

MURRAY HOFMEYR: NO NEED TO WEEP

Leon Kok, Johannesburg

A month ago I reported in the Association Newsletter on the apparent death of a prominent Old Boy, Murray Hofmeyr. Fact is that I got it wrong, only to discover since that he is alive and well and being well cared for at the Brenton Care Home in Knysna.

I'm delighted about this good news, though take full responsibility for the faux pas. I also apologise unreservedly to the Hofmeyr family, the School and the Old Boys Association for any anxiety endured.

The context of this is that two months ago I was fed information in good faith on Murray's deemed death by long-standing friends of his, located in Knysna and Gauteng. They were unable to either confirm the time or place of his death, but were confident of the correctness of their information.

Though connected and known to the School, I have no desire to cast aspersions and don't believe that anything constructive can be achieved by implicating them. They genuinely considered Murray a great man, felt privileged that they had known him, and indeed cared for him. They will remain nameless.

Having been persuaded however that they might be right and having myself closely tracked Murray's career since the early 1970s, I felt it imperative that the School give recognition to his extraordinary accomplishments. I had also engaged with him extensively when he was with Anglo American and chaired Johannesburg Consolidated Investments. Further, as far back as the early sixties, I recalled him campaigning door-to-door for the then infant Progressive Party.

On the Party issue, interestingly, Murray and its first secretary and a former teacher at the School, Larry Robertson, were good friends, particularly following the party's establishment in 1959. I venture to suggest that Murray probably had a significant say in Larry's appointment. Then Party leader, Dr Jan Steytler, and Murray were fairly close.

I actually bided my time in proceeding on the profile, and made a concerted effort first to determine that Murray had in fact passed away. This included engaging with Anglo American, members of the Rand Club, and, of course, the School. I also canvassed retirement establishments in Knysna, the Churches, the Police and various attorney firms. These efforts came to no avail.

The facts before me seemed ultimately to suggest that Murray had passed away, the situation required a value judgment, and I proceeded with the writing of the profile and sent it to the Association office for publication in the Newsletter. During the ensuing weeks I received no feedback whatsoever.

Earlier this month the School advised me that establishment member, Gavin Beckwith, had received a letter from a friend of his, William Bucke, also Murray's tax adviser, who had seen the profile and expressed concern about any intimation of Murray's passing.

This information was duly passed to me, I immediately contacted William, and he indicated that he had just returned from Europe, having spent two weeks with Murray's son skiing in Austria, and advised that Murray was definitely alive, though suffering from Alzheimers. William also directed me to the Brenton Care Home in Knysna which confirmed the same.

Am I remorseful about my ill-judgement and that this went pear-shaped? Absolutely.

Am I sorry that I highlighted Murray's strengths and successes? Definitely not.

Important indeed is that the likes of Murray Hofmeyr are not lost to public knowledge and that his legacy lives on, particularly at PBHS. Two singular issues that he raised with me and stick out were his belief in the importance of a thriving economy to achieve widespread opportunity, peace and stability, and the need for broad flexibility of mind for the success of any type of democracy. Failure to realize this, he believed, were a certain recipe for revolution, disorder and discontent.

- *Leon Kok is an Old Boy and independent writer.*