Reluctantly Loud
Interventions in the History of a Land Occupation
KONI BENSON, FAEZA MEYER

In memory of Domitila Barrios de Chungara, who died in 2012 before we could compare notes on intervening in history. (1)

“This is the truth, we would go home if we could, we don’t know where home is. I have spoken to Council, to the Anti-Land Invasion Unit: if you want me to go home like you keep saying, please show me and I will go home, because I have no idea where home is.”

“I didn’t choose to become an activist, activism chose me.”

- Faeza Meyer

FAEZA MEYER WAS ONE OF A GROUP of backyard shack dwellers who, in May 2011, occupied land in Tafelsig in the township of Mitchells Plain, Cape Town. (2) From 5,000 people the group dwindled down to about 30 families who continued to defend their right to erect structures under which to sleep, since they have no where else to go, and the city has literally left them out in the cold – offering them accommodation in a dumping ground miles away from their families and support networks. Over an 18-month period they faced a series of raids and court cases and appeals up to the Constitutional Court level, which ranged from eviction granted, to where the judge actually reprimanded the city and demanded a plan for the homeless, to a final eviction and the joining of a neighbouring occupation in October 2012.

Cape Town is a city where the official waiting list for low-cost housing is more than 450,000 families long and the city delivers about 11,000 units a year and criminalises those who attempt to put up their own structures. The leader of the remaining occupiers, Faeza Meyer, has been keeping a diary of events since May 2011 – on scraps of paper, in notebooks, and in her head. Her diary tracks her journey to direct action and confrontation and the brutal response of the state. It documents the dynamics of a community under stress, captures her own politicisation of being homeless, and speaks to the reality facing an increasing number of people who will reluctantly become activists, confronting, and challenging the status quo, and the law, in attempts to survive. (3)

3. Youtube link to short WWMP documentary Faeza narrates about the initial occupation http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGm5yNFgpHw&feature=related
In alliance with Koni Benson, a feminist historian and housing crisis ally, Faeza has been putting her writing and fleshing out raw thoughts onto the computer. Koni has been collecting newspaper articles, photos, flyers, letters and other resources that document this struggle. In the process we have been recording an ongoing conversation documenting Faeza’s reflections of the unfolding events for her both personally and politically, elaborating on many of her diary pages that are blank or in point form. As we talk, we type.

This piece presents edited snapshots from the diary of 545 days on the fields surrounding Kapteinsklip train station, the last stop on the Mitchell’s Plain line. For this chapter, in conversation, we devised a selection and editing strategy to co-produce a history that centralises diary entries, deciding to highlight life and politics of struggles for land and housing, above the chronological details of the unfolding occupation and to exclude the collaboration and conversations between us, which we present in detail elsewhere.

The contributions from the diary include Faeza’s reflections on her experiences, which speak to a reality facing increasing numbers of people everyday: a reality of growing homelessness on what has been called a planet of slums, sub-standard overcrowded sickness-inducing housing crisis, a criminalisation of people erecting shack in open spaces in South Africa, resulting in survival necessitating confronting the law. Living in hand-dug, grave-like trenches on empty fields of an urban township, it’s hard to imagine Kapteinsklip residents as a threat to anyone, but what else explains the response of the state? What justifies Anti-Land Invasion Police Units in post 1994 South Africa?

To Asef Bayat’s proposition of “the quiet encroachment of the ordinary” – individual non-collective survival practices of urban majorities in the Middle East that involve the relentless but “non-movement” direct occupation of resources of the elites to simply get by and that add up to a redefinition of land use, settlement patterns and resource flows in the city,4 – it seems most accurate to describe Faeza as reluctantly and confidently loud. Her diary leads to questions of what is ordinary, what is encroachment, and what is heard or muffled beneath the normalisation of privatising basic shelter and accepting the urbanisation of inequality as inevitable and insurmountable.

We aim to give readers a collage of insights into the experiences of one woman’s story of a journey into the struggle to politicise land and housing in South Africa, but also a sense of the proportion of the housing crisis, the politics of space and footholds, and defensive and offensive attempts to challenge these dynamics. This, we think, speaks to both activists and academics searching for creative alliances, interested in the politics of presentation, and hungry for interventions that challenge the disappointments of democracy in South Africa and internationally.

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Alternatives to Waiting?

13 May 2011

People moved onto the Kapteinsklip field on 13 May 2011. I was on my way to hospital and I came across a meeting of a Backyard Dweller’s Association. They told us about this land invasion that was going to take place. They didn’t use those words, land invasion. They told us we were going to get plots. They gave out numbers, little numbers, with their stamp on it and charged people R10 for registering with them and gave us a plot. They had a book where they put our names and ID numbers, which they said would then secure the plots. They said we will get the plots that Friday, 13 May 2011. When we got there on Friday, we took all our stuff from where we were living – our self-built structure like a wendy house, and myself and my husband and my four kids we moved onto the land and they told us that the plot size was supposed to be 6 x 4 metres. The structures were up, people were starting to move in. People were happy. On our field, Kapteinsklip, there were plus-minus 1,000 people. Swartklip, the field next to us, had about 4,000 people. They were under the impression that they were going to get houses here. That Saturday, the atmosphere was wonderful. A happy environment. Everyone who used to live in backyards, and some homeless, everyone was going to get houses, everyone felt free.

We were living in a self-constructed shack in the backyard of my sister’s mother-in-law’s sister in Tafelsig in Mitchell’s Plain for three months. Before that we were living by my mother in Beacon Valley, also in Mitchell’s Plain, also in the backyard, but it was too full. We had my family of five, my mother, father, my brother and his pregnant girlfriend and my other brother and his wife and children. My whole life I had lived there and there had always been lodgers, as well as our family in those three rooms. That was why we were in the backyard. I’d lived there all my life since I was nine, and the house was too full. I am now 35.

Four months ago, I married Ebrahiem. Before I was married for 10 years. Seven years ago my husband disappeared. He was reported missing. The police say there is rumours that he was murdered in Retreat near the station at a shebeen by a gang. They heard him shout and people say they even saw him dead, but they are afraid to come forward and testify in court. We have never recovered his body. The week after he died, the shebeen people laid cement, but the police say there is not enough evidence.

The people from the housing department said I need to get the info from the detective to say I am in this situation with my four kids. Apparently they were supposed to send me a death certificate after six years, but still once a year I get a letter saying the search is still on. I went to register on the waiting list four years ago, but recently I found out my name is not on the list and they cannot find my details. They say I must start over.

I was supporting everybody; my four kids, my mother, my two brothers and their families. I had two jobs. I did catering, décor – I am very good at that. I used to make beads. I used to paint on bottles that I get and use for the tables and then sell that. I also had a full time job at the crèche, five days a week. On weekends, catering; at night the beading and painting and making little bags, just to support the family. When I got married then my brothers were working and I started my mother with a business, selling boerevors rolls every weekend. That brings in R2,000, then I could move on and do something for myself. I left the job at the crèche because the people at the crèche decided to make it a family business and, unfortunately I was not family. The catering was just when there was work and jobs, it still happened regularly because I believe I have a vision to decorate. I can come into a function and make miracles of nothing. I could decorate this office with just these papers and make it look like a party, with a party atmosphere.

Once we got married we moved into the backyard of my sister’s husband’s aunt. We paid R500 a month, R80 a month for electricity and R100 towards the water every third month if we had. They were very understanding people. It was just one lady with her daughter’s children living there.
The Unexpected

14 May 2011

Sunday morning when we woke up, outside was law enforcement, land invasion (unit), City police, and everybody was afraid. The atmosphere changed. People started to become scared. Everybody was looking for the Backyard Dwellers Association – they were the people who told us everything was going to be ok and we had come with all our possessions. There were a few contracted trucks standing ready. We believe the trucks had convicts from Poolsmoor on the trucks. We know it was convicts because one of the ladies started to cry because her brother was on the truck. He had a 10-year sentence, and he was there to break her house down. The convicts had no choice, they were not even allowed to speak to us.

The Backyard Dwellers Association told us to make a human chain and stand firm, that there was nothing they can do to us. But even with a human chain the law enforcement and the land invasion had shields and they moved us off the field. The people at Kapteinsklip decided not to use violence and move away. They then drove over all our things and broke and damaged everything; structures, crockery. They then had the convicts pick up all our canvas and materials and put it on the trucks, and then they left.

When the police disappeared, so did the Backyard Dwellers Association. People were standing there with no hope – hoping the Association will sort it out because they even pretended to speak to Helen Zille [Premier of the Western Cape Province] on the phone and say that these guys had no right to do what they were doing and that she would sort it out. They left a committee of marshals and the marshals told us we must put tires on the road and the station and they wanted us to burn the road and the station. We refused because we knew what was happening at Swartklip and we didn’t want the same violence, and so we said no. That was the Sunday.

Law enforcement came every day. The Monday. The Tuesday. Most people were left with little bits of plastic to sleep under or sleeping with someone else with what they had left. We started to share accommodation. I think at the time that was the best thing that could happen to us, because it drew us closer. It formed unity. We got to know everyone and their situation – why they were there and why they couldn’t go back. We started to form unity.

Go Home?

17 May 2011

On Tuesday 17 May the sheriff of the court said over a loud speaker that we were there illegally and we were not allowed to be there. They gave us an interdict and five minutes to vacate the land. Once again, they removed whatever we had. People lost their IDs, their papers, their dentures. There was a lot of things people lost while law enforcement and land invasion units removed our structures. That was when we realised that this is illegal, we were not going to get anything. Nobody was going to be able to help us with this. We had been manipulated into the situation we are in now. People started to retreat – the lucky ones who could go back to where they were at. The rest that stayed behind, about 120 people, had nowhere to go. Yes, we all tried to go back, but either there was someone else now living where we were living before, or the people didn’t want us back, or people had no structure to put up in someone’s yard, so they just stayed with us on the field.

When we left where we had been staying, the people there, the owner, also relied on the money we gave them and because we were gone they thought we were not coming back, so they put others there. It was not that they did not want us there, but they have to look at how they’re going to live.

They say even if you live under a trolley with a blanket over top of it, it is a structure. They say anywhere you are living is considered a structure, so they can take it. Interim interdict says that both parties stand apart ’til the next court date. Our lawyers say they can remove structures, but not us. Are they working towards our death?
Punished for Being Poor?

17 May 2011

I am a person who keeps a personal diary, for my children one day. In the event I am not there, they can read and see what their mother was thinking and feeling. At the end of the day then it doesn’t leave what people say of their mother: they will have proof of what she did and what she did for them. That is why I keep a diary for myself. For the field, I keep a diary – I thought at least Cape Town should know we have been manipulated into this situation and this is what we are going to. I didn’t think it was fair. So somebody had to see the truth, to know the truth. To me, it is not in all these papers I took to the lawyer, and to anyone helping us. This is only the truth on these diary papers and I think everybody deserves to know the truth.

There are people who assume we want to be there, or we want to jump the queue, or we are criminals, or we want to aggravate the councilor to give us houses. There were people who’d say we know exactly what we are doing, or that we are unfit parents putting our children on a field. The truth is that we were manipulated into the situation and to Council or the City or government, this is punishment enough for us. We have been convicted to live on this field. How can you convict us twice? How can you take from people who already don’t have. No one came and asked why are you here? What happened? They didn’t look twice before taking our stuff. If they had known, I am sure this would not have happened.

I didn’t finish matric/high school. I am not educated enough. I don’t know law. I don’t know the everything about everything. Since I have been on the field I have learnt a lot. I learnt that if we were educated enough we would have known this cannot be legal. I have been reading the interim interdict and the law. The PIE [the Prevention of Illegal Eviction Act] clearly states that before you issue an interdict you must know the situation and why people are where they are at. The city never even considered asking us why we are on the land. It was wrong. And rude. They are convicting these people twice. They say there is a waiting list. Waiting list? Waiting on this field. And only now they are paying us attention.

This is the truth, we would go home if we could, but we don’t know where home is. I have spoken to Council, to the Anti-Land Invasion Unit: if you want me to go home like you keep saying, please show me and I will go home, because I have no idea where home is.

Unlearning

26 May 2011

Jumbo was working at Workers World Media and he lived in Tafelsig. He tried to bring unity among the Backyard Dwellers Association and the two camps, Swartklip and Kapteinsklip. He has all the patience in the world. He would come back to us, nightly and stand around the fire. Guys, we need unity. Yes they lied, but we need to see who is dividing us. I met Lenaise and Boeya because of him. At first we thought we should be little, and not cause problems, and wait until they sort us out. Then I realised why are we not inviting people? Why should we be quiet and small? We need to be big and be heard. So we went to Mitchell’s Plain Town Centre and invited people living in little boxes, begging and scarralling to come and live with us. At first they did not want to, because law enforcement is knocking our structures every day, but eventually they are coming.

Jumbo says he is going to the Eastern Cape and wants to introduce us to people like him. He took us to a forum at Community House. I could not understand or concentrate on a word. I was so hungry. Tupac, from Swartklip, took us on the train – he is this big rasta guy with a deep voice, he always looks angry. He was looking at us like you have no idea where you are going and what these people are talking about because they are much more smarter than you and you will have no idea. When I got there it was worse. What is these people talking about? The walls were full of words – neoliberalism and the state and local government and provincial and mayor and labour power and capitalist systems and where all these people fit in. I was sitting there thinking to myself I am never going to be able to know all this words and what they mean.
They refer to us as Animals

21 June 2011
Law enforcement, Metro Police, Anti-Land Invasion Unit. All the above parties was here today. They took our tents, plastics, and canvas. They demolished the underground and took the roof structure. When we asked for names they would not respond – badges were covered with black insulation tape.

Mr. Louw from Law Enforcement told us that Mr. David Norkea gave the order to break the tents our kids were in and removed all our stuff, even though we had no structures standing. According to the interdict, we are not allowed to put up structures, but allowed to be on the land. They traumatised our kids. We have a premature baby with us and a mother who had a cesarean section. Mr Norkea and the driver of the law enforcement bakkie was swearing and threatening to lock us up. Mr Norkea broke the small tent our mother and baby sleeps in. They referred to us as animals. The driver told one of our elders, Mr Frick Meyer, that he is going to remove his uniform and moer him and kick him in his poes. When we reported the situation to what appeared to be the senior officer among them, he reckoned we had no witnesses. Then they left.

Witnesses:
Faeza Meyer
Ebrahiem Fourie
Isgak Abrahams
Bianca Newing
Ricardo Arendse
Frick Meyer

Keep Your Bek

24 June, 2011
Where will we sleep tonight, or should I say, how will we sleep tonight? We have been here for 40 days, only through the grace of god.

9.30am. It is raining. Our structures are all down. We are sitting under a piece of plastic. Our beds and mattresses with blankets are covered with canvasses and more plastic. Law enforcement and land invasion arrives. Once again name tags and badges are covered with insulation tape. We recognise faces, but do not know their names. When we ask for their names, they swear at us. “Keep your bek” is the response we normally get (shut your mouth). They are becoming more aggressive by the day. They now tell us we should leave the field because nobody knows we are here. Our kids are afraid. They left us standing in the rain with no shelter. The driver of the bakkie arrives again swearing and threatening our people as usual. All we know about him is that he is from law enforcement. They take our things once again. I don’t know if what these people are doing is legal. If it is legal, why are their identities hidden?

Officer Loupsher from Law Enforcement is walking around laughing and swearing, instructing more guys to take more of our stuff. Mr Danny Christians from the Dept of Housing shows me a paper from the High Court that I just see but is not given to me. I notice a date on it 17th of the 6th month 2011. He said he is going to return to remove all our belongings including blankets, pots and bedding.

I gave a message to them while they were there, I was speaking to Councilor Anwar Adams on the phone. He said to me that Mr Albert, from Land Invasion, just spoke to him and said that they are not allowed to take our blankets and stuff. When I told them what he had said, they said Mr. Albert had nothing to do with what they are doing, that it is not his business. We are being insulted, sworn at and threatened. Our people are cold and afraid. When and where is this going to end?
The SAPS (South African Police) arrives 10.30pm with Neighborhood Watch. The ladies from the Neighborhood Watch judged us and insulted us, saying we are there on purpose, that we know what we are doing. They had everyone get out of their beds because the police claimed they had a complaint about us selling dagga (marijuana). They never searched for the dagga but they had us get out of our beds and did a move and touch – fingerprinting to check for criminal records. They found no dagga or criminals among us. J

Witness:
Mrs Meyer
Mr. Abrahams
Mr. Skipper
Mr. Jacobs
Mr. Fritz
Mr. Fourie
Mr. Pearce

Baptism

25 June, 2011

Today our premature baby is going to be baptised. We are hoping for a good day. We invited some people who are in the same struggle. People from Swartklip and from backyards.

We were worried because the Imam who was supposed to come did not, but then the Imam who came was the one who married the mother and father who happened to be crossing the field by coincidence and didn’t even know about the baby. That was sent from god. To have a baptism you need water, scissors, sugar. When they pray you cut two strands of the baby’s hair. Put it in the water and pray over it. You put a bit of sugar in the baby’s mouth. The Imam prays in the baby’s ears. Baby was given the name Imaan, which means Faith.

Everyone arrives including Mrs. M from the “Cape Party,” with the Backyard Dwellers Association. Mrs. M is also a community worker, and came with some other sponsors who brought us some soup and party packets for the kids. The SANZAF [South African National Zakah Fund] delivered 50 blankets and promised to bring us food.

Land Invasion (Anti-Land Invasion Unit) and Law Enforcement just drove by. They didn’t remove our things like they normally do. We think it’s because we had too much people visiting us. Kowthor from the Argus arrived and he did our story, the baptism of the baby.

I’m starting to notice that the police only come when it rains.

The same day I met Lenaise, the “spokesperson” for people occupying land across the way at Swartklip. She told me she wants us all to get on board together because after all we are fighting the same battle. She said a Lawyer for Human Rights would like to see us.

We had a very good day. The weather turned out very nice. We had lots of people. We could really see that people cared for us.
Robbed

1 July, 2011
Land Invasion
Law Enforcement
They arrived at 10.30am.
Taking all our wood and plastic, leaving only the small tent.
Once again, no name tags, no response when we asked for names either.

Last night someone from Law Enforcement came around and told us to break down our structures before 7am and he promised nothing will be taken.
Yet today, they still come and take our things.
Our people are being pushed into a corner and not allowed to move freely on the field while they move around us like we are ghosts.

It’s sad when they leave. It feels like we have been robbed once again. 26 days for us to go to court. That means another 26 days of being robbed.
We have no shelter. No food. No water. And soon, no hope.
They even took the wood we use for fire.
What’s even more depressing is that they threw the holes our people live in closed with sand- not even giving us the opportunity to remove our clothes and our other belongings.
No Shows

2 July, 2011
A tiring day, a lot of stuff to do, so the day’s writing is a little short.

No Land Invasion, only Law Enforcement driving past now and then. We got the news that Tupac from Swartklip is severely injured and the other people around him traumatised. They have been threatened with a gun. Lenaise called me to tell me what happened. Apparently four guys whose names are unknown are responsible for the damage/attack.

Today the new Interim Committee was supposed to have a meeting. Instead Nadia from the Backyard Dwellers Association phones me at 12.30 to say the meeting is cancelled. She mentions that four people, no names, had to go to a Janaza (funeral) and that we can’t have the meeting without everyone being present.

We went to people we know for some food. Some people that we know, I sent them a sms and asked for a little sugar or little meillie meal. If I don’t have air time we need to walk to every house to ask. Not begging, just ask, because we know the people. I tried to round up the rest of the committee to verify what happened. With no air time, it took me some time to go from point A to Z to get to everyone to find out what is happening on the interim committee - the 10 people. People were either not home, not answering phones. That meeting never happened.

When I got home they showed me a Cape Cobra, still alive in a bottle alive, that was found on the field – a National Geographic hour. They put a mouse in the bottle and with one split second that mouse was dead.

When I come home we have to build our structure again. I sort everyone out and see that everyone’s structures are ok, that there are enough plastics for everyone, that all the children are settled. That everyone has eaten. I sit with each house individually if they want to speak to me about problems – like any house, there are always problems.

We sit around the fire at night and listen to each other’s sadness. Our family is growing day by day. How can law enforcement and land invasion take from people who has nothing?

Court

27 July 2011
The 27th, the day everyone has been waiting for. Hoping our lawyer Sheldon would at least get the judge to say we are allowed to put up a structure, but sadly that didn’t happen.

It has been 75 days. We survived the rain, cold, wind and daily harassment of the police. Our structures and other possessions have been confiscated and many nights we have been forced to sleep in the open. But our spirit of defiance remains strong and we are determined not to be moved.

At court things broke out of hand. Just like law enforcement other people pushed us into a corner. Our people started to become emotional. Tears were shed and fowl language were used.

I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. The people who occupy the land, the ones the court case is actually about, were denied the right to speak in front of the court by the supporters of other organisations. When we marched to the Civic [Centre] after pushing and forcing they let me speak to the Mayor to explain our circumstances on the field. I even gave her the baby to show her the real people affected.

I really hope things are going to change for us. I hope the Mayor’s smile was real.
“The Lady Who Made the Speech”

28 July, 2011

Today Mr David Norkea came around. He was looking for the lady who gave the nice speech to the Mayor the day before.

He asked me for names of the people living on the field. I told him we are about 11 families. He was being very nice compared to his normal rude and violent approach.

He asked me not to allow anyone else onto the field, because according to him, that will only cause problems for us. Our people now have hope again.

The Council at least knows we are here now. And maybe the Mayor Patricia DeLille has spoken to them and told them to leave us alone at least until the court case is resolved. Because after all it is inhuman to live under circumstances which we are being forced to live under.

I am happy for everyone, but at the same time I am afraid for them too. I am afraid of how everyone is going to feel and react if things don’t work out the way they expect it to. They have been through so much. And when I see the joy on their faces I wish this day could last forever.

Cape Mental Health

1 August, 2011

Last night Anti-Land Invasion Unit and law enforcement paid us a very unfriendly visit. They took our stuff as usual, but acting much more violent.

My husband and me had an appointment at Cape Mental Health at 8am today. Ebrahiem is at his lowest. He does not have access to his kids. His ex-wife is sending sms’s saying if you want to see them take me to court. You need to support them/me first. He had already been to Cape Mental Health. The social worker made me sick. I am not a psychologist or whatever she is, but I would have treated him better. She said, “don’t you think you need to get yourself a job?” Where? She phoned his ex-wife and after speaking to her over the phone she was a totally different person, like she had made up her mind that he is a bad person. He lashed out. So she said, well if you are going to threaten me I can’t help you anymore. We can always talk and I calmed him down. I could see the pain of not seeing his children. For all the time he was married to her he worked as a carer on night shift. So he was with them all the time. And then he was cut off. That is not easy for him. The social worker gave him a letter to take to the children’s court. They said they would make an arrangement to meet with the ex-wife and one of the lawyers. He kept saying he doesn’t want to take his children through this system because it is not good for them. So we begged her to see the children. She would not agree.

Applying to Picket

23 August, 2011

102 Days.

We went to the meeting at the Civic Centre. Our meeting with SAPS and the City didn’t go so well. They had all kinds of objections as to why we can’t have the picket. They claim it is unfair to SAPS to have to protect us for 24/7 and they didn’t have the resources. Myself and Ebrahiem and Mhlobo, the Chair of the Housing Assembly, attended this meeting. It was like we were not there. We were talking, but their minds were already made up. They claimed that there was never a 24/7 picket. Mhlobo told them about a 24/7 picket that he attended but they didn’t want to listen, they just said come back with a better plan.
Holding it all together

25 August, 2011

I emailed the Mayor to cancel picking up the memorandum. We went to the Civic Centre again to apply for a later date, and then they had a problem with the field we wanted to picket on. They said it was too close to the court. Mr David Norkea was there from Anti-Land Invasion Unit and Barnard Botha was the chair. Steve Haywood of Housing Dept was there and Antoinette, the city’s lawyers, was also there. Also some other reps of Metro Police.

My argument is they give us an application form and we put in the date, time, place and then they change everything so why fill it in? They should just tell us where when etc… They change the date, the time, they even want to change the venue of the picket. So we didn’t accept their suggestion. They said picket from 8am-4pm on some other piece of land because the first land we chose to picket on they said had an interdict and the second one they said was too close to the court.

I went to ILRIG and booked the hall for Saturday and phoned around to mobilise for the community meeting.

I also phoned my mom and my sister-in-law, who is having a baby. And I am concerned about her. She had pain for days and no baby and they kept sending her home so I called to find out if she was ok. She was sent to Mowbray Maternity Hospital.

Drafted a leaflet for Sat meeting at Yellowood Primary. I also called Mr. Sanosi, the principle of the school to set up a meeting for tomorrow.

I was exhausted. I got home to the field and people was complaining that the food was not distributed properly and there were accusations that someone was taking tins of food and selling them. I was so tired, I just couldn’t wait to go and sleep. I could see also that it was putting a lot of strain on Ebraheim and I was really worried about the pressure on him, so I take too much pressure on me so that he doesn’t take too much pressure on himself and I worry he will get sick. All my life I have been the one whose not supposed to get sick. But he gets sick. My parents look to me, so I would not let them down. I can’t get sick.

Court

30 August 2011

The courts were well protected as if we were criminals arriving – they had guns and tape and didn’t want to let people into the court. They called out the names of the people who should be inside – those on the list of people, which I was on. So I could go and listen firsthand to what the judge had to say. At first he seemed sincere and reasonable and saw that there is a real need. But by the end of the day, he proved to us that the system does not work for us.

Judge Nathan Erasmus acknowledged that it was wrong what was done against us and said that if we don’t want to go to Blikkiesdorp the city must look for another relocation area. But in his final judgment, he was so different. Everyone was crying. People from Swartklip were crying with people from Kapteinsklip. He had made us believe that the city was going to engage with us and sort out accommodation. I spoke to Sheldon that day and he said he would be in contact with them and then with us, but then he said Blikkiesdorp or nothing. I wasn’t going to go to Blikkiesdorp, so I am worried. Where will we go to then? There is pressure because some people want to go to Blikkiesdorp and others are saying that this will make the case of those of us staying weaker.
From Eviction to Kuilsriver Riots

29 September 2011

This morning we had to clear the field. Our lawyer, Sheldon, says he has no more resources to represent us. The city offered to move us to Kuilsriver where we were offered space, or thought we were, by someone the newspapers are calling an angel or good Samaritan.

Instead, we found ourselves in Kuilsriver being held hostage by an angry community. We had gone because Ibrahiem Abrahams had come to the field yesterday telling us he has a piece of land for us in Kuilsriver. He said we didn’t need to bring anything, he will put up Wendy Houses. So we moved, and the city moved us as it was eviction day.

When we got there, the community was really angry because four weeks before there was a fire and four children had died and their families, according to the community, were still without anywhere to go. They had been looking for the owner of this piece of land. They were really upset that we got this piece of land when their own community was struggling to get land to live on. It was a traumatising situation.

Donna and another girl from the Trauma Centre went through the whole day with us – they had heard about the eviction and had come to give their support. They came with us from Tafelsig to Kuilsriver. They were very supportive and kept checking will we be ok. The community was so angry, it was like we were held hostage and couldn’t get out by the gates. I had sent an sms to our lawyer, Sheldon, asking about how we can get transport to get out of there. He sent me a message saying that David Nortje who works for Anti-Land Invasion is trying to arrange transport back to Tafelsig for us. I tried to call David Nortje, because his car was now gone. He forwarded me the message he got from the city officials. It said “Hi sir as from our executive director Hans Smit no transport will be provided for the people” (from 0842314618 @17h05).

We eventually called Captain Brikkels from Mitchell’s Plain police station and he said not to worry they will fetch us. We also got Siraj, one of the occupiers, who had a bakkie – so he transported some of our stuff back. I called Mike and he came with two bakkies with his friends. There was a container on the land where we had put our stuff, and we left it there to be safe. Never to be seen again. Ibrahiem Abrahams just said he was so sorry and it wasn’t safe for us to be there and there is nothing he can do.

The Mitchell’s Plain police, SAPS, came with a bus and we put all the women and the children and the men left the bakkies. I was one of the last who left. I drove with Mike. The police bus dropped people on Baden Powel Drive and they had to walk through the bushes to come back to Kapteinsklip. Because we had been evicted and we knew we could not go back to the field, we ended up on the side walk.

Sleeping on the Sidewalk

1 October 2011

On the 29th, after Kuilsriver, we put our stuff down in a long line of mattresses on the side walk back in Tafelsig near the Kapteinsklip train station and just slept there. In the morning some of the community walked past and cried seeing us sleeping there. We were just cold and had put our mattresses and blankets and then our plastics just over us to cover us from the cold. People were discussing where we should go. Some said let’s occupy another piece of land. Some said let’s live in the middle of the road and make some noise. While we were still thinking about it, law enforcement came to us with documents that said if we are not gone in 24 hours, we can be jailed up to five years. So after two nights on the sidewalk we moved onto the land by the railway at Kapteinsklip, just across from where we had been.
Writing as Relief

13 October 2011

I write and it’s like when you read a book and you hear the story and you respond – no don’t do that, or don’t give up, or this doesn’t make sense, it is not right, you can’t give up. So I read it like that, like it is not mine, like it is somebody else’s story. So I read it and give advice and say, I wouldn’t do that or that is not worth it. I then think of a good friend, as if it is their story. And I can then say, no my friend go that way instead. And that really helps me a lot – to re-read what I write.

If I am crying and it feels sore, I don’t try and be brave, I just say I don’t like this, or I hate that, or I am sick of this, or I am giving up. Then I put the book down. I go get coffee. I come back and I re-read it like it is my best friend. And I write over top of all of it. It will be ok, or she doesn’t really hate you, or so and so is confused. And it works for me. That best friend in me, helps me. Otherwise long ago I would have give up. I think that is what most of us need – the best friend within. For me, I hear that voice when I read what I wrote and write back to that voice, talk to that voice, with a different perspective.

Hunger, Anger, & Eid

7 Nov 2011

Yesterday we decided we wanted to have Eid on the field. Normally everyone would go to their families and celebrate it there. The minority on the field are Muslim. We decided we wanted to share it with everyone else on the field. So everyone, Christians, Muslims, all put together what we had and I got up at 5am and started to make food with Rushana. We went to Aunty Elizabeth’s house and cooked there. Briyani and chicken and potato and pudding and Aunty Patricia brought us some cake. We dressed up all the children. All the Christian children were also dressed up and they were confused – is it Christmas? It was nice.

For one day at least there were no fights and no arguments. Everybody was just nice to each other and having fun. I think it was because everyone had something to eat that day. A lot of the time when there are arguments we don’t realise people are hungry. Being hungry can make you hungry, and when your children are hungry, you can be really angry. But that day I saw it. I was sitting trying to figure out what is the difference today than the other days. The difference was that that day everybody had something eat. A lot of times I think people are too shy to ask. Most days the kids all come by me and whenever we eat I make sure the kids all get something to eat. The parents have arguments. I realised what food can do. How a hungry person can react with their stomachs and not their brains. I must make it my duty to make sure everybody has something to eat, no matter how little. I have started to monitor people just to see if they have eaten. I will go around and ask what food they are going to make. I realised a lot of people go without food because they are too shy to say they have no food. I think, when I am not there, children go to sleep without food!

It was a nice day. Everybody was there. Everything was nice.
Flames and Fear

8 Nov 2011

I went to bed about 9pm last night. Boeta Suleiman and Boeta Ali were the last people to sit by the fire. Our fire is in the middle. All the shacks are built in a circle and whomever cooks has control and can watch the children by the fire. Enid came to ask me for a candle. She plaited her daughter, Stacy’s, hair half way and then her candle went out and she didn’t have enough light for her to plait the other side. I didn’t have either. I had only a small piece of candle. So she decided they would sleep and do it in the morning.

About 1 o’clock in the morning I woke up to shouts and screaming and pounding on the door. Strangely to me if there is anything on that field, I am a light sleeper, I hear any noise or anything that happens. That night I did not hear a thing. There were five people knocking and I didn’t wake up. There was a fire. When I went out, I saw Enid’s shack was on fire. I was so dumbstruck, standing there as everyone was running around. It struck me, they did not have a candle, so how did it happen? Ebrahiem and others were running like crazy and the fire, it looked like it had hands, reaching for the shacks next to it, spreading. The only thing I told Ebrahiem to take was my bag with my papers in it and my Koran. The only two things I grabbed. Then I realised I had no shoes and just a night gown. No pants. So Ebraheim ran back in. The plastic on my shack was melting. I said, don’t worry, leave it, your life is worth much more. People were trying to save stuff and break shacks down. I was standing there, just counting the children. People were talking to me and I was not responding.

This guy with blue jeans and a black hooded top came up to me and asked for a cigarette. I just looked at him. At the time it was all crazy. I thought I don’t know you and why are you here in the middle of the night, but I don’t have time for that now. In the morning, we all thought, this guy doesn’t belong there. When the fire started, he was sitting there on the stairs. If you sit there and a fire starts, you don’t sit and look at the fire, you tell people, get up, get out.

The railway police were there and we asked the security to phone the ambulance and the fire brigade. One of the girls, Enid’s young daughter we call Poppy, her name is Siara, she came out of the shack and her clothes were on fire. I nearly went crazy. They rolled her in the sand and the fire went out. Her father’s arm was burnt. It looked terrible, first degree burns. I could see right to his bone. Eventually the fire brigade and the ambulance arrived and they hosed down the fire and what was strange and even one of the fire brigade guy said, the fire spread and went out and continued in one place. He was struggling to kill that fire. They left and the ambulance was there. Not one of them came and asked are you ok, did anyone get hurt? The ambulance people were standing their laughing and they left. There was no shelter, it was raining and we had to go under pieces of plastic. That broke down a lot of people’s spirit.

In the morning, Stacey, Enid’s daughter, wet her bed and dirtied her pants. She is 10 years old. That is not normal for a 10 year old. I realised our people were traumatised from what happened. Ebrahiem and Boeta Suleiman had tears. During the whole situation I felt I had to be the stronger one. I don’t know if I make everyone feel ok or if I can make them feel ok, but at least I can try. I called Donna from the Trauma Centre and asked them to come out and speak to the people. She came out and she took the names of the children and how many people. Later in the day she sent a message that she got some clothing and wanted to organise a day like a workshop to get everyone there to talk about what happened.
Seeing the Housing Problem instead of Seeing Us as the Problem

13 December, 2011

In the morning everybody was worried about what was going to happen because we finally got the opportunity to put up the structures we had lived in for a little bit more than a month. So we were worried. If we were evicted what would we do? Before we went to court we spoke about it a little bit and decided if we were to be evicted we would go to another piece of land.

The SAPS police bus came to fetch us and escorted us to the court. When we got there I phoned William Fisher, our advocate. He said he would meet us in front of the court. When he got there he was not very enthusiastic. He said that the judge that we are going to have today, she used to be a lawyer for the City. So it was not very likely that she would rule in our favour. He also told us not to worry about it, that we must just relax and see what happens in court throughout the day.

According to us we were back in court because the previous judge didn’t really listen to the case he just wanted to know about the safety of the children and the fence by the railway. So we thought we were there to explain is it safe for the kids. But this judge wanted to know only, is there alternative accommodation for the people? The city’s lawyer said he didn’t have any instructions on that. The judge said go back, take a break, get instructions from the city, and come back after lunch. When we got back after lunch, his response was that there is no other alternative accommodation, that Blikkiesdorp was full and that it was offered to us but we didn’t want it, so he feels we should just be evicted.

The judge said the city cannot run away from their responsibilities. Her exact words: “these are human beings, waiting for houses between 17-30 years and the city must take its responsibility for that.” The Railways advocate was very confusing to me. Most of the time he got up and said something that was in our favour. Saying, it’s safe there for the kids, that they have closed up the holes in the fence, which they did, that we were a safe enough distance from the railway and that the Prasa is not in a hurry to have us removed and that it is entirely up to the city when they can sort us out.

Two weeks ago they cut off the water and closed the toilets. Our advocate mentioned it at court and then the judge said it is inhuman and that he must send Prasa a letter telling them to turn on the water and give us permission to use the toilet again.

The judge previously asked who is Ricado Arendse and is he still on the field? In the court papers there is a problem and it causes divisions on the field because not everybody’s names are on that paper. The judge wanted to know who is representing Ricardo because his name is not on the court papers. William said he is representing the 16 respondents “and others” whose names are not on there. Even that caused division because people’s names were not on the list. Even my name was not on. Because Isgak put only the names of the people he wanted on. I told people not to worry because the document did say “and others”.

We left there and everyone was so relieved. At least they would have a roof over their heads for Christmas and not be homeless. We waited for the bus. I had to send Mr. Jordaan, from the police, to come and get us and eventually he came with the bus and we went back to the field. More than other days people were cold and hungry because it was raining and we were wet but people were satisfied because of the outcome of the court. They were satisfied that we could stay longer.

But I was satisfied because the housing issue had been opened. All this time it has been about us and jumping the queue and invading illegally, but now finally there is a judge that sees it is about housing and the city has no plan. The real problem is them, but they say we are a problem. Even occupiers see themselves as a problem. Now, slowly, the blame is shifting to the city and the housing problem. So for me personally I wanted that problem to be opened up in court. No other judge saw that as a problem – they saw us a problem. Now they see it is not us but the city has a problem. People die waiting on the list. I don’t even think there is a list. Now the city is under pressure. They have no choice but to come up and say what is the plan. According to the city’s advocate there are two different types of housing each with a different plan and both have lists. Is there two lists then? He says there are two plans and you have to wait in the queue. So I am a little bit excited about the next court date because I want to hear what is this plan, because I don’t believe they have a plan.
Racism and Activism

14 December 2011

Before occupying I think I was silently, deep down an activist. If my mother had the opportunity to talk to you she would say I should be rich today because I have so many talents, but I give everything away and make other people’s problems my problems. I never get to the limit to say, this is all I can do. I want to help more. I was the problem child. I can’t say, I will wait and let you be hungry today and solve it tomorrow. I won’t sleep. I don’t know where to draw the line. I am 36 years old and when I became an active activist, it felt like me being me, the me I wanted to be the whole time. I could never be that me, because the so called Coloureds have a tradition of how you are supposed to look at things. I have always been the one to be on the outline to say this isn’t right, to look things through. They will agree it is not right, but they say it is the way it is. There was a time I thought I was crazy and the only one looking at the world in this way. Then I found that there is a whole other world out there who looks at things the way I do. It is tradition for us as so-called Coloureds to think and look at things in a certain way and accept things.

I want to put down my history to put words, to show others, I have been through that, and maybe it can help you to get out. Our so-called Coloured people have the same problem, when we are in that oppressed problem, it is so close to home we don’t see it. The problem is we were taught not to care. It doesn’t matter, you are supposed to wait on the waiting list, or live in your mother’s backyard. You are supposed to. The saying we have is “jy moet eerste krui” – you must crawl first before you get up to walk. Or “7swaar jare”, which is the seven difficult years in a marriage first. We adapted to that. It’s as if it is ok and you have to go through that. We don’t have to go through all that! I have sat down and removed colour, race, sex, everything to come to an understanding of what a human being is and why things should be done different for males or females or coloured or black or white people. If you strip all that colour and race we are all human being and we should all be living according to the rules of the country. It should apply to all of us. And at the moment it is not applying to all of us. If it doesn’t apply to the people in my community or to the working class, then it doesn’t apply to me yet.

Inheritance

3 January 2012

I went to Mowbray Maternity Hospital to fetch Charney Paulse and her baby because they did not want to give her baby to her. She had let me know the day before that they found dagga in the baby’s system and they would not give the baby to her. She is rasta and says smoking dagga is her religion. So I had to go see the social worker and had a discussion about the responsibility to make sure the mother looks after the baby and if she doesn’t I have to phone the social workers and tell them. My role is to assist and make sure the mother looks after the child, Kyle, properly. She is doing ok. I got to name the baby. Her daughter’s name is Kelly. She is like our daughter. She is withdrawn, been through a lot, at two years old. It doesn’t matter what you offer her, she will not speak. It is like she is on mute when someone tries to have a conversation with her. She sleeps by me. She won’t go with her mother to sleep by a friend. She just wants to stay. She thinks I am her mother. So I named her brother Kyle. Kelly is traumatised but very clever. One time when I was at the Globalisation School, the mother went somewhere and left her with someone and then that lady thought she was with the mother when the mother got back, but the mother thought she was with that lady. It was not ‘til the next day they saw her by herself under a soaking mattress. The whole night, by herself. She is two! It breaks my heart to think of it.

There is an eight year old on the field now who has never been to school. Eight years old! The mother was on drugs and the father was abusing her. For six months before we got to the field, they were living in the bushes. The father broke both the mothers legs in those bushes and she had to crawl out. So we chased the father away. They left in November, and came back in January. Then he came back. He is one of those guys who appears so nice. Just sitting there chatting. So I asked Ebraheim to build an extension right next to us so she stays there. Then the other day the father, he made her pulled down her pants to check
if she had slept with another guy while he had gone to fetch water. Right there, in front of the children. I told him to pack up and leave before I called the cops. All the women on the field said this is not going to happen, you must leave. The men, we excluded from it, because when men argue, it always gets to fights. The mother is now back on drugs. She spent the money she was paid in January, and did drugs with people on the field! And she says she has no money for the kid for school. I gave them the opportunity to live there, and I heard what she went through. The mother was taught to live this way. She is very young. The father was so possessive because he was on drugs. He would bath her, make her lie naked until he dressed her, brushed her hair. The kids are very withdrawn, just going where their mother is, never playing with other children. They know the bushes like the back of their hands. The older child told the police that her mother stole a DVD. I don’t know how it worked, because the mother did not steal it. She was taught to be older and bigger than her mother. She had more freedom than her mother. She is competing with her mother as well. When her father gets there she would cry and run forward, then waiting for the mother to come, then take a few more steps, waiting for the mother, staring at the father, waiting for him to come forward. And she tells the father stories that doesn’t make sense. The mother wanted to take her to school on Monday, but the child put up a performance, and left with the father. Then the father just dropped the child with other people. It was only at night that the people called to say the child was with them, when it was too late to go get the child. Even I was too afraid to go walk the field at night. She really needs help. The things she says when no one is listening. That child is too much of an adult. It is dangerous. She swears at her mother. And walks away like it is ok. The ugliest words. And when the father is there the mother can’t do anything to her. When the father is there she has a little bit of control over her children. She told me the only thing she wants is to have control over her kids. When he is there, he chooses her clothes, she must just lie there. He makes the food. He built them a house with no windows and when she looks out the door he wants to know who she is looking at. Scary. And I think my life is difficult! He doesn’t live there anymore but he visits. We have built her an extension and closed it at the back and made it so that if he wants to get to her he has to come in via us. As long as I am there and can see him I allow him to see the children. He is not a bad person. In a sick way, he takes care of them. In his mind he thinks it is right. Ebrahiem said to him when he was crying when we chased him away that I too was at the same place you are and nothing will come right for you until you stop using drugs. If she is in school then I can go and call social services because the school will know the right way to handle it.

Despondent

10 February 2012
I am in a bad mood today. I really don’t know anymore. Today is one of those days that inspires me to pack up my bag and leave. For nine… almost 10 long months I have been through so much, but things just seem to get worse. It has gotten to a point for me where I need to make a personal choice. I need to decide what is important and if the struggle is effecting my children. I spoke to Marius, our lawyer, today. He had no good news. In fact, he didn’t even have bad news. Nothing. We have 12 days left before it’s Judgment Day. No one is doing anything about that. The division on the field doesn’t even allow us to do anything. The closer it gets to the eviction the more difficult it is for people on the field to communicate.

I am sitting on my bed with Mervin, a five-year-old boy, whose mother had to go work with a newborn baby. She does domestic work in Tafelsig. Baby was two days old and she went back to work! Writing is the thing that kept my sanity. I said to Ebrahiem I feel I am slipping into depression. That the children are depressing me. I look at Winston and I can’t look at him. His stepfather killed his mother in front of him when he was nine, and up to today he can’t find his sisters – he was 11 living under a bridge, he had to leave his two sisters so he could go and find work and get money from other people washing windows in Cape Town. They were gone when he came back, they were not where he left them in Knysna. Yet he is active today. Puts up a structure in a few minutes. I look at him. He has no family. Nobody. He will tell people I am his mother. He is plus-minus 25. He is still looking for his sisters.
If anything that happens, he looks to me. He is not someone who can communicate and get things across properly. I think he is from suffering a complex and low esteem. He won’t look people in the face. But he is a gentleman. Neat and tidy. Clever. Just he didn’t finish his education. People like him in times like that, I don’t want around me. I don’t want to see them. I can’t look at him. Because I think what will happen if we get evicted and go our own separate ways. What will happen to Winston? The writing helped me a lot. Putting my emotions on paper was like talking to someone else. Then I have the opportunity to read it and say, oh this is what is happening to my best friend. That is how I see my diary. And I think, what would I do to fix this for my best friend, for someone else? So I say the writing, my diary, kept me sane and going.

Suicide

12 February, 2012

8.18am: I just woke up. Whitney Houston died this morning, past 4 SA time. 3.55 California time, age 48. Her daughter was not allowed to see her. That was the first thing I heard on the radio. I was not struck at her death, but more struck at the fact that her daughter was not allowed to see her. It put me on the spot where my own daughter, Nadia, is concerned. It makes me think how short time is. Then I wonder if this is worth loosing time with her, because every moment with her is precious to me.

10.32am: Suddenly the sadness of being evicted soon and not knowing what’s next, kicks in all over again.

I basically dragged through the day up until 4pm.

4pm: Leon tried to commit suicide again at 4pm. The pressures is getting to some of the people around me.

He took a piece of wire and tied it onto a piece of pole in his structure and put it around his neck. He had locked his door already. One of the other rastas there, Francois, he said he just had a feeling that something wasn’t right with Leon. He looked through a little hole in the structure and he saw Leon standing on the bed with a rope around his neck. So he broke the door down. I could not get up and go to him. I could just not face him. Koni, I felt bad and guilty. But for the place I was emotionally, I could just not handle it. Previously he wanted to cut himself with a blade. I could just not be there with him at the time. Ebrahiem went and spoke to him and got him to change his mind. Leon was crying saying that he doesn’t have anywhere to go. He was explaining how his mother treats him bad. He is 45 years old or something.

9.20pm: I got into bed, listening to the radio. We had no food this morning.

9.33pm: Someone tried to burn Ricardo and Bianca’s place down, my next door neighbour. Someone opened his window and threw in a burning piece of cloth.

I don’t know why. Why would someone do something like that? It is sick. A few weeks ago someone tried to burn my place, and then it was Ricado. Sitting here now, a few weeks later, putting this down on the computer, I don’t know how I got through that time. There was no food. Ricado’s fire. Leon’s suicide. There was so much going on in my head and I just could not clear it because one thing after the other was happening to me.
Writing My History is Keeping Me Alive

16 Feb 2012

I feel despondent. My husband almost went to jail for child abuse that he did not commit – he was confronting the man next door who is abusing his kids. Only when they took the kid to the hospital, the Dr saw it was not that the kid was hit across the nose like the father said, it was that the father had stuck four sponges up the kids nose, and the kid told the Dr it was his father who did that. The man is crazy. He walks around with a sim card in his ear, and then puts the sim card down on the table and tells his wife, he can hear everything she says when he is not there, because of the sim card he puts in his ear. He’s on drugs. And my husband almost went to jail because of him! I got so angry with the police. They say talk about abuse, open up, and then when we call them, they don’t come. I have called them on four occasions. Yesterday was the first time they came, and these kids are being abused right there. The man is mad and I am risking my family and the police don’t come.

I don’t want to be a part of this system that we have to live by. I don’t want to turn a blind eye. It is the same system that tells us to speak out. Say something, they say. Stop child abuse! Stop woman abuse! Children must be seen not hurt! Who are we trying to fool? Who are they trying to fool? I saw, I reported, but the system failed again, as usual, because we are poor.

A friend of mine, Rene, even called a social worker. She couldn’t handle seeing what these kids have to go through every day of their lives. The social worker said they would come a month ago, but they didn’t. I can pack up and live in a small space by my mom, have my kids near me. But what will happen to the kids on the field?

I am slipping into depression. Ebrahiem strangely is now encouraging me instead of the other way round.

The advocate’s secretary said I must go see him at court. I got myself all the way there only to not find him and then the secretary said go find him in the courts in Belville. We have six days left to appeal because the court granted our eviction.

And when I go back home and tell people on the field they make it seem like I am the one who is negative. What is the use to have a house if my kids will be without a mother or father? It makes me sick and sad and confused. Maybe I just need to sleep. I was up since four something. The rastas were making noise. I was on the road the whole day yesterday. To Cape Town to ILRIG [International Labour and Research Information Group] to Belville, only to sit there and find out the advocate is not coming. Then I had to go all the way home. I was supposed to go to his office this morn but his secretary is telling me he is not there. It is urgent, and yet it won’t happen today.

And I cant go to the field to tell people the reality. They want to hear we are appealing. I can’t keep putting ointment on wounds that I can’t heal. I can’t keep doing that. I can’t tell people things will be ok if it won’t be ok.

They make it so hard for me, but I still want to be there.

I am in the middle of deciding – do I pack up and leave or do I just take the pressure. That sounds selfish. But that is how I feel.

I know I will get through this. But how will I get through it? Who will I consider? My kids, or the other kids on the field? They both need me. My kids are more privileged. They are with my mother. They have food and water and go to school. A so-called normal life. The kids on the field, there is not a hint of normal. Nothing is normal for them. They only hear foul language and people attacking each other and they sometimes have breakfast and sometimes have lunch and sometimes have supper. How can I turn my back on them? I don’t see a way out.

Yesterday I had to just put bread outside the door and lock the door. Because all the kids come to me. And that is not me, to lock them out. Yesterday I just didn’t feel like being there with them. That tells me something about me and what is happening to me. The situation is changing who I am. I wanted to be in a closed environment and not see or speak or hear anyone. I can’t get to a conclusion, about what I really want to do because I see all the weights they all carry. But what is on my side. I wish I could just scoop all the children up and put them somewhere safe until I am sorted out and figure out what I am going to do.

The phone rings and I panic – what did I forget?
I have not seen my own kids in two weeks. But I call them and they understand. My daughter is proud of me, asking how the kids on the field are. My baby is only four years old and every time I see him he cries. Is it worth it for me to lose time with my kids that I will never be able to catch up to, never, it’s gone. It’s just a sad world. I don’t know.

It started off that I was there for the rights of my children. Taking a stand. So that I could get a house for my kids. After it went sour, I realised I had to fight for this or it will never happen. So it was ok to go on, to leave them and fight. I don’t know if it’s becoming too much or if this is where it is supposed to end. It took me 10 years to decide to give up on my marriage. Ten full years to decide I have had enough. I’m not a person to give up. Somehow I need to convince myself that this is enough for now, because I have been through too much. I can feel my body is too much. I sweat. I forget. I don’t sleep or eat. Concentrating on my history and writing, helps. I have my husband there and I can speak to him, but his situation, I can’t put more pressure on him. And he feels what I feel, so I have to keep it to me, because if he feels it he might slip into depression. Writing helps me so much. It’s like a conversation with me about me. Sometimes I come to solutions. My history keeps me alive, thanks to you. It makes me sit down and think, talk, and write. I find it amazing – it’s like I didn’t write the words, they come out, I don’t know what I will write next. Another idea just comes. So when they say write an article for a newspaper, I say no, I can’t write, because I don’t know how I do it. For me it is writing to figure it out. So maybe I must write about how I feel and decide from there. I need to take a stand for me and my family and ask is this what I still need to do or not.

I am finding myself in politics. I don’t know if this is the stage you all go through. I am so emotional at times and I don’t know why. I can’t say it’s about this one thing, this boy or his sister or his brother. Or am I emotional for his mother and father because they have gone through pressures in life. A year or two ago I could have taken something and hit the father. But now I am seeing him as a working class member, and know he wasn’t born like that – nobody is born bad. So I look at them and things around us and feel I am not making a change. It doesn’t feel to me I am making a difference if I can’t make a difference in a child’s life, I don’t know what I am doing anymore. I have been reading Marx and Lenin and I find myself thinking, this is just the beginning of reading this, but the world has become smaller to me – I end up talking politics to my children, my parents, everyone on the field. Every conversation I have ends up explaining why things are the way they are. There is no normal conversation anymore. But who knows what normal is? Maybe there is no normal. I used to be able to just write, but now I am looking for that one word that makes such a difference in a line or a paragraph. I am writing the history now to look back and say I thought this way a year ago, and this is how things change when you become an activist. This is how you think at first, and there are stages you go through. I know what I am going through now is a stage. I wake up in the morning, and I never have enough time. The whole 24 hours in a day is too little. I sit up at night and write. I write it and I try and make sense of it afterwards, so to me I wrote this and then try and make sense of what I just wrote and it does make sense. I have learnt to just write what I feel, however mixed up it feels and then afterwards I make some sense of it.

Raeed’s Birthday

17 February 2012

It was my baby’s birthday, Raeed. Five years old. I knew that his grandmother and his aunts have decided to give him a little party, on the 18th. Before I went there I first phoned him to say Happy Birthday and to tell him I was on my way. I was worried he woke up and his mother wasn’t there on his birthday. I just phoned to tell him not to worry and that I am on my way. I asked him what he wants for his birthday and he says a Play Station III and a Blackberry. That made me smile again. With everything that is happening. It just made me laugh. I could not wait to get to him.
Nine Months Later

27 February 2012

An activist academic in India, Jai Sen, is writing a book on new movements, new politics. Is this struggle new, or am I new to this old struggle?

I’m a 35-year-old female who was born and raised in Cape Town, the Mother City of South Africa. I spent the whole of my 35 years here. Yet I knew nothing. As I’m writing this I have come to realise I feel more and more each day that I know nothing about Cape Town and even less about South Africa.

That made me realise that I’ve been in struggle all my life. What’s weird about the situation is that the information I have now has been available to me, but it always felt OK to not know.

Nine months ago I would’ve said I am a Coloured. Five months ago I would’ve said I’m a “so-called Coloured”. Today I feel offended that there is a Colour pasted to my life because I am a human being with red blood running through my veins, like any other person no matter what the colour of my skin.

For nine months I have been trying to build the organisation with the people in the community where I’m from. Because my own perception is that building organisation and uniting with other organisations is the only way to fight any struggle.

It has been a long nine months for me. Building an organisation isn’t as easy as I thought it would be. I’ve seen and learnt a lot and been through even more. Fires, dead bodies, evictions, my human rights violated, and accused of things I would never dream of doing.

Sometimes the way I live, the strength and courage that I have surprises me too. I have always been a people’s person. I have all types of friends. Throughout my life things wasn’t always easy and that would make me question myself as a person. I would always do my best to help anyone, especially when it concerns children or the elderly – they are the joys of this world to me. When things would go wrong no matter how big or small I would always sit back and think what I could’ve done differently or how I could be responsible for the other persons actions.

Like I said before it was always OK for me to not know. Not to know that mine and the future of my children and loved ones are being controlled by a system way bigger than us. Not to know what my Constitutional rights is as a South African citizen. Yet, like I said before it was ok not to know. OK because according to me, I knew what I was suppose to know, and as the saying goes, “life is what you make of it”. Little did I know at that time life was what the system “capitalist” decides to make of it for me.

Finding that out wasn’t easy or safe in my case. Waking up in the middle of the night with my shack on fire while I’m sleeping SCARES the living daylights out of me, but turning around now wouldn’t be giving up anymore, it would mean me selling my soul.

I look around now and it saddens me to think that the majority of the population in my community doesn’t know or just like me before, thinks it’s OK to not know.

For nine months I have bent over backwards to find out more so that firstly, I could know. Then I could let others know. That it’s not OK to not know, and only when you KNOW, life can be what you make of it.

For me there wasn’t much to know about housing. I knew that someday I would want one of my own to raise my children and live the happily-ever-after life. The very picture, the same system who decides whether or not I’m human enough to get what is rightfully mine paints for me as OK.

Like any other respectable citizen I had faith in the system and put myself on the council’s waiting list; happy that I was on a list that would ensure, someday, my children would have their own space, because I was sure I would never be able to buy one. Unfortunately I didn’t have the education that would get me the job I needed to earn enough.

I would dream about getting that perfect job so that I could open up a savings account and save enough to buy the house of my dreams, but that would always just be a dream.

Then the opportunity arrives, the rumours spread that there would be land made available for those who never had a house before. Excitement took over my thoughts. I couldn’t wait to be on my own. To be an owner of a piece of land that I could call home.
Things didn’t work out the way we were told in meetings and the leadership simply did a disappearing act when Anti-Land Invasion Unit and the Law Enforcement stepped in to enforce the laws on us.

That was the moment of truth for me. In all my confusion I decided to find out for myself where I legally stand. Because I was now homeless and lost most of the little I had.

Help came from all over. Everyone was sending me in different directions and that brought on even more confusion.

The first time I was taken to ILRIG I met Michael Blake. If ever I was confused it got even worse. It sounded like the comrades were speaking a language I would never understand.

Michael is a wonderful teacher. He introduced me to new things and new people like Koni, and together with the staff of ILRIG and Worker’s World Media I began to see light at the end of the tunnel. Don’t get me wrong, the light is faint, but at least I see it now.

From what I have learnt and experienced this far, there’s not much new in our immediate struggle, most of what we are going through and experiencing had already happened to others, even worse.

Learning from all the other struggles and comparing it to ours taught me a lot. I could learn from the mistakes others had made. To always put me ahead of where I’m supposed to be.

One thing I think that is different and could help others in struggle is to document the everyday struggle I’m in and maybe someday someone can learn from my experiences and mistakes.

I never thought my diary would be useful to anyone but me, but now that I think about it while I answer the questions, I am seeing what Koni said, that it will be useful for me, but also for movements and people too.

Aching Belly

28 February 2012

I hardly slept. I had stomach cramps again the whole of last night. It was terrible. The pain was unbearable. There was also lots of movement outside on the field during the night and that kept me awake as well. I have to go to a meeting today at 10am at the library at Kilimanjaro, in Tafelsig. I am afraid of walking there. My stomach is so sore and I go to the toilet every few minutes.

When I have to use the toilet every few minutes or hours, I use a bucket and then Ebrahiem goes and empties it and washes it. It makes me so sad and I don’t even want to look at my own stuff. Sitting there on a bucket. And Ebrahiem is so brave. He goes and takes it to the bushes and washes it out and it’s always there for me. He does that even in the middle of the night.

I arrived at the meeting safely.

Baby Corpse in a Pick ‘n Pay bag

11 March 2012, Sunday

7am. I got a very disturbing call from Charney. She was crying over the phone. She told me that the baby doesn’t want to wake up. He is two-and-half-months old. I told her to get dressed and take him to hospital immediately and that I would meet her there. I told Ebrahiem what she had told me and within minutes we were both dressed and on our way out. I phoned Charney on the way there to check if the baby was ok. Unfortunately she said he wasn’t breathing anymore and the ambulance was on its way. So I had to go to the shack in the backyard of the house where she was, just across the field we occupy. Babies name was Kyle and then she changed it to Ishmael when she got involved with a Muslim boyfriend. We took a taxi to MP Town Centre, the Tafelsig taxi was still empty when we got there and we knew it would take time for the taxi to fill up before it would go. We decided not to wait, and to run there. I was so worried, I wanted to get there, we were running all the way there. When we finally arrived, the police was there and there was yellow tape like it was a crime scene in front of her shack door. Ishmael was lying on the bed. When I saw Charney, she broke out crying and I knew then that I would have to be strong for her and carry her.
The police told me not to enter the shack, but I did anyway. I picked him up. He was still a little warm. He was not cold and stiff like a dead body should be, according to me. I lifted up his sweater. He had a striped blue and red sweater on. He had no kimby (diaper) on. I put my head against his chest, hoping I would hear his heartbeat. But nothing. The only thing I could hear was my own heartbeat, because I was running and my breathing was very loud too. Ebrahiem was sitting on his knees on the bed, looking at Ishmael, and that worried me even more. I now wanted to be strong for him too. He was very attached to the baby.

The police doesn’t even know what it is to take a stethoscope, how can he declare it dead like it is a crime scene and didn’t let the mother in? What more stress can you go through? I just ran and went in, I didn’t listen to the police officer. I went through the tape, lifted his sweater, tried to listen to his chest, but my heart was beating so fast and loud I could not hear anything. Ebrahiem was crying on his knees. I was so angry with the police. Where is the ambulance? What gives the police the right to tape it up and declare the child dead?

Charney told me she had breast-fed him at 4am and he had been fine. When she got up to use the toilet at about 7am, her boyfriend told her there is something wrong with the baby because he just wouldn’t wake up. Normally he would be awake by that time already. She rushed to him and realised that he wasn’t making a joke. She panicked and that is when she sent me a please call and I phoned her back.

It was the most traumatic day, I think. It was like I lost one of my own children. She was always depending on me with him. I was so sad. But I had to be strong for everybody. But eventually I felt I couldn’t do it anymore. I phoned Aunty Pat. I was so glad she was coming because there would be someone else also in control of everybody else emotions. I told Charney I was going to get Aunty Pat at the taxi rank. When I saw Aunty Pat I burst out crying, I just could not control it. In that moment I thought it was good for me and that I could go back and be the mother Charney needed me to be. I had never had the responsibility on me to have to bury somebody before.

The mother was crying. She didn’t have an ID. The baby didn’t have a birth certificate. They would not give the child to her. I had to go to the morgue. They didn’t want to give him to me. They did an autopsy. We had to sit in the morgue in Salt River and wait for the doctor for hours to do the autopsy. I had to go to the police and get paperwork. Then the morgue gave the child to me – in a plastic bag! It was a white bag – it may as well have been a Pic’N Pay shopping bag. Cut open from the autopsy. Stitched bloody and messy. Luckily I had a blanket and the mother did not want to keep him, to hold him.

We had no money. Lucky for us, one of the members of the mosque came to Igshaan’s dad (Igshaan is Charney’s boyfriend, but not the father – Leon is the child’s father, he is a rasta and after that he cut his hair and is very different, very changed). Igshaan’s dad is a mechanic, and I spoke to him there immediately – we knew each other because he had previously transported my material to build my shack with his truck. So I spoke to him and said we have a problem now because this child had to be buried and we have no money. He said don’t worry, just bring the child and we will get him buried. That was such a relief because everybody was looking at me for what to do.

I had to be so strong. For the mother. She doesn’t have family. The other child, the baby’s older sister, stays with me. The mother looks at me as a mother. Eventually I did break down. I really did break down. It was a terrible experience.

When we talk about saving someone’s life we think of the police, fireman or a doctor. These are the people who normally saves our lives.

Who saves our lives while we are living?

I couldn’t help but feel that we are partly responsible for Ishmael’s death. He shouldn’t have been living on an open piece of land with no water, electricity or even toilets, vulnerable to all kinds of diseases. Even though Dr’s has said that he died of natural causes they also mentioned a chest infection. Could we have avoided this?
Benevolence?

30 April 2012

I want to write up about a woman I call Mrs. M, from the Cape Party. It has caused such divisions on the field with the food she brings. She gave us a lot, she brought plastics when we were really in the rain. But now she is keeping track and lists of what she gives us and when we complain that she brings bread that is green, she causes problems. It is only me and her that has contact with the lawyer, and she wants to tell me that I must work via her. I have been in contact with the sheriff from the first day. We can talk. He is a working class member and doesn’t like what he must do. He gives me tips, this is what you must do or mustn’t do. Mrs. M sends me a message late at night for the number and the email address of the sheriff. I gave her his number, then she tells me that she doesn’t think I should be in contact with the sheriff, that she must be in contact and let me know. I feel bad because she is old and a pensioner already but I had to say, please don’t tell me who I must phone – you call who you want to phone and I will call who I need to call. She is causing problems on the field.

She started an organisation on the field called First People First. I think the Cape Party has this idea that if the people of the Eastern Cape go home, there will be more jobs and more houses. I said, if you want people to leave, you leave. You are also not from the Cape. So if you want them to go, you go. It doesn’t matter if we have people from the Eastern Cape or from China here, we will still have the same problems – it is government and capitalism causing our problems, not people who come here. She’s been spreading stories on the field that ILRIG is getting money for them and not giving it to them. She is really sick. And when I listen to what she has to say, she is screwing people with her politics. When she mentions what she has given us already and says we should be grateful, and that she is old and doesn’t have to do this.

She is also collecting money from the 16 respondents on the courts list, I am not even on that list, and she went to find out how much grant money they each get. So she is taking money from them so that she can save up and buy them Wendy Houses. She is only collecting from the 16, so how much division do you think that is going to cause? I tried to go to their meetings and to respect what they are doing, I thought if I listen and attend then I can sit and listen and explain what is wrong. For example, they started a women-only committee with rules that only women could be on the committee and they even offered that I could stay and be the chair. And they wanted to draw up a constitution in an hour and register the organisation immediately. I was sitting there and I put up my hand and I said there is gender inequality, and there is nothing wrong with the men on this field, and said you can’t have a constitution set up in one day, and it was not even one day it was an hour.

So from then on they were anti-Faeza. But don’t get me wrong, they were anti-Faeza all the time, they just put another point to being anti. Mrs. M is making sure that the organization is running- First People First. There is now one male as part of the organization now. It is messed up. They don’t work in the rest of Tafelsig, they make that very clear. They only work on the field, and say they only focus on issues on the field not in the wider community. They want women-only on the committee, and they argue for black (Xhosa) people to go back to the Bantustans. And the field is so full of people now, but for every black person who comes to the field and asks to put up a shack, they will call the cops. They only focus on people on the field, but their chair does not live on the field and their secretary is a white lady (Mrs. M) that lives in Newlands somewhere, in a very nice house. Her son is in the Cape Party. And what is strange is the people on the field were arguing saying they want nothing to do with political parties. In the beginning the PAC, Eisha and Anwaar Adams who is the PAC, offered us help and I didn’t see they had an agenda for helping us because they came all the time and only after the elections did they tell us who they are and where they are from. The same people fighting now were saying we don’t want political parties. Now they are having the Cape Party steer them in directions. Mrs. M got 9,000 rands from Americans for the people on the field. I want nothing to do with it because it makes me feel uncomfortable when I think of Mrs. M and money. I don’t know if people know what they are saying and now they say that they can afford a lawyer to prove I got 150,000 rands from ILRIG, so they have been barking like weak dogs all the time saying they will take me to court and ILRIG to court because they are getting money for the poor and making ourselves rich.

As rude as they are, and as weird as they go on, they will never do it in front of my face. Even we’ll be at court and they will come and ask me to do something. Why would you be so nasty from a distance and then you never do it in my face and you still ask for my advice?
Then the other day when we got to the field, we were threatened again by the people who follow Mrs. M. One woman was jumping up and down, she had a knife in her hand with a rope on it so it wouldn’t fall out of her hand. Like she was in battle, with a shirt wrapped around her arm. It looked crazy. It was scary because of the children. Cheney and Boeta Ali made a case against them. We then dropped the case even though he hit Charney with an iron bar. He is crazy when he drinks.

Who is at the root of our problems? This group of people is still working class. They live in our community without water, just like us. Yet they allow Mrs. M to take control of us. She even gets letters from the city of Cape Town thanking her for the good job she is doing with us.

We don’t have any information about our legal situation because we have limited access to our lawyer. He chooses to speak to Mrs. M.

I asked Mrs. M for the court documents, which we normally had access to when Sheldon was our lawyer and with Marius in the beginning when Mrs. M was not around. She responded with an sms: “we decided not to give out documents while working on the case. Info gets leaked out, discussed, not good for any court case, and generally not done.” I am really upset. This is the first time I heard that people don’t have access to their own documents. It doesn’t even involve her, yet she has access. I phoned Marius and asked him “are you part of the we?” He said he would call me back, but he never did.

There are talks that we should expose her on Monday among ourselves and the youth. In a way I feel it is about time too. But what I feel and what I know makes it difficult to decide. Things are going to get more dangerous around us if Mrs. M decides to put more pressure on them. And that is exactly what she is going to do. That is exactly what she has been doing all the time. That is why exposing her is not so easy and why I don’t use her real name. But we should eventually, sooner than later, expose her for who she is and what she really represents.

Mrs. M was not happy about articles about us protesting in the papers. She has the city under the idea that she is in control over what is happening at Kapteinsklip. We were at the globalisation school. She came to Boeta Ali very upset about the newspaper. We said that we gave the ward councillor 14 days to respond or we will march to Parliament. She said that if we march to Parliament she will withdraw from the field. That is why there was so much craziness on the field when we got back. When we sat down and listened to people on the field we realised that the city is going to take back the certificate they gave her if she does not have control over the field. She had come to the field a while ago with “good news” – a letter from the city praising her for the good work.

When she comes with bread all the kids must stand there and have their photo taken with her and be grateful because someone is thinking of you. At the beginning I thought she didn’t know and she was old and her head shakes. I think she uses that to look like a victim, and that she is brave to come into the community. I wasn’t even sure at first to tell her the bread was stale. People call her mam. Why can’t people call her by her name – mam and bassie, its gone! So when we protest, it shows that she does not have control and she does not like that. People listen to her and then become upset with us, worrying her support and the food she brings and the bread – which is so green the dogs won’t eat it – I want to take a picture of it. It is green and so hard. And that is what she thinks of us.

She claims she is busy organising water for us. She says we must wait. We have been waiting two years. How much more must we wait and the kids getting sick. Everyone is fighting with each other over water. They brought us six toilets and you cannot even wash your hands. I am scared of those toilets. People are going to get sick. Ricardo took a picture of the toilet-filled to top. There is a hole and they come with a pipe and suck it all out. But even if they come three or five times a week, that one day, everyone else still has to sit on everyone else’s what should I call it. It is unhealthy. And then we fight. She also brings plastics to cover your roof and she has the access to the lawyer, so people listen to her. Mrs. M has a website about the nice things she gives to people, in Blikkiesdorp, Tafelsig. She is manipulating us and have people to fight over R50 we cannot afford. People in the community are asking us for money to pay for their water. We are not really in her heart. We are not at the root of her. She is exploiting us. She is making us fight each other. And people don’t see it. It makes it more difficult. I don’t want to fight them. Politically I am not allowed to fight them. But must I wait ‘til they stab me or someone close to me?
Public Health

31 August 2012

A Terrible Experience at the Day Hospital.

Ebrahiem is sick. He has a headache that prevents him from opening his eyes. I called Michael and asked him to call an ambulance. He called an ambulance and phoned me back saying that they are on their way. The ambulance finally arrives after one hour. The paramedics examine Ebrahiem and ask me a few questions and for his ID. I explain to them that I am really worried about the pain in his head because it is the third severe headache he has had in less than a week. I also told them he suffers from clinical depression.

Bringing him to the day hospital could possibly be my worst mistake. I think this is a dangerous place for people who suffer from depression. There is no respect or compassion for people. A half an hour after we arrived at the hospital I had to go and tell the sister in trauma that Ebrahiem felt a tingling feeling and his mouth was numb. She said to bring him in. He couldn’t walk alone because he was still unable to open his head, the jacket he had put on his head to keep the light away, and was still unable to open his eyes as the light hurt his eyes and that made the pain worse. She told me to put him on the bed and then she examined him herself. Actually I don’t know what “examine” is supposed to be. She put something on his finger that was attached to a machine and checked his blood pressure. I asked her if she could give him something for the pain. She said only the doctor can prescribe medication and that the doctor will be with him soon. All this while I have to watch my husband cry like a baby. Eventually I couldn’t handle seeing him in pain like this so I attempted to ask one of the doctors myself. She looked up at me and said he has to wait his turn, but meanwhile she was busy doing nothing. How difficult is it to give someone something for pain? She just refused. Then they told me that I was not allowed to be by his side anymore. I had to sit in the waiting room.

I bought a cool drink and I thought he might be thirsty. I asked the sister if I could go and give it to him. He wasn’t on the bed where I left him. I asked the sister. She said he went to the toilet. I went to look and he was sitting on the floor in a ball covering his head in the passage. I helped him up and took him back to his bed. I think about two hours of laying in that bed he called me and said his head is feeling a little bit better. He was hungry. He spoke to the doctor and told the doctor. He has been writing up about how he feels. He told the doctor his head was feeling a little bit better, but that he was cold. The doctor said if your head is better go home! Ebrahiem wanted to see the sister in charge. She was a very nice lady just trying to cover up everything that is wrong in that hospital. She sounded to me like she was trying to keep the peace. Ebrahiem kept saying it is not about keeping the peace it is about what is right and wrong and that even though the medical help is free, they are getting paid to do a job, so why are they just talking to us however they want to. She gave him a form. He said he will fill in the form but wants to make sure that this form goes to the person in charge of the hospital and he did not trust that they would give it to that person. So he filled it in and we are waiting on a response. When they helped him it was about 7pm – he sat without medication and that no one will give him pain tablets until the doctor sees him and that I can go and buy pain tablets if I wanted to give it to him.

There is an old man sitting in a wheelchair next to us. I feel so sorry for him because he has been sitting there alone for the whole day. Ricardo helped him to sit properly because he was sliding out of his wheelchair. It is so sad to see this happening to our people. After 7pm, he spoke for the first time really. He had a R2 and he wanted Ricardo to buy him a packet of sugar and tea because he was very thirsty and wanted tea. He was under the impression he was still at home. I am not sure if he knows he is at hospital. He told me how he had nothing to eat or drink for the whole day. Ricardo went to the Town Centre to buy him some coffee. Amongst ourselves we had about R10. Ricardo asked him first how much sugar and if he wants milk. Immediately after Ricardo left, he responded as if Ricardo is his own son. He was saying ‘nie hy kom nou rig, hy slaan nie meer vir my nie’ (he was saying his grandson is coming right, he is not hitting me anymore). It was so sad that he was there alone and nobody for the whole day since the morning til the evening, when we left, no one was with him. I was not even sure what his name was. He kept saying how proud he was of his grandson who he confuses with Ricardo. He says he doesn’t perform with me anymore. I am so sorry to think someone can hurt a fragile old man in a wheelchair.
There is this 17 year old who doesn’t speak. He has been on the field for two weeks. Yesterday they found him beaten up. And he has no recollection of who hit him. The newspapers asked him what is his name, he said Wayne Liederman. But then he has 10 other names. He told me his name is Bronwyn. He told Ebrahiem his name is Devin and everybody on the field has a different name for him. He looks traumatised. Like something really bad happened to him. The only thing I know is he said he went to Wynberg Boys, but he has been to a home for naughty boys. I don’t know if any of it is true. He changes his mind. And he never speaks unless people speak to him. I am hoping the article in the Plainsman will get his family to recognise him.

The people from the Health Dept came to the field while we were in hospital. Mr Bell. He came on Thursday. He said he doesn’t care if we are legal or illegal, he will fight for our human rights and we are still entitled to our Constitutional rights of water and toilets. He said he will meet with us the next day. We told him about the court date of Siqalo Informal Settlement on Vanguard Drive and how we are supporting them, so he took my number and said that some of us must stay and he will meet with us with the City the next day. When the ambulance arrived the City had come. This lady from the City, she had been there before to spray numbers on the shacks. She looked at me and said who invited us here? I said there was a guy from the health dept and he said that he will be meeting with us today. She made it very clear that the city is not willing to put water on this land for us or toilets because we have been evicted and it is private property. I am not sure if Mr Vincent Bell pitched that day because I then went to hospital.

Protection?

23 Sept 2012
Hey Koni! Seeing that I don’t have time to write today and maybe for the next few days, I thought I would write to you via email on my phone whenever I can, if that’s ok with you? I think I told you about the couple who is from Zimbabwe. They living with me now in my shack. Their place we helped them to put up isn’t any bigger then a toilet and it leaks like a shower. Koni I am so sad to think their daughter Patina was in that shack for a few nights when it was really raining. Garry and Kattie didn’t even say anything. Are they afraid of us? I don’t think so I always try my best make them feel at home and I know the other people around me try hard too. Garry I know speaks and understands English. But Kattie she looks so young like she could be 20 years old. She only understands a small little of what we speak. I wish I could help them. I just don’t know how. This is going to be a real hectic week for me. Video training, Community House 25th Anniversary and last but by no means the least our protest for service delivery. Time to have lunch.
Mwah

3.23pm
Hi. its been a real hectic day for us. Everyone is busy and learning. Our memorandum has been drafted, checked and now its done. The leaflets are also done and they are busy cutting it right now. Its time to take it into the community.

4.33pm
On our way home. I have such a lot to do now. We going to buy my mom sausage then we heading home. We have leaflets to deliver and posters to put up. I’m have to pack my clothes because I have to be at WWMP at 8 o’clock sharp. The 3-day video training starts tomorrow.

6.59pm
Just when we think things are moving forward the challenges pops up. Everyone is on the edge. I know they tried and we have talked about how much time and energy this is going to take. We knew that we are going to be tired and some of us even angry. On our way home we realised that we didn’t put a date, time or venue on the leaflets. How could we have missed that? How could I have missed that? Now it means
each 1 of the 1200 leaflets has to be fixed with a pen. When we got home Neville’s mom told me what had happened to her. The police is here now. Koni I don’t know how much of this I can handle.

Mwah

7.31pm
Reneshia told me that her boyfriend invited friends over to have a tik party. He then ordered her to take off her clothes so that his friends could have sex with her. When she refused his friends left and he started beating her. In the event he hit their newborn baby on his head. There is a mark to prove this. She has more than 1 case against this man and an interdict. What more does she need? Maybe a death certificate. To top it all we had to convince them to take the matter to the police station. Then the system really proved to me that there is no concern for the poor and even less concern if you happen to be a women. They wanted to transport both of them locked up at the back of a police van. After showing them the interdict and letters from social workers. Do they still not know who the victim is? We stopped them immediately and offered to take her and the baby to the police station while the real criminal is in the van. So now we at the police station. Social worker wants to see us now.

8.45pm
Yes she does stay on the field. Can you believe this system? They want to debate if he is supposed to be held or set free! I am so angry! What is there to decide? The man beat his wife because she wouldn’t share her body with his friends to support his bad habit. He then managed to strike the 2 week old baby on his head. If that’s not enough evidence of abuse, then I really don’t know. The social worker gave me the opportunity to speak. She wants to see the interdict. We going to fetch it now.

9.09pm
We couldn’t find the interdict. They now tell her to go and stand in a queue with the baby to make a case against him so that they can actually have a reason to arrest this man. I just want to remove the baby from all this madness. But how?

10.05pm
The 2 police officers with the social worker and another female police officer whose standing behind the counter taking notes while Renecia (this is the correct spelling of her name) is talking eventually decides that he’s not going to be arrested, but he can only be escorted by police to collect his things then they must drop him anywhere. And they did just that.

10.35pm
Renecia looked very alive and to be herself away from her boyfriend happy to be herself and safe. I guess that’s the actual reason why I keep doing what I do.

12.45am
It’s time to go to sleep. This was a very long day. I hope I didn’t forget anything. I set the alarm for 6am.
Contagious Disease

9 Oct 2012

I don’t know if it is me changing. But yesterday I was at my aunt’s birthday. I was very close with her. She was at all my births. It was her 50th birthday. But everyone had to sit there and be careful not to knock over the champagne glasses and sit and wait to queue up to wish happy birthday. Very bourgeois. Not about having fun. All high heels, so uncomfortable and it wasn’t like that when I was little and it was about people and having fun. Not about sitting proper. My uncle gave a speech and it was all about making our children capitalists. I can’t blame him because I used to do that, wanting to be up there and get somewhere in life. Better car. Better than the next person. I don’t want to compete with anyone anymore. I just want to live. I would rather wear my broken tackies and broken pants. And see me for me. Not because my hair looks like a model or I have 10 gold rings. No I don’t want to live like that anymore. I don’t want my kids exposed to that either. I was so happy to get back home to the fire where we would all stand around and share the food we brought back and not have to be quiet and official. Ebrahiem went and knocked on each person’s door when we got back and everyone was happy with food and conversation. That is how I would rather be. It feels right. I fight with the parents on the field. I know it can be changed now. If we have to change it only when they are teenagers it will be harder. I have to change my daughter now – she wants a matric ball with a car that will cost R5,000. Now she says I want to celebrate but not like that. The other kids don’t have me and Ebrahiem as parents and other activists who go to the globalisation school to encourage them and show them the truth about who is who. Everybody wants to be capitalist. It is a scary world. My kids have been in this corrupt system and I taught them some of that too because I didn’t know. I have always been a bit more to the activist side and always considered the black sheep who would want things to happen democratically. But there is no such thing as democracy in poor families because there isn’t enough to share, so our parents tend to keep the equality and freedom of speech away from us because what if I ask for more. Even if my mom thinks I am back chatting then children are oppressed and not allowed to say what they feel. Nadia said you know what mommy, before all of this, I didn’t tell you but I was very angry in a way with you because it looked to me like you don’t have time for us or you choose to spend little time with us when you can because you are unemployed, but now you don’t have to worry about that where I am concerned and I will also tell my brothers because I see you are helping other people and I want to help other people too.

The globalisation gave that to me. To have her there and doing the courses. If you are an activist, there are stages you go through. Now I can see that I was in the stage that Ricado and Bianca are at, where you can’t sleep, all the information is there and it feels like it is too much, I see Bianca is so tired and politically drained. She speaks to everyone who passes, having political talks. I used to listen to myself. That was me. Trying to spread this awareness: I know now, I want everyone else to know. Now I can relax a little because there are people around me who are now taking it on to tell other people. It should be a contagious disease that infects everyone so they can open their eyes. One day I would like to sit down and analyze the wool they pulled over our eyes when I was young and over my mother so we can remove it. It is still there. My mom is a little more radical, but others are still saying shame, I am so sorry you are living on a field and others going to my mom saying you can’t have your daughter living on a field, make space for her. She says she offers me. I can’t now. Not knowing there are people who have gone through the struggle with me, who will still be there.

The youth have inspired me so much. Their protest, things went wrong. There wasn’t participation. Just Siqalo and us and one or two community members. But it was fun. And we finished. They stuck it out. I would have worried no one showing and even the police saying no one is here, why not cancel? They said no, we will do it and go give the memorandum and go and come back. So many youth would have said no, but they stuck through it ‘til the end. When we are done there was a whole conversation and to hear how everyone feel and we sat down and thought what did we do wrong, what must be changed for next time. We took it as a learning experience and I was so proud of them.
Thin Air

18 October 2012

I haven’t written as much as I would have liked to this week. Everything seems to be going wrong all at once. Monday Nadia’s phone got stolen, Tuesday the sheriff let us know we are going to be evicted. I no longer have a phone where I can check my e-mails, the lawyer hasn’t contacted me yet, I had to contact him because I am worried what people will loose and how Mike’s office writing this (during a break from the Housing Assembly meeting, waiting to be interviewed by phone on the Voice of the Cape). The quiet around me makes me think of the seriousness of tomorrow.

What will happen to us? This is what we consider our 3rd eviction. First the City of Cape Town got judge Nathan Erasmus to order our eviction from City owned property. Then because we had NOWHERE TO GO, we lived for a few nights on the side walk in Yellowwood road in Tafelsig right next to the piece of land we got evicted from, there they brought us a letter that stated if we do not move within 24 hours we will be arrested and could be jailed for up to five years. We moved from there with no choice to railway property only to get evicted again. Where will we go? Everyone wants to know. I don’t know. Maybe we will disappear into thin air.

Evicting Ourselves

19 October 2012

There was no doubt in our minds that we were going to be evicted today. The sheriff confirmed it. Mrs.M let me know. And Elizabeth also came to tell us that law enforcement is just a few minutes away. The second group of people didn’t want anything to do with us wasn’t there when it all started. They were told by the lawyer that they had to protest in front of the court, which we couldn’t understand because there was no court date. The night before we had given them papers and koki’s [pens] to make posters. We were in agreement that they would protest at the court since that is what the lawyer told them, and that we would protest on the field. When I asked the sheriff about this court thing he said it would be of no use because there is nobody at court.

They couldn’t have made it to court because it wasn’t long before they were back. To me it felt like a trick by Mrs. M to get people off the field so that the sheriff can do their job. When they came back they appeared as if they were on our side. By then we had already blocked off the road with burning tires and the guys started burning the two toilets we had on our side. Some of the guys from the second group also brought toilets from their side to the front, and blocked the road with us.

The SAPS law enforcement arrived with a truck that would take our stuff, just like the sheriff explained it would happen. Our stuff had already been removed from our shacks so now we were stalling law enforcement so that the second group of people could save some of their stuff.

Everyone was running up and down trying to save some of their valuables. Then one of the SAPS police officers approached us and told us that the eviction wouldn’t take place today, that it would be postponed. When the second group of people who belongs to First People First heard that, they started shouting at us, especially me. They were now walking around with sticks and all kinds of sharp and dangerous objects, making statements like they don’t want us on the field anymore.

Mrs. M made a statement that she had organised with the sheriff to give us a chance to move peacefully. How crazy is that? How can we, after one month and six months of suffering, just move peacefully? What were we fighting for all the time?

Marius the lawyer arrives. I think listening to what he had to say and the way he said it really cut through my heart. Ebrahiem asked him if he is representing everyone on the field like he claimed all this time he was, and he couldn’t answer. Instead the other people around him from First People First, were saying no. His response to Ebrahiem was to keep quiet. I on the other hand just couldn’t accept and keep quiet. First of all I wanted to know and then it looked as if he had not been representing us for a
while and everybody knew about it except us. When I asked him “just answer the simple question” he did. He said “no” and excused himself to “speak to his clients”. When I turned around and looked at the people who was here from the start of this occupation, who slept on the sidewalk and underground, who struggled for so many months, I just broke down and cried. They have been sold out, manipulated by a lawyer, marginalised and excluded from their own struggle. I wanted to be strong for all of them, but I just couldn’t. I was so sad, angry, but more frustrated that Mrs. M and Marius could get away with what they are doing. If there is a god out there, then I hope he sends them both to hell.

The Housing Assembly was there, and Michael, Judy and Koni, and some members of the community. There were housing activists from Zille-raine Heights, Civic Road, Makaza, Siqalo, Delft, Blikkiesdorp, Overcome Heights. Vivanne had slept over the night before. She was really supportive. She was there for me emotionally. I don’t know where she got the money, but she bought bread and polony for everyone to eat. At one stage she was crying, she said she just really felt for us. Winston’s shack had been burnt the night before and she was so upset. He was so angry that he burnt his couch saying law enforcement won’t take his stuff. He put it out again. But I don’t think that it went out completely because while we were protesting in the road we saw his shack was on fire. So we had to take it all down, because that would have been worse and caused much more problems for us if it had caught the others on fire.

Everyone around me was telling me how everything was going to be ok. I didn’t think so at the time. For a second I sat down on the side walk and could not move or look up at anyone because I had no answers. I was so angry and wanted to prove to everyone that this is too rotten people. I was not going to move.

The press was all over, trying to get pictures of people being sad. I wanted them to be there so much, but when all the division was there so open to everyone to see, I wanted them to just disappear. But they were there and I had to tell them the truth, that the lawyer was only representing 23 people now. And they write in the paper now as if they were blind and didn’t see that there were much more than 23 people there. In fact, when I read what they wrote in the papers, they mostly just quoted Mrs. M, and it wasn’t even her being evicted and they spent so much time taking us aside and interviewing us and photographing us. That is the reason why we need to write this, so others can see what the press does.

We had to have a meeting, an urgent one, inspired by Judy and Koni and Mike, because I was just going to sit there and didn’t know what was next. When we had the meeting, we asked the press to leave because we didn’t want them there – I think the press thrives on other people’s emotions. I wanted our emotion to be out there. But I was so confused. What was the right thing to do and what was wrong? I just wanted to be alone with the people who have been around me all the time. I wanted to tell them it would be ok, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t even look at them. I can barely remember. I remember I said I know I can’t handle anymore of this. I have tried to be strong for too long. I can’t do this anymore. I can’t put my husband’s life at risk. I can’t live without my children anymore. I can’t handle people swearing at me, throwing in my windows, every second day running around shouting at me, setting my shack on fire. I just couldn’t anymore. I remember Luvuyo saying we can move to Siqalo. At one state I said I can’t, I just won’t let Marius and Mrs. M win this fight.

Then there was some sense talked to me by this old man from Siqalo and Mike and people, telling me how dangerous it is for us there and the violence that will come tonight, and how people die for no reason. Luvuyo said they will find my body there, it really clicked that my children might grow up without a mother if I continue to try and convince people here who the enemy really is. I remember saying I will go to Siqalo, but that I cannot speak for anyone else and they must decide for themselves. Everybody else who was with me said yes, they would go. It felt like I had influence over them and their decision and I was worried whether or not I made the right decision. A month from now will I feel it is my fault that people are in Siqalo. But there was nothing else I could think of to make things better at the time.

The group from Siqalo who was there was just wonderful. They decided that they would not leave until we were all safely transported to Siqalo and that all our stuff was there safely. We couldn’t change their minds. I was really worried they would get hurt and I didn’t want anyone to be hurt on my behalf. They were just so strong. And the people on the field were just swearing things like, “you kaffir” and they
were just so brave, and every time they would shout, they would just start singing. The ladies were so inspiring, they came to me and said “don’t worry Sisi, everything will be fine, you are going home now.”

Judy spoke to Stephen, who offered us two trips in the taxi for free. Michael phoned me after saying he can organise a truck and he would pay for it. We tried to get a hold of a truck, Simpiwe’s brother had a connection with a truck, but eventually said there was no driver. Luvuyo found a truck and it cost 700 rand for the truck to do trips.

Going Home: The Move to Siqalo

20 October 2012

The way we were transported was so nice. It was half of Tafelsig’s people and half of Siqalo’s people who travelled with each taxi. The people of Siqalo didn’t want to leave us alone. They were really protecting us. I had to fetch Nadia who was at my cousins so she can look after the children at my mothers. Usually on a Friday and Saturday they are with me. Nadia really wanted to be there, but I couldn’t allow her to be there with all the emotions, and the swearing and the fighting. Luvuyo was the last person to stay and he took a taxi. That was for me the most brave thing to do – to stay behind with a bunch of angry people. He could have gone with the second taxi, but he didn’t want to. He went and he bought some food for us. It was just amazing how the people of Siqalo reacted. When I got there after I sorted out my kids and my mother, everybody was there. It was like a different group I met – all smiles. People had collected dry clothes for everybody to change into. There was a shack and coals inside already to heat up and there was food already, first for the kids and then for the adults. There was two shacks for us. One was very tiny and Luvuyo gave me a key and said that is where you will be sleeping. The others were already in bed. Everybody was exhausted. The Mama of the house came to me and hugged me and said don’t worry there are no more rude people here. Her daughter came and said Faeza if you want to you can sleep by me in my bed. The last thing I wanted to do was invade and made anyone uncomfortable. I didn’t sleep fine. I couldn’t get it out of my mind how things had happened and how people with money and resources can just manipulate situations if they want to.

The next morning Luvuyo came to us and relocated all of us into our own shacks. People were so happy and excited. Our neighbours were so welcoming. They collected R5 to make food for us. They just wouldn’t accept no for an answer. I said to Luvuyo you can stop now, we are here and grateful. He said Faeza don’t refuse, it is our culture, and it is not me, it is people of Siqalo who feel that way.

The truck broke down, where it was towed to Samora Machel. On the Sunday it arrived. People got their stuff. But already the people of Siqalo gave us beds and blankets. They did such a lot for us.

On Sunday there was a meeting at 2pm. Everybody stood in a wide circle and they started off their meeting by praying. Someone prayed in the middle of the circle and people held hands. Luvuyo started off telling people what happened to us. I couldn’t understand a word but I could see from his body language and he mentioned Tafelsig. Pumla, Mama’s daughter, who is in Grade 11 and a youth member, came to us and started to translate. What was happening was so extraordinary. People put up hands in the meeting and said I have two zincs, and I have four poles, and I have some planks. All kinds of donations. Someone said I have a big piece of yard. One of the Mama’s said I have a place that is finished that people can move into right now. Luvuyo said this one guy has a complete shack for me, they must just earmark a piece of land. And in the meeting they went around and collected money for us. People were not shy. One woman said I don’t want to give a R5, I want to give a R50. Boeta Ali started to cry and go on his knees. Ebrahiem started to cry. I tried not to, but then I was also crying. One of the guys in the meeting, I could feel was negative what he said and Pumla didn’t want to translate and just said he is drunk. I said that we must hear. But later in the meeting he put up his hand and said I have materials for you and welcome to Siqalo.