing, and then for those

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<sup>12</sup> The lowest level, the other levels being Team Delegate, General Delegate, Coordinator and General Coordinator.

people to replicate the model and so on, for five levels. A fully developed structure would entail 10,000 people or less depending on the ratio of men and women which was regulated to favour promotion of women who were historically poorly represented in the highest levels, typically as a result of discrimination experienced in the outside world.

And then what happened when you'd promoted ten people to the highest level of the organisation structure? You stopped!! You had done enough by that time, others would carry on the work. There was nothing more you could learn by building a sixth level. This for me was a stroke of genius. An organisation that allowed people to develop a process and go higher and higher to be left with... Nothing!! Brilliant.

Although Silo was the figurehead and the one orientating the highest level of the council at that time, it was designed so that there would be no one individual running the organisation. And surely it would only be a short time before Silo's role of orientator would be made redundant by the very self-destructing structure that we were creating.

Everything that Silo's doctrine stood for about the equality of all human beings was neatly embodied in this organisational form. To me it was obvious what I had to do. If I really wanted a world without violence, with equality, with no poverty and the possibility for all human beings to develop in parity then I would have to take in my own hands the task of building a group, or rather a council, of my own.

And then the perfect tool was created for doing so, the questionnaire for detecting the new sensibility we were looking for in people and for sure with this we'd grow massively.

## An Encounter of the New Sensibility

Despite my difficulties to build the Party due to the impenetrability of my immediate environment and the university cycles of exams and holidays, this wasn't the case around the world and many interesting things were happening. After Florence, a delegation of humanists had travelled to several Warsaw Pact countries to meet Communist Party officials because they were intrigued by the rapid appearance of our Party around the world and by our many shared points of view and they wondered if the Humanist Party could be a useful tool for democratisation of their countries.

We had a lot of disagreements with the way Communism had been imposed by violence and its terrible abuses of Human Rights over decades but the fact that they reached out to us was interesting. These were the days of the collapse of the Soviet Empire. East Germans started to stream out from behind the Iron Curtain in August 1989, crossing the Hungarian border into Austria in their funny Trabant cars. And on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November the Berlin Wall effectively came crashing down and Germany headed towards unification. I watched the scenes on my little portable TV at home and couldn't believe what I was seeing. Essentially a non-violent revolution had brought an end to a massively violent regime.

In Africa, Silo would later go to see Kenneth Kaunda, the President of Zambia, who had declared himself a humanist while in the contradictory position of leading a one-party state. Silo and those who accompanied him made proposals for multi-party elections which eventually took place in 1991. Kaunda lost, but at least he lost in coherence with his humanist ideals.

But before that would happen, boundless joy was experienced by Humanists as on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1989, Laura Rodriguez became the first ever elected Humanist Party member of a national parliament as a member of the victorious *Concertación* alliance of political parties that fought the Chilean election against Pinochet's right wing allies. Latin America was shaking off its military dictatorships: a humanist future was on the horizon.

What we needed now was a tool that we could use to rapidly find all those who shared our way of seeing the world, those who shared our sensibility with regards to world events and soon enough we had one. It was a questionnaire to revolutionise the way we contacted people and I can't tell you how happy I was when the idea was proposed.

I was actually quite glad I hadn't discovered the Humanist Movement earlier than I did because a regular method of contacting was to go knocking on people's doors in a style that sounded to me like Jehovah's Witnesses. I thought it was counter-productive to go door-to-door unless it was an election campaign and was so glad that I never had to do it. I was only marginally less horrified by the idea of stopping people on the street and asking them if they were interested in nonviolence (as Silvia did) or asking people if they really hated the Romans (as Jon and Owen had tried one quiet day when they were finding it very difficult to stop people).

This was my introduction to the world of "resistances". I learnt that a resistance stopped you doing something

that you wanted to do really, or something that was perfectly reasonable, but you were too afraid to do. What was the big problem in my head with stopping someone on the street and starting a perfectly sensible conversation about the violent state of the world and the need to do something about it? I'm afraid my English, middle-class, conservative background refused this possibility. It wasn't "the-done-thing" to stop people on the street unless you were lost or needed a light for your cigarette.

But people doing questionnaires on the street were quite common, you saw them all the time, and so the theory was that the questionnaires should reduce our resistances to go and talk to people, some of whom, in theory, would be delighted that we had stopped them.

The questionnaire was a set of three filters designed to detect those with our sensibility. Well, in reality there was a fourth and a fifth filter.

The first filter was: do I really want to stop this person I see approaching? The second one was the same filter in reverse: will that person stop? Then came the third filter: two questions.

- Do you believe the world needs to change?
- Do you believe you need to change?

A "yes" to both of those questions got you onto the fourth filter. But it was quite funny sometimes to see the reactions of those who failed the filter. The questionnaire started with "My name is Tony, I'm not trying to sell you anything. Do you have time for a quick survey?" If the candidate failed the first two questions we finished with a polite, "Thank you for your time. Have a nice day." And the rejected one would look slightly bemused and go on their way. "Was that it?" you could hear them thinking almost.

On the other hand, the successful candidate would be



invited to consider six more questions about values and other such matters and again there would be a possibility that the result would be, "Thank you. Have a nice day." The other possibility was that the person passed through the filters and clearly shared our sensibility and so was invited to an introductory meeting about the Humanist Movement. In itself it was another filter because if they were too busy we didn't ask them to leave their phone number. That was it. We took no prisoners!

Once the survey was circulating for testing and had been translated into all the languages used by humanists on the street, it was announced that the next international meeting would take place in Paris in July 1990 and everyone was invited to go there en-masse to start missions to build new councils.

It was called the "Encounter of the New Sensibility". Thousands of us would take to the streets of Paris and we would humanise the city. Armed with the French I'd learned at school, I joined in as we descended on the City of Light on a sultry summer weekend.

While those with the biggest councils were meeting to evaluate the previous six months and discuss future strategy and how, as a movement, we saw the state of the world, the rest of us were swarming on the streets. We were on every street corner. We worked in teams of three and on some corners there were many triads almost 'competing for customers'. We shared our street corner with Swedes: tall, blond, Viking gods and goddesses who, not surprisingly, were much more successful at stopping Parisians than I was!

It's estimated that we did one million questionnaires that weekend. Amusing anecdotes circulated such as the Frenchman who was so intrigued by what was happening on his street corner that he had to do the survey 25 times before he passed the filters. French newspapers even questioned what was going on. Hundreds of new

members joined our ranks and Humanists from around the world stayed after that weekend to continue developing their new groups.

Once we all got back to our own cities we were ecstatic and couldn't wait to implement what we'd learnt abroad. We were recommended to stick to the filters of the survey only. In other words, we weren't to discriminate against anyone. If they discriminated against us, that was their problem, but we had the written filters and no more.

This led to a highly amusing game developed between Rupert, a friend of mine in Jon's council, and myself. Knowing exactly the kind of person the other had unfounded prejudices against, the game entailed selecting the candidate that the other person had to stop. The game was called Mr. Resistance and we played it for the rest of the summer.

And of course we each chose the ones we thought the other would have the biggest resistances to stop: the skinhead, the old-age pensioner, the body-builder, the business man, the woman with two small children at her feet and bags of shopping, the beauty queen, the football fan, anyone who looked slightly crazy. It was such an effective game that by the end of the summer I could stop absolutely anyone. I had eliminated all my resistances to stopping people on the street, for ever.

Moreover the survey was paying dividends. Dui, an Icelander, had come to build a council in London in a neighbourhood where we usually did our surveys and he was meeting lots of people. Some French humanists went to Hungary after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and a large council developed overnight. Other missions were sent to New York, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Sao Paulo, Valparaiso in Chile, Berlin, Palermo in Italy and many, many more. The insertion of the Humanist Party into the Chilean government also led to other possible missions because apart from our member of parliament,

and a number of positions within the executive in Chile we could also count on the Chilean Ambassador to New Zealand and cultural attachés in Warsaw and Moscow positioned precisely in places where it would be interesting to build our organisational structure and influence in the world.

We were growing rapidly everywhere. And so after the summer break we planned a mission to Cambridge to help me build my council.

## “Moonie scare in Freshers Fair”

When I look back now at the newspaper headline screaming out from the back page of “Varsity” the University newspaper, I blame myself. It was me who first used the word “Moonie” in the Varsity offices when we went to condemn the organisers of the Freshers<sup>13</sup> Fair: the event where everyone went to sign up for sports clubs, academic and cultural societies and the myriad of other social activities that keen, new students wanted to take part in at the beginning of the academic year in October.

Back at the end of the previous term I’d registered “The Movement” as a society so that we could have a stand and contact people. Associations were classified into groups such as sport, politics, cultural, religious, international, etc., and as there was no category of “social and personal revolution” I put us in with the “international” associations which turned out to be language societies more than organisations which had any international application. Anyway it didn’t matter too much. We had our stand and we prepared for thousands of students to arrive.

We organised a team of four or five from London to come and help make contacts with the surveys. Jon and others stood and stopped the people and I sat behind

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<sup>13</sup> Freshers: short for Freshmen—first year students

the table and gave the intro meetings. It was very tiring because many people passed the filters and I spent the whole of the first day talking. Not everyone was interested once they'd heard what I had to say but a number were and said they would come to the first weekly meeting of term in my new room in St. Catharine's College.

This was the beginning of my third and final year and I had the best room in college: room A1. It looked onto the college's central court and was one of the very few rooms available to students that had a phone line. This was before mobile phones and internet.

Being very pleased with ourselves as a result of day one of the fair, we went back for the second and final day. Things went the same way during the morning session. We took a break for lunch and when we came back again we started the final contact session. Suddenly one of the organisers of the Fair approached us.

"I'm sorry, but we're going to have to ask you to leave."

"Excuse me? What's going on?" I enquired.

"You have to leave. Please take your things and go."

"Why?"

Then another of the organisers, who subsequently turned out to be from the student Green Party, said, "We have information that the Movement is a front for the Humanist Party, which is a dangerous sect. Please leave immediately."

I was mortified. This was happening in front of a growing crowd of people. Jon was furious and getting angry. This was an unfounded accusation and they gave us no right of appeal against the decision to kick us out. An unelected court had met and judged our fate and that was it. The Green Party was spreading negative propaganda about us all over Europe and North America at the time and it had even reached Cambridge apparently. I

just wanted to get out of the hall immediately. We packed up and left in a state of outrage and humiliation.

Actions done in the heat of the moment seldom turn out the way you hope. We decided that this injustice needed to be denounced publicly and immediately and so we found out where the office of the university newspaper was and we marched there ready to tell our story to The Media who would surely see the injustice of the situation and publish an interview that would lead to a full and public apology by the organisers of the fair.

We arrived and were shown in to an office to meet one of the student journalists and we explained what had just unfolded. Then I said the words that probably gave him the easiest headline he ever wrote. "They treated us like we were the Moonies, or something!" I foolishly exclaimed.

This was a Wednesday and Varsity was published on the Friday. I was alone by this stage because the contact operation had finished and everyone had returned to London. When the article came out I was horrified. I didn't know what to do. I called Jon and read it to him then I sent a copy via fax to Highgate. I couldn't believe what was happening. This was injustice on top of injustice.

But it got worse, this little shit from the Green Party came to my college<sup>14</sup> and informed the Dean that there was a dangerous sect operating on the grounds and that he would be well advised to have me expelled. The next thing I knew I was summoned to a meeting. Fortunately the Dean could see the ridiculous nature of the accusation and in the end he was only concerned that I respected the rules of having no more than ten people in my room at

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<sup>14</sup> Cambridge University is made up of over 30 or so colleges, each one autonomous.

any one time<sup>15</sup>. I assured him that the chances of more than ten people coming to my meeting were now very slim.

Jon insisted that we needed to reply to the article associating us with the Moonies and so we wrote a letter which the paper promised to publish. He wrote it in my name and I took it to the office in good time for publication.

My first weekly meeting was the next Wednesday and Owen came up from London for moral support. Three people came as I remembered and we had a nice interchange. One young guy in particular showed a lot of interest and asked to borrow my copy of the Norms and Theory of Organisation. I was delighted that someone else could show such an interest in these themes in particular.

Friday came around and Varsity was published and I rushed to find a copy and look for the letter that we'd written. I found it, of course it was much reduced in length from our original, but at least it was there. I continued turning the pages of the newspaper and there on page three was an article about The Movement: the sect operating from within the heart of the University.

I was stunned. The guy in the meeting had taken the documents I had given him and fabricated a terrible story about the Movement, how it was essentially a pyramid scheme, how Silo made millions of dollars every year out of his followers, how our celebrations of the change of seasons and the alchemical symbols we used to draw our organisation chart were evidence of dangerous occult

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15 There was a rule that any gathering of more than ten people was considered a "party" and therefore needed permission in advance from the college authorities.

activity, how our Guided Experiences<sup>16</sup> were unsafe psychological practices, and other such baseless nonsense.

This was now getting too much for me to take. Fortunately my friends in college didn't pay too much attention but I was starting to get paranoid that people were looking at me and avoiding "the guy from the sect". I faxed this new article down to London. I couldn't believe what was happening to me.

Jon was apoplectic with rage by this stage. He demanded that we get an apology from Varsity and the opportunity to publish an equally long article giving our response. Of course they refused and Jon knew they would so he wrote a huge answer to each of the points raised in the second article and had it printed at his own cost. It was an A3 sheet of paper printed double-sided and he must have published about a thousand copies.

News of our difficulties in Cambridge was starting to spread, even Silo had been notified. Friends from Manchester came down and together with the team from London we spent the day handing out the thousand copies of our letter: "The Movement Answers Back".

We went to several dining rooms in different colleges and went round and gave our reply to as many people as possible. In one moment, in the street outside my college I saw the author of the second horrendous article cycling towards me. I stopped him and asked him why he'd done it. He had no answer but he was a bit annoyed himself because the newspaper had published his article anonymously. Presumably they thought I was going to track him down and sacrifice him to the satanic gods that we worshipped.

It didn't stop there. Cambridge University Students Union, a kind of student government, took it on them-

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16 Exercises used by humanists in order to resolve tensions and improve behaviour associated with negative images recorded in memory in the past and which continue to act on us today.

selves to investigate what was going on. They kindly called me to ask if I could supply them with relevant materials for their investigation, which I willingly did. I sent them a copy of the "Study of the Movement: 1969-1990" which was a document of the time with a lot of background information about the Movement, its structure and the organisations it had launched into the world.

Their conclusion was that the Movement was probably harmless but that I was a bit naïve for being involved in what was clearly a worthless organisation.

I withdrew from Movement activity. There was always the excuse that university demanded a lot of my time, which was true because it was my third and final year, but I just wanted to go back to an anonymous life without people looking at me strangely. It was all totally surreal and it totally knocked my confidence.

This experience in itself was also trivial compared to the treatment that colleagues were receiving in other countries. Ever since Silo first went to the mountains in 1969 there have been opponents, or the Contra as we call them adopting the Spanish word. At first it was the sections of the Catholic Church hierarchy and the military dictatorship working together to have Silo's message suppressed. It didn't work though and a massive dispersion from South America in the 1970s took the Movement around the world.

The contra followed everywhere we went. It's true that we were unconventional and anti-system: we still are, but the violence and hatred we have received has been disproportionate.

In Argentina two Siloists were murdered in broad daylight on the streets of La Plata. An attempt was even made to assassinate Silo himself. At the beginning, the attacks in the media in Argentina and Chile were incessant. Some of our people were kept in concentration camps during the military dictatorship. Others lost their

jobs and were alienated from their friends and families. By the time the Contra reached Europe and North America it was coming from Green political parties who were furious that we also started to campaign on green issues, feeling that it was somehow their exclusive domain. They dug up all the old propaganda from South America and updated it with their own perverted twist on our dangerous behaviour.

Some of the worst treatment was reserved for French humanists though. One of our locales was fire-bombed. Communists and anarchists persecuted us, presumably out of fear of competition. The French and Belgian parliaments issued official lists of sects operating in their country and included Humanist organisations. Many people lost their jobs as a result and whereas at the time of the Encounter of the New Sensibility there had been hundreds of members, just a few years later the structure had been decimated.

So whereas the treatment I received felt terrible and I suffered a great deal, it really was nothing in comparison. It was a few young idiots acting like big bosses trying their skills of bullying people who don't have the same access to resources for replying.

Every time we've been attacked by the contra they have never given us the opportunity to satisfactorily respond to any of their accusations. Only once have we ever been given the opportunity to appear in a legal setting and explain our position and receive a fair hearing. Instead unfounded accusations printed and propagated in one place have been recycled and reused in other places which are then used as the "evidence" in accusations made in a third place. Eventually you end up with such a huge stack of claims that anyone would believe that there must be some foundation to it all. Sometime later I was given a folder containing the published accusations of the Contra in the English language. There are newspa-

per articles from the USA, Canada and the UK. All of it groundless and all of it ultimately traceable to the action of the Catholic Church in Argentina and Chile back in the early seventies, dug up, updated and repackaged by the Green Party in the mid-eighties alarmed at our incursions into Green Politics fearing a struggle for the same political space: The Catholic Church – The church of love and tolerance and The Green Party – the defender of the environment and human rights.

There is one exception to the lack of justice in all of this experience and happily it comes from France. A few years ago a municipal authority in Paris published defamatory material about the Humanist Movement on its website and our French friends decided that this couldn't be left unchallenged. They raised money and hired a lawyer. The lawyer took the case through the courts and at the end of a long and expensive battle the judgement came down in our favour. None of the defamation on the website was justified and could be legally sustained. The Municipality lost the case, they had to pay our costs and pay compensation. It was a great moment and a great vindication for all of us who've ever been unjustly accused of belonging to a sect by the System.

## Santiago

After the minor trauma of the previous term's persecution, I at least had something to look forward to: my first trip to South America. I saved up enough money over the previous summer to buy my ticket but this left me absolutely penniless and so when David offered to buy me my ticket as a gift, I accepted the kindness. I bought a ticket to stay for three weeks because I decided that if I was travelling that far and paying that much for the ticket then I didn't want to come back so quickly.

It was my first trip by plane since the short one we'd taken as a family to Guernsey when I was a boy and it was my first flight to a foreign country, a foreign continent, another hemisphere. I had to organise a passport and the Chilean stamp was the first one I ever got.

Things have changed a bit in Santiago since that first trip in December 1990. The airport was quite small and unsophisticated, not like the pristine edifice that greets you now and whereas you still aren't allowed to bring food into the country, at least the authorities didn't automatically suspect you of smuggling and scan everything you own and harass you with sniffer dogs as happens now on arrival.

I discovered that one of the advantages of visiting friends in a political party in government is that they can come

to the airport to collect you and take you through a passport control channel reserved for diplomats. I was very impressed. It was Pía Figueroa, Undersecretary at the Department of the Environment at the time, who came to collect us.

It was great because here, in Chile, humanists were in positions of responsibility where they could actually do something to make a difference in the lives of people. There were elected mayors and councillors working at a more local level too. It had the feeling of being the start of a phenomenon that would grow indefinitely and really Humanise the Earth.

Despite buying books to teach myself Spanish I hardly spoke more than a dozen words so I was utterly dependent on Chilean friends speaking English. Many of them did because many of them had been on missions to different English speaking countries and Karen Rohn from the USA had lived in Santiago for many years.

With all these English speakers available it was somehow decided that I would stay with Monica and Marcos, a young couple in Pía's council who had a very young daughter, Alicia. Neither of them spoke more than a few words of English and so communication was extremely difficult but somehow with the use of a dictionary we managed to understand each other. The reality is that 23 years later and now able to speak perfectly good Spanish, I still find it nearly impossible to understand Marcos, such is his manner of communication in everyday life! But back then, equipped with a strong intention and a dictionary, we had no problem.

We arrived in Chile between Christmas and New Year. The big meeting for those orientated by Silo was in the first few days of January and then reproduction meetings would take place to cascade the information down through the various levels. The most remarkable news was that once more there would be a change of contact

strategy and Marcos informed me surreptitiously before I heard it officially from Jon, that there would be no more questionnaires. These changes were typical throughout the Movement's history. Silo would design and test new strategies, evaluate them and move on to something new. He saw a bigger process of a 36 year plan that he'd set himself back in the 1960s, for him six months was the blink of an eye. In this opportunity it was decided that instead of going out to complete strangers with our message we would take it instead to our closest family and friends. I think at the time I feared this more than I had feared going to the street for the first time, but it was just another ridiculous resistance that had to be overcome. Really, if our message was so great what possible excuse was there for not communicating it to those closest to us?

The answer was of course that experience told us that the immediate environment was difficult. I'd already tried it when coming back from Florence...

Another event in the calendar was the big gathering that took place on a Saturday afternoon in a sports stadium. It was nothing formal, just an opportunity for all the humanists from Chile and overseas who were in Santiago for the meetings to get together and hang out.

Silo was there too and people were taking the opportunity of meeting him and having their photograph taken. This almost-rock-star treatment must have been very tiring but he never stopped smiling and acceding to all requests for photos and for him to sign their books. I also took the opportunity together with Monica and other friends of having my photo taken.

There were other events scheduled in the calendar to take advantage of the fact that we had a role in government and to present what our people were doing. To this end we visited Pía's office in downtown Santiago and she explained her experience of the previous year's work. In

fact her experience until then had been very impressive. Twice we'd met during that year in London when she came on behalf of Chile to take part in environmental conferences in London and Nairobi. The work that she was doing was being highly appreciated especially by those in developing countries.

In addition we were invited to Valparaiso where the Chilean Parliament building had been recently relocated. There we were given a tour of the facility. In one moment I will never forget we were taken into the debating chamber and introduced to the elected members as a "delegation of representatives from the Humanist International". The chamber got to its feet and started applauding. I had no idea that such formalities would take place and had gone there dressed in casual T-shirt and terrible Bermuda shorts!

Laura Rodriguez took time from her schedule as a busy legislator to talk to us about her experiences. Chile was a very conservative country, and still is actually, so the projects that Laura was introducing, such as a divorce law, were very controversial and in the vanguard of national Human Rights. Sadly, Laura never got the opportunity to see her work come to fruition as she died of cancer before her elected term completed.

Going to Chile was a great opportunity to make new friends. Whereas Florence and Paris had been whirlwind experiences of arriving, attending the activity and leaving again, here there was more time to get to know people from other countries, especially English speaking ones. I got to know Americans, Canadians and Brazilians apart from the many Chileans. I also became friends with Salvatore Puledda, an Italian who was very friendly and enjoyed telling me lots of stories. I was especially impressed by Salva because he was Silo's left-hand man in terms of the organisation structure of the movement, and in those days the hierarchy was such that people in

the heights didn't socialise too much with us minions in the base!

I took away with me many impressions from this new experience of spending time in one of the Movement's heartlands and the one that most affected me was that it was possible to have a way of life that could totally revolve around humanist ideals.

Here in Santiago humanists socialised together, they worked and played together, they had children together and those children went to school together. At the weekends they got together to do social activities and once a week they had their regular meetings of personal development and structural growth. Interaction with the outside world came when trying to humanise it. Here elected representatives were working on our behalf. Although Laura was in a different country I felt that in a way she was also representing me and working for me.

It was a glimpse of a world that very strongly attracted me and which was such a contrast to the experience of the UK. Although I liked living in the UK at the time and I had great friends at college and family members who were dear to me, I never again felt that the UK was the place for me.

We didn't have such environments, or 'ambits' to give it the word we use in our jargon. The System surrounded me in everything I did. Whereas in the UK it was possible to talk to my closest friends about the important existential things that we used to discuss in the Movement, the responses that I received ranged from boredom (in the best of circumstances) to outright hostility (in the worst). This constant experience was draining and later on it led me to leave the UK altogether in search of a better ambit and I eventually settled in Hungary.

Back then in the UK sitting in my bed in college, utterly unable to sleep because of all the new images and experiences in my head, I wrote a long letter to Chile. It was



thoroughly cathartic, I must have been complaining about all the difficulties in my life. On reflection, the trip to Chile sent me into a bit of a crisis really.

I've never thrown away any letter I've ever been sent. In reality I stopped receiving letters in about 1995 after e-mail was invented but to my great surprise as I wrote this chapter I remembered my old letters and in there I found four from Marcos in my collection. It seems we exchanged news for the rest of 1991. I can see from his letters that mine to him must have been terribly heavy and full of complaints for the difficult life in the UK and the difficulties of doing humanist activities in such an impermeable environment.

Once I left University I went back to London and lived in Highgate for a year but with time I gradually started to disconnect. Doubts were creeping into my mind about the underlying doctrine of the Humanist Movement. Silo said that everyone was capable of personal change. I desperately wanted to change who I was and I couldn't and so I started to doubt that this Movement really was the best thing for me.

In order to come out of this negative mood or climate, I would have to make some dramatic changes in my life.

## Out of the closet

I had the first idea that my attractions to boys were not quite usual when I was ten years old. There was a boy in my class at school who had a "girlfriend" who "broke up" with him. In reality, despite our young ages many of us boys had girlfriends. Of course we only saw these young partners in school hours or maybe once a term in a school disco but in any case these were our first attempts at relationships, mimicking the ones our parents were trying to have.

When Gavin and Lisa broke up, the first thing that came into my mind was that I felt sorry for him and would very much like to give him a hug. Of course I didn't and I didn't pay it much thought until I was 12 or 13 when I definitely started to feel attraction to another boy in class. I was uncomfortable by this because by this age I was well aware that boys who liked boys went by the name of "gays" or "queers" and in my town we certainly didn't like those kinds of people. In fact we made jokes about them and we even said stupid things about killing them.

If any boy did anything remotely effeminate, unless the context was completely clear that it was making fun of gays, then it could lead to you being persecuted. In

school I was terrified that someone would suspect what was happening in my head.

From the age of ten, after mum left her second husband, she made friends with a teacher at the local secondary school I attended. He was very nice to us and mum really appreciated his friendship and he was very good to me and always encouraged me to do well at school. It was an innocent time and parents didn't worry at all what their children did when they weren't at home. I would go and visit this friend of mum's, Simon (not his real name), as he was building an extension to his house so I'd go and help. Other times he would be making covers for textbooks and I would help him with that too. In reality I spent quite a lot of time with him helping him with one thing or another.

He also had a good music system so on a Sunday evening I would sometimes go round with my cassette and record the music charts from the radio. On one occasion the circumstances of which I can't remember precisely, there was a classical music concert on TV, the last one of the annual series of concerts called 'The Proms'. It's a bit of a tradition in the UK especially among the rich and cultured. Simon wasn't rich, but he was certainly cultured and one day I hoped I might be both. In this concert they celebrate the end of the season with all the most patriotic British music and the entire audience and the choir sing the words to the famous tunes.

We were both lying on the sofa, I was maybe 11 years old possibly 12, and I suddenly realised that I was being touched inappropriately. I had no idea what was going on, I hadn't even hit puberty yet. I really didn't think anything of it. I knew about sex between men and women, although I really didn't know how it worked, but sex between men was a mystery.

I don't want to make this sound more than it was. He did this to me a few more times while I was still ignorant

enough to let him and nothing more than that ever happened. When I got to the age of 14 or 15 I could understand what he had done and I asked my mum if Simon was gay and she immediately knew why I was asking but I just said that someone at school had told me and I wondered if she'd heard about it.

These were the days when there were no role models for gay youngsters and the few gay men on television frankly appalled me. Either they were stereotypical, limp-wristed queens or they were transvestites. I missed out on the androgynous David Bowie of the seventies, but in the eighties we had the horror of Boy George. The first openly-gay pop-star who looked remotely like a man was Jimmy Somerville from Bronski Beat and then there was Frankie Goes to Hollywood who taught us all to relax when we want to come. What charming lyrics!

More horrifying than all of this though was the emergence of AIDS which started killing gay people in huge numbers at the beginning of the eighties. Homophobic Christians lost no time in calling this "god's punishment".

When I got to the age of 15 I was noticeably homophobic. Any mention of homosexuals on the playground would have me pretending to vomit and exclaiming how disgusting it was. There was one guy in my class, Gary, whose life I made a hell. In honesty, we all did, but I was the leader. I persecuted him because one day another idiot school friend had suggested that Gary was gay, probably for no other reason than there was only a letter R to differentiate the spellings.

I was still plagued, and increasingly so, with inappropriate thoughts towards some of my friends at school, especially Steve who I fell in love with very hard. I tried to have girlfriends too, but I wasn't exactly the most popular boy in school, because I was more academic and academic by definition wasn't popular and I was also rubbish at football and all other sports. But in any case I

tried and I used to get depressed about it and then I'd go to talk about it with Steve, who despite being the most popular boy in school also found it difficult to find a nice girlfriend. So we would talk about girls together. I never had any doubt that he was 100% straight, and I had no chance with him, but still I was quietly obsessed.

In the end, my first kiss with a boy was when I was 18 years old. He was 17, I think and we were at a party. It was one of those parties where someone's parents have gone away for a few days leaving their teenagers at home. Of course my friend, Ros, who I was kind of in love with at the time and was hoping that things would work finally with a girl, invited me and a number of her other friends. I went and we spent the night drinking rum and coke and listening to cheesy eighties pop music, singing and dancing like idiots in her parent's living room.

As the night got late people started finding rooms and beds to sleep in. I was in the parents' bed with Ros and her brother and his friend Darren. The party was still going on downstairs and after half an hour or so Ros got out of bed because she wasn't really that tired after all, so did her brother. This left me and Darren. I had had enough to drink by that time and was very sleepy and not fully conscious until the moment that I became aware of how close I was lying next to him. In fact I could feel his breath on my face.

Our hands brushed together, we moved them away, and then they brushed together again "accidentally". The next thing we were kissing! It was extraordinary, exciting, passionate and terrifying. What if someone had walked in?

After a while I had to get out of bed. I think the effect of whatever alcohol I had drunk was starting to wear off as a result of all the adrenaline coursing through my adolescent body. I went to the toilet, sat on the floor and

thought to myself, "Oh god! What am I going to do now? I can't be gay."

And I really couldn't be gay because I was anti-gay in a big way. I hated them by this stage. It was the clearest case of self-loathing any psychologist could ever have diagnosed. And to this day I am highly suspicious of anyone homophobic. It almost always highlights an insecurity based on an underlying homosexuality. It's as Shakespeare writes in Hamlet, "the lady doth protest too much." A too vociferous protest of one's own dislike of homosexuals is often a very clear demonstration that the opposite is in fact the case.

I spent the year in Guernsey where I had too many other things to worry about besides my sexual orientation and I arrived at University a very innocent boy really. But I couldn't stop the inappropriate attractions in my head.

My first love was Peter. He was doing the same course as me but things only got complicated after a party in our second year. He fell in love with me but I was totally confused because although I was in love I was determined that I wasn't gay, that this was just a phase, and that one day I'd find a nice girl and get married. We spent a few weeks at the end of the second year in a condition that we'd definitely put on facebook as "it's complicated". I even persuaded him to come to Paris with me for the Encounter of the New Sensibility which he hated because I more or less abandoned him to be with French humanist friends.

In reality I treated him very badly. He was ready to come out and tell everyone about who he was and I wasn't. It was only three years after leaving university when we met at a college reunion that we could talk about it. If I'm honest, I still liked him but he had moved on in his life and was in another relationship.

After University I went to live in London and I shared a house with two friends: Sikin from Kenya originally,

and Jane from Brighton. They were both lawyers and I was working in the Telecommunication industry. And in this situation I maintained the outward appearance of a homophobic idiot but eventually my incoherence was too much to bear.

One day Sikin's cousin, Aryn, came round to visit us. He was a friend of ours and he'd just started seeing a new girl, Martina. Sikin wanted to meet her and eventually Aryn had to admit that Martina was in fact Martin! Sikin was very supportive of this unexpected development in her family and Aryn invited us to go to a gay club with him. I decided that I would be a good friend and show Aryn some support and so the three of us went.

It was the best night of my life!

I had been to straight clubs before where everything is very tense. The boys dress like they're going to the office and the girls wear very revealing clothes. Frequently there were fights between the increasingly drunk party-goers and nearly always the evenings were unpleasant. In this gay club though, everything was different. People were relaxed, wearing what they like, dancing like no one else was watching them and generally having a great time. The music was fantastic with all the camp disco and dance music I liked. There was a band who played ABBA songs. I was in heaven!<sup>17</sup>

And I knew this was my environment. I knew there was nothing I could do to stop myself being gay. Either I had to come out or I would have to commit suicide because being a straight man, getting married and having kids was not an option for me anymore.

I didn't know what to do and I didn't know how to do it. I got terribly depressed. I eventually called Aryn a few weeks later, arranged to meet him for a drink and

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<sup>17</sup> Just an anecdote to say that on that night Aryn met a new guy, Paul, and they've been together ever since.

told him what was going on. He was so lovely to me. He listened to all my angst, all my fears, all the stupid things I said about it being impossible for me to come out and he just told me that everything would be alright. And eventually it was.

A few weeks later I took the opportunity of the fact that I worked an hour and half away from London and had to commute every day and so I moved to Southampton. Although Jane, Sikin and myself lived together as if we were all married to each other I couldn't bear my incoherence any longer and I had to get away from them because I couldn't tell them.

Not long after that, my work sent me to Ireland for three days to work on a joint project with a Dublin-based company. I took the opportunity to stay four extra days. I felt secure enough in a different country to go to my first gay bar alone without being recognised. On my second evening I met a nice guy from Kilkenny called Canice and he became my first boyfriend. He moved to London and we would meet at weekends.

It soon became clear though that my incoherence was increasing in this situation. I still couldn't bring myself to tell Sikin and Jane, with whom I still maintained a very close friendship. I was telling more and more lies about what I was doing and where I was going. I was getting depressed again. I eventually decided that I couldn't be gay and I broke it off with the Irishman. I was devastated.

A few days later after days of suicidal thoughts somehow I was able to find the strength and make the decision to come out. Although I had disconnected from the Movement by this stage, I never disconnected from the Principles of Valid Action and in this internal decision that I took I found great strength in the principle that says:

*When you harm others you remain enchained, but if you do not harm anyone you can freely do whatever you want.*

I knew that I wasn't harming anyone with my sexual orientation, even if my mother's hopes for grandchildren could be affected. So I started the process of coming out. It was around October 1994. I was nearly 26.

Over the period of a week or so I told all the important people in my life, except my parents. I never had one bad reaction. I didn't lose one friend. All the worst things that I thought would happen to me never came close to realisation.

Moving forward a few years, Sikin, Jane and I had been through a friendly 'divorce' and were all living separately. Canice and I had broken up and I was living with an American guy, Steven, in a house in South London. One day the phone rang. It was David. Somehow he had found my number. I hadn't given it to him because more or less our communication stopped after I left university.

I knew that his marriage had eventually broken down, that they had sold everything on the island and that both he and Lilly had moved to different parts of England. I felt terribly guilty about this. I was convinced that it was my fault, and despite the fact that I could be justified in wanting to know my father, it didn't justify the way I did it and the fact that their relationship was ending in divorce.

I was very surprised to hear from him but I wondered what he wanted, after all I had broken up his family. This is more or less the conversation we had:

"Hi Tony, it's your Dad here. How are you?"

"I'm good thanks. Long time, no hear! How are you?"

"I'm good. I'm living near Bristol. I've got a little karting business and bought a little house."

"That's great! How's Lilly? Do you still hear from her?"

"As far as I know she's good. She's gone back home to her family."

"Look, I'm really sorry that you broke up. I feel very bad about everything, you know. It's my fault."

"Don't worry about it. It was going to happen sooner or later. Look, I'd like to see more of you and I'd like to get to know you better again."

I started to get nervous. I was living with a man and I was adapting well to life as a gay man. I wasn't sure I wanted to tell my father about it though. Nevertheless, I resolved rapidly that if we were to renew our father-son relationship then I'd have to be honest.

"Ok, it's fine, we can spend more time together but you have to know one thing... I'm gay."

Then to my ever-lasting surprise I heard the words down the phone that made me re-evaluate everything I thought I knew...

"That makes two of us then."

"Oh my God!"

It wasn't my fault his marriage broke up after all!

I don't know what made me gay. I don't know if it was the lack of a father figure during my childhood, I don't know if it was Simon's inappropriate touching, I don't know whether it was something genetic. It could be a mixture of all of these things. What I do know is that the subject made me suffer very greatly during the early part of my life.

When I first found the Humanist Movement, one of the things that attracted me most was the promise of personal change. I was seeking to change myself very profoundly and I saw in the tools of the Humanist Movement the way to do it. I thought that with enough work on the psychological contents of my head I could transform. Furthermore, I was told about the examples of two long-time members of the Humanist Movement who had, in fact, joined the Movement as gay men and were able to change

and later on get married and have children. I wanted this very much.

Yet, despite the efforts I was putting in during different workshops, meetings and seminars of personal work, I wasn't making any progress. As time went by I started to lose faith that this was possible, and so I started to lose faith in the doctrine that Silo taught.

If you look in Silo's books you find very little guidance about sexual themes. In *Humanise the Earth* he says:

*I will tell you that in reality sex is sacred, and it is the centre from which all life and creativity springs, just as it is from there that all destruction arises when issues about its functioning are not resolved.*

But nowhere does he say that homosexuality is wrong. Certainly, as I already knew from the Principles of Valid Action, the golden rule in life is to treat others as you would like to be treated. I wanted to be respected and loved for who I was and I was prepared to give this same treatment to others.

However the Movement is a product of its generation and the sixties and seventies in Latin America are not associated with a great sexual revolution and macho attitudes were very much characteristic of the early moments of this nascent movement, even more so when it reached a post-Franco Spain and even if emancipation for women was very much part of our theme. This however doesn't appear to have been Silo's personal feelings regarding the subject. I never spoke to him about sexual orientation but I have it on very good authority that in the six-month Centre of Work held on Corfu way back in 1975 he commented, "It doesn't matter where you put your appendage, what matters is that you put it well!"

The reality is though that when I joined, homosexuals were invisible and rumours of the ability to change

one's sexuality abounded. A macho attitude impregnated the organisational structure even in London and in this atmosphere I decided to leave and I could only come back after I sorted out what was happening in my head.

Eventually, after talking to humanist friends, especially Silvia, I could see that my interpretation of the doctrine of personal change was unhelpful, despite the fact that I believe it could be true and that with a lot of deep psychological work one can change their sexuality. But to that possibility I always answer now with, "Why bother?" The gender of the person you are in a relationship with is not important, the important thing is how you treat them.

I have learned to be a very happy homosexual. If there was a pill I could take to change my orientation I would not take it.

## Reconnecting the Spirit

During the time I spent getting my head around my personal contradictions I kept in touch frequently with Silvia. In fact most of the time I kept on paying my six-monthly membership fee despite being totally inactive. I enjoyed coming to London and finding out the latest news about what was happening with our friends around the world even though mostly it wasn't positive news in the early nineties.

Laura Rodriguez passed away, and our Humanist representatives in the Chilean government all resigned in protest at the disgusting betrayal of the people by the governing coalition that they were a part of. The Movement stopped growing and I think some people got a bit obsessed with numbers of people and lost sight of the greater goal. The organisational structure stopped being something fun to build and instead became a bit of a source of suffering.

In Siloist thought there are two types of suffering. There is a suffering registered through the body which can be caused by illness or hunger or some physical disability. Generally this situation can be resolved or improved through greater social justice, the use of technology and advances in medical science.

*There is yet another kind of suffering that does not recede even with the advance of science or with the advance of justice. This type of suffering, which belongs strictly to your mind, retreats before faith, before joy in life, before love. You must understand that this suffering is always rooted in the violence that exists in your own consciousness. You suffer because you fear losing what you have, or because of what you have already lost, or because of what you desperately long to reach. You suffer because of what you lack, or because you fear in general.*

*These, then, are the great enemies of humanity: fear of sickness, fear of poverty, fear of death, fear of loneliness. All these forms of suffering pertain to your mind, and all of them reveal your inner violence, the violence that is in your mind. Notice how that violence always stems from desire. The more violent a person is the more gross that person's desires.<sup>18</sup>*

Furthermore, suffering can come through three distinct pathways and these are related to the three different times of the consciousness: memories from the past, a difficult situation in the present, and fear of the future. Silvia and I would laugh about the fact that somehow the structure had turned into the fourth pathway of suffering.

Many changes took place in the Movement in the early nineties just as I was dealing with other issues. So when I came back, the landscape within it had changed considerably. Most significantly, Silvia had changed her orientator, as many people did in those years. I started to work in Silvia's council, but the council was Silvia and I! We made some agreements right from the start:

- We would work as peers, formally Silvia would be the orientator but we treated each other as equals.

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<sup>18</sup> Extract from *The Healing of Suffering* from Silo Speaks in *Collected Works Volume 1*

- We didn't give a damn about numbers of people and instead we would do what was coherent for us and, most importantly,
- We would have some fun.

The first thing I wanted to do on coming back was somehow reconnect with the spirit of Florence. There, something extraordinary had happened and I knew that another injection of such energy would launch me once more into the world. It came in the most unexpected place: New York.

In September 1996 another change of stage was happening in my life. I had more or less lived with my two great friends from University since 1992 and I was getting restless to be more independent. The same thing was happening to all three of us. Jane was a lawyer and got the opportunity to go for a year to the New York office, I wanted a holiday so I said I'd go with her for a week when she moved there to help her settle in.

In those days, the Humanist Movement organised a celebration every three months to mark the change of season on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, June, September and December. Where ever you were in the world you could be sure that humanists were gathering on precisely these dates. It just so happened that I was in New York for the 21<sup>st</sup> of September. However, I had no idea how to connect to the seasonal celebration in New York. I didn't know the New Yorkers personally and I didn't know where their locales would be so I made my very first trip to a cyber-café.

In a print shop on Fifth Avenue near the corner with Central Park, I found a place. I still wasn't very used to using the internet, but with the help of a search engine I found a site for one of the organisations of the Humanist Movement, the Centre of Cultures, which was at that time starting to form in many cities dealing specifically

with the issues of violence and discrimination experienced by people from different countries and cultures who had immigrated.

It was a very interesting moment because the Movement was once more starting to expand but this time not in the places where the Movement had its strongest roots: in some of the biggest cities of Europe, North and South America, and Mumbai in India but this time it was starting to appear in remote places of Africa, in Asia and countries such as Bolivia and Haiti. These contacts in those countries were coming precisely from the immigrants who'd gone in search of a better economic situation in the places where the Movement was already working.

On the website there was a phone number. When I called the phone number an answer machine responded. Fortunately the message told me that on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September at 7pm in Hunter College on the Upper East Side of Manhattan there would be a seasonal gathering. I wrote down the details and decided to go.

I arrived in good time and to my surprise there were at least 100 people there. Normally in London we were lucky if ten people showed up to the seasonal meeting, and here they had to organise a hall to get everyone in. I didn't know anyone, but Humanists are always on the lookout for new faces to welcome to any event they organise, so before I knew it Dennis Redmond and Aaron Freimark came to introduce themselves. I explained that I was from London, that I was a tourist on holiday and that I was looking for kindred spirits with which to share the seasonal celebration. They were delighted to have me and introduced me to others.

I don't remember too much about the event, but what remains recorded in my memory is the same sensation of being at home, surrounded by an atmosphere that made me very comfortable and relaxed, something that I expe-



rienced in all the other humanist gatherings I'd been too. I reconnected to an intangible element that you can't find described in Silo's books. It's a way that people talk to each other, a treatment that people have between each other, a kindness. It's our spirit and it's the same where ever our people gather in the world. I've experienced it in Sydney, in Chennai, in Budapest, in Maputo, in Buenos Aires, in Milan, in Madrid and every other city in the world where I've had the fortune to visit our friends. It surpasses the barriers of language, age, culture and gender. A Siloist radiates this intangible quality and when many of us are present in the same place and at the same time the energy is impressive.

I came back from New York with my batteries recharged, with my meaning in life reawakened and with a renewed passion to Humanise the Earth.

## Personal work and politics

Once more back in action I decided at first to just help Silvia develop projects that she was motivated by. As an Argentine and a doctor, Silvia had always been wary of doing political activity and, with all the positive news of the work with immigrant communities in big cities she set herself the task to develop a Centre of Cultures in London. Yet the environment still continued to be impermeable to our proposals. Despite organising a few events including speaker evenings and even an art exhibition, we didn't find a way for our proposal to Humanise the Earth to really connect with people in those communities.

During those first days we also set ourselves the task to revise the book *Self-Liberation*<sup>19</sup>. Over several months—and having grown to a team of four with the inclusion of the Kiwi, Natalie, who had first been contacted by Juanita, the wife of the Chilean Ambassador to New Zealand, Tomás Hirsch, during their two years in Wellington, and Giovanna, an Italian businesswoman living in London—we studied the section on Relaxation: learning how to relax our external muscles, the tensions we could feel and control in our internal organs, and the

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<sup>19</sup> *Self-Liberation*, published by Samuel Weiser, Inc. York Beach, USA 1981.

mental tensions that create so much noise in our heads. Having advanced well on how to relax, we entered into the theme of the images that haunt our imagination. We learnt to observe the images that flow through our heads, detect the ones that produce physical tensions, and modify those images by introducing new elements that discharged the tension originally produced. This technique was easily applicable in everyday life. Then we learnt to apply the same techniques to the things we remembered from our childhood: those experiences that produce tension when we remember them and continue affecting our behaviour in the present.

We studied an extraordinary scheme of the consciousness inspired in the work developed by Gurdjieff and his “Fourth Way”, and expanded on and deepened by Silo and the team of researchers who spent six months in Corfu in 1975. This scheme of the Centres of Response describes how the body gives different responses from different centres that are associated with different parts of the body: the action of the intellectual centre is registered in the brain, emotional activity is registered in the heart, the motor centre is registered in the solar plexus and the vegetative centre, which includes the sexual centre, is registered throughout the entire body in a diffuse way.

The scheme divides every centre into motor, emotional and intellectual parts and we did exercises to practice working with different centres. We studied the importance of body postures, we learnt how the different centres work at different speeds and how they relate to each other. I discovered that when the emotions are very strong, exercising the motor centre (going to the gym for instance) effectively discharges the emotional pressure and allowed me to behave more intentionally. Finally we learnt about the importance of paying attention.

Then the work got really interesting. The module on Self-Knowledge is a very powerful tool for understand-

ing oneself, discovering what are the driving forces that motivate our behaviour, the actions that we constantly repeat in our biographies, the roles that we adopt in certain situations and how they have usually been formed in the past in situations that have nothing to do with where we use those roles now. The module goes on to address the subject of the values we hold dear and the qualities we consider important in the image we have of ourselves. We finished the work with a look at the reveries that operate in our consciousness. Reveries, or daydreams, are with us all the time. When we're hungry, for instance, we daydream about food and these reveries come and go according to how we satisfy these vegetative desires, but there are other reveries that operate more profoundly and affect our behaviour in the world. We went in search of the reverie that most strongly operates, in other words the “reverie nucleus”.

After all of this work of studying the images in my head and how it affected my behaviour, I had a beautiful “eureka” moment. I remember it clearly on a train from London to Birmingham. I was daydreaming (how ironic) and suddenly my daydream was considering the issue of the “reverie nucleus”. We had used the exercises of taking notes of free-flowing images and creating stories around them, plus we noted the images that occurred in our dreams. With all of this material we tried to decipher the reveries and discover what lay in the nucleus. What was in mine?

Sitting on the train I suddenly realised what it was that drove me. It affected all aspects of my behaviour and created a lot of tension within me. I realised that I was desperate for people to like me! In daily life I tried to make everyone like me. I'd always done it. In an instant I could see that my behaviour was completely driven by this reverie in all areas of my life. Suddenly many aspects

of my personality made sense to me and I could see how the reverie nucleus acted.

It's a bit like that moment when I put my contact lenses in first thing in the morning. Suddenly what was a complete blur becomes clear. Things I did (and continue to do even today sometimes) made sense seen in this new light. It was an extraordinary piece of self-knowledge to be in possession of.

Armed with the result of all of this work, I was able to change my behaviour, because for the first time I could see how I behaved. The work with attention gave me the ability to observe how I acted as if I were watching myself, like my vision was outside my body watching what it was doing. I could start to live more intentionally and much less mechanically.

With all this new internal freedom to do what I really wanted to do, I told Silvia that I wanted to go back to my passion: The Humanist Party. I had really fallen in love with it in 1989 and I wanted to go back. I'd never had the chance to do an election campaign and in 1999, ten years later, I got my first chance.

In 1999, Humanist Parties across Europe decided to mount a joint campaign for the European Parliament Elections. I wouldn't be surprised if we have been the only political party ever capable of such a thing. A meeting took place in Milan between representatives of several countries and each country was asked to prepare a report about the conditions in each country with respect to health, education, international relations, economics, etc., etc. On the basis of this, a platform was designed which was applicable to the whole of Europe.

In London we created a list of 10 candidates but it cost us £5000 to do so and this we divided between five of us. We had no organisational base in London, we were no more than a handful of activists, it was an effort to even get a list of 10 and we had absolutely no chance of

winning any seats but we really wanted to be part of this common European action. We paid the money, we registered and we got our party's name on the ballot paper.

I then had the chance to take part in my first ever party political broadcast<sup>20</sup>, going to Paris one February weekend to be filmed speaking one of the lines of the manifesto entitled, "For a Europe of Human Rights". Altogether we put up candidates in eight countries: Portugal, Holland, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain and France. We presented our platform as a Europe-wide platform and so we even included friends from the Czech Republic and Hungary in the video—which didn't become part of the EU until 2004—and Switzerland that will probably never be in the EU!

It was great fun. Having paid all that money for the privilege of having our names on the ballot paper, the electoral rules meant that we could have a leaflet delivered to every home in the region. There are around eight million people who live in the Greater London area and I think we printed half a million leaflets and sent them for distribution. We put a phone number on the leaflet. I wanted to put the number for the second phone line I had in my house at the time, but Jon thought it might be more reliable to have a professional company collect all the enquiries that were generated from the leaflet. Once the campaign was over we would have lots of new contacts to follow up and then we would be able to establish new base councils all around the capital. That was the idea at least.

In the end, of course, we didn't win any seats in any country of Europe, but to be fair we hadn't expected any. We never took part in elections in those days because we thought we had any chance of winning, it was always to have space in the media to have our point of view heard

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20 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag3VrFVVQYg>

and to build our grassroots support and increase the number of base teams. Elections were always a very efficient method of reaching people. In an election period, people expect to receive information about the different proposals of the different parties. If someone comes to your door during an election campaign, it's perfectly understandable. You have a very restricted window of opportunity in the UK to make political contacts.

On Election Day, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1999, I had the absolute joy for the first time in my life of going to vote for a political party that would truly represent me in an elected assembly!

We got 2586 votes or 0.2% of the votes cast. Given the base of supporters we started with, I was quite impressed by this result. It felt that there must be people in London after all who resonated with our proposals and hopefully some of them had made contact through our phone line. And it turned out that they had! We had dozens of calls and lots of messages left on the equipment of the company we used to collect the contacts. Sadly the company experienced some kind of technical failure and all our precious contacts were lost.

The following year elections would take place in London for the new London Assembly. There used to be a London-wide council until the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher abolished it because it was always fighting against her. When the Labour party came to power in 1997 they reinstated it with a new name and with fewer powers than it used to have, they also implemented the position of Mayor of London and the first elections would take place in May 2000.

Whereas the European elections had been done with the support of five humanists who divided the costs, that year there was no appetite for more election expense so I decided to do my own campaign in my area. First though, I would need a base team and I set out to create one.

It was the first time that I'd tried to build my own council since the days of university and I was keen to do it and prove to myself that we could build groups in London if we did it seriously.

I went around the neighbourhood and I put up posters on lampposts with tabs with a phone number that you could pull off the bottom. I made hundreds of them and put them up every weekend. I used to get very excited to walk around the neighbourhood and see that people had taken the phone number tabs. Then I was even happier because some people started to call. I managed to get a little team going which included some very strange and eccentric characters of the area. The most interesting, though, was Ahmed. He was an Iraqi Kurd and a refugee in London. He had a terrible situation. He had had to leave his family behind in Iraq because of fear for the activism he did in his homeland. He lived in a terrible hostel for refugees, and his immigration status would not permit him to work; even though most of his compatriots did, he preferred to live on the tiny money he got, study, and avoid trouble with the authorities.

He was interested to contact me because he thought I might be able to help him get his immigration status resolved, and in fact I did write letters on his behalf, none of which were particularly successful.

With the help of others in London, we organised workshops and invited people to come and help develop the proposals for our manifesto. From the information gathered in those workshops we elaborated our platform, created campaign leaflets and a website. Ahmed was invaluable, while I worked during the day, he put leaflets door-to-door throughout the neighbourhood. I think we distributed 20,000 in the end.

On May 4th 2000, for the second and last time in my life I was able to vote for a candidate who would represent me, namely myself! I got 1261 votes or 1.261%. I remember

going to the election count in Brixton and the votes were being counted by machine and I was amazed every time I saw a vote appear for the Humanist Party.

Unfortunately we never built on this work that we started. Shortly after this we stopped doing political work in London altogether, and we've never contested an election since. Now, I live in Budapest, but if things change in the world, and a Humanist Party reappears in the UK, I would seriously consider going back to help develop it.

However, our attention in London was taken by more exciting matters. The news coming from around the Movement was that Humanism was resonating very strongly in Africa. Stories were emerging of thousands of people joining us because they saw in our proposal the way for a nonviolent social revolution. Finally people weren't listening to us with scepticism, rather with enthusiasm and desperation to get involved. I suddenly had a realisation that the world would not be humanised because we did something in London, the revolution would come from the places that needed it most, existentially. It would come from the developing world.

It was at this time that my friend Sikin from university was getting married to her Dutch husband back in Nairobi. I resolved to go and see what the other side of Nairobi was like, the side the tourists and the wealthy Indian community don't see. I wondered if Kenya was as open to Siloism as other parts of Africa.

## Benson

I first met Benson Jowi for the first time in March 2000 when I went to Kenya for Sikin's wedding. In the arrivals hall of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport I was met by a big bald Kenyan with a big friendly smile showing off his perfectly white teeth and holding up a sign with my name on it. You would have had no idea that he had been battling against AIDS for years. I pulled out of my rucksack a bag of pharmaceutical drugs, much to the surprise of those travelling with me for the wedding, and he gave me flowers.

Benson was a simple man really. He came from rural Nyakach, an area by Lake Victoria in the west of Kenya. He had done well at school and got involved with non-governmental organisation (NGO) projects and shown himself to be a proficient manager. He was involved in the project which built the electricity network from Lake Victoria to Nairobi. In the late eighties he discovered that he was HIV positive.

In those days it was a death sentence. The only treatments available were experimental and certainly not available to Africans unless they were very rich. Benson decided that the best way to survive was to become an expert in the subject and so he taught himself everything there was to know and rapidly became one of his coun-

try's experts in the field despite the fact that he had absolutely no medical training and that the internet was very new technology in Africa.

He set up a small NGO of his own called Joint Research Services and he marketed himself for projects that were just that, research projects carried out jointly between western medical companies and Kenyans suffering with HIV/AIDS. It was through this organisation that he contacted me.

Apart from the political activity I was trying to develop in the UK in 1999, on the side I was trying to reproduce a project that was running very successfully in California through Homer Hobi. Homer had for years been organising a drug recycling project. The theory was that a range of new drugs was becoming available to battle the effects of the HIV virus. These drugs were taken in combination because it was found that the virus could rapidly mutate and adapt to the effects of a single drug. Nevertheless, the virus could also adapt to the combination therapy but it took much longer to do so.

What would happen to patients is that they would find that their combination had lost its effect and a new combination would be prescribed. In this situation the drugs remaining in the patient's bathroom cabinet were redundant and the drug companies couldn't take them back because they couldn't guarantee that they'd been stored properly and not been tampered with. In this situation a patient had no choice but to throw away all these good drugs. Here is where Homer's project came in. Homer collected all these unused drugs and sent them to a facility in Santiago where he was able to keep dozens if not hundreds of people alive on combination therapy treatment.

I thought I might be able to do something similar in the UK and so I put a little advert in a magazine specially targeting HIV/AIDS patients and it was through the

e-mail address in that advert that I received a response from Benson asking very kindly if I would consider his project in the case that I received any drugs from UK patients. The coincidence was extraordinary. He was in Kenya and three months later I was planning to be there. I didn't get any other responses from other countries, just this one from Kenya. The response from UK patients was quite small though and I didn't collect very much, but I decided that whatever I collected I would take to Benson.

Benson showed me around the real Nairobi. I had been there three times before and stayed with friends in the Indian community who live like royalty compared to the ordinary Kenyan.

It was the British who brought Indians to East Africa to build the railways in 1896 and during the colonial period Indians had more privileges than Africans. Once the British left in 1964 the Indians were in the best positions to take over the trade that takes place in the country, basically they were in the best positions to make a good living and this they have done very successfully. In Kenya the wealthy are either politicians or Indians.

What Benson showed me opened my eyes. It was the first time I'd seen hard poverty. We saw the slums of Kibera and Mathare where up to one million people live in homes made of wood and iron sheets and sewage flows through the alleyways between the homes. He took me to his neighbourhood, which despite being obviously middle class for Kenyans was still shocking. His house was tiny and he lived there with his wife and six children.

In the back there was his office filled with text books, medical brochures and pharmaceutical leaflets. In the middle was a desk with his computer and piles of papers. We sat down and I tried to explain to him about the Humanist Movement. He was extremely interested in the ideas that I presented and he suggested that we could start to build the network of activists in Kenya. This was

music to my ears because that was exactly what I wanted to do.

Besides meeting Benson, I also made contacts with Human Rights groups in Nairobi and I went to meet them and explain about the Humanist Movement, but I didn't get the same feedback.

So, I stayed in contact with Benson and six months later I went back to Nairobi together with Silvia to give a weekend workshop about the Humanist Movement. We couldn't believe it. Fifty people turned up and we hadn't advertised it anywhere. These were all people who had come because of Benson's recommendation. There were people from Nairobi, from universities and the various medical people he worked with and there were people from his home area of Nyakach. Also attending were a few young people: his eldest daughter Alice and a friend from the neighbourhood, Hesbon.

The initial workshop went very well despite the fact that it was so cold in Nairobi, something that Silvia and I hadn't expected at all, arriving in thin clothes and T-shirts. We gave an overview of the history of the Movement, we explained its ideology and our broad definition of violence that includes economic, psychological, sexual, racial, religious and moral violence. We explained the importance of adopting the principles of solidarity and coherence in one's personal life and the need for simultaneous personal and social change. We talked about different social projects and gave examples, and we explained how the structure worked with its networks of Orientators who guide the group and set the strategy, Administratives who look after the flow of information, and Supports who focus on the themes of personal development of the members of the council. We talked about how all of this is paid for and we were very careful to distance ourselves from the NGOs that have

flooded Africa, explaining that the Humanist Movement is not a funding organisation.

The response was amazing. Everyone wanted to immediately join and I set Benson the task of collecting all the details of the new members. When I arrived back to the UK I went into my office at work and to my great surprise and lasting joy there were 30 membership forms on my desk that had been faxed overnight from Kenya.

That was how things started in Kenya, and ever since that time I have been travelling three times a year on average to follow up the humanist and humanitarian projects that developed as a result.

One time during international protests that humanists were taking part in against the USA military intervention in Afghanistan, I think it must have been, Benson did a very simple activity of writing "No More War" on two pieces of paper, sticking them together so that they formed a cylindrical shape, fed this into his fax machine, and dialled the fax machine at the US Embassy in Nairobi and left it running for an hour or so!

Benson and I became great friends. He was well aware that I was gay and he knew, through the internet, that it was homosexuals who were doing the most activism in the field of AIDS research. With his international contacts he was able to travel the world attending conferences and because of his own condition he would make sure that from time to time he would come to London because he could just walk into any hospital there, see a doctor, explain his condition and get a supply of drugs for himself. On these occasions he would stay with me and my partner of the time.

He also helped me start some projects with gay men in Nairobi. Their stories horrified me. Kenyan culture just can't accept homosexuality thanks to the loving and

tolerant Christian Church and Leviticus 18:22<sup>21</sup> of their Bible. What happens is that those gay men who can't accept hiding their sexuality marry and have families of their own, are ostracised by their families and chased out of their community because they bring shame. They end up in Nairobi, mostly they don't have a good education—just like the majority of Kenyans—and as they need to eat they end up in prostitution. There are plenty of clients, because of course a homosexual orientation is not a western disease as homophobic African politicians would have you believe, it is a tendency that is present in all parts of the world and has been tolerated and even celebrated throughout history in different cultures and civilisations.

Frequently though, these clients are tremendously damaged psychologically and express this contradiction through terrible treatment of these prostitutes. Of course for the sex workers themselves, apart from the abuse and violence they receive, they also put themselves at great risk of catching HIV. In the year 2000, they could earn 1000 shillings for sex with a condom (about 13 US dollars) but 2000 shillings for sex without one. They tried to organise themselves, they tried to get access to support from charities but ultimately every one of them dreamed of finding a western boyfriend who would save them from their African lives. More than one of them thought that I could be their ticket out of prostitution. But of course, this was something that I couldn't offer. Benson though did what he could to help them. He would even take groups of them for food from time to time when he had money.

I put Benson in contact with Homer in San Francisco one time when Benson had the opportunity to go there

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21 Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.

for a medical conference. Homer showed Benson around the Castro district where all the gay life is concentrated. It was the weekend when the annual Pride March was taking place. The next time I met him he told me all about his experience and the things he'd seen which quite shocked the rural Kenyan boy within him. "Tony, there were more people on that gay march than take part in my own country's national celebrations," he told me wide-eyed before laughing loudly.

In January 2002 we had an international meeting of our council in Rio de Janeiro and we brought Benson from Nairobi. He was a big novelty to the South Americans he met and on a visit to the slums of Rio de Janeiro on the bus he taught everyone the Swahili words to the typically touristic Kenyan song, "Jambo Bwana"<sup>22</sup> [Hello Sir].

Sadly in October that same year he fought his final battle with AIDS. He was in Kisumu, the big city near to his home village, visiting family members and one morning he woke up not feeling well at all. They took him straight to the hospital but he knew it was the end. "I'm dying," he told his wife, and it was true, he didn't survive the day. A few days later, a mutual friend contacted me to say what had happened. I was very shocked because it was so unexpected. I was planning to be in Nairobi a few weeks later, we had so many plans for how to humanise Kenya together.

I was in Santiago at the time and many of us who had known Benson gathered together and we did a Well-Being Ceremony<sup>23</sup> for him and gave thanks for having known him.

Years later, and through a charity organisation that my friend Suzanne and I set up together, we had the chance

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22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUrVeRG05IM>

23 Ceremony of Well-Being from the book, *Silo's Message* the text of which can be downloaded from [www.silo.net](http://www.silo.net)



to build a medical facility in the small market town of Katito where Benson was from. When we went to the local Ministry of Health and said that we wanted to do something to help with medical services, they told us that what they most needed was a building from where they could administrate HIV/AIDS services. From that facility thousands of Kenyans are receiving life-saving treatment which is not only extending life expectancy but also returning sick people to economic activity, thereby allowing them to look after themselves and their families.

During the inauguration of the facility, I took the opportunity to reflect on how it had come to pass that the building was here and gave thanks once more for having met Benson who showed me the real Kenya and inspired me to support a community I would otherwise never have known and help in a small way to save the lives of thousands of people.

## Humanising Africa

Going to Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, for some people was easy. For me it was difficult and I had to overcome lots of resistances to do so. However, the more I went the easier it became and I would find myself in the situation that whereas on the day of the flight to Africa I didn't really want to go, on the day of my flight back to Europe I was having such a great experience that I didn't want to come back either.

The Italian humanists would go there and take a suitcase full of their mama's home-made pasta, a big block of parmesan cheese and 10kg of ground coffee. There were so many of them going to Senegal that it was more cost effective to rent a big house on a permanent contract than to organise hotels. There were others who travelled to Africa and they lived like Africans, they would stay in the houses of those who were members of their council no matter what the conditions were like. Jon was one of these travellers.

I was much more conservative. Fortunately I had a good job in the System so I could afford to stay in hotels and eat food from reliable sources. When I went into the countryside to visit friends developing projects and humanist structures I always had to face the battle with African hospitality. Whenever a guest comes to visit, an

African goes out of their way to welcome you with food. I would always refuse to eat the meat; not because I'm a vegetarian, but because I had no idea how it had been prepared. This would offend some people but I always explained that the purpose of the visit was to Humanise Africa and that I couldn't do it very well if I was lying in my hotel bed with some kind of illness. I used to explain that although an African is used to the food and is very hardy to all kinds of diseases, my pathetic, white, European immune system had lost all its resistance to many bugs and that it was better for me to stick to rice and vegetables. In any case I never went hungry but people thought I was very strange and sometimes rude.

In terms of transport also, I always took the easy option. The first time Silvia, Natalie and I went to Kisumu from Nairobi we did so in a minibus organised by Benson. What should have been a leisurely six-hour drive with a stop to take in a view of the enormous Rift Valley took us nearly ten because the vehicle broke down twice in the middle of nowhere. We were sure that in any moment we would be murdered! After that experience I nearly always flew to Kisumu, but when I first went to Kenya this flight wasn't much fun either. Although it only takes 45 minutes to fly there, the plane, with seats for only 30 or so passengers, had a tiny little propeller engine and when it was up in the air it used to swerve from side to side to avoid the clouds. Fluffy white clouds may look nice and friendly when you're standing on the ground but when you're flying through one in a tiny aeroplane they are pure evil.

On one occasion when sitting by the window looking down onto the Rift Valley from 18000 feet above sea level, the plastic panel around the window fell on top of me and I almost screamed fearing that I would be sucked out into the sky. Fortunately it was just some old glue that

had failed to stick properly and the plane came safely to land shortly afterwards with me safely sitting in my seat.

When using land-based public transport I didn't like to take risks either. Normally I was travelling with money or my laptop and frequently both and I didn't feel at all secure, partly because nearly every trip to Africa I went alone. Sometimes I would take a taxi to go huge distances and when I really couldn't justify the expense I would go by minibus and pay for all 14 seats. It took me about five years of going regularly to Africa before I lost my fear of travelling on public buses, although I still continued to buy two seats on the bus: one for me and one for my luggage.

On one other unforgettable occasion in Ghana we went to visit a town hours outside of Accra called Keta to visit some contacts of Kafui who was in my team. We travelled on Saturday, spent the night in Keta and had meetings on Sunday before returning. However, we left it late to come back, and because it was Sunday there were far fewer minibuses around. We got around half way back to the city before the bus reached its final stop so we all had to get out and wait for another one to take us the rest of the way, but there were very few of them and there were hundreds of people waiting. I was imagining that we'd have to sleep outdoors unable to find any transport until the morning. Then Kafui managed to find a van that was transporting onions to market. He paid for me to sit in the front passenger seat and he sat on the onions in the back with two or three others. The onion van was stopped by police every few kilometres and Kafui had to give a bribe each time. Eventually we got home around 1 am.

Building structure in Africa was exhausting work though because of the heat, the travelling, the mosquitoes and the terrible infrastructure. On public buses you had to stop repeatedly because the police at the side of the road take money from all the drivers in a way which is

completely corrupt but accepted by the politicians who do nothing about it in parliament because they know that they need the police to keep them safe when they visit their constituencies. Corruption in Africa starts all the way at the top of government and penetrates through the whole of society even including family relationships.

When the vehicle isn't stopping because of bribery it stops to let people on and off and the local vendors waste no time in shoving all the things they sell under your nose. I remember particularly well on one little stop by the border with Uganda where a woman held a bowl of big ants with wings under my nose as if I would like to buy some. I noticed other women with similar bowls trying to tempt other passengers and then to my horror someone actually bought a small paper bag of writhing ants and proceeded to eat them! The women, seeing my astonished face, started to laugh at my reaction. I don't think they'd seen many white guys at their bus stop before.

Then there was the problem of African time. European time works differently to African time. In Europe, or maybe I should say the UK, you make an appointment and at the time of the appointment you arrive and do whatever it was you were meeting to do. In Africa you can make all the agreements you want, but ultimately you will have your meeting in the morning or in the afternoon. A more specific time is impossible to arrange. I can't tell you how many times I have tried to organise five or six different things in one day only to have to cancel everything after the 2<sup>nd</sup> one because we just ran out of time.

After the year 2000 I spent nine years travelling repeatedly to Kenya and Ghana and occasionally to Uganda and Tanzania to develop the council I was building. During the course of these visits I was working with members of my team in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kitale, Kakamega,

Katito and Kisumu in Kenya, Moshi in Tanzania, Jinja and Kampala in Uganda and in Ghana they were in Accra and Tema.

We held dozens of seminars on basically the same things we had studied in the first workshops. Every time I added a new subject such as the Principles of Valid Action<sup>24</sup>, the Healing of Suffering, Guided Experiences, the Experience of Force and the fundamental questions<sup>25</sup> and a course of Education for Nonviolence that Silvia and I developed.

For their part, the Kenyan and Ghanaian members of my team were also promoting the formation of social projects, and where social projects were already in place they brought them into the structure of the Movement so that we soon had a huge diversity of projects: people looking after orphans, widow support groups, AIDS support groups, literacy projects, malaria awareness, Artemisia projects<sup>26</sup>, etc. When I came to visit Africa I was encouraged to go and visit some of these projects which also brought other problems with it.

For some it became such an important thing for me to visit their project that all sense of rational thinking went out of the window. One such occasion was when Rashid wanted to take me to see a farming project. He was absolutely insistent that I should see this project but it was quite difficult to get to because it was in the flood plain of Lake Victoria and a car couldn't reach all the way. We had to get out and walk for a couple of kilometres.

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24 From the book, *Humanise the Earth* in *Collected Works Volume 1* by Silo, published by Latitude Press, San Diego, USA, 2003, page 18

25 Letter 5, *Letters to my Friends*, in *Collected Works Volume 1* by Silo, published by Latitude Press, San Diego, USA, 2003, page 478

26 [www.anamed.org](http://www.anamed.org)

This was fine in theory except I could see ominous clouds starting to form.

“Rashid, are you sure this is a good idea? Look at those clouds. I think it’s going to rain,” I said.

“No, no, no. The rain never comes from that direction,” replied Rashid.

“Ok,” I said doubtfully.

We started our journey. On the way we had to cross three make-shift bridges; basically tree trunks placed over a stream which had been worn smooth and rounded over years of people crossing. The Africans could all walk across quickly and confidently in their bare feet. I on the other hand, with my shoes, crossed very gingerly hoping that I wouldn’t fall in. After 30 minutes we arrived at our destination. Rashid showed me a field with maize, exactly the same as dozens of other fields of maize I’d seen repeatedly over years of travelling to see projects. And of course as the clouds had got closer and closer and darker and darker, at that moment big fat drops of water started falling from the sky.

After a few seconds talking about the field of maize I demanded that we go back because of the rain. But by now it was torrential and I was getting wetter by the second, the solid ground immediately dissolved into thick, sticky mud and it became very difficult to move forward. Then there were the bridges. If I had had difficulty getting there, getting back over those bridges was impossible and Rashid knew it. I was getting increasingly angry at the stupidity of the situation and then the indignity of having to be literally carried across the river on someone’s back because I would have fallen off the bridges. Eventually we got to a collection of mud houses and sheltered under the eaves and waited for the rain to pass. I was soaking wet and cold. The water penetrated all my outer clothes and got into my underwear. I had

my laptop in my rucksack and thankfully it was the only thing that didn’t get wet.

By the time we eventually reached the car I was furious! I had to take a plane to Nairobi two hours later and I’d already checked out of my hotel. Poor Rashid! I shouted a great deal and vowed never to visit his projects ever again.

Once in my hotel in Nairobi after a shower and with dry clothes on the incident didn’t seem so bad. But I had to throw those shoes away because I couldn’t get rid of the smell of mud. Rashid and I still laugh about this incident even now after many years, but I never again went to see a maize field that wasn’t by the side of the road.

In all this time I’ve been going to Africa I’ve never felt myself to be at great risk, in fact the only time I’ve ever been robbed was on the streets of London 400 metres from home. One time in Nairobi though, someone did try to pull a gold chain off my neck but it was very thin and when I felt a hand on the back of my neck I turned round and the guy ran off empty-handed. This is not everyone’s experience.

On our first trip to Kisumu with Silvia and Natalie in 2001 we stayed in a little hotel. There were many of us staying there because Benson had organised a medical treatment camp in two rural areas: one was at the village he came from, Magunga, and one was in a place called Bondo, not far from where Obama’s family comes. He contacted many NGOs and the local Ministry of Health, he called a doctor friend of his and organised a free supply of the most commonly needed drugs and we spent four days in these two villages.

On the one side there was the possibility for the local residents to see the doctor, but other volunteers came to do training on HIV/AIDS awareness and nutrition, etc. while Silvia, Natalie and I did training on Humanism. Hundreds of people came and on the first morning I gave

an introductory meeting in front of maybe 100 people with translation to Dholuo, the local language. Natalie caught everything on film and we were so happy with the response that we thought we'd make a short film of the experience.

The next morning, Silvia and Natalie went to their room to get their stuff and the video camera that was on the bed had disappeared. The room was locked and the windows had bars over them, but someone had pushed a stick or hook through the window, grasped the video camera and run off with it! I spoke to the hotel manager and even said that I would give money without asking any questions or calling the police if the camera turned up. When that didn't work I begged just to have the video tape returned. After all, the machine was replaceable, but what we'd filmed was gone for ever.

Then many years later, we were developing a programme where volunteers from the UK would come to Kenya and we organised activities with children in a school at Magunga. Monica and Rashid from my team put everything in place at the school and I organised the volunteers together with Suzanne from London.

Among the volunteers were my mum and her husband, Mike. I was travelling so often to Africa and visiting her so infrequently that she said that they would come to see what I was doing in Kenya. It was great, except that on the second night they had a very bad experience. In Kisumu we normally stayed in very basic and cheap accommodation but as my mum was over sixty I put her in the best hotel in town. In the evening she and Mike would take a taxi to whichever restaurant we were going to meet at.

On that evening they got to the restaurant first and as mum didn't have much money on her she suggested that they go to the bank, 50 metres away, and get some from the cash machine. On the way back, very carefully and

quietly a man came up behind her with a machete and tried to cut the strap off her handbag so that it would fall and he could grab it and run away. Mum felt something and screamed out. Her husband is a big guy and he used to be a fireman and so he knows how to handle himself in a difficult situation. Without thinking he grabbed the attacker, forced him to drop the knife and got him into a position where he couldn't harm anyone. A security guard from the restaurant came running over. Mum and Mike hurried into the restaurant and there they noticed that he had a big cut which only just missed the big artery in his wrist. I had to take him to hospital for stitches and he recovered. Fortunately it was right at the beginning of the trip and the experiences over the following days were so amazing for them that the bad memory faded quickly.

Some would say that we were foolish on our missions to Africa: the conditions were too difficult, the dangers too great, the infrastructure too damaged, the social situation too bad and that we were too naïve. Yet hundreds of humanists disregarded all the difficulties and undertook these missions. Within a few years we had developed our organisational structure in 40 or so different African countries from a starting point of zero. We grew from tens of thousands around the world to over a million members.

Africa opened up to Humanism in a way we couldn't have dreamed of. Everywhere we went to speak, people wanted to join us. After the years of growing very slowly in the UK, with a feeling of joy when someone stayed for more than a handful of meetings, we were being overwhelmed with the response from Africa. It was somehow like I imagined it would be when I came back from Florence all those years previously with the expectation that within six months we'd have formed a Humanist government. It made sense though. Here in Africa where the system was utterly destroyed, where everything is

a business (including religion) and where corruption invades every aspect of life, it was not a surprise that our message was received so well.

It took us many years before we fully appreciated that what we thought we had built was not quite as it seemed.

## Kenyan Diary

In October 2002 I went to Kenya for the first time since the death of Benson and I kept a diary of the trip. In 2007 the United Nations adopted the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October as the International Day of Nonviolence to honour Gandhi's birthday. However Nonviolence has always been a theme of ours in the Movement and in our council orientated by Pía we were organising Days of Nonviolence in 2002 in all the areas where our council worked.

In Kitale, my council orientated by Johnstone Sikulu organised a day of activities and I went to record it all on my new video camera. I went for a month and as I was visiting my team in Mombasa, I also took the opportunity to check-in for one night into a tourist hotel on the beach. Here are some extracts of the diary I wrote.

### FRIDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> OF OCTOBER

I arrived and got off the plane and was greeted by the first sign of how I will have to develop structures here without Benson—no one was at the airport to pick me up. Usually Benson would be right there when the door of the plane opened, ready to rush us through customs without having our bags searched. This time I was on my own.

Fortunately all my bags looked harmless to the customs officer so they didn't identify that I had a bag full of children's books and old mobile phones.

### **SATURDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

At 2pm we had the first ever meeting of the nucleus of Council A-Pi<sup>27</sup>. We confirmed the schedule of activities for the trip and discussed the objectives which are: to create a General Delegates council in the first instance and create one second instance council of General Delegates also, to qualify the Admi and Support sectors to the level of Team Delegate, to embark on a series of personal work based on the principles of valid action, to build a strong and committed team in the first instance not just have a bunch of people who don't know each other very well.

This was all that I did on Saturday and although it wasn't much it was a landmark in the process of this council.

### **SUNDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

I went to see Benson's family today over in Buru Buru and chickened out of telling his wife that Benson died of AIDS. I must do this before I leave so that she has the chance to get tested and find out the worst.

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<sup>27</sup> All the teams, or councils, that constituted the Humanist Movement were denominated according to numbers, letters of the Latin alphabet and letters of the Greek alphabet.

### **TUESDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

On arrival in Kisumu I was met by Dora and Janet and we went to the hotel I stay in. It really is a dump and on this occasion the hot water system has broken so it is back to cold showers that I hate so I am going to go native like Jon and not take showers unless I can avoid it!

We had a very nice meeting with the first instance members who are in town—Dora, Alan, Charles, Janet and a couple of new guys. We had a very long conversation about how we are going to organise the first instance now that we have restructured and I think we have taken the first steps to rebuilding a growing process in Kisumu. I even managed to enthuse them about council names. On Saturday we will have a meeting of the first instance and on Sunday we will hold an open meeting about the Humanist Movement and the principles of valid action to anyone who wants to attend. This all sounds very encouraging.

### **THURSDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

After having to endure another hideous lunch I got home to finally succumb to the cold shower and discover that my first trip outside in the sun has resulted in horrible sun-burn. When will I learn about sunblock?

### **FRIDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

During a phone call on Wednesday, Johnstone insisted that I come to Kitale to have a meeting about the planning of the event on the 26<sup>th</sup>. I didn't really want to go because I plan to go there next week, but we re-organised the plan so that I could go today. It was a good idea really

because ever since I have been here the political tension has been increasing<sup>28</sup>. On Monday five people were killed in Kakamega, which is only one hour from here, during clashes between the two rival factions of KANU<sup>29</sup> that are each trying to put their own candidate for presidency. This is people killing each other within the SAME party! Utter madness. Anyway, I have been terrified since they told me in Kitale that some politicians were going to be attending the day of nonviolence and I wanted to talk to them about this.

In the end we had a meeting that was quite good. I think they have over-estimated how much money they think the event will raise but I don't mind covering some of the costs at this point because it is important that they learn how to do something like this. I can cover some of the shortfall by selling the T-shirts and caps in the January meeting (he writes optimistically!). Anyway we are going ahead. Local schools have been asked to submit designs for a logo for the day of nonviolence and I will be in Kitale next week to help judge which is the winner. The plans for the event sound very good with a whole mixture of sport, art, drama, dancing, singing, poetry, boring speeches by people who like the sound of their own voices, and hopefully a lot of Humanism. I'm looking forward to capturing it all on video. I told them that the moment that a politician stands up and says "vote for me" they are to pull the microphone out of his hand.

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<sup>28</sup> In October 2002 the President of Kenya was Daniel Arap Moi who had been in power since 1978 and ruled as a dictator until the USA threatened "consequences" if he didn't move to multi-party democracy with limited numbers of terms of office for Presidents. There were only three months left of this President and politics was an extremely hot topic.

<sup>29</sup> Moi's political party.

## SATURDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER

Hurrah! The hot water has been fixed in the hotel showers!

James arrived very early in the morning from Nairobi and woke me up at 7am. He rested a little in the hotel and Dora arrived at 10am so that we could organise the afternoon's meeting of the first instance of A-Pi. Dora brought a printer friend of hers who was interested in the Movement and who could also give us some costs for printing "Silo's Message" and "Humanise the Earth" here in Kenya.

For the meeting we decided on the following agenda:

1. Relaxation (external, internal, mental)
2. How to name a council
3. The importance of teamwork and what it means for us to be working as a team.
4. The membership fees.
5. Valid action and the Principles.
6. Planning for the open meeting for Sunday
7. Calendar of activities.

At 2pm the meeting was meant to start, of course, we are running on African time and the last person arrived at 3pm. Eight people from the first instance attended: James, Dora, Janet, Alan, Charles, Rashid, Aloice and Javan (new orientator who may work directly with Silvia).

We went through the agenda and the meeting was fantastic. Most people seem to love the principles and the theme of teamwork brought to light all the key words I wanted, like trust, transparency, consensus, diversity and friendship.

More importantly, it was the first meeting where I really felt that we were developing the Humanist



Movement. The tone, the language and the behaviour could be found in any other team of humanists anywhere else in the world. If some of this gets imparted to the second and third instance then we are assured of developing a process that can lead to independence of the council safe in the knowledge that we are taking all the elements with us. The Centre of Work for Team Delegates<sup>30</sup> that I want to do next year with these guys will be very opportune.

Later on in the evening when everyone had left, James and I chatted for a long time about Humanism and our hopes for a future Kenya. I really feel that this process is a good one now.

My sun burn is still very painful...

### SUNDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER

After today's meeting Janet, Janet's admi, Rosaline and I were invited to Dora's house for dinner. It's the first time I've been to dinner at the house of an African who wasn't well off. Everything about Africa is, to my European eyes, dirty: the floors, walls, curtains, even the pictures on the walls. I don't think for one minute that Dora doesn't care for her place I just think it is part of African psyche. People just don't notice it. In Europe, conditions like that would have the social services people condemning you, in Africa people's immune system and bodies are just so used to it that it is not an issue.

In addition the water in Kisumu is not treated with chlorine because those who are meant to add it to the water steal it and sell it instead, so people cannot use the tap water where it exists. Dora keeps her water in a corner

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<sup>30</sup> A four-day retreat going into many subjects in Self-Liberation and other books.

of the kitchen in a big plastic tank. The four of us chatted in the kitchen while the food was being prepared which was tilapia (fish), ugali<sup>31</sup>, tomato salad and green vegetable of some sort. It started to strike me how different our countries are when I realised that the lady who cleans my house on a Saturday for four hours earns more in those four hours than these teachers do in a whole week. We had a very nice chat and we talked about the differences between the cultures and the social security systems. It is one of the few times that I have spoken with people in the team outside of structural themes.

### MONDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER

What is it that the principle says? "If day and night, summer and winter are well with you, you have surpassed the contradictions".

Today my day and night were the contrasting hotels I was staying in. When I went to pack my things this morning, I discovered that my clothes bag had been colonised by an army of very tiny ants. I had to take everything out and get rid of the ants. In the afternoon, I was unpacking my bag in a luxury hotel on the North Coast of Mombasa where I had planned to take a day off before going back to Kitale. The hotel was absolutely gorgeous it was only a shame that I was there by myself. However, I have got used to my own company over recent weeks so it wasn't such an issue.

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<sup>31</sup> Ugali is a standard food in Kenya and is basically a cooked mixture of maize flour and water

## **TUESDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> OCTOBER**

I can't believe this. Mombasa has been scorching hot ever since I arrived last Thursday and the day I take for myself by the beach the skies open and it pours down with rain for most of the day.

## **THURSDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

Today was a difficult day. It started out with getting up at 5.30am so that I could get my flight to Kisumu. From Kisumu I went by road to Kitale and so it was nearly 7 hours later when I arrived there. I could also feel that I was starting to come down with a cold. Fortunately they didn't have too much planned for me to do so by 8pm I was in bed.

## **SATURDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

Yesterday we celebrated the Day of Nonviolence here in Kitale and what a great day it was. The plan was to start with a procession through the town starting at 9am and end up at the stadium where a day of entertainment, speeches and fundraising was planned, followed by a soccer match until 5pm. The procession eventually started at 10am (1 hour seems to be the standard deviation for African time). It took about half an hour to go through the length of the town to the stadium. At the head of the parade was a couple of acrobats, one on stilts (long wooden poles for legs) and one on a unicycle. Immediately behind them was a big banner proclaiming the day to be a day of nonviolence and behind them came a brass band making a great deal of noise. There were about 200 people in the procession altogether.

Everyone in the town, from all the houses and shops, came out to the streets to see what the hell was going on. No one failed to know what we were doing. Eventually we ended up at the stadium and although not as many people as expected were there I estimate that there were well over 500 people in the stands and on the pitch watching what was going on. For the day's entertainment there were various singers, choirs and dancers of varying quality. The acrobats at the head of the procession did juggling and various amusing antics. There were some bicycle races including a cycling-backwards event which was very funny also.

After the entertainment came the speeches and messages from various guests. Felix, from Ann's team, had spent four days to come from Burundi to see what we were doing and we had mobilised members of the structure from Mombasa, Nairobi and Kisumu also. My speech was read out (badly) and then 200 copies passed around to the people in the stands.

After the speeches, came the fundraising part which is quite strange if you have not been to one before. They call it a "Harambee". I don't know whether it is an African or Kenyan way to raise money, but basically what you do is invite a group of people to your party as specially invited guests. If they accept they are more or less obliged to contribute a sum of money to the fundraising effort. In the same way all other guests are expected to chip in as well. What happens is that every contribution is announced to the attendees of the party thereby everyone knows how generous everyone else is. The plan was to have lots of politicians come to the event because they all have a special budget for this kind of activity so that they can impress the electorate with their donations to good causes. Unfortunately, in our case the day before, the president dissolved parliament, which had been expected any day but the timing meant that many politicians were

stuck in Nairobi and couldn't attend. Although, it seems because the guests received an invite they are still honour-bound to donate money to the fundraising efforts so we still hope that more money will come in.

Once all the collections were made (and poor old Felix from Burundi was made to contribute twice because he was a very special guest!) we went on to the most curious auction of fish I have ever seen in my life. The people from Kisumu, in a brave plan to try and pay for the expenses of travelling and accommodation, brought with them 100 fish that they had fried the day before. The plan had been to just take the fish immediately to market where we had someone ready to sell them. The problem was that the vehicle they took from Kisumu broke down three times and they ended up arriving six hours late! This meant that no one would want to buy the fish at that time of the day. In the stadium the Kitale people started doing a fish auction. This involved two people vying with each other for the honour of buying three fish. Each person would go round the stands getting other people to chip in to their fish-buying fund. At a certain point a winner was declared. Then two other people would do exactly the same thing. Usually the loser from the previous round would enter again and the audience would feel sorry for them and so make sure that they won the fish the second time. Everyone in the crowd seemed to find this whole thing totally entertaining and chipped in loads more money. At one time they got bored with fish and tried their hands at a couple of live chickens that had been donated for the cause also. Totally amusing! Eventually though, the people from Kisumu made a loss on their investment in the original fish.

Everything overran so the soccer match that we had planned had to be cancelled because there was due to be a Kenyan league football match happening at 5pm. The fish auction was still going on when this football match

started, much to the annoyance of the Kenyan League officials! About half an hour later the skies opened and what can only be described as biblical rain descended onto everyone. We all had to huddle under the stand for 40 minutes while it passed (although the poor footballers had to continue, even though in parts of the pitch they had to wade through ankle-deep water to get to the ball)!

Once the rain stopped everyone was cold and a bit wet so the event ended. The organisers and guests from abroad went off to a place for something to eat and to get to know each other a bit more. Everyone agreed the day was great!

At the moment we are still not sure of the outcome of the fundraising, but excluding T-shirts and caps which still remain to be sold it seems that they raised about £800 profit for their projects which is a lot less than they had hoped for but actually a great achievement for them, I think. It was the first time they had done anything like it and they made a lot of mistakes and learned a lot in the process. The way they worked as a team was also very good.

Around the town people really enjoyed the event. We got coverage at a national level (apparently) on radio, TV and newspapers. People have said that if they knew more in advance they would have closed down their business for the day and come to the stadium. Others have asked when the next one will be. In the stadium many people had to be turned away from paying their Humanist Movement membership fee there and then because we didn't have the facilities to register people.

On a sad note, today, the theme of death came up again. Dunstan, who has been a very active member of the team, lost his father. He found out when he had got home at the end of the day. This place is just so full of death it really is starting to get me down.

SUNDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER

Every now and again you feel in Africa that you are having a breakthrough. Today I had that experience.

While we were waiting for a meeting to start, some members of Johnstone's first instance started to ask more about the history of the Movement. The conversation that we had dealt with the themes of transcendence, death and intentionality amongst other things and all this with an African audience that I assumed would not be able to cope with the themes. Instead some of the people in that chat reminded me of how I was with Silvia when I first found out about the Humanist Movement when I used to keep her up telling stories about the Movement until the early hours of the morning after Humanist Party meetings.

Also I am very pleased with the implementation of the networks. James and Dora are really going for it and I am starting to see that there is a real Support and Admi in most lines of the first instance now. The need to really train the Support sectors in the principles has been keenly adopted by James and also by all others that I have spoken about it with. Also I have given them responsibility and ownership of the sectors and they have accepted it. For instance, today, James talked with David (Johnstone's support) and Dora with Benard and Gideon (Johnstone's and Jared's admis respectively) and they discussed their particular themes. It is starting to have the feel of a real council, just like we would have differentiated meetings in our Council 14 meetings.

The job is not completely done yet but we are getting there. And it's a good job because I only have four days left in the country.

## May the Force be with you!

I wonder if George Lucas ever read "The Inner Look"? He was certainly in California in the early seventies when the first Siloists appeared there bringing their strange Experience of the Force with them. Of course there were many alternative spiritual expressions appearing in those days and everyone cool had a Guru. But Lucas's Star Wars film from the late seventies certainly resonates with anyone who has worked with Silo's Experience of the Force even if telekinesis, telepathy, levitation and proficiency with a light-sabre are not among the qualities that we have noticed in ourselves during that work.

Back in the early nineties when our strategy for growing our movement involved going to our immediate environment of friends, co-workers and family, I remember Silvia's hilarious experience at work where one of the nurses in her hospital started referring to her as Jedi Swinden! What's even more extraordinary about this whole coincidence between the works of Silo and Lucas is that the first three words of the famous title of this chapter, spoken by the commander of the Rebels in their war against the Empire, "May the Force [be with you]," sound very similar in English to "May the Fourth" which is precisely the date on which Silo went to the mountains to make his first public appearance and which now

Siloists around the world celebrate<sup>32</sup>. It is also the date of celebration chosen by founders of the new Jedi Religion<sup>33</sup>, precisely because of this linguistic similarity.

In the last UK census in 2011 the Jedi Religion was the fourth most popular religion, coming in after Christianity (70%), No religion (14.7%), Muslim (3.1%), Hindu (2.1%) and then Jedi with 0.7%, or 390,000 followers.

Silo's Experience of the Force is an exercise with mental energy. He describes it as the same thing discovered by Brahmins through meditation<sup>34</sup>. In Silo's Message he also described how he discovered the presence of the Force through meditation over several days. Then rather humbly he concludes, "Finally, I observed that my 'discoveries' were not discoveries at all but arose from the inner revelation at which all arrive who, without contradictions, search for the light in their own hearts."

The experience itself is extraordinarily simple to carry out. You sit down in a balanced position and relax your body, inside and out, and your mind. The sitting position is important because the body should be sending as few signals to the brain as possible; so no crossed arms or legs. All sorts of discomfort should be eliminated and a position such as sitting on the edge of a firm chair without your back being supported, where your spine is in a vertical position, is ideal. In this posture the brain will resist any urge to get too relaxed and fall asleep.

Then the experience is basically a work with mental images done with one's eyes closed using the "mind's eye"—an expression which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, at least, and was even used by Shakespeare in his play,

32 Of course this only works in English! In Spanish it would be "El cuatro de mayo" (May 4<sup>th</sup>) and "Que la Fuerza este... (contigo)" (May the Force we with you). They don't sound alike at all!

33 <http://www.jedichurch.org/>

34 Chat about the system of G. I. Gurdjieff, Bogota, 1974.

Hamlet. Silo later developed this concept substantially in his essay Psychology of the Image<sup>35</sup> and renamed it the "Space of Representation."

1. *Simply, we remember a crystalline, translucent sphere and we mentally position it outside ourselves and upwards. It doesn't matter how high.*
2. *On the second step we'll slowly bring the sphere down until it's in front of our eyes. Now it can be visualised more clearly.*
3. *We'll try to put this sphere inside our heads. We can still visualise and see it inside our heads.*
4. *We lower the sphere through the neck to the centre of our chest, between the lungs, at the level of the heart.*

*In this fourth step it can be noticed that the image of the sphere has lost its visual representation but now it's become a sensation. The sensation that there's a sphere there, but we don't see the sphere anymore. To visualise the sphere at the level of the lungs is as difficult as to visualise it outside and up, but we can easily visualise it at eye level, inside the head, and when it goes down to the chest. In this fourth step, if we observe and feel the sphere calmly, it tends to increase in volume in our chest as an internal sensation. The sphere increases in volume from the lungs outwards in such a way that a natural, mechanical concomitance between the sphere and breathing is produced. Breathing becomes deeper but we don't concern ourselves with it and let it go deeper. All our mental attention is put at this moment exclusively in the sensation of the internal expanding sphere.<sup>36</sup>*

In Silo's Message he dedicates a chapter to this exercise

35 Silo, Collected Works, Volume I, Contributions to Thought, Latitude Press, 2003, p175

36 From the Telediol conference given in the early seventies in Latin America.

and he further explains that as the expansion exceeds the limits of the body:

*The sensations from your hands and other areas of your body will have a tone different than usual. Then, you may notice increasing undulations, and vivid images and powerful emotions may arise shortly afterwards. Allow the passage to take place. . . Upon receiving the Force you will perceive the light or strange sounds depending on how you usually represent things. In any case, what is important is that you experience an amplification of consciousness, among whose indicators are a greater lucidity and disposition to understand what is taking place.*

When I first read about this experience I didn't understand a word of it, of course. There was no alternative but to try it out. I tried it a few times in our weekly meetings but to no avail. Nothing remotely interesting ever happened. Sometimes I might experience a profound relaxation which Silo referred to as the Experience of Peace, an experience which equates to what happens when the expanding sphere reaches the limits of the body, but I never felt 'undulations'—although to be honest I wasn't quite sure what an undulation was—and I never saw any light and certainly I was never more lucid.

Other people would tell me about their extraordinary experiences, the energy they felt, the light, the emotions, but I never felt anything. It became a matter of growing concern for me that I was unable to have this experience. What was wrong with me? Or more worryingly, was everyone else lying about the experience to sound like they knew what Silo was talking about? Was this another example of the Emperor's New Clothes?

In the year 2002, Silo's Message was published and what I had conceived for years as the Humanist Movement being a vehicle for personal and social change, suddenly

took on a whole spiritual dimension that created a whole new set of resistances in me.

Was everything we did some kind of front for a new religion? I was very concerned. Suddenly we went from political parties to spirituality. Huge gatherings were organised where ceremonies were held. The first ceremony in the book was called "The Service" and was basically an Experience of the Force carried out with other people connected to a meditation on a phrase from Silo's Message and a kind of prayer, a request, for something positive to happen to ourselves or to a loved one.

I hadn't been to church apart from weddings and funerals since I was about nine years old with school. My mum wasn't religious and had never pushed it on me or my sister. When I was very young though I did show a great deal of interest in the Bible stories we learned at school. My mum told me one time that she was sure I'd go into the priesthood, so keenly did I talk about these subjects at home. However, by the age of ten, I was starting to have grave doubts about the existence of God. It started with all the earthquakes, wars, famines and diseases that were always in the news. I couldn't believe that the God we were being told about would allow such things to happen and the idea that all of that must be part of 'God's greater purpose' and that we lacked faith was such transparent bullshit. Plus there was the domestic violence at home, and despite my most fervent prayers God never intervened to alleviate my mum's suffering. I couldn't accept this huge failure on God's part so I came to the conclusion that he didn't exist. I also therefore took the logical metaphysical steps that there is no heaven and no hell. When we die, we die. That's it. It's all over. Thank you for playing.

And I had no problem with these conclusions. I became very accepting of the fact that one day I'll die. Around this time though, I also started to become fascinated

by the paranormal. My interest led me to reading about ghosts, the occult, witchcraft and characters such as Alastair Crowley. TV series such as Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World amazed me. So much was my interest that years later when it came to investigating university courses I actually looked to see if any British university offered Paranormal Psychology as a degree course.

I never personally had a paranormal experience myself though until I arrived at University. It was Sikin from Kenya who introduced us to Ouija boards. She and her friends at boarding school had done it as a game and one night she suggested that we tried it. I immediately jumped at the chance and with several friends we spent many nights during our first year staying up until the early hours of the morning engrossed in this extraordinary pastime.

It was very simple, we took a small table; one that we had in our bedrooms. We took a lightweight container such as the top of a can of deodorant spray, 28 small pieces of paper arranged in a circle with the 26 letters of the alphabet and a 'yes' and a 'no'. Then Sikin would start the proceedings by trying to make us relax but normally we did this after an evening in the college bar so we were relaxed enough. And so she would intone seriously, "Will a friendly spirit please enter the glass?"

And of course the first time she said it we all immediately started rolling about on the floor in uncontrollable laughter, so ludicrous was this request. The first time took us lots of attempts before we got all the laughing out of our systems. It was the most ridiculous and amusing thing I'd certainly ever heard!

However, once the humour was behind us we could start asking questions. "Is someone there?"

And I swear on my life that the deodorant cap started to move towards 'yes'.

"Are you a good spirit?"

'Yes'

"Do you know anyone in the room?"

'No'

"Then thank you, you may leave."

I could not believe what was happening. I had my finger on this plastic cap and it was moving. We moved on to the next spirit.

"Do you know anyone in the room?" Yes.

"Who?" L-O-U-I-S-E

And we had a Louise around the table!

Sikin asked Louise to take her finger off the cap and she continued to ask questions.

"How do you know Louise?" B-G-F-R-A-X-T-Z-K

Totally incomprehensible.

And so it went on. We couldn't get anything useful out of the conversation. And yet that cap was moving, sometimes it was a very weak movement, but other times it was very vigorous, even anxious to communicate.

Night after night we tried. I took it very seriously in a scientific way, as did my friend Rob. All of us thought that it must be someone pushing it, even unconsciously, but we never had any proof. One night it was just three of us around the table: Sikin, Rob and I.

"Do you know anyone in the room?" Yes.

"Who?" S-I-K-I-N

Sikin duly took her finger off the cap, leaving Rob and I.

"How do you know Sikin?" N-I-G-H-T-C-L-U-B

"Really? Where?" L-O-N-D-O-N.

Sikin had no idea who she could have met in a London nightclub, so often had she been! She tried to narrow it down a bit.

"Who was I with?" Z-A-I-N-U-L

Once more, Rob and I were constraining ourselves not to laugh out loud at the strange name, but Sikin was sitting open-mouthed. How had the cap spelt the name of one of her best friends that she'd never even mentioned

to Rob or me before? Rob and I, not coming from very cosmopolitan backgrounds, had never heard this Indian name before and to our childish minds it just sounded funny to us. Neither of us could have invented it and then convincingly pushed the cap across the table without the other one realising what was going on. Sikin wasn't touching the cap either. How the hell had it moved like that?

We didn't get any more answers that were more astonishing than this and a spirit that knew me never entered the room so I couldn't verify it against my own experience mainly because I didn't know any dead people at that time.

Exams descended on us and we lost interest in this phenomenon but it made me think: Science cannot explain away all my experiences. Most of them it can, but there are a few experiences in life that Science doesn't have the answers to. There are forces within human beings that are unexplained.

When a person dies in their sleep, one moment there is life, the next moment it's not there. Nothing has happened to change the chemical composition of the body, yet life is not there anymore. What is it? Is it possible that there is a spirit? A soul? Transcendence? Does life continue in a different way after death? I learned in my physics lessons that energy cannot be created or destroyed it can only be converted from one form to another. What happened to the energy of life? What happened to this Force that Silo spoke of? I'm not sure I had the answers, but Silo was convinced in the reality of transcendence and all I could do was just believe in his conviction.

All that changed though in 2002 with the Retreat of the Force.

## Retreat of the Force

I was trying to remember precisely when it was in the UK that we organised the Retreat of the Force—a four day retreat somewhere quiet without internet and mobile phones. This retreat was scheduled to take place right after our biannual meeting of the Humanist Movement which that year was taking place in London. Then suddenly I remembered it must have been in 2002 because it coincided with Brazil winning the soccer world cup and Brazilians from our council had come to London and then totally disrupted the schedule by insisting that the main meeting be delayed a few hours so that they could go and watch the final in a Brazilian Bar on Tottenham Court Road.

There are some forces in nature that are too great to oppose, such as the force that binds Brazilians to the television during a football match, so we just had to accept the situation and be happy for them when Cafu, their captain, held the trophy aloft and a big impromptu Samba poured onto the streets of central London.

Two days later and 16 of us set off to a remote farmhouse in South Wales which would be our base for our intense work with Silo's central experience. We were friends from four continents including Filipinos,



Chileans, Brits, North Americans from the US and Canada, and a Sri Lankan.

I remember being very apprehensive about this retreat. Generally, personal work was never my preference. I was more inspired by the social action, but I did recognise that personal change would have to go hand in hand with social change and, after all, I appreciated that I suffered sometimes for various reasons and these workshops always gave me useful tools to deal with those situations. Nevertheless four days away from the world, immersed in personal themes was a daunting prospect. But, I was driving people to Wales in a hired car so I couldn't back out.

The retreat itself was very easy going in terms of the schedule. We worked three or four times a day with relaxation, the Experience of Peace, the Experience of Force, the ceremonies in Silo's Message, reading different chapters in the Inner Look and interchanging at length about their meaning. I wrote notes during those days (because we were recommended to) and I still have my little notebook from back then.

I started off going into an increasingly bad mood over the first two days. I couldn't let myself go into the experience, I had too much noise in my head and I had some stupid song constantly repeating itself. Here are some of the comments I wrote down:

"The image of the sphere was poor and there was no register of it in my heart and subsequent expansion. My usual climate [mood] of disappointment and frustration has manifested itself."

"My concentration could not be maintained and eventually my frustration returned."

"If someone said I was free to leave and meant it, and it was easy, I probably would."

Then on the second day, I got angry about soup! I'd been holding back my growing frustration until some

trivial incident with powdered soup occurred and I exploded and stormed out of the dining room and went to lie down for a while to calm down my nerves. After this it seems that things started to improve.

The problems that people generally have with this experience are: underlying tensions in the body, a too fragmented personal situation, too much noise in the head and too many expectations about what will happen in the experience. A very important part of the experience is just letting the mind follow what is being said but in my case this was always difficult. I have this internal "I" which is always watching out for any sign of something interesting to happen in a state of tense expectation. There's "me" in my head saying, "Is something happening, yet? Come on, when's the Force going to come? Hurry up!" and so on... With all the pressure it's no wonder the Force never wants to show itself.

When the third day dawned I think I was really ready to go home but at least my anger had gone and I was left with a kind of resignation to the fact that I was stuck in Wales for another two days. My "I" had clearly got tired of the whole experience. We had breakfast and then Julian<sup>37</sup>, the retreat coordinator, called us for the first Experience of Force. It was around 11am.

Here are the notes I took afterwards:

"I still feel weak writing this down. Something incredible just happened and I still can't control my emotions. If that isn't the Experience of the Force then I'd like to know what is."

For the first and last time in my life the sphere turned into a sensation in my chest. It had a totally different quality to all the other times I've ever worked with it. The sphere came to rest in my chest and turned into a sensation. It was as simple as it's written. Then it started

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<sup>37</sup> Julian Burgos from Chile.

to expand and then as it says in the book, my breathing started to alter and become deeper. It continued to expand and it grew until it was outside the limits of my body and I was inside a sphere of sensation.

Then something extraordinary happened, I lost control of my body, I felt impacted by a huge energy. My breathing was altered and I couldn't do anything to stop it. It wasn't pleasant or unpleasant, I didn't feel happy or sad, I was just taken by a Force I've never experienced before.

My internal "I" must have been furious at this because suddenly it woke up as if it was saying, "Hang on. Wait a minute. You're having an Experience of Force without me, you bastard!!" And almost as suddenly as the Force had hit me, it went away again.

But all the others in the room had barely started their own experiences and I had had the most intense shock to my body and everyone else was still trying to get into it. I had to leave the room. I went to the bathroom and sat down and I could feel a huge emotion start to emerge from very deep within me. And this was rather awkward because as Brits we're kind of trained from birth that we don't show emotions. I can probably count on the fingers of one hand the times I've cried. Once was the day I got my exam results and was accepted into university, the second time was after meeting my father, the third time was the day I left university, the fourth time was when Princess Diana died (but this was the morning after I told my mum that I was gay, so I think it was just a delayed reaction to that) and the fifth time was about to hit me in a big way. I could feel it.

I tried to calm down and after a while I could hear that people had finished the Experience of Force in the big room so I opened the bathroom door and went to join the rest of the crowd. At that moment Selene, a Chilean living in the USA, was emerging from the room; a big, soft motherly woman who loves everyone and everything

and who I felt was a bit 'New Age' for my liking and not serious enough to be a Humanist! She looked at me and I dissolved into tears. I cried like a baby on her shoulder for about ten minutes. I can't ever remember crying like it before or after and I will always be grateful that Selene was the first person to come out of the room and find me there. I'm not sure I could have cried on anyone else's shoulder like that.

I remembered the sentence from the book. "Later you may notice increasing undulations, and in a short while vivid images and powerful emotions may arise." Now I knew what he meant by undulations, at last! Later that day I tried to describe the experience to another person in a totally inadequate way. "It's like an orgasm but it's not centred on your sexual organs, it's outside the body, it's on the surface of your skin and not sexual in any way."

Certainly I now understood the theme of powerful emotions too. The effect of the Force remained for the next two or three hours. While talking in the group with others, sometimes the tears would come again with me unable to stop them. Eventually though I regained my composure. The Sri Lankan was so disturbed by my behaviour that he suggested that I stop. Of course now there was no power on Earth that would have made me stop!

The remaining day and a half in the retreat were uneventful except for that same night when we went for a walk in the moonlight and Ted from Chicago and Natalie scared me to death by jumping out behind a tree and screaming at me. I blame them for never having another experience of force ever again!<sup>38</sup>

At the beginning of day four we were asked to write down our comprehensions and what we would like to take away from the experience:

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<sup>38</sup> This is a joke.

“I know the Force exists through my own experience. I don’t have to believe it any more. I have gained a better understanding of the need for personal work in my life. I have a lot of unresolved crap to deal with which I don’t even know about. I want to spend more time practising the experience now that I have had it once. I want to take more control of the Force. I want to share the experience with others and help them to have it. I want to become more like a person who doesn’t suffer. I want to be relaxed and laid back and full of peace, force and joy.”

I haven’t made all of those last items my reality yet, but some of them I have. And the point of the Experience of the Force is not to feel that huge impact and then turn into an emotional wreck, the point is that when the Force can be experienced and managed, it opens a huge new world of possibilities. With management of the Force comes “an amplification of consciousness, among whose indicators are a greater lucidity and disposition to understand what is taking place.” Although the newcomer may first encounter strong emotions, as I did after thirteen years of trying<sup>39</sup>, beyond that lays a huge source of energy which can be made available for Humanising the Earth.

In a conference given by Silo in 1975 in the Philippines he said:

*When we work with the Force we’re doing nothing more than a general kind of acupuncture. Some acupuncturists have this theory: they suppose that there’s energy moving throughout the body and in some points of the body the energy is scarce, it doesn’t pass and as it can’t pass through this point, the point becomes*

<sup>39</sup> I have to say that some people have a great disposition to the work with the Force. On one occasion I gave a copy of Humanise the Earth to my friend James in Nairobi and he came back the next day and described the experience of the Force he’d had with his eyes open, while reading the chapter: the first time he ever read it!

*sick. When there’s an overcharge of energy, when there’s a lot of energy in a certain point, that physical point is also working erroneously. It seems that there’s an art to liberating energy in the overcharged point, and in making it circulate through the discharged points. If this can be achieved through this art, the energy circulates appropriately, then sicknesses disappear. When we work with the Force we know that the energy circulates. The contradictions between our ideas, our emotions and our movements tend to disappear because the energy’s circulating. It’s a kind of energetic massage. It’s a kind of tonic. That’s why we say that it’s similar to general acupuncture. It’s clear that our intention isn’t to cure illnesses but rather to distribute energy appropriately, to massage this energy that’s erroneously distributed, and therefore allow the potential that all of us have to manifest, to allow its development to be stronger, with more force.”<sup>40</sup>*

In 2005 I had the chance to tell Silo about my experience and I explained my sadness that I couldn’t repeat the experience. “Don’t worry,” he said to me. “The fact that you’ve had it means that it is an experience that is always working within you.”

“Yes,” I said, “but I’d like to be able to master it so that I can project it to others. I imagine that it must be fun to be able to project it.”

“Yes, it is,” he replied with a big smile on his face.

Wales, for me, marked a before and after in my relationship with Silo’s Message. If the Experience of Force was available to everyone in the right circumstances, it must mean that everything else that Silo wrote about in the Inner Look could also be true. In the second chapter of the book he writes, “I know how you feel because I can experience your state, but you do not know how to experience the things I am speaking of. Therefore, if I speak to you without self-interest of what makes human

<sup>40</sup> Chat about the Inner Religion, the Philippines, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1975

beings happy and free, it is worth your while to try to comprehend.”

I was able to verify that Silo did in fact know more about my inner world than I did and my faith in the truth of what he was trying to transmit grew to new heights. It may be that I haven't been able to experience everything in Silo's Message but I'm confident that one day I will.

## Education for Nonviolence

Success in taking our Movement to Africa was a great compensation for the complete failure to Humanise Europe but in some moment the huge disparity between the two continents became too much to accept and it became necessary to try something new.

Since going to Africa I lacked a permanent presence in London which was needed to develop the Humanist Party and then this got worse when my job took me to Cologne, Germany where I lived in a hotel, Monday to Friday, for 18 months. Once that was over, nothing of what I'd previously built in London remained, but I did get a British Airways gold card and enough air miles to fly to Argentina!

News from other countries was showing that the theme of Education for Nonviolence was resonating. People everywhere were developing training courses that took fundamental elements of humanist philosophy and turned them into adult education courses. Silvia and I thought we'd have a go at doing our own rather than translate material from South America and in any case Silvia was looking for a good way to end her book<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> From *Monkey Sapiens to Homo Intentional*, by Sylvia Swinden, published by Adonis and Abbey Publishers Ltd, London, UK.

Initially what we wanted to do was create a course of six workshops that took two to three hours and acted as an introduction to humanist themes but would also lead people to the conclusion that the only way to achieve internal peace was to also work for peace in the world. We hoped that having reached this conclusion, the workshops would then be a way to start a new process of structural growth in the UK.

We took the basic elements of: Violence in all its forms; Relaxation, the Experience of Peace and body postures; Valid Action; Discrimination; One's Virtues; and Organisation, and we turned them into workshops. It was an interesting process because for the first time I was creating something on a larger scale than just a poster or a leaflet and it required us to look through all the materials produced over 30 years for the parts of our doctrine that we thought could be most useful.

In the first workshop we introduced the theme of violence with one of my favourite speeches given by Silo in San Francisco in 1982:

*We denounce violence as the fundamental problem of the present moment.*

*All individual and social conflicts stem from a situation of violence.*

*We distinguish between numerous forms of violence and we aren't just referring to its most evident manifestation, physical violence, which we find in wars, torture, terrorism, assassinations, assaults and physical punishment.*

*There is also economic violence known as exploitation.*

*There is racial violence known as discrimination and segregation.*

*There is also religious violence known as fanaticism or intolerance.*

*And there is also a psychological violence that begins within the family, it continues to be found in education, and it ends up putting the young to sleep and turning them into nihilists. This*

*in turn opens up an abyss between the generations and this abyss threatens the stability of the individual and society.*

*So let's not be surprised when someone responds with physical violence if we've subjected them to inhuman psychological pressures or the pressures of exploitation, discrimination or intolerance. And if this response should surprise us it's either because we're an interested party of the injustice (in which case our "surprise" is also a lie) or because we only see the effects without noticing the causes that determine this explosion.*

*If suicide or mental illness is the road that someone has taken in order to escape their daily reality it's because that person has been subjected to a situation of violence. It's true that there are organic mental illnesses and there are suicides that occur when a person has an incurable disease. But the statistics are swelling; the number of cases is increasing by the day and they do not refer to these physiological problems.*

*These tragic eruptions that seem to us to be simply individual cases are manifestations of a system of violent tensions that pressures human society.*

*Someone might believe that their isolation or lack of communication with others is simply their own personal problem but the fact is that today isolation and non-communication affect enormous groups of people. How could this be then just a personal problem if millions are feeling the same non-communication and the same isolation?*

*Yes, we're against physical violence. We've also manifested ourselves against the bomb in Europe, in Moscow and in New York, as millions of pacifists have done in order to show the world that there still exist enormous moral reserves of peace and hope.*

*But we aren't concerned only with this problem*

*The antinuclear marches and manifestations are fine. But they aren't enough. It's necessary to clarify oneself and clarify others. It's necessary to take on a courageous commitment and to define the positions that we, and others, have with respect to violence. It's necessary to dismantle the bomb that we carry within ourselves.*

The words of this speech are still as relevant in 2013 as they were when they were first spoken in 1982, if not more relevant.

In the third workshop we got to the meat of humanist doctrine: Valid Action—solidarity and coherence. Solidarity is how it sounds: treating people as you would like to be treated and coherence is a fantastically simple way anyone can use to decide on what course of action to take in any given situation. The theory is simple; any action is ‘coherent’, i.e. it makes sense to do it, if three things coincide: my thoughts, my feelings and my actions.

Therefore to know what to do in any given situation all we have to do is consider those three things. In a very old book<sup>42</sup> written back in the early seventies is a short section that stuck in my memory and became very useful when writing this workshop on Valid Action. The section goes:

*True reason in the false heart produces hypocrisy.  
True feeling in the false head produces stupidity.  
True action in the false head produces setbacks, and humiliation  
in the false heart.  
If the action is false and the head true, a void will result.  
When the head, the heart and the action are false, vengeance,  
envy, unease, boredom and the “no” will be produced according  
to the proportions.  
Whoever says “yes” thinks, feels and acts truly and “truly” goes  
in one direction which is triple.*

It illustrates the sensations experienced by different combinations of false and true actions, thoughts and feelings and anyone can see how it works by reflecting on what was happening to them the last time they felt stupid or hypocritical.

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<sup>42</sup> Minor Poetics, written back in the seventies and published in South America. Copies of the text in English can be found online.

I was also impressed to discover in the course of our research how our principle of treating people how you would like to be treated is found in all the major philosophies and religions.

*Do not hurt others with that which hurts yourself. - The Buddha  
This is the sum of duty: do nothing unto others which would  
cause you pain if done to you. - Mahabharata, XIII:114  
No one of you is a true believer until he desires for his brother that  
which he desires for himself. - Prophet Muhammad  
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. - Matthew  
7 v.12  
What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the  
law: all the rest is commentary. - Talmud, Shabbat 31a  
In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all  
creatures as we regard our own self. - Mahavira  
Don't create enmity with anyone as God is within all. - Guru  
Granth Sahib  
Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. -  
Baha'u'llah, tablets of baha'u'llah, 71*

The key elements of Valid Actions are that they are coherent in thought, feeling and action, in other words they are unitive, they also work in solidarity with other people and you wish you could repeat the action. In Humanise the Earth, Silo explains:

*And what is the flavour of an act of unity? If you would recognise  
it, rely on that profound peace which, accompanied by a gentle  
joy, leads you into agreement with yourself. This act bears the  
sign of the most integral truth, for in it, thought, feeling, and  
action in the world are united in the most intimate friendship.  
Yes, valid action is unmistakable; you would affirm it a thousand  
times over should you live as many lives! Every phenomenon that*

*makes suffering recede in others is registered as a valid action, as an act of unity, in the one who carries it out.*<sup>43</sup>

In terms of the results of our workshops, they were as successful as all our other actions. A number of people took part and then drifted away over time. We hadn't found a way to change the balance of forces between Africa and Europe but the experience of these workshops left us with a more profound understanding of the themes dealt with and that in itself was useful and most certainly our actions had been valid.

## Configurations

Each change of level within the organisation was marked by an act of configuration. The first level of Team Delegate required you to put together a group of ten people, a General Delegate had ten Team Delegates, a Coordinator had ten General Delegates and a General Coordinator had ten Coordinators. That was the process and those were the levels you were promoted to on fulfilment of the structural requirements. The levels were formalised at the seasonal meetings on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June and December when a census was taken and membership fees collected.

Ever since I'd participated there was a sense of great anticipation the closer we approached to a seasonal because we could measure our growth, see how we were doing and the new places we were opening. The nineties had been a period of restructuring but towards the end of the decade the first missions were going to Africa and a process of growth started to build rapidly.

I first became a Team Delegate in December 2000 after our first conference in Nairobi and when I went to Buenos Aires in January 2001 for the global meeting I felt that I was part of a growing movement with huge possibilities. I had originally thought that we'd humanise the Earth starting from Europe but it was now clear to me that it would come from places where the global

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<sup>43</sup> Humanise the Earth, in Collected Works by Silo, Volume 1, published by Latitude Press, 2003, page 49

economic system was totally destroyed and change would come from there through necessity. In the Western world there's too much belief that although everything isn't perfect, it's more or less ok and it's a system that can be perfected. This theory works for probably less than 10% of the world's population (the Occupy Movement would say the system works for only 1%). In the rest of the world it's clear that the system is a complete failure.

In this meeting in 2001 the Assembly of General Coordinators was formed and met for the first time in Mar del Plata, Argentina. This was the ambit formed by the first 11 General Coordinators and marked a brand new stage in the history of the Movement because Silo stopped giving "orientation". Until then Silo had outlined how he saw the present situation and the future tendencies, he defined our strategies for growth and the new themes for personal work. Once the people he orientated became General Coordinators in their own rights they then became autonomous and they had to do all this work for themselves!

The Assembly elected a Delegate Coordinator for a two year period, a kind of a chairperson who took responsibility for looking after the administrative tasks needed by the Assembly: a website of materials, the organisation of a committee to plan the annual meetings, recording of new commissions formed to study particular ideological matters of interest to us all, maintenance every six months of a global census and recording the promotions of new General Coordinators. A register was also kept of those General Coordinators who finished their structural process because they had promoted the required number of new members to the Assembly.

In January 2002, the next milestone was reached when everyone who was directly orientated by Silo had joined the Assembly. By this time there were 62 councils working autonomously, we had broken the barrier of

100 countries where humanists were active and Silo took the opportunity of having his hands free from organisational duties to withdraw from the Assembly and put the final touches to Silo's Message. In his own words in that meeting:

*"A book, an experience, and a path... that's the Message. And there we are. And so then, we cut those organisational relations with the Movement. Long live the Movement!"*

And then he said goodbye, got up from the table, walked to the door, let himself out and closed the door behind him. Someone funny got up from their chair after a few moments just to check that Silo hadn't locked them in the room!

In the meantime my projects in Kenya and then in Ghana continued to develop and grow. One year after the meeting in Argentina I was promoted to General Delegate and one year after that to Coordinator and we'd expanded to Tanzania and Uganda. By December 2002 I'd left my job and had enough savings to not work for a couple of years and so I dedicated this time to the growth of my council. In 2003 I travelled eight times to Africa and twice to South America. After all this accumulated work I had the conditions to join the Assembly myself in December 2003. At least that's how it seemed on paper. So with great apprehension I found myself the orientator of my own council: Council 105, and I went to my very first meeting of the Assembly. By this time there were 130 councils and meeting all together in one place would have been a waste of money, so we saved a great deal of expense by organising video conferences connecting four points of the world together: Rome, Buenos Aires, Santiago and Barcelona, the latter being where I headed at the beginning of January, very nervously and ever-so-slightly terrified of what I'd let myself in for! Surely all



of those super-beings in the Assembly would see how unworthy I was to be among them...

Every time I was promoted I had a sensation of being a bit of a fraud to begin with. We always had the members to count on, but we never collected the entire membership fee and this was really against the agreements that had been established. However we could see it in process. It was like we were blowing bubbles that later on became solid spheres. If the configuration wasn't perfect to start with, six months later the deficiency had been compensated. In my visits to Africa there were hundreds of people at our events and social projects were everywhere. The inability to collect the membership fee was a bit of an administrative failure but didn't seem to be slowing down our actions in the world. Also I had a bit of ambivalence towards taking money from Africans and using it to subsidise my journeys when I was perfectly able to pay for myself.

Then strange things started to happen in Kenya. On one occasion I was taken by Rashid, from my team, to visit an Area Chief, a kind of representative of the President in that part of Kenya. He wanted me to explain what the Movement was because he'd heard all kinds of stories about people selling their goats so that they could pay for their children to join sponsorship programmes that then failed to materialise and then there were stories of containers full of goods from Europe that had been impounded in Mombasa and money had to be collected from Kenyans in order to pay the import taxes.

It was clear that something bad was going on and people who had heard about the Humanist Movement were using it as a vehicle to extort money. When I heard these stories I dropped the membership fee completely for my council because I didn't want anyone accusing my team of anything. If we needed money for any activity we

would just collect it when it was needed, cover the costs, and act transparently for anyone to see.

Back in Barcelona however, none of this was a worry. I was flying! I was a bit of a novelty to all the others. Hardly anyone knew me because I had never really had much to do with European humanists because the people in the councils I had been in came mainly from North and South America. I was so glad that I'd made the decision earlier in 2002 to use my air miles to fly to Argentina because there and in Chile over two fantastic months I took Spanish lessons nearly every day and so although my ability to communicate was far from perfect, I could understand everything important and somehow express what I wanted to say.

In hindsight, it was good to be someone a bit new because everyone immediately remembered me. Apart from Jon, who joined the Assembly six months before me, I was the only Brit in the Assembly and he'd gone to Chile for the Assembly meeting. I remember such a great atmosphere in those days in Barcelona. I shared a room with Tito de Casas who'd been in the first groups organised around Silo back in the days before the Movement was called a Movement. He spoke English excellently having lived for years in the USA and he looked after me and introduced me to everyone. I can't remember the things we discussed even, but what remains is a sensation that this environment that I was a part of was extremely important and had the elements necessary to change the world. National coordination bodies were starting to form so that people from different councils could start to coordinate actions in different countries regarding the formation of the organisations launched by the Movement: the Humanist Party, the Community for Human Development and the Humanist Centre of Cultures.

I was very keen to get involved in coordinated activ-

ities, especially in Africa because with the growth of humanism there I was beginning to think again that within five or ten years we would have humanised the Earth. It was a bit like the days after my visit to Florence. I had a new utopian vision of a world humanised by the efforts of those most in need of a humanist future and I was determined to do my part.

As for the configuration of my council, I knew it wasn't perfect and I had a lot of work to do, but I also took responsibility for it and knew that it was my task over time to improve it. I also knew that events in the world were going in our favour and all the deficiencies would work themselves out and that in the future, the new members I would introduce to the Assembly would have all the same formation in our doctrine of personal and social change as I had received and in this way the Assembly would improve in quality because the presence of Africans would make it much more representative of the world's population.

Finally, entering the Assembly opened a new world of possibilities for me in terms of the relationships and friendships I was able to create with others who were opening Africa. My colleagues in the Assembly were motivated and dedicated. They had a global vision of our process and the common intelligence we were able to generate was impressive with the productions of the different ideologically-themed commissions.

Silo had taken his structural project from the first groups formed after the meetings of the Canary Islands in the late seventies and 24 years later he'd created the conditions where he could withdraw from the organisation he himself had created in the knowledge that he'd left it in capable hands. Instead of the megalomaniacs who stop at nothing to make it to the top of political parties, governments, organisations, media corporations and so on, Silo was true to his word and his doctrine. He'd

created his self-destructing council, seen it develop and as events took their course he'd made himself redundant and withdrawn to leave it in the capable hands of others.

He could have stayed in the Assembly, he could have continued to give us orientation, he could have changed the structural form in any moment having decided that the conditions weren't right to give up what he'd created: none of us would have objected to him staying around as our orientator. In fact for many it was difficult to have to work without Silo's close guidance. Yet his insight in the late seventies into the fact that a vertical structure was not the way to change the world, and that the future was a horizontal environment of peers working side-by-side using mechanisms of decision-making by consensus, was a forerunner to the subsequent social movements that emerged in the first years of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Delegate Coordinator

In 2003 Pía, the orientator of the council we were in, came to London as she did from time to time to help us with the development of our own councils. On this particular visit a long-time friend of Pía's from Milan, Anna Polo, also came to visit and one night together with Silvia, the four of us went out for dinner to a rather nice Italian bistro in West Kensington. The conversation turned from one subject to another; no doubt we talked at length about all the news coming from humanists around the world. Anna frequently visited Iceland and India among other places as part of the Support function she fulfilled in her council and in Italy our movement was very strong also.

In one moment we touched on the subject that greatly interested us because Pía had told us in the council meeting in January in Santiago that her project was to promote seven members of the team that she orientated into the Assembly and therefore follow Silo in closing her structural project. Silvia and I had a role to play in that project and Pía was playing with mental images.

What images could be useful to keep in mind as we embarked on the final stages of this structural project? Pía proposed that once we'd finished that project we could take a holiday and go and visit Corfu where, in 1975, Silo and his team of researchers had done all the

investigations necessary to lay the foundations of Siloist Psychology. This seemed like a great idea! We could visit one of the places where a key milestone in our process had taken place with someone who had been there.

Silvia and Anna explained their motivations for continuing to develop strongly the projects they had and then it was my turn to speak. "You know," I said in a rather sheepish and shy way, "I'd like to join the Assembly so that I can take part in the election for Delegate Coordinator..." Surely then I went bright red at my own audacity. "Great, Tony!" Pía exclaimed. "It's a great image!"

The Delegate Coordinator was the only official position in the Assembly. It was a role elected every two years at the Annual Meeting and was a kind of administrator role. It meant a total dedication to the matters of the Assembly and meant you were at everyone's service.

I don't know why, but ever since I'd read the Norms back in 1989 I thought about how great an honour it would be to do such a role and this image was motivating me to continue the development of my council, thereby contributing to Pía's project. I knew I had good administration skills and I knew that if I were ever given the opportunity then I would work tirelessly to help the Assembly function as efficiently as possible. I could think of no better service to give to the Movement.

One year later I was in the Assembly and at the end of 2004 the two year period of the second Delegate Coordinator, Maxi Elegido from Spain, was coming to an end. As the annual meeting got closer and closer my anxiety increased. Did I dare put my name forward? It was true that the first two Delegate Coordinators had been men, and there was a strong feeling in my conversations with friends in the Assembly that it was the turn of a woman to be elected and I concurred whole-heartedly with that reflection. One name that frequently came up in specu-

lative conversations about who could do the job well was Ariane Weinberger from France, among others.

In November 2004 there was a meeting of European Humanists in Budapest. Six hundred activists from around Europe and representatives from other continents came to that meeting which marked a new moment where continental Humanist Forums brought together all our people once every two years. As part of the delegation from France came Ariane and I asked her in my terrible French if we could have a coffee together and, she accepted my offer in her perfect English.

We talked for an hour or so about what was happening in the Assembly, and of course the matter of the impending election arose and I told her candidly that I was thinking of putting my name forward but that if she was thinking to do so too then I would gladly stop those thoughts and support her. Ariane wasn't at all sure that she was going to take part in the election. Many of her friends were encouraging her but she was a long way from making a decision. She also made a wise observation that in reality everyone who wants to participate should do so and if the Assembly really wants a woman to do the job it will elect one and that artificially forcing a female candidate into the role by male candidates not taking part in the election was almost undemocratic.

We agreed to both meditate on the matter and leave our final decisions until the days before the meeting and to stay in contact.

January came and Maxi's term was over. I'd also had the opportunity to speak to him about the election when we met in Accra, Ghana, during the planning meeting for the future African Regional meeting of Humanist Parties. He'd also been very encouraging that I should participate in the election. Yet I was plagued with doubts and as the date for the election approached I still hadn't decided. That year I took part in the Assembly meeting

at the video-conference organised in Rome. The day before my flight the pressure was too much and I wrote a one-page letter about who I was and why I was participating. I didn't know if I'd send it but I prepared it just in case.

*Dear Friends,*

*Ever since I joined the Assembly I have been considering putting my name forward for the role of DC in this election and I want to take this opportunity to write a few paragraphs about my reasons for that.*

*...*

*In terms of the gender of the DC, twice now we have had a man do the job and statistically it is time for a woman to do the job, however I don't think that the role should be done by a woman just because it is perceived to be a woman's "turn". Those who have the interest and the disposition to do the job should put their names down and let the election choose the result.*

*In terms of my process, well in comparison to the majority of my peers in the Assembly it is short. My first experience of a humanist meeting was in Florence. In terms of my generation, I am inexperienced; I never had a coffee with Silo! I never attended any of the meetings of council 1 (apart from as an observer in Obras Sanitarias). However, as in the system, the generational differences exist and this is all part of the fantastic diversity of the Assembly that we are heading towards.*

*Clearly this is not an election with any kind of political connotation. We are all in complete agreement about the aims of the Movement and the strategy to achieve these aims. It is an election for someone who can give the best of themselves to facilitate the development of the Assembly.*

*Being someone from outside the heartlands of the Movement I frequently spend my time thinking about this. ... However being on the periphery also puts one in the position of having to connect with people outside of their normal circle of acquaintances. For me, my experience in the Assembly has been incredibly rich in*

*terms of my dealings with people I never knew before. Working in commissions, helping to establish coordinating bodies in those countries where my council operates, participating in regional activities in two continents and putting myself at the disposition of the technical team of the current DC has been incredibly useful for me to gain an image of the direction that the Movement is heading in that I didn't have before.*

*So my reasons for putting my name down are simply this: I have the disposition for doing the role and I have the technical skills to work with a team of people and manage change. And this last point is for me the key to the next two years, if the previous two years have seen huge changes in the Movement then the next two years will see even more.*

*The culture of the Movement will move away from its Latin American roots, the interchange will have to adapt to people from different cultures and backgrounds, the Movement as a whole will see the world changing even more quickly and demand from us quicker and quicker responses. As the next DC I would use all my virtues to help the Assembly adapt to that change and help the diversity flourish.*

*Of course even if I am not chosen I will gladly offer my service to whoever will take the role.*

*I encourage others to put their name forward to ensure that there is a real choice of candidates. Without doubt each one would be excellent in the role.*

*With warm greetings of peace, force and joy,  
Tony*

By the time I got to Rome there was still no sign of Ariane participating but Gunther Alexander, a Brazilian, and Miguel Daulte from Spain had put their names forward. Gunther was inspired by a dream with Silo and I think Miguel wanted to make sure that at least there was a contest with more than one candidate. I spoke with Marianella, Marilena and Giannis, friends from Greece who

were staying in the same apartment as I was and they were fully supportive as they were keen to have someone from a sexual minority taking part.

The first part of the meeting was in a hotel meeting room without connection to the other points. We went through the agenda and inevitably came to the subject of candidates for the election. "Would anyone from the Rome node like to take part?" asked Loredana Cici who was chairing the meeting. This was my last opportunity to speak. There had been no e-mails from Chile where Ariane was participating in the Santiago node. I was terrified but I put my hand up and said I'd like to participate in the election.

The Italians in the Assembly didn't know me any better than the Spaniards had one year before so I read the letter to introduce myself. No one thought I had a chance of winning this election but everyone was very kind and also happy that someone from the Rome node was participating. Finally the meeting ended late and we got back to the apartment at around midnight. Marianella helped me with the translation of the letter to Spanish and we sent it to the e-mail list a few hours after the deadline closed. There was still no news from Chile.

At this stage, although I was still scared about opening myself to the possibility of humiliation, or worse, victory, at least the terrible pressure I felt inside had left me. It had been coherent to take part in the election, whatever the result would be.

When I woke up in the morning and checked my mail news finally arrived from Ariane and she too had decided to do it. Later on she would tell me that she'd been waiting for my e-mail before deciding what to do. So we were four candidates: Gunther, Miguel, Ariane and I.

The mechanism for the election was a triple-secret ballot. These were the rules:

*“The election mechanism will be by self-nomination and secret triple ballot, which in general terms is as follows: a combined definition of the profile of the function for the next two years is produced. Those interested announce their candidacy, a member is designated to arbitrate and a first round of voting proceeds. The votes can be positive, null or blank, all being counted. The count is carried out and a first result declared. There is a pause and there begins a period of dialogue, after which votes are cast again. In this instance, there cannot be any new candidates. It may happen that one or more withdraws, the election continuing with those that remain. In the event that only one remains then their election is automatic. After another pause, dialogue and exchange a third and final vote is done, the result being determined by simple majority. In the case of a tie, new candidates are able to present themselves and the three rounds are repeated.”*

The first round of voting took place at the end of the first part of the video conference on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January and the results were announced. I came third with 50 votes and was very impressed by the result to be honest. Ariane was well in the lead with 88 votes out of 226 potential voters. I was happy. Then things started to get interesting. Miguel immediately sent a message to announce his withdrawal as did Gunther just before the 2<sup>nd</sup> round started. I'd been thinking about it, but decided that 50 was a decent number and that it was worth seeing what would happen after round two. I could always withdraw at the end of that result.

In the meeting room in Rome we remained behind to vote in the second round. Gerardo, an Italian living in Prague, told me, “Tony, I don't think you'll win this time.” I had to admit he was probably right.

The results of the second round came through and to my astonishment I'd received 99 votes! Ariane was almost over half way with 112 votes but it was clear that the Assembly was evenly balanced between which

characteristics they wanted for their new Coordinator Delegate: a woman of experience, well-known by all or a relatively young guy, virtually unknown by everyone. Nevertheless that night I slept well because although I didn't expect to win in the third round it had been a good idea to participate. The Assembly had taken me seriously as a candidate.

The next morning brought more interesting messages. Several of my friends in the Assembly, especially those from the days of working together in Pía's council, encouraged me to banish all thoughts of withdrawing my name (which had been a possibility) and an e-mail on behalf of the Brazilians participating in Buenos Aires told me that they were actively campaigning on my behalf; not for me specifically, but because I represented precisely the 'younger' generation that they were so keen to see become the protagonists of the Assembly.

Anyway, there now became a real possibility that I could be elected and as if I wasn't nervous enough I received a phone call from Maxi who was coordinating the election process from Madrid to explain what would happen during the transition from one Delegate Coordinator to the next. He had the same conversation with Ariane who no doubt was listening much more attentively than I was.

We gathered together again at the video conference centre and the third round of voting took place. Everyone found a seat around the table. I sat on the edge close to the back of the room, away from the tables not expecting to need to move. The four points of the conference were connected. We could see Maxi in Madrid about to announce the results. In Santiago, the Chilean friends were so confident of Ariane winning that they'd put her in the centre of the room ready to immediately take over coordination of the meeting.

Maxi was getting ready to speak when suddenly Jon

spoke to me across the room in great surprise, “Tony, you’ve won!”

I had no idea why he was saying this but it later became apparent that once the election had been closed on the computer then the results were available to anyone looking at the Assembly website. I thought Jon was just being optimistic and then Maxi announced the results and it was true. I got 115 votes to Ariane’s 105! The room erupted into applause. The rooms in Buenos Aires, Santiago and Madrid did likewise. I felt like something very cold and heavy had landed in my stomach. I felt sick!

I was totally in the wrong position. I couldn’t remember what I had to do next, but space was made for me at the head of the table so that I could sit and coordinate the rest of the meeting. The applause continued and I tried to restart the meeting but I began to stammer and lost the entire thread of what I was meant to do now. And then in that moment the Gods of Technology smiled on me and intervened seeing my distress and the video conference system fell over and we lost contact with the rest of the world.

Then everyone in Rome turned to look at me once more and the room erupted into applause again. The doors burst open and the translators from the cabins in the room next door ran in to give me a hug. It was incredible. None of us could quite believe what had just happened. An unknown guy from a country totally irrelevant to the process of the Movement had just stolen the election from one of the most competent women the Assembly could ever have chosen. It seemed that youth had triumphed over gender considerations.

The connection was down for only about five minutes, but it was precisely what I needed to compose myself, get some water, read the notes that Maxi had given me and find out what the next thing on the agenda was.

The video conference restarted and I introduced the

next item on the agenda. Through the video conference screens we could see that something was happening in Buenos Aires. People were getting up and moving around. Then Tito’s voice echoed through the speakers from Madrid. “Tony, can you wait a moment, people have gone to get headphones for translation.” It seems that no one in the Spanish speaking world had appreciated that once they’d elected me, I’d speak in English. I could have chaired the meeting in Spanish perfectly well and I did it several times later on, but one point I was keen to develop from the start was that the Assembly needed to open up to new languages, especially English and French. In fact before the third round of the election, I had written to Ariane to ask that when she is elected could she please coordinate the meeting in French. We had translators available in every place precisely for that reason!

It was as if in Buenos Aires and Madrid people were saying, “What do you mean he’s not going to speak in Spanish?” It was a shocking realisation for them and it was highly amusing to all of us who’d spent years in meetings dependent on the goodwill of friends for translation from Spanish in order to follow what was being said. Finally, the meeting came to a conclusion with a very moving ceremony of well-being for one of our colleagues from Kenya who couldn’t participate and his wife who had been in a road-traffic accident.

I suffered with guilt for many days because of Ariane and when she arrived back in Paris she invited me to come and visit the next weekend and I accepted immediately. She was very kind to me and perhaps she felt that it had been coherent to have taken part and then fortunate to not be elected, knowing the work involved. She offered me her total support as did everyone in the Assembly. The messages of congratulations were very kind.

So that was it, I’d been elected. I successfully chaired the rest of the meeting. We’d taken a number of deci-

sions on the formation of new commissions, including one on our position regarding sexual orientation, and the meeting was over. I don't think any of us could still believe what was happening. Unexpected would be an understatement, unbelievable was a better description. In that moment the Assembly changed for ever. It was as if the Assembly, through a lack of other willing candidates, had decided that it had to change from something comfortable and known and instead opted for what was a minor revolution. Having humorously mentioned that I'd never had Coffee with Silo seemed to have been the decisive element in this election.

## **The Humanist Movement position regarding Sexual Orientation**

One of the things I've been most proud of during my time in the Humanist Movement is the production of a position statement giving a clear point of view regarding the discrimination of those with minority sexual orientations and gender contradictions.

I first started to question our lack of clarity in January 1998 at the international meeting in Buenos Aires. Thousands of people had travelled there on account of the invitation to all of us to witness the meeting of Coordinators and General Delegates. The meeting was held in the Obras Sanitarias stadium and it was on this occasion when Silo gave his masterly description of "What is the Humanist Movement Today?"<sup>44</sup> Despite the large numbers of people at the meeting, there was only a handful who were openly gay or lesbian.

This was quite an intense meeting for a few reasons. Firstly I nearly missed it! I bought a ticket to Argentina that would have me arriving on the morning of the meeting, but it was agreed in advance through Silvia that she would send someone to the airport to collect me. My flight arrived on schedule around 9am and the meeting was due to start at 11 or something like that.

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44 [www.humanistmovement.net](http://www.humanistmovement.net)



After waiting in the arrivals area of Ezeiza International Airport for a while it was clear that no one was waiting for me. Very few people had mobile phones in those days, so you were dependent on people fulfilling their agreements! You couldn't call to find out where people were.

I started to get worried. I actually had no one's phone number! I hadn't written down the address of the stadium and I didn't remember its name so I couldn't just take a taxi there either. Also I still couldn't speak Spanish and I didn't know which hotel I was staying in. Just when I was wondering what the hell I was going to do, coming through arrivals were other humanists who were on a flight arriving more or less simultaneously. I didn't know them, but I recognised them from their T-shirts, I guess. They did have people to meet them and I managed to get a lift.

Then those days in Buenos Aires were intense because of Homer! Homer Hobi is a loud Californian who's been in the Humanist Movement right since the very early 1970s. Homer should write his own auto-biography because he's a great character. He's also gay and we were participating in the same council orientated by the Canadian film-director, Danny Zuckerbrot. Homer was very open, very relaxed and very loud. He was also starting to question the invisibility of LGBT people in the Humanist Movement and had been researching all the areas in our official materials where the wording specifically referred to heterosexual relationships such as in the Guided Experience, "My Ideal" which talked about the partner of the opposite sex. Homer wanted to have all of these minor things changed, to leave no doubt of our position.

The thing about being gay or lesbian is that you never stop coming out of the closet. There's always some ambit of your life you haven't told explicitly, or some new acquaintances who assume you must be straight. So we

go through our lives always having to explain to these people, "Actually I'm gay."

It was like this for me in the Humanist Movement in 1998. I had come out to my friends and family in the UK, but this was my first international meeting since I'd come out so I had to go through the process again. I spent a lot of time over those days in Buenos Aires being around Homer and he would always introduce me to others as "Tony, my gay friend from London!" When he did it there was the first initial feeling of discomfort but he did make it easy for me because I didn't actually have to tell anyone.

Silo suggested to Homer that he write an article for the electronic magazine that was being produced at that time in Movement circles. I helped a little together with a bisexual woman from New York, but the e-magazine wasn't widely circulating and it didn't feel like it was making an impact.

Finally in 2004, in a meeting of Humanist Parties of the European Region in Budapest I met Marianella Kloka and Marilena Livanou from Greece. In the past they used to be a couple and they were both LGBT activists in Athens. In fact a big proportion of the council they built in Greece was gay and lesbian.

Marianella ended up chairing the working group on Discrimination for the region but in Budapest she organised the first ever event I attended in the Humanist Movement on the LGBT theme. I had recently joined the Assembly of General Coordinators and Marianella and Marilena were already there and so we started to plot how we could get the Assembly to adopt an official position with much more weight than anything previously produced.

In the next Assembly meeting in January 2005, we took the opportunity to propose the formation of a Commis-

sion to define a position<sup>45</sup> on the subject and so it was formed. We produced a well-researched and referenced document about the present situation of LGBT rights around the world, we gave it a historical and cultural perspective and we denounced those we found responsible for the generation of discrimination. It was unanimously approved by the Assembly.

Here is the final part of the document.

## THE HUMANIST POSITION

With regard to sexual orientation, the Humanist Movement is opposed to all discrimination of those who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) or who engage in fully consensual same sex relationships.

When people are discriminated against, whether it is on an individual or social basis or by the state, it is a dehumanising action negating their intentionality and freedom. Discrimination objectifies people and is a form of violence, based on primitive commonly held theories like “human nature”.

Considering that this discrimination is very pervasive, members of the Humanist Movement denounce this discrimination whenever it crosses their paths.

We have the vision of a Universal Human Nation where everybody, including LGBT people, is able to live freely without having to hide themselves or live their lives in a way that they register as violence which is the basis of

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<sup>45</sup> Among those helping to produce this position were Marilena Livanou, Andrés Koryzma, Luis Alves, Susana Córdova, Huga Tormen, Roberto Cruz, Giannis Papagiannopoulos, Gabriel Serra, Claudie Baudoin, Homer Hobi and Dennis Redmond.

contradiction and suffering. We aspire to a society that goes beyond tolerance where LGBT communities and people together with other discriminated minorities can unite forces in the construction of a new society where the human being is the highest value, and respect, liberty and dignity are fully exercised.

We have not considered in the current work, how heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality and being transgendered work at a biological level, nor have we considered the arguments from geneticists and naturalist sociologists who promote their theories that are frequently based on homophobia or morality entrenched in religious dogma. Whereas the “gender” or “sex” of a person is a matter of biology and anatomy—a natural state of the body—why a person wishes to have a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex or why a person believes that they were born with the wrong gender continues to be a matter of debate. The result of this debate will not change our position because for humanists this is part of the rich diversity of humanity. We have taken as our starting point the fact that people who identify themselves as LGBT exist today, have existed throughout the history of humanity and will certainly exist in the future.

Freedom, intentionality and one’s personal, social and historical transforming action characterises the human being and it is in this context that the expression of ones sexuality finds its meaning and even more so if scientific advances allow modification of one’s own body.

As human beings over time we have humanised sexual expression. Sexual activity is no longer only a means to reproduce. It is an activity that encourages a rich communication, can mobilise the profoundest of images and produce the strongest energies and emotions in human beings. Sex has also, throughout history, been a tool of

social control. To quote Silo<sup>46</sup>: *“If you ask me to explain further, I will tell you that in reality sex is sacred, and it is the centre from which all life and creativity springs, just as it is from there that all destruction arises when issues about its functioning are not resolved. Never believe the lies of the poisoners of life when they refer to sex as despicable. On the contrary, in it is beauty, and not in vain is it related to the best feelings of love. Be careful, then, and consider sex a great wonder, which must be treated with care, without turning it into a source of contradiction or a disintegrator of vital energy.”*

We reject all aspects of philosophies, moralities, sciences and religious dogmas that seek to repress the expression of sexuality.

Quoting Silo<sup>47</sup> once more; *“The control of sex by a particular social or religious “morality” has served purposes that had nothing to do with evolution, but the contrary.”*

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46 The Inner Look, Chapter 17, para 6, 7 & 8, Humanise the Earth, Collected Works by Silo, Volume 1

47 The Inner Look, Chapter 17, para 3. Humanise the Earth, Collected Works by Silo, Volume 1

## Coffee with Silo

After my election victory I became kind of famous as the guy who'd never had coffee with Silo. People fell into two camps: those who thought I should immediately seek the opportunity to have a coffee with him and those who thought that having a coffee with him now would ruin my credibility. I have to say that I wasn't in the least bit concerned about my credibility and would have happily travelled half way around the world for such an opportunity. However I never held out very much hope that such an occasion would materialise. After all, I was very much in the Movement and Silo had taken himself out of it so that he could continue to develop his spiritual message. What possible reason did I have to justify inviting him for a coffee when I was sure he had many more important things to do?

In May of 2005 though, we did meet on the occasion of the inauguration of the Park of Study and Reflection in La Reja, Buenos Aires, Argentina. General Coordinators attending that event were taking the opportunity of the mobilisation to take part in an informal gathering the day after the celebrations and I'd been promoting the idea and wanted to attend personally.

Silo took this opportunity to especially recognise the Humanist Movement whose efforts had built the park:

*Though located in distinct points, many of us are filled with joy at this celebration. We are joyful because we need to thank neither governments, nor corporations, neither the powerful, nor the mass media. Everything here, as in the other parts of the world has been built thanks to the efforts of the Humanist Movement and a group of people who, without financial speculation, or calculation of personal benefit have supported the development of our Message.*<sup>48</sup>

My encounter with Silo then was unexpected on my behalf as the day before the inauguration I went to the Park with a couple of friends just to see how the preparations were going on. I was near the meditation hall looking around when out of the Centre of Studies walked Silo. There were a few others also around and he was greeting them so I went over to say “hi” too. We had met before a couple of times, the latest one being in Santiago when he launched Silo’s Message and officiated a Ceremony of Recognition<sup>49</sup> in which I participated. Apparently Silo had passed comment after watching the ceremony on video and seeing me there in the crowd, “He’s very well placed in our things.”<sup>50</sup> I don’t know if it was a premonition of events to come, but certainly I considered myself very well placed.

On this third encounter he greeted me with a big smile and said, “We should go for a coffee sometime!”

Of course someone had told him about my funny line in the letter to the Assembly and it made me laugh that he’d remembered it with so many other things to attend to. We exchanged a few words about the preparations and

<sup>48</sup> Words by Silo at the Inauguration of the Park of Study and Reflection, La Reja. [www.silo.net/en/present\\_milestone/index/4](http://www.silo.net/en/present_milestone/index/4)

<sup>49</sup> From the book, *Silo’s Message* by Silo, the text of which can be found at [www.silo.net/en/message/index](http://www.silo.net/en/message/index)

<sup>50</sup> “Él está muy bien puesto en lo nuestro.”

how great the occasion would be but we didn’t get our diaries out to plan a time to meet.

In those days, I was in contact with Maxi occasionally asking him for advice about something or other regarding the Assembly and he wrote to me about this coffee with Silo and suggested that I contact him directly and see if a time could be arranged when Silo would be in Spain in September of that year. I was very interested in the idea and I did write to him to ask about the possibility to meet.

Despite these interchanges I still wasn’t entirely convinced that we’d get the chance to meet up though because of his schedule and the mass of other people who no doubt hoped to see him.

So I bought my ticket to Spain, in any case there was an activity planned in the new Park of Study and Reflection, Toledo, to inaugurate the monolith—the stainless steel cylindrical pillar that recorded the year the park was opened—and it would be nice to attend it. Finally, I got a message to say that if I would be in Aranjuez on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September then there was a chance to take that coffee together.

As it happens the inauguration turned out to be a great opportunity to meet friends and see the typically Spanish landscape of this park for the first time. It’s dry and dusty, on the side of a slope but with the most amazing view over the countryside: on one side there are olive trees and on the other side are fields for other crops and in front of you, you can see for miles.

Silo was there and he was going to be officiating one of the ceremonies. He took his time waiting for the crowd to settle and then quite unexpectedly went walking round the park again, waiting for the conditions to appear in which to give the experience. I watched him and the way he works and I also watched the people watching him and it struck me that it must sometimes be very lonely to be Silo. People were behaving in an odd way around

him like he was an exhibit in a zoo, watching to see if he would do or say something funny, fascinated by this rather elderly, yet youthful man.

In one moment, the conditions he was looking for clearly appeared and so he performed the ceremony which was followed by others. When all the formalities were over everyone started to hug and chat as we normally do on such occasions. Silo went walking around again and I had to go shortly because of my return flight to London. It was then that I noticed that he was alone once more in a circle of people watching him. I found it quite uncomfortable to see him in this situation so I just broke into the circle walked up to him in the centre, gave him a hug and said thank you for spending time with me. I explained that I had to go to the airport and that I very much hoped to see him again in the near future. We exchanged goodbyes and I left.

Some people saw Silo as some kind of demi-god, a Jesus Christ kind, a Buddha or a blissed-out hippy. He was not like that, he was Latin and Argentinean. I saw him when he was animated, emotional, laughing hysterically, enthusiastic and even one time to my great surprise I saw him when he was frustrated and pissed off. He expressed the full spectrum of human emotions.

From my side, I met him several times afterwards and I never treated him as if I was in awe of him, despite the fact that I was. I always treated him like a wise, friendly, approachable grandfather figure; he wasn't old enough to be my grandfather, but in any case that was how I saw him. I like to think that he appreciated this treatment and that hug in Toledo Park because I know that if I were in his situation I wouldn't have liked to be treated that way by the crowd.

On my way back to the airport I reflected that I had totally blown the great opportunity earlier in the afternoon to meet him. I had been thinking for months about

it and wanted to plan it well in advance so that I would gather all the questions I wanted to ask him about his philosophy, his life's work and his vision of the future. In the end I didn't do it because until I was sat there with him I didn't believe it would actually take place.

I arrived by car to the house where Silo was staying with several others on this visit to Italy and Spain. It was about lunch time but for those in the house it was clearly shortly after breakfast and people were still drinking coffee and getting ready for the day. Silo was upstairs and when he came down, he invited me outside to a place in the courtyard where a table and chairs were set out and we settled down to chat. Shortly afterwards someone very kindly brought us coffee to make the scene complete.

I don't think I really knew where to start but first I wanted to clarify that he wasn't expecting to talk about the Assembly and he assured me that he wasn't the least bit interested in the subject. Having gotten that out of the way, I proceeded to ask him many things about his books, his ideas, some historical stuff, how he saw the projects of the parks, and Toledo in particular. We spoke about God and the Disciplines—the meditation practices that Silo had been working on with small numbers of people that would later be opened up to anyone who wanted to take part. I was considering the Energetic Discipline and I consulted him about it. We laughed a lot and he told me anecdotes. I told him about my experience with the Force that I had had three years previously and how interested I was to be able to master it.

He told me about an experience when, in the seventies, he was travelling around Europe with friends and wanted to come to London. He took a ferry from France and landed in Dover and was treated so rudely by the border guards that he went back to the waiting room and sat there until the boat started boarding passengers and got back on the boat and went back to France. He never tried

ever again to come to the UK. Finally, I asked him how he preferred to be called because we referred to him by three names: Silo (which he used for his books), Mario (which was his actual name) and Negro which was a nickname. “Call me Negro,” he replied.

You would have thought that I would have recorded the encounter. I didn’t. I did however write notes back in London but then you might have thought that I would have valued those notes so much that I would have backed them up to read later. I didn’t. And now they are lost for ever. Yet somehow these facts seem to be in keeping with the totally half-asleep way I dealt with this meeting.

I have nothing tangible to remember of the occasion apart from a long-range photo taken in a paparazzi fashion by Manuel Hidalgo. I have no notes and nothing to refer to. There was no one else in the chat so I have no one else’s memory to rely on. Yet, I am so happy I had the chance to meet and talk at length with the man who changed my life. If I could go back and re-do it for sure I would do it better but that’s not possible. I’m left with the positive memories, the grainy photo and knowledge that I got the chance to briefly meet one of the most brilliant minds of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

## Humanist Forums

Siloists love getting together in big international gatherings. Internationalism is one of our strongest characteristics and despite the fact that we struggle to communicate sometimes verbally with people from different countries, the reality is that this never stops us getting together whenever the opportunity arises and as long as we can afford to travel.

In the first years when I participated in the Movement we had an opportunity every six months to travel and meet our friends but after the formation of the Assembly, the organisation started to fragment into many autonomous units who met wherever it was convenient for them. It would have defeated the purpose of gaining autonomy if we all agreed to meet in the same city.

Towards the middle of the first decade of the new century the spiritual<sup>51</sup> need we had to get together again led to the launch of initiatives called Regional Forums<sup>52</sup>.

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51 In the sense of need of the spirit.

52 In reality Humanist Forums date back to 1993 when the first Global Forum took place in Moscow right in the middle of a Constitutional Crisis in Russia which led to hundreds of deaths in Moscow. Humanists attending from around the world were unable to leave their hotel for several days. It was precisely at this time also while Jon and Silvia were in Moscow that an IRA bomb

In Europe it started with a planning meeting in Prague with 200 or so people in 2003 and that led to the European regional meeting of the Humanist International in Budapest in November 2004. Two years later Europeans met once more in Lisbon in November 2006 and our last gathering was in October 2008 in Milan.

In Latin America the process started in 2004 with a gathering in Costa Rica, followed two years later with a Forum in Quito, Ecuador in October 2006. Two years later we met for the last time in La Paz, Bolivia in November 2008 when President Evo Morales famously came to the opening ceremony and said, "Sometimes journalists ask me if I'm from the Right or the Left, but I'm neither Right nor Left, I'm Humanist!"

Although Latin America and Europe had more people available for organising such events, other regions also joined the party with the North Americans organising a forum in November 2007 in New York. Africa started with a pre-meeting in Accra, Ghana in November 2004 followed by a Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in January 2006 and finally another Forum in Nairobi, Kenya in October 2008. The Asia-Pacific Region met to make plans in Chennai, India in November 2005, and this was followed by a Forum in Mumbai in March 2007.

Of all of these events I only missed out on Prague, Costa Rica and Mumbai. In 2005 and 2006 I was the Delegate Coordinator of the Assembly and I did everything I could to assist the organisation of these events. I chaired the planning meetings when necessary, I wrote and translated minutes, and I offered encouragement and support to everyone taking part. Every time I could travel, I went,

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exploded outside the Highgate locale of the Humanist Party, the flat above which they were living in. There were subsequent less eventful Forums in Mexico City in 1994 and Santiago one year later. After these experiments Silo did what he usually did, put the subject of Forums on hold and tried new things.

even after I finished my two years as Delegate Coordinator.

There was an interesting development to these forums because although they started off being quite internal meetings of dedicated humanists, by the end we were targeting a lot of energy towards building relationships with other organisations and individuals who were making interesting contributions in the field of peace and nonviolence. The forums that we organised were essential in creating relationships that we later built on in the World March for Peace and Nonviolence.

Silo himself took a keen interest in these forums, having been in all the first three in the nineties and then again in Lisbon and Quito. On one of the last occasions I met him in Punta de Vacas Park of Study and Reflection in November 2009, right after the entire structure of the Movement had been thrown out and a new organisational form prepared, I asked him, "Negro, are the Regional Forums still a relevant form of action?"

"Of course they are," he replied without hesitation.

The forums that I most fondly remember, though, all took place in Africa. The first planning meeting in Accra was organised by Jon and I and it was on a very small scale. Thirty-four Africans from twenty-one different countries took part together with a number of Europeans who travelled to help out.

Accra is an incredible city. It is by the coast, flat and sprawling out in all directions for miles and miles. The cold season is when the temperature drops to 27 degrees C. You come out of your air-conditioned building (if you are lucky enough to be in one) and a film of sweat forms on your skin and remains until you take a shower. The traffic is a nightmare and at virtually any time of the day or night you are guaranteed to find yourself in rush hour. For me the nicest thing about the place is the vegetation. Beautiful tall leafy trees are on every street corner and

mango trees are everywhere. I dream that one day in the future I might have a little place in Africa with a mango tree and eat them fresh as they drop onto the sand.

Despite the poverty I never felt safer in an African city than I did in Accra. I would travel around with Kafui from my team and I never once experienced a sensation of insecurity there. Kafui was a very special guy and passed away far too early in his thirties in 2010. He contacted me through an interest in politics and we became friends through my regular visits to Ghana. He also came to Kenya on occasions in order to take part in our council meetings.

He was a strangely religious guy. I don't think he had a definite religion, he would just pick and choose the bits he liked of different Christian and Muslim denominations and leave the bits he didn't like. Once in Nairobi when we shared a hotel room together he woke me up at 5am with his vigorous prayer ritual. We would discuss bits of the Bible and the theme of God. He knew that I didn't believe and he found this fascinating. How could someone without faith in God be trying to change the world? We would laugh over all the things that are banned in Leviticus and the contradictions that fill the Bible from cover to cover. "What about eating prawns?" I asked. "An abomination," he replied. But he didn't care about those details and he saw Siloism as Christian even if Siloists reject the label. In this way he wasn't very much different to Gandhi who saw himself as a Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Christian who preferred the Hindu tradition. Somehow Kafui could see what we all could see, which is that the roots of all religions have a humanist basis. It's what's built on that basis which is so incoherent and violent.

Unfortunately in no other respects was Kafui like Gandhi! He didn't get angry easily, but when he did, he exploded. And he was involved in a million different

things. One time I organised for him to take part in a humanist retreat in Accra with friends from a different council and he arrived so late and then couldn't stay for the whole of the first day that he was kicked out of the retreat and he couldn't understand why his behaviour was unacceptable.

Despite these difficulties, he had an incredible capacity for contacting people and was always taking me to see government officials, traditional Chiefs and MPs to tell them about whatever activity we were working on. I enjoyed working with him very much.

In Accra, the streets come alive at night once it gets dark and the temperature drops a bit. For a preparation meeting it was a good place and the atmosphere was amazing because it was the first time that African Humanists from different councils working in different countries had the opportunity to meet together. Right from these first encounters you could see the signs of an emerging African Siloism.

Siloism in this sense is hard to define because it's not just what you read in Silo's books. It's the experience of being together with others, united in a common project, with an internationalist outlook. It's a sense of humour, a sense of being relaxed in each other's presence, a sense of trust towards others. It's a sense of belonging, a sense that nearly all the best moments of my life happen with these people. It's an openness and a willingness to share hopes and dreams and be wildly idealistic in the knowledge that the moments shared with these people are the moments that make life truly worth living because back there in the real world, joy and happiness are sucked away by the pressure to survive in a world that really doesn't care about you. All of this is to love the reality you build and by definition to Humanise the Earth.

And this is what could be sensed in that first meeting. You can tell a gathering of Siloists, not by the contents of



the talks but by the spirit and warmth generated by the participants. It was here in Accra, on a very small scale because of the numbers of people but it was inspiring for those of us from outside Africa who really didn't know how this meeting would go. What were we creating in Africa?

The final declaration was written by an international team and read by a Kenyan woman and a Senegalese man. It was very moving, by the end some of the Europeans were in tears, so strong was the emotion generated by these words:

*Dear Friends!*

*It is my pleasure to stand in front of you in this colourful inauguration of the steps towards an African Humanist Regional. This day something good, great and big has happened. The Humanist Movement has found its roots in the heart of Africa*

*Africa our Motherland  
Africa the Black Continent  
Will finally get to know and find peace  
Peace brought by her children  
Members of the Humanist Movement*

*I'm overwhelmed that we have conceived this first African Regional Meeting in Accra, Ghana where history seems to repeat itself. It was in this country that the first president, Kwame Nkrumah cried out for the unity of Africa.*

*We are still standing in front of a fundamentally fractured Africa, and we need to think about and build the future of Africa. This new inspiration of constructing a Humanist Africa is helping us to reconcile with our past and opening the door to the future; a humanist future for a Humanist Africa in a Universal Human Nation rich in diverse contributions with the same rights and possibilities for all.*

*This profound sensation that we felt in Accra guides us towards a new direction that will overcome the division by different countries which are all in a state of weakness.*

*We can affirm that a new Humanist Africa will be born but the spread of this sensation will depend on us. We would like to ask all of you to stand up.*

*We came from a difficult past  
Many of us live in a difficult present  
But if we are able to spread this humanist message of Accra  
We will be able to build a better future  
A Humanist Africa!!!*

*Let us think now of the best we can give to our sisters, our brothers and our children to humanise this continent.*

*An education and health care available for all.  
Quality of life dignifying the value of African people.  
An Africa of Human Rights, without discrimination, violence or wars, but with justice, peace and equal opportunities for all.*

*With the best in us we are wishing you PEACE, FORCE AND JOY FOR A HUMANISED AFRICA.*

Still these words convey power and emotion even today. My favourite personal experience of Forums though came in Nairobi 2008. The number of people participating had grown as had the number of countries sending delegates. The difficulties of languages were growing and somehow we had a task one evening to identify who would be the Regional spokesperson due to the planned resignation of the temporarily-appointed Mozambican, Ivan Andrade.

We congregated some 150 people into the largest meeting room of the conference centre after dinner. It wasn't at all clear to anyone how we would reach such a decision and I don't know how it happened but I ended

up facilitating an interchange of views in two languages. All the Africans were sitting on chairs in four or five rows around a circular space in the middle and around that all the Europeans were standing and observing, wondering how it would go. I opened up the discussions and by way of framing, I asked Dani Horowitz from Switzerland to explain how things in Europe worked with the Spokesperson. With the context given we opened up the possibility for candidates to present themselves. Two appeared, a young man from Mali, Balla Drissa Doumbia, and another from Mozambique, Michel Ussene, who was by this time standing next to me in the centre of the circle helping with translations from English to French.

We then opened up discussions. Everyone wanted to speak and we let everyone say what they wanted to say. The meeting was loud, with a lot of laughter, a great sense of humour, a heart-felt interchange of views about the characteristics required of a Spokesperson and it went on for what felt like hours without a break. We were clear that we wanted a unanimous opinion. This meant that one of the two candidates would effectively have to be persuaded to withdraw because it was clear that both candidates could have done the job excellently. In some moment the young Malian became convinced that Michel would do the job better and withdrew as a candidate.

This description doesn't adequately convey the energy generated in those interchanges or the intensity. No one got frustrated or angry, no one tried to impose their views on others. No one treated anyone else with anything other than respect for their views and interest in their opinion.

All of us, including the observers, were exhausted, yet exhilarated by the time the experience had finished because it felt that we had achieved something extraordinary: we had effectively found someone who could speak on behalf of the Humanist Movement for an entire

continent, someone to work alongside Tomás Hirsch from Latin America, Chris Wells from North America, Sudhir Gandotra from Asia-Pacific and Giorgio Schultze from Europe. Africans had chosen an African to speak for Africa.

The delight at this experience was surpassed though the following day in a moment when I realised that the process of Humanisation in Africa was no longer dependent on outsiders. A huge gathering had been organised in Uhuru Park to celebrate the Forum. Thousands of Kenyans took part and it was a great party and a big success. Later that evening, there was a kind of unspoken understanding that the Europeans were in need of more familiar food, so we went to an Italian restaurant in downtown Nairobi while everyone else made their way back to the conference centre where a discussion was due on the impending World March. We ate and chatted for a long time and I was fully expecting the meeting at the conference centre to be abandoned without the presence of Europeans but when we returned full, a bit tired, and not really ready to start another long discussion, I was astounded to see that the conference room was full with all the African delegates and they were working very well without the Europeans. In that moment I knew that my aims of coming to Africa had been achieved. We had formed African Siloists, we had given them the best of ourselves in order that they may take this project in their own hands, claim it as their own and take it forward with or without foreigners coming to guide them. It was one of the most beautiful moments I ever had in the Movement.

Since those days, Humanist Forums as a way of social expression of our project have not entirely disappeared. In West Africa, an annual Forum of Humanists takes place and the World Centre of Humanist Studies has developed an international Symposium which has many

of the elements of the former Forums, most noticeably, of course, the joy of getting together.

Forums in general were a great excuse for Humanists to come together. In those forums we gained in spirit and inspiration. We charged our internal batteries for the task of humanisation of a world that has fallen apart, morally and psychologically apart from economically. In those meetings we imagined the world we wanted to live in and what we could do to make those images materialise.

## Why do fools fall in love?

Reading until here you might think that after I met the Movement and resolved my sexuality then my life transformed into a blissful utopia. You might think that armed with all these wonderful tools to resolve tension and eliminate suffering I would have been floating around life like some kind of smiling Buddha. In fact I always found it strange that Silo started his movement by reaching out to people who felt themselves to be failures<sup>53</sup>. I never really connected with this sentiment until many years later.

You see, I knew my life was blessed beyond measure even though I came from a poor background. I had had the fortune to be born in a country where the education system allowed me to fully develop myself in a way that prepared me perfectly for a life of success. I'd been to the best university in the world, my career was great and by the age of thirty I was a director of a company in which I was a significant shareholder. I was earning an obscene amount of money. This led me to a financial situation that is unimaginable for the vast majority of the world's

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<sup>53</sup> "My teaching is not for the triumphant, but for those who carry failure in their hearts," was the message on the first posters and graffiti.

population. How could anyone feel like a failure in such circumstances?

I never did, and failure wasn't my motivation in being a Siloist; in fact one of the phrases that resonated with me was from the Thesis of the Humanist Party where it says, "Before thinking about their origin or destiny human beings find themselves in a particular vital situation—a situation they did not choose."<sup>54</sup> Given that I hadn't chosen my situation I felt that my role was to bring the situation of the world at least up to the standard that I'd been fortunate enough to experience. Even today I justify my activism on the basis that changing the world for the better means that people around me in the world will be less violent and suffer less and this will make for a happier world for all, including myself. Expressing it this way makes it sound a bit selfish, but why would anyone not want to make the world a happier place for others and for themselves?

However with time, the subject of failure did start to resonate. I experienced some significant financial disasters. I have never speculated with money in stock-markets but I have lost a lot of money on costly attempts to develop businesses. You can guarantee that any time I had to exchange money from one currency to another, the following day the rate would change to my disadvantage and continue in that direction. This happened particularly when I moved to Poland in 2008. The same thing then happened four years later when I moved to Hungary.

Nevertheless, the area in life where the theme of failure has caused me most pain is in matters of the heart. I am, in fact, a big romantic despite how others may see me. I have said elsewhere that I don't cry often and this is true, even in my worst personal relationships,

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<sup>54</sup> Thesis of the Humanist Party.

yet somehow every time I watch a stupid Hollywood romantic comedy I will end up in tears at the happy endings. It's quite pathetic and most embarrassing when it happens on flights!

Although Siloism has not been able to prevent my suffering in many relationships, it has at least helped me to get out of it and I am quite convinced that my life without a coherent set of principles to live by would have been much worse given the easy access to alcohol and drugs in the world.

I think the biggest heartache I ever suffered was with a guy I met in 2006 called Ben. We met in a nightclub one Friday and he was good-looking, charming and funny and loved 80s music. We danced all night and when we parted I gave him my number but he didn't give me his, which I thought was a bit strange, but he said he would call me. I didn't believe him, but in fact the next day he did and we arranged to meet on the Monday.

We met in a bar in central London and shared a bottle of wine. After a very short while the subject turned to things like what you do for a living, where you live, etc. and he was very evasive and I realised he was hiding something. My intuition works very well in these situations and I said to him, "You're already in a relationship, aren't you?"

"Yes," He replied. And then the next realisation hit me like a train.

"You're married, aren't you?"

"Yes." And then the next one...

"You've got kids, haven't you?" And he looked at me sheepishly and nodded.

"I've got one little girl and my wife's pregnant."

At this moment the most coherent thing to have done would have been to shake his hand and say something like, "Well this has been a fun conversation. It was nice

to meet you but I've just remembered that I promised to go and visit my sick mum," or any other terrible excuse.

But instead after a second shared bottle of wine I invited him to come to my place for the night. When I think about it now it was just such a stupid thing to do, but he was nice. Also I have a weakness for people who need saving and this one definitely needed saving. He was a complete mess.

I think I fell in love after that first night and it was terrible because for security reasons he said I couldn't have his phone number which I could understand but it drove me crazy because I'm someone who always likes to be in control of every situation, or at least on an equal level of control. In this case I was dependent on his e-mails or his phone calls and we would meet up once or twice a week when he could make an excuse to his wife. I feel evil about this now but he was going to have to leave her sooner or later. He was clearly a gay man who had made some terrible, terrible decisions.

Fortunately I was planning a three month trip to Kenya and although I was devastated at the thought of leaving him I knew that it was the best thing to do. I had hoped that when I came back from Kenya we would start again and we exchanged e-mails every week, but apparently on the first weekend I was away he met someone else. When I came back from Kenya he told me and I was broken-hearted! I could have accepted him going back to his wife, but to another man... It was very hard. The strange thing about this was that he knew that he was going to have to resolve the situation with his wife and he insisted that I had to help him through it because I was the only one who gave him any sensible advice, which was true, I had told him everything I knew about coherence and solidarity and we sat and made plans for how he was going to deal with the situation, especially with the pregnant wife. In the end, instead of waiting until the pregnancy

was over and letting her recover and telling her in the least bad way, he got drunk one night stumbled home at 2am after a night out with the new guy and confessed everything. How she didn't give birth right there and then I don't know, but somehow she survived.

Nevertheless through all of this I was suffering like crazy. My heart was torn apart. I understand the register of depression because in this condition you just feel like you're under a huge weight. Every day I woke up and told myself, "This will pass." It didn't feel like it but I knew it was true and sure enough with time, I did get over it, but it took me about six months. The most helpful thing during this time was the fact that I had friends with whom I could make a catharsis along the lines of that recommended in Self-Liberation. Many times I would visit my friends, Jane and Suzanne, and they would listen to everything I had to say while I discharged all my accumulated tension. I recommend never keeping things locked inside. If you have a tense situation, tell someone you trust. You might not be able to find the solution by catharsis but it does make it easier and in the process you can see the situation more objectively and the points of view of others enable you to see things differently. They can also help you with low self-esteem because in situations like this you can feel like there's something wrong with you. Another useful trick also comes from a knowledge of the centres of response. If your emotions are very strong move the body. Exercise in a gym, play a sport, go for a long walk, make your body tired. Exercising the motor centre is the most effective way of discharging the emotional centre.

Interestingly I now see that nearly all my best disasters have come from the same club I met Ben in. A few years prior to Ben I met a Colombian, Ernesto. He was another good-looking guy who needed saving. I took him into my home and saved him because he needed us to register our

partnership with the immigration authorities so that he could apply for a UK passport, otherwise he'd have to return to Colombia when his visa expired but after a very short time, things started to go wrong with us.

He was always criticising me, my appearance, my weight, my cooking, everything. He treated me very badly. He needed money and I gave him lots of it. It was never enough. Our sex life was terrible and in this respect I think one of the best pieces of relationship advice ever to be found is in a song covered by Cher from the film *Mermaids*, "If you want to know if he loves you so, it's in his kiss. That's where it is. Oh yeah!" I have always found it to be true that when a relationship is going bad, the intensity of this most intimate of gestures is the first thing to disappear.

We stayed living together because he needed the visa. I was working as a consultant and was going all over the country and abroad to visit clients. Then one day he confessed to me that he was HIV positive and had contracted it from a former partner in Bogota and my world fell apart for a few days until I was able to take a test and verify my own status. I couldn't believe that we'd been together for so long and he hadn't thought to tell me this piece of information. The relationship was effectively over for me even before this confession so once the paperwork came through from the lawyer I asked him to leave and he went to live with a new boyfriend he had already started to see during my absences from home. He said he had no money, which was true, so finally the easiest thing for my mental health was to give him £5000 and tell him to be out by the end of the week.

It took me a long time before I started seeing anyone else.

In fact I was so long without a partner that I seriously considered moving to Argentina and was making initial plans in 2003 when, on another visit to that same club,

I met Gareth. This one was perfect! He had a job, a car, his own flat, he was my generation, we shared the same sense of humour. It was great. He liked to drink, but I didn't think too much of it and for three months we had a fantastic relationship together and I was in love again!

Then one night he got totally drunk, confessed to being a manic depressive and an alcoholic and that for three months he'd been trying so hard to behave well but he couldn't do it anymore.

The relationship changed immediately, from one of a couple to one of parent and child. He fell apart emotionally. He had an extraordinary capacity to drink and gain energy in the process and then in some moment his body would just stop functioning and he would collapse. I would find him unconscious in the living room, sometimes with cuts and bruises. He would then spend the weekend lying on the sofa with a hangover while I went shopping, cooked and cleaned for him and nursed him back to a condition where he could function and go to work on Monday.

It was terrible for a further 18 months. Every time I compromised more and more on the relationship, eventually relying on a shared sense of humour and a friendship to justify staying together because all other elements I thought we had in common had disappeared. His drinking got worse and in his frustration he would also start to verbally abuse me, degrading everything I did, especially in the Movement. He hated it when I went to Africa. I also discovered how terrible a thing alcohol is in this condition. I don't consider myself as someone who drinks a lot, in fact in these days I virtually never drink alcohol, but in those days I did and I noticed that when I had alcohol inside me I would take all of his verbal abuse personally and when I was without alcohol I could see it for what it was: the only way for him to express his

internal contradictions. Once I understood this I immediately stopped drinking in his presence.

During those 18 months I realised that there was no future in this relationship but I was already in my thirties and starting to think that I might never have a successful one. This is why I compromised and compromised. This continued until one day he started to add drugs to the alcohol. It started with cocaine and ecstasy tablets. He knew I didn't approve and he would hide them in the house and take them when I wasn't looking. Then very strong prescription pain-killers started to arrive from the USA. He would take enough tablets to anaesthetise a horse and spend the weekend almost in a coma. The second time he did it I left him, once more devastated. I realised that I couldn't save this one. It was very sad and left me feeling terrible for weeks.

My most spectacular relationship disaster though happened in 2008. Again I repeated my usual behaviour of finding someone who needed saving. This one, Pawel, was Polish, stunningly attractive and in need of help. He came along in a moment when I needed a big change in my life and I was looking for a reason to leave London. I persuaded him that we should go to live in Poland and open a bar together. I didn't want or need to work in a bar to earn money, but he was without qualifications and without a future in Poland. Being the manager of his own business would have avoided the need for qualifications and relying on an employer to take a risk by hiring him.

We talked for weeks about this possibility. I took a bank loan secured on my flat in London and we went to live in Krakow. Almost immediately things started to go wrong. It had been a mistake to bring him there. I realised that he had gone to live in London for a reason: he was running away from Poland and its conservative attitudes and systemic homophobia. Now, in my experi-

ence Krakow, apart from being one of the most beautiful cities I've ever been to, is also a very cosmopolitan place and very gay-friendly. It has a large student population and many tourists. Several multinational companies have set up large offices there and the economic development is impressive. In such an environment attitudes always tend to be more open and tolerant.

Nevertheless Pawel started to dress in black in case any item of coloured clothing might show his sexual orientation to the Polish public. He started to suffer from panic attacks in the street and on the trams. He couldn't function properly. Very shortly after arriving he told me, "Look, I can't open a business with you. I don't have any qualifications and I'm scared it will all go wrong." I was a bit shocked because we'd talked about it so much in London, but given the other behaviour I was starting to notice I agreed that it wasn't a bad idea to abandon the bar plan temporarily. He said he wanted to go back to school and finish his qualifications and I decided that I would learn Polish as part of my plan to start a humanist project there. The World March was already on the calendar and I was interested to develop a route between Moscow and Berlin. I made up a budget for our living expenses and despite the fact that neither of us had or wanted a job I worked out that there was enough money for both of us to last for one or two years before having to deal with the issue.

The longer we stayed in Krakow the worse he became but we were kind of tied to each other and to Poland by that stage because I had lent him a lot of money so that he could renovate a flat in his home village which was in his name but in a terrible state of repair. Also I had no interest at all in returning to London. The last job I had done in the UK involved a 90 minute journey to the office and another one on the way home. I had been working in the UK telecommunication industry since I left university

and it was getting more and more tedious every time I started a new contract. Poland for me was a chance to change everything in a new landscape.

It was in this relationship that I really understood the truth behind the phrase in *Humanise the Earth*: “There, in the heart of your beliefs, lies the key to what you do.” Pawel had convinced me about his desire to finish his qualifications. He had enrolled in a weekend school, I had bought him the books he needed and a laptop. He started off well but after less than a month he had developed a huge fear about going to school. He would go out on a Friday night and get totally drunk and then be unable to function on the Saturday. It became more and more clear from his actions that despite what he told himself and told me he had no belief that he would finish school.

It then became a further repeat of Ernesto and Gareth and I spent a further nine months with someone who criticised me for everything I did, the way I dressed, my weight, the fact that I never used expensive cosmetics or spent more than 15 minutes in the bathroom getting ready. I have never had such an intense need to use our tools of personal work. The ability to disconnect from mental tensions was essential, the ability to see the criticism as something that had nothing to do with me but was just some projection of his internal violence, the ability to clench my fist and relax it to thereby send a sensation of peace through my body were all learnt during my experiences in the Movement and never did I use them more than in that relationship.

Eventually one day he went out got so drunk that the next day he couldn't remember anything of what he said to me and I told him that it was enough. The relationship was over. I didn't care about the money anymore, I just wanted him to go back to the UK and leave me in Krakow, where I happily spent the next year and a half without

a relationship but instead sharing a flat with a friend, Marcin.

I started to re-evaluate everything I thought I knew about relationships.

What are the elements of a relationship? Friendship, a common project, a warm domestic arrangement, mutual support and sex, among others. I found that I got three of these elements from my living situation with Marcin. We never had sex, we didn't have a common project, but in all other respects we were the perfect couple. We never argued, we looked after each other and we had a great friendship. I realised that the only things lacking were a common project and a sex life. I knew that I would never find a couple with whom to share a common project unless I found it in the humanist movement, and the community of gay Siloists in the world is sadly small, especially in the more peripheral places where our people can be found.

I have observed many couples in my life and I have noticed that the most successful ones are a partnership of two individuals: two unique individuals who gain in strength and energy because of being with that other person. It is a condition where two people make a common project to build a life together, but not at the expense of all other things. It's a situation where one of Silo's general laws of conduct applies: there exists a “a certain proportion, in which one tries to give order to the most important things in one's life, dealing with them as a whole and not allowing some aspects to move ahead while others fall too far behind.”<sup>55</sup> People in the successful relationships I've seen don't disconnect from all other aspects of their lives in order to dedicate themselves to their couple.

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55 Silo, *Letters to my Friends*, Letter 1. *Collected Works*, Volume 1, published by Latitude Press, 2003, p433



It was then that I realised that I didn't in fact need a relationship at all. Having a relationship might be a nice thing to have, but it wasn't an essential element of life. Through experience I also came to the conclusion that to tie yourself to one person in a bad relationship through fear of being alone is even more frightening than being single.

Still, I kept on trying and even after the failure with Pawel I was still willing to try one more thing...

I have never ceased to be amazed by how badly people are capable of treating each other. This final experience is the most extraordinary thing I ever did. Not because of the emotional trauma I felt at the time, nor because of the financial cost or the period of time over which it happened but because I allowed myself to make the same mistake twice with the same person.

In 2007 I went to Australia for my friend Rob's wedding in Brisbane. My flight was via Sydney and I intended to spend a few days there partly to visit the lonely Siloist Decler who has been valiantly working nearly single-handedly to build some kind of community for over 20 years and partly to take a look at the city to see if I might like to live there. It was in another period of deep disillusionment with London. I immediately fell in love, but this time with the city, the people, the food and then, to my great surprise, on one of my last night's there I met Nigel, a New Zealander. He had all the qualities I like in a partner and we spent a couple of great days together before my flight back home. Once home we lost contact until one day I was at work and he appeared on my messenger system and we chatted non-stop for about four hours. We remained in contact for weeks in a very intense way and I bought a ticket to go back to Australia.

We were quite clear at the beginning that despite how much we liked each other, either one of us could possibly meet someone else in the period before my flight, so we

tried to take the situation very easy, without building too much expectation. Yet, as the time got closer and closer to departure I had a growing feeling that there was something nice here and that this would be a great holiday. One week before I went we were chatting about the places we'd like to see and things to do. It was going to be great and I forgot to stop the expectations from rising.

I woke up on the morning of my flight and sent him a text message: "I hope you're ready for me. I'll be there in 24 hours," to which I got the reply: "I'm really sorry, Tony. I don't know how to say this, but I've met someone else."

I could not believe what was happening. I was about to get on a plane and travel for 24 hours to meet a guy who couldn't wait one more week without going out to find someone else. I was gutted. Again.

This in itself wouldn't be so bad if he hadn't contacted me one year later in 2008. This time I was living in Poland and in the disastrous relationship described above. I told Nigel all about it and he told me that he was so sorry because of my previous trip to Australia and that he had made a mistake with the other guy and he said very clearly that he wanted me to go back immediately to Australia. I wasn't ready to do such a hasty thing again but we remained in contact.

The World March was approaching in October 2009 and I had every intention of going to the first stages in New Zealand, because I'd never been there, and Australia, because I love Sydney.

I told Nigel of my plans and he was very happy and again we made plans of things to do and places to see in the week before I would arrive in Auckland. This time I was confident it would work and again I allowed myself to have expectations and of course the same result happened. I arrived in Australia. He had met someone else, again. He was sorry and I was furious with myself. This time I did something I never do. I deleted all his

contact details from my phone, e-mail, messengers and I never contacted him ever again. I refuse to make the same mistake three times!

I look back on all of these relationship failures now and mostly they make me laugh at my own foolishness. How had I bought all the Hollywood bullshit about the need to be in a perfect relationship and try to make bad ones better because of a belief that I could save the other person? Since 2009 I have re-evaluated everything and put all areas of my life into a better proportion. Personally for me, my circle of friends and the people I share my life with are as important, if not more so, than being in a relationship. The former will last forever if I treat them well, the same cannot be said for the latter. Then again, I have to recognise that I am the common denominator in all my relationship failures, maybe it's best to not to ask me for any advice.

## A Bird named Intent

Fortunately when talking about the subject of failure, I at least find myself in good company.

Silo himself recognised the failure of his project in a speech to the world in Punta de Vacas on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2004:

*We have failed... but we keep insisting!  
We have failed but we keep insisting with our project of humanising the world.  
We have failed and we will fail again, a thousand and one times, because we're flying on the wings of a bird named Intent that soars above frustration, weakness and pettiness.  
The force that animates our flight is the faith in our destiny, the faith in the justice of our action, the faith in ourselves, the faith in human beings.<sup>56</sup>*

Another very great friend and personal reference of mine in the Humanist Movement, Dario Ergas, has also talked about his own experience of failure in a book called the Meaning of Non-meaning that I had the very great

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<sup>56</sup> Silo's speech on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2004 in Punta de Vacas.

pleasure to translate to English<sup>57</sup>. Dario defines failure thus:

*Failure is precisely the sudden recognition of what we believed to be real, not being so.*

*Failure is the experience of recognising that what I believed to be real, what my whole being experienced as true, what my logic showed me to be without doubt, was not so. Failure is experienced as painful, but it is the type of pain that I feel when the dentist extracts a decaying molar or the oncologist extracts a malign tumour.*

Failure, and its associated pain, hasn't only been restricted to my relationships with partners. It has also been present throughout the entire process of developing the Humanist Movement; it's just that I didn't always recognise it. Initially the inability to do anything useful in the UK was frustrating and demoralising but then compensated for by the great reaction I received in Africa.

All of us who went to Africa grew incredibly strongly and quickly. Everywhere we went and spoke about the Movement people wanted to organise themselves into our structural form. The only difficulties we really faced were technological ones because of the very poor IT infrastructure. I built a council of around 10,000 people in four years by travelling four or five times a year for a week, on average.

During 2005 I started to feel that something wasn't quite right. This sensation wasn't limited to what I was building, it was the whole Movement. In some countries we had hundreds of thousands of members but yet we weren't capable of legalising even one of our official organisations. In an election in some place where the

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57 The Meaning of Non-meaning, Dario Ergas, translated by Tony Robinson, awaiting publication.

Humanist Party did exist we could receive fewer votes than we had members. It didn't make any sense.

I had felt that it was ok to grow rapidly because we'd correct any mistakes once the council was configured. In 2005 I tried to fix the problems but by 2006 I realised that it wasn't working so I decided to go to Kenya for three months and really take my time to get to know what was happening on the ground. I wanted to meet the people working in the teams of the people who worked directly with me and I prepared some new training courses to deepen everyone's knowledge of our doctrine. I even wrote a book! Well, it wasn't very original, just a compilation of all my favourite parts of other books put together in one thin volume that I could print very cheaply in Nairobi. It was called, "How to Humanise the Earth".

I also used this time to organise two training sessions for all humanists in Kenya who wanted to attend. We covered many ideological aspects, our three official organisations of the time<sup>58</sup> and Guided Experiences as a form of personal work<sup>59</sup>. Later on I did a third seminar on Humanist Forums as we were preparing to host one in Kenya in 2008.

But during this time in Kenya I spent many days in all the cities and towns where we had people. And I noticed that those working directly with the people in my team—the second instance, in the jargon of the structure—were new people. Despite the fact that my team had been around for years, the second instance was very new and inexperienced. It immediately showed the problem that

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58 The Community for Human Development, the Humanist Party and the Centre of Cultures, later renamed to Convergence of Cultures. These three were subsequently joined with official status by World without Wars and Violence and the World Centre of Humanist Studies.

59 Guided Experiences in Collected Works by Silo, Volume 1, published by Latitude Press, USA, 2003

we had: people didn't stay connected to us for more than a few months.

And with time I understood that there was a fundamental problem with how our message had been communicated. Sub-Saharan Africa has a serious problem since independence and it is a dependence culture that has been developed between the West and Africa. If a white man or woman goes into rural Africa the people of that community immediately believe that there is money involved. Why else would the white man come? Surely he has money. This, of course, attracts everyone who needs money—which is the entire community—and when the white man talks about Humanising the Earth the Africans agree on the importance and do what the white man asks because they calculate that then the money will come. The concept that a white man comes to preach peace and nonviolence and not bring money is something unthinkable. Any African who brings the white man must, by extension, have access to the white man's money. It's like a law of nature.

I investigated and discovered through conversations that the reason the second instance was so new was because the old ones always left after a few months when they finally realised that there was no money coming or after fighting with the orientator of the team and accusing them of stealing the money given by the white man. This was why the second instance was so poorly qualified. For the people in my team it was terrible because they were being accused of all kinds of financial crimes and yet they hadn't received a penny.

Once I'd worked it out I was horrified at what I'd built. Effectively I'd been deluding myself for six years that I had a network of activists because that's what they wanted me to hear and they were deceiving themselves also thinking that the Humanist Movement was a funding organisation. In some cases though, it was func-

tioning as a funding organisation. Many councils set up child-support projects which did a great job of supporting children but nothing to create a network of humanist activists, others did literacy campaigns and anti-malaria campaigns, among others, to great effect, only none of this was changing the world.

In my case, I went back to the basics of building our organisation. I decided that we'd have to rebuild it slowly and it occurred to me that we hadn't been much more successful at building structure in Africa than we had in most other parts of the world. But I have to say I learnt a hell of a lot in the process of failing!

In 2009 Silo was invited to review the situation of the Movement that he'd built and propose changes. I was expecting that he'd turn back the clock and put all those who had closed their councils back in place to orientate them once more and that we'd do everything properly this time. Yet I was very much mistaken and instead he abruptly killed the structure off. He proposed to drop the organisation structure of the Movement and leave in place the five official organisations with a really simple structure as horizontal as possible, each organisation would be autonomous. There would be base teams and these base teams would coordinate to elect a National Coordination Team and a World Coordination Team of 12 people would be elected to deal with things that needed coordination at a global level. To all intents and purposes the organisational heart was in the grassroots, the National Team supported the base and so did the International Team.

It was a big shock to all of us. Many of us were relieved that the charade of building phantom structures was over but personally I was affected very hard by it.

By this time it was nearly ten years I'd spent travelling to Africa to spread a humanist message and it had been a big failure; not a complete failure as a Movement because

many good African humanists remain; and not a failure in terms of what I had learned, the experiences I had and the people I knew; but a total failure of the original plan. My hopes of Humanising the Earth starting from Africa proved as futile as my hopes of Humanising the Earth starting from Europe had been some 18 years previously.

Quoting more from Dario:

*Failure is the state of consciousness when I suffer disillusion. I can only become disillusioned when I've been under an illusion. Illusions are fantasies that I took for reality. In failure, the consciousness starts the search for a new reality, new beliefs that allow us to understand a situation in a new way. The consciousness broadens and searches for new responses which make it grow and modify the world.*

*When we look at the world or at ourselves, we look at it in a certain way. This way of looking, is partly our intention that is launched towards the world and partly a belief system, assumptions upon which we structure all the data that we receive. When the belief system breaks we experience failure and it's the failure of this way of looking. It's not the failure of the intention that was trying to be implemented and completed in the world. On the contrary, now the intention is liberated from a way of looking which held it prisoner. Now this intention has the possibility to build new meanings and realities. New beliefs will occupy the space left by the old ones, but they will open the future to new worlds for us.*

This way of seeing failure is very interesting. If the intentions are good then in reality we must embrace the failures and actually hope that the failure arrives sooner rather than later. We should even be thankful to finally discover that what we have done has been a failure because from our failures we can learn and move

on. Then in this case our intention can be reshaped into a new project, and who knows where that will lead us?

So, two failures down, 999 more to go then. Where's that bird gone? I need a ride to somewhere new.

## The Cause of the Courageous

In 2006 Silo started talking about the danger to the planet posed by nuclear weapons and quite frankly I was shocked that he was turning to this matter now. I'd been scared to death of nuclear weapons in the eighties when it really did feel like a war would erupt at any moment and we would all be doomed to an early death. Sting wrote songs about his hope that the Russians loved their children too and there were movies on the television that showed us how we'd suffer for months and years if we were even lucky enough to survive. For me though, I thought definitely it would be worse to survive and I imagined myself running into the path of an on-coming missile to make sure I didn't have to. One day at school the authorities scared the life out of us by testing their nuclear siren. It was surreal, I don't think anyone was prepared for it as suddenly from nowhere the noise started. It's the distinctive sound of the Second World War: an alarm which is sounded to say that the enemy bombers are on their way and everyone should find shelter. Our lesson stopped while the haunting noise continued for what felt like several minutes. We looked at each other in fear thinking our final moments had come.

Surely 22 years later the theme was old news? The Cold War had ended, hadn't it?

Well, yes it had but what I found out was that the world was still facing a huge nuclear threat. The number of countries with weapons had increased and the general situation of global instability was getting worse. The bombs in existence are hundreds of times more powerful than those used in the Second World War and there are tens of thousands of them in existence. Added to the apparently remote danger of an actual war, is the much more feasible possibility of an accident and on top of that an increasing possibility that a terrorist group could cause havoc with a few kilogrammes of radioactive material.

It was in the face of these concerns that Silo was asked to film a short TV spot which our Movement spent months pushing onto the TV screens of the general public in as many countries as possible. It even ended up appearing on the big screens at all the Serie A football matches in Italy.

*Everywhere people are saying: War is a disaster! Let's give peace a chance. To avoid a future nuclear catastrophe we need to work to surpass violence today. Invading troops must be withdrawn, occupied territories must be returned and arsenals dismantled. These are the urgent problems of the moment. This is the cause of courageous men and women.*

When this short video appeared I felt totally ignorant and I asked the Assembly if anyone would like to form a Commission to study the theme. Within two months we had prepared a final draft which was approved. Never did the Assembly move so quickly. Finally I understood what the problem was:

## EFFECTS OF A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION ON OBJECTS<sup>60</sup>

As with any other bomb, what produces the biggest damage is the shock wave. In the case of nuclear bombs the height at which they are detonated is an important factor. If exploded at a low height they produce a great crater but little damage to the city they are dropped on. If exploded at a level higher than necessary they produce big winds and an electro-magnetic pulse effect but do not destroy buildings and the damage is much smaller. For example: The bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were programmed to explode at a height of 550 meters since that was the distance at which they would produce total devastation.

The winds produced by an atomic bomb are equivalent to those of a hurricane and they usually produce damage to a minimum radius of 25 to 30 kilometres (for a 10 megaton bomb). As if the hurricane-force winds produced by the shock wave weren't enough, the mass of hot gas created by the bomb vaporises everything that exists in the same radius.

A millionth of a second after a nuclear explosion the temperature inside the bomb reaches about 10,000,000°C. However, the majority of fires happen because of other factors, for example: broken gas pipes, burnt wood and papers, short circuits, etc. Residual radioactivity (later on) and instantaneous radioactivity (immediate) created by the explosion spread around a very wide area of several kilometres. Residual radioactivity produces radioactive rain and it usually also affects areas that were not directly hit by the explosion. Depending on the height of the explosion, residual radiation can vary (also influenced by local climate and winds). All the water, the soil and all the food affected by the explosion or the radioactive rain remain contaminated for a long time. There is little experience regarding radioactive rain so the true duration of the contamination produced cannot be determined with accuracy.

Instantaneous radioactivity is produced by gamma rays and the neutrons liberated at the moment of explosion. Today people who suffer

<sup>60</sup> The following are extracts from the prepared document and they are still as true today as they were when we wrote them.

from the physical effects of the explosions in Japan still exist (including the descendants of those that witnessed the explosion).

To these effects should be added the so-called Electro-Magnetic Pulse (EMP). It is necessary to highlight that today everything that keeps a country working has electronic or magnetic equipment at some point of their circuit (water, gas, electricity, communications, etc.). As this pulse produces high voltages, these are then discharged through the existing lines of TV, electricity, telephones, etc. for which they can affect many more kilometres than the actual bomb.

## EFFECTS ON THE FOOD CHAIN

*“A large scale nuclear war could damage the agricultural production by means of a series of mechanisms:*

- a. Brief episodes of cold or icy temperatures during the development of plants, associated with the sharp initial climatic interference or with extreme phenomena taking place during long term chronic climatic dysfunction;
- b. Insufficient duration of the period of development of vegetable maturation for grain crops in middle latitudes, as a result of lingering reductions of mean temperatures of a few degrees (1 to 3 degrees C for some crops, 3 to 5 for most, and 5 to 7 for almost all the important nutritious crops);
- c. An insufficiently integrated thermal period (integration of the temperature during cultivation time) resulting from lingering reductions of a few degrees;
- d. A period of insufficient hours of sunlight resulting in reductions of a few tenths of 1% in sun light, if they persist during the season of vegetable growth; and,
- e. reductions in seasonal rains;
- f. Other possible physical disruptions, among them, ionizing radiation, the contamination of the air (especially in the areas of low ground), local acid deposits, the increase in adverse UV-B radiations;

- g. Interactions with ecological effects, such as letting loose plagues or illnesses;
- h. Interference with energy and technological agricultural supplies, such as reductions in the supply of fertilizers, plague-killers, herbicides, fuels and lubricants for agricultural machinery, spare parts for those machines, seeds, manpower, economic incentives and agricultural and meteorological forecasts”<sup>61</sup>.

## EFFECTS OF A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION ON PEOPLE

*It should be considered that it is almost impossible when the streets and avenues are blocked that a wounded person may receive immediate urgently-needed help, as most deaths occur basically due to not having received timely assistance. A large toll of dead and wounded is due to indirect effects, mainly the impact of objects that have been hurled by the wind. Human beings exposed to the explosion up to a radius of 13 Km will receive significant burns over more than 25% of the body. The direct observation of the initial fire ball causes permanent blindness in people up to a distance of 25 Km.*

*Although, any opaque material may help in the moment of the explosion, people hidden or with thick clothes may still receive burns but these are not likely to be lethal. Every living being receives a tenth of a “rad<sup>62</sup>” per year which is normal and does not generate risk. In general 400 rads are lethal for a human being. A nuclear bomb can generate millions of rads at the point where the explosion begins although this radiation vanishes quickly into the air. Generally if a person receives more than 400 rads it’s because they are in an area already destroyed by the shock wave and have few possibilities to survive.*

*If death doesn’t happen in the first 30 days after exposure to radiation, an adult has many possibilities to contract cancer up to several years after the explosion. Permanent genetic alterations that may affect several later generations not exposed to the explosion also take*

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Journal.

<sup>62</sup> A rad is a measurement of exposure to radioactive material.

*place. Another way in which people are directly affected is through the lung damage caused by the abrupt increase in atmospheric pressure that takes place. There is also a high risk from radioactive rain since radioactive nuclei become absorbed into the food chain. This can be so for the foods ingested by people and by animals.*

*The serious psychological damage taking place in the population should be added to all of this.*

This is the description of a single bomb on a single city. A nuclear war would not be so simple. There would be an exchange of dozens of bombs and millions of people would perish. On top of this, the planet would be sent into a nuclear winter because of the amount of dust and smoke that would be ejected into the atmosphere. The poverty and hunger that already exists in the world would be increased by a staggering factor. It is estimated that a “limited” interchange of 100 bombs would be responsible for the deaths of 1 billion people.

Sorry to make it more depressing but in this scenario we cannot avoid the fact that if any bomb were to go off near a nuclear power plant it would create the conditions for a perfect storm. A nuclear bomb doesn’t kill most of its victims via radiation, it kills via the force of the explosion, but if all the radioactivity inside a nuclear power station were spewed into the atmosphere or into the rivers it could poison an entire hemisphere. People are going crazy in Japan now trying to control Fukushima. If they were trying to control 20 Fukushimas in the middle of a war zone there would be no hope. Power plants would go into meltdown and explode. In the light of this, having even one nuclear bomb or one nuclear power plant in our control cannot be seen as anything other than a crime against humanity.

Our civilisation has developed through the exploitation of carbon deposits: coal, oil and gas and those deposits seem to be nearing a point of exhaustion. Almost every



single item of modern technology has been made due to the use of those carbon deposits. We have a window of opportunity to wean ourselves off of fossil-fuels and fully exploit the wind, solar, geothermal and tidal energy sources that can keep our planet charged with energy for millions of years. Nuclear power cannot be part of the future mixture of energy sources because it's just too uncontrollable. You only need one reactor to explode and it's too big a risk to take: you can't say sorry after it's too late. Money and profit cannot be a determining factor in this decision.

If we don't take the right decisions now we put our entire civilisation at risk and it will send us back to the dark ages because it will take millions of years for carbon deposits to be available in the quantities required to power a future industrial revolution and it's this knowledge that has turned me into an ardent anti-nuclear campaigner whenever I have the free time to do it and it was Silo focussing our attention on this that created the conditions for the Movement to attempt its biggest ever undertaking.

## Marching for Peace and Nonviolence

Some things in life are mundane and boring, some things have to be done out of necessity and others are done out of habit. Very rarely in life do things emerge from the realm of inspiration, and even rarer is the time when those inspired thoughts materialise in the world as inspired actions, and the times when those inspired actions can be felt across the world and that you can be a part of can be counted on the digits of one hand. Such an example is the World March for Peace and Nonviolence which started on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2009 in Wellington, New Zealand and finished on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2010 in Punta de Vacas, Argentina, in the Andes.

Of course the inspiration for this phenomenon was Silo himself who proposed a huge mobilisation of people to our Park of Study and Reflection. The idea for this started to circulate among those of us in the Movement around the beginning of 2008. Silo imagined 100,000 people in the mountains and as there is not enough infrastructure up there to accommodate that many people the idea emerged for a temporary mobile town camped out in the fields around the park with a small army of volunteers preparing food and looking after all the visitors. He knew that his days on this Earth were numbered by this time and I think he wanted to go out in style really making

a big impact in the media and creating a huge wave of consciousness of the need for profound changes in society and the lives of individuals.

The problem was how would we mobilise that many people up there? Getting to Argentina is expensive, even if you live in South America and to get 100,000 people there would require an unprecedented leap in magnitude from the three or four thousand who had gone to the park the previous time he spoke in 2007.

Enter Rafa de la Rubia from Spain. Rafa is full of huge ideas. He doesn't think about literacy projects, he thinks about a network of Humanist Universities; he doesn't think about small-scale violence in his neighbourhood, he launches organisations such as "World without Wars" and he campaigns for "Nuclear Disarmament of the Mediterranean". So when Silo proposed the trip to the mountains Rafa came up with the idea of the World March as a vehicle to bring people there.

Rafa's disarmament campaign had been gaining momentum and conferences had been held in Greece, Spain, Italy and France. His organisation World without Wars was opening new branches throughout many countries in South and Central America as well as Africa where he was working. It was with all this floating around in his mind and the freshness of Silo's call for nuclear disarmament that the demands of the March were formulated. The March campaigned for:

- nuclear disarmament at a global level;
- the immediate withdrawal of invading troops from occupied territories;
- the progressive and proportional reduction of conventional weapons;
- the signing of non-aggression treaties between countries;

- the renunciation by governments of the use of war as a means to resolve conflicts.

In addition the aim was to instil in people a consciousness of nonviolence as a way to produce social change.

I remember chatting to Rafa right at the start of his plan and it was already then a huge plan to visit 40 countries and gather people around the world in a March for Peace and Nonviolence such as Gandhi had done on a smaller scale with his Salt March. Such a global adventure had never been tried before. You could see that Rafa was inspired. He had a very strong image inside himself which had to be expressed in the world. He imagined bringing thousands of Africans to South America by boat, and filling trains on the Trans-Siberian Railway with people heading to Argentina. Most people, like me, were impressed by his clarity of images and strength of purpose but few of us took his plan seriously.

Then one day Rafa sent out an e-mail saying that he was in Mendoza and he'd been talking to Silo and in those conversations Rafa had asked about the usefulness of such a World March to which Silo replied that it's not only useful it's urgent. The stage was then set, the entire Movement and the newly emerging communities of Silo's Message were orientated towards this global mobilisation. I think from that day on probably Rafa didn't sleep for more than four or five hours a night for the remaining year and a half of the project.

In that moment I was already working in coordination teams that were organising the Milan Forum and the Nairobi Forum. I had just moved country and I couldn't take on anything more at that time, but in January 2009 I put myself fully into the plans.

The most useful thing I probably did during that time

was translations, we had a website<sup>63</sup> which eventually appeared in 29 languages and as the easiest thing for many people around the world was to translate from English, it was therefore essential that everything was available. *Pressenza* was launched specifically to publicise the March which was generating huge amounts of material for translation also. An international coordination team was formed and I was on it and I put myself at Rafa's service. Anything he needed he could ask me and I would try my best to get it done.

In those days we had very good contacts with the Chilean and Argentinean governments and we used those contacts to the maximum to help us open doors and so it was through the Chileans that we were invited to present the project at the United Nations in New York during the two weeks of a preparation conference for the five-yearly Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review cycle.

We would also take the opportunity to meet new contacts in the Abolition 2000 network of anti-nuclear weapons organisations. We were very keen to get their endorsements and have these more than 2000 organisations also feel like the project was theirs and mobilise their members in the events that had by now expanded considerably and were now due to take place in 100 countries.

I happily agreed to organise our delegation to the UN which included Rafa and four New Yorkers apart from myself. On this trip I met Alyn Ware who was organising the World March in New Zealand with great enthusiasm and his colleague Mayra Gomez from Bolivia who organised events in Los Angeles.

In fact the March was starting to gather momentum in countries where the Humanist Movement didn't exist: New Zealand, South Korea, Japan and the Balkan

countries among others were completely new places for us. The potential for getting our message out and raising consciousness of our demands was incredible. An endorsement campaign gained particular enthusiasm among our activists and when the endorsement of Desmond Tutu from South Africa arrived, swiftly followed by the Dalai Lama and a host of national Presidents, we couldn't believe the impact we were making.

With all of this enthusiasm we arrived in New York ready to impress the diplomats. Rafa and I dressed up in suits and spoke with conviction to anyone who would listen to us. The Chileans organised a presentation room one lunch time during the conference and there must have been diplomats from at least 30 different countries who came to listen to us. There were many Latin Americans as we expected but also there were Poles, Austrians and even the Chinese. This latter presence was an incredible surprise for us. If we could open the door to China and reach one billion people with our proposal, what an amazing thing that would be...

And to our great surprise after the presentation the tiny female junior diplomat approached us and invited us to a private meeting to discuss the World March. We were ecstatic.

Half an hour later we were in a quiet area next to the General Assembly Hall, talking to the Chinese. They asked us many questions about the March before reaching the subject that they were concerned about most: the Dalai Lama.

"I'm afraid we are very concerned about the appearance of the Dalai Lama on your brochure. Do you realise that the Government of the People's Republic of China considers this man to be a terrorist?" said the diplomat.

"Errr, no," we replied.

"Yes, he is inciting his people to all kinds of violent acts

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63 [www.theworldmarch.org](http://www.theworldmarch.org)

in Tibet and we find it strange that you consider such a person to be appropriate to support your March.”

“Well, we can’t stop people from endorsing our March. People are free to endorse it or not.”

And it was true, we accepted all endorsements, including some political ones that were clearly hypocritical in some cases. In the Dalai Lama’s case we had happily accepted his endorsement not having any doubts about his commitment to nonviolence, despite what the Chinese government were now trying to tell us.

“We might be interested in supporting your March but you would have to remove him from your materials and supporters list.”

“We cannot agree to that I’m afraid.”

“We notice that you also have the support of a number of South American Presidents in your material and on your website. We will have to explain to them our position regarding this World March.”

The above isn’t the verbatim conversation because I didn’t record it, but this was the message they were communicating to us. They would support the World March as long as we ditched the Dalai Lama and if we didn’t agree then they would try to destroy the relationships we had built with Latin American governments who were sponsoring events. We left the meeting in a state of shock and mild outrage but wondering if there was a way to find a compromise position. We were very worried that the Chinese could make good on their threats and do a lot of harm to what we had prepared so far.

Rafa even sent a message to Silo to ask for advice and his reply was basically to tell the Chinese to go to hell. So we confirmed our position in writing that we were unable to accept their conditions and waited to see what they would do. In the end they did nothing but it was quite interesting to be threatened by one of the countries least respectful of human rights at the United Nations.

Our meetings with the NGO community also had good moments and bad moments. We experienced a lot of goodwill from the majority of organisations but a tiny number of French delegates were still repeating the same old stories of the sect that they had been using since the 1980s. One particularly unpleasant individual was Pierre. On the first day of meetings at the UN I heard him say something negative about the World March and its humanist background so I thought I would try out my diplomacy skills, given the building we were in. After the meeting finished I went up to him and put my hand out to shake his hand which he took willingly.

“Hello Pierre. My name is Tony and I’m from World without Wars and I’d like to invite you for a coffee.”

As soon as I said “World without Wars” it was as if he had experienced a strong electric shock. He ripped his hand from mine and said that he wanted nothing to do with me or my organisation. He didn’t want to talk to me. The World March was a front for a sect and he was exposing the truth to everyone. It was a bit like being back at university with the bully from the Green Party and although I was shocked, I wasn’t 21 years old anymore and I just decided to leave him to enjoy his paranoia because in this context of being at the United Nations, having the backing of worthy people around the world including Nobel Peace Prize winners, spiritual leaders, and celebrities and experts from all walks of life, being accused once more of belonging to a sect just sounded surreal and absolutely not worth responding to because I realised that no one listening to these accusations was questioning the intentions of the accused, they were questioning the sanity of the accusers.

It was in those days and seeing Alyn’s uncontained enthusiasm for what was going to happen in New Zealand that I decided that I wanted to be part of this historic endeavour. I’d already been playing with images

of how I could get involved and so I now had a plan to go to the beginning and, of course, the end in Argentina. I knew that it would be most difficult for Rafa to fill the Base Team for the legs in New Zealand and Australia as it was so remote and I'd never been to New Zealand before and I thought it might help Rafa to have someone who could translate, so I bought my ticket to Wellington. I was also extremely excited about the possibility to go to the Chatham Islands, or Rekohu in the native tongue. These islands are the closest populated islands to the International Date Line. When the day starts according to the international calendar, it does so first in Rekohu. The local population, the Moriori, were practitioners of nonviolence for hundreds of years before the Maori came and virtually slaughtered them all. Only a handful survived and the population was decimated. A ceremony to renew the Covenant of Peace on Rekohu seemed like a great symbolic way to start.

But then my March didn't end there because a few weeks later, as the March was getting closer, I was asked if I would go on the route from Turkey to Switzerland on a bus through the Balkans and write reports for *Pressenza*. Again, I'd never been to any of those Balkan countries, or even Turkey and so I thought, "Why not? I may not get the chance again."

So it was that on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2009 I arrived in Wellington and began the adventure of a life time. I took part in the first 10 days in New Zealand and Australia and I was hooked! I asked Rafa if I could continue and he was very happy for me to do so. I found myself a role by writing a blog and generally doing any job that Rafa, or anyone else, needed me to do. I became the guy who collected all the photos at the end of the day and chose a selection of thirty or so to upload onto our website. I actually took the role of internal communications quite seriously because apart from our Media Team in *Pressenza* many of our own

people around the world were desperate for news, videos, photos and stories of what we were doing. There was a state of excitement around the world that I have never witnessed before. It was the experience of everyone being in tune with the same goal and converging in the most awesomely diverse activities.

I had to return to London from Sydney but once I arrived there I immediately bought a ticket to rejoin the March in South Korea, Japan and Russia. From Moscow I headed to Istanbul for the Balkan March and from there I went to Berlin where Silo was invited to address the Nobel Peace Laureates at their Annual Summit on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November—the date the First World War came to an end.

From there I made a detour and headed prematurely to Punta de Vacas for a meeting with Silo to plan the end of the March and from there I took a plane to New York arriving on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November ready for the rest of the Base Team to arrive from Africa and from the Big Apple I did the entire March down to Punta de Vacas.

Looking back now, the March wasn't easy at all. It was physically exhausting. We were working long hours and resting little. We were sleeping in the most varied places, from shared Maraes in New Zealand—the communal sleeping quarters of the Maori—to an occasional luxurious hotel in South America and everything in between. Sometimes we had internet connections, sometimes we didn't and on the occasions where we didn't we had to search the local towns and cities for cyber cafes from where to work and post everything that we were doing. There were personal tensions too. You can't do an endeavour like this and not experience difficulties between people and in reality they were far fewer than could have been expected.

The Base Team was a mixed bunch of people about half and half divided between life-long humanists and others.

Anyone who came with a purpose had an incredible experience. Isabelle Bourgeois from Switzerland videoed the whole thing and made the most hilarious, emotional, touching and informative videos from her purely personal perspective. Gérard Hourdin from France bought himself a good camera and photographed everything he saw. The amazing Montserrat Ponsa, 72 years old at the time of the March, documented everything in her laptop and wrote a book about the experience. All the humanists on the team had a very clear image of what they wanted to do and mostly it was to ensure that Rafa was prepared with everything he needed in his role as Spokesperson and to ensure that the logistics were looked after in every place we arrived, because from time to time we needed half a day without activity in order to do mundane things like wash clothes! Luis Silva Garcia, a professional nurse looked after our health. Micky Hirsch also took photos and his language skills were priceless. Whenever I wasn't doing anything else I made sure that the World March Banner or the World without Wars flag was always strategically placed behind anyone being photographed or filmed.

On the other hand those who came without a purpose got bored and a bit frustrated when we weren't in events and found the absolutely random living conditions to be a source of suffering. Personally I was so tired every night that I could have slept on the floor with a rock for a pillow and I would have been happy.

The following few chapters are extracts from the blog I wrote and detail some of the more important, emotional and humorous moments of the March. I'm writing this chapter coincidentally on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2013, exactly four years after setting off from Wellington.

## New Zealand – New Experience...

29<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009

New Zealand is stunning it has an incredible landscape. Everything is so green and the mountains, canyons and rivers are all dramatic. I could talk about it but the images speak better than words. It's very easy to see why the British wanted to colonise this place over 200 years ago. It rains like in Britain and everything grows like it does over there!

Tourism New Zealand is one of the local sponsors for the World March events so part of the Base Team yesterday went to visit tourist sites including "Gravity Canyon" where our intrepid Belgian, Pierre did a bungee jump!! The rest of the Base Team had to get some work done. Our schedule has been so tight that there's been virtually no time to write anything or edit any video and today most of the Base Team is flying off to Rekohu where the World March will be blessed by the local islanders at sunrise on the 30th September. We are all expecting this to be a very spiritual and moving experience.

We are starting to count on a number of incidents which make life more "interesting". Yesterday Marco<sup>64</sup>

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64 Marco Inglessis, from Rome.

left all his money and passport in a KFC (fast-food restaurant) in Taupo which led to an interesting half an hour as we all speculated what to do in the event that we couldn't find it again, but as we are in New Zealand and not Italy the bag with everything was on the back of the chair he'd been sitting in, so no drama. Then in the evening we had our first experience which really took the team out of their comfort zone....

...In order to get the real Maori experience we had been booked to stay in a Marae. We were due to be greeted officially by the residents and share a meal and then stay the night. Of course we arrived late so we couldn't get the full greeting but the amusement started when we were shown our sleeping accommodation—1 room with mattresses and pillows for 30 people! No distinction between men and women, no en-suite bathroom, no mini-bar and half a dozen blankets between everyone. For sure on a journey like this after 93 days the team will know each other more intimately than the closest members of their own family, but of course none of us were expecting to be sleeping like this, and it's not even the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October yet.

Fortunately most people seem to have slept well.

Now we're off to Rekohu. I must go and pack...

## **The March and the Moriori people— an experience in the Chatham Islands**

**30<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009**

Yesterday we arrived on the main island of the Chathams, Rekohu, which literally means the “Sun through the mist”. The Base Team together with another 30 or so invited guests were met by the grandson of the last “pure” Moriori, our host, a great guy called Maui Solomon and his lovely wife Susan at Wellington airport. From there we took a flight in a rusty old charter plane to the island for the Blessing Ceremony and Renewal of the Peace Covenant, a traditional ceremony carried out on the Island for centuries. The Chatham Islands are so symbolic of our March because the Moriori people who lived here had eradicated violence as a means of resolving disputes, or at least eradicated murder. Conflict resolution (when no other method was possible) was done with a form of battle in which two opponents fought with fighting sticks, but the first person to bleed was the loser. It was not necessary to kill. This was the custom for centuries until the British brought a boat load of Maoris from New Zealand towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Maori (having no such problem with murder) then massacred virtually the entire population of the island, leaving only a few to survive as slaves. The youth of the Moriori

wanted to renounce the Covenant and fight the Maori to the death, but the elders overruled the younger ones, leaving the Moriori with their principles of nonviolence and their integrity intact, but their bodies destroyed. I'm sure this is what Gandhi would have advocated. Sadly, the Moriori were a people ahead of their time.

The theme of the day was one of ceremony. The Moriori Elders greeted us with a traditional ceremony, and after the greetings the visitors had the opportunity to offer gifts at the altar to the ancestors. This was a very moving moment in which thoughtful gifts connected to peace and nonviolence were offered; a portrait of Gandhi, a print of Picasso's *Guernica*, a World March flag, a copy of the Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen, and others. Graeme Allwright<sup>65</sup> sang his version of the French National Anthem, *The Marseillaise*, with the new words, and others recited poems. All very lovely and moving.

At night we were guests at a superb feast! Never have I seen such large lobsters.

The night was spent in the Marae which is where the previous ceremonies had been held, but this was like a first-class super-Marae. However, it was still basically 50 people in one room sleeping on mattresses on the floor...

This morning, some of us got up at 5:00am to take part in another blessing ceremony at sunrise. However, *Rekohu* more than lived up to its name as "Sun through the Mist", because we had much more mist than sun. However, we felt invigorated as we came back inside and then dived into a fantastic English breakfast: sausages, bacon, scrambled eggs. Honestly, I'm not going hungry on this March...

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<sup>65</sup> Graeme Allwright (born November 7, 1926) is a singer-songwriter. Born in Wellington, New Zealand, he moved to France in 1948. Together with Sylvie Dien, he wrote new lyrics to the French national anthem, "*La Marseillaise*", making it a song of peace rather than a song of war.

To finish the news of the day, we received some very disturbing reports of a tsunami on its way to the island. You may have seen on the news that 14 people have died in Samoa following an earthquake. A tsunami warning was issued and we all got very nervous as the spiritual guide of the Moriori started chanting a prayer. However, the gods of the Moriori are with us and we have not been disturbed in our Mission.

P.S. Maui has asked me to point out that the plane wasn't so rusty after all! It was in fact very shiny, but it did look like it was held together with string and tape :-)



## The World March has started!! Can you all believe it?

2<sup>ND</sup> OCTOBER 2009

After nearly two years of planning, hours and hours of work, countless meetings, lots of sweat and several nights of little sleep the World March for Peace and Non-violence has finally started. Hurrah!!

Today at 9:30am in Wellington by the statue of Gandhi we launched the World March with a joyful event with speakers and ceremonies and around 250 participants, which wasn't bad for a cold and windy Friday morning in Wellington. We lit the torches, waved our flags and marched. The March went on a Peace Heritage Walk around Wellington city centre, visiting all the places connected with Peace and along the way stopped for a concert where musical entertainment was provided by various artists including Graeme Allwright who's been with us all week, finishing with the renowned Topp Twins. The March then went on to visit the Parihaka monument dedicated to the largest Maori village in New Zealand which in the 1870s became the centre of a major campaign of non-violent resistance to European occupation of confiscated land in the area. I recommend reading about this Movement that is virtually unknown outside of NZ.

The media came to record the start of the event and the

Kiwi member of the Base Team, Juanita McKenzie, was interviewed on breakfast TV this morning bringing more attention to the March.

It's great to think that finally we are on the way. Clearly there is a long way to go, but now all the preparations of the Base Team are behind them. All the circuits have been tested and a lot has been learnt in the week prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October. Now it's a non-stop series of flights and events taking our message around the world.

Although the theme of this entry is the WM launch, yesterday we also had some new developments. We have two new members of the Base Team, Charles Lasater and Sinthya Penn from California who only originally planned to come for the launch and have ended up inspired and cancelling their return flights to be able to stay with the Base Team. I'm sure these two won't be the last to be inspired this way (I'm even thinking about it myself).

Yesterday we also had the chance to present the WM at a meeting organised by the NZ United Nations Association, where apart from hearing Rafa's words (read by me) the audience were very happy to hear from our very own Anna Polo who spoke about the process in the Czech Republic which led to the USA abandoning their Missile Defence Programme.

I know it's only the first day, but the team are exhausted already! Tomorrow we have a horribly early flight to Sydney where the forecast is for rain...

Still, rain won't stop the March.

## The Korean Demilitarised Zone

16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2009

So, we spent the night in a Buddhist retreat centre, very basic yet very warm and very comfortable. Breakfast was another strange affair from the point of view of unknown food, but no one complained of hunger later in the day.

Today though was a serious day and gave us a lot of things to think about. The first being that South Korea and North Korea are still officially at war and between the two sides there are 1,000,000 soldiers. The Koreans are from a civilisation that goes back 5000 years and the last 1% of that time has been spent as a divided people. It's like building a wire fence across the United Kingdom between Liverpool and Hull and saying to the people on one side, "So, you will have nothing to do with the people on the other side. You can't contact your family in any way. If you live on the other side, I'm sorry, but you have to stay here." In the day of mobile phones and internet, the people in the North and South are even unable to exchange letters with each other. It's a totally inhuman situation.

And also it's something that I think very few people in the West are really conscious of. It's like the days of the

Berlin Wall and in these times also the experience of the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

The people of Korea have asked the World March to adopt their issue as one of the issues of the March and we are happy to do it and inform people where we can.

There is a complicated political situation around the issue and I'm sure we don't understand even a small amount. There is a UN force here which according to local peace activists is nothing more than a puppet US force. There was also a UN Security Council resolution to dissolve the force which was passed back in the 70s but still has not been implemented.

Anyway, today was extraordinary, because we visited the Demilitarised Zone and we understand that we are the first foreigners to visit the Zone in 56 years of its existence. Now this sounds amazing if it's true and it is true that it was hardly a tourist attraction when we got there. Maybe we are the first to visit this part of the DMZ which is at the mouth of the river Han, an important ecological point as well as historical for the people of Korea. When we got there, there were just a few soldiers who followed us, and an old lady growing rice and millet. There are barbed wire fences everywhere, yet great calm, at least during the day. We were told that the soldiers are mostly asleep during the day and like owls they come out at night.

Anyway, we heard from people whose families are on the other side of the border. We heard from Sung Yong Park, our host, who explained how the place he was born in is in the DMZ now and that when he was growing up he lived with loud speakers in the village broadcasting propaganda messages to the people in the North and hearing propaganda messages to the people in the South.

We had lunch in the DMZ – a roll of sushi and a banana. Rafa said a few words and we went to the next point which is an observatory point where you get a good view

of the North. This is like a tourist point where members of the public can come and see “the other side”. There we had a minute’s silence thinking of those who are split from their families, and the many hundreds of people who died trying to cross the river to the other side.

Later we went for a meeting with local activists where we discussed the issues more and we were asked as guests to talk about how we think the Koreans can advance towards reunification. What could we say? But it made me think, what would Gandhi do in this situation? Surely one day he would have left his Korean Ashram and started a March. He would have explained the need to reduce military spending and to act with love towards one’s enemies. He would have spread a message of peace around Korea, then one day he would have approached the wire fence and taken a pair of metal cutters from his small bag and made one cut in the fence. The fence would have come down within six months. For Gandhi he wouldn’t care at all that one side had a fence and weapons and the other side had renounced all of that. For him it would have been his truth and history shows that his truth was not a bad one.

The need for each one of us to develop a little Gandhi within ourselves is the message of the World March, however each one of us may express it in the words used in our organisations, in our religions, in our philosophies and our beliefs, but the message of treating others the way we want to be treated is at the root of this March.

When one sees the suffering of the Korean people, one realises this more than ever.

## Day 15 – Country 9 – Japan

17<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2009

Finally after all my time with the Base Team since the 26th of September, I’m delighted to say that tonight I’m sleeping in a room by myself. Not that I don’t enjoy all the snoring, burping and other noises that echo around the rooms that we’ve been sleeping in until now, but it is nice to have some time to yourself. I didn’t go out for dinner tonight. Instead I found a supermarket in Hiroshima, bought some sandwiches (with what I can only hope was ham and cheese although the label was incomprehensible) and thought I’d have an early night. I’m writing this from my bed and now it’s nearly 1am.

The schedule we have is crazy, really. If we were to plan this March again all flights before 10am would be banned! So anyway this morning we got up at 4:15am to get our 8:00am flight to Fukuoka, Japan and one hour later we arrived feeling greatly encouraged as we found pictures and stories of our March yesterday in the Demilitarized Zone had appeared in three Korean newspapers overnight.

Upon arrival in Fukuoka we were met by Makiko<sup>66</sup>, our

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66 Makiko Sato

lovely Japanese organiser who has put together a tough schedule taking in three cities in three days. So today we started in Fukuoka on an island at the southern end of Japan. Here we had a very small yet charming event in a public square where several media outlets came to interview Rafa. The friends in Fukuoka thought it would be a great idea if we then sang “We shall overcome” and assuming that one of us must be able to play a guitar they tried to give one to us so that we could play along. Sadly in this part of the Base Team we appear to have no musical ability and we all sing like frogs! After two very quick verses we moved on with the programme to hear messages from young students of English in support of the World March and then we had probably the shortest March we will do throughout these three months, from the square to the taxi rank 100m away where we had to flee to the train station to get the connection to Hiroshima. This we achieved with two minutes to spare!

We arrived in Hiroshima after an hour on the famous Japanese Bullet Train and after leaving our bags at this magnificent hotel where I have a room to myself (did I mention that already?) we went to our next event. This was an event called NO NUKES 2020 and was organised by the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, an organisation funded by Hiroshima City and chaired by Steve Leeper, a friend we first met in New York back in May. Steve presented Rafa to all the young people at the event and talked about the World March, then he presented Rafa with an embossed copy of the Hiroshima Nagasaki Protocol, and a letter of support for the World March.

The kids at the event then made a couple of symbols. One spelling out NO NUKES with what must have been hundreds of thousands of paper cranes folded by local children, and 2020 formed by children sitting on chairs holding white paper in the air.

After this we had to wait around for a couple of hours

before the next event which was probably one of the most moving events I will experience on this March. It was quite simple really, the words “NUCLEAR FREE NOW!” were formed on the ground with candles in little glass jars and it gave a very evocative atmosphere to the event which was accompanied by beautiful singing and music.

Then what was for me the most emotional part was meeting a little old lady who survived the atomic bomb. These people are called Hibakusha in Japan. Rafa explained to her about the World March and how important it was for us to be in Hiroshima and to meet her. Then the most amazing thing happened when she started to say to us, “Thank you! Oh, thank you!” but with such profound sincerity that it nearly made me cry and I almost couldn’t translate for Rafa. Now I rarely get emotional in real life (although I can cry in a good romantic film), but being here with this little lady, whose hands were suffering from arthritis and whose skin still showed the effects of the radiation, and on top of that she was thanking us, it was too much for me. It still affects me several hours later as I write this blog. Then Rafa held her hand and she came with us and held the World March banner as Rafa spoke to those present. It really was a most humbling moment and I shall never forget it.

We’re only on day 15 and already we’ve achieved so much. Even if the March finished tomorrow it would be an incredible event, but we’ve got another 78 days to go. It’s a good job I’m not doing the whole journey with this team though because I’ll be an emotional wreck at the end.

## A call from the Bank...

27<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2009

“Hello Mr Robinson, this is HSBC bank. Sorry for troubling you. Would it be possible to confirm some unusual transactions that have appeared on your account in recent days?”

“Yes, go ahead. Right now I’m in Prague airport about to board a plane to Istanbul.”

“Ok, I’ll make it quick. Last week did you pay for internet connection in Tokyo airport?”

“Err, yes...”

“Ok. And did you later that day withdraw money from a cash machine in Seoul?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Fine. Two days later did you withdraw money from a machine in Moscow?”

“Yes, I did”

“And the following day did you pay for internet access in Riga?”

“Yes”

“And then you tried to buy a train ticket in Warsaw but it was rejected.”

“Yes, that’s right I was going to call you about that.”

“All of that was you?”

“Yes. And by the way, right now I’m going to Turkey so please can you allow me to withdraw money from there and also from all the countries between Turkey and Switzerland in the next two weeks.”

“Yes sir, if you give me a list I’ll put it on the computer.”

“What? You want all of them?”

“Yes please, sir.”

“Ok, so that’s Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy and Switzerland”.

“Sorry, Greece, then?”

“Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy and Switzerland”.

“Errr, don’t worry sir, I’ll just put down that you’re travelling in Europe. When will you be back in London, sir?”

“Errr, the 16<sup>th</sup> of November.”

I didn’t have the heart to tell him where I’d be between the 17<sup>th</sup> November and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January!

It’s great to be back Marching again!

## What's in a name?

30<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2009

There are two things which have struck me strongly on this Balkan section of the March so far. One is the name you give to different territories and the other is the borders between countries.

I almost got into trouble in Turkey with this theme and in Greece we've also been warned to be careful with what we say.

In a conversation with Esra<sup>67</sup> about the Kurdish/Turkish conflict I was wondering what there may be in that region where the Kurds live that causes such conflict, thinking about oil or gas or minerals etc. So I innocently asked; "What do they have in Kurdistan that's so valuable?" Well, it was like I'd hit her! She said, "You can't use that name in Turkey, if people hear you say it you can get into trouble!" It was a reflex reaction that has clearly come from years of Turkish sensitivity to the issue. Of course, now that I knew that it was bad to say it, I kept on accidentally saying it in conversation all afternoon because the word was in my head all the time.

Then we arrived in Greece, and this northern part of

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67 Esra Gonen, one of the Turkish organisers.

Greece is called Macedonia. Of course one of the former Yugoslav republics was also called Macedonia and Greece didn't care about this while this territory was part of the Yugoslav Federation, but as soon as Yugoslavia started to dissolve, the issue of the ownership of the name "Macedonia" became a big problem. In Greece, if you want to be politically correct you have to refer to the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Of course when Giorgio<sup>68</sup> spoke in public in Thessaloniki he referred to our next country as "Macedonia" and complaints were raised with the local organisers. It's important we don't offend the locals, but then also we have to be faithful to our principles.

Fortunately we don't really care too much about the names of lands; the people are the most important thing.

The other point I was reflecting about was the border. On crossing from Turkey to Greece by bus it occurred to me just how random the whole thing of countries is. I've been in 12 different countries in the last 30 days, each time showing my passport, sometimes getting a stamp, sometimes not; sometimes they want money, sometimes not. But each time it feels so random. Such a terrible pretext to get money from you, mostly. It's like they make a rule just so that if you break it they can fine you. This happened to Eduardo yesterday. He stayed two days more in Turkey than his visa allowed, so they gave him a choice of not coming to Turkey for five years, or paying a €100 fine. I mean, where's the principle here? The possibility to do something against the rules, but then pay your way out shows how the whole thing is just a fund-raising exercise. At least they could be honest about it and save everyone the pain of wondering what will happen when you go through customs and also stop

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68 Giorgio Schultze from Italy was the Spokesman for the March between Istanbul and Belgrade, then after Giorgio went back to Italy the Base Team asked me to do it until we got to Switzerland.

the ridiculous process of filling in visa forms. Turkey was easy. They just wanted cash. Russia, on the other hand, wanted to know where I went to school and a list of all the countries I'd visited in the last ten years!

The other thing about the border, of course, is how many people died so that a line went through the map at that point. Millions have died so that lines can be drawn on maps. It's another absurdity and all those deaths have no meaning in the moment when you cross the border in times of peace.

Today I was interviewed four times in Thessaloniki which was interesting. One guy from a national channel asked me what I thought about the problem of illegal immigrants and what the World March proposed. After a short moment of panic I came up with the following answer, which I more or less accurately quote here...

"The World March's proposals are to eliminate nuclear weapons and to progressively reduce spending on conventional weapons. With 10% of the 1.5 trillion dollars that were spent last year on military spending we could eradicate poverty from the planet. With 50% we could solve all the world's problems of hunger, employment and environmental damage. All of this can happen, but we need to create a consciousness of the need to achieve a culture of peace through nonviolence and start voting for politicians who will advance this agenda. So the problems of immigrants will go away when we solve the problems of violence and eliminate nuclear weapons and the threat of war."

What we are proposing with the Universal Human Nation is so breathtakingly simple and brilliant!

So tomorrow we leave Greece, cross a ridiculous line on a map and head to a country that we don't know what to call knowing that whatever we call it, some people will be offended. Still at least we know we're heading for the capital, Skopje, and no one is disputing that...

## Goodbye to the Balkans – Ciao Italia!

10<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2009

With a great sense of needing to go back one day with time on my hands, we left the Balkans, crossing the border from Slovenia to Italy on Saturday morning. I realise that there has been a "Balkanisation" of my wallet over the last week as I seem to be carrying with me; Turkish Dinars, Macedonian Dinars, Serbian Dinars, Bosnian Marks, Croatian Kuna and the Euros used in Greece and Slovenia. Of course all of this paper accompanies well the New Zealand Dollars, Japanese Yen, US Dollars, British Pounds, Polish Zloty, Czech Crowns, Russian Roubles, Kenya Shillings and Ghana Cedis which are the consequence of a year of travelling that has been extremely good for the airlines.

Saturday was an intense day for us. The bus left at 8:00 am, the first meeting was at 9:00am and we continued until 11:00pm. The events included; a meeting in Sežana where an Italian/Slovene choir sang for us; a meeting at the border where the Mayor of Monrupino welcomed us; a stop outside Opicina where we laid flowers at a monument to the 71 victims of the Nazis who were murdered and then cremated at the only Nazi crematorium in Italy; then another stop in the centre of the town

where a group of “Runners for Peace” set off for the centre of Trieste dressed in World March T-shirts. All of this was before noon!

Then on arrival in Trieste a police escort guided us into the town centre where we had an official welcome at the University. It was fantastic and quite emotional. As we walked into the hall with our World March banners we were applauded and cheered loudly by those present. One old lady in the second row was sobbing vigorously, something which is guaranteed to almost make me cry in solidarity. Once again, the bus has given me the job of spokesperson, but as there’s been no time to prepare anything, I speak without notes, hoping once more that I don’t mess up.

In the reception there are professors from the University; including a very interesting professor from the department of Peace Studies—whose point of view is clearly in line with ours; the Mayor of the town; and the President of the Province. There was a moment of tension when the Professor started to denounce the policies that the Mayor identifies with and the facilitator tried to explain that this is not a platform for politics, unfortunately what most people seem to have failed to realise is that peace is political. There is so much contradiction in what politicians say and do. In one moment they speak of peace as their ideal, and in the next moment they speak of the need to sell arms to countries “because if they don’t then another country will”, as if this horrific statement justifies anything.

There’s a referendum campaign in Switzerland at the moment in which there is a proposal for Switzerland to stop selling weapons overseas. Those who oppose the proposal use the argument that, “if we don’t sell weapons overseas it will create unemployment,” and as Dani Horowitz said in yesterday’s press conference in Geneva,

this argument can be said in other words: “it’s ok to kill people in order for us to earn money to eat.”

Anyway, the Mayor was clearly feeling a bit attacked by the Professor and later as I presented the Mayor with the World March certificate and scarf, he was so pleased that he pulled me into a big hug, and he’s much bigger than me!

Later on, after finding some nice Italian food—Dino<sup>69</sup> had proposed we eat Japanese food but why would you go to Italy and then eat Japanese?—we assembled in the main square for a peace sign. Supposedly it was to start at 3pm, so knowing we were in Italy we ate happily until 3:30. Imagine our surprise when we arrived in the square and it was full of people, already in formation, accompanied by a fantastic samba band who created such a great atmosphere; full of energy and life.

They played until at least 5pm, long after we’d taken all the photos and videos we needed of the peace sign. It was a great gift from the Trieste organisers. There were many more than the 1000 people they’d expected. I’m delighted for them. Also the sun was out most of the day and it does make a great difference doing activities in the sun or the rain!

Later on we went to see a number of different choirs sing in a World March concert and then at the end of the evening we were treated to a special concert by Stefano Barone who plays Spanish guitar but in a way I’ve never heard before. He doesn’t just pluck the strings, he hits the wood, he kind of raps on it with the plectrum, and makes all kinds of noises which he then records and plays as accompaniment to the next sound that he makes. You have to watch him to see how he does it and it’s fascinating.

Anyway, all of this ended at 11:00pm at which time

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69 Dino Mancarella who helped to organise the Balkan March.



we had to go to our accommodation which was by far the most basic we've experienced, but it was free so no one complained!

## Silo speaks in Berlin

**16<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2009**

The World March had two parts in Berlin. One was the March and events planned for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of November (which were the dates planned back at the beginning of the process) and the second was on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. This is because we had originally planned to coincide with the Nobel Peace Laureates Summit (which was to be on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>) but eventually they changed their plans and we couldn't change ours so a small delegation of World Marchers went back to Berlin.

The Nobel Summit was important because we have been taking their Charter for a World without Violence around the world and this Summit was an opportunity for us to officially receive the Charter from them. On this occasion, Silo, the founder of Universalist Humanism and the inspiration behind World without Wars and the World March, was given the opportunity to speak to the Summit. It is without doubt one of the most important moments of the March for the Humanists involved.

So, as is usual, when Silo speaks, humanist friends come to listen and so around 200 of us converged on Berlin. The Germans did a splendid job of organising everything with airport collection, hotels, venues, wifi

and merchandise all organised. Also there was a splendid party organised for the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> with great food.

The party was an opportunity to meet with many friends from many countries that the World March has visited and to hear about the different experiences. There were about four or five of us from the Balkan team also present. In one moment the Germans gave us all a quite unexpected present, they all got onto the stage to sing a very powerful version of “Ode to Joy” in German. It was the second time they’d done it; the first being in the airport when the Base Team arrived. This time though, with more singers and a smaller space the noise was tremendous and full of emotion. Many were once more moved to tears!

The following day we got up by 6:00am to be ready to leave by 7:15 to get to the venue and with everything prepared so that at 9:00 Silo could speak. On arrival at the Berlin City Hall I have to say I was surprised because it’s probably the first time I’ve ever seen 200 humanists be on time for something! That shows how important it was.

I had been asked to do the translation from Spanish to English, so I went to the translation booth and started to re-read the translation to prepare myself. A short while later, the official summit translators arrived and to their disgust they found me there. “That’s great! A volunteer translator,” said one of the guys, in a tone of voice that indicated that it wasn’t really so great after all. So a series of quick conversations between Marita (the German organiser from our side) and the translators resulted in my eviction from the translation booth, something that I was most grateful for a few minutes later when Silo started to speak.

Before Silo spoke though, we had the great pleasure to hear an introduction from Mairead Corrigan-Maguire. Now I recommend reading about this woman. Three of

her sister’s children were killed in an accident during an incident between the IRA and the British Army back in 1976. Her sister later committed suicide. Mairead decided to adopt non-violent strategies to fight the violence in Northern Ireland and together with Betty Williams she won the Nobel Prize in 1977.

When she speaks she reminds me a bit of my mum! She sort of has a motherly way like she just wants to give you a big hug and look after you and make the world a better place. Anyway she was very enthusiastic about the World March and made a great introduction and invited Silo to speak.

And then there was a small moment of magic.

I was standing by the side of the first row of chairs. From here I could see Silo directly and also the main door leading in to the hall. Silo went to the microphone and started his speech, “Una marcha recorre el mundo. Es la Marcha por la Paz y la No Violencia,<sup>70</sup>” and then he stopped. Someone was entering and I looked and I realised why Silo had stopped... Gorbachev had just walked in. He’s much smaller than I imagined and if it wasn’t for the red mark on his head I may not have realised who it was.

I knew that Gorbachev was due to speak later around 10:00am and I hadn’t really expected him to come for this, but there he was taking his seat and Silo re-started, “Una marcha recorre el mundo. Es la Marcha por la Paz y la No Violencia.” He spoke slowly and deliberately and it was very nice. At the end, everyone in the audience stood up to applaud, even the Nobel Summit people and all the authorities and dignitaries who were sitting in the reserved seats in the front rows.

Gorbachev didn’t stay until the end unfortunately, but

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70 A March is circling the world. It’s the March for Peace and Nonviolence.

it was clear that he had come to see Silo and I wonder what passed through their minds as they exchanged glances. One of the great heroes of nuclear disarmament meets one of the great heroes of non-violent social transformation. Fantastic!

Once Silo had finished, Mairead gave the charter to Rafa and then Anna Polo gave a gift to Mairead and thanked her for her support, and that was it. I crossed the hall to go out and chat to whoever was there about our impressions of the speech only to nearly bump into Gorbachev himself as he came back in to speak. If only I'd have been a bit more prepared I would have shaken his hand, but alas I wasn't ready...

## **“It's up to you New York, New York!”**

**1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2009**

“Start spreading the news! I'm leaving today. I want to be a part of it: New York, New York,” sings Frank Sinatra in my head as I reflect on what has been an extraordinary day.

Yesterday began at 5:00am and finished at 2:00am today, I was wearing my T-shirt on top of my sweater all day in the form of a walking advertisement—welcome back to the World March!

It really was extraordinary though.

The base team arrived at 6:00am on Monday after a flight from Senegal that was the last country on the African leg of the March. I can't imagine a greater contrast. From poverty to wealth, from nothing to everything, from summer to winter, even from French to English (and a lot of Spanish). Everything has changed for the Base Team.

I was staying with Dennis Redmond, the USA March Coordinator, who may be the only real New Yorker in the NY organising committee. And it was at his place on Sunday morning when we finally got confirmation of our guest star for Monday: Dr. Bernard Lafayette. We've been trying to contact this guy for years, ever since the North

American New Humanist Forum two years ago, and finally at the last minute we got his confirmation that he's landing on Monday morning and he'll speak on the Monday evening event and head the March as it leaves Brooklyn. This guy worked with Martin Luther King Jr. in the civil rights struggles in the 1960s. He was with MLK the day he was shot, and having failed for years to finish college due to being jailed so many times for his activism, he finally finished his undergraduate degree, masters and doctorate in four years to qualify and develop one of the most interesting programmes of nonviolence education in the world today.

I feel humbled, and like I'm a fraud, when I have the great pleasure to talk to him over dinner. I talk about nonviolence and, apart from being nice to people in my daily life and living my life as coherently as possible, it's nothing compared to Lafayette. He talks about nonviolence and describes how he was arrested 27 times in the civil rights struggles. I talk about nonviolence and how we organised a forum about the subject in the UK. He talks about nonviolence and how he took on one of the toughest centres of racism in Alabama, a place called Selma, where "the Blacks are too scared and the Whites are too mean," and (together with others) organised the Selma to Montgomery marches—a conflict that led to the Voting Rights act of 1965. I talk about nonviolence with people in the UK and we discuss about what to do when there's a conflict over whose turn it is to do the washing up or how to deal with someone who pushes you as you get into the underground train. He talks about his work with nonviolence and explains how a young Nigerian boy, after going through the active nonviolence course, wakes him up at the training centre at 3:00am to confess that before the course he was responsible for 170 deaths in violent confrontations in the Niger Delta.

This guy is worthy of respect when talking about non-violence. I'm not sure that I am.

Back to the March earlier in the day; an estimated 1200 people participated in the March across Brooklyn Bridge today. The atmosphere was electric. So many young people came to support the March: ok, they got the day off school for this, but it was cold, wet and raining. If I were them (and 16 years old), I'm sure I'd have headed for the nearest shopping centre or coffee shop. It was great. We had Veterans for Peace, the students, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Parrots for Peace, Pax Christi, a local Hindu organisation, Brooklyn for Peace, World without Wars (obviously) and many others (who I can't remember and who I will add if they let me know). As one end of the March was leaving the bridge the back end of the March was just approaching it. And it was an absolutely miserable day for weather! I bought my 3<sup>rd</sup> umbrella of the World March: the first one being in Sydney, Australia and the second one in Vicenza, Italy.

Later in the evening we had the speaker and musical event at Riverside Church, which is where MLK gave his speech "Beyond Vietnam" which caused such outrage at the time because he attacked the US government for the war in Vietnam. For the World March we had Rafael speaking, Tomás Hirsch from Chile for Latin America, and Chris Wells for North America. Chris had the unenviable task of following Dr Lafayette though because he was just an incredible speaker. He told us that we had given him inspiration! What an incredible compliment for the World March.

During the event we saw a great five minute summary of the World March up to Spain and finally, at the end

of the event we got to hear a live performance of “Peace on Earth<sup>71</sup>”. We were all on our feet clapping and singing.

To paraphrase Frank Sinatra, “If we can make it here, we’ll make it anywhere. It’s up to you New York, New York!” I think we can safely say that we made it here...

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<sup>71</sup> Performed by Mark Lesseraux and his band.

## Guatemala and Honduras

### 13<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2009

The day after our spectacular welcome in Tapachula, Mexico we were up at 5:00am to head for the border and enter Guatemala. Guatemala is a land of myth and magic, of Mayan culture and indigenous struggles, of beautiful landscapes and terrible violence, of abundance and exploitation. The programme was intense so we had to split into two buses; I was in the first bus that was planning to spend the night in the capital, Guatemala City and the other bus was heading a few hours further East to Esquipulas.

On route we stopped and did a couple of Marches, one through the border city where we crossed the border into Tuxtla. On this March we had Miss Guatemala accompanying us in her precarious high heels, looking beautiful and trying not to sweat too much in the heat, plus a group of drummers from Costa Rica and our new Base Team member, Guillermo<sup>72</sup> from Argentina. We’re gathering quite a collection of beauty queens on this March, Miss Australia 2008, Miss Czech Republic 2003 and now Miss Guatemala!

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<sup>72</sup> Guillermo Sullings, economist and author.

The second march was in a smaller town where we were accompanied by dozens of children dressed as firemen. Apparently the day is a special day in Guatemala, a public holiday where the children take part in civic events to support local services, in this case the fire brigade. It was very cute, and with the drummers and the stilt walkers it had a great atmosphere.

Later on in the bus we stopped at a place called “Los Encuentros” where the local indigenous spiritual guides performed a blessing ceremony for us. This was fascinating to watch. There was a big fire in the centre of a patch of land and the shamans were throwing different chemicals on it to produce different smokes, different flames and different smells. Then they started to throw the same chemicals into the encircling crowd (I don’t know if this was to make the Base Team more flammable or not but no one suffered any injury or burns!) Some of our people were very moved by the scene which was made all the more strange by the dramatic mountainous landscape and the indigenous folk of the area who are very short and were wearing typical clothing of the area. We had with us a couple of great Guatemalan lads from the capital city, Gustavo and Andres, who looked like twins and clearly had some European ancestry because they towered above the indigenous guys. They looked like giants in the land of the little people. Even I felt tall!

Having received the protection from the indigenous friends we headed for Guatemala City. Along the way I spoke to Camilo, a member of the “People’s Front” a socio-political movement that doesn’t participate in elections but yet is working at the social base in a civic education project that aims to inform people better so that the population is able to make better choices at election time. Apart from being Gustavo’s and Andres’s uncle, he is very well informed about the situation in Guatemala.

Guatemala is an incredibly rich country with an incredible inequity in distribution (This is a situation that’s been repeated to us in many other countries we visited.) Most of the Central American region’s food comes from here and in addition many different minerals are mined here, including gold and uranium. Of course none, or very few, of the benefits go to the locals—surprise, surprise. This is the biggest conflict in the country. A few control the vast majority of the resources, discrimination against the Mayans is rife everywhere, and the people keep on voting for the same rotten politicians.

In the evening, we arrived in the capital to be greeted on the highway by dancing, music and hot chocolate. Then we went to the central event for this team which was a cultural event in the city centre. We heard the local musicians, watched a demonstration of the ancient game, Pelota—a rather strange game where you try to get a 12 Kg ball through a vertical hoop about two metres up a wall, with points scored depending on the part of the body you use to get the ball through the hoop—and then we made a rather beautiful peace sign with candles. I love these things—maybe I was a pyromaniac in a previous life.

We stayed overnight in a modest hotel that at least had good internet access and we slept for a few hours. In the morning (up again at 5:00am) I got rather a shock when on the bus Rafa pointed out three or four men standing around outside the hotel. These people were our security guards for the night. I rather naively assumed that we’d be safe everywhere in the world, but Camilo organised security for us, just in case anything bad could happen. I’ve travelled to many, many places around the world and never has anyone organised security for me. I’d heard about bandit attacks in Latin America in the past, and clearly with a rampant drug trade and immigrant smuggling rife you never know what could happen, but still

it's the first time on the March that I've felt anything apart from perfectly safe.

Once on the bus we headed for Honduras and the city of Copan. This is just over the border from Guatemala and was our only plan for Honduras. This is largely due to the fact that the country suffered a coup d'état in June. For people who don't know the story, the President of the country was attempting to take a revolutionary path, like Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador, and call for a constituent assembly, convoking citizens to design a new constitution for the country. Now, President Zelaya organised a referendum on this subject and two days beforehand the Right wing parties organised with the military to storm into his residence, bundle him onto a plane and fly him to Costa Rica at gun point. The International community complained, the OAS passed resolutions, even Obama expressed his outrage (although if you ask any Central American they'll tell you that this coup happened with US blessing) but after all this they let the coup just happen.

The days before we arrived in Copan there was a new election which all of Zelaya's supporters boycotted and of course the Right won handsomely.

In Copan we were met by the people of the country; a mixture of indigenous peoples, Europeans, mestizos (those who've mixed between indigenous and Europeans) and, rather unexpectedly, Africans. Apparently during the colonial days many Africans made it from the Caribbean islands to the mainland in Honduras and established a thriving colony of their own. We were treated to African dancing and drumming, and suddenly we were transported back to another continent...

After the official welcome, we headed to the nearby Archaeological Park where the Mayan city of Copan is found. It's incredible. There are pyramids and a huge complex of buildings that shows a great hub of Mayan

culture which was re-discovered and recovered from the jungle that is capable of eating everything. There are trees hundreds of years old growing out of the sides of structures and literally destroying them with their massive roots systems that can break rocks as they grow down in their search for water.

Now the site is cared for, it is a UNESCO heritage site and there are archaeologists and with time, the complex is being restored. Here we planted a tree for the World March – a local pine tree, and hopefully in hundreds of years' time it will still be there for future generations to come and see the moment when human history started and pre-history was left behind.

## Feeding time at the zoo – a day with Juanes

19<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2009

Here I am writing from Ecuador trying to integrate into my consciousness everything that happened in Colombia. We have received one of the best receptions of the World March throughout its entire journey so far, maybe it's even been the best and, far and away, we have had the most success in terms of media coverage.

We arrived on Tuesday and already at the airport we had at least 100 people waiting for us to arrive. There were TV cameras, dancers, singers and big hugs for all the Base Team members. We were transferred to our hotel where we dropped our bags and rushed off to a press conference with the Mayor, Samuel Moreno and his lovely wife. Also at the press conference we had a couple of very famous Colombian musicians, Pipe Bueno who's only 17 years old, and Mario Muñoz from the group Doctor Krapula. Of course, coming from North Europe, I've never heard of them but in Colombia they are known everywhere.

Once this was over we took a funicular railway and headed to the top of Montserrat where we were expected for dinner. We've had very little opportunity for tourism throughout the whole March because that's not what we

came for, but from Montserrat you could see the whole of the city lit up at night, and in addition we had an exquisite dinner which is probably the best food of the whole trip, even beating the crayfish of Rekohu. (Also it made a great change from frijoles, the staple diet of Central America.)

The next day there was a mega-march of about six kilometres from one park to another going through the city of Bogota. We were accompanied by the Mayor's wife, a senator whose husband was murdered by paramilitary forces and who has been working for peace ever since, and at the start of the March we had Mario with us again and the band, Aterciopelados. The musicians didn't march with us though as they were playing in the concert later. The media were there in force, and even Reuters asked me for an interview in English.

We did the March with what must have been at least 2000 people with hundreds of banners showing that we had the support of many organisations, including the LGBT community, I was happy to note.

The concert started at about 2pm, but at 3pm it rained for about 15 minutes (while the Base Team were all eating lunch) so by the time we arrived at the stadium the poor audience was drenched! Still, it didn't seem to matter to them, they were here for a party and a bit of rain wasn't going to stop them.

Rafael and Tomy<sup>73</sup> went on stage and got another fantastic reception. When it was Tomy's turn to speak to the audience he knew exactly what to say: "Here in Colombia people want no more violence. They want an end to obligatory military service. They don't want US military bases." The crowd went wild. It was fantastic and given

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73 Tomás Hirsch, Spokesperson for the World March in Latin America.



that the concert was apparently being broadcast live, the message reached all over Colombia.

It is clear that this is a very effective way to get our message across to our target audience: youth. There were about eight or nine acts playing, either they were wearing the World March T-shirts, singing about peace, or expressing what peace is for them. Aterciopelados came on stage with white furry peace symbols...

There was a reserved area in front of the audience where special invited guests could go. The Base Team was there and took advantage of the good view to take lots of photos and talk to the other people who were also receiving the VIP treatment. It was great fun. Sinthya and Juanita were transported back in time to their own adolescence and they insisted on staying right to the end whereas the others lost their energy and enthusiasm and returned to the hotel early.

The next morning we flew to the border with Ecuador, to a city called Pasto where we were meant to drive to the border to meet Juanes. Now those of you in Latin America or Spain will probably know who he is, but most of the rest of us had no idea.

As has become a bad habit now, we were late for the event but mostly this was because the connecting flight arrived late into Bogota. We drove through the stunning Colombian countryside, which left us feeling very peaceful and enamoured of the region but we really had no idea what was about to happen to shake us from that reverie...

On arrival at the border town we could see up ahead that there was a crowd waiting so we stopped our bus, got our banners out and started walking in that direction. What we found was the traffic totally still and hundreds of people; women and men of all ages, and the police and firemen trying to form a barrier between Juanes and his fans. I was thinking to myself, "How the hell are we

going to get in there?" The crowd was about ten people deep and tightly packed.

So, I think Juanes must have got out of his car and started walking totally encircled by all these security people from the police and fire brigade. I realised that there was no way to push my way through the crowd, so I went ahead of the mob and waited for it to reach me, and as the security people reached me I told them that I was with the World March and that (together with my Spanish in a terrible English accent) was enough for them to let me into the inner circle, where I eventually found Rafa (who had clearly pushed his way through) and Tomy. We walked all together in our secure bubble, but at the bubble's edge it was like feeding time at the zoo. Everyone wanted a piece of Juanes. The crowds had clearly attracted the pickpockets also because by the time they had breached the security bubble, Tomy had had his passport and wallet taken, Rafa was missing all the coins in his pockets and David (our Colombian Coordinator) was without his blackberry and mobile phone.

Still, with all this chaos there was the media. It seemed like there were hundreds of expensive cameras all pointing in Juanes' direction and apparently a couple of channels were broadcasting live.

We approached the civic buildings where a banner was to be handed over to the Ecuadorian singer, Juan Fernando Velasco, and things were getting more and more scary. There were stone steps to negotiate and of course cameramen and young people were falling over everywhere, not realising the steps were approaching. In this moment I saw Isabelle and I had an idea to ask Juanes to say a few words for all the thousands of volunteers around the world who have worked so brilliantly for the success of the March. I tried to get Isabelle through the security cordon which was impeded by the fact that she kept dropping things like the microphone and her

hat. Anyway, we got her in and ready to film and I asked him to say a few words and he gladly did so, but then Isabelle was pressing buttons and plugs because there was no sound. We tried a couple of times and although we got images there was no sound. Then she realised that the camera was in the wrong mode and that we hadn't captured anything. By that time of course Juanes had passed by and we were in the crowd again. Well it was so stressful that I didn't want to push in again and say we'd had a technical malfunction, but Isabelle was so upset with herself for not capturing the sound that she went off to try again (which she did, incidentally).

Juanes met the Ecuadorean and together with Rafa and Tomy they all said a few words and suddenly Juanes was moving again, back up the hill, with his fans still trying to kill each other in order to get as close as possible and take a photo.

I was very shocked by what I'd witnessed, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, poor Juanes!!! This is his life every time he leaves his front door. He told me he'd been in London a couple of weeks ago and I was imagining that for him that must be lovely because he could walk down the middle of Oxford Street naked (although in December it's not recommended) and no one would notice him. Secondly, people are crazy!! This is the World March for Nonviolence, but I don't think many of those people would think twice about pushing people out of the way if it meant they could get two centimetres closer to their hero. Montse damaged her ribcage in the all the pushing as she made her way into the inner circle and the poor guy who was carrying the World March T-shirts was virtually assaulted by the people who wanted to get the same T-shirt as Juanes, of course not one of these people thought to pay for them. Sometimes the difference between human being and savage animal is very difficult to detect.

One very nice story to go with the day was the personal journey of reconciliation taken by our Isabelle. Isabelle is from Switzerland and her father was a diplomat and in 1980 he was the Swiss Ambassador to Colombia when a violent paramilitary group called M-19 forced their way into an Ambassadors' party that he was attending and took 13 Ambassadors hostage.

After a two month siege of the Dominican Republic Embassy, eventually a deal was prepared whereby the hostages and hostage-takers were transported to Cuba where everyone was released unharmed, but during the two months, both the Swiss and Austrian Ambassadors had been kept separated from the others and were prepared to be the first ones killed should the government not meet the demands of the hostages.

Isabelle's father died nine years later, but Isabelle was a teenager when all this was happening and it's clearly something that she still hasn't recovered from.

In the March with Juanes, we were also accompanied by the elected Governor of the Region, Antonio Navarro Wolff, who was in the M-19 leadership during the time of the hostage drama. He was, very kindly, helping us to get our passports checked quickly when someone told Isabelle about this and suddenly she was face to face with one of the people responsible for her father's kidnapping. It was a very tense moment which I think she had been preparing for right from the beginning of her plans to join the March. Her idea was to interview him about those dramatic days and try to find some reconciliation for herself. I haven't seen the footage that they took, but Isabelle was barely able to ask the questions without crying and tears were pouring down her cheeks, but she continued asking all the questions that she must have been asking herself for years. It was very moving to watch and all the rest of the Base Team were standing

around intensely aware of the drama and significance of what was happening to Isabelle.

The Governor was initially surprised and probably a bit frightened by what was happening—I don't imagine that many hostage takers meet the family members of their hostages, especially 19 years later—and he was probably expecting a hysterical Isabelle to start kicking and punching him and he started very defensive, but I think he started to realise that this was not about any kind of revenge, it was about Isabelle trying to understand why this had happened to her as a teenage girl and he softened and the two of them seemed to connect at a very human level.

He explained that his left leg was artificial and a result of the conflict, but Isabelle pointed out that he had put himself into that situation and only had himself to blame unlike her father who was just doing his job.

The interview finished in a very good tone and they exchanged e-mail addresses. M-19 gave up the path of violence years ago and has entered into a political process and in fact we found out that the person in charge of that hostage operation was now working alongside President Uribe having totally turned around his political opinions. I don't think Isabelle thought for one minute that he'd even still be alive! Maybe there will be some further interviews Isabelle will want to make before the reconciliation is totally complete...

## 30 countries, 38 flights, 50 beds

I blogged until the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, until the climax of the March started. It was the first time I'd ever done anything like that and the feedback was amazing. People sent comments and greetings from all over the world. What *Pressenza* could achieve in terms of media coverage and what videos and photos could transmit in terms of images, the blog was able to achieve in transmitting the atmosphere of what it was like to be in the Base Team. It was this experience of writing that led me to take the subject more seriously and the possibility to write this book comes from there.

From the moment we crossed the border into Argentina the intensity and excitement grew. For me the first stop was a place called Resistencia close to the Chaco Park of Study and Reflection. Local organisers had been working on a schedule of activities which included a visit to a war memorial to honour the Argentinean victims of the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War and Roberto Kohanoff insisted that I should be the member of the Base Team to speak despite my protests. How could a British guy speak about peace and nonviolence in front of a war memorial in Argentina to young men killed by people from my country?

I didn't know what to say but Roberto insisted it would

be ok so I explained the demands of the March and then I turned to the theme of reconciliation and Silo and I said that we needed to understand that this conflict was created by politicians and military leaders and that the young people on both sides, those killing and those being killed, were innocent victims. Silo spoke of the need to repair twice-over for the harm that we have done to others and I said that maybe participating in a March for Peace and Nonviolence is one way to make amends. Later on, when a report of the event was printed in the local paper, a veterans' group was asked their opinion of the March and they were intransigent in their response and rejected any possibility of reconciliation without a handover of the islands to Argentina, a position which sadly repeats the same cycle of recriminations for mistakes made in the past and which will ensure that nothing changes in the future.

From Resistencia I went with Roberto to Tucuman where I represented the Base Team in a great event in the city centre with lots of music and culture. From there I flew to Buenos Aires where we had a meeting with both the Mayor, who was clearly bored stiff by the whole theme of the March, and then with President Cristina Fernandez who was absolutely lovely and totally absorbed by what we were doing and expressed great respect for Silo. Again I spoke on behalf of the Base Team—Rafa was in Chile meeting President Bachelet—and she complemented me on my Spanish! Later in the evening there was a great March from Plaza de Mayo, the site of the Presidential Palace, to Congress a few blocks away. Thousands of people took part including a delegation of Indians who gave a very multi-cultural feeling to the event; one of them was even dressed as Gandhi.

The next day was another early start as we had to drive 800 Km to a reception and inauguration of a monument before finally finishing in Mendoza a further 250 Km

west. It was a long and tough day and we arrived late in San Luis and we started to eat dinner at about 11pm. There were speeches and music by an Argentinean TV talent show winner, who was very good, before we continued our journey and arrived in Mendoza at around 4am. At 10am we had to be at the City Hall in order to take part in an official reception. This was also amazing because the welcome was so sincere and joyful. They were really happy that so many people were coming to their province. I spoke again and I half-joked that it was the Military in Argentina who had chosen the place for the end of our March 40 years previously when they said to Silo that he should go to the mountains and speak to the stones and so he did. He spoke to the stones in Punta de Vacas as well as to the 200 young activists who would later take Siloism to the four corners of the Earth and eventually lead to this March bringing so many tourists to Mendoza. The most amusing part of the joke though was that a representative of the Military then very apologetically came to see me and tell me how much things have changed in Argentina since 1969!

Our final event in Mendoza was at the train station where a passenger train had not been seen for over 20 years and the World March had been a good opportunity for the train company to not only bring hundreds of people to Mendoza but also to try out the newly rehabilitated sections of track which they hoped would later become part of a new regular service between Buenos Aires and Mendoza. Hundreds of people got off the train in a great party atmosphere and headed up to the mountains with their tents and sleeping bags strapped to their backs. This was the 31<sup>st</sup> of December. It was nearly over for us.

But we still had two days to go and we had no plans for New Year's Eve and yet we knew that there was going to be a party in Punta de Vacas Park where we were officially

expected in two days' time. Half the Base Team were in Mendoza, the other half were in Santiago, Chile and in Mendoza we decided that we weren't going to miss the Party in the Park so we hired a mini-bus, put on our warmest clothes, despite it being the middle of summer, and headed to Aconcagua.

The party was great and in what must be one of Silo's last ever public appearances he took the microphone at midnight and said with a great smile on his face, "In all cultures, dates and languages we'd like to celebrate this new world that, despite the atrocities of war, injustice and despair, is already being hinted at in the gentle breeze of the dawn of humanity. For all of us and for all human beings we look forward to a hug of peace, force and joy."

The echoes of "Peace, Force and Joy" sounded around the park and the valley as hundreds of ecstatic humanists celebrated together the end of 2009 and fervently anticipated the biggest ever mobilisation of humanists that would take place 36 hours later.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, the rest of the Base Team arrived from Mendoza and we had a final dinner together. It was a beautiful occasion with everyone given the opportunity to stand up and express their feelings about the experience they'd lived in the previous three months. We all knew how emotional the following day was going to be and we also knew that then it would soon be time to say some difficult goodbyes.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January we got up early because the final act was due to start at 4pm and we were expected in the Park by 2pm for media activities. Punta de Vacas Park always has a highly charged atmosphere for me and as we drove along the winding roads that led us higher and higher into the mountains the landscape became more and more dramatic and our excitement reached new levels. After three hours we turned the final bend and

there it was: the little hamlet of Punta de Vacas, no more than a handful of houses, a truck park and border control facilities and above that, the blue-roofed buildings of the Centre of Studies and the multi-purpose hall, the shiny stainless steel monolith, and the white-domed meditation hall and above all of that the lookout point with its orange flags fluttering like crazy in the breeze. This was it. We'd met on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September in Auckland, New Zealand and 100 days later we were here in Punta de Vacas. It was an epic journey, it was an amazing experience and it was now almost over.

We reached the Park, some of us did interviews with CNN who had come to cover it live and then we exited the park again to March in formation back into the Park. Those who had done the whole thing were at the front: Rafa, Montse, Luis, Micky, Pierre, Isabelle, Juanita, Charles and Sinthya, those who had done fewer days came behind. In front of us was a piper from Galicia leading us in, we entered the park and it was a sea of orange flags, thousands of people were taking photos, many people were openly crying and I had to stop to give one young woman a hug. It took us at least half an hour to reach the stage which was only about 100 metres away from the gate through which we entered.

We went onto the stage. First of all we lit the Nuclear Abolition Torch that we had received in New Zealand and taken around the world and lit on all official occasions. That torch had first been lit in Hiroshima in August 2009 in a preparatory event for the March and after Punta de Vacas we took it to the United Nations where it now hangs in the office of the Head of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs. After this we started the speeches.

Back in the middle of December I'd been contacted by Tomás Hirsch inviting me to be one of eight speakers in the closing act of the World March. This was a huge honour for me and a terrifying prospect at the same

time. I've never spoken in front of so many people before and Tomy appreciated how daunting this would be and explained that all of us could choose which language to speak in. I knew though that if I would speak I'd do so in Spanish because the vast majority of the crowd would be Spanish speakers.

Rafa had given me a lot of freedom to choose the route of the March that I wanted to do because I was a late joiner to the Base Team and I had had to organise all my own flight tickets. This gave me the possibility to leave the Pacific leg of the March in Bolivia on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December and join the Atlantic leg of the March in Paraguay on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December and with this came the glorious opportunity to spend the 24<sup>th</sup> of December in a nice hotel in Asuncion where I could sleep and relax and write the speech that I eventually gave in front of at least 15,000 people:

## MY MARCH FOR PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE

*First of all I have to say that I never planned to do this March. In the end I did over 50 days of Marching I have been to 30 different countries in four different continents and by the time I reach home in Poland I will have taken 38 flights, spent around 200 hours on a bus and slept in at least 50 different beds!*

*What can I say about such an experience now?*

*First of all this for me has been the opportunity of a lifetime. I have experienced the best of human kindness and witnessed the effects of the worst of humanity. I have laughed a lot and I have sometimes been moved to tears.*

*In Japan we met Hibakusha, the bomb survivors. One of whom said to us, "Thank you, oh, thank you! It's so important." I was translating these words while trying not to cry due to feelings of such great empathy for the terrible suffering that this lady has lived through and feeling totally unworthy of her thanks. Rafa*

*took her hand and led her to the microphone where he spoke to the crowd and while she held the World March banner. When you are hugged by someone who has survived an atomic bomb, what you do as a human being becomes much more important. In Korea we heard from families who have been divided for over 50 years by a disgusting barbed-wire fence that divides a people with a history going back over 5000 years. You ask yourself, "How can this be?" The people ask you to make the whole world know about this situation, to make it public and a source of international condemnation like the Berlin Wall was. But today we have walls in many places: Israel-Palestine, USA-Mexico, South and North Korea, and the walls that you can't see: the border controls that appear harmless until the moment that you discover that you share your name with someone on a list of criminals<sup>74</sup>, or until you discover that you don't have the required visa; and the walls in our minds, the difficulty to treat others as you want to be treated, the difficulty to recognise the humanity in people who are so very different to us, the difficulty to communicate with people who speak different languages and have a different way of thinking. This March was also about bringing down these walls.*

*In Bosnia, we heard from activists who feel that they live in a pause between two wars: the last war and the next war that is sure to come because when peace is imposed without any steps taken towards reconciliation you can be sure that physical violence is not very far away.*

*In Serbia and Kosovo, we saw the results of war in the ruined buildings and the destroyed streets of Belgrade and Pristina and for just one second you think you can imagine the horror of living in a place like that in the moment when the bombs are dropping, not knowing if this will be your last few seconds of life. Of course,*

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74 I had problems getting into New Zealand and the USA for this reason, having to wait without my passport while the police checked if I was the Tony Robinson on their list of wanted criminals.

you can't really imagine that horror, because whatever you can imagine is nothing compared to what the real horror is like.

In Mexico and Guatemala we heard about the problems of people smuggling; people who are struggling to find a way to make some money to support their desperately poor family members back home and you hear about the women who travel alone in search of work and who are therefore considered to be no more than common prostitutes worthy of rape, slavery, enforced prostitution and even death; because who would miss a common prostitute?

In Colombia we heard about the interminable wars between government and paramilitary forces, we heard about hostages, and teenage daughters worried sick about their fathers. You see a country where 364 days of the year the theme is violence and on just one day of the year; when the World March is in town, the newspapers talk of peace.

In Bolivia, we saw for ourselves the disgusting situation of economic violence, the result of 500 years of naked exploitation by a colonial power which left their own descendants in charge to continue the exploitation, and you see the hope in a new indigenous-led government—the government of Evo Morales—that, through a process of building a new constitution, nationalising the country's natural resources, and repossessing land from landowners who had no right to it in the first place, has brought pride back to peoples who used the tool of nonviolence—the ballot box—to create social change.

With this March not only have we witnessed the horrors, we have also seen that we were carrying the hopes of millions of people and we have learned as much as possible about nonviolent social change from the many examples we have met along the way. As Dr Bernard Lafayette, Martin Luther King's colleague said to us in New York, "this March is not about yourselves, this is about your children and about the children who are yet to be born."

In this March we have recognised the same music of rebellion against a violent system even if we have heard this same music

played with different instruments. We have felt the certainty that the music we are playing is the music that can change the world we live in. To paraphrase Silo<sup>75</sup>, we are a rainbow of diversity, we now know that the softness of our water can break apart the hard rocks. And like David in front of an insolent Goliath, this March has shown the world that we can bring down those things that have seemed so solid and impenetrable until now.

A few days later I wrote to Silo regarding an idea I had to write his biography and he replied with his opinion and very kindly added<sup>76</sup>, "Your speech in Punta de Vacas impressed me with its simplicity and the inner truth with which you addressed everyone there... it was a very existential address and very beautiful at the same time."

I stayed in the mountains a few more days because there were meetings planned to launch the new way the Humanist Movement organised itself and on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January it was Silo's birthday. It was the last one he had and although I knew he didn't believe too much in these kinds of celebrations he knew that people would be in the park to wish him well. I was there also.

He was very frail by this time and he walked very carefully guided by Tomás Hirsch and he walked around to greet the crowds and as I always did I took the opportunity to give him a hug. It was the last time I saw him.

What a privilege it was for me to know him even if only at a distance or for very short periods of time.

My final anecdote from the March concerns my journey home. Throughout the March there had always been people to meet us at airports with reception com-

75 In his speech, "What is the Humanist Movement Today", Obras Sanitarias Stadium, Buenos Aires, January 1998.

76 Tu intervención en el acto de Punta de Vacas, me impresionó por la sencillez y la verdad interna con que te dirigiste a todos los concurrentes... fue una alocución muy existencializada y al mismo tiempo muy hermosa.

mittees, big smiles and warm hugs and as we moved further and further south the temperature rose and rose. I experienced temperatures in Asuncion that I've never experienced before with the temperature reaching over 40 degrees.

Once the March was over, my body kind of collapsed. The fatigue I felt was debilitating. I hung out with the Hungarians in Uspallata for a couple of days, but mostly I slept and ate. Finally we headed for Chile because our flights were going from Santiago but it took ages to get there because the borders were jammed due to the volume of traffic and a strike by border officials. On my last day in Santiago I had lunch at the house of Micky Hirsch with a few friends and later that afternoon I headed to the airport for the final flights. After 24 hours of travelling I arrived in Krakow and the middle of winter. From +40 degrees, I landed in -20 degrees. There was no one to meet me at the airport; no flags, no music, no smiles, no hugs. I got in a taxi, went to my flat, bought milk from the corner shop for my instant coffee and spent the next three days wrapped up in bed. My March was definitely over!

## Morphology

When Silo left the Movement to its own devices in 2002 he already had in mind a couple of things that he wanted to work on. One was the development of the spiritual current inspired by his book *Silo's Message* and the other was the development of something that he referred to as "The School". He had opened and closed The School twice before over the course of his life, on both times not apparently seeing the conditions to keep it open, but it seems that in the third attempt he wanted to take his time to develop the bases and the process for joining before launching it into the world. In reality, Silo saw The School as the origin of everything else that he did in the world. Both the Movement, with its organisations, and *Silo's Message*, with its unstructured way of working are expressions in the social world of the need to create conditions for the mental development of human beings and the attainment of higher levels of consciousness. The School is interested in dislocating the phenomenon of the "I"—the phenomenon where one perceives one's body and mind as one and the same thing—so that one can enter into profound areas of the consciousness that are



considered sacred. These higher levels of consciousness Silo referred to as inspired consciousness<sup>77</sup>.

In 1975 Silo explained:

## OPENING AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHOOL<sup>78</sup>

*At the most internal levels, in reflection and meditation, human beings perceive themselves as a manifestation of the divine. They observe the divine as arising in everything that is consciousness; the divine at the higher levels of animal consciousness; the divine highly manifested at the higher levels of human consciousness. This development of the divine at different levels is not a matter of chance, it isn't something fortuitous. It's what explains the meaning of history; it's what explains the meaning of everything. History and things have no meaning without this entity that keeps unfolding and manifesting in an increasingly conscious way.*

*Work carried out at the most internal levels leads one to notice this divine spark in oneself. If you can distinguish well between the levels of consciousness, and if you know how to differentiate the levels proper to allegory—the levels where hallucinations arise, where confusion arises—from the clear levels, where things also present themselves with clarity, with a different clarity from the clarity of the allegorical world, different from the world of semi-sleep, but where strong evidence is also retrieved... If you can distinguish between those two levels, you can understand that the presence of this divine entity within oneself can arise and make itself evident to the consciousness without being mixed up with mechanisms of a hallucinatory or an illusory kind. You may understand this sooner or later but the work of School has always been a work of contact with one's own interiority*

*at the highest levels of consciousness, where this divine spark makes itself evident for those who work on themselves.*

*In this way the work of School, in its ultimate root, is a profoundly religious work: very far from what's understood today as religion. It's a work that sets a certain frequency of responsibility for one's intelligence, in the highest sense: responsibility for the process of the consciousness of the planet.*

*And that's why it's at times when this consciousness is endangered—when it's bewildered and confused, when it's wandering, when it's psychically disintegrating—that the works of School manifest themselves. And these works of School arise and seek the means appropriate to the moment in which they must act. The concerns of School are in no way profane. They have manifested through actions in the social realm, some of its expressions have been of that kind, but its fundamental concern is not profane, not mundane.*

*We know that consciousness on the planet Earth, everywhere on Earth, is becoming deranged. Some talk of psychic plagues, of collective mental illness—well, that's an approximation of what we're talking about when we talk about the disequilibrium of the consciousness on planet Earth.*

*It's useless—and at the level of School we don't think this way—it's useless to look for sociological explanations for why the mechanisms of a certain kind of society drive people crazy, or why economic pressures of one kind or another disturb and confuse the consciousness. Things go beyond that, they have to do with processes, because today this kind of mental plague which is spreading everywhere is being seen in primitive societies just as it is in developed societies. The process is what is relevant; it's a part of the process of the human race.*

*It doesn't matter to us that at this moment, within very limited scientific circles for example, there are people who feel a certain degree of internal responsibility enough to want to prevent a catastrophe. It doesn't matter to us either that in certain limited political circles there are people of very good will who are doing what they can to prevent a catastrophe. Those isolated efforts*

<sup>77</sup> See Psychology IV. [www.silo.net/en/conferences/index/3](http://www.silo.net/en/conferences/index/3)

<sup>78</sup> Extracts from a chat in 1975

and those good intentions don't matter to us, nor are we interested in helping those people do things well, because everything that happens with them and in their consciousnesses is also very accidental. Today they think one thing and tomorrow they may think something else. So we do our things independently of the fact that people of goodwill exist.

...We are going to begin setting up the conditions to admit people to these internal works. People who can prepare the future rise of new conditions for the human mind.

We cannot propose our work in terms of strategies or tactics; those are profane ways of proposing things. We don't have strategies and tactics, we do our work and at most we set a certain time line. But in our work we don't depend on things going one way or another, we don't adjust our work to profane conditions.

...When we speak of the divine, of religion, all the ideas we have about the divine and religiosity begin to be erased, because the idea people usually have about the divine is allegorised and corresponds to other levels. The perception of the divine as intelligence developing in the universe doesn't coincide with the higher levels of consciousness.

Silo explained that The School has seen its origins partly in the ancient Mystery Schools of ancient Greece but also in traditions that are Buddhist and Arabic. Silo re-discovered and refined four ways to access these higher areas of consciousness—"The Profound" as he referred to it.

The paths that we know today are based on discoveries that were made by various peoples over a period of time no greater than 5,000 years. Given this great diversity of fragmentary sources, it isn't possible to cover all the knowledge of, and practices for, gaining access to the Profound. Our Four Disciplines work with the manipulation of external material objects (*Material Discipline*), with psychophysical energy (*Energetic Discipline*), with mental objects (*Mental Discipline*) and with mental forms

(*Morphological Discipline*). Clearly these disciplines do not exhaust all other possible paths.

The *Material Discipline* is based on the works of Chinese Buddhists and Taoists, as well as the inhabitants of Babylon, Alexandria, Byzantium, Arabia and the West. That assemblage of works in its continuous transformation and deformation was known as "alchemy". Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century alchemy was in hopeless decline, and many of its discoveries, procedures and instruments were handed over to the incipient science of Chemistry.

The *Energetic Discipline* finds its roots in Asia Minor from where cults of Orpheus and Dionysius spread towards Crete and Greece. In that process they underwent major modifications until they were finally eradicated by triumphant Christianity. Fragments of extraordinarily rich experience can be recovered from certain Shivite<sup>79</sup> and Tantric lines.

The *Mental Discipline* encounters its greatest source of knowledge in Buddhism. To support the distinctions between mental acts and objects it appeals to the rigorous language of a particular contemporary philosophical current.

The *Morphological Discipline* recognises significant antecedents in certain pre-Attic<sup>80</sup> currents of thought that flourished under the "oriental" influence of Egypt, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. The Pythagorean School would represent one such case.

The Disciplines work with routines that are repeated in each moment of process (step), until the operator obtains the indicated register. By convention the entire process is organised in twelve steps separated into three quaternas. Just as each step has a designation that approximates the idea of the register being sought, each quaterna marks a significant change of phase. The Disciplines lead the operator in the direction of profound spaces. On concluding the disciplinary process the operator is in

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79 Related to the Hindu god, Shiva.

80 Attic, a dialect of ancient Greek originating from Attica.

*conditions to organise an Ascesis separate from any steps, quarters or routines.*<sup>81</sup>

When talk among Siloists turned to Disciplines at the beginning of the new century, they did so in a very unofficial and mysterious way. We knew that some people were working with Silo on the Disciplines but no one was talking about it very openly. It did feel a bit like the ancient mystery schools with secret rites and initiations. I'm not sure whether this was to stoke interest in the disciplines or keep interest down, but it resulted in the former and everyone wanted to know what was going on and so rumour, gossip and anecdotes spread rapidly and in some cases inaccurately. In my famous coffee with Silo I asked him about the Disciplines and if they were essential for us. He told me that they weren't essential and that one should only try a discipline if one was truly motivated to do so. I had none of the context that I have written above at that time and I thought that maybe it could be something useful for later in life but that for now my vocation was towards social change. I guess I thought that I could play with higher levels of consciousness after I'd retired! Nevertheless, I also knew that Silo never developed anything that he didn't consider to be of utmost relevance so I wrote to a friend, Karen Rohn, an American living in Santiago, who had been the first of Silo's disciples to make it through the 12 steps. I asked her if I could do the Energetic Discipline as I knew that it was connected somehow to the Experience of Force that I'd experienced in 2002 and which I wanted to master and go deeper into.

I got the standard reply which only added to the mystery. "Thank you for your enquiry. We have noted

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<sup>81</sup> Extracts from a document from The School, giving context to the four paths.

your interest. Don't contact us again about this matter. We will be in contact if we accept your application." Or words to that effect.

Eventually I received an e-mail, together with thousands of others around the world, saying that The School was opening its doors to anyone who wanted to go through the process. I should appear in Attigliano Park of Study and Reflection, Italy, on a certain date in 2009 and await further instructions.

I duly appeared and was given a pack of preparation work which consisted of a revision of all the personal work I'd ever done over the previous twenty years. The process was called "Levelling" and was aimed at bringing everyone who wanted to study a Discipline to the same level of knowledge about Siloist ideas, his psychology and his practices of personal work. It was also an opportunity for everyone to resolve any personal problems that had been lying around unresolved. A schedule of work was given with two further seminars planned along the way which were compulsory. The work would be finished when at the third seminar everyone came with a written summary of the work they'd done. It was highly recommended that the consumption of alcohol be given up, not out of any moral problem with alcohol, but out of the fact that purposely inhibiting ones consciousness with alcohol is counterproductive if one aspires to reach new levels of consciousness.

There were no teachers in this process. The work was done in groups who met regularly to interchange about their experiences and discoveries. Part of the work from Self-Liberation required a partner so everyone found one.

In these days I was in an awkward situation for these works because I was living in Poland and there wasn't even one other Siloist in the country and so I had to do these works by myself and use skype to interchange with people, but it wasn't very ideal. Then I needed to find a

working partner who could work in English and this was also difficult. My first Hungarian partner dropped out before the first seminar. I found a second partner who was Greek and even though I travelled to Athens to start the work with him, he dropped out because of his health and didn't attend the second seminar. So for me it was a very lonely process and I arrived to the final seminar with something written down but nothing like the quality or depth I would have liked to have done.

The third seminar was when the Disciplines were officially presented via short videos by those who had finished the process, "Masters".

In the case of the Material Discipline (Alchemy) I had already previously discounted it because I have a degree in Chemistry and I always assumed that the process (that was meant to be performed in a laboratory) was meant to produce gold as the mythology around alchemy says it should do. As my chemistry background told me that making gold out of things that aren't gold to start with is impossible, when I received the notes about the discipline, the first thing I did was sit down with a pen and paper and try to understand what chemical reactions were taking place and which shiny, yellow metal alloy or compound was being produced at the end. To be fair, the presentation of the discipline doesn't claim to produce gold. This was my imagination interpreting too much.

I sat through the presentation of the Mental Discipline and despite the fact that I understood every word that was said, none of the actual sentences made any sense to me. I just didn't connect with the subject. Rather alarmingly, the same thing happened to me on a smaller scale with the presentation of the Energetic discipline which was a bit of a shock as I had originally planned to do it.

And in this situation, waiting for the fourth and final presentation I knew that I was in trouble. I am not artistic, I have no appreciation of art, architecture,

music or anything vaguely cultural or aesthetic. My view of Modern Art is that if it's something that I think that I could make with the same materials then the object I'm observing must have no artistic merit whatsoever, by definition. Modern Art for me is the ultimate "Emperor's New Clothes". I'm the little boy who can see that it's crap while all the adults have to pretend that it's something fine in order to not look stupid among all the other adults. So the thought of doing morphology which precisely led to the fields of Architecture, Music and Fine Art in modern day life was something I thought would be impossible for me. Yet when I sat to watch the presentation I was amazed by how simple it sounded. Even I could register some of the sensations that one is meant to experience during the explanations given.

In a most unexpected way I had found my Discipline and so I became a Morphologist.

It would make little sense to extend this story and give details about the 12 steps of the discipline and my experiences because these things must be experienced personally and with the possibility to talk about it with others doing the same process. If anyone would read my descriptions and then start the discipline it would only create noise and confusion. So suffice is to say that nearly two years after starting the levelling, I chose a discipline and after a number of difficulties and in a less than perfect condition I entered The School on a freezing cold day in December 2010.

## Footsteps

Possibly the biggest influence on my life outside of the Humanist Movement has come from my friend Suzanne. She and her husband David took a big chance on me when they invited me to be a director and shareholder of their Management and IT Consultancy Company in 1997. I wasn't even 30 and the possibility they offered me to develop my career gave me the opportunity since 2002 to dedicate most of my time to the things in life that are important for me personally.

Our business was very successful in a moment when all technology companies were doing well but what I liked most about our company was the values that we held, which were of course heavily influenced by treating people (our staff and customers) the way we want to be treated. It wasn't a cooperative, it wasn't an ideological company. We earned good money and we gave excellent opportunities for all our employees to develop their careers.

So successful were we that from an original team of four people, our company was bought by a French company three years later when we had forty-four members of staff and one million pounds in the bank. As part of the company sale the four shareholders were required to stay for two more years. Suzanne became the

Managing Director of the combined UK operation. But almost as soon as we did the deal with the French, the dotcom bubble burst. It was a disaster for us. We struggled on as best we could but the conditions imposed on us by the new owners meant that we had to start making people redundant. The problem with any kind of redundancy programme though is that it's so anti-human and when you start doing it maybe you can remove the people from the company who contribute the least, but what happens is that all the people who contribute the most also leave because they see that the company is in decline and they want to make a better career somewhere else.

If it had been down to the four of us, we would have cut our costs, worked without making a profit and even asked everyone to take a pay cut if we still couldn't pay the wages. We wouldn't have forced anyone out of the company. Sadly our new owners didn't agree with our strategy.

All of this took a great toll on Suzanne. As time went by she was treated worse and worse by the French despite the fact that they'd put her in that position ahead of anyone else in the UK. Finally she was also asked to leave, which she happily did but she was not the same person I knew at the end of the process. All her fun for life and spark had gone. If she wasn't clinically depressed, she might have been on the way. In this situation I invited her to Kenya!

I'm a great believer that your own life always looks and feels better after you try to do something to help others who are worse off and it was with this in mind that I arrived in Nairobi in 2002 for the first time with a fairly apprehensive, yet open-for-anything, Suzanne. She had two small children<sup>82</sup> back in the UK and I was conscious

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<sup>82</sup> Bethan and Matthew who has specifically requested a mention in my book and gets it here.

of the need to keep her out of danger as much as possible, despite the fact that I'd never knowingly experienced danger previously. Yet somehow, there always seemed to be some unusual incident when Suzanne came with me.

On her very first trip, James in my team organised for us to visit a new project in the Mathare slums of Nairobi. The people there were doing an education project about HIV/AIDS and they were going to perform a play for us. It was the first thing we went to see together after arriving in Nairobi the night before. We took a car to find James and together we were taken by the group leaders into the slum. I had never been into the centre of a slum before, only ever visiting things on the edges previously. But this time we went deep into it. We had to pass over rivers of sewage, and navigate our way through the narrow lanes that divided the rows of dwellings made of iron sheets and wooden posts. Even James was alarmed by this and confessed that he'd never been so far inside a slum. We arrived into a clearing after about 10 minutes and here the group were performing their play. It was very touching really. These kids had nothing and yet they were concerned enough about their health to perform street theatre to educate others about how to prevent the spread of AIDS. At no time did anything bad happen, but the location, the smells, the living conditions and the people were incredible. For Suzanne it was a million miles away from her comfortable home and loving family and yet I think that despite the shock, she enjoyed every minute of it, not because it was a pleasant experience, but because it made her feel alive again, it allowed her to gain a different perspective on her life and appreciate once more everything she had back at home, regardless of the recent experiences in her professional life.

On another occasion I took her to Kisumu where I had a meeting of my Humanist Movement council. These meetings tended to last a few hours and despite her keen

interest in the Movement she never felt the need to join it. I think also she was a little apprehensive of joining a movement where we practiced the Experience of Force, especially after Silvia informed her once that she knew someone who actually had an orgasm while working with the exercise. Suzanne wouldn't have liked that. After all, we are British and very reserved and conservative about these things!

So, while I was going through the agenda of my meeting, Suzanne and two local friends from Kisumu went walking around this rural area on the outskirts of the city, not far from Lake Victoria. On this occasion, while they were out a thunder storm arrived, the heavens opened and it rained heavily for about an hour. Suzanne and her two guardians were stranded and had to find shelter in a little adobe house, the guest of the woman who lived inside it with her children, chickens and goats. They arrived back an hour or so later, soaked to their skin and desperately in need of tea.

On a third trip, which again coincided with a council meeting, Suzanne arrived on the morning when I had planned to travel by bus to Kisumu with many people from our council who had met in Nairobi. The resulting timetable had her flying for nine hours from London, and then taking a bus for nine hours to Kisumu on Kenya's notoriously terrible roads.

On this trip we stopped at a small town called Molo, at the request of Francis from my team. He was developing projects there and wanted me to talk to some people. This area has suffered a lot with tribal violence and we talked about it and how to deal with it. I remember it vividly because at first I didn't know how to respond, but ultimately I said, "You can go for revenge and kill those who try to hurt you and then their sons will kill your sons and so on. Or you can take the much harder route and be brave and save your sons from all this bloodshed. It's up to you!"

The experiences of violence that people have never cease to shock me in Africa, yet Silo's teachings of peace and nonviolence and strategies for social and personal change are still applicable in even the worst cases.

I think after all these experiences she was starting to get a feel for how life is for the majority of Africans and in the first years of travelling Suzanne found it difficult to adjust to life at home after a trip to Kenya. One time she called me one evening after having friends over for dinner the day when she arrived back in the UK from Africa. She had had a disagreement with someone about the value of doing projects in Africa. For Suzanne, the experience of going to Kenya was still very raw and difficult to integrate and having to try to explain to people who'd never seen anything like that why it was so important to try to change the system—at least the way things are in Kenya—was too difficult. I recommended to her my own strategy that I learnt years ago: there's no point in trying to convince anyone of anything and if you realise there's a fundamental difference of opinion, just drop the subject and move on to something else.

Sometimes Kenya was also overwhelming with the scale of the mess over there and I repeated a mantra that I've always used: I didn't create this mess in Kenya, I don't feel guilty about it and yet still I do the best that I can from the best of intentions to try to improve the situation for people there. Without this strategy there are only two other possibilities: sell everything you own and give all your money to the poor and therefore become unable to do anything to help anyone; or do nothing, stay at home and ignore the situation. Neither of these alternatives works for me, so I always took the path of rejecting guilt and doing the best I could.

Suzanne has always been more practical than I have in Africa, but then again she is a Businesswoman and Entrepreneur, I'm the naïve idealist. Whereas I could

come up with some utopian ideas, Suzanne could make them happen. It was very much with the two of us using our best virtues which we had previously applied to our company, but this time to social development in Africa, that we came up with the idea for Footsteps<sup>83</sup>.

Footsteps is a UK based charity that we launched in 2004. Previously I'd set up a charity organisation with Jon and Silvia, relayNET, which we'd used for raising money to help us with a few small projects when we started going to Africa, but with Jon and Silvia the idea was to ensure transparency with all the money we raised and allow us to claim tax from the government for any donations we received. With Footsteps however, we developed a plan to build an organisation that could actually deliver community development on the ground.

Footsteps deals with three things: building classrooms and medical facilities, sponsoring orphans so that they can go to school and taking UK volunteers once a year to Kenya for a 10 day trip to play with children at the schools we build and learn a very small amount about life and the culture in rural Africa.

By 2005, we invited Rupert, another friend from our professional careers, to join us in Footsteps. Between the three of us we have organised very successful fund-raising campaigns, probably more than half a million pounds all together, and so far we have built around 40 classrooms, an HIV/AIDS clinic and a children's ward at a local hospital, sponsored 80 children to make sure they go to school until they are ready to find a job, and taken about 150 volunteers to Kenya for a trip they will never forget.

It's not much, compared to the huge need, but to those people that we help out we change their lives and give them hope. We have also had the chance to save lives.

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83 [www.footstepsuk.org](http://www.footstepsuk.org)

The most direct example of this was on our first volunteer trip. One of our volunteers, Liesa, became very fond of a young boy walking on crutches. It was one of the first trips we did and that year it was a two week programme. The little boy, Bravin, aged around 10 at the time, was good in English and liked speaking to the *mzungus*<sup>84</sup>. In the second week Liesa wanted to go and visit where the boy lived. I agreed and sent her with one of the teachers to look after her. At the boy's house she asked him about this broken leg and arm and he said he'd fallen out of a tree about a year ago. She couldn't believe it and asked if she could see the damage to the leg. He unwrapped the bandage and to Liesa's horror a bone was sticking out looking rather green. No wonder the boy was walking with crutches and in constant pain.

Liesa came to see me very distressed and asked if there was something we could do. Of course there was something we could do, we found out how much it would cost to have him treated, Liesa paid for it, about £200, and the next week he was in hospital for surgery. The doctors said that if it hadn't been treated it could easily have become infected with gangrene and he could have lost the leg completely or even got blood poisoning and died. That was six years ago. Now the little boy, Bravin, is a big boy, in his second year of secondary school and always among the top performing students. He'll never have a career running marathons like other famous Kenyans, and he'll always have a slight limp (because he doesn't want to go for more surgery), but we saved his life and gave him the chance of an education, and a possibility to live a normal life and help his community economically in the future.

If this were the only child we'd have helped, creating Footsteps would have been worth it but we have another 80 children on our programme. Not all of them have such

dramatic stories, but each of them we are giving a chance for a better life.

When the organisational structure of the Humanist Movement was dissolved many people who were developing activities and NGOs in Africa stopped travelling there and to our friends in Africa it was a big shock and they felt quite abandoned and this was because they had never truly understood the purpose of the Movement. And for some of those travelling to Africa, not returning became a matter of ideology. They felt that what we had been doing was naïve humanitarianism and not humanism, and this I agree with.

In general there should be no need for charity organisations that do the job that governments should be doing. Charity organisations should be limited to disaster situations: tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc. When charities are building schools, feeding the poor and healing the sick they are doing the work of governments and this is a sign of a dysfunctional society. Ideologically, I was always against charity organisations. In fact, I have seen with my own eyes the terrible work that NGOs do in Kenya. They have millions of dollars to spend and instead of helping those in need, the money is spent on expensive offices, 4x4 vehicles and projects that have no relevance to the people they are trying to help. NGOs are big business in Africa, they have very little impact on people's lives compared to what they could do and money is spent according to targets set in meetings in European or North American offices or worse, spent according to a religious dogma.

Yet, after my experience of working with Footsteps I have changed my opinion regarding my own involvement. The best people in the world to work in humanitarian organisations are humanists. Of course this humanitarian work has to go hand in hand with the development of a social movement and a revolution so that NGOs become

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84 White people in Swahili



redundant. NGOs need humanising because the people managing them around the world are so hopeless and much more obsessed with making sure they get money to pay their wages than they are with changing the lives of those in need.

I have no doubt that Footsteps is incapable of changing the world. It has nothing to do with my hopes for Humanising Africa through the creation of a network of well-qualified activists who will organise a social revolution based on personal transformation, yet it has value nevertheless and for me it is one of the most coherent things I have ever done in my life.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> I have to give a final recognition here to Rashid Miruka and Monica Aluoch who worked with me in the Humanist Movement since my very first visit to Kisumu in 2001 and whose work with Footsteps has been invaluable. Nothing that Suzanne, Rupert or myself do there would be possible without Rashid and Monica.

## Siloism post-Silo

For the greater part of twenty-two years Silo made my life easy. He gave a global outlook and analysis of the present situation and set the strategy every six months. With only the lesser tactical details to resolve it was easy to know what to do. Even when I gained my so-called “autonomy” in the Movement, I still looked to Silo to show me the way through the informal meetings he had with friends and the notes that circulated afterwards. And it was this orientation that allowed me to do incredible things over the years, things in which not just me, but every one of us pushed ourselves to new limits. More than just slogans, I really felt that I could “learn without limits” and “love the reality I built”. This Argentinean led me to travel around the world, he got me talking about peace and nonviolence to Presidents and Prime Ministers and speaking in front of thousands of people. He inspired me to become a writer, a translator, a journalist, a politician and a philosopher. He took me out of my comfort zone working in places I would never have thought to go to and transforming people’s lives. I have even moved country... twice! He gave me the tools to change my life and I’m quite certain that without him my life would be very different and much worse than it is.

Then suddenly on September 16<sup>th</sup> 2010 he left without

leaving us any instructions for what we should do or how we should do it!

Of course this isn't strictly true, he left plenty of instructions behind, it's just that the instructions didn't tell us what to do precisely instead they showed us how to find the answers we seek within, because that's where they have to come from. There are no more "orientators", there are no more gurus.

Looking back now, everything he said over the last two years of his life was said in the knowledge that he could go at any time. I think he knew he had more or less two years left in 2009 and he expected to go sometime after January 2011. I suspect that September 2010 was just a few months earlier than he anticipated.

In these last two years I think he recognised the failure, more than ever, of his project to Humanise the Earth and he also realised that there was no one in the condition to act on his behalf or replace him among the people he left behind. In this context, the way he rapidly turned everything on its head in 2009 makes sense. One day we had an organisational structure with its vertical hierarchy and assembly that had been a huge part of our lives for years, the next day it was dissolved. The School that he created also had positions of power and a hierarchy of sorts and all of this he eliminated. Every place where it was possible that someone could be seen to be in power was abolished. Suddenly everyone was in a process to enter The School and learning how to access The Profound and inspired states of consciousness. All of us went through the same process of Levelling and Disciplines and subsequently received information about how to develop self-discipline—Ascesis—and research into the human consciousness and produce monographs to present the discoveries to others. By the end of this process every one of us had the same elements at our disposal. We all had the instructions for how to live our

lives, should we choose to follow them. My interpretation of this was that he put us all in the same conditions so that hopefully a few of us would have our own experiences of the profound and from there could come new translations of that experience that could build on the work that he had started.

He didn't leave one single project behind; he left a whole menu of possibilities, plus the possibility to create something totally new. Everything that he launched was there for us, our five official organisations: The Community for Human Development, The International Humanist Party, Convergence of Cultures, The World Centre of Humanist Studies and World without Wars and Violence; the amorphous Silo's Message; the International Press Agency, Pressenza; hundreds of different action fronts and campaigns; all of the books that he ever wrote on the website [www.silo.net](http://www.silo.net); together with an ever-expanding network of Parks of Study and Reflection. All of this he left us. It's an incredible legacy which the world at large is not aware of.

Personally I have eaten a number of different courses off the menu. I have worked actively in World without Wars, and in Pressenza, and I translate documents and books written by Silo and Siloists in order to make these works accessible to an English-speaking audience. When I'm in need of some kind of spiritual communion with others and when others are in need of such support then I find that participating in the ceremonies in Silo's Message with the communities of Messengers who meet in Budapest is very uplifting.

World without Wars has been through a period of reformation since 2010. It now has a new organisational basis with grassroots teams and national and international coordination teams, and ways of participating and being elected to those teams. Our activists are working in several fields: there are those developing cultural activi-

ties through the International Active Nonviolence Film Festival and the “Peace Is” photography competition; there are those developing activities in the field of education with networks of schools for active nonviolence; and there is the field that I work in: nuclear disarmament. I have been elected to the World Coordination Team twice and from time to time I act as the spokesperson for the organisation, writing position statements regarding conflicts happening in different parts of the world. Libya, Syria, Mali and Iran have concerned us greatly in recent times and in March 2011 when the earthquake and tsunami in Japan rendered the Fukushima nuclear power plant inoperable and highly unstable we were able to develop a highly coherent position against nuclear energy.

After the World March finished a delegation from World without Wars attended the next conference to review the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty at the UN in New York, and in a meeting of the umbrella group, Abolition 2000<sup>86</sup>, looking for someone from World without Wars to join the Global Council, they invited me, partly because I was acting as a spokesperson in Rafa’s absence and partly because I speak English. It’s a largely symbolic role, and we decided as an organisation that it would be good to accept an invitation which was in recognition for the work that had been started by Rafa back in 1995 and culminated in the World March. The ambit of Abolition 2000 is very interesting because the people who participate there are world experts in nuclear matters: international law; nuclear science; international diplomacy; history; politics and many other subjects.

Pressenza is also a fascinating project because you get to filter the most relevant news from a humanist perspective and write opinion pieces about matters of relevance

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86 [www.abolition2000.org](http://www.abolition2000.org)

to what’s happening around the world and publish all of this through a portal which thousands of people are accessing every day. In fact the number of visitors has tripled in the last 12 months as I write this. The news we publish is about peace, nonviolence, humanism and the fight against discrimination, we publish it in five languages and we have established cooperation agreements with dozens of Media organisations all over the world. I’ve also found that Pressenza can go hand-in-hand with World without Wars. I’ve attended conferences as a spokesperson for World without Wars and written articles and interviewed people for Pressenza. It’s a great combination.

For the last three years Pressenza has participated at the Global Media Forum organised by the German media company, Deutsche Welle in Bonn, Germany. On the third occasion we had the opportunity to organise a workshop on the subject of economic values and of course we presented the need to make a paradigm shift and align economic values to human values, in other words to humanise the global economy. I moderated the workshop and it was incredible to see in such a workshop that people in the audience were not just interested in the subject of economics but also wanted to know what contribution spirituality could make.

And I’m starting to see, as time goes by, that as the world is going into an ever-increasing crisis, people are finally starting to lose faith in what governments and bankers are saying and they are looking for alternatives including spiritual alternatives; especially where spirituality is based on treating people how you want to be treated.

This can also be seen in the recent global social movements such as the 15M and Indignados of Spain, the Occupy Movement of the USA, in the beginnings of the Arab Spring and in more recent movements such as the

Brazilian demonstrations against the costs of staging the Olympics and the World Cup, and Turkish demonstrations against the cutting of trees to make way for a new shopping centre in Istanbul; they are all using nonviolence as a guiding principle in their actions. Furthermore they all see that their protests are part of a generalised global discontent with a system that is inflicting increasing hardship on human society.

It is also clear that the world is now in a situation where social unrest can occur in any place on the planet. The Icelandic government was overthrown as a result of the economic crisis and if people on the streets of Reykjavik are demonstrating, it means that the conditions are ripe for protest anywhere.

What should Siloists do in such a situation? It is when I consider questions like this that I miss Silo the most. The World March and the subsequent death of Silo was a great moment of synthesis for us, i.e. it was the end of a long stage of our development process which culminated in a huge convergence: first in our social activity and then in our personal development when each of us studied a Discipline and developed our Ascesis.

What I have come to realise though is that we may not ever be able to realise our dream of Humanising the Earth. The planet is in a precarious situation. The threats of economic collapse, wars, nuclear holocaust, environmental destruction and unrestrained violence in our personal lives, domestic lives and in society in general are hanging over us like a Sword of Damocles. In this situation, what should we do? Firstly it is important to not despair and to remember that global processes do not move in straight lines. One day things can look very bleak and society suffers one setback after another. Then something happens, an illusion affecting an entire nation or an entire empire is broken and a system collapses to be rapidly replaced by another one. This is a

reason to be hopeful because although today things may look bad, the triumph of anti-humanism is not assured; in fact it looks increasingly doubtful. So, it still makes sense to go into the world and make our little noise, to create our little sparks even if the environment doesn't hear us or see us, because in some moment our sound could echo and our sparks could land on the dry tinder and the signal that the world needs to change direction will be captured by the whole world.

In this context, "what we should do" takes a different perspective because there are thousands of Siloists and each one of us has a different image of what should be done and this is great. So the answer to what "we" should do cannot be a single activity with everyone doing the same thing. This is the past.

The answer to this question, then, can be found in the Parks of Study and Reflection which is another activity to which I dedicate as much time and energy as I am able.

## Parks of Study and Reflection

In a curious development at the time around 2003, a request reached us from Silo to raise money for a project to buy the land in Punta de Vacas where he had given his speech, the Healing of Suffering, back in 1969. Previously in 1999, to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that speech a shiny stainless steel cylindrical pillar, “the monolith”, was erected to mark the spot. I visited it for the first time in 2002 on a day trip from Santiago while there learning Spanish. I remember thinking at the time how cold and desolate it was—there was still snow on the ground in places—and yet the landscape was amazing and very dramatic.

The project consisted of buying the land from the local authority and converting it into a Park of Study and Reflection—a place to get away from the world, a place for retreats and a place for quiet meditation. There would be different buildings: a Centre of Studies, a place for research into matters of interest to The School; a Centre of Work, a place for meetings; a multi-purpose hall for dining and other purposes; a workshop, a place for developing crafts such as glass and metal work and perfumery; and last, but certainly not least, the stunning meditation hall, a hemi-spherical space on the inside, with four entrances—reminiscent of the 4 Disciplines—on

the outside, a conical tipped roof, and, when seen from above, a footprint in the form of a Templar Cross.

The park would also have other symbols: a water fountain with a form borrowed from Tantrism, a gate with a form borrowed from Shintoism, and a hermitage: in fact the same hermitage which Silo built with the stones lying roundabouts in 1969 when he lived in these mountains for six months. Finally there would also be a series of seven stainless steel plaques mounted on trapezoidal walls, called ‘steles’<sup>87</sup>. On these steles would be inscribed the Healing of Suffering in: Spanish, English, Russian, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic and Hebrew.

Siloists around the world did a fundraising campaign and came up with around a million dollars to construct everything and in 2007 we went up to the mountains to inaugurate it over three days of “spiritual inspiration”.

For those of us who’ve contributed to the creation of a Park, and hopefully also for others who accidentally stumble upon them and come inside to take a look around, they are very special places. In my case, when I visit a park, no matter which country it’s in I have the same sensation of being in “my park”. It’s the same park if it’s in Hungary or California, Mozambique or Spain.

2007 though was the first time that I felt the full emotional impact of these places. I was still trying to get my head around the concept of the parks in those days. Punta de Vacas wasn’t the first Park I visited, in fact I’d been to the Park in Attigliano, Italy in January 2005 when the monolith was inaugurated and I’d been to others later on. What I couldn’t understand at the time was the purpose of such places. Not only were they somehow a distraction from the building of a social movement, they were also extremely expensive. Nevertheless, as with everything else that Silo did, I recognised that there must be some

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<sup>87</sup> Pronounced ‘steals’

reason in this apparent madness and that eventually I would understand.

It was on the second day of the three day trip to Punta de Vacas that I realised how powerful the place was. Whereas the first day was about meeting and catching up with old friends from around the world—there must have been around 4000 of us—and the third day was when Silo spoke about the importance of reconciliation and positioned it as a step more advanced than forgiveness and way ahead of the barbaric concept of revenge, the second day was dedicated to ceremonies to officially open the various buildings.

But before any of the ceremonial stuff started I arrived in the Park and something very strange happened. I was in the place for five minutes, I hadn't met anyone, I was just walking around and a huge emotion welled up within in. Tears came to my eyes. I suppressed the urge to cry because I could think of no reason why I would want to. Over the course of the morning the same thing happened repeatedly. From within me came a need to experience a deep release of tension. It was very strange, and the only thing I could kind of compare it to was the day I said goodbye to my father after meeting him for the first time after nine years.

It was good that I was wearing sunglasses because in any moment I was prone to tears rolling down my cheeks. I said to myself I'm going to have to find Dennis<sup>88</sup> and get this out of my system. But I couldn't find him and so we went from one building to another, from one ceremony to another, and the charge within me built and built. It was finally at the inauguration of the Centre of Studies when it happened. The ceremony was being read in Spanish and I stood in the crowd translating it to English

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88 Dennis Redmond, my lovely friend from New York who I wouldn't feel self-conscious in front of as I turned into an emotional wreck.

for those around me who couldn't understand what was being said and at the end, as frequently happens in our ceremonies, they're finished off with a round of hugs to all those standing nearby. In this situation it was in the arms of Rita<sup>89</sup> that I let myself go for a few minutes and let the power of what was happening overtake me.

I cannot interpret what happened that day but I know from talking to others that similar experiences happened over the three days of the encounter. Was it a kind of mass hysteria spreading contagiously from one person to another? Was it some kind of connection with the same state as I had felt in my Experience of the Force? Was it just a deep joy at being surrounded by my community, my spiritual family, my friends, those with whom I shared a passion and a project for a better world? Was it an expression of the inspiration I felt in that mythical place? Maybe it was all of these things on top of each other that destabilised me so much. In any case it wasn't the last time such a thing would happen.

Five years later, in 2012, I went back to the Park in a moment when I was in doubt and needed to find some answers or at least find a way to integrate, to understand, everything that had happened to me since 1989. What was the meaning of all that work now that our structure was no more? What is the appropriate action to take when the world is falling apart around you and you are powerless to prevent it and when your movement is incapable of giving a coherent response in the face of such crisis? How could I move in the world without Silo's orientation? Answers to these questions and others I sought at the end of 2010 and throughout 2011. But it seems I was not alone in this search because one day I received an e-mail expressing questions in a similar vein, with an invitation to meet around the anniversary of 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1969 back in

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89 Rita Dobonyi from Budapest.

the Park where it all started. Without thinking I bought my ticket to Santiago.

They were very intense days with very intense discussions and conversations with many people expressing their disappointments, frustrations and failures. We tackled different subjects concerning how we could reconnect with the force to go into the world as renewed and inspired Siloists. It was very interesting and in some cases inspiring, but my answers finally came to me in the last part of the last day. We closed our gathering with a Ceremony of Recognition. This is a Ceremony from Silo's Message used to welcome people who wish to become active members of our community and as I read these words, coincidentally finding myself once more in the same building where I had hugged Rita exactly five years previously, I was this time overwhelmed with my head buried in the shoulder of Javier<sup>90</sup>.

*The pain and suffering that human beings experience recedes when good knowledge advances, not knowledge at the service of selfishness and oppression.*

*Good knowledge leads to justice. Good knowledge leads to reconciliation. Good knowledge also leads us to decipher the sacred in the depths of our consciousness.*

*We consider human beings to be the highest value above money, the State, religion, social models and systems. We promote liberty of thought. We promote equal rights and equal opportunities for all human beings. We recognise and applaud diversity in customs and cultures. We oppose all discrimination. We consecrate just resistance against all forms of violence: physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, psychological, and moral.*

*In the same way that no one has the right to discriminate against others for belonging to a religion or not, we affirm our*

*right to proclaim our spirituality and our belief in immortality and the sacred.*

*Our spirituality is not the spirituality of superstition, it isn't the spirituality of intolerance, it isn't the spirituality of dogma, it isn't the spirituality of religious violence. It's the spirituality that has awakened from its deep sleep to nurture human beings' best aspirations.*

*We want to give coherence to our lives, to make what we think, what we feel, and what we do coincide. We want to surpass bad consciousness by acknowledging our failures. We aspire to reconcile and to persuade. We propose to live increasingly by the rule that reminds us to treat others as we want to be treated.*

*Let us begin a new life. Let us search within ourselves for signs of the sacred, and let us carry our message to others.*

*Today we begin the renovation of our lives. Let us begin by seeking mental peace and the Force that gives us joy and conviction. Then, we will go to those closest to us and share with them everything great and good that has happened to us.*

*Peace, Force, and Joy for everyone!*

This wasn't the first time I had done this ceremony. In fact I'd been "recognised" for the first time in a ceremony officiated by Silo himself way back in 2002 in Santiago. This time though what I felt was not that I was being recognised by those in the community around me or the ones officiating the ceremony, but somehow that I was recognising within me the perfect coincidence of the concept expressed by those words with the purpose and the meaning that I profoundly feel that my life has. Now I understood: I am a politician, I am a journalist, I am a Messenger, I am a Master, I am a spokesperson, I am a chairman, I am a project coordinator, I am an activist, I am a philosopher, I am a writer. I am all of this and the 1001 other things that I've learnt to do in my life at the service of Humanising the Earth because above all, I am

<sup>90</sup> Javier Tolcachier, from Cordoba, Argentina.

a Siloist. To paraphrase an old slogan of the Humanist Party<sup>91</sup>: “Tony Robinson—much more than a Human Being”.

And in this moving experience I could finally understand the importance of the Parks in all of this. It’s in the Park that I put myself in the best conditions for advancing in my personal development. It’s in the Park that I find the inspiration through exchanging with others to set myself goals and projects. It’s in the Park that The School develops and from The School comes Silo’s entire project and the communities that have been established in Parks in over 50 places in all continents taking forward his ideas in a myriad of different forms.

The Park is the point of rooting which keeps our community working as a cohesive unit and if there is any hope for humanity to continue its mental development, assuming that we don’t manage to destroy the planet first, then I’m convinced that it will come from there.

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<sup>91</sup> The original slogan was: “The Humanist Party—much more than a Political Party”

## Guided by a Purpose

I know that what I’m about to say sounds irrational but I have a sensation that my life has been guided by a purpose which has been operating without me being totally aware of it. We can of course also call this a series of “fortunate coincidences”. Let’s take just a few:

### FINDING SILO

You have no idea how difficult it is to find Siloists in the UK! Even at its highest moment of development back in the 80s there were surely no more than 200 at any one time and this was well before I was involved. There are only four Brits who made it through the Discipline process: Jon Swinden in London, Ken Dickinson who has lived most his life in California, Tony Henderson likewise in Hong Kong and myself in Hungary. In the UK today there are three Siloists: one Brit, an Argentinean and an Italian.

To have found the Humanist Movement through a personal contact<sup>92</sup> involved me being in Cambridge as a

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<sup>92</sup> I would never have stopped to speak to anyone in a street-contacting campaign.



first year student in 1988, this means that I had to have taken a year off before going to university, which means that if I hadn't decided to track down my Father I would have missed my opportunity to meet Dan who was three doors away from me on the corridor of the building we lived in. Let's say that I would have met Siloists later on, it was nevertheless being in Florence in 1989 that changed my life.

Without a string of unexpected circumstances I wouldn't have been there.

### **LIBERATING ENERGY**

Ever since I got involved I knew that I wanted to dedicate my life to these ideas and I knew that I would have to change the balance between the time I spent working in the system for money and the time I wanted to invest in my things.

This involved a whole series of events in my professional career putting me in the right place at the right time to become a company director which liberated a lot of my time from work after the company was sold.

### **ELECTION TO COORDINATOR DELEGATE**

It seems to me that if I hadn't taken the time to go to South America, after being liberated from work, with a clear plan to learn how to speak Spanish then I would never have felt myself able to stand for that election and fulfil the role that had attracted me since I first read about it back in 1989, fourteen years previously.

That election gave me the opportunity to make new friends all over the world and really see the full international dimension of our project. These experiences were

vital to the role that I would subsequently take in the Base Team of the World March.

In sum, the path that I took—that some may say is a series of coincidences—is for me the expression of a guiding purpose that has been working deep within me. I might agree that being in the right place at the right time in 1988 could have been a coincidence—although an extraordinary one—but after that there's a purpose at work.

I have noticed the same mechanism working in other moments also. The most recent has concerned my arrival in Hungary.

In 2010 I made the decision to leave Krakow in Poland and move to Hungary. Now, I had been thinking of going to live in Hungary since 2006 and the circumstances never seemed quite right. Eventually I took this decision during the process of levelling that I did before entering The School. As much as I love Krakow (and it is a stunning city) I felt lonely there without other Siloists around and it was during the general revision of my life that I decided that I must go to Budapest. But I thought that taking the decision would be much easier than making the project happen.

I had to sell my flat in London and it had a very difficult condition because the building needed a new roof and I had to organise it with everyone else who lived in other flats in the same building. The whole process could have been terribly complicated, but every difficulty was surmounted very easily. When I went looking for a flat in Budapest, I couldn't find any that were appropriate at first and I was thinking that I wouldn't be able to find anything in the condition I wanted and then on one day I found two, next door to each other, in great conditions, in the centre of the city and they were owned by a British

woman with whom I could easily resolve any difficulties and I had exactly enough money to buy both of them.

A few weeks later I packed all my belongings in a van organised by my good friend, Fulop<sup>93</sup>, and I left Poland behind.

Living in Hungary has been a complete transformation and in fact I did it with the intention of living a more coherent life. I was clear on the following requirements: I wanted to live in easy reach of a Park; I wanted to live close to other Siloists<sup>94</sup>; I wanted to have free energy and apply this to my priority issues; and I wanted to lose the compulsive need I sometimes feel to be in a relationship. All of this I have achieved through moving here.

Here in this last chapter of the book I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the Hungarians and the others who came to live here before me for everything they have done to make my move here as easy as possible. The Hungarian language is a nightmare of the same magnitude as Polish and without help I couldn't even pay the electricity bill.

The ambit of Hungarian Masters is very special and many friends from other parks who have come to visit Mikebuda Park will all agree. It was probably on the day that I entered into The School in December 2010 that I truly fell in love with them all.

The day was very long and those presenting themselves to The School had to go through a process that seemed to go on for ever. At the end of the day, the results were announced and those who were accepted stayed for a final ceremony and it was a moment of pure love between all those present; a sense of being welcomed with open

93 Attila Fulop, from Budapest. He and a driver journeyed seven hours to Krakow to collect me and, pack my things in a vehicle and then drive seven hours back to Budapest. For this he gets a special mention here in the book!

94 In fact there are three of them: Anita, Sanyi and Stefi living in the flat next door to me.

arms into a community that will look after you for ever and a community that you will look after in return. Ever since that entry to School I never doubted for a moment that I should be in Budapest and that this was now my extended family. To put this in perspective, a relationship with a partner may or may not come into my life, but a more important relationship for me is the one I have with this community, because they will be with me for ever.

Have I achieved what I intended to do by writing this book? Will my friends and family know me better through reading these pages? Will they think I'm delusional and re-writing my own personal history through very rose-tinted glasses? Will other Siloists recognise the situations I've been in and smile while remembering their own experiences? Will someone completely ignorant of Silo and his teachings pick up this book and achieve some insight into this lifestyle I've chosen? Maybe not...

And ultimately I've decided that it doesn't matter because writing this book has been a very joyful experience for me and totally inspiring.

I have come to reflect<sup>95</sup> on a document that we were given to study after the Disciplines which gives the elements for further development in the process called Ascesis. In it is written:

*When we speak of profound transformations, we are making a kind of substitution of the formation landscape<sup>96</sup> which comes*

95 Thanks to Isabel Garcia Zinsel from Toledo Park who reminded me of these words when I told her that I was writing my autobiography.

96 The formation landscape is what surrounds you during your formative stages of life: the physical places and buildings, the people, the culture, the history, etc. All of this "forms" a human being into what they are today.

*and pushes us from behind. We substitute it for something more conscious. The world in which we were formed and act is not something conscious. But when we substitute it, we replace that world in order to move with the purposes that we ourselves form... Leaving behind your given formation landscape and entering into one that you form yourself is something serious. To construct a purpose is to construct a different formation landscape, with a certain tone of affection. Without that power of affection, those purposes are seen from the outside and not from within... It is these landscapes that have to do with the purpose.*

This book then is the formation landscape that I want to build on as the foundation of my purpose in life and project that into the future. I have done many other things that didn't make it into this book: I've been to some great parties, I've had some nice relationships that didn't last, I have other amazing friends who I love dearly but don't get mentioned in these pages and I even learned how to cook and organise dinner parties for friends, among other things. None of these things made it into the book, because it's not on the basis of those things that my purpose in life will be expressed. It is on the basis of the things written here and on the fact that I had the enormous privilege of meeting Siloists and the subsequent chance for that unique Coffee with Silo.