

# **THE INNER IMAGE**

**An examination of the life of Helen Elizabeth Martins  
leading to her creation  
*The Owl House and A Camel Yard*  
as Outsider Art**

**Thesis**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
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**by  
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**A tribute to 'Miss Helen' for her courageous search  
and for my children - Karen, Laurien, Murray and Cameron -  
with much love**

*'Where there's light, there's a way'*  
Freda Eksteen

## ABSTRACT

*The Owl House* is situated in the Karoo village of Nieu Bethesda, and the person responsible for its creation, Helen Elizabeth Martins (1897-1976), is South Africa's best known *Outsider* artist. A number of newspaper and magazine articles, television programmes, radio interviews, play, films, short stories, theses and art works have resulted directly from her work. Interest in *The Owl House* continues to grow, with visitors coming from all over South Africa, and various parts of the world, to visit it.

The Owl House was Helen Martins' home for most of her 78 years. During the last 30 or so years of her life she devoted all her time and energy to transforming the interior of her house into a glistening fantasy world of colour and light, using crushed glass stuck to almost every surface, coloured glass pane inserts in the walls, mirrors of many sizes and shapes, and countless paraffin lamps and candles. She called her garden 'A Camel Yard', and filled it with over 500 cement statues, structures and bas reliefs. All the labour involved, apart from crushing and sorting the coloured glass, was provided by at least four different men, who assisted her over the years, Johannes Hattingh, Jonas Adams, Piet van der Merwe and Koos Malgas, though Helen Martins was the inspiration and director behind it all.

Through a study of Helen Martins' background and life, and their effects upon her psyche, a rigorous attempt has been made to reach some understanding of why she became a recluse, and what caused her to create this unique body of work comprising her entire domestic environment. She became increasingly asocial as her life progressed, and ultimately ended it by committing suicide in 1976.

Through the universality of symbolism, the meanings of the subjects, themes and concerns which she chose to depict are studied. Then, together with some knowledge of her life and personal influences, an attempt has been made to deduce what it was that Helen Martins was trying to express and work through in her creations.

This study also led to an awareness of the fact that, although each one is unique, there are many examples of Outsider Art throughout the world. Fundamentally, creators of Outsider Art remain asocial in relation to their cultural milieu and cultural context. Some other examples of Outsider Art, both in South Africa as well as in Europe and India, were visited, and are described and compared with *The Owl House* as well as with one another.

The way in which society reacts or responds to Outsider Art and its creators is studied through the comprehensive records of one specific case which caused great controversy in Johannesburg during the 1970s.

Ultimately, working alone or with assistance, it is the Outsider artist who is the driving force

behind these unique works, and whose indefinable inner fire of passion alone makes it possible to bring them into being. It would seem that the fascination with Outsider Art is that through their work, creators allow others a glimpse into a different sense of reality which is both mysterious and inexplicable.



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*While every effort was made to trace the authors of photographs, in some cases this was not possible, and apologies are made for any omissions or mistakes.*

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## **Synopsis of chapters**

### **Chapter One. Introduction - the Owl House**

This chapter briefly sketches the background of The Owl House and why it seems important to study it further.

### **Chapter Two. The Milieu in which Helen Martins was nurtured: Nieu Bethesda in the early Twentieth Century - the forming years**

The village of Nieu Bethesda came into being towards the end of the nineteenth century to found a church for the local farming community. Helen Martins grew up in this strictly Calvinistic, puritanical and patriarchal society which was dominated by the church. This must have had a profound effect on her later development and how she reacted to the events of her own personal life history.

### **Chapter Three. Upbringing, education, and family relationships - the early years**

Helen Martins' family structure and relationships, as well as her educational background, are investigated with a bearing on how these factors would have affected her adaptation to later events. The eventual result was an intense and obsessional outpouring of creativity over a period of approximately 30 years, commencing when she was in her late forties.

### **Chapter Four. Brief career, marriage, abortions and divorce - the missing years**

This period, lasting from approximately 1919 to between 1927 and 1929, was the only extended time that Helen spent away from Nieu Bethesda. It is the period of her life about which least is known, and which probably holds some of the important clues to her later reclusive lifestyle and unusual creativity.

### **Chapter Five. Return to Nieu Bethesda - the lonely years**

Helen Martins returned home when she was about 30 years old to look after ageing and invalid parents. She became increasingly reclusive, and after they had both died, started on the transformation of the house and then the garden. It was during this time that she started on a long-standing love affair with a married man, about which, until now, little has been known. Her life style and support, or lack thereof, from various people, is investigated.

### **Chapter Six. The Owl House - beginning of the creative years**

In this chapter the house is described in detail, from the exterior, and room by room. Such a record is important, both because the interior is so completely unusual (and unless ongoing restoration work is undertaken, will not last indefinitely), and also because from it, one can attempt to discover if some motivation, patterns or themes run through her work.

### **Chapter Seven. A Camel Yard - the creative years continue**

The work in the plot surrounding the house is totally different from what she created inside, although there are links in themes and subjects. The initial impression is of an overwhelming confusion of repeated themes, cement and glass sculptures, and brick, cement and metal structures. The works are recorded and described in detail, including a plan with key.

### **Chapter Eight. Light creating years - and darkness**

The stage during which Helen Martins did most of her enormous output of work, the last third of her life, is also the period about which there is the most written and verbal evidence to be found. Included here are extracts from interviews which were conducted with many people throughout southern Africa who knew her. There are also a number of letters available, written both by Helen Martins and other people, which add to some understanding of occurrences and influences which affected her life. This chapter leads up to her suicide in 1976.

### **Chapter Nine. Darkness and light - the Shadow**

Light versus darkness, literally and metaphysically, were the two dominant and opposing forces in Helen Martin's life, which ultimately emerged in 'concrete' form. In trying to understand her work it must be realized that one is dealing almost entirely in symbolism. Symbols, it would seem, were the only way in which her psyche could express itself and strive for wholeness.

This chapter explores various areas of her life, her resulting creative expression, and her 'Shadow' with which ultimately she does not seem to have become reconciled. Finally, it appears, it overwhelmed her courageous, albeit unconscious, efforts to come to terms with events in her earlier life and achieve wholeness.

### **Chapter Ten. Expressing the unconscious - sources, subjects and symbols**

To try to understand the work of Helen Martins, that is so obviously an unconscious 'inner journey', it is necessary to look at the symbolism involved in her choice of subject matter, and the repetitiveness of certain themes running through her work. In this chapter conclusions are drawn from the entire study, parallels drawn between various works, and an attempt made to understand the motivation behind Helen Martins' work.

### **Chapter Eleven. The concept of Outsider Art**

Outsider Art, brought to the public's attention by Jean Dubuffet as 'Art Brut', is a field for serious study. There are many examples of Outsider Art already documented in the world, and museums and publications devoted to this subject. This section discusses the concept of Outsider Art, some early examples, and the growth in awareness of this form of art.

### **Chapter Twelve - Other Outsider Art environments**

South Africa has a number of Outsider artists, some are known but there are many others as yet either undocumented or undiscovered. This chapter describes some of these, as well as examples in Europe and India, and relates them both to The Owl House and to each other.

### **Chapter Thirteen - Outsider Art in society**

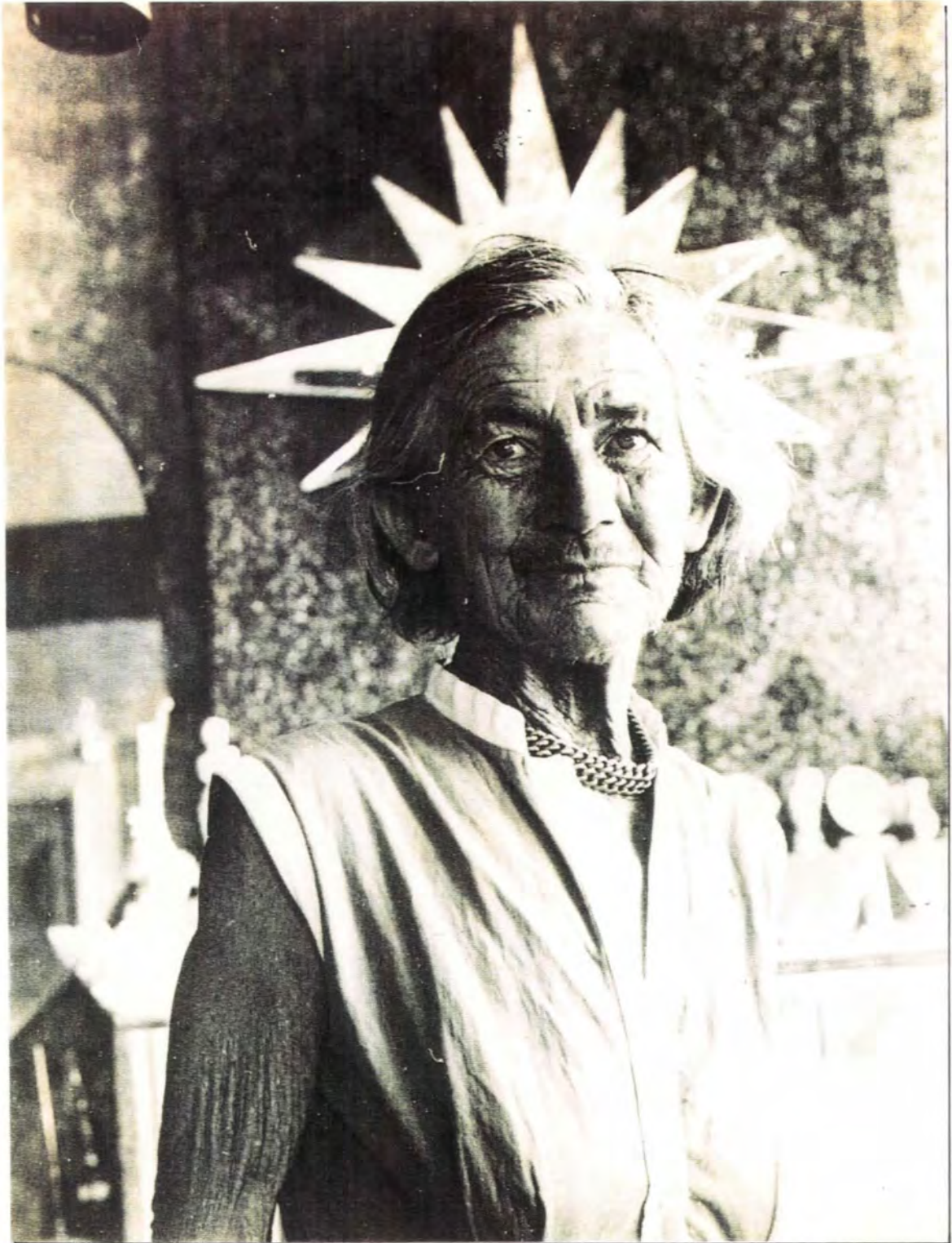
Leslie Goldman, labelled a 'junk artist' by the press and public, worked in his Johannesburg suburban garden creating large sculptures from waste materials. These raised an outcry from his neighbours who appealed to various committees of the City Council to have them demolished. Public interest was raised and other artists were called in to support his right to create as he wished on his own property. There was a court case, which he lost. Ultimately the debate was about what is art, what are artists materials, and the rights of the individual versus the mass.

### **Chapter Fourteen - Conclusion**

Many people are artists, many others are craftsmen or home-makers who enjoy decorating their homes and gardens. But something mysterious and indefinable - a unique and driving passion - separates Outsider artists from these others. Working with or near them does not cause others to become Outsiders also. This is seen in the men who worked closely with Helen Martins: once she had died, none of them possessed the special spark which Helen had, to be able, or motivated, to continue on their own. It seems that the sense of creating a reality, other than the one which we recognize, is what so entrances and mystifies visitors. In today's world where emphasis is on materialism, science and technology, these Outsider artists fulfil a crucial role in asserting the power and impact of imagination unbounded by conformity and the opinions of society.

## History and chronological account of Helen Martins' life and events which influenced it.

23-12-1897	Born - Nieu Bethesda
6-2-1898	Baptized - Nieu Bethesda
Nov 1914	Passed Standard VII Examinations - Nieu Bethesda
1915-1918	Opleidingskool - Graaff-Reinet
1919?	Taught at Wakkerstroom?
7-1-1920	Married to Willem Johannes Pienaar at Nieu Bethesda. The couple lived on her brother Peter's farm at Wakkerstroom
Jan 1921	Taught at Cullinan Govt. School, Premier Mine
1922-1925	Seemingly with Johannes Pienaar, at least at times, as they appeared in theatrical productions together. However she left him on and off during this time
29-9-1925	Helen finally left her husband and went home to Nieu Bethesda
25-5-1926	Officially divorced from W J Pienaar
1926 to +/-1927/29	Unknown, possibly working at Muizenberg
+/-1927/29	Returned to Nieu Bethesda to look after sick mother
4-9-1939	Hattingh family move to Nieu Bethesda
1940 /1941	Relationship with Johannes Hattingh begins
10-1-1941	Death of Helen's mother - Nieu Bethesda
1-2-1945	Death of Helen's father - Nieu Bethesda
+/- 1945	Started work on transforming interior of house
1947	Hattingh family returned to live in Peddie
4-7-1952	Marriage to Jacobus Johannes Machiel Niemand - the marriage only lasted for between 6 weeks and three months
21-5-1953	Officially divorced from J J M Niemand
+/- 1956/8	Death of Johannes Pienaar (during Korean War) USA
16-2-1963	Death of Johannes Hendrik Hattingh at Peddie
+/- 1964	Koos Malgas started working at The Owl House
1968	Death of Alida Martins (Helen's sister)
Sept 1971	Death of Mrs Estelle van Schalkwijk (friend)
+/-Aug1972	Death of Mrs Lettie Kritzinger (friend)
1973/4?	Met Jill Wenman and Francie Lund
5-8-1976	Helen drinks caustic soda
8-8-1976	Death of Helen
Nov 1989	The Owl House provisionally declared a National Monument



Helen Martins, circa 1969.

Blignaut de Villiers.





This is the dead land  
This is cactus land  
Here the stone images  
Are raised, here they receive  
The supplication of a dead man's hand  
Under the twinkle of a fading star

Is it like this  
In death's other kingdom  
Waking alone  
At the hour when we are  
Trembling with tenderness  
Lips that would kiss  
Form prayers to broken stone

from *The Hollow Men* by T S Eliot

## Chapter One

### Introduction - The Owl House

In August 1976, four months short of her 79th birthday, Helen Martins committed suicide in her fantasy world of glittering glass particles, lamps and mirrors, stars, moons, spires and cement statues.

'Miss Helen', as she was commonly known in the district, was born on 23 December 1897 in the same house which she much later named 'The Owl House', and where she spent most of her life. The unique creation encompassing her entire domestic environment was achieved in the latter part of her life, over a period of approximately 30 years. This resulted in the total transformation of her traditional flat-roofed Karoo cottage and its surrounding plot of land, situated on the outskirts of the village of Nieu Bethesda.

The creation of The Owl House was in fact the result of an unusual, symbiotic relationship between Miss Helen and the men who physically created the work. It was executed by different men at various stages of its growth, under her direction. One was a friend, Johannes Hendrik Hattingh, who worked as a builder and helped her over many years. Others were coloured inhabitants of the village whom she employed to do specific tasks. The work involved the breaking down and building of walls, the insertion of windows, painting, the fixing of ground glass to virtually every internal surface and, on the outside of the house and its plot of land, the making and erection of cement statues, various structures, and metal and perspex stars, moons and suns.

Over the time period, each man did very clearly-defined sections of the work. Frans Olifant was involved very briefly. He was followed by 'Klein' Jonas Adams, then there was Piet van der Merwe - by trade a builder - and finally, for the last 12 years, Koos Malgas. He had previously earned his living as a sheep-shearer, and was the finest artist-cum-craftsman of the three. The only labour which Helen did herself was to grind up the coloured glass, and wash and sort it (interviews Malgas, K. 1988 and Wenman, J. 1988).

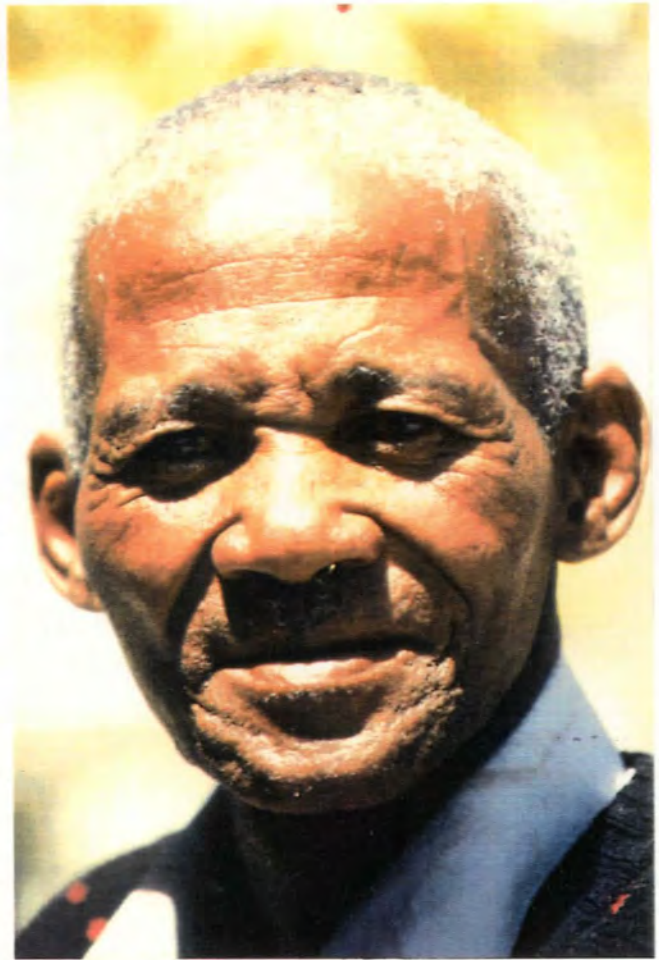
According to her eldest sister Annie le Roux, Helen had no formal art training (interview Le Roux, A. 1986). None of the men with whom she worked had any art background either (interviews Adams, J. 1990; van der Merwe, P. 1989; Malgas, K. 1988). It had always been said that Johannes Hattingh helped her chiefly with building work, but according to his daughter, he was also involved in most other aspects of the work (letters and interview Kruger, M. 1993). Each of the other three afore-mentioned men - Jonas, Piet and Koos - played his own, very differentiated and distinctive part

in the creation of the whole. The work of each is markedly individual. The Owl House and Camel Yard would not exist without the combination of Helen and these helpers: Helen to inspire, commission, supervise and purchase the necessary materials - cement, glue, glass bottles and whatever else was needed - and her helpers to make the necessary practical construction decisions and physically execute her vision.

Until she embarked on this strange and complex work, which occupied most of her time and used up all of her meagre finances, Helen had shown little interest in creating art works. The sources of her work were often trivialities; picture postcards, photographs, Christmas cards, household utensils, illustrations on the packaging of foodstuffs or household cleaning materials, or 'kitschy' ornaments. In addition, two very important sources of inspiration were illustrations by William Blake and an illustrated copy of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam which she had been given. These were all greatly enlarged in their new rendition. Her inner vision and her unconscious, which she needed in some way to express and explore, were extraordinary, while many of the inspirational objects used to express that vision were very mundane.

Helen Martins and her work have inspired numerous newspaper and magazine articles, of which well over 150 have been collected by the author. The earliest is referred to in a letter from Gerty Beddy, a former fellow student with Helen, dated 20-9-1970, which is probably the same as the earliest article traced, dated 1970 (De Villiers, B. 1970). The most recent to date were published in the second half of 1995. In addition there are a number of short stories - published and unpublished (Garriock, N. 1988; MacLennan, D. 1978; Maister, N. 1988); Athol Fugard's play and subsequent film *Road to Mecca*, which have received world-wide acclaim; theses and dissertations (Emslie, A. UNISA: 1990; Godiner, C. Uncompleted MA Fine Art, Rhodes University; Marks, B. A. University of the Witwatersrand: 1987); films (amongst them: Robert Brooks, Ian Difford and John Peacock: 1978; Lynton Stephenson: 1989; *The Owl House - an inner journey*, directed by Kevin Rixon: 1993; Athol Fugard and Roy Sargeant: 1990, *Road to Mecca*; *Outsider Art*, 1991: Catherine Hunter, Cape Town Film and TV School); numerous television features and documentaries (amongst these: *The Owl House*, July 1990: Global News Services; Athol Fugard on *The Road to Mecca*, 1991 or 1992: TV1; *The Owl House*, approximately 1988: TV1); radio programmes and interviews; and art works (amongst these: *Homage to Helen Martins* - screenprints by Simon Ford; *Neo-New Bethesda* by Barend De Wet; and *Concrete Sculptures* by Beezy Bailey and Koos Malgas). Particularly since her death many have examined and been inspired by the life and work of Helen Martins. But there seem always to be more unanswered questions than answers as to why she became the strange, misunderstood recluse that she was, and why she created this remarkable work.

Helen Martins ended her life by drinking caustic soda, and took three days to die in agony. This savage, self-inflicted death has only served to add to the mystique which already surrounded her



Three of the men, all from the village, who worked with Helen Martins over a long period of time: (top left) Piet van der Merwe; (bottom left) Jonas Adams; (right) Koos Malgas, who was responsible for most of the work.





Puphin Coudyzer



ATHOL FUGARD'S  
**THE ROAD TO MECCA**



Athol Fugard's play *Road to Mecca*, part autobiographical, part based on Helen Martins' life, has been performed in many places round the world. These two programmes are from the Market Theatre and CAPAB productions respectively. In the Market Theatre production, Yvonne Bryceland played the part of 'Miss Helen' and Elize Cawood that of the young woman friend.





Acknowledgement of the importance now accorded to The Owl House can be seen in the road sign on the Graaff Reinet - Middelburg road, indicating the turn off to The Owl House at Nieu Bethesda, and that it has National Monument status.

Twisted in wire letters on the netting surrounding the Camel Yard, Helen unequivocally stated what it was that was being created: 'This is my world' brooks no argument.



Helen's eldest sister Annie was a vital, warm and alert old lady when interviewed in Swaziland in 1986. She was then aged 92 and lived with her elder son, Joe. She produced invaluable family photograph albums and could fill in many details of the Martins family's earlier years together.

while she was alive.

She died intestate, and the Municipality of Nieu Bethesda bought the property from her family, after a period of indecision from all concerned as to whether it should be destroyed or preserved. They purchased it without at that stage appreciating its artistic worth, nor knowing that it would later receive national and international recognition. Today The Owl House is run as a museum. It has become the prime tourist attraction of the village and one of its largest sources of revenue. There was for a long time, however, a local lack of understanding of the true value of Helen's irreplaceable creation, and of the need to preserve it in its entirety without altering any elements within the whole concept.

The major questions concerning art are at once the most simple and the most complex. Is 'The Owl House' art, and does Miss Martins deserve to be placed in the ranks of great fine artists? The body of this work will attempt to answer these questions, bearing in mind that such questions have almost always been asked of great art. It will also define and explain Outsider Art and relate 'The Owl House' to other examples of this genre.

It is necessary to investigate very thoroughly Helen's background - family life and early years and later life history - to try to understand why she became a strange recluse recreating her entire domestic environment. 'This is My World' she proclaimed in twisted wire script on the high fence surrounding her property. Inside the fence was her house: multi-coloured and encrusted with glass in the interior, and her garden filled with fantastic cement statues. Beyond was a village where others cultivated flower and vegetable gardens or lucerne to fatten sheep, and where other women's pastimes included tea parties and card games. Already there have been many misrepresentations and inaccuracies in articles published about her life and work, and it is essential to base theories upon established facts. Over a period of 11 years as accurate a record as possible of her history has been gathered from very many sources, and interviews have been conducted throughout South Africa, Swaziland and Namibia.

To justify embarking upon a work which will make even more public Helen's hidden, inner world and also to understand why it seems important to do so, it is necessary to come to terms with the strong and disturbing sense of invading what was very private to the maker, and intruding upon personal pain. This can only be approached with a feeling of great respect for a woman of committed purpose. It must also honour her courageous and unremitting search for her own truth by attempting, in her absence, to convey some of the truth of her life. It is a story which affects everybody who visits The Owl House.

The fact remains that The Owl House *is* a public museum, which Helen herself had hoped for. Reference is made to it in her unsigned will (Appendix 9) and in various letters. Her niece Betty Crous, daughter of Helen's sister Alida, wrote:



*Several years before her death Helen had publicly communicated with Herman Martins (her nephew who was SA Consul General in New Orleans at one stage) about her worries that nobody would look after her Owl House, and the words "National Monument" were even used - I saw this article in the Sunday Times myself. (letter Crous, E. 1993).*

The Owl House was provisionally declared a National Monument in November 1989, and interest in Helen's work continues to grow as it becomes more widely known. It is acknowledged as South Africa's most famous example of 'Outsider Art' - a unique form of creativity which receives recognition and acclaim throughout the world, particularly in Europe and America. In these countries there are many examples of Outsider Art which are meticulously maintained as museums, and which welcome visitors from all over the world.

However, one of the most important reasons for writing a work on Helen Martins and her life and creation, is the least easy to explain. It is the inner, very uneasy knowledge, that what Helen became we all have the potential to become. The Owl House is more than unusual, not only in its strange conception, subject matter and execution, but also in its origins. A visit to The Owl House and surrounding Camel Yard has a profound and lasting effect upon any visitor. It calls up a nagging disquiet which is the inevitable result of being taken beyond one's safe and known limits. What made Helen go beyond that undefined boundary into a no-man's land which most people would not or could not bear to enter? How could a woman from a fairly conventional family of her time, spend the major part of her latter years creating the strange, inexplicable body of work that she did? What controls - those that keep most of us within certain boundaries - were loosed in her to make her embark on such a lonely, painful, but certainly also fulfilling and often exhilarating, inner journey? These are questions which are asked, or sensed, by almost every visitor to The Owl House; they beg for answers.

Much of her early history was learned from her eldest sister Annie le Roux, a vital, warm and fully alert old lady of 92 when interviewed in 1986 at the home she shared with her son Joe le Roux in Manzini, Swaziland. The information gained from this rewarding meeting was vital for helping to acquire a more intimate and personal understanding of Helen. It could only be obtained from an immediate member of her family, and helped to throw light on many aspects of both Helen's life and that of the Martins' family.

## Chapter Two

### **The milieu in which Helen Martins was nurtured: Nieu Bethesda in the early Twentieth Century - the forming years**

According to the records of the local D R Church, Helen Elizabeth Martins was born on 23 December 1897 (although her family gave 1898 as her birth date), and grew up in the community which literally owed its existence to the church at its centre.

Nieu Bethesda, dominated by the impressive and substantial whitewashed Dutch Reformed Church building, is a charming small Eastern Cape village in the Sneeuberge, situated in a fertile, well-watered valley at the foot of Kompasberg. It is 50 km north of Graaff-Reinet and 29 km from Bethesda-Road, which, to this day, is still the nearest railway station.

The village was founded in 1878 when part of the farm Uitkyk was purchased for the sum of £4 000 from Mr Barend Jacobus Pienaar to establish a church for the local farmers. Until then the minister had to travel on the long and dusty road from Graaff-Reinet to conduct services. The first building to be used as a church was the old wagon shed of B J Pienaar (Schutte, 1978: 51).

The newly formed 'Dorps Comité' had to decide on a name for the new town. In 1875 the Rev Charles Murray, then minister in Graaff-Reinet, wrote to '*die Heer, J. M. Martins, Voorzitter van het Comité*' with four suggestions:

*Bethel, Bethelsdal, Bethelstad or '(iv) Bethesda - dit is: Huis van weldadigheid. Zie Joh.5:2.'*  
[*Bethesda - that is: House of Goodwill.*]

He continues: '*Daar het dorp word opgericht om weldadigheid te doen aan de armen zou no. iv) niet onaardig zyn. Het klinkt goed. De keuze aan u overlatende. Ben ik met achting C. Murray*' (Schutte, 1978: 2).

[*'As the village is being established to help the poor, number (iv) would not be a bad name. It sounds good. Leaving the choice to you. I remain faithfully C. Murray'*] (Appendix 8).

Number (iv), Bethesda, was the committee's choice. According to tradition, the 'Nieu' came about when, in November 1878, Charles Murray said at the foundation meeting of the Nieu Bethesda congregation: '*Laten wij het nu Bethesda noemen*', [*'Let us then call it Bethesda'*] the 'nu' in the

sense of 'now'. It was incorrectly minuted as 'Nieuw' and from there became 'Nieuw Bethesda' and later 'Nieu Bethesda' (Schutte, 1978: 2-3).

Nieu Bethesda, in addition to being founded as a church centre, had, as one of the precepts of its very existence, that no alcohol should ever be sold or obtained in the village. This was a condition of sale of the farm to the church. It was only overturned by the municipality in the late 1980s, when the first liquor store opened, called - ironically - 'Malgenoeg' ['Mad enough'].

The church dominated the village and surrounding community, not only physically, but also in its all-pervading influence on the lives of the inhabitants. Mrs Rosalie Briers, (née Pienaar), was a contemporary of Helen Martins' eldest sister Annie and her grandfather was Mr Barend Jacobus Pienaar, the original owner of the farm Uitkyk on which Nieu Bethesda is situated. She was born only five years after the village was founded, grew up in Nieu Bethesda, and on 8 December 1993 celebrated her 100th birthday - still in perfect mind and health. She said that as children she and her brothers and sisters had to attend church three times on Sundays, which included one Sunday School session (interview Briers, R. 1993). Helen Martins' eldest sister Annie le Roux, said that in the Martins' household devotions were held every day, and she remembers that their father claimed that the only book he ever read was the Bible (interview Le Roux, A. 1986). Anyone in the village who followed a form of non-Christian religion would have been regarded as heathen.

Dutch Reformed Calvinism places strong emphasis on the sanctity of life (Thou shalt not kill), the family and marriage (Thou shalt not commit adultery), a moral and sober lifestyle, modesty of garb, and respect for the traditions and authority of the church. It is a strongly patriarchal system, with the minister, church elders and deacons serving as the authority figures in the church. When the dominee emerged from the vestry at the beginning of a service, he would be accompanied by a formidable phalanx of black frock-coated elders and deacons, forming an invincible male barrier at the front of the church between God and the congregation. Men were the undisputed heads of the family, be it in the role of father, husband or brother, and on the whole women then did not follow an independent career after they were married. This church still plays a pivotal role in the religious, social, economic and political life of the white community of the town and farming district. Many of the conventions, even though some may have been modified, continue to influence almost every aspect of daily existence.

The church was built solely for the use of the white community, a tradition which, through long-established custom, still endures today even though in 1993 the congregation had dwindled to an average of approximately 20 to 30 people, and there is no longer a resident minister. In the adjacent black and coloured townships, with a combined population of approximately 1 000 people there are five churches. When the original church building was completed in 1905 it could seat close on 700 people, but in fact the church membership never increased to more than 375 (Schutte, 1978:



Martins' family album

The three little Martins sisters: from left to right, Alida, Helen and Annie. (Circa 1899).



David Goldblatt

Nieu Bethesda from the west. Dominating the whole village is the spire of the Dutch Reformed Church.





David Goldblatt

The interior of the Dutch Reformed Church, which dominates the valley in which Nieu Bethesda is situated.

51-52). Social intercourse between the different communities was not part of South African tradition, and interaction between white, black and coloured people was in the form of master-servant relationships. Therefore people did not worship together; nor yet did they visit each other's homes on a social basis.

Doubt of the church's teachings would not have been tolerated. The dark side of mankind's nature was viewed and dealt with in a fundamental way - 'the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6 v 23). Nieu Bethesda would have been a very lonely place for a person with doubts in subtle and complex areas of right and wrong, and for a woman particularly; and to find sensitive guidance would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible. In fact, even to reveal such difficulties or doubts to anyone in a position of spiritual authority would have been unlikely.

Helen Martins grew up in this environment, in a family which would have been expected to follow the norms and traditions of the community without question. Apart from being a rather quiet, reserved little girl, there are no accounts of her rebelling against this prescribed lifestyle, until, according to her sister Annie, she married a local man, Johannes Pienaar, 'against her father's wishes' (interview Le Roux, A. 1986).

As the story of Helen Martins' life unfolds, with some brief interludes of which little or nothing is known, it will be seen that she eventually flouted virtually all the social, moral and religious norms of the community in which she was raised, spent most of her life and eventually died. Her creation of The Owl House and Camel Yard was the physical manifestation of her rejection of most of the teachings of her background and upbringing, and outside the social and moral conventions of her time.

## Chapter Three

### Upbringing, education, and family relationships - the early years

Helen Martins' mother bore 10 children, six of whom survived, and Helen was the youngest of them all. Her sisters Alida (Alida Seymour) and Anna Francina (Annie le Roux) preceded her in the family, and the three boys were older than the girls (Appendix 1). Helen was born in the same house in Nieu Bethesda in which she ended her days.

Mrs Martins must have spent most of the first 16 years of her marriage (as was the case with women in the days before birth control), pregnant or nursing small babies. The date of her marriage, and that of the birth of her first son William Henry (who died young), are unknown. But by working out the times between the births of her other children, (not, for this exercise, taking into account Helen, who was the last), she bore a child on average every 18 months. It is therefore likely that she was married at the beginning of 1881, when she was aged just 18, and probably bore her first child by the end of that year. Her second child Peter van der Merwe, was born in July 1883, which would have been 19 months later if these estimates are correct. The gap between Helen's birth and that of her next eldest sister, Alida, was 34 months - far and away the longest break Mrs Martins had between births.

Possibly one of a significant series of facts which led to Helen's eventual unconventional life and art creation, was that she was named Helen Elizabeth after one of her earlier sisters who had died young (interview Le Roux, A. 1986). She was thus manifestly linked with death right from the start of her life. To know that one is a substitute child must surely have an adverse effect upon any but the most insensitive person. Dr Vera Bührmann, the respected Jungian analyst, and author, commented:

*Replacement children are heavily burdened - they carry the fantasies of the mother. They never form the identity of an integrated person. (Interview Bührmann, V. 1990).*

(One thinks of another South African woman, the well-known and also eccentric Olive Schreiner, who was named after a dead sibling. Her relationships with men were not conventional, and she kept the coffin of her dead baby with her until her own death.)

Helen's father was Petrus Jacobus Martins, who died in February 1945, towards the end of





Martins' family album

Mrs Hester Martins with her three daughters - Alida left, Helen centre and Annie right.



The Martins' family home, on the outskirts of the village Nieu Bethesda, which Helen many years later named 'The Owl House'.

the Second World War, at the age of 89. Her mother, Hester Catherine Caroline Martins (née van der Merwe) - also, according to the Church records (Appendix 1), known as Hester Catharina Cornelia - died in January 1941 aged 79.

The family had earlier lived on the farm Aasvoël Krans not far outside the village, which Mr Martins owned. Annie said, however:

*We were all born in Bethesda. The three boys were born in another house in town. We girls were all born in The Owl House; it wasn't called The Owl Hoŭse then - Helen named it later. (Interview Le Roux, A. 1986).*

Mr Martins had a dairy herd, irrigated a lucerne plot, and supplied Nieu Bethesda with fresh milk. He was imprisoned in Graaff-Reinet during the Boer War, as the British thought he was keeping his cattle fodder for the Boers. Annie added more details about her father:

*He was a very eccentric man and very religious. He used to say that he had no education - 'not one day's schooling' - and the only book he read was the Bible. (Interview Le Roux, A. 1986).*

He was well-known for his habit of writing people's names and comments next to appropriate verses of retribution in his Bible - for their real or supposed transgressions against him (interviews Le Roux, A. 1986; Crous, E. 1993). The clinic sister in Nieu Bethesda, Mrs Rina Retief, confirmed Piet Martin's habit of writing people's names in the Bible next to the appropriate verses concerning what they had done, and said that he used to lie on the stoep of the shop over the road with his head in a box (interview Retief, R. 1985). Mrs Retief also said that when she was a child, Mr Martins would offer her a tickey every time *not* to cut her hair.

Mrs Gertruida Claasen, former postmistress and town clerk of Nieu Bethesda, who knew the family for many years, and was until 1987 curatrix of The Owl House, said:

*Helen's parents were unhappily married, and her father was a queer old bird. (Interview Claasen, G. 1985).*

She also said that in later years her father would taunt Helen with letters which arrived for her, and then tear them up without letting her read them. Annie said that in the home situation Helen was always subject to her father's authority, and that:

*Father was the dominant one in the family - he was much older than mother. (Interview Le Roux, A. 1986)*

She told of how her father used to block up the keyhole of the pantry door with newspaper to prevent germs from entering, and: *'There was a woman with halitosis - we called her "blouvlammetjies"' ["little blue flames"].*

In the only known tape-recording of Helen's voice, made as a tape-letter together with sisters Annie and Alida for Annie's son Peter, or 'Doemsie' as he was called (date unknown, but post-1945,

as it was after her father's death), Helen is recounting incidents from the past. She tells of one occasion when she attempted to make bread for her father. (She speaks progressively faster and faster as she gets more and more excited whilst telling a story, and it is not possible to make out every word):

*Mev de Klerk - sy was die wonderlikste mens. Sy slaan jou op jou bors as sy met jou praat, en vir die kaffirs het sy altyd gesê 'oupa' en vir my pa "oubaas, oubaas". En jy weet, Oupa was vreeslik vies vir **allerhande** dinge; as hy sien jy knie met jou hande dan wil hy nie die brood eet nie. Ek weet nie hoe dink hy - waarmee moet jy dit knie nie. En Oupa vra my eendag mooi, ek kon toe nou vir hom 'n broodjie bak - ek het die eer gekry - en ek het die broodjie spesiaal se vollige kleur gebak als, en **ongelukkig**, net toe ek die broodjie nou uithaal, vee ek sommer die broodjie met my hand so met 'n bietjie koue water af dat dit mooi sag is. En Oupa kom mooi nou net by die agterdeur in, toe oupa sien ek vat my met my hand oor die brood. En Oupa wou aan daardie brood nie vat nie. En van toe af, toe kry Oupa weer **ander** iemand om vir hom te knie en Mrs de Klerk het dit toe nou gehoor, die ou - ons noem haar 'ou Vetlet'. Sy was 'n **wonderlike** persoonlikheid gehad. En hier kom sy. Sy wil altyd alles wat verkeerd is wil sy regmaak. En sy sê vir Oupa: 'Oubaas! Waarom laat jy nie Helentjie jou brood met haar mooi sag hande vir jou knie?' Sy was 'n wonderlike ou mens; daar's sulke baie dinge wat ek vir jou kon vertel, maar nie op die tape recorder nie.*

*[Mrs de Klerk - she was the most wonderful person. She hit you on the chest when she talked to you, and the kaffirs she used to call 'grandfather' and my father "**old master, old master**'. And you know, Grandpa had an aversion to all kinds of things: if he saw you kneading the bread with your hands, he refused to eat it. I don't know what he thought one should use for kneading. And one day, Grandpa asked me nicely to bake him a loaf - a great honour - and I made a special effort, but unfortunately, when I took the loaf out, I used my hand to wipe it with some cold water to make it nice and soft. At that moment Grandpa walked through the back door and saw me with my hand on the bread. And he refused to touch that bread. He then found someone else to bake for him and Mrs de Klerk heard about it, the old lady - we called her 'old Vetlet'. She had a wonderful personality. And here she comes. She always wanted to fix things that were wrong. And she said to Grandpa: 'Old master! Why don't you let little Helen knead your bread for you with her lovely soft hands?' She was a wonderful old person; there are so many things I could tell you, but not on the tape recorder.]*

Mrs Rose Briers, who grew up with the Martins children and turned 100 in December 1993, told of how Mr Martins stopped his wife and children going on holiday as an example of his warped character:

*They were going on a holiday once I remember, and the mother packed the cases and everything, and the next morning he [Piet Martins] let one of the horses out, so they couldn't go in the cart and they missed the train. He wasn't going with them. The cases were packed and everything. (Interview Briers, R. 1993).*

In later years, Mr Martins was banished by Helen and her mother to an outside room where he had to fend for himself. Mrs Gertie Retief, aged 88 when interviewed in the Huis van de Graaff

old age home in Graaff-Reinet on 19 October 1993, grew up in the house over the river from the Martins family, left the village when she married, and on her return to Nieu Bethesda in 1946 was Helen's immediate next door neighbour. She was six years junior to Helen.

*Piet Martins was heeltemal afgesonder. Helèn se huisie - dis mos so 'n stoepdeur - hy's mos daar in. Hulle het hom eenkant toe geskep - Helen en haar ma - in haar ma se tyd. En toe het sy ook nou niks met die ou man te doen gehad nie. Niemand het hom opgepas nie. Hy het maar net by Helen gebly. (Interview Retief, G. 1993).*

*[Piet Martins was completely isolated. Helen's little house - there's a verāndāh door - he was in there. They pushed him to one side - Helen and her mother - in her mother's time. And then she had nothing to do with the old man. Nobody looked after him. He just stayed with Helen.]*

This room is now painted black and also encrusted with ground glass, the window has been blocked up, and inscribed in the outside cement step leading into the garden is 'The Lion's Den'. Mrs Claasen said that when old Mr Martins was ill in his last years, a social worker, Mrs Bekker, used to come and: 'do what Helen should have done - wash him and his pyjamas. She certainly didn't do it.'

Mrs Norah (Olivia Leonora) van Niekerk (neé Pienaar), aged 93 when interviewed in her home in Graaff-Reinet in October 1993, younger sister of Mrs Rosalie Briers who was also at school in Nieu Bethesda with the Martins girls, said:

*I don't think he treated his wife too well. Helen wasn't fond of her father at all; he was a very, very difficult man to live with. Even after his wife had died, he did lots of things that - I can't tell you, but he wasn't a popular man at all. She wasn't fond of him at all - not the way she treated him after her mother's death. She really despised her father. She put him into this room that she painted black, and she didn't wash his clothes. People from Bethesda, church people, went there and washed him and bathed him because they said his clothes were full of lice. She didn't attend to her father after her mother's death. (Interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993).*

Piet van der Merwe, one of the workers who assisted Helen with reconstruction of her house and some of the structures in the yard, said:

*Hulle het baie gestry, Miss Helen en Piet Martins. Sy was baie bakleierig. (Interview Van der Merwe, P. 1989).*

*[They fought a lot, Miss Helen and Piet Martins. She was very quarrelsome.]*

Mrs Claasen recounted that Helen's father said she should be called 'Helletjie' ['Little Hell'].

One wonders what had occurred in the past to cause such a seemingly serious aversion to her father. It would seem that these clues to Helen's (and her mother's) relationship with her father; Helen's later relationships with, and attitudes to men; and possibly also her strange attitude towards bearing children, are important enough to add to an overall picture, and possibly lead to some understanding of her work.

From many people's observations, Helen was obviously devoted to her mother - '*She was very attached to her mother*', said Mrs Norah van Niekerk. From Annie's account though, their relationship had a bad start. Her mother had heart trouble, and after Helen's birth spent six months in hospital in Johannesburg, while Helen was looked after by an aunt and bottle-fed. From that time her mother remained an invalid. This would not be surprising after so many births within about 16 years, and the sorrow of losing four of her 10 children. Annie said: '*Helen had a raw deal in life*', seeming to refer to this as the beginning of many tribulations. Annie referred to her mother as, '*an angel*', and said that Helen was very close to her. (Interview Le Roux, A. 1986)

Helen's own career and future were curtailed when she returned home, still as a young woman, to look after her ill mother. According to Annie, when her mother died, Helen slept in the room with her coffin as:

*She couldn't leave her mother, whom she'd loved, alone. She mourned for her mother and cried on her grave.*

Early photographs exist of Helen as a solemn little girl, posing with equally solemn mother, sisters Annie and Alida, and friends. The children all attended the local school, which in those days before roads and transport improved, catered for over 200 children. (Today the school has closed as there were no more white children to attend it). Annie said that Helen's family nickname was 'Joodjie' ['little Jewess'], because of her rather hooked nose. Annie herself was a tomboy and known ever after as 'Tommy'. '*Alida was materialistic, Helen was ethereal*', said Annie.

Norah van Niekerk said:

*I believe her father was very fond of Alida, she was a pretty girl. She was also a clever girl. After Bethesda, Alida went to school at Uitenhage, Riebeeck - an English school. I don't know if she did her matric there. - She was quite attached to her father I believe. (Interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993).*

By all accounts Helen was a bright student both at school, and later at college. Norah van Niekerk continued:

*Helen was two years older than I was. She must have been a very intelligent girl; although she failed Standard VI. But it was really on account of the teacher being a problem - the whole class failed.*

*When I passed Standard VI, I bought Helen's English reader, and you know, education at that time was very poor - I don't think I'd even heard of a dictionary. Helen had looked up all the words in the reader, and written finely the meanings of the word at the top. And I can remember when the inspector came and asked the class, 'can you give me the meaning of that word?' And of course they were dumb, and my hand went up because it [the meaning] was written on top of the word. That shows she wanted to understand. I bought the book from her for two shillings, and was quite pleased to have it!*

A certificate amongst Helen's papers stating that she passed Standard VII in 1914, when she would have been 17 years old, is corroborated by Norah van Niekerk:





Helen Martins (left), Vera Weich (centre), and Girlie du Preez (right).

Martins' family album

Mrs Martins, Helen's mother (left), with an unknown woman.



Martins' family album

*Horace W. Nicholls*



6004 STUDIO, BRITCHARD ST.  
JOHANNESBURG,  
SOUTH AFRICAN WEST COAST.



Martins' family album

Pear blossom time in Nieu Bethesda. Back row, left to right: Gladys Weich, Annie and Alida Martins. Front row: Helen Martins and Vera Weich. The Weich girls were daughters of the local dominee.



Martins' family album

The Nieu Bethesda school, with a teacher, Miss Hutchinson. Alida and Annie are third and second from the right, centre row.





**WILLEM VAN ZYL**  
EN GESELSKAP

WENA NAUDÉ  
BABS LE PAGE  
MONA BOTHMA  
DIE 8-JARIGE DOGERTJIE  
ANDRIES BRILL  
LOUIS STEYN, en  
JOH VAN NIEKERK

in  
**DIE ROERENDE  
EN BESIENENDE  
LIEFDES-DRAMA**

**DIE BRUG OP ONSE PLAAS**

DIE  
OPVOERING  
WAARNA U SO  
GRETIG EN ANGSTIG  
VERLANG HET

Wat kan egte en edele  
MOEDERLIEFDE alles oorbrug?

PRAGTIGE VERVOERENDE SANG  
GEDURENDE DIE SPEL

'n Gedroomde Vertolking van die  
Beroemde Danseres deur

**WENA NAUDÉ**

**Dorpe**  
BELFAST  
LAGERSDRIFT  
MACHADODORP  
SABIE  
WITRIVIER  
CAROLINA  
BREVETEN  
WATERVAL BOVEN  
HENDRINA  
DAVEL

**Datums**  
Vrydag 24 November  
Saterdag 25 November  
Maandag 27 November  
Dinsdag 28 November  
Woensdag 29 November  
Donderdag 30 November  
Vrydag 1 Desember  
Saterdag 2 Desember  
Maandag 4 Desember  
Dinsdag 5 Desember  
Woensdag 6 Desember  
Donderdag 7 Desember  
Vrydag 8 Desember  
Saterdag 9 Desember  
Vrydag 15 Desember

**Plekbespreking**  
Gebrs. Viljoen.  
Mr. A. P. Kruger, Onderwyser  
Die Stadsklerk  
Skoolhoof  
Mr. A. Barnard, Onderwyser  
Aptek en Nuusagentskap  
Mr. Ahlers, Stasie

sekretaris Instituut.  
Mr. Alex Abrahams  
Mr. Jordaan  
**MC-BASAR**

**EENDRACHT**

Bespreekte Plekke: Grootmense 3s. Kinders 2s.  
Onbespreekte Plekke: Grootmense 2s. 6d. Kinders 1s.

Mr. Geyer, Skoolhoof.

Old theatrical posters showing Helen Martins' cousin, Wena Naudé (daughter of her mother's sister), who was a very well-known actress in her time.

*Helen didn't do matric. Bethesda school only went up to Standard VII or VIII at the time, and after Standard VII you went to do teaching. Most people did Standard VII, and most didn't do four years after finishing at school - it was two years. (Interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993)*

Helen, together with Annie (who was five years older), attended Reinet Huis, the Teachers' Training College which was part of the Midlands Seminary, in Graaff-Reinet, and Helen was there for four years. The principal was Helen Murray, sister of the renowned Reverend Andrew Murray. According to a letter from a former College classmate, Helen was always, '*so clever and good ... neat and thorough*', and held up by a Miss Bennett as a '*Born Teacher*'. (Beddy, G. 1970).

Certificates, and a letter of recommendation from Ben Taute, Hoofonderwyser, Opleidingskool [Headmaster, Training College], show that she attended the College for the four years of 1915 to 1918, and was placed twelfth in a class of 76. She also received UNISA music certificates in pianoforte. In February 1919 she was awarded a Third Class Teachers' Certificate (Senior), Second Grade by the Department of Public Education, Cape of Good Hope, and passed English and Dutch Higher Register. In April 1919 Helen Elizabeth Martins was awarded the Certificate of first grade from the Tonic Sol-fa College, Staff Notation Examination (Appendix 3).

Helen did not travel very extensively and almost certainly not beyond the boundaries of South Africa. If it were not for her art work she would have remained unknown beyond her village. It is however important to put her in the context of a family reaching many other fields and places in life: Helen's mother, and the mother of the well-known South African actress Wena Naudé, were sisters. Helen's eldest brother Peter van der Merwe Martins, who taught in Volksrust with her first husband Johannes Pienaar, was Member of Parliament for Wakkerstroom. Peter's son Herman made his mark in the world and first became Member of Parliament for Wakkerstroom, and later South African Consul-General in New Orleans. He married President Swart's daughter, and was a pall-bearer at the President's funeral. '*I saw him at the funeral on television*', said Norah van Niekerk (interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993).

Helen's sister, Alida Seymour, travelled extensively and seems to have introduced the exotic into Helen's later life through gifts and postcards. This has been confirmed in a letter from Alida's daughter, Betty Crous, saying:

*Many of the objects in the house came from Alida, who was very protective of Helen, and loved her very much. (Crous, E. 1993).*

Jill Wenman said:

*Alida was probably the most important person in Helen's life. She identified a great deal with her. A lot of the places that Alida travelled to, such as Egypt with its camels, have been put into cement. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).*

## Chapter Four

### Brief career, marriage, abortions, divorce - and the missing years

According to her sister Annie, Helen taught for between 18 months and two years in Wakkerstroom before she married (interview Le Roux, A. 1986). As she qualified as a primary school teacher in 1918 (Appendix 3), she would probably have commenced teaching at the beginning of 1919 and her marriage to Johannes Pienaar took place on 7 January 1920. Her father was against Helen marrying Johannes Pienaar, also from Nieu Bethesda, who, Helen's sister Annie said, was: '*very clever, very good-looking and very aggressive.*'

Willem Johannes Pienaar, born on 30 May 1892 (Appendix 6), was five-and-a-half years older than Helen. They were married in Nieu Bethesda, interestingly not in the local church but in a private dwelling (Appendix 1). The reason for what was an unconventional choice of venue, at that time and in that church-centred community, might well have been because, '*Johannes was an atheist*', according to his cousin, Dan (also Willem Johannes) Pienaar. He continued:

*Dominee Weich said to Johannes, 'I can't do anything for you'. He lent him a book, and after reading it, Johannes said, 'I believe in God, but I can't believe in Christ'. And we were a Calvinistic family.* (Interview Pienaar, Dan. 1993).

(Dan's and Johannes' fathers were brothers. Their paternal grandfather, also Willem Johannes, married twice and the father of Helen's husband Johannes was the son by the first wife. The second wife - a Van der Merwe - produced five sons, one of whom was Dan's father. Thus Johannes was a great deal older than Dan. Interview Pienaar, Dan. 1993).

The couple were not unusually young when they married - Helen had just turned 22 and Johannes was 27. The marriage certificate states that Helen was 22, which also serves to corroborate that her birth date in the Dutch Reformed Church records was correct.

From a very young age, Johannes Pienaar showed himself to possess an outstanding intellect, and his wide-ranging interests included the theatre, politics and the academic arena. Women were obviously attracted to him judging from later events, so Helen must have had some notable qualities for him to have married her in the first place.

Mrs Norah van Niekerk, aged 93, said about him:



Photographer unknown

Helen as a young woman, reflected in the glass table top.

*I know he came from a very, very poor family. He was at school long before me. I knew his younger sister, she was in the class with me. She was called Hester; her mother's name was Hester also.*

*I heard that he was very bright at school, so he left Bethesda school to go to Richmond, which of course had a bigger school. Bethesda school only went up to Standard VII or VIII at the time. And then the principal of the [Bethesda] school took this boy with him to Richmond to give him a chance to pass his matric. The boy actually stayed with this Mr van der Merwe, the principal. He thought Johannes should get a chance, because his parents definitely couldn't send him anywhere. And from there on I now can't tell you - how far he got I don't know. (Interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993).*

Mrs van Niekerk's elder sister Mrs Rosalie Briers, who was at school in Nieu Bethesda at the same time as Johannes Pienaar, and turned 100 on 8 December 1993, said:

*I know Johannes was clever at school. He'd finish his sums in the afternoon, and then we'd all copy them. (Interview Briers, R. 1993).*

His cousin Dan Pienaar could expand on Johannes' future academic career:

*Johannes was a very brainy guy. ... He came first in the Union of South Africa in exams - I don't know if it was matric. ... He was an expert in languages, and got his MA in languages when my Dad was still at school. He used to help my Dad with such things as Latin and Maths. At one time he was studying for three completely different degrees at the same time. He went to America, and became a Professor, and he introduced psychology to one University. When he died there was a great oration, a long piece, in a newspaper about him. (Interview Pienaar, Dan. 1993).*

Johannes was very involved in dramatics, both as a writer and an actor, as well as in the promotion of cultural activities. Found in a chest of drawers in The Owl House was a formal group photograph of seven young people in their twenties. It is of the *Bestuur van die A.T.V., Bloemfontein 1918*, and the President was W J Pienaar. This was a cultural organization, the Afrikaanse Taalvereniging, started by the Afrikaans writer, D F Malherbe. (Acknowledgements to NALN Bloemfontein, for information)

In another old photograph, acquired from Helen's sister Annie, Johannes is standing with the cast of a play entitled *Saul*, which he had written and in which Helen starred; she is sitting in the centre of the cast. Annie says that Helen was pregnant when this photograph was taken, and kept having to run off the stage as she was feeling nauseous. It was 1923 when Pienaar wrote *Saul*, a five-act play with music and songs and a cast of 25. It played in aid of the Dingaan's Festival Funds in 1923 and 1924, and again on 25 April 1925 to raise funds for the Volksrust Municipal Hospital. (Binge, 1978: 116-118).

The play received a favourable review in *De Volkstem* of 25 April, together with a review of Paul de Groot's first Dutch production. De Groot was at first very put out that Pienaar had the effrontery to call his group the first Afrikaans professional theatre group, and also that he was planning to tour in the Transvaal, Free State and to Cape Town with it. He came to Volksrust to see

what this was all about, as well as bringing there his production *Die Heks* which was performed on 6 June 1925. He was apparently much taken by Pienaar and his group because he then helped them with their production before they went on tour. '*W J Pienaar played "Samuel" and Mrs W J Pienaar played "A daughter in the house of Samuel"*'. (Binge, 1978: 116-118). De Groot's interest in the group continued. By December 1925 Pienaar had joined him, playing in *Die Heks* in February 1926 and also De Groot's production of *Oorskotjie*. (Binge, 1978: 129, 137).

The couple lived in a house on the farm of Helen's brother, Piet, near Volksrust and her brother and husband both taught in the town. Mrs M M Kruger, daughter of Johannes Hendrik Hattingh, with whom Helen much later had a long-standing relationship in Nieu Bethesda, wrote about Johannes Pienaar and also about Helen's unconventional behaviour:

*Helen Martins (HELLETJIE - 'UILE') se eerste man was Johannes Pienaar, briljante seun van Oom Graatjie Pienaar, stil, stoer en sterk; ... hy was intelligent en briljant. Trou met Helen Martins: Kunstenaar en gepaardgaande temperament! Ook onderwyseres. Sy wou nie kinders hê nie, was "bang" hulle sal "swart" wees! As hy middae van die skool af kom, dan sit sy in 'n vrugteboom! So het sy aan my ouers vertel. Toe egskedding. (Letter Kruger, M. 1993).*

*[Helen Martins' (Little Hell-'Owls') first husband was Johannes Pienaar, brilliant son of Uncle Graatjie Pienaar, quiet, sturdy and strong; ... he was intelligent and brilliant. Married Helen Martins: Artist and matching temperament! Also a teacher. She didn't want to have children, was "afraid" they would be "black"! When he came home at lunchtime, he would find Helen sitting up in a fruit tree. She told my parents about it. Then divorce.]*

Johannes became involved in politics, and for this reason, and possibly also because he became romantically involved with another woman, a school staff member, later lost his teaching post in Volksrust. Mrs Rosalie Briers said:

*He was very fond of giving concerts and used to act well. My father wouldn't allow me to be on the same stage with him. He earned a very good salary teaching, and got involved with politics - he was against the government - and then he was put off his teaching post. His poor father had to struggle to get him educated, and then he had no job. My father was very angry with him. (Interview Briers, R. 1993).*

A former pupil of both Piet van der Merwe Martins and Johannes Pienaar, Mrs Pearl Harrison wrote from Volksrust:

*Mr Piet v. d. Merwe Martins was my English teacher from Std. 7 to matric. He was obviously Afrikaans, but we all agree that he was an exceptionally good English teacher. ... Mr Pienaar was known to us as "Paal!" ["Pole!"] He was unusually tall. It was said, and I believe it, that he was one of the best history teachers in S.A. He lectured to us in English and Afrikaans and we took down notes in which ever language we preferred. ... "Paal" was very well liked. He had no favourites but he had a dry humour. When the girls spoke very softly he used to bend down with his hand behind his ear, to listen. He was the president of our Debating Society and I was the secretary.*



Bestuur van die A.T.V., Bloemfontein,  
1918.



Mej. C. Malherbe, T. A. du Toit, A. Smit, (SA), Mej. J. v. Zijl, W. J. Pienaar, (Pres.), J. Nel, Mej. M. de Bruyn.

Helen's first husband, Johannes Pienaar (third from the right), President of the ATV (Afrikaanse Taalvereniging) Committee, in 1918. This photograph was found amongst Helen's possessions.



Martins' family album

Johannes Pienaar (standing on extreme right wearing a white suit), wrote a play in which Helen (centre front), starred, said her sister Annie. 'She was pregnant at the time and kept having to run off stage to be sick. The title of the play was *Saul*.' (Circa 1923).



*He fell in love with our lady teacher - Miss Wimble. One day she had left before him and was walking in the distance. He jumped on the back of a passing wagon - horse drawn, and simply jumped off when he reached her!! ... I "heard" that he went to England and was interested in politics, but I really can't guarantee this.* (Letter Harrison, P. 1994).

Mrs Corinne Corke (née Landsberg), another former pupil, wrote:

*Mr Pienaar was a most wonderful history master and very popular with all his students - we truly loved him. As you say he was married to a Miss Maartēns, sister of our English teacher Piet Maartens, and they all lived on a farm outside Volksrust on the Sandspruit road.*

*Piet Maartens eventually took up politics and became elected to Parliament for Wakkerstroom - that is the seat that included Volksrust. There were no children by the first marriage.* (Letter Corke, C. 1993).

Helen did become pregnant soon after the marriage. Annie said:

*Her husband said she was too young to have a baby and made her have an abortion. She didn't want a baby either - she was frightened.* (Interview Le Roux, A. 1986).

Jill Wenman, a close friend of Helen's in her latter years, did not agree with this statement: *'I didn't get the impression from her that he had urged her to have an abortion.'* (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).

This sensitive and personal fact of abortion was told quite openly and matter-of-factly, without any attempt at shielding Helen or protecting her privacy. It does not seem to be widely known (or maybe discussed), although Mrs Erika Cloete, wife of the dominee in Nieu Bethesda from 1971 until sometime after Helen's suicide, mentions it in passing in a letter as an accepted fact (letter Cloete, E. 1986). Both Jill Wenman and Koos Malgas, independently, said that in actual fact Helen had two abortions while she was married (interviews Wenman, J. 1988 and Malgas, K. 1988).

What is commonly recounted is that Helen said she was afraid to have children as she thought they would be born with horns and cloven hooves, and this is why her marriage broke up. (Her brief second marriage in 1952 occurred when she must have been past child-bearing age).

As earlier stated, Mrs M Kruger had a different version of this story: that Helen told Mrs Kruger's parents, Mr and Mrs Hattingh, that she didn't want to have children because she was frightened that they would be black (letter Kruger, M. 1993). Koos said she told him she had the two abortions because she: *'wouldn't be able to look after children and care for them.'* (Interview Malgas, K. 1988).

Jill Wenman said:

*Helen told me she was married to Pienaar and was really upset when she fell pregnant, because she didn't want to have children. She said, 'It's my luck - I'd have had children born with horns.' You speak about things, but to what extent do you take every word literally? And then when she had a second abortion she said he left*

*her because it was a kind of 'skande' [scandal] in the valley. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).*

Johannes Pienaar's cousin, not surprisingly, did not know about the abortions. His response to this information, and the divorce about which he did know, was:

*Scandalous in the Calvinistic background of our family. I don't know of any relation of mine that's been divorced. A Protestant DRC Background? Unheard of! (Interview Pienaar, Dan. 1993).*

The reason for the divorce however is perhaps not as clear cut as these accounts might indicate. Mrs Norah van Niekerk said:

*He of course met another girl, you know - definite - when they [he and Helen] were married. A man came to my brother - it must have been that man's wife. He wanted to know about Johannes from my brother. Then he said Johannes had to leave South Africa - Johannes was afraid of this man because he'd taken his wife, and he went overseas. (Interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993).*

Norah van Niekerk's sister, Mrs Rosalie Briers, said:

*Johannes Pienaar left her for a second Helen. He was so fond of acting, and this second Helen played a part with him. And he fell in love with her. That I know. It was because of another woman. I don't even know if she [Helen Martins] had another boyfriend before Johannes. (Interview Briers, R. 1993).*

There seems to be no doubt that Johannes was extremely successful in his later career, which embraced both political and academic fields. Discovering the true facts among many rumours has not, to date, proved to be successful as regards his academic career. There are many stories recounted concerning his political career. Mrs Norah van Niekerk said:

*A cousin of mine - he was a principal of a college in Graaff-Reinet, and also came from Nieu Bethesda - said to me, 'Did you know that Johannes stood against Churchill in England, for one of the counties, for Parliament? Churchill came in.' (Interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993).*

Mr Dan Pienaar expanded:

*Johannes fled the country on the advice of his attorney. My Dad told me about him. I don't know why he left. He went to England. It was the time of Lloyd George. He asked Johannes to stand for Parliament. The first time he didn't make it, but the second time he nearly came in.*

*He really cut his ties with this country. He changed his name, and went back to the original spelling 'Pinard', it might have been 'Pinardt'. Pinard means a good glass of table wine! (Interview Pienaar, Dan. 1993).*

Mrs Corke had more details about Johannes Pienaar's political life, as well as an explanation for his departure from his teaching post and possibly also his precipitate departure from the country:

*Mr Pienaar became enamoured of a Miss C H Wimble, an English teacher on the staff of our High School, and whether it was due to the pending divorce or whether it was because Mr Pienaar became involved in politics I really don't know but the result was*

that he had to leave.

*He married Miss Wimble and as you say went to America and then later to England, where he stood for election for Finsbury Park. I do not know how successful he was. He also added a "d" to his surname Pienard. (Letter Corke, C. 1993).*

The true facts concerning Johannes Pienaar's British political career, and the surname which he adopted, were found in the records of the House of Commons Library, Westminster, London:

*A candidate named W J Pinard stood for the Liberal Party in Finsbury (a Metropolitan Borough in north-east inner London) at the General Election of 1929.*

*He polled 4,855 votes, third to the successful Labour and runner-up Conservative candidates (17,970 and 9,026 respectively). He did not stand against Churchill at this or any other time.*

*I very much regret we have no further information on Mr Pinard.*

*(Letter, Public Information Office, House of Commons, 8 September 1994).*

Johannes seems to have continued his dramatic involvement, together with his teaching, until he left South Africa. Amongst the records in the Nasionale Toneelmuseum, Bloemfontein is the Paul de Groot-album in the F C L Bosmanversameling. There are numerous newspaper clippings recording the theatrical productions of the Paul de Groot Toneelgeselskap, which toured throughout South Africa, with advertisements of forthcoming productions and write-ups by theatre critics. W J Pienaar is mentioned as one of the cast. Also performing in the group, usually in a starring role, is Helen's cousin, Wena Naudé. An article in Die Burger dated 5 December 1925, writes: *'Die geselskap onder leiding van mnr. Paul de Groot, bestaan uit dr. Anna Aucamp, mejj. Wena Naudé, Gertruida de Villiers, mnre. W. J. Pienaar, Tommie Beckley en Attie Buitendach.'* It writes further: *'Die geselskap, die eerste Afrikaanse beroepsgeskelskap van sy soort, sal "Oorskotjie" opvoer.'* Die Burger of 3 February 1926, under the heading *"Oorskotjie" in die Operagebou*, reports: *'Die ander karakters is nie van baie betekenis nie. Mnr. W. J. Pienaar het vir Carlo Bernini, Tito se vriend, gespeel. Die beroemde toneeltjie met die vuurhoutjies het hy met baie kleur weergegee. ... Ons hulde aan mnr. Pienaar vir de knappe dubbele karaktervoorgawe.'* Helen's nephew, Herman Martins, said that Helen was part of the group after her divorce, but her name is not mentioned amongst the records. However, there were a number of other Afrikaans dramatic groups in existence at this time. Among her photographs were three with the words 'Afrikaanse-Toneelgeselskap' written on them in white ink. Jill Fletcher, who has made an extensive study of early theatre in South Africa, said that she recognizes the woman's costume in the one photograph from the play *Oorskotjie*, and that the woman must be Wena Naudé. (Interview Fletcher, 1995). In all likelihood, Helen could be the central figure in the two other photographs; there is a strong similarity to the photograph of her in *Saul*. It could however, also be Wena Naudé. Johannes Pienaar is probably also one of the characters in these photographs. Unfortunately there is no information written on the back of them.

The possible reasons for Johannes Pienaar having to flee the country, were found, on further

investigation, to be even more complicated than either his involvement in politics or a relationship with another woman. The relationship between Johannes Pienaar and the Martins family, which must initially have been close when Johannes and Piet Martins were teaching together and Helen and Johannes were staying with Piet on his farm, later broke down on all sides. Records of the Supreme Court in Pretoria (Opposed Illiquid Case Ref. No. TPD 8/519 127/1928) show that in February 1928 'Peter van der Merwe Martins, a teacher presently of Volksrust, Transvaal', sued 'Willem Johannes Pienaar, a teacher formerly of Volksrust, Transvaal', for sequestration of his estate, as he owed him the sum of £363.3.5 together with five per cent interest from 11 August 1923 in terms of an unpaid Promissory Note, and he believed him to be insolvent apart from a bonded portion of a farm in the Standerton district. The document states:

*Up to March 1927 Respondent was a Teacher in the same School at Volksrust as your Petitioner, and before the above date your Petitioner repeatedly demanded payment of the amount due. Respondent without notifying or informing your Petitioner of his intended departure, despite having had the opportunity to do so, left Volksrust during March surreptitiously and without the knowledge of your Petitioner. Your petitioner has made diligent enquiries amongst the colleagues of the Respondent and of himself as to the present address of the Respondent, but he has not been able to find out Respondent's whereabouts.*

*Subsequent to March your Petitioner made enquiries from one H. J. van Kraayenberg, a Teacher of Platrand, Transvaal and a friend of Respondent, as to the present whereabouts of the Respondent. The said van Kraayenberg intimated to our Petitioner that he was aware of the address of the Respondent but that he refused to divulge it to your Petitioner. [Inserted in ink, it continues:] Your Petitioner has also been informed that Respondent is in London, England. This information was given to your Petitioner by the said van Kraayenberg. [The document continues in typewriting:] The Respondent therefore having property within the Union has departed from his dwelling and the Union and absented himself with intent by so doing to evade or delay the payment of his debts and thereby has committed an act of Insolvency.*

*And your Petitioner as in duty bound will ever pray.*

The Order of Sequestration was published in the Government Gazette of 29 February 1928, and in The Volksrust Recorder of Friday, February 24, 1928.

In his way, Johannes Pienaar disregarded social norms and conventions as much as Helen did throughout the rest of her life. He became involved with one or more other women, one of whom seems to have been married, while still married to Helen. He then fled the country, leaving behind what, in those days, would have been a large unpaid debt to his erstwhile colleague, landlord and former brother-in-law - Helen's brother Piet. His estate was sequestrated, and he cut all family connections. His cousin Dan Pienaar said:

*When he cut his ties with South Africa he cut them with the family too. He never maintained any contact with his own father. My father was the one that told him his father had died. The Pienaars are hotheads. (Interview Pienaar, D. 1993).*



Three photographs found in Helen's house. Jill Fletcher, theatrical historian, recognises the costume of one as being from *Oorskotjie*, in which Wena Naude starred. Johannes Pienaar and Helen are most probably in these other two photographs.





Pienaar's daughter came to seek out her father's roots, according to Dan Pienaar:

*Many years later his daughter, Audrey d'Oliviera, came to South Africa and visited my father in Pretoria. She married a Portuguese who has since died. (Interview Pienaar, Dan. 1993).*

Jill Wenman said:

*Helen told me that Pienaar's daughter by his second marriage came to the village to see her once. She apparently also wanted to see the house where her father had grown up. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).*

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 1921 Helen Pienaar went to teach at the Cullinan Primary School, Premier Mine, near Pretoria. The school had started off in a tent in 1904, and in 1921, the year in which Helen started teaching there, the school split into Afrikaans and English components. The first Afrikaans school at Cullinan was then housed in the Dutch Reformed Church hall. A special commemorative book was published in 1979 to mark its 75th anniversary:

*Die skool het begin met 'n leerlingtal van 173 en vyf onderwysers. Die volgende onderwysers het van die E.M.-skool oorgekom: Mnr. A.C. Enslin (wnm. hoof); mnr. J.A. Gilfillan, mej. B. de Kok; mej. E.M. Vosloo; en mev. H. Pienaar. (Wood, 1979: 47).*

*[The school began with a pupil quota of 173 and five teachers. The following teachers came over from the E M -school: Mr A C Enslin (acting head); Mr J A Gilfillan, Miss B de Kok; Miss E M Vosloo; and Mrs H Pienaar.]*

Fortunately, because it was in the year when the Afrikaans school started that Helen commenced teaching at the school, the names of the teachers are listed, otherwise there is no record of individual teacher's names, and it is not recorded in the book whether she continued teaching at the school, nor yet for how long.

In January 1921 Helen Elizabeth Pienaar was granted a TED Teacher's Provisional Certificate; in June of that year a Teacher's Third Class Certificate; and in September a letter from the TED in Pretoria is addressed to Miss H.E. Pienaar, Cullinan School, P.O. Box 114, Premier Mine (Appendix 3). Cullinan is a good distance from Volksrust where her husband Johannes Pienaar continued teaching. Questions arise, such as: Why did she accept a teaching post so far from her husband; was the 'Miss' Pienaar an error or had she by then separated from Johannes Pienaar, even if only for a while? Or did she perhaps pretend to be unmarried to obtain a teaching post? According to her sister Annie, Helen and her husband were married for between one and two years and then separated (interview Le Roux, A. 1986). However, the couple were evidently still together thereafter, as has been seen in their joint theatrical appearances in *Saul* in 1923, 1924 and 1925.

On 6 January 1926 her husband sued her for divorce. He stated that she was then residing in Nieu Bethesda, and that: *'On or about the 29th. day of September, 1925, and at Volksrust aforesaid the Defendant wrongfully and maliciously deserted the plaintiff and has refused and still refuses to*

*return and to restore conjugal rights to the Plaintiff.*' (Supreme Court of South Africa (Illiquid Case, Transvaal Provincial Division) Registered No. R.S.C. 85). A single page of shorthand in the Supreme Court divorce records, of which not all is decipherable, gives a few more personal facts. Johannes said: *'...our marriage was rather unhappy from the beginning. ...my wife had left me in the past...before the last time when she went away.'* The marriage was finally dissolved in the Pretoria Supreme Court on 25 May 1926. Helen was to receive £6.0.0 per month *'as and for maintenance'* from Johannes Pienaar. It was payable quarterly in advance as from 1 March 1926, until 28 February 1931. These payments would terminate if she should die or remarry before February 1931. This meant that she only received financial support from her former husband for five years, and thereafter nothing.

The effect in the 1920's, on a young woman brought up in a small rural community, in a strictly Calvinistic tradition with all the moral and religious prohibitions on just such things as abortion and divorce, when neither were socially accepted, must have been profound. It also seems extremely strange, that in the bounds of a lawful marriage, either Helen and /or her husband should be so against such a foreseeable event as having a child together, and that they or she alone should have resorted to such an extreme measure as abortion. Mrs Mattie Cupido said:

*She told me she was afraid to have children. She was afraid they'd have horns and a tail. She said to me: 'Mattie, I thought God would punish me because I had an abortion'. That thing worried her.* (Interview Cupido, M. 1993).

Unless Helen could make peace with herself about both the abortions and the divorce, it was likely that the effects on her psyche would manifest themselves at a later stage in her life. From studying her work, and in particular the strange sculpture in the 'passage' bedroom (detailed in chapter six), and passages marked in her Bible (Appendix 5), it would seem that she did not make peace with herself. Abortion and divorce were both actions *outside* the accepted norms of society. People, such as Jill Wenman and John Moyle who knew Helen in her last years, said that even then, so many years later, the conventional part of Helen was upset by things such as people laughing at her work, or thinking she was mad, but nevertheless she continued living her life as she felt she had to.

John Moyle, an architect who met her about three years before her death, said: She didn't say: *"to hell with you" but she still acted out "to hell with you"* (interview Moyle, J. 1993).

After her divorce, Annie said that Helen and a friend worked in a restaurant in Muizenberg (interview Le Roux, A. 1986); Jill Wenman said that she worked in a chemist's shop in Muizenberg, and one wonders why she did not use her training and continue teaching. Possibly she wanted to see more of life than a classroom would have afforded. This is the mysterious missing part of Helen's

life, and virtually nothing is known about this period. A letter to the press asking for information from anyone who knew anything about her then evinced no response, even though a similar earlier letter requesting information about her first husband brought a flood of replies from all over South Africa.

It might have been a self-imposed exile, judging from a letter signed 'Willoughby, c/o Standard Bank, Brakpan', found amongst her papers by an earlier researcher, Caroline Godiner. Helen's sister Alida was married to Willoughby Seymour, Standard Bank Manager in Brakpan, and this letter was written by him to Helen. Dated 14 March 1927, it is more than straight-speaking, very revealing, and was unfortunately not totally legible. Extracts from it read:

*But perhaps you will not mind if I do a little plain speaking - I hope you won't - the point of view of another person is always worthy of consideration. I know that you have had a very bad time - bad enough to give anyone even less sensitive than yourself a warped outlook on the world - but it seems not improbable that you have had too much (been forced into too much) brooding over your troubles, and that they have become an obsession. This is not at all uncommon in such cases. Then there is the question of pride - perhaps perverted pride. One nurses ones ... [illegible], one ... [illegible] gets a melancholy pleasure out of them. One feels that it is rather an ... [illegible] thing to be up against the world alone and to be fighting the world all on one's own - it appeals to the egotism which we all possess.*

*But is it really a feasible proposition to be fighting the world? Your present occupation for instance (which we are so glad to hear is now carried on under easier conditions) is it not the case that this cannot possibly be a permanency? It seems that physically it can only be done ... [illegible] for a limited time, being a continuous strain, and mentally and morally it must be even worse. Do you not owe a duty to yourself not to subject your soul to such degradation if it can be avoided? And if in your (forgive me!) exaggerated self-depreciation you no longer feel such a duty, have you none towards others? Would you deprive others of the pleasure and privilege of helping you? How would you feel if the positions were reversed - Alida in yours and you in hers?*

*Apart from your duty to yourself you cannot escape your obligation to others. Your mother is fretting terribly about you and would be much happier if you came to us which seems better for you than going to Nieu Bethesda.*

Helen's response to this letter is unknown.

When her mother became ill, Helen, as the single daughter, was the logical member of the family to come home and care for her. Both her sisters were married, lived elsewhere and had their own families; and in those days a woman's career was generally not regarded as of much consequence. This was the end of her life outside of Nieu Bethesda.

## Chapter Five

### Return to Nieu Bethesda - and the lonely years

And so Helen returned to the home where she had grown up, and from which she had made a brief venture into the wider world.

Although the white population of Nieu Bethesda has dwindled radically since those days, it is otherwise probably still very much unchanged. Then it was a thriving village community; in 1993 there were less than 30 permanent residents. From the tar road between Cradock and Middelburg, or approaching it from Graaff-Reinet from the other side, one travels on a narrow, winding dirt road through the mountains, and vast clear countryside.

Kompasburg dominates the whole area and the heads of many windmills are a prominent feature of the village as one drops down from the mountain approach and enters through an avenue of giant old pear trees. Stone furrows, bringing clear water from a perennial fountain high in the western mountains, run alongside the wide dusty streets, and lucerne plots or vegetable, flower and fruit gardens receive regular leadings of water. The streets are lined with pine and cypress trees.

Houses have shutters and wide verandahs to ward off the summer heat. In November 1992 Nieu Bethesda was one of the last villages in the country to obtain electricity, but there are still no street lights, which would only obliterate the brilliant star-lit nights, and there is also no water-borne sewerage system.

Don Maclennan, in his short story *The Road to Mecca*, from which Athol Fugard took the title of his play, writes:

*... the cold wind from the Renosterberg seems to have swept the coloured folk into the south east corner of the valley like a whisk-broom sweeping rubbish, because their houses, built of mud brick, sinkplaat and yellow grey stone are hardly distinguishable from the hillside against which they huddle, unlike ours which seem to have nothing to be ashamed of. And their school is full to overflowing. (Maclennan, D. 1978: 46).*

Jill Wenman's comment here is:

*With all respect to Don - it wasn't the wind that swept them there but the imposition of Group Area legislation which affected the lives of the people in the village drastically! (Notes Wenman, J. 1989)*

The Owl House is on the western edge of the town facing outwards over the dry lonely



Photograph on her dresser of Helen in the Camel Yard with a statue of a pelican.





The Owl House (right) viewed from the dry river bed, with Kompasberg looming in the background.

mountains and the dry wide river bed with white fossilized bones - the remains of mammal-like reptiles which inhabited swamps 250 million years ago - visible in the black bedrock. A pepper tree stands outside the house, which is squat, dull, tired and dusty-looking. It does not, from the exterior - until one approaches very close - seem to promise anything at all out of the ordinary. It does not even have the architectural charm which is a notable feature of many Karoo houses.

Helen returned to this setting, to run the home and look after ageing and infirm parents, somewhere in the region of her thirtieth birthday, between the latter half of 1927 and 1929. She definitely visited there in September 1926, as she, Alida and their mother wrote a letter from Nieu Bethesda to Annie on the birth of Annie's first child (letter Martins, H. 1926).

Mrs Tiny Hartzenberg, who was Helen's back neighbour for almost 50 years, said that when she and her husband moved to town in 1927, Helen was already living in the house and caring for her mother (interview Hartzenberg, 1989). However, the letter from Alida's husband Willoughby, referred to in the previous chapter, was written in March 1927, and Helen was obviously then not yet back in Nieu Bethesda (letter Seymour, W. 1927). She might have come back towards the end of that year. In a letter to the Master of the Supreme Court in Cape Town, Helen writes that she looked after her invalid parents for a 'full 16 years' (letter Martins, H. 1947). As her father died in February 1945, this could mean that she had returned to Nieu Bethesda in 1928 or 1929.

A letter with an illegible signature, but obviously from one of her siblings, which is dated January 1932 and addressed from Poste Restante Johannesburg (letter Martins, ?. 1932), says:

*I am going over to Volksrust to see Piet [Helen's brother who taught and farmed in Volksrust] - with the view to his relinquishing monies for Mother and your support ...*

*Helen it would be sheer impertinence on my part, to lay down the law to you in respect to the attitude you should adopt under the trying circumstances you find yourself in.*

*Even offering you advice must smack as uncalled for and gratuitous but yet I would counsel you to call upon all possible sense of humour and tact you would be capable of. Permit me please, to thank you for your unselfish service to mother under the most trying and practically impossible conditions.*

*Had I believed in a God, as conceiver of the great majority, I would have relegated you to his generosity for reward. Being utterly pagan and agnostic I feel that the least we can do is to help ameliorate your trials and incidentally also mothers.*

*Again thanks Helen my best wishes to mother Annie and father,  
Sincerely ?????*

Exactly what these 'most trying and practically impossible conditions' were is not known. It would seem though that they were probably endured for a long period of time, as her mother died nine years later of breast cancer, and her father after another four years, of bowel cancer (letter and tape Crous, 1993).

Mrs Tiny Hartzenberg said that Helen talked to her about her problems, one of which was

that she did not want to look after her mother who was very difficult (interview Hartzenberg, T, 1989).

Helen would have been 47 years old when both her parents had died. Annie said that just after their father died, and still during the war years, Helen came to visit Annie and her family twice on their farm at Amersfoort. After the war ended she decided to close her house and go to live with Annie, but then changed her mind and returned home (interview Le Roux, A. 1986).

She stayed on alone in the house, possibly then with neither the courage, confidence, energy and experience, nor the finances to break away and start a new life elsewhere. It may have been the case though that this was a positive choice, as another element enters the picture. It is generally known that Helen had a long-standing and important relationship with a married man in the village, Mr Hattingh, but it was difficult to find out when this relationship occurred or anything about him (interviews: Hartzenberg, T. 1989; Retief, G. 1993; Van Niekerk, N. 1993; Wenman, J. 1988; Swiers, S. 1993; Cupido, M. 1993; Pienaar, Sharwood 1993; Pienaar, Stirling 1993). However, subsequently his daughter, Mrs M M Kruger responded unexpectedly to a letter in the Eastern Province Herald asking for information about Johannes Pienaar (letter Ross, 1993). She wrote a number of letters containing a great deal of information about her father, Johannes Hendrik Hattingh, and also some photographs (letters and interviews Kruger, 1993).

The Hattingh family came to Nieu Bethesda in 1939 at the outbreak of war. Mrs Kruger says that the relationship between Helen and her father lasted for 21 years, and continued even when the Hattingh family had left the village in 1947 to return to Peddie, until his death in 1963. On the tape which Helen and her two sisters recorded, (tape Martins, H., Le Roux, A. and Seymour, A. Date unknown - between 1945 and 1968), for her nephew Peter le Roux ('Doemsie'), Helen mentions Mr Hattingh, and confirms that he was a valued friend at the time when her father's death occurred, which was in February 1945. (Helen speaks very quickly and at times it is extremely difficult to make out every word.) This poignant and also very endearing tape extract gives some insight into how she felt about coping with her invalid parents who seemed as if they would continue living interminably. The difficult situation was compounded by her loneliness and the fact that she was without close moral support. We are also given a glimpse of a very sensitive person, with a sense of ironic humour, and of how important the support of Mr Hattingh must have been to her.

*Helen: Hello Doemsie. Doemsie, Mamma en Aunt Alida is vreeslik lastig. Hulle wil hê ek moet hulle grappe vertel van die verlede. En hulle ken die grappe net so goed soos ek. Al waarom ek moet nou vertel weet ek nou nie, want hulle ken dit. Nou maar Doemsie, here goes, hoor. Ek praat nou maar met hulle, en as jy wil inluister, dan moet jy maar inluister.*

*Ek sal maar vertel van dokter Van Schalkwijk wat oor Oupa gedokter het. En Oupa het baie lank siek gebly. En ek het naderhand rêrig Doemsie, ek het moeg geword, om hier Oupa op te pas. (Nervous laughter.) En toe, toe gee dokter Van*

Schalkwijk vir my medisyne, ek weet nie wat was die naam nie - so 'n bruin botteltjie. En Doemsie ek moet vir jou eerlik wees, ek het baie moeg geword later, en Oupa wou nou nie doodgaan nie. (Nervous laughter.)

En ek gee toe 'n dosis 'n bietjie sterker in, nie om hom dood te maak nie, maar dog, as ek hom 'n bietjie sterker ingee, dan sal Oupa gouer gesond word. En van ek dit ingegee het, het Oupa sommer in 'n slaap ingegaan, 'n soort van 'n komo, wat ek nou nie geweet het. En toe het Oupa toe nou maar naderhand die asem uitgeblaas.

En onmiddellik het ek besef dat ek is die een wat Oupa nou in ander woorde rêrig voor sy tyd laat doodgaan het. En konsensie! Praat van 'n konsensie! Op-gevreet! Maar Doems, Here, ek sê weer, ek was baie moeg al, jy weet; ek was alleen ook. En dit het my so gekwaam (gekwel?) dat ek gedink het nou als bied te doen nie moet ek nou normartel(?). En dit was om - daarom was jy bang om, sê maar dat dit uit te kom dat ek oupa nou voor die tyd laat dood gaan het. En toe dog ek, wel die enigste wat ek kan doen is luiwormerig(?). En ek het vir vier dae nie nat of droog oor my lippe gehad nie, en ek was honger gely, my aptyt het nie weggegaan nie, al het my konsensie my gevreet soos, soos wurms. En toe vier dae verby is, voel ek, nee, miskien sal die enigste oplossing wees vir my geestestoestand, want dit het my gebrand soos die hel, jy weet - my gewete: die oggend ek sal die bus vat, en ingaan, en gaan bieg voor my dokter Van Schalkwijk.

En ek dink Mamma en Aunt Alida het vir jou miskien daardie tyd al vertel dat ek het 'n baie goeie vriendin - vriend - gehad - meneer Hattingh. Hy was my lewenslange vriend. En hy het altyd al my belange op sy hart gedra, en my lief en leed het hy probeer sadend(?) deel met my. En toe my pa nou al dood is, en begrawe is, toe het ek hom vertel van die goed wat ek bietjies te sterk aangemaak het. En in die môre toe ek die bus moes vat, weet hy nou ek gaan dokter Van Schalkwijk nou verwittig van alles wat ek aangevang het. Toe kom hy nou nou afsien by die bus, en toe ek in die bus sit, hier kom hy aangedraf. En ek het toe die bottel en die bromide in my sak opdog asof dit nou moet gaan getuig voor dokter Van Schalkwyk.

En net voor die bus wegtrek, spring meneer Hattingh so om die bus, en hy sê: 'Ek hoop tog, kan jy nie nou 'n bietjie water ook bygooi nie?' (Laughter from all the sisters.) Ek het dit geniet, ek gaan gehuil word sien? En as ek water bykom, dan sal die straf nugter(?) erger(?) slegter(?) ligte(?) wees. (More laughter.) Hy kan nou nie saam gaan, maar ek is toe nou alleen in. En Doemsie, dis snaaks, ander mense is mos nie honger as 'n konsensie hulle pla, of as hulle hartseer of verdrietig is, en as hulle hoe gesê(?) Maar dan wil ek net eet. Jirra, en ek is honger! Nou voor daar toe tyd verloop, en nou gaan ek na dokter met die leë maag. Ek gaan na sy konsulting room toe, hy ken my goed, want hy ken vir Ouma al die jare, jy sien. As hy inkom, tel hy sy kop so op, hy dra so 'n donker bril, hy sê:

'Goeie môre suster, en hoe gaan dit?' En toe begin ek al bewerig word, en hy sê: 'Hoe gaan dit met die oubaas?

Ek sê: Nee dokter, ek het my pa dood gemaak.

Hy sê: 'Jy het hom doodgemaak?'

Ek sê: Ja dokter.

Hy sê: 'En hoe het jy gemaak?'

Ek sê: Dokter, ek het daardie medisyne te sterk ingegee.

Hy sê: 'Waar is die medisyne, het jy dit?'

Ek sê: Ja dokter, hier is dit.

Hy sê: 'Gee bietjie hier.' En hy vat die botteltjie - dit was toe al voor(?), driekwart half of so omtrent. En hy vat die botteltjie, en maak dit oop, en hy proe met sy

vinger daarin, en hy sê: 'Is niks anders - dis net 'n bietjie bromide, dis al wat dit is.' Hy sê, 'Maar wil jy nie vir my 'n bus(?) neem nie?' Ek sê: Ja dokter, kan dit maar vat.

Hy sê: 'Nou kyk, gaan nou huistoe en slaap nou lekker. Daar is nie so 'n ding dat jy jou pa vergewe het.'

Hy sê: 'Ek vra net gister van Mrs Kense(?)' (dis 'n goeie vriendin van my pa en ma) - 'ek vra net vir haar, "hoe gaan dit met ou meneer Martins?" Toe sê sy: "Nee, hy gaan nog maar net so stadig aan agteruit".'

En toe is ek nou daar weg van dokter Van Schalkwyk af. En Doemsie, toe is ek darem nou of ek bietjie verlig voel. Ek het mos nou darem nou my soñde beken. Maar toe is ek honger. Ek kon toe nou nie meer wag om by die te huis kom nie, maar dis nog lank voor die bus my kom optel. En ek gaan toe sommer daar by die eerste, die beste, cafe in, en hier kom daar 'n - ek dink dit was 'n Kleurling waiter, met die bou en die skou(?), en ek sê: 'I want a cup of tea and a bun please.' (Helen, laughter.) En Doemsie, ek het lekker geëet - vyf dae wat ek nooit geëet het nie! En toe ek nou moet gaan betaal by die counter, niks minder of meer as fourpence wat ek moet betaal! Maar toe is ek hartseer om te dink dat ek na so 'n common cafe gegaan het, en so min moes betaal!

En net laat ek uitloop, sien dat die ruite is vol vlieëmis, vuil; jy kan sien dis van die agter af groot bortels/wortels(?) wat ingekruip het, maar ek het die ding nie gemeen nie, sien.

En toe ek nou hier kom, toe staan meneer Hattingh om my te verwelkom, met 'n yslike mandjie aartappels en 'n halwe brood. Foeitog! En ons is die huis in, en ek moes vir hom toe die hele ding vertel. (Laughter and applause.)

[Helen: Hello Doemsie. Doemsie, Mommy and Aunt Alida are a great nuisance. They want me to tell them jokes of the past. and they know the jokes as well as I do. Now why I should, I don't know, because they know them. But Doemsie, here goes. So I am talking to them, and if you want to listen, you must just listen.

I'll tell about Doctor Van Schalkwijk who treated Grandpa. And Grandpa was ill for a very long time. And eventually, really Doemsie, I became tired of looking after Grandpa. (Nervous laughter.) And then Doctor Van Schalkwijk gave me some medicine, I don't know what it was called - a small brown bottle. And Doemsie, I must be honest with you, I became very tired later on, and Grandpa wouldn't die. (Nervous laughter.)

And I gave him a somewhat stronger dose, not to kill him, but I thought that it would speed up his recovery. And after I had given it to him, he went into a sleep, a kind of coma, which I didn't realize. And eventually he breathed his last.

And immediately I realized that I was the one who had caused Grandpa's premature death. And conscience! Talk about a conscience! Eat-en up! But Doems, Good Lord, I repeat, I had had enough you know; and I was alone. It worried me so much, that it would come out that I had caused Grandpa's early death. And I thought that all I could do was ...??? And for four days I went without food or drink, and I was hungry, I didn't lose my appetite, even though my conscience devoured me, like, like worms. And after four days, I felt, perhaps the only solution for my state of mind, because it burnt like hell you know - my conscience; I would take the bus in the morning and go in to town and confess to my Doctor Van Schalkwijk.

And I think Mommy and Aunt Alida have probably already told you then that I had a very good friend - Mr Hattingh. He was my friend for life. And he always had my interests at heart, the bitter and the sweet he tried to share with me. And



after my father had died, and been buried, I told him about the somewhat strong medicine mixture I had administered. And when I had to catch the bus in the morning, he knew that I was on my way to tell Dr Van Schalkwijk about everything I'd done. As I took my seat in the bus, he came running to see me off. And I had the bromide in my bag as evidence for Doctor Van Schalkwijk.

And just before the bus pulled away, Mr Hattingh jumped around the bus and said: 'I hoped that you could add a little water?' (Laughter from all the sisters.) I enjoyed it, I was about to cry you see. If I added water, the punishment would be lighter(?), worse(?), heavier(?). (More laughter.) He couldn't accompany me, I had to go alone. And Doemsie, it's funny, other people aren't hungry when troubled by their consciences, or when they are sad or distressed and when they ... ?? But then all I want to do is eat. Heavens, and I was hungry! And there I was going to the doctor on an empty stomach. I went to his consulting rooms, he knew me well because he'd known Grandma for years, you see. As he entered, he lifted his head, he was wearing dark glasses, and said:

'Good morning sister, and how are you?' And I started to feel shaky, and he said: 'How is the old man?'

I said: No Doctor, I have killed my father.

He said: 'You killed him?'

I said: Yes Doctor.

He said: 'And what did you do?'

I said: Doctor, I gave him too strong a dose of that medicine.

He said: 'Where is the medicine, do you have it?'

I said: Yes Doctor, here it is.

He said: 'Give it to me.' And he took the bottle - it was about three-quarters, or half full. And he took the bottle and opened it, and put his finger in to taste it, and he said: 'It's nothing but a little bromide, that's all.' He said: 'But don't you want to take a bus(?) for me?'

I said: Yes Doctor, you may keep it.

He said: 'Now listen, go home and get some sleep. It is out of the question that you've poisoned your father.'

He said: 'Only yesterday I asked Mrs Kense(?) (a good friend of my father and mother) - 'I asked her, "How is old Mr Martins?" And she said: "No, he is still going down slowly".'

And then I left Doctor Van Schalkwijk. And Doemsie, I felt so relieved. I had now confessed my sin. But then I was hungry. I couldn't wait to get home, but it was still a long time before the bus would come to pick me up. And without further ado, I went to the nearest, the best cafe. And I think, from the build and looks, that it was a Coloured waiter who came to me, and I said: 'I want a cup of tea and a bun please.' (Helen, laughter.) And Doemsie, how I enjoyed it: for five days I had had nothing to eat! And when I had to go and pay at the counter, it was about fourpence I had to pay! But then I was upset to think that I had gone to such a common cafe, and had to pay so little!

And as I was leaving, I saw fly-specks on the windows, **dirty**; one could see ..?? that had crept in, but I didn't know that, you see.

And on my arrival here, Mr Hattingh was waiting for me, with an enormous basket of potatoes and half a loaf of bread. Shame! And we went in to the house, and I had to tell him what had happened. (Laughter and applause.)

Once both her parents had died, suddenly, all that she had ostensibly existed for, for so many

years was gone. Her life had lost its previous purpose and also its responsibilities. Her social life had probably never developed much: people who knew Helen and her family at that time said that she kept very much to herself even in those early years (interviews Hartzenberg, T. 1989; Claasen, G. 1985). Her solitariness might have been compounded by several factors: the years of tending ill and difficult parents; an inherent tendency towards unsociableness; a self-perceived alienation from society due to her divorce and abortions; and the fact that her relationship Mr Hattingh, who was a married man, could not be publicly acknowledged and could only exist in privacy.

The fact of having no seeming purpose, responsibility, or any accessible family members to whom she could relate (her sisters, to whom she was emotionally close, lived far away), and an emotional relationship which was outside of society's conventions, must have contributed to her alienation and solitariness. She was not bound by the social conventions of the village. Koos Malgas and his family recount how she used to come and visit them in their house in the coloured township (interview Malgas, K. 1988). This would not have been found acceptable by most of her fellow white citizens. Jonas Adams said: '*Sy het te veel van te veel bruin mense gehou,*' (interview Adams, J. 1991) [*She liked too many of the brown folk too much*], meaning that, that would have alienated her from the white community.

In addition there was her unsuccessful first marriage, and an intensely religious upbringing - '*We had family devotions every night,*' said Annie. Her relationship with a father, who threatened Bible-endorsed punishment for wrongdoing, was bad. Divorce and abortion were strongly disapproved of by society and later on she did not attend the church, which was, and still is, a pivotal centre of life in the community.

Mrs Erika Cloete, wife of the dominee in Nieu Bethesda during Helen's latter years, said:

*My husband asked her about her religious convictions, and she put it to him that she was no atheist, but had no need for formal religion and she never attended church services, except once for the burial of one of the well-known residents.*

*After her death, an article appeared in a local paper, blaming the community for a lack of interest in Helen and having rejected her. I could not agree to this. The people tried to help her, but their help was not always appreciated, so it was just natural to discontinue it. ... on the whole the attitude of the community was sympathetic to her, although in later years not many really kept in touch with her. One of the neighbours in previous years had supplied Helen with a daily plate of food, left on top of the wall adjacent to Helen's property, according to her wishes. This was later discontinued on account of complaints from Helen about it. There were others who also tried to help her, but who also discontinued after complaints. These people wanted to help her, because they knew that she did not prepare any proper meals for herself. One wonders how she actually managed to keep going. (Letter Cloete, E. 1988).*

Nieu Bethesda is a community like all small rural communities, with an interlocking, mutually-supportive social structure. The sense of history and continuity, and the sharing of joys and



Photographer unknown

Mr Johannes Hattingh, the great love of Helen's life, escorting his daughter, Machteld Maria, to her wedding on 4 January 1958.

sorrows is very important, and is something that does not exist in large modern cities. People know their neighbours and feel a responsibility for each other. The counterbalance to this is of course a lack of privacy in conducting one's affairs and daily life, but can be more than compensated for by the feelings of belonging and of being of consequence.

Dr Johan Pienaar, District Surgeon in Graaff Reinet during the last 10 years of Helen's life, said:

*There's now so much interest in her, and at the time when she created these things, produced them, nobody really understood what she was doing; I think literally that the Bethesda people were a bit bang [frightened] of her, and there seems to have been precious little contact between the community and Helen Martins. (Interview Pienaar, J. 1993).*

People in the community must have had difficulty in really comprehending how very different Helen was from them, and that she could in no way have followed the same lives that they did. Mrs Norah van Niekerk's comments clearly demonstrate this:

*She could have made life so easy and pleasant for herself, because at that time, you know, people - they were playing rummy and they were playing card games. If she had entertained in her home, and asked people, she could have had quite a nice life. But I don't know; she was definitely an introvert you know. (Interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993).*

The fact that Helen became a recluse, and particularly so considering she was not a newcomer or an 'outsider' to the village, must have been through her own choice - conscious or unconscious. 'Characters' or eccentric individuals seem both to exist and to be encouraged in small communities (residents tell tales about them with great enjoyment). As Helen was in their eyes 'part' of them, the people of the community would have tolerated her increasing strangeness and 'outsider' behaviour. It would have been a matter for much comment, probably great concern, later acceptance - with the resultant seeming neglect, but not forcible interference.

If she had become so alienated in a large, impersonal and technological city, this would not have been so surprising; but that she did so in her own home village shows how very deep and acute her alienation was, both within herself and from those around her. Thus the way in which her life developed from here on towards its appalling conclusion, although bizarre, was not totally unpredictable. Her life had become so unbalanced it would seem, that in the natural tendency of the psyche to equilibrium, it tried desperately, through her creation of The Owl House and the Camel Yard, to achieve this state.

How this took place and whether it was eventually successful, will be investigated in the following chapters.

## Chapter Six

### The Owl House - beginning of the creative years

*Alas!  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass  
Or rats' feet over broken glass  
In our dry cellar*

(from *The Hollow Men* by T S Eliot)

From the exterior, The Owl House is an unremarkable flat-roofed Karoo cottage, painted white. It is situated on the outskirts of the village, directly on the street, and facing out into the veld. It consists of a long, narrow front stoep with a curved, black, galvanized-iron roof, and is approached by a few stone steps. The verandah floor is made from cement, upon which white dots, resembling snow, have been painted, and crushed glass resembling a snow drift piled against the house wall. The strip leading directly between the steps and the front door has pieces of clear glass from broken bottles embedded almost flush with the cement.

The left-hand side of the verandah is enclosed with wire netting. Inside the first section are perched eight cement owls, with a large glass-covered owl-relief against the wall. A little nesting box, shaped like a house with red glass windows, is fixed to the netting. The second and smaller section, towards the north end of the verandah, probably once contained live birds.

The shutters and frames of the two windows, and both doors, are heavily encrusted with white painted crushed glass. Painted onto the right-hand dining room sash window are two large, stylized suns with faces, and on the upper pane of the left hand 'Honeymoon Room' is painted another sun - all looking out at the late afternoon sun which looks in at them. Above the front door is another sun, professionally engraved on a circular mirror. Painted above the door are the words **The OWL HOUSE**. Another owl with outstretched wings perches on a beam above the door to emphasize the point. The fly gauze on the outside of the front door fanlight is also covered in white glass fragments.

Upon entering the narrow central entrance hall, one turns right into the dining-room or left into a bedroom. These three rooms are all very dark and gloomy. The verandah roof blocks off the light except in the late afternoon. If one carries on straight ahead one enters the sitting room - a bright and cheerful room. The first door to the right out of this room opens into a small bottle-lined

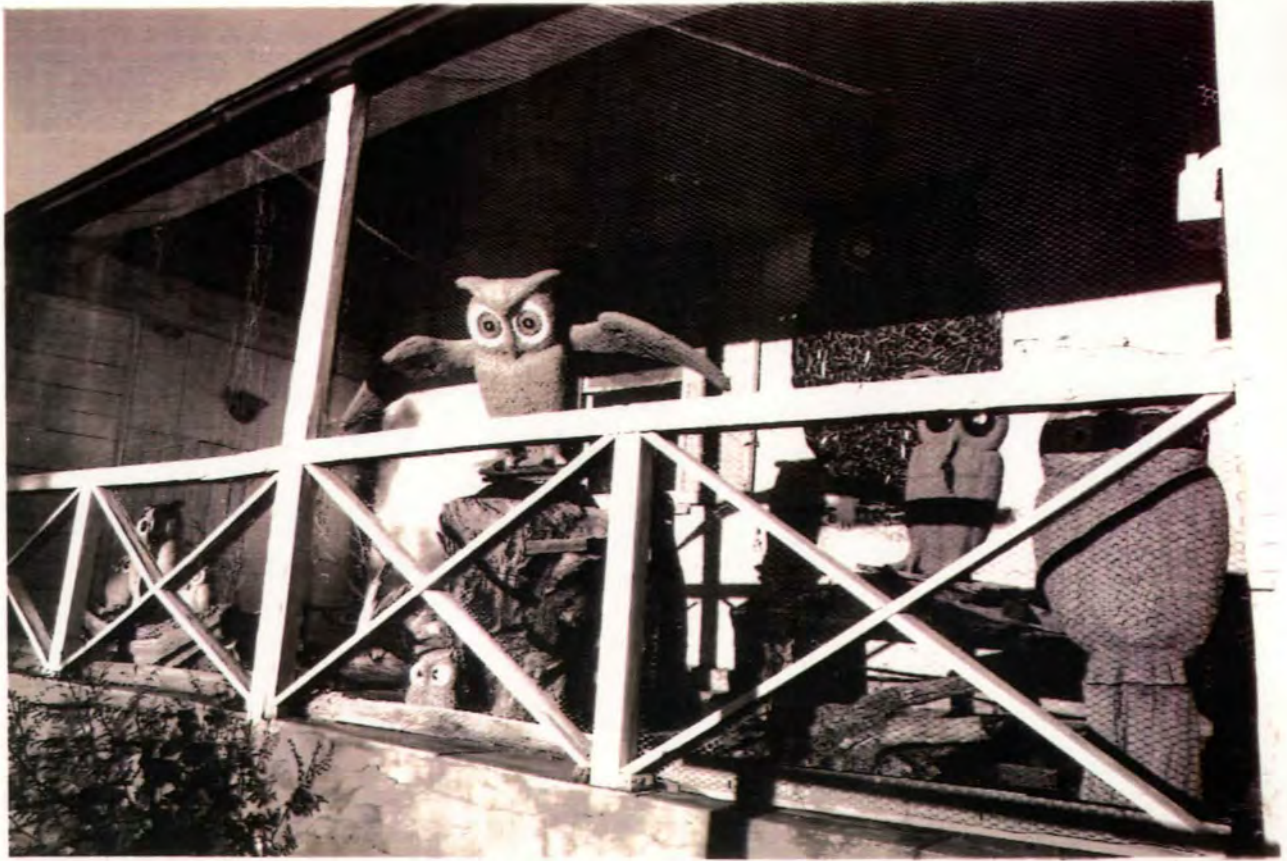




Johan Polgier

Helen Martins, (circa 1973/4)





The Owl House and a close-up view of the left-hand side of the front stoep showing just some of the many owls which occur both inside the house and in the Camel Yard.



Over the front door is written *The OWL HOUSE*, and a cement owl with outstretched wings perches on a cross-beam. Above the door is a sun engraved on a circular mirror. Through the entrance hall and sitting room light shines through an orange pane of glass, above which is a leaping springbok.

In front of the house are some of the 'Queen of the night' cactus, so beloved by Helen.



pantry; the second door to the right, to the kitchen. Off the kitchen is the unique little bathroom, and a back door leads to the back stoep and 'garden'.

The door to the left of the sitting room leads to a bedroom which also serves as a passage, as it leads into another long, narrow bedroom with large windows abutting immediately onto the neighbour's garden. From here a red door to the right leads into an outside store room (which is still in its original state), which Helen named 'Bluebeard's Chamber' according to Jill Wenman (interview Wenman, J. 1988). 'The Lion's Den' is another outside room which is entered after walking round the house to the other side of the 'garden', or through the second door to the right at the south end of the front stoep.

After an unknown number of presumably unremarkable years looking after her parents, and then alone after their deaths, it was said by her sister Annie (interview Le Roux, A. 1986), and also friends and neighbours, that Helen recounted how she was once lying ill in bed and suddenly, with the moon shining through the window, thought how dull and 'vaal' everything was, and how she would like to brighten up her life. Jill Wenman says Helen told her that she broke down walls and put in the windows to let light in after the deaths and unhappiness (interview Wenman, J. 1988). She then evolved the extraordinary concept of covering every internal surface in ground glass, applied to multi-coloured designs on the walls and ceilings.

It is very difficult to describe the impact made when one first approaches, and then enters The Owl House. One of the many emotions to be registered could be shock, then disorientation and claustrophobia; it is so unexpected and unfamiliar, and so filled with sensations and objects. Only after a few visits does one have enough feeling of familiarity to start absorbing an impression of the interior as a unit - let alone its details. The colour everywhere is overwhelming, as is all the reflected light; but the atmosphere is oppressive, with no feeling of happiness. One also has a very strong feeling of reticence about intruding in a home that was so clearly private, and is still filled with personal, intimate objects.

Helen systematically started 'redecorating' and transforming her entire house, inside and out, beginning with the interior. She collected bottles and glass of all colours from wherever she could. The coloured children from the village would bring bottles and sell them to her. Mrs Stella Swiers, in 1993 Chairperson of the Independent Development Trust Women's Committee of Nieu Bethesda and member of the Town Council, said:

*Altyd het sy gesê ons moet opas, ons moet nie vir haar stukkende bottels bring nie, en sy was bekommerd ons kinders se hande kan ons sny - seerkry by die stukkende bottels. Sy gaan dit self stukkend kap en meng. Ons het nooit vir haar stukkies gebring, want sy wou dit nie by ons vat nie. En na die tyd het ons maar gewonder, 'Hoekom wou sy dit nie gevat nie? Sy sal dit maar stukkend kap'. Sy was bekommerd by onse hande. Ons tel in die riviere op, en naby ons by die*

*bruinegebied, en bring ons by haar. Ons het baie by die ou ashoop bottels gevind waar die wit mense se vuilis neergegooi, en soek ons daar ons bring vir haar deur die rivier. Dan gee sy vir ons lekker lekkers - kweper lekkers. Sy het altyd met die lekkers betaal, nie met geld nie.*

*Baie van die kinders het vir haar bottels gebring. Ons sal in die middag optel, en daarvandaan dan gaan ons houtveld, maak ons hout vir ons ouers, maar daar het ons nou lekker iets om te riep en kou. (Interview Swiers, S. 1993).*

*[She always said we must be careful, we mustn't bring her broken bottles, and she was worried that us children might cut our hands - get hurt by the broken bottles. She was going to break them and mix them herself. We never brought her broken pieces, because she didn't want to take them from us. And later we wondered, 'Why didn't she take them? She was just going to break them'. She was concerned for our hands. We used to pick them up in the river, and near us in the brown people's area, and brought them to her. We found lots of bottles at the old rubbish dump where the white people's rubbish was thrown, and we looked there and brought them to her through the river. She gave us delicious sweets - quince sweets. She always paid us with sweets, not with money.*

*Many of the children brought bottles to her. We used to collect them in the afternoons, and from there we went to collect wood for our parents in the veld, but then we had something delicious to chew on.]*

The entrance hall was the room where she started (interviews Malgas, K. 1988; Wenman, J. 1988; Van der Merwe, P. 1989). The walls were painted with varnish, and the glass fixed to it whilst still wet. This was so successful that she then thought of introducing colour, and sticking the glass to wet paint. She painted the walls and ceilings of all the rooms in various colours in geometric designs - some seemingly to a rigid pre-plan, others with no apparent set rules. However if a piece of furniture was in the way against a wall, she did not bother to move it, but just painted around, leaving the original colour behind it. The same applied to pictures which were already on the wall.

She first started grinding the glass up between two stones, as the black people ground mealies. Mrs Barbara Shaper, who used to live in Nieu Bethesda, said that she saw Helen working this way (interview Shaper, B. 1986). Later, however, she used very heavy-duty coffee mills to grind the glass to the desired coarseness or fineness, until all six or seven of them finally broke under the strain, and she resorted again to stones or a hammer. Koos Malgas, the man who worked with and for her for approximately the last 12 years of her life, said that his predecessor, Jonas Adams, did a number of the rooms, but Koos also did a fair amount of the glass work himself, and he was responsible for the impressive sun on the kitchen ceiling (interview Malgas, K. 1988).

Initially the glass was applied to the walls by hand, which according to many of the people interviewed, left Helen's hands in a dreadful state. Later they found that a plaster-spattering machine - used to apply the rough 'Tyrolean' plaster when that was in fashion - was an effective method of applying it to the surfaces. Koos says that Helen liked to leave the glass which fell to the floor, where it lay.





One of the many heavy-duty coffee grinders which were used by Helen to grind up glass. It was then applied to almost every possible surface inside the house as well as on various statues and sections of walls in the Camel Yard. After a number of mills broke under the strain, Helen again resorted to grinding the glass between two stones or using a hammer.

Although he probably did not do much of the glasswork, Piet van der Merwe said that when he worked for Helen, he used to apply the glass with a trowel to "a sort of jam" on the surfaces (interview Van der Merwe, P. 1989). Presumably this was a thick type of glue - or maybe a varnish.

The house is not conducive to uninhibited movement. Glass is everywhere: to knock at the front door, ill-advisedly sit on a chair, walk barefoot, or lean back against a door frame for a better angle for a photograph, are all hazardous and painful activities!

Helen wanted light, and she created it with a vengeance, in the most ingenious and novel ways. Apart from the light-reflecting glass-encrusted surfaces everywhere, she had large mirrors especially cut to her designs in the shape of suns with rays, crescent moons, stars, hand-mirrors, hearts, a cross, as well as many rectangular ones. These were hung in every room at strategic and obviously well thought-out points. They reflected room to room, light to light, image to image, moon and sunshine to other points, and when her multitude of candles and lamps were lit, must have increased the light a thousandfold. Giant candles, in stands impressive enough to place upon an altar, have tinsel twisted around them to amplify the glitter, and her collection of varied and multi-coloured paraffin lamps of all sizes fills two wall cupboards. To have visited Helen at night when she lit up her house must have been a remarkable privilege to experience. Mr Stan Wenman, father of Jill Wenman, said she told him that to light it up completely for a special occasion, such as the visit of friends, would take her three hours (interview Wenman, S. 1989). Jill concurred with this, and described it:

*It was stunning - it was like a child's fairyland - unbelievable. Lighting up the place was a joyous experience of sharing rather than that of a depressive trying to escape darkness. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).*

Helen's next-door neighbour from 1946, Gertie Retief, said:

*Die glas in die huis was dan pragtig. Ons het dit honderdmaal gesien as alles gelig was, en in die sitkamer het sy baie kerse en die goed, en daar het sy dit nou opgesteek sekere getye, en ons het gaan kyk. Ek dink daa'ie tyd wat Helen dit gedoen het, was sy nie meer so eensaam en so alleen nie, jy weet. Ek dink toe't sy meer in die omgewing gegaan. Die kerse - sy het so wonderlike kerse - ek onthou dit baie goed. Ek kan nie onthou wanneer sy ons uitgenooi het [response to query as to whether it was on Christmas Eve], maar dat sy ons uitgenooi het is die heilige waarheid. Maar dat sy al daardie ligte aan die brand gesteek het, die hele huis en so, dit is waar. Dit het ons dikwels om te gaan sien. Dit was pragtig. (Interview Retief, G. 1993)*

*[The glass in the house was beautiful. We saw it lit up hundreds of times, and in the sitting room she had many candles and such things, and she lit it all up at certain times, and we'd go to look. I think those times when Helen did it, she wasn't so lonely and alone, you know. I think then she was still more a part of the community. Those candles - she had such wonderful candles - I remember very well. I can't remember when she invited us, but that she did invite us is quite true. And that she lit up all the lights in the whole house, that's quite true. We often went to look. It*

*was beautiful.]*

Apparently there were three magnificent paraffin-burning coloured glass lamps in the sitting room. 'Collectors' items', Mr Wenman said, which were raised and lowered with pulleys. These are unfortunately no longer there as they were removed by family after Helen's death, even though she had stated in her unwitnessed will that they were to remain in the house. (Appendix 9). She collected large coloured brandy goblets which were suspended upside-down from the ceilings all over the house to catch the light when one looked through them.

Helen had certain walls knocked out in the house, and inserted panes of glowing red, orange, yellow and green glass. The first to be done was the green window between the 'passage' bedroom and the long bedroom. The entire interior of the house seems to have been designed to manifest the ultimate possible effects of all sources of light - sun, moon, artificial lighting and mirrors. It was commonly known, and corroborated by Jill Wenman (interview 1988) and journalist Blignaut de Villiers (interview De Villiers, B. 1989), that Helen did not sleep only in one bedroom, but in various places in the house, depending on her mood and the positions of the moon and the stars. Jill Wenman said:

*The way the furniture was arranged in parts of the house was to give meaning to the celestial bodies in the garden - the real ones and her own. Lying on the one bed in the room between the sitting room and the long bedroom, if you opened up the fanlight, you used to be able to see the stars in the garden, and you could also see the moon rising from there. The only room in which she did not sleep, was the red bedroom, which she named 'The Honeymoon Room'. She painted the 'sun with jealous eyes' on that window - that's why they're green. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).*

Blignaut de Villiers was, as far as is known, the first journalist to interview Helen and photograph her work. He estimates that it was in 1969 or 1970; his article appeared in *Dagbreek en Landstem* of 30 August 1970. He said:

*The walls inside was all different colours. And she would light them all [lamps and candles] and would lay on her mattress - then in the passage, then in one room, and as this kaleidoscope of colours started mixing ....! But on the church tower [in the garden] there's a coloured half-moon, and on a full-moon night, when the moon was at a certain angle, it would shine through this half-moon on the church, and through the kitchen window, and the whole place would be filled with half-moons; ja, as it goes from the one wall to the other, mirrors from the one wall to the other, and on the glass. I did not see it, but she told me about it and that was now a climax of her fantasy nights I would call it. To her it was heaven; she would kind of seem to me to go into a trance with all these beautiful coloured lights and so on. But on the full-moon nights - that was the special one. I say (in the newspaper article) that when she lights all the lamps it looks like 'n droom paleis [dream palace].*

*When the rays of the sun in the afternoon used to come through certain windows, I could get the picture of what it was like when all lit up. She often used to invite me to stay over and go with her through a night of all this - ah, what would you call it - of her 'Little Glory'. I somehow couldn't visualize myself being in a*

house, with an old woman alone, with all that for a whole night, sleeping on the floor. That just put me off a bit. She had a kind of mattress that she used to move around in the house. Every night she'd sleep in a different place. Of course you can't carry a bed all over the place, so she had what I'd rather call a little matjie, and she would fall asleep with this whole kaleidoscope of colours. Maybe it also had a hypnotic effect on her and maybe I was scared of that kind of thing - what do they call it? - the unseen world.

She also told me that during the day, with the sun at a certain angle, it would mirror stars from the top of one of the church towers onto her walls. With the house all closed up, it is dark during the day; then you could see it clearly. (Interview De Villiers, B. 1989).

The artist Peggy Delpont, whose family has for many years had a holiday cottage at Nieu Bethesda and who knew Helen Martins (it was through staying with their family once that Jill Wenman came to meet Helen), said:

*Helen Martins created a wonderful cult of the kitsch. Inside, even the most mundane objects became part of a wonderful kitschy world. Everything was very dense and full. Wherever you turned you scraped yourself. She lived in a kind of fantasy world. There was the extravagance of the glitter, with the full moon and heady Queen of the Night cactus flowers outside. The best gift that one could give her was candles.* (Interview Delpont, P. 1986).

She said that in her opinion, The Owl House was an original and unique creation of merit, whereas she would not say the same about the Camel Yard.

The house is filled with a profusion of trivial objects and clutter. These range from baskets of plastic fruit, to fluffy animals, wind chimes, dusty old collections of carved soap, face-powder boxes, perfume bottles, cheap mass-produced trinkets, bangles and necklaces, shells, small plaster-of-paris models, etc. These are similar to what can probably be found in most homes, only more so - as if nothing was ever thrown away. It has also been said that the house was full of her neuroses. Many of the statues in the garden are derived from little objects, pictures, branded household products, or photographs found in the house.

Repetition of objects in the house (and in the garden) would seem to be intentional. For instance, prints of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, two of which hang in the sitting room, one in the dining room, and one in the 'passage' bedroom, were repeated not only in the house, but in cement bas-reliefs and busts outside in the Camel Yard.

Helen Martins went to a great deal of effort to obtain exactly the mirrors, lamps, coloured glass and other items she required to create the effects she envisaged, and contacted suppliers throughout the country over many years, as well as using friends and acquaintances to assist her with her very specific requirements. Blignaut de Villiers said:

*Twice she wrote and said I must buy her a new lamp, but it must be similar to the ones she had. In PE [Port Elizabeth] there was an old Jew shop, a bicycle shop called Cycle Corner. It was actually a cycle shop but used to sell all kinds of other*

*things also, such as these little lamps which were imported; coloured ones - paraffin. They had to have a bracket kind of thing that she could fix them to a wall.* (Interview De Villiers, B. 1989).

Letters still exist from Hallis Art Gallery in Port Elizabeth, dated 1954, saying that at Helen's request they have ordered *The Mona Lisa* and *The Age of Innocence* from England, and '*will do our best to trace the other prints for you*'. The second letter, written in October, states that as many firms in London lost their plates and copyrights in the bombing during the war, it will be difficult to identify, let alone order the specimen prints which they sent overseas for Helen (Letters Hallis, 1954).

Richards and Barlow, Glass Merchants in Cape Town, wrote in November 1957 to say that regretfully they could not match the samples of tinted glass submitted to them (Letters Richards and Barlow, 1957.)

A. Davis, from Johannesburg, wrote in the same month to say that his agency could offer a background of Black Vitrolite Glass and that the effect of the glass would then be '*even more intense as it will contrast to the black of the background*'. This must have been the sun over the front door. It cost the large sum of £37-15-0d or £41-5-0d depending on whether it was 30" or 35", including plywood backing, mirror chain and screws '*as well as the assurance of a top quality product*' (Letters Davis, A. 1957).

The Plate Glass Beveling and Silvering Company in Port Elizabeth reported in May 1965 that they were processing Helen's order and hoped, '*within the next few days, to despatch same to you*' (Letters Plate Glass, 1965).

### **Description of the Rooms**

#### **Entrance Hall (3.64m x 1.78m)**

The front door has a glowing deep orange, textured glass pane in the upper panel, and there is a red fanlight above. On the inside it is painted black, and thickly crusted with ochre glass. The varnish on the walls gives a dun impression, and blue, green, amber coloured and clear fragments of glass are stuck to it. The door frame opposite, leading to the sitting room, is deep yellow, with an engraved glass fanlight, and five carved African wooden birds perch on the ledge above the door against the fanlight.

A beautiful collection of long, many-coloured silken scarves hang from hooks to the left of the front door, along with little handbags and a cloth and a straw hat. Below them are some tiny and elegant sandals, and one pathetic little handmade wooden sandal with a strip of hide across the toe. A Persian carpet hangs on the wall to the right of the door. On the wall opposite are two large mirrors - one a crescent moon to the left of the door leading through to the sitting room, and one





Various views of the entrance hall. The effect of the late afternoon sun shining through the pane of orange glass can be seen in two of the pictures, top left and bottom right. Large mirrors flank the door leading through to the sitting room and reflect this light back and forth.



Different views of the dining room. It is dark and gloomy until the late afternoon sun shines through the single window which has two sun faces painted on it.



Some of the candles and lamps lit at twilight in the dining room, reflecting backwards and forwards in moon and sun-shaped mirrors on the walls, and sparkling through glass fragments on the walls and ceiling. Two painted suns peer in through the window panes.

shaped like a giant hand-mirror - approximately 1,6 metres high, to the right. Next to it are two small porcelain Arab heads. Draped on the wall next to the crescent moon is a crocheted shawl. To the right, hanging from the ceiling, is a delicate oriental brass wind chimes. On the floor are four old fashioned cream and caramel coloured earthenware kitchen jars.

To the right, two tall red poles, supporting large candles, stand on either side of the doorway to the dining room, with silver tinsel twisted round them. Above the right hand one is a small crescent-shaped moon mirror. The door itself has been removed, but the outer frame is painted mauve and the reveal yellow. In the one corner is a chair with a carved back and crushed glass covered seat, and opposite it a matching chair with an upholstered seat. On a little stand to the right of the door is a plastic basket filled with plastic fruit, standing on a tiny table with glass fragments on its top. Above the door to the 'Honeymoon Room' on the left is a rectangular mirror in a heavy carved picture frame. The door frame of the red 'Honeymoon Room' has been treated as the walls, as has the reveal of the door. The door itself is red and covered in the same glass as the walls. In the doorway hang wooden bead wind-chimes. These are just one of the many wind-chimes which hang throughout the house. On the floor are two rag rugs and another small carpet.

When the front door is closed the hall is very dark and oppressive. However, in the late afternoon when the setting sun shines through the orange glass pane in the front door, the effect is extremely dramatic but also creates a sinister, oppressive and almost tangibly 'thick' atmosphere.

### **Dining Room (3.6m x 3.55m)**

Both this room and the red bedroom to the left are quite small. The shutters of the window which looks onto the verandah are open, but this by no means makes the room light. Two suns with faces are painted on the sash window, filling both panes - a yellow one with green eyes above and a green one with yellow eyes below. Jill Wenman says that this room is not much changed from when Helen was alive, but just more cluttered now. The ceiling is painted in a geometric design in mauve, pale yellow and emerald green; and a frieze which continues the design is in a darker yellow and light mauve. All of these surfaces are glass encrusted. The wall above picture-rail height has a five centimetre strip of wallpaper border, and below it is old-fashioned, patterned wallpaper, in the same design on three walls, and different on the fourth; predictably also with glass stuck on to them. Glass was not affixed behind the pictures or mirrors. The wooden floor has no covering.

The room contains delicate antique furniture: a round table, six ornate carved and upholstered chairs, a small matching couch, and a small table in the corner. On the tablecloth stand seven large candles, a paraffin lamp, and three little leather camels. These were a gift from Helen's sister Alida who travelled extensively, and were apparently the inspiration for the cement camels in the garden (interviews Wenman, J. 1988; Le Roux, A. 1986). There is also an exquisite miniature mauve



leather boot, approximately 10 cm in length and well over 100 years old, which Helen once lent to Mrs Estelle Van Schalkwijk to paint. (Letters Van Schalkwijk, E. 1963.)

Two candlesticks entwined with tinsel stand on the window sill, next to a very primitive drawing of a camel on a piece of board, which is also covered with glass. Approximately 20 different candlesticks are clustered on the side table, some holding large and tall candles, and there is a brass bowl containing plastic fruit.

There are four mirrors in the room: one cut in the shape of a sun with rays of different lengths, two small crescent moons, and a broken circular one. As in all the rooms, there are a number of pictures on the walls. Here one encounters the first of a number of Leonardo da Vinci's famous *Mona Lisa*, which also appear elsewhere in unexpected forms and situations. Another picture is a Biblical scene of the wise men from the east with their camels. A surprising and incongruous combination is a Stella Nova photographic portrait of Helen's niece - her sister Alida's elder daughter Molly - wearing a Voortrekker bonnet, superimposed on a picture of the Voortrekker Monument. In addition there are two more sentimental pictures - one of a young man reading to a young woman wearing flowing garb and holding a spray of St Joseph's lilies, and the other of a wistful praying feminine figure holding a spray of St Joseph's lilies in the foreground, gazing soulfully upwards, with three powerful lions emerging into the Roman arena behind her.

#### **The Honeymoon Room (3.6m x 3.55m)**

This is the room into which the 'Jealous Sun' is forever doomed to peer through his green eyes from the top half of the sash window, which is on the left as one enters. The lower pane is of textured clear glass. Opposite the door a semi-circular aperture has been made in the wall and rich, red, textured glass inserted. This gives light through to the 'Long bedroom'. The ceiling and this wall are both bright red. The other three walls are all painted in irregular stripes of red, black, brown, mauve, yellow, and pale green. Again, all the walls glisten with glass.

The floor is covered in linoleum, with two little scatter rugs on it. A wardrobe with a long mirror on each of its two doors stands between the two beds. These are opposite the sash window and the peering sun reflects back from them. On top of one of the beds lie two black 'golliwog' dolls in an everlasting frozen embrace, covered in an icy frosting of glass 'confetti' which has drifted down from the wall and ceiling. Above this bed is a mirror in the shape of a cross, and a little paraffin lamp attached to the wall. Over the other is a sentimental picture of a sleeping child.

The washstand holds a record of toiletries of the time: Fun Fare Sebbix shampoo, Vaseline hair tonic, Black Lace skin perfume, Roses and Lilac talc, Savilles June talc, and also Lecol lemon juice and a paraffin lamp. On a small table are a painted enamel bowl and jug and four huge coloured candles, and in the corner stands a dressing table with wing mirrors.



The Honeymoon room is apparently the one room in which Helen never slept. The 'sun with jealous eyes' painted on the window can be seen reflected in the wardrobe mirror. On a bed lie two golliwogs embracing. The pane of red glass has been inserted in the wall adjoining the long bedroom.





The sitting room is light and bright and the geometric patterns on the ceiling are clearly visible. The entire east-facing wall consists of clear glass with an orange pane in the centre. Real stuffed birds hover in front of it (centre left). Some of the many paraffin lamps are kept in one of the cupboards flanking the door from the entrance hall, as well as on a washstand nearby (centre right). A doorstep made from a bottle with a black woman over it holds open the glass-encrusted door leading from the hall.

A small cement female torso with outstretched arms carrying a candle in each hand, with a bottle as a base, stands on the sill of the arched red window, along with two candlesticks and two tiny figures of the Virgin Mary and Child. There is coarsely crushed clear glass on the sill of the sash window and six burnt-down candle stubs. Jill Wenman said that according to Helen, the clothes kept in this room were Alida's (interview Wenman, J. 1988). This was confirmed by Koos Malgas (interview 1988), and Mrs Norah van Niekerk, said that Alida sent Helen the clothes from her two daughters, as Helen was so small (interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993).

### **Sitting Room (3.6m x 5.94m)**

Bold geometric designs in rich colours dominate this bright room. Two recessed glass-fronted cupboards, with the glass painted yellow, flank the door through which one enters. The one on the right has four shelves filled by 38 decorative, assorted, coloured paraffin lamps, 19 glass mantles for lamps, two glass candle holders and two coloured glass goblets. The one on the left contains a collection of cups and saucers, plates, and little china vases and animals. An adjacent washstand holds yet more lamps.

The ceiling, which is very striking, is painted in deep emerald, orange, lime green, light red, black and deep red. The walls are painted in horizontal stripes and big squares, but with no discernable pattern, in lime green, black, red, brown, navy and light blue. All surfaces are, of course, encrusted in crushed glass.

The door into the sitting room from the hall is held open by a doorstop in the form of a stuffed fabric black doll created over a sand-filled bottle.

One central pane of the large window, which virtually fills the wall opposite the door, has been replaced with warm orange glass, and tiny stuffed birds hover inside the window. A leaping springbok silhouetted in the fanlight above the orange pane initially seems as out of place as does the picture of the Voortrekker Monument with Helen's niece superimposed; until one realizes that the entire combination of objects and symbols is totally strange and incongruous, and therefore, no one thing is actually out of place. Helen seems to have selected objects which appealed to her for reasons which were entirely personal: some sentimental, some influenced by fashion at certain stages of her life, and many others seemingly because they touched chords in her unconscious. These were all inexplicably and often charmingly mingled, which adds to the feeling of disjuncture when entering both the house and the yard.

Two large and one smaller rectangular mirrors - two with stars engraved in a corner, a heart-shaped mirror, and a cupboard with a mirrored front, all bounce colour and light backwards and forwards.

Pictures on the walls are: two reproductions of the Mona Lisa, one large and one small; a

drawing of an owl; a contemplative Christ; a watercolour of a beach scene at Wilderness, painted by an artist friend, Estelle van Schalkwijk (wife of Dr Johannes van Schalkwijk in Graaff-Reinet), according to one of Estelle van Schalkwijk's letters to Helen; a photograph of a child; and a black and white, typically romanticized and idealized Victorian picture of a nude winged male, flying off with a long-haired woman while kissing her. This is probably Psyche and Eros. Another smaller coloured print of this picture also hangs in the 'passage' bedroom. Glued to the bottom of the picture's mount is this typed inscription:

#### REUNION

*Guess now who holds thee  
"Death" I said; But There  
The Silver Answer Rang.  
Not Death, But Love.*

Hanging on the window frame is a little picture of an Eastern man sleeping on a Persian carpet, with other carpets hanging on the wall behind him, and pottery displayed in front of him. The wording below the picture reads:

***Dreaming of the Golden Road to Samarkand: A Moroccan Carpet-seller, Careless of his Wares, Takes his Midday Siesta Beneath the Burning Sun.**  
Even the traditional home of brigandage, the East has been surpassed by the banditry of the ultra-modern West, for such scenes as this, reminiscent of the Persia of Omar's day, are frequent in Tunis and Tangier. The roadside vendor of pottery and rugs sleeps, with fatalistic calm, trusting in Allah to preserve his merchandise from robbers.*

This whole scene has been meticulously reproduced in cement, glass and wire in the garden. Possibly too, the hanging of the Persian carpet in the hall was inspired by this picture.

Many and varied little objects cluster on window sills, shelves and tables, including a collection of larger and more beautiful and unusual shells than those found on various window sills and other ledges throughout the house.

Lamps, inverted brandy goblets, and candles, hang or stand throughout the room, as well as a cluster of Christmas decoration bells. A little golden cupid flies in the centre of the ceiling, from one of the hooks which once suspended one of the large ornate paraffin lamps.

Cement statues, which fill the garden, start appearing inside the house in the sitting room. In the far corner stands a cement owl, with outstretched wings, which is thickly covered with large pieces of broken coloured glass. In its inverted face sits a cement baby attempting to put his right foot into his mouth. This is one of only two nude statues in the whole house or yard that is clearly of the male sex, as it has a penis. Another is a similar baby near the moon-gate at the side of the house.





Above: In the sitting room is one of two prints entitled 'Reunion'. The other is in the passage bedroom. The text below it reads:

Guess now who holds thee  
"Death" I said; But There  
The Silver Answer Rang.  
Not Death, But Love.

Sitting in an upturned-face owl in the far corner of the sitting room is one of only two nude male statues which is portrayed with a penis. He is attempting to put his foot into his mouth. The second similar statue sits in a pond in the Camel Yard.



Above: The picture of the Moroccan Carpet-seller in the sitting room reproduced (below) in cement and glass in the Camel Yard.

Jill Wenman says that this room is the one that is now most different from what she remembered it to be. The antique dining room table used to stand in here, and various other pieces of furniture have either been moved, or removed by relatives.

**'Passage' Bedroom (3.6m x 4.22m)**

Two beds stand in this room. The length of one of them has been extended by a small table tied to its end with wire, to accommodate a longer-than-usual mattress for her friend, Mr Johannes Hattingh. He was very tall - Mrs Gertie Retief said: '*Hattingh was lank*', and this bed was adapted for him (interview Retief, G. 1993).

The washstand cum chest of drawers holds numerous articles, including a little cement 'server' lady on top of a bottle, reaching out her arms and holding candles in her hands and with bangles hanging from her arms. A similar figure stands on a chest of drawers. One item of particular interest is a little plaster-of-paris mould of a seated mermaid which inspired the many mermaids in the Camel Yard and one in the bathroom. Necklaces hang from the corners of many of the pictures and from nails inserted in the walls - some of them made from little shells, and a fan is also pinned up on the one wall. A green sun is painted on the top pane of the large window. Next to it is a door with panes of green glass in the upper portion and the fanlight above. This casts a mysterious and uncanny light in the room, and especially onto a most disturbing object lying on the floor below.

What it actually is, is unknown. What it expresses and symbolizes is open to conjecture, deep thought, and analysis; and will be discussed more fully in a later chapter on the symbolic implications of the works. The upper part is covered in a piece of thick, dark, stiff hide, as if wrapped around a headless body, with one partially formed (or deformed) arm. Koos Malgas says that Helen made this herself, and that it was stuffed with some padding. She then got him to make, in cement, the legs and feet which stick out at the bottom (interview Malgas, K. 1988). One of these feet is human - the other is a cloven hoof. Next to it lies a metal spoon: Koos says that the spoon was not there in Helen's time. As far as is known, this is the only statue that Helen actually made herself. Jill Wenman says that Helen used to keep it on the floor in front of the stove recess in the kitchen, or it would be pushed against the back door to stop the draft coming through, and called it her 'Little Devil'. Koos says that although he liked all the things that he made, this one was strange and he did not know what it was meant to be. It did not seem to concern him unduly however. It is an object with a definite 'presence' though, and many people find it causes a greater uneasiness than anything else in the whole house or garden. It would seem to be the physical manifestation of the unresolved psychological or spiritual burden which Helen carried around with her. '*It is dark,*' was the comment of a young photographer, Christoph Heierli, visiting The Owl House for the first



time in October 1993; followed by the thoughtful question: 'Was she ever pregnant?' Another young man said: 'It looks like a rotting corpse.' It is also reminiscent of a prematurely born animal which has died and shrivelled in the dry heat encountered in the Karoo.

The effects of criss-crossing reflections from the placement of mirrors in this room is most impressive and very effective. There is one very large one, shaped like a dressing-table hand mirror, one heart-shaped, and four rectangular ones, and the chest of drawers is backed with a rectangular mirror. As everywhere else, numerous small objects and ornaments cluster on every window sill and horizontal surface. Amongst these are shells, plastic flowers, a pine cone, and ostrich egg shells. Next to the washstand-cum-dressing-table is a brown leather suitcase, covered in glass fragments, with a pile of old dusty books on top of it.

This room probably has more pictures in it than any other, even though it is fairly small. Two repeats from other rooms are a *Mona Lisa* and 'Reunion'; the latter is in colour and smaller than the black and white print in the sitting room. Then there are: some family photographs; a Mother and Child (a la Italian Renaissance art); a picture of a child's face; 'The Dawn of Heavenly Light', depicting a woman clutching a book to her bosom while gazing soulfully upwards; a Victorian woman in a long, high-necked gown holding a young child up to a portrait of its father, entitled 'Fatherless', with the following words from Tennyson's 'Break Break Break':

*Oh for the touch of a vanished hand  
And the sound of a voice that is still,*

and another with the wording:

*"Holy Week in Seville": an Andalusian Girl inspired with the Spirit of Semana  
Maria.*

which has the soulful young girl in the foreground, and Christ hanging on the cross amongst the crowd far in the distance. There are a number of sepia photographs of a nude female - three back view and one side view - which Blignaut de Villiers said Helen had told him were posed for by her sister Alida:

*The first visit I didn't have the guts to ask her, but the second time I asked her if I could photograph those pictures. And she said 'Yes', because she could see that I appreciated what was going on. So I snapped them all. But although it's all nude studies, it's er, you know - I served on the censorship board and had to do with all the pornographic stuff and all that, there's no way you can call that porn. I wasn't so much interested in the lady in the pictures, I would like to have found out more about the photographer because he was someone who knew what he was doing. That kind of photography I haven't seen around in a long, long time. (Interview De Villiers, B. 1989).*

Helen used the photographs as inspiration for some of her sculptures in the Camel Yard. John Moyle, an architect who first visited The Owl House three or four years before Helen died, said:



Various aspects of the 'Passage' bedroom. The long bed (bottom right) was extended with a little table to accommodate Helen's long-time love, Johannes Hattingh who was exceptionally tall. Green light falls through the panes of glass in the external door (centre right), onto Helen's 'Little Devil' lying on the floor (bottom left). An enormous heart-shaped mirror reflects into other mirrors in this and the adjoining room.





Below: professional photographs of nudes on the washstand and the glass-encrusted wall, together with one of the reproductions of the Mona Lisa and a little cement figure with outstretched arms holding bangles. Above is a page from Helen's niece, Betty Crouse's photograph album. Posing nude is Alida, Helen's sister and Betty's mother. It is evident that one of the poses was copied from the reclining nude, bottom left.





More nude studies on the green glass-covered wall in the 'Long' bedroom, reflected in the dressing table mirror. Below are two views of this bedroom with its three beds, geometric designs on the ceiling and walls, paraffin lamps and the round table supported by a cement snake. Large mirrors hang on the walls, including some shaped like a heart and a hand-mirror.



*A lot of the sculptures came from the Edwardian art photography of nudes. I got the impression that Helen and her sisters used to photograph each other with a Brownie camera, emulating them, aware of the beauty and yet the 'naughtiness' of it. (Interview Moyle, J. 1993).*

The sisters did experiment with nude photography - Alida's daughter Betty Crous produced photographs of her mother imitating some of the poses in these photographs, and they seemed to be comfortable with nudity - unusual in the puritanical society in which they had been brought up.

### **The Long Bedroom (2.8m x 9.47m)**

It seems that this was Helen's favourite room in which to sleep, and it is not difficult to see why as it is the lightest, brightest, and facing north, probably the warmest bedroom. Windows extend down a great deal of the length of the long outside north wall, and there are also windows on the west wall. On the other long wall there is the green frosted window through to the previous bedroom, and the red semicircular window to the Honeymoon Room. Long mauve, red, orange, yellow and green sunfilter curtains hang in front of the northern windows, but let in light and colour. The overall impression of colour in this room is mauve, pink, green and yellow. The ceiling is again decorated in strong geometric designs, and the walls in bands or blocks of colour.

Three beds stand in a row at the far end of the room, and there is the usual bedroom furniture. Seven mirrors hang in this room: one heart-shaped, two rectangular, one cut like a large hand-mirror, one rectangular with the corners cut off, a crescent moon, and one on the wardrobe door which has been angled across a corner to reflect back into many of the passage bedroom mirrors. A bedside table also has a mirror on its surface.

On windowsills and ledges are many little ornaments, including seven plaster-of-paris mermaids, and on three windowsills a collection of shells.

Pictures comprise: Jesus as 'The Good Shepherd' carrying a lamb, a shepherdess with sheep, a Scottish girl hugging a collie dog entitled 'Twa Friends', two nude female photographs - part of the series in the previous bedroom, and one of a nude woman covered in a transparent veil, a contemplative woman, a statue of a nude woman carrying a pitcher - which has been interpreted twice in the Camel Yard in cement, a child's portrait (probably her niece Molly), and a photograph of Helen's mother.

Some of the furniture in this room is decidedly unusual, and part of Helen's creation. A circular table is supported with a cement snake coiled at the base and then rising up straight to hold the table top. Two cement owls stand up on their tails, leaning forward on their legs (which makes them look somewhat like frogs), and on their heads are balanced the upward-looking flattened faces of other owls. Jill Wenman said:



*These were her own invention. She was terribly excited about them. They were used as chairs - when I visited they were round the dining room table. You would sit with the beak between your legs and could rest your hands on the glass eyes on either side. They were also used as bird baths or bird-feeding tables in the garden. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).*

The wardrobe in this room is still filled with Helen's tiny fragile garments of muslin, white lawn and hand-made lace on hangers, (which people who knew her in her later years never saw her wearing); and rows of tiny, handmade, imported elegant shoes of the fashion of the 1920's and 30's.

These are the clothes of what must have once been a very delicate and feminine woman. It is interesting to speculate as to why she kept these garments for so many years when they had no part in the realities of her daily life; perhaps they were also part of the dreams and illusions which the house embodied. That they were kept by design and not by default is evident in her unwitnessed will (Appendix 9). She states:

6. *My clothes or personal belongings must not be sold or given away under any circumstances.*

There is a closed and locked door which leads off to the storeroom which she called 'Bluebeard's Chamber'.

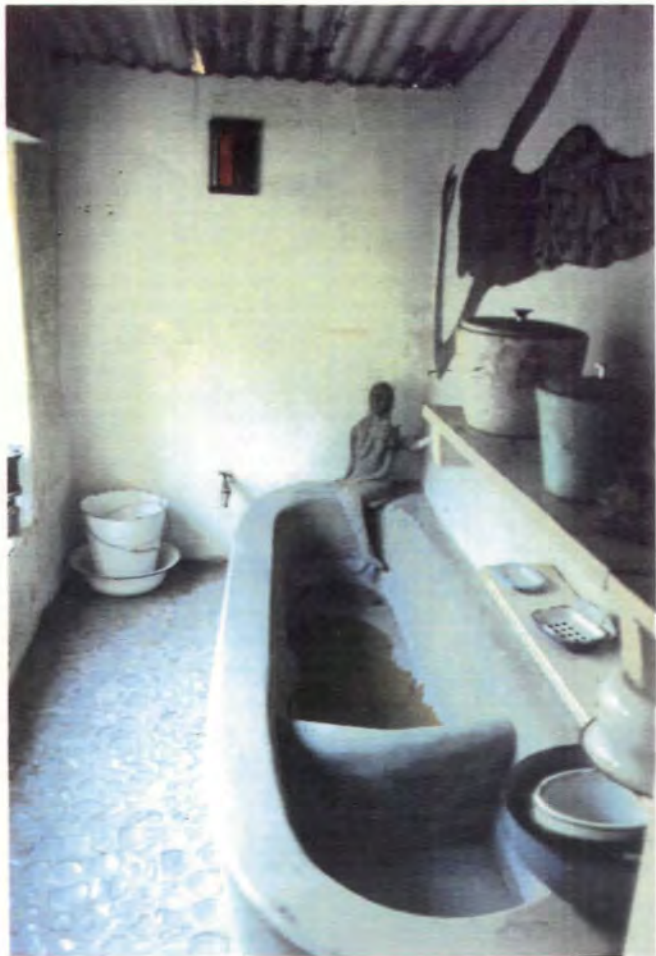
#### **Pantry (3.65m x 1.53m)**

This room, leading off the sitting room, is lined with shelves holding over 400 sealed fruit-bottling jars. Some of these are filled still with ancient bottled fruit. All the others however remain ready filled with sorted, ground, coloured glass, of various degrees of fineness and coarseness. In their own right they are visually most attractive.

Mrs Barbara Shaper said Helen told her that the preserves in the house which she had made 15 or 20 years earlier were too good to eat - they were just to look at. She also said that Helen was probably a very good cook in her time (interview Shaper, B. 1986). Many recipes cut out from newspapers, or written on scraps of paper tucked in books and drawers in the house, would seem to confirm this observation.

John Moyle said that Helen would take the round glass tops from some bottles of preserves to use as eyes for her cement owls or other statues, leaving the contents to go rotten in the bottles (interview Moyle, J. 1993). This shows very clearly where her priorities lay.

A pane of deep orange glass has been inserted above the plain textured glass of the small sash window. The pantry door is very low, not more than 1,5 metres high and has deep red glass inserted in its red painted, glass-encrusted frame. The little fanlight above is of clear textured glass.



Over 400 bottles stand on the shelves in the small pantry. Some are filled with old fruit and others with assorted shades and colours of ground glass. Daylight shines through orange glass in the window and red glass in the particularly small door leading off the sitting room.

The bathroom has a long window along one side and a little cement bath on the other, divided into two compartments. The floor is covered with clear glass fragments set in cement. The tap does not run into the bath but stands to one side. There is no ceiling in this room and bathing in winter must have been an ordeal, especially as water would have had to be heated on Helen's little primus stoves. A mermaid perches on the far end of the bath and a frog-footed woman swims along the wall above the bath.



The kitchen has a large window on the east side, looking out onto the Camel Yard.

Bottom left: Helen (left) is showing Peggy Delport the view through the window.

Centre left: The kitchen hearth is backed with a large pane of red glass with owls perched against it, and a cement fish swims across the front of the hearth. Primus stoves were the only cooking equipment which Helen used. They stand where the stove used to be, and to the left of the hearth stands a double-headed owl.

Centre right: Through the kitchen door is the back stoep where Helen ground glass.

Bottom right: The top half of the back door has a pane of red glass in it which lends the back stoep a very different countenance when viewed through it.





Some of the ordinary household items which acted as inspirations for many of the things depicted in The Owl House are on a trunk in the kitchen. There is the Sunbeam floor polish tin which had its face reproduced countless times, as in the huge sun painted on the kitchen ceiling (below). Others are a dressing table hand-mirror, which was reproduced on Helen's instructions, but to a far greater scale, by glass merchants in many parts of the country, and a plaster of paris model made from a rubber mould. This was the inspiration for the mermaids in the Camel Yard and the one in the bathroom.

### **Bathroom (1.26m x 2.24m)**

A large window was made on the longer outside wall of this small, narrow room, which was obviously added on to the house. There is no ceiling at all and just bare corrugated iron covers the bather from the sky. Anyone taller than 1,64 metres would knock his or her head on the door frame and beam inside. There is no door to the bathroom. The floor has pieces of broken bottle clear glass embedded flush with the cement. A narrow, shallow cement bath has been made against the other longer wall opposite the window, divided into a second, smaller compartment at the end closer to the doorway - perhaps to act as a wash basin. Perched on the far end of the bath is a small cement mermaid, and on the wall above the bath is a large, horizontal relief female swimmer wearing webbed flippers.

The bathroom has only rudimentary facilities, and the plumbing was not designed for practicality. The one tap does not even run into the bath, but comes out of the wall near the bath, and would require a bucket placed under it to put water into the bath. However, the bath itself does have a plug outlet; the smaller section does not. Numerous jugs, buckets, and dishes stand on shelves next to the bath. How Helen ever satisfactorily cleaned this rough bath surface is hard to imagine. In winter this room must have been icy cold with the large expanse of glass and no insulation, and not at all conducive to bathing. A small primus stove stands on the windowsill. From the height of the one small mirror on the far wall one can see what a very small woman she was - she was apparently less than 1,45 metres tall.

### **Kitchen (3.65m x 4.25m)**

In her later years Helen spent all her pension money on buying cement and paying Koos to make the statues, and survived on countless cups of tea, bran rusks and bread, and plates of food and milk supplied by concerned neighbours. Her lack of interest in food is very evident in the kitchen. The old stove recess has become mostly decorative and minimally functional. Mrs Tiny Hartzenberg, Helen's next door neighbour since 1927, said, '*Helen threw the stove out into the garden long ago*' (interview Hartzenberg, T. 1989). Against the red glass inserted at the back of the stove recess perches a row of four cement owls. A bas-relief fish, again in grey cement and with a blue glass eye, decorates the front of the one-time hearth. Pitiful little spirit stoves are all the cooking equipment available. A hollow has been made in the cement floor of the recess with one tap leading into it, but no outlet. This could have been to hold a very small washing-up bowl, at which one would have had to squat in order to wash up.

Another little owl perches above the window, and two owls stand on top of broad-based wine bottles carrying candles on their heads. Two cement figures created on top of bottles hold both arms straight up clutching candles. There is one of Helen's special double-faced owls, which also served



as chairs or birdbaths, standing in the kitchen.

There are many open shelves, and other cupboards, containing the usual kitchen paraphernalia of jugs, cups and saucers, plates, tea-cosies, bells, and so on. A vertically hung rectangular mirror has been attached, seemingly arbitrarily, to the shelving, but it is evidently to reflect another view of the Camel Yard from inside the kitchen.

The entire ceiling is dominated by an enormous sun created by Koos Malgas. It is painted onto a bright red ceiling, and is predominantly yellow, with green eyes and green, yellow, orange, navy, red and white rays. The red of the ceiling is exposed to make the defining lines of the face. Particularly coarse pieces of glass have been very effectively stuck onto the sun.

The utterly down-to-earth surprise which one encounters in the kitchen is a Sunbeam floor polish tin (standing on a glass-encrusted trunk), and to realize that this well-known stylized sun's face - a trade design for a commercial product - is what has been taken as the source for every sun which has been painted, or cut out of galvanized iron, in the entire property. In all probability this was the only appropriate object available to show Koos as an example of what Helen wanted him to create.

Also lying on this trunk is an old hand-mirror of the type which one finds on so many women's dressing tables. Helen apparently sent this away to have the design copied as a much larger but similar shaped mirror for hanging on the wall. When it arrived, she wrote back and said: *'Thank you, that is very nice, but now will you make another one, only bigger!'* These facts about the Sunbeam tin and the mirror were pointed out by Jill Wenman at The Owl House in December 1988.

The low circular cement table in the centre of the room has six kudu horns for legs. Piet van der Merwe proudly said he made it, and his signature is engraved in the cement top. It has been fixed to the floor with a central metal pipe.

Almost an entire wall has been replaced with a picture window of clear glass, allowing a wide, uninterrupted view of the Camel Yard. The top section of the back door has been replaced with a pane of clear red glass, which creates a strange view of the back porch through it. The fanlight is of textured red glass. On the floor, both inside and outside the back door, the inverted bottoms of clear bottles have been inserted into cement, creating an unusual and permanent surface.

One now enters quite a different world - 'A Camel Yard'.

## Chapter Seven

### A Camel Yard - the creative years continue

*Shape without form, shade without colour,  
Paralysed force, gesture without motion; ...*

*This is the dead land  
This is cactus land  
Here the stone images  
Are raised, here they receive  
The supplication of a dead man's hand  
Under the twinkle of a fading star.*

(from *The Hollow Men* by T S Eliot)

Visitors to Nieu Bethesda when Helen Martins was alive, would either hear about the strange lady who made cement sculptures in her garden, or come across them by chance as they walked past, and peer then in amazement through the fence. They might also have seen a diminutive weather-beaten woman scuttling out of sight behind a statue or round the corner.

What their eyes encountered would have been unexpected indeed. Surrounded by very high netting, and while Helen was alive, also largely enclosed at the top to imprison her many birds, this space was described by Helen herself, by writing in bent wire on the netting, as *A Camel Yard*. In another part of the fence is written a very clear statement: *This is My World*. The area itself is not large; the plot measures approximately 32 by 32 metres, and also contains the house.

Starting on the roadside outside the fence, and growing also in profusion inside the plot when Helen was alive, and until a number of years later (when all were arbitrarily removed by the Municipality), were the thrusting spiky spears of the 'Queen of the Night' cactus. At certain times of the year these white cactus blooms contrast, in their opulent and fleeting fragility, with the dry starkness of cement sculptures, brick towers, and cut-out galvanized-iron suns, stars, moons and steeples which fill the yard. The flowers (which are pollinated by moths) open during the cool secret night, and do not last long into the light and harsh heat of a day.

From the road, the house occupies the extreme left-hand (north-west) corner of the plot. To the right of the house one looks through the fence at the yard, and immediately adjacent to the house is a moon-gate. A moon-gate is normally a circular opening in a brick wall. This one is interesting

in that it is a free-standing circular brick structure, but the high fence in front of it prevents it being used as an entrance to the Camel Yard. Perched on top of it is an owl, which Jill Wenman says Helen called a 'two-faced owl'. This was because not only did it have faces on both sides, one looking out and one looking in, but '*it was also two-faced like the villagers, who said one thing to her face and other things behind her back.*' (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)

The initial impression when first entering the Camel Yard is of total confusion. There is too much for one's senses to absorb, to make sense of, to be able to discern any theme or pattern. Even when one climbs on the roof to view the yard from as great a distance as possible, there is no overall design which could be discerned by anyone other than Helen Martins. It is almost certain that no one could explain why she followed the path of inner compulsion that she did. The only possible way to attempt to make some sense of Helen's work seems to be by trying to understand the workings of her unconscious through a study of her life, and the universality of symbolism and the collective unconscious.

There are two major movements in the flow of the statues; the main one from north to south (which Helen called east), and the other from east to west, towards the moon-gate. These, however, are not rigidly imposed. There are approximately 469 cement sculptures and other structures in the Camel Yard and in the house, and 44 bas-reliefs in the yard and on the front and back porches - a phenomenal output and obviously the product of many years' work. Many of them are life, or nearly life-size, in proportion.

The choice of cement as the medium for their construction is interesting. It would be difficult to find a material which is less sympathetic, either aesthetically or with which to work. The most likely explanation for her choice is that cement was comparatively cheap and the material most readily available. The men who actually fashioned the sculptures would have been familiar with working with cement, from repairing their own homes if nothing else, and one, Piet van der Merwe, was actually a builder. Glass is the other material which has been extensively used in the Camel Yard - as a structural medium as well as for decorative purposes. This was freely available, largely as a waste material in the village and surrounds.

No grass or other soft vegetation, other than some weeds, grew on the ground. It was hard, bare and unadorned except where crushed glass was used as ground-cover. Koos Malgas said:

*Miss Helen didn't like it called a museum - she said it was her garden. She said she didn't have water for plants but she grew beautiful statues! She meant those were her plants.* (Interview Malgas, K. 1988)

Her sister, Annie, said:

*I think what triggered the cement sculpture side off was her success in making little sculptures of owls. She collected owl pictures.* (Interview le Roux, A. 1986)



Jean Parker

Helen amongst the statues in her Camel Yard (circa 1974).

Koos said that the very first article that he made for Helen was a surprisingly delicate little clay figure in an empty sardine tin. It was of a woman holding her hands to her head, taken from an image on a pill container. It is still in the house, on a windowsill in the sitting room. She then asked him to reproduce it again but much larger as a bas-relief on a cement slab. She was so pleased with the result that she employed him in place of Jonas Adams (interview Malgas, K. 1988). He says that he made a number of bas-reliefs, starting on the south facing wall of The Lion's Den and progressing to the cement water tank, until Helen allowed him to progress to free-standing statues (interview Malgas, K. 1993).

Jill Wenman said:

*The inspiration for many of the things in the garden came from things that are in the house. For instance the pictures in the long room at the end of the house - the Victorian nudes - were the inspiration for many of the sculptures. The Mona Lisas are translated into cement, and there's a little plastic nativity scene duplicated in the garden. Many of them, such as the little plaster-of-paris mermaids, were very small and have now been blown up to 100 times their size. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Helen gave the idea, and then Koos says he made it. He said that it was not always from a photograph:

*One didn't always look at a picture; like some of those mermaids, and the owls too. She would just say she wanted an owl, and then I made it. Sometimes the things were just from both our heads. (Interview Malgas, K. 1988)*

Apart from crushing glass, confirmed by Jonas Adams (interview Adams, J. 1991), who said that Helen poured the glass into the coffee mill while he turned the handle, the only actual labour that Helen did, according to Koos, was to carry buckets of water to wet the sculptures and keep them from drying out too quickly. She also used to pay the three little Malgas daughters two cents per bucket of water, or give them a 'botteltjie jam of konfynt' [bottle of jam or preserves].

Subject matter ranges so widely that it is impossible to discern a unifying theme or pattern from such eclecticism. There are some major subjects which are repeated over and over again, including such obvious ones as owls - of which there are 80 in the garden, house and on the stoep - and approximately 49 camels. The Mona Lisa appears many times in differing forms and interpretations, as do such things as peacocks (13), lambs (18), pyramids (12) and mermaids (14). Including all the owls, there are approximately 120 birds, of different types, and numerous images of the sun, moon and stars. Eastern philosophy and various religions, such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are portrayed in the form of statues, bas-reliefs, bottle edifices, structures and inscriptions formed in wire in various fences. They are more fully described later in this chapter.

From what Koos says, Helen had very specific ideas as to where each statue was to be sited. She did not work consistently from one end of the yard to the other, but all over the place, and they



were often working on more than one piece at once.

*Today I maybe made an owl and tomorrow a camel, then a mermaid. I didn't work every day on one thing. Miss Helen had a plan. "Koos, you must make me a little statue here, and it must look in that direction, or over there." (Interview Malgas, K. 1988)*

By the time she committed suicide there was not much space left for many more works in the yard. This has been put forward as a reason for her suicide. However Koos recounts that she had plans for transforming many more of the works with the addition of colour in the form of paint and glass. He recalls that Helen said camels were brown, not grey, and she wanted to cover them in brown glass, and the wise men with coloured paint (interview Malgas, K. 1988). This would have meant there was still a great deal of unfinished work to give purpose to her life, so lack of space, although not to be dismissed, was not necessarily the reason for her suicide.

Some of the mermaids outside the kitchen window, an ibis near them, a Bushman figure, five of the group of seven bodiless giraffes, and some of the camels and riders in the procession, are Jonas Adams' work. It is easy to distinguish them from Koos Malgas' creations. Koos's work has a fineness, sophistication and finish which is mostly not evident in Jonas' work.

Jonas Adams was born in May 1900 and said when interviewed at his daughter's home in Nigel, Transvaal, that he had fought in '*Jannie Smuts se oorlog*', [*Jannie Smuts's war*], and worked for Helen who was a very kind woman, and '*n lig in die donkerde, vir omtrent 10 jaar, nie minder nie*' [*a light in the darkness, for about 10 years, not less*']. He continued:

*Sy besluit en ek maak. Sy was my handlanger. Koos het my gecopy. (Interview Adams, J. 1991)*

*[She decided and I made. She was my assistant. Koos copied me.]*

Koos said that he made the sculptures by starting with a wire framework bent to the desired shape, which supported chicken wire, and the cement was then worked onto this. The wire used he says was 'bloudraad' - a fairly thick-gauge fencing wire. Only occasionally in some exceptionally large parts of a sculpture, such as the neck or body of a big camel, would he fill in to a certain degree with pieces of broken brick or rubble to save on cement. It seems that it was he who decided on the method of construction. A product known as 'Adhesive' he says, was used where extra strength was required - for instance in the structures made from bottles, or to stick glass onto the sculptures. This was applied in a thin coat to the cement after it was dry. It was also sometimes mixed with the cement. It was purchased from a hardware store in Graaff-Reinet, and came in white powder form which was mixed with water.

Every available surface, vertical as well as horizontal, was used by Helen as providing scope for expression. All the outside walls are adorned with bas-reliefs, as is one cement water tank in the



Helen showing a visitor round the Camel Yard



From the street curious visitors would read high up on the surrounding fence the words A CAMEL YARD cut out from galvanised iron. The Queen of the Night cactus flowers which Helen so loved have not yet wilted in later heat of the day.

Henry Clemens



These photographs of different views of the Camel Yard were taken from the roof of The Owl House to see if there was any discernable pattern evident in the placement of statues. However, on the whole it appears rather chaotic from above, and apart from the very evident movement by one large section towards the south (which Helen designated East), there does not seem to have been any master plan to which she worked. Statues following a specific theme are often grouped together, such as the pyramids or the mermaids, but others seem to have been placed wherever there was a suitable gap for them.





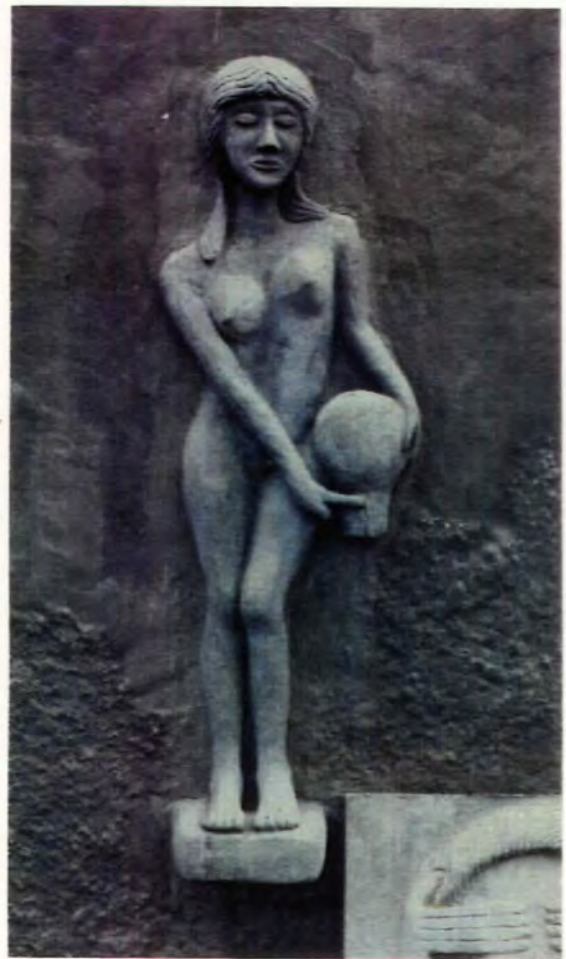
Helen gave Koos Malgas the task of copying an illustration on the packaging for headache powders, before she decided to employ him. This he made from clay contained in a sardine can (top left). She was so pleased with this first attempt that she got him to copy it again on cement slab (below), and thus began the successful partnership which lasted for some 12 years. A little wooden figure of an ibis and two plaster of paris models of a mermaid served as inspiration for other sculptures in the Camel Yard.



Above: A cement ibis and two mermaids copied from little ornaments inside the house which were made by Jonas Adams.

Below: The cement table and enamel bowls on the back stoep where Helen ground, washed and sorted her coloured glass.





Top left: The photograph of a water carrier hanging in the centre of this arrangement was used as a guide to make two cement versions of this figure in the Camel Yard. One is free standing and the other afixed to the southern wall of the Lion's Den.





Another photograph, this time of a reclining nude figure, which was copied in cement and placed next to a bottle-lined pool. Helen's sister Alida was also photographed in a similar pose based on this same photograph.

garden. Various quotations, but mostly taken from the writings of Omar Khayyam, are inscribed with twisted wire in the wire netting surrounding the property. The wire, which was the same as that used to reinforce the sculptures, was bent with pliers said Koos. *'It was difficult, but Miss Helen showed me nicely,'* he said. Other quotations are made from cut-out galvanized iron. In the earlier years, when the yard was divided up into aviary sections, there were more internal fences which also carried other quatrains from Helen's beloved Omar Khayyam. Evidence of these only exists in a few rare photographs taken at the time.

The East would seem to have made a profound impression on Helen, and she reflected this in much of her work. Some of the earlier sculptures are of subjects such as pyramids, sphinxes and Buddhas; and then the vast procession of camels, wise men and shepherds marching to the east. Except that it was not actually true east, but Helen's personal east - defined by her by writing, in the wire netting on the south boundary fence, **East Oos**. (The bilingual touch is very charming). Koos said:

*The only mistake she made was with those camels. She said to me later that she'd made a big mistake, because they weren't walking east.* (Interview Malgas, K. 1988)

Jill Wenman said:

*She felt she didn't want the wise men not to arrive at their destination, so she created a destination for them; but where they were already marching to wasn't east, so she had to make her own!*

*One of the things she wanted to do before she died was to build Meccas. She wanted to find out what Mecca looked like, but it was very difficult. She had an extraordinary correspondence with the Young Men's Muslim Association, asking them please to send her a picture of Mecca, because she wanted to build it in her garden! Finally she built symbolic Meccas from bottles - the absolute antithesis of what the young Muslim men would have appreciated! Altogether she built six Meccas - a whole series and all different. One is a sort of Bethlehem type with a manger - not the nativity scene though. On top of them are inverted coloured brandy goblets to catch the light.* (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)

Koos however is emphatic that only two of the bottle structures were intended to be 'Meccas' - the one with the inverted red glass brandy goblet on top of it, and the other with a little pool inside it (interview Malgas, K. 1993).

It must surely be symbolically significant that even in her spiritual pilgrimage, Helen was heading in what seemed to be a false direction. But then again, destinations are often arrived at by devious routes. Esther Harding in 'Women's Mysteries' writes:

*Mystics in all ages have recognized that transformation may take place through the downward-going road, although we, with our Western philosophy of progress, advance, and the increased control of life through rational science, have lost sight of this fact. The Gnostics said for instance: "To go up or go down, it is all the same," and William Blake wrote that it matters little whether a man take the right road or the*

*wrong one, provided he follow it sincerely and devotedly to the end, for either road may lead him to his goal* (Harding, M. E. 1986: 151).

Onward, onward - ever motionlessly onward - marches the caravan of camels and wise men reaching out towards their destination: the birth of the Christ child, or Mecca, bypassing on the way oblivious buddhas, and mermaids sitting in pools made from inverted bottles. Jill Wenman said:

*Camels are things that survive periods of drought and hardship in the desert. Her life here was very much a desert existence in a way.*

Some of the wise men's robes have been very effectively painted in bright colours, breaking the overall dull greyness of the cement. A striking characteristic of these sculptures is that though they all evince great urgency and action (albeit frozen), they show absolutely no emotion. There is a quality almost reminiscent of Greek archaic sculptures in their impassive faces.

The wise men are not the only statues reaching out. In fact this yearning/reaching is a notable feature of the Camel Yard. There are a number of sun-worshippers, little nude female figures with arms reaching upwards, which Koos says were inspired from a figure on the handle of a small bell in the house (this cannot now be found). Some of them balance precariously on the top of towers made from bottles.

Other figures reaching out, but in a different fashion, are what Jill called the 'Dutch Ladies'. *'The source of these women was a picture of a Dutch lady in a big dress.'* However, Koos Malgas says they were derived from a figure atop a little dinner bell (interview Malgas, K. 1993). Most are reaching out to welcome and guide the visitor in through the moon-gate. These figures have a great deal of feminine charm and grace, and their method of construction is extremely effective and unusual. The skirts are constructed from ascending tiers of green or brown beer bottles through which amber light glows. From just below the waist, upwards, they are made from cement, with bodices encrusted in coloured glass. Large pieces of amethyst or other coloured glass adorn wrists and fingers as jewellery, and their cement hair is stiffly swept up into French topknots.

One of the Dutch Ladies is reaching out offering a bottle of beer to a somewhat gross old man in red-painted garments, seated cross-legged and leaning complacently back in a cement chair with his arms behind his head. Jill says that he used to have a beard made from sheepskin, and that this was called the 'debauchery corner'. Another figure in this part of the yard, just outside the kitchen window, is the 'Cock Man' - a very strange man-rooster figure, with his trousers unbuttoned. Jill explained:

*That came from one of those cartoon postcards that her sister sent her from Warner Beach. On the bottom it said:*

*"Now he knows the terrible fate,  
Who overcomes all gluttons*



*He will reform before it's too late,  
And do up all his buttons!"*

Jill said the mermaids are reaching out to the passer-by as if to say, 'Come into my pool, come into my pool!' One of the mermaids clutches an incongruous yellow plastic comb. Near the moon-gate stands another figure - reaching out to wave goodbye with one hand and blowing a kiss with the other, according to Jill. One female figure with both hands stretched out together as if giving or receiving, is apparently of Helen herself, according to both Koos and Jill. Koos said it was an earlier work of Jonas Adams' which he, Koos, later added to. Helen had a great love for birds, so it is possible that she was depicted feeding them.

Two female figures hasten along urgently with the camel procession, with stiff cement hair streaming behind - the taller one leading the little one by the hand. Jill says that Helen gave her this piece as a birthday present - which was to remain in the garden - and that it was of Jill and Helen themselves; '*She was showing me the east*'. Nearby stand a number of lambs.

'*She wanted worshipping figures in the garden,*' said Jill. A dramatic and totally original and unusual worshipper appears to be something of an acrobat, bending over backwards in an arc, and wearing a skirt encrusted with large pieces of deep blue glass, and a bodice made with clear plain or textured glass fragments. Jill had said to her:

*You're supposed to worship the other way in Mecca - not backwards. To which Helen replied, "That is rather silly, because if you bend the other way you can't see the sun or the other things you're suppose to be worshipping!" Helen always worshipped the moon, and this is a figure worshipping the moon, in a way in which she could see it. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

A shelter of green and brown bottles contains the Nativity scene, with the infant Jesus lying in a cement crib, Mary and Joseph in attendance, and a kneeling figure worshipping. Nearby stand an appealing donkey covered in crushed brown glass, a beast, and some lambs. There is a particular charm and gentleness about this scene, and maybe more expression than in the faces of most of the other sculptures.

There are four little hooded figures in various places in the yard, holding lambs. '*Miss Helen said the shepherd must have a "kappetjie" ["little cap"] - he was cold in the snow,*' said Koos.

Another strange and slightly sinister hooded figure, with a caterpillar twisted round it, comes from an illustration by William Blake, as does his Adam and Eve, which illustrated the *Temptation and Fall*, in an early edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

One of the most unusual amongst all these images is a large figure combining a camel's body with spread wings and an owl's face. Standing on it is a woman with arms stretched out and 'ruby nipples', according to Jill. She said that this was one of Helen's favourite pieces and as far as she knew, her own conception. Other figures which combine animal, or human and animal elements, are a cat-owl reaching out with little hands, the 'Cock-Man', sphinxes, mermaids, an owl with webbed feet, on friezes swimming women with what look like webbed-feet, but which Koos said (interview 1993) are rubber 'frog-feet' that swimmers use for speed, and the many suns with human faces.

Many structures reach up heavenwards. There are two red-brick towers, topped with silver painted metal stars. Numerous long metal poles hold up metal stars, red perspex stars (now rapidly disintegrating), crescent moons, and suns. There are four churches, all with steeples. One is painted white, with a black metal roof and black steeple. There are green, blue and brown windows in the steeple, and a cement female figure leans out of a lower window holding out a white enamel candlestick. A second church, the smallest, was inspired by a Christmas card said Jill Wenman, and is white-painted cement, with a black cock on top of the steeple. The third has a silver roof, and a cement steeple. Entire, heavy, brown, green and blue bottles are built into the walls as windows.

The fourth and largest of the churches is cement coloured, with a black metal roof and a silver spire topped with a star. It has red glass windows, and a black-painted recess at the back of the spire, about 1,8 metres high, which can easily accommodate one person, particularly one as small as Helen was. On a wall inside there is a cement relief of two praying hands. Scratched into cement on the wall are the well-known words:

*God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change  
Courage to change the things I can  
And wisdom to know the difference.*

According to local residents, in earlier years Helen did attend the imposing Dutch Reformed Church, which is only about three blocks away from The Owl House (interview Retief, G. 1993). However, she seems to have withdrawn more and more from the social life of the village. She was extremely self-conscious about her feet. She had had the two little toes amputated when in her sixties. Thereafter she could not wear shoes and felt that everyone looked at her and talked about her when she appeared in public. Mrs Stella Swiers said she then built her own church (interview Swiers, S. 1993).

Blignaut de Villiers said:

*She couldn't go to church because she was embarrassed about her feet. But she did want to go to church, so she built her own little church. It's a nice little thing that she built, and it was just big enough that she could slide in there and say her prayers, and then she would come out again. (Interview De Villiers, B. 1989)*

The front of the tower has a clock face inscribed with numerals for the hours, and within that circle, on of a smaller diameter inscribed with letters for the 12 months of the year - in both English and Afrikaans. Attached to the hands of the clock are two taut wires being pulled on by two straining figures. Jill Wenman said that these figures were once part of a triple group depicting the swift passage of time, and that one crucial figure in this group was missing.

*There is an old man, and then there was a little boy, now no longer there, kneeling down and looking up at the clock - that was the old man thinking back to when he was young, and about the fact that he's growing older and time is running out. The two people are holding back the hands of time. Helen was very preoccupied with the fact that her time and her life were running out and that there wouldn't be enough time to finish what she had to do. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

(Note: Since returning to Nieu Bethesda in 1991 to restore The Owl House, Koos Malgas has



A sunworshipper balanced on a tower of bottles (top left); welcoming Dutch ladies and a peacock (bottom left); worshipping wise men and the seated figure of 'Helen' with her two little toes missing (top right); and two female figures hurrying along with the procession, which Helen said represented her and Jill Wenman, according to Jill (bottom right).





The Debauchery Corner where are found the Cock Man with unbuttoned trousers, a seated man leaning back being served beer by one of the delicate Dutch ladies. Perched on the kitchen window sill behind is a row of owls. On the left is a seated man keeping guard on one side of the steps leading to the Lion's Den.





The female figure with outstretched hands represents Helen, according to Koos Malgas. She is either feeding the birds or waiting to receive something. Behind her is a vast galvanised iron sun, with mouth made from red perspex, and blue perspex for the eyes. Below is the backwards bending figure which Helen said was worshipping the moon, and could do so better in this position than if she were kneeling down.





Above left: Mermaids beckoning to passers by as if saying, 'Come into my pool, come into my pool.'  
 Centre left: A hooded shepherd holding a lamb. Behind, a woman holding an enamel candlestick leans out of a window in the church spire.  
 Centre right: Near the moon gate at the edge of the property this figure waves goodbye whilst blowing a kiss.  
 Below left: Helen's own imaginary creation of the winged camel owl with the woman with 'ruby nipples' standing on its back.  
 Below right: The nativity scene housed inside a bottle structure.





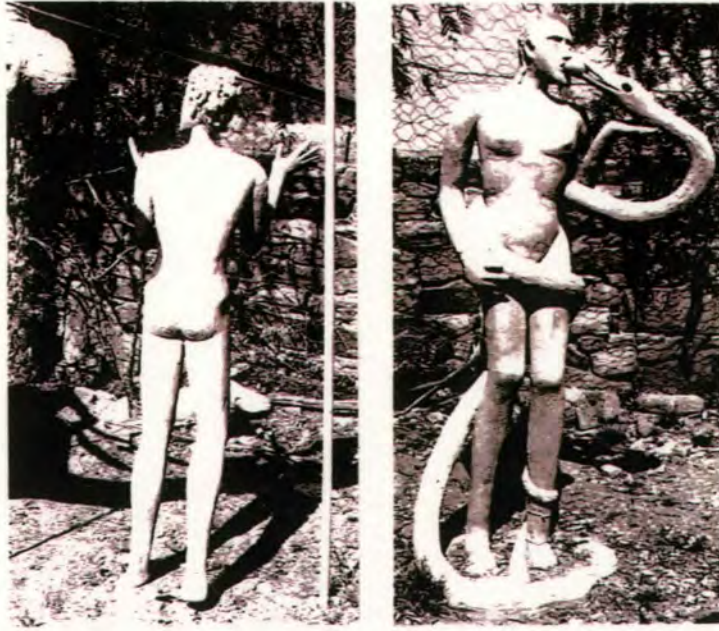
What is Man!



I have said to the Worm, Thou art my mother & my sister

Bottom left and right: Illustrations by William Blake for *The Gates of Paradise*. Top: Sculptures from these engravings in the Camel Yard.





106 *Temptation and Fall*, from *Paradise Lost*, 1808 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Bottom: William Blake's illustration from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In the Camel Yard (above left) Adam and (above right) Eve and the serpent.





This strange figure of a bushman was made by the first man who worked with Helen, Frans Olifant, according to Piet van der Merwe who later did a large amount of the construction work on the property. Behind are four of the group of seven giraffes. According to Jill Wenman, Helen said their bodies were 'underground'.





Left above: Two figures straining to hold back time - the clock hands on the steeple - while the old man (figure in shadow) thinks back to the time when he was young.  
Bottom and right: Details of these figures.



Right: Three spires in the late afternoon sunshine. At the back of the far church tower (left) is a black painted recess with two cement praying hands and inscribed in wet cement the well-known prayer:

*God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change  
Courage to change the things I can  
And wisdom to know the difference.*







Above: Painted cement owls perched on a log in the Camel Yard. Below: A broken section of Helen's own invention, the owl totem poles.

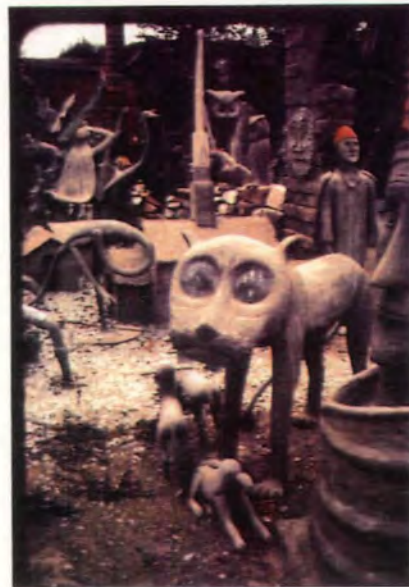




The injured stork which Helen healed eventually flew away, and she had it immortalized in painted relief on the south-facing wall of the Lion's Den, above a bas-relief sun.



Left: The two Easter Island Long Ears - above the one a sun-worshipper balancing on a tower of green bottles, and (right) the lion with wire whiskers and car headlight glass for his eyes. This statue used to have two lambs next to it and they have now vanished. However, these lambs can still be seen in a photograph (bottom) taken a few years before Helen's death.



Joan Parker





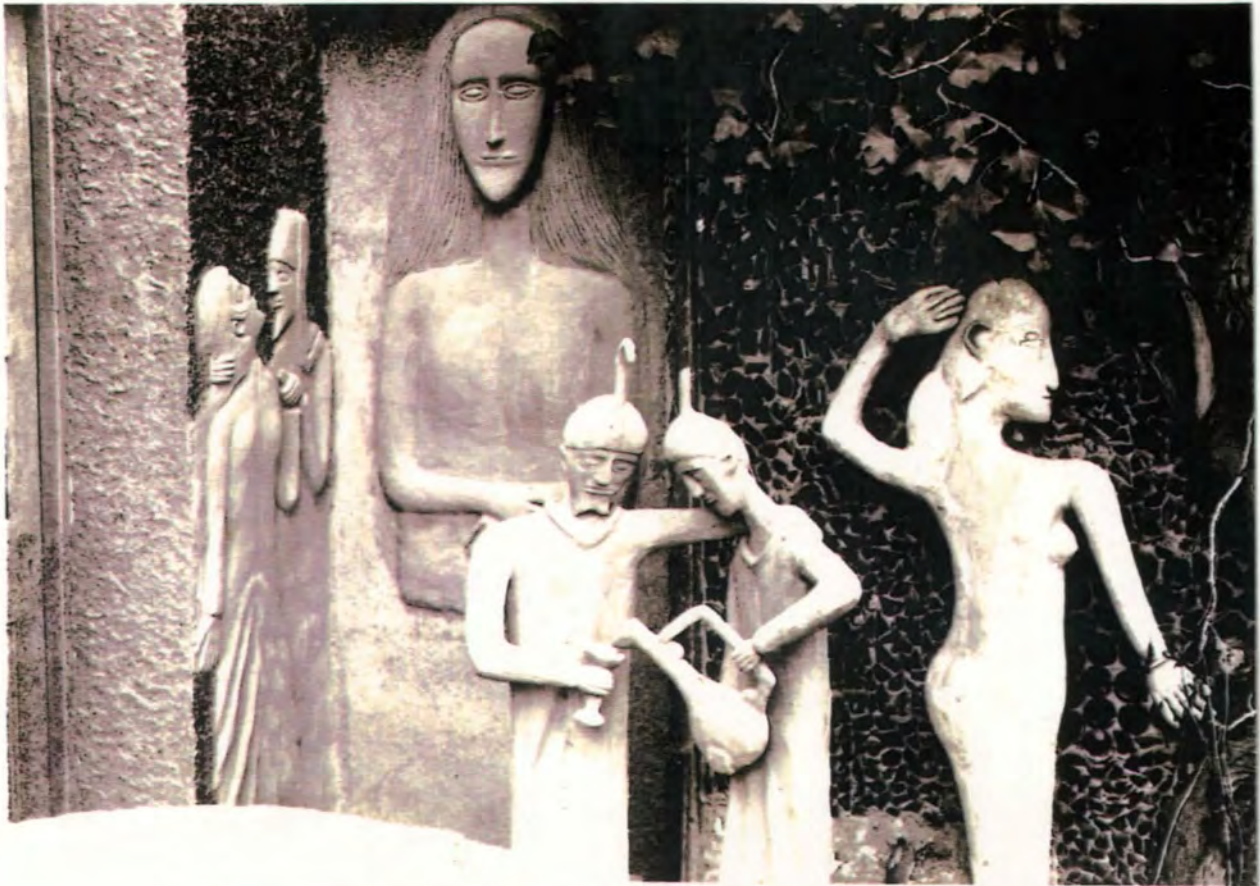
Top: A corner of the Lion's Den with the stork and sun clearly visible on the south wall, and the door into the room on the east-facing wall. (Bottom left and right) Seated on each side of the door are two figures with a seated cat next to one and a sleeping cat next to the other.



Above left: The cement watertank with a number of bas-reliefs on it, including the Mona Lisa (left) and another headache pill lady. Below left are more figures: A young lady from South China and the Japanese healing effigy.

Top right: A small 'Kompasberg' with peacocks perched atop it. In the late afternoon light they cast shadows on the neighbour's wall behind them. Below right: The archway surmounted with numerous birds and standing to attention on each side of the arch two men each wearing a red fez. In the foreground are the moon worshipper and the lion with wire whiskers.





Scenes faithfully copied from illustrations in Helen's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam* are portrayed in sculptures and bas-reliefs on the back stoep. The two lovers (left above and in colour below), are from Quatrain 57:  
*You know, my Friends, how bravely in my House  
 For a new Marriage I did make Carouse;  
 Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,  
 And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.*



The romantic Quatrain 12 in the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam* is depicted in cement, situated under a tree in the Camel Yard:

*A Book of verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread - and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness -  
Oh, Wilderness were paradise enow!*





Jean Parker



Jean Parker

When Helen was alive there were many more fences erected to keep birds inside the Camel Yard. Top: this fence which had verses from Omar Khayyam written in twisted wire, has long-since vanished. Below: this small section of fence still exists, standing alone in the northern section of the yard, with a pointing cement hand attached to the wire:

*The Moving Finger writes: and, having writ,  
 Moves on: nor all the Piety nor Wit  
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
 Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

recreated the missing figure of a baby).

The 'forest' of seven giraffes' heads and necks, also tall structures reaching up, is inexplicably strange. Fortunately Jill could elucidate on Helen's unusual, and humorous, reasoning behind them:

*When I asked her why they didn't have bodies, she said, 'But they do have bodies; the bodies are just underground!' She said they weren't decapitated, she wanted them to be life-size giraffes, but they had to be able to reach the grass. When these little shrubs were growing it would have been very difficult for them, so she just pushed them underground! (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Other towering pieces were totem poles made from owls standing one on top of the other with outstretched wings. These now no longer stand - there are just the broken elements lying around. Jill said:

*These totem poles stood in the aviaries and were her own inspiration. They were original pieces rather than derivative, and served as perches for the birds.*

Many different varieties of birds are represented in the Camel Yard. In addition to all the owls, there are four blue cranes, four doves, two ibises, two roosters, 13 peacocks, five kiewietjies, four pelicans, two storks, and two hens. What is very difficult to visualize now is that the garden was once a living, active place, full of ongoing work, not to mention the sound and activity of a multitude of Helen's beloved live birds. Much of it was completely covered over with wire netting to contain the birds. Koos says that the top was covered with 'pig netting,' which has apertures large enough to let doves fall through, but not to allow them to fly out again. The mermaids' pools were for birds. Koos used to fill them up with water every week, and the wild geese would swim in them and all the birds would drink from them. So they were functional objects as well as decorative, and water was an essential element in the Camel Yard. The other objects which were used as bird baths and feeding tables, were the upturned concave faces of the owls balancing on standing owls. Today, only the pool next to the cement water tank has any water in it.

Anne Emslie wrote her UNISA Hons. thesis on this very topic of the crucial missing elements of water and live birds from the art environment. She emphasises just how important the water was to Helen, in that to keep all the little ponds filled was a major exercise. She writes:

*It was no small task to ensure that the **dammetjies** and birdbaths were always kept filled with water. It was an act of dedication and a labour of love. Koos Malgas, who made both the **dammetjies** and the half-faced owl birdbaths, recalls how every Wednesday he was required to make numerous trips with buckets down to the stream that runs past the front of the house. He would haul the buckets back to the garden and laboriously fill up each **dammetjie** and every birdbath. The effort required to maintain the water in the garden is testimony to the importance of this element for Helen Martins.*

*However the significance of the water extends beyond the needs of the birds to become a central part of the meaning of the space. ... the presence of the water (is crucial) to a correct understanding of the art environment. (Emslie, A. 1989: 40-41.)*



Apparently Helen had kept goldfish in the early days, and wanted to breed tortoises, but her birds ate their eggs (interview Le Roux, A. 1986). Birds were of great importance to her: she kept peacocks, laughing doves, Egyptian geese, bantams, and often wild birds that had been injured, which she nursed back to health. The bas-relief flying stork, painted white with red legs, which virtually dominates the south wall of the house (a wall of the Lion's Den), was an injured bird that she had looked after until it was well, said Jill.

Blignaut de Villiers said:

*In the beginning of course, the yard was totally covered with a wire mesh, and she had - oh man, she had birds in that place. And the beauty of it is they were all tame, and they were nesting in little hollows on the Buddhas, and all over. That made it look so cute. But later on the mesh started going to pieces, and the black man who originally helped her to get all that mesh over that huge yard, and to also turn the mealiemeul mill, for her to grind the glass to splinters; he at times would disappear for a long time, and so, somehow with wind and storms, the wire started collapsing and the birds got out.*

*I can remember the last time that I was there, there was hardly any birds, and she battles to keep the place up and keep it the way she likes it. (Interview De Villiers, B. 1989)*

In addition to birds and water, plants were another intrinsic element in Helen's concept of the Camel Yard. Photographs taken during the 1970s, when she was still working there and showing sympathetic visitors around, all prove that trees, the Queen of the Night cactus, some other smaller succulents, ivy and pelargoniums were part of her overall design. The municipality has in recent years seen fit to remove, without good reason, every vestige of plantlife and greenery, and reduced the yard to a barren desert-like place, which changes yet further the entire atmosphere which Helen had created.

Figures from many cultures and religions are incorporated in the whole, eclectic combination. Two Easter Island 'Long Ears' figures, one with the added strange top-knot of Helen's invention, stand near the 'debauchery corner', and written in the cement base of the one are the words 'The Long Ears'. Jill Wenman's father, Stan Wenman, initially told Helen about them, and she was so fascinated that he then sent her pictures and diagrams so that she could construct them. He says that she did not take much notice of the technical diagram, but adapted the picture as it suited her.

The lion with wire whiskers and car headlights for eyes is walking towards the 'Lion's Den'. Jill said:

*One thing that's been removed is a lamb which was with the lion. [These lambs can be seen in slides taken in the Camel Yard at this time, by Jean Parker]. The Lion's Den is the one room which she never let me go and see. It was sealed off, and covered in black glass. She said it was her father's room. She didn't like that room, and called it The Lion's Den. The figures sitting there [on the steps] are guarding the room. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

These two figures sitting on either side of the two steps leading to the Lion's Den, are two closed-looking and uncommunicative figures. Koos says that the one on the left is a woman, but this is difficult to see. The one on the right is a man. Each has a cat next to him or her - one of which is sleeping (interview Malgas, K. 1993).

A bas-relief frieze surrounds the cement watertank. Koos said these were some of the earliest works which he made. Of the eight figures on it, one is, according to the inscription underneath, 'The Young Lady of South China'; and a second a Japanese healing effigy, or 'witchdoctor' according to Koos. It has many sharpened little teeth. Written underneath it is:

*O his image a wooden GOD  
is supposed to possess healing  
powers. The patient first rubs his  
afflicted body on the painful spot and then  
rubs the wooden figure in the identified place  
which is supposed to effect a cure  
Outside the Temple at Kyoto JAPAN*

The other figures on the tank are two Mona Lisa's, with, below their long hair, glass embedded in their lower sleeves. Written underneath the one are the words 'The Stream.' Another figure is the other rendition of the lady from the pill container with her hands to her forehead. Beyond the Japanese figure are three owls balanced on a branch. Attached to the tank is a water trough, with three mermaids and a pelican perched on the corners and reflected in the water.

Some other strange figures are seemingly recumbent camels, but with large glass-encrusted mound-like bodies. One has a buddha on its back; the second a small pyramid, and the third a little sun-worshipper standing on a plinth of four green bottles.

The 12 pyramids which line the eastern boundary of the property are not all made to the same design. Ten are stepped and made in cement; one has smooth sloping cement sides; and the third is encrusted with large pieces of glass and on top is balanced what could be a type of metal lantern. Four sphinxes on slabs are sited in the area of the pyramids. One has 'THE GREAT SPHINX' written in the cement base, and a second: 'stone statue of a Sphinx.' Each one is different from the others. The source of these sphinxes was apparently the lion depicted on a *Lion* matchbox (interview Malgas, K. 1993).

In the far south-east corner of the yard is built a 'mountain' which Koos speaks of as 'Spitskop'. Both Koos and Jill say it was meant to represent Kompasberg, which dominates the northern horizon of Nieu Bethesda and is the highest peak in the Cape Province. It was painted white on top to resemble the snow in winter; Koos said the snow lasts the longest on this high peak. Perched on either side of the mountain are two peacocks with sweeping tails.

The large brick archway, cement-washed, is impressive though not very attractive. It is virtually in the centre of the yard. On top of the central upright column above the arch is an owl with

outstretched wings. On the next level down are two peacocks with long tails, a stork poised as if about to take off, and another owl - also with outstretched wings. On one side of the archway is a sun in relief, with the same face as that depicted on all the other suns, and on the other an owl in relief. Standing to attention on the insides of the archway are two figures wearing long robes and red-painted fezzes. Red perspex stars, which once were held aloft on long metal rods, now hang down broken and forlorn. This was probably meant to be one of the most imposing structures of all. It was constructed by Piet van der Merwe. The sculptures were made by Koos Malgas. He said that he had to use a scaffold to construct them on site, as otherwise they could not have been lifted up to that height (interview Malgas, K. 1993).

Almost the entire frieze on the back stoep depicts verses from the version of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* which was illustrated by Robert Stewart Sherriffs (Fitzgerald, E. 1974). This 'precious' book was given to Helen by Don MacLennan, and Jill Wenman says that she made this frieze as a tribute to him. She did however own her own copy before he gave her this special book. There are 16 bas-relief figures in the frieze, and one on the circular cement table on the back stoep which is a repeat of the figure on the longest wall, holding the Islamic star and crescent moon symbol. Three free-standing statues in the back stoep and yard are derived from this source.

By the back door is a rooster - a somewhat larger version of the little one on the church steeple - which Jill says Helen made 'to wake her in the morning', and an impassive eastern-looking figure stands next to him. There are a number of other seemingly unrelated figures dotted around the whole area of the yard. Initially some nearly pass unnoticed in all the density and confusion, until on closer observation one sees that many of them have particular charm and grace.

Written in bent and twisted wire fixed to the netting fence are verses or sayings which obviously particularly appealed to Helen. Most of them are from her beloved *Omar Khayyam*. Some are difficult to decipher because the mesh of the netting is confusing. Some of the quotations which have previously been recorded cannot now be found; early photographs however show how different the yard was when sections were completely netted in, and it was on some of these now vanished vertical fences that verses were written. Other sections appear to have some words missing.

On a section of netting outside the workshop in the yard is a cement hand with a pointing finger, seemingly floating, and formed in wire letters on the netting is the following quotation from *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (Fitzgerald, E. 1974: p.78.):

**The moving finger writes and having writ  
moves on nor all thy piety nor [wit]  
shall lure it back to (cancel half a line)  
nor all thy tears (wash out a word of it)  
(words here in brackets are missing)**

On the western fence, in letters cut from galvanised iron and legible from outside the property are

the words, **A CAMEL YARD**. **This is my world**, legible from inside the property, is written in script from twisted wire. And high in the southern boundary fence, in galvanized iron, cut out, is: **EAST OOS**, and also, to the left, and lower down, in twisted wire script: **And then the Moon !** - with a round galvanized iron moon next to it. Nearby, also from *Omar Khayyam*, in wire script, is (Fitzgerald, E. 1974: p. 89):

**And the Caravan moves for the North //**  
**Oh make haste ///**  
**Ah love / could thou and I with fate conspire**  
**To grasp this sorry Scheme of things entire**  
**Would not we shatter it to bits - and then**  
**Re-mould it nearer to the Hearts Desire /**

From inside the Camel Yard and to the left of the moon-gate is reproduced the scene depicted in the picture of the Moroccan Carpet Seller which hangs in the sitting room. Cement and coloured glass 'persian carpets' hang on the fence nearby as well as lying on the ground under the recumbent figure of the sleeping carpet seller. Inscribed on the fence in twisted wire is the text copied from the picture:

**Dreaming of the Golden Road to Samarkand -**  
**A Moroccan Carpet Seller Careless of his Wares**  
**takes his - Midday siesta**  
**Beneath the Burning Sun**

**The roadside vendor of pottery and rugs**  
**sleeps with fatalistic calm**  
**trusting to Allah to preserve his merchandise**  
**from robbers**

Also in the western fence, through the moon-gate, and written, in twisted wire script to be legible from outside the property, is:

**Oh, fill The Cup // what boots it**  
**to repeat how Time is slipping**  
**underneath our Feet :**  
**Unborn Tomorrow, and**  
**dead yesterday,**  
**Why fret about them**  
**if Today be sweet ///**

Further to the left along this fence, and facing out to where the moon would have set, but written - in cut out galvanized iron - to be read from inside the yard, are the following poignant words (Fitzgerald, E. 1974: p. 89):



**Ah MOON of my Delight who knows't no wane  
The MOON of Heaven is rising once again  
How oft hereafter rising shall she Look  
Through this same Garden After me - In vain/**

Jill Wenman said that every time of all the many times that she came to stay with Helen at Nieu Bethesda, Helen would bring her here - and read it to her:

*It used to give me quite a bad feeling. She used to feel her impending death quite acutely. The idea of the moon coming up and looking for her after she was dead - that's just such a haunting sort of thing. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

## Chapter Eight

### Light creating years - and darkness

*Is it like this  
In death's other kingdom  
Waking alone  
At the hour when we are  
Trembling with tenderness  
Lips that would kiss  
Form prayers to broken stone*

(from *The Hollow Men* by T S Eliot)

It was within a year or two of her thirtieth birthday when Helen came back to Nieu Bethesda to look after her parents. She could not then have known that this was to be her home for the rest of her life - a further half century - and that she would have eventually transformed it into her own unique self-created world from which she would be unable to tear herself away.

Her growing obsession with introducing light into her life, both through her own ingenious creations and the manipulation of natural and man-made light sources, was always underlaid with a darkness that must have been a response to a number of difficult and painful events experienced during her lifetime. Some of these occurrences are known now, but the most crucial to an understanding of Helen and the whole extraordinary expression of her unconscious will probably never be fully understood. Either she buried whatever it was too deeply to even acknowledge to herself, or felt she could not talk to anyone about what had happened.

Some of the early contributory factors to the way she developed have been discussed in previous chapters. Seminal amongst these were that she was a 'replacement' child for a dead sibling - the first 'Helen Elizabeth' was born in 1891 - and also the youngest child of a tired mother who, by the age of 35, had borne ten babies. Her mother was thereafter an invalid, and for the first crucial six months of Helen's life was not available for bonding to take place between mother and baby. It is very likely that Hester Martins distanced herself from her husband after this time - it must be significant that she bore no more children after Helen. Helen had an extremely strange father, who had great difficulty handling interpersonal relationships, and who she seems to have hated. Professor Eleanor Nash of the Department of Psychiatry at Groote Schuur hospital has suggested that his state could have had genetic causes, and that he may even have been schizophrenic (interview Nash, 1989). In her father's old age, when Helen held the more dominant position in the relationship, she and her

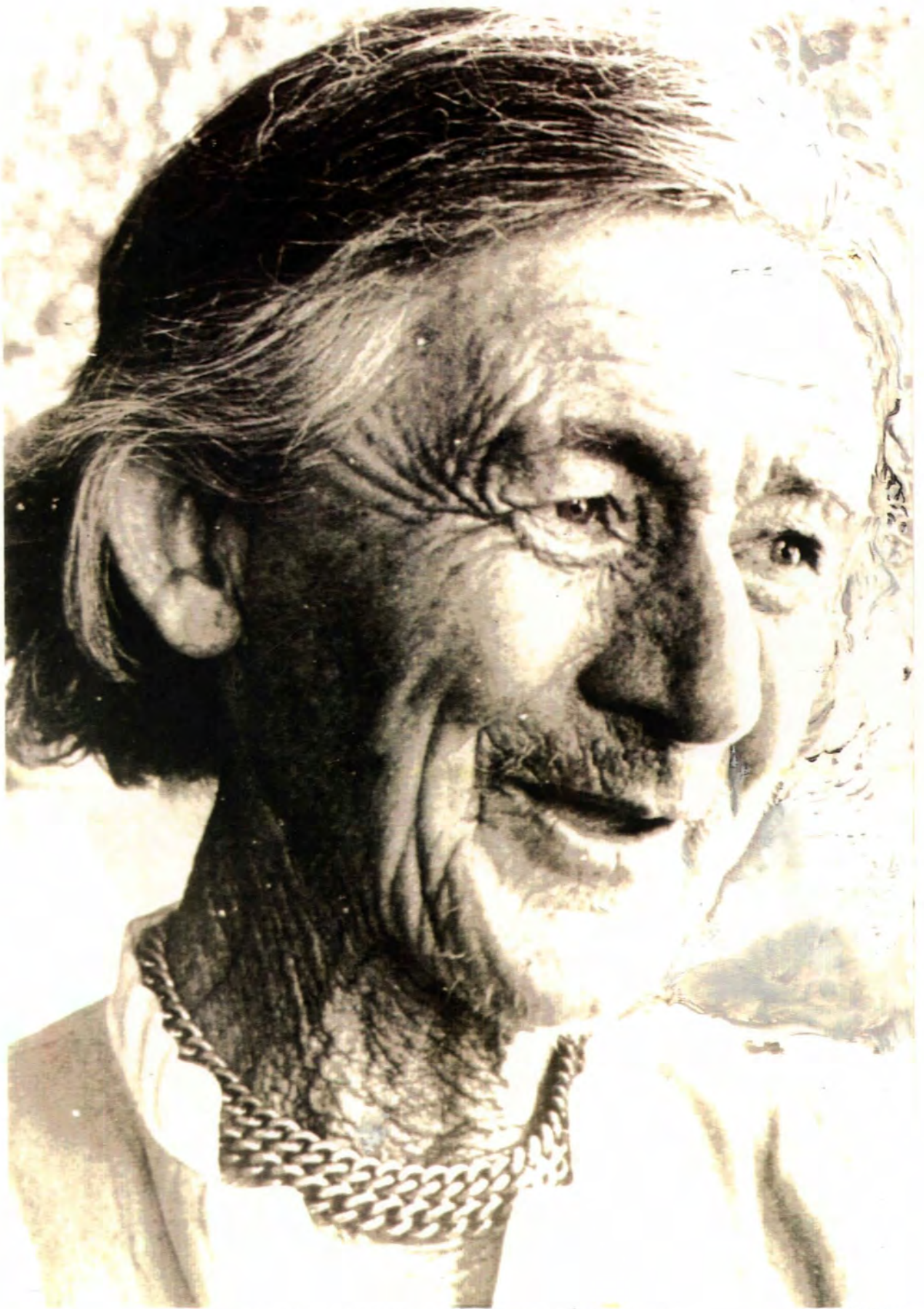
mother banished him from the house to live, neglected, in an outside room. (It is interesting that when asked, Helen's sister Annie seemed to know nothing about this). Her marriage, to an obviously exceptional man, did not last long, and during it she inexplicably had two abortions; then her trail vanishes for between two to four years, until her return to Nieu Bethesda. The only piece of information which has been found referring to this missing period of her life is the letter from her brother-in-law, Willoughby Seymour (quoted in Chapter Four). The content and tone of the letter indicate that this period did not heal any earlier damage or sense of sin which may have caused Helen to go so far away, but rather compounded it and was contributory to her state of mind:

*One feels that it is rather an ... thing to be up against the world alone and to be fighting the world all on one's own ... But is it really a feasible proposition to be fighting the world? Your present occupation ... is it not the case that this cannot possibly be a permanency? It seems that physically it can only be done ... for a limited time, being a continuous strain, and mentally and morally it must be even worse. Do you not owe a duty to yourself not to subject your soul to such degradation? (missing words are impossible to decipher)*

From this time on, some of the factors which would have had a major influence on Helen were her ongoing poverty, which was a constant battle for her; the daily grind of looking after difficult parents with no end in sight; loneliness, and no known close emotional relationships in the village - until a married man, Mr Hattingh, appeared on the scene. Then, as that long relationship developed, she probably had to cope not only with her own conscience, but also the presumed censure of the villagers. It must have affected her when he moved away from Nieu Bethesda, even though he visited her regularly. There was her second, brief marriage to Mr Niemand, and all the probable trauma of a second divorce.

Somewhere towards the end of the 1950s she had surgery to her feet, which left her extremely self-conscious of their unsightly appearance and unable to wear conventional shoes. From the early 1960s onwards, a number of people who were of great importance in her life died. It appears that as she became more and more involved in her creation of The Owl House, she became increasingly alienated from the local community, and less and less inclined - or able - to put energies into anything other than her own immediate world. As she got old her health and emotional state deteriorated, and darkness, physical or metaphorical, started to overwhelm her. It is most likely that Helen was attempting to introduce 'light' into her life as a counterbalance to harsh realities.

Although having stated so emphatically (and obviously memorably) her strong feelings against bearing children of her own, the very poignant extract from a letter in the possession of her sister Annie, seems to suggest that this was at odds with her deepest feeling on the subject. This letter from Helen, dated 3-9-1926, was written to Annie when Annie's first baby, Joe, was born. Alida (who had her six-month old baby Molly with her), and their mother were all staying with Helen at the time.



Helen wearing the heavy silver necklace which seems to have been a favourite piece of her jewellery.

Die Burger



*Niemand sal weet wat in my siel omgaan wanneer die lewe met sy gebeurtenisse so snel verby my oë gaan - en julle altwee my sussies ook al moeders - mag God my help - ek moet nou ophou.*

*[Nobody will know what goes on in my soul when life with its happenings flashes past my eyes so quickly - and both of you my sisters also now mothers - may God help me - I must stop now.]*

There are framed photographs of Alida's two daughters in the house, and many more of them and Annie's two sons amongst boxes of family snapshots. Evidently these nieces and nephews were of importance to Helen. Alida's younger daughter, Betty Crous, told of how in 1936, when she was six and her elder sister Molly was only 10, their mother and father went off on a visit to East Africa. They put their two little girls on the train to travel alone, in the care of the train conductor, from Brakpan to Nieu Bethesda. '*One would never do such a thing today,*' said Betty, '*but then it seemed fine.*' They stayed with Helen and their grandparents for three months.

*I can remember aspects of that visit clearly. Ouma was very ill when we stayed there. [Note: she lived for a further four years, only dying in 1941]. Something that I remember very, very vividly, was Helen getting us to paint enormous Walt Disney figures on the outside walls of the house in Nieu Bethesda. That was an unusual thing to have children do. (Interview Crous, 1993)*

André Pienaar, whose father and Helen's first husband Willem Johannes Pienaar were cousins, said that he can remember, as a child in standard 3 or 4, going to spend holidays with his grandfather in Nieu Bethesda in the mid 1950s. There he first met Helen and used to spend time with her and help her:

*There was a stamp with the faces of the Prime Ministers on it, and I used to help her draw the faces with crayon onto cement. (Interview Pienaar, A. 1993.)*

Andrew Tainton who grew up in Nieu Bethesda and left in 1948 at the age of eight or nine, said that he was very frightened of Helen Martins - that she was:

*... a woman who was going mad; she was a daft woman. She had strange behavioural patterns; she used to walk around with nothing on. I once bought some pigeons from her and they then flew back to her. There was no way I was going back to get them! There were all sorts of mirrors in the house and ground glass on the walls. At that stage there were some statues in the garden, the odd one, but not many. (Interview Tainton, 1993)*

This interview helps to pinpoint when certain stages of The Owl House creation commenced, and how far the work had progressed. It also confirms evidence which has emerged more recently, showing that the work on the house and the yard started much earlier than was originally thought - probably soon after Helen's father died in 1945. This would mean that it extended for about 30 years. Her friend Mr Hattingh was a very important figure in the work, according to his daughter Mrs Machteld Kruger (interviews /letters Kruger, 1993). This would have been in assisting with and

directing major construction aspects, such as breaking through walls to insert windows, and erecting netting over sections of the yard. Machteld Kruger says that he was responsible for making some of the mirrors in the house. He would also have been able to advise on practical methods of constructing the cement sculptures, and someone with whom Helen could share her ideas and enthusiasm.

When interviewed in the Old Age Home in Graaff-Reinet in February 1989, (she died a month later), Mrs 'Tiny' Hartzenberg, aged almost 88, was found sitting in an arm chair immediately underneath a large five-pointed star-shaped mirror. There could be no doubt at all from where this originated. Mrs Hartzenberg confirmed that it was given to her by Helen as a gift - which she ultimately felt obliged to accept, but reluctantly, as it was 'very valuable'. She said that Helen had given her very specific instructions as to where to hang it, so that the sun caught it to full advantage.

Mrs Hartzenberg said she was Helen's next-door neighbour from 1927 when she and her husband moved to town from their farm, until Helen's death; their back gardens abutted onto each other. She says that Helen was already then back in Nieu Bethesda looking after her sick mother:

*I had a very soft spot for Helen. She never mixed in the community - it seemed to me she didn't care a damn what people thought about her. She didn't seem to have an object in life except the East and her statues. Helen was very proud of her house and garden and what she had accomplished. (Interview Harzenberg, 1989)*

Helen and Mrs Hartzenberg would have been only about three or four years apart in age (and both equally diminutive). Through circumstance, situation, this closeness in age, and long-term familiarity with one another's lives as neighbours, a bond of one sort or another must have developed over a period of almost 50 years. This would have been in spite of totally different life situations. The one was a wife and mother, and presumably a fully integrated member of an active community. The other was asocial, and became increasingly more strange and isolated. Mrs Hartzenberg said of Helen's family:

*Her parents kept to themselves. Her mother was not a very friendly person, and her father was a very 'tricky' man. He was not very honest. The municipality used to allow only so many sheep on the commonage. Piet Martins would put his allotted number there in the day, and then send in a further batch during the darkness of night!*

Mrs Rosalie Briers had another similar story:

*Piet Martins - they say he wasn't very honest. When there was a prayer meeting in the night he'd put his sheep to graze in somebody else's lands, and then before they said 'Amen', he'd take them all out again! Hy was 'n slim man, en skelm. My pa used to say - 'n skelm is nie dom nie'. [He was a clever man, and sly. My father used to say - 'a crook is not stupid'.] (Interview Briers, 1993)*

This view of Helen's father is substantiated by Piet van der Merwe, one of the men who

worked on the house and garden with Helen. He was a sprightly 78 year old, returning home at the end of a day's building work, when interviewed in February 1989 in Nieu Bethesda.

*He put his animals in other people's lands at night. They would follow the spoor home the next morning, and there they would find Piet Martins sitting on the stoep with a set face, and his hat pulled down over his face, like this (he demonstrated). He would say: 'Don't come and cause trouble with me!' They would have to take him to the magistrate in a wheelbarrow! (Interview Van der Merwe, 1989)*

A former resident of Nieu Bethesda, Mr Karel van Heerden, corroborated Piet van der Merwe's story:

*The old man had to go to court one day, because he was caught stealing lucerne for his goat. He wouldn't go, so the policeman came to take him and put him in a wheelbarrow to go to the Justice of the Peace. I can vouch for it - I saw that with my own eyes.*

*The Martins family was very eccentric. The old man wasn't normal. We ran a butcher shop at the time, during the war when there was no butter available. The old man would come to get dripping, and brought a dirty can. My mother wanted to wash it, but he wouldn't let her - he said it was 'skoon vuilgoed!' ['clean dirt!']. Helen and her mother made him move to an outside room. They wouldn't have him in the house, they said he was too dirty. (Interview Van Heerden, 1993)*

Annie said:

*He had a phobia about cleanliness. He was fancies - fanatical. If a neighbour came to knead the bread, he said no one must speak to her in case she spat in the bread! When any of us children were sick he would pass notes through the door with a cleft stick. (Interview Le Roux, A. 1986)*

It is interesting to speculate on these contradictions: Piet Martins was so fanatical about 'cleanliness', that he wouldn't eat bread that his own daughter Helen had baked for him if she had touched it (tape recording Martins, H. Chapter 6), was neurotic about germs, and yet he was not at all particular about the cleanliness of a food container, and was, according to Karel van Heerden's account, put out of his home because he himself was dirty. It may be that it had something to do with excretions or secretions from other people which repulsed him rather than 'dirt' in its impersonal sense.

Mrs Norah van Niekerk commented:

*What her father and mother's you-know - what they were like together - I can't tell you, but I don't think it was too well. (Interview Van Niekerk, 1993.)*

Mr Sharwood Pienaar, a lifelong resident of Nieu Bethesda, said about the relationship between Helen's parents, and Helen and her father:

*Things were all right, to a degree, before Helen returned home, then they were not good. Helen and her mother, together, put him out into that outside room.*

*Mrs Martins was quite a nice person. At her funeral, Mrs van Heerden wanted Helen and her father to stand next to her coffin for a photograph. Piet Martins wouldn't stand there if Helen was there; it had to be either the one or the*

other, but not the two of them together. (Interview Pienaar, Sharwood. 1993)

Piet van der Merwe also said that Helen and her father did not get on well. It would seem as if, let alone within his own family, he did not get on well with many members of the community either. His granddaughter Betty Crous, said:

*Oupa Martins was a very peppy old guy who used to get into all sorts of altercations with friends and acquaintances in Nieu Bethesda. He was forever having arguments, and I think these went as far as to end up in court. And the old boy was very religious; he had this family bible which was about 12 inches thick, and he used to make notes in the margins in passages where he thought the description applied to the latest person he was taking to court on some matter or other; 'Ja, dis jy Koos', or whatever. [Yes, that is you Koos'.] (Interview Crous, 1993)*

Piet Martins evidently held a jaundiced view of life and social conventions: Annie told of an incident occasioning two comments by her father, which are very telling when viewed from Helen's situation. He heard two coloured children of the village singing as they walked down the road:

*'Ma sê, pa sê, trou is 'n lekker ding!' [Mother says, father says, marriage is a pleasant thing!]. He called out to them, 'Sê vir julle ouers, hulle lieg.' ["Tell your parents they lie"].*

*He was worried about the world, and said that people shouldn't have children. 'If a boy is born it is sad, but if it's a girl, it's even worse', was his viewpoint. (Interview le Roux, A. 1986.)*

Betty Crous recounted another story about her grandfather's eccentricities:

*After Ouma died, Oupa sometimes would go and stay with Aunt Tommy [Annie] or my mother [Alida] for a few weeks, and the one time my mother was travelling back to Nieu Bethesda with him by train, and had booked a coupé for them. She thought he would be safer on the bottom bunk, and it would be easier for him if he wanted to go to the toilet. At one stage she woke up, and he was missing. She went to look for him, and couldn't find him anywhere in the middle of the night. Eventually the other passengers were aware that something was wrong, and were peering out to see what was the matter. And the story going around was that they were a honeymoon couple, and the husband had absconded! They never did find him, and she had to return to Nieu Bethesda and tell Helen what had happened.*

*Anyway, he turned up a few days later, with the story that he had got off the train at a station, and crossed over a bridge, and then there were houses on the other side, and he knocked on a door and the people were so kind to him, and even told him to come back again! (Interview Crous, 1993)*

When Mrs Mattie Cupido was a child she knew Helen. Her sister, Alice Meyer, was one of the clinic sisters who attended to Helen at times. Their home was directly over the wide river bed from the Martins' home. She recollected further incidents about Helen and her father:

*I used to go past the house on my bicycle - I was scared of her. She used to call out to me, 'Piet Meyer's little girl'. I took her mail for her because I passed her house every day. She was a very shy woman; I was one of the privileged few, she used to ask us in for tea. She was very fond of my father and when he was bed-ridden, she used to bring him eggs. She was English-speaking - she never spoke Afrikaans to me.*





Photographer unknown

Helen's sisters, Annie (left) and Alida (right) with their respective children. Annie's sons are Joe and Peter, and Alida's daughters are Molly and Betty.



A detail of one of Helen's dressing tables: a cement figure made on top of a bottle holds bracelets and rings on outstretched arms; some toiletries of the time; and family photographs. On the right are Helen's two nieces - Alida's daughters - Molly and Betty.





Helen's mother, Hester Martins, with four of her grandchildren. On the left are Annie's sons: Joe (back) and Peter. Betty, sitting on her grandmother's lap and Molly, standing, are Alida's daughters.

[In actual fact Helen and her brothers and sisters used English and Afrikaans with equal fluency and proficiency.]

*My father was Piet Meyer; her father was Piet Martins. At full moon he used to shout across the river to my father 'Piet Meyer, Piet Meyer!'*

Helen's two sisters always played an important part in her life, her brothers less so, and Alida was the one who mattered most to her. Annie said that Alida wrote well, was materialistic, widely travelled, very artistic in her own right, a classical musician, 'was brilliant - a genius'; but as well - 'very hard, a miser, and cynical', and 'Helen had a fearful respect for Alida'. She said that Alida tried to discourage Helen from her work, and scoffed at her 'stupid things'. In spite of this attitude, Helen wrote in her unwitnessed - and therefore invalid - will (Appendix 9) which she made with the help of Jill Wenman not long before her death:

*All my Meccas, camels, owls and all other cement works are to be dedicated to my friend Jill Wenman, and my sister Alida Seymour.*

Jill says Helen told her that one of her brothers - it was James Henry - later became a recluse, and lived many years in isolation in the Lebombo mountains. He spent his time doing crossword puzzles, and went off to town once a month on a donkey to obtain provisions. He was ultimately murdered. Annie's elder son Joe, said: 'My mom was the only normal one in the family. The rest were all unbalanced' (interview le Roux, J. 1986). This story somewhat substantiates Joe's statement about more than one member of the family being unusual. His cousin Betty Crous, Alida's younger daughter, adds more details:

*Koos [nickname of James], the recluse who lived on the mountain, was a farmer and I think had been a transport rider. (Interview Crous, 1993)*

Annie said that her brother Philip (Flip) spent most of his life in Kenya where he grew pyrethrum. 'He retired to South Africa, and missed Kenya very much - he use to cry.' The eldest brother, Peter van der Merwe Martins who taught with Helen's first husband, Johannes Pienaar, in Volksrust in their early years, was very successful and later became Member of Parliament for Wakkerstroom. He was evidently an outstanding English teacher, according to some of his pupils from the 1920s (letters: Harrison, 1993; Corke, 1993), and also taught Latin. He was also proficient in Hebrew and Greek, but spoke no black languages, according to his granddaughter Mariechen Martins (interview and letter Martins, M. 1994).

From all accounts, the period in which Helen lived in Nieu Bethesda looking after asocial, eccentric and ill parents until they died, must have been long, difficult and lonely for her. This is evident from her choice of adjectives in a letter dated 8 April 1947, to the Master of the Supreme Court in Cape Town asking about a plot of land which she thought had belonged to her father. She wrote:



*I looked after both my parents for full 16 years (my mother having been a total invalid for the last 12 years).*

When her father eventually died on 1 February 1945, the sole asset in his estate was the sum of £51-8-2 in the Post Office Savings Bank. He died intestate (Estate documents Master of the Supreme Court, Cape Town), and his other surviving children named in the Estate documents - James, Annie and Alida - were all required to write to the Master saying that they wished their respective shares of their father's estate to go to Helen.

In the process of winding up Piet Martins' estate, the Master's office had many queries they addressed to Helen: amongst them being why her surname was Pienaar if she was the daughter of P J Martins, and more than one request for the required letters of release from her siblings. In her response dated 5 April 1945, she shows a fascinating combination of fiery exasperation and sense of self-esteem, mixed with subservient deference to officialdom:

*Dear Sir*

*Your letter (undated) to hand.*

*I am legally divorced.*

*May I respectfully request of you and with every respect due to you - should you have any more questions to ask, would you kindly do them all in one.*

*I am leaving here towards the end of April. Enclosed please find statement from my sister. From my other sister and from my brother you shall probably hear.*

*Respectfully yrs*

*(Mrs) Helen Pienaar*

*P.S. Will you please address to 'Helen' Pienaar and not merely H. Pienaar.*

At this stage, it seems that she intended leaving Nieu Bethesda for a long period, and to an undisclosed destination. On 22 April 1945 she wrote to the Master's office enclosing her brother's written consent, and ending:

*N.B. As I am leaving here on the 1st May would you kindly keep back all correspondence and money until you hear from me. I am leaving here, no address nor any reference, whatsoever so please detain all further correspondence.*

Other than visiting Annie and her family on their farm at Amersfoort at this time (interview le Roux, A. 1986), Helen also went to the Natal coast with her other sister Alida and family. Her niece Betty said:

*My parents took a holiday cottage in Umbogintwini, and it was just after the war - the trains still had blackouts. My mother asked me to take Helen to the Indian market, and she was dying to go. I was 15 and I remember that I was so ashamed of this aunt of mine who looked like a witch; she was very lined and dressed all in black. She loved it and bought all sorts of things which I'm sure she later used in her house. (letter and interview Crous, 1993)*

After the years of isolation looking after her parents in Nieu Bethesda, judging from Betty's recollections of her on this holiday, it would seem that Helen was not very worldly-wise:

*She also went to the beach at Umbogintwini, and came back with two sacks of shells to take home. The beach was very lonely and my mother was worried about her being alone and went to look for her. She was just in the nick of time as this man looked as if he was about to accost her. My mother asked her if she wasn't worried, and she said she was wondering what she was going to talk to him about. She was very naïve, and this was in 1945, so she was already aged 47.*

From the earlier mentioned letter written in April 1947 to the Master of the Supreme Court, it is evident that Helen was battling financially, a situation which continued for the rest of her life. She wrote from Nieu Bethesda asking for assistance in obtaining Erf No 77 in the village. She claimed it had belonged to her father, was still registered in his name and he had often said he wished her to have it after his death. She states in the letter that it was being used, along with a number of adjoining erwe, by Mr A Pienaar, 'with the hope' [by Mr Pienaar] 'that no further investigation nor query will ensue'. She continued:

*Owing to circumstantial needs and distress, I have been obliged to turn in whatever direction which could possibly afford me help. .... I now wish to ask your permission that Erf No 77 shall be given to me, in order that I may let it, to whomsoever will give me the highest rent.*

*I have no income whatsoever, sir. .... Physically I am not strong enough to work for an income; and it is upon this little Erf, which I am now relying solely; as this would afford me an income, upon which I could live.*

*Will you please give me your kind attention and grant me your permission.*

Other than these letters in the Master of the Supreme Court's files, not much documentation or correspondence has been found from the 1940s and first half of the 1950s, and very little is known about this period of Helen's life. She only later obtained an old age pension, which her nephew Herman Martins helped to organize for her (interview/letter Martins, M. 1994) and which she was ashamed to be seen collecting (interview Claasen, 1985).

*Oom Herman het ... ook maandklike geld aan tant Helen gestuur het. Oom Herman se eggenote, Tannie Barbara Martins ('n grootmaakkind van oud Staatspresident CR Swart) het my ook ... meegedeel dat sy dikwels klerasie vir tant Helen gestuur het. Volgens oom Herman het tant Helen die geld wat sy van hom gekry het gebruik om sement mee te koop in stede om noodsaaklike lewensbehoefte te koop (letter Martins, M. 1994).*

*[Uncle Herman also sent money every month to Aunt Helen. Uncle Herman's wife, Aunt Barbara Martins (an adopted daughter of old President CR Swart) also informed me that she often sent clothes to Aunt Helen. According to Uncle Herman, Helen used the money which she got from him to buy cement instead of for basic essentials.]*

Helen's sister Alida also used to send her a regular monthly cheque, which was continued by her niece Betty after Alida's death (interview Crous, 1993). Amongst her papers there are two letters from lawyers in Cape Town, dated 1973 and 1975, referring to the estate of the late J H Martins (her brother James), from which she received a monthly cheque of £30. Mrs Gertie Retief, her neighbour said:

*Sy was eensaam en alleen, en ek dink sy het 'n bietjie swaar gekry. She didn't have money. Die familie het vir haar geld gegee, ek dink veral Alida. Alida het vir haar die meeste gedoen en gestuur. Ek praat onder korreksie. (Interview Retief, G. 1993)*

*[She was lonely and alone, and I think things were difficult for her. She didn't have money. The family gave her money, I think especially Alida. Alida did the most for her and sent her the most. I speak under correction.]*

Later, to make money, she did what would have created an enormous scandal: in a town which did not allow liquor to be sold, and in a country which at that time had laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol to the black and coloured members of the population, Helen brewed and sold alcohol to the local coloured community. Gertie Retief said:

*Sy was in die moeilikheid gewees. Kyk, sy het drank gestook; sy het op 'n tyd drank daar gemaak, ek dink van druiwe. En toe het sy dit verkoop om 'n inkomsteljie te hê. Toe het hulle haar nou gevang. My man was burgermeester. Toe's hy Graaff-Reinet toe. Toe't hy kom pleit vir Helen dat hulle haar nie met 'n tronk straf nie. Ek kan nie nou meer onthou wat sy gekry het nie - toe het sy afgekom.*

*Toe het ek besef, maar die vrou moet honger ly, daarom maak sy drank, verkoop sy drank, aan die swartes. Toe het ek vir baie jare, elke twaalfuur dinnertyd, 'n bord kos daar op die muur gesit, vir baie, baie jare. Toe't sy daai dinge nou gelos. Dit was nie lank nie. Dit was maar net daai tyd toe die druiwe in seisoen was.*

*Jy kan baie maklik 'n ander kritiseer as jy nie weet wat daai een se posisie is, né? Sy het altyd vir my 'Kinnie' gesê - ek sit nou die bord daar, en as sy nou die bord kom haal dan bring sy vir my gister se bord, en daar is nou altyd 'n briefie by of so aan. Die mooiste, mooiste briefies waarmee sy vir my bedank het vir die kos wat ek so elke dag vir haar gegee het. Sy het 'n vreeslike mooi handskrif gehad. (Interview Retief, G. 1993)*

*[She was in trouble. Look, she did brew liquor, she did make drink there, I think from grapes. And then she sold it to have a bit of income. And then they caught her. My husband was mayor. Then he went to Graaff-Reinet. And he went to plead for Helen that they wouldn't give her a gaol sentence. I can't remember any more what she did get. Then she got off.*

*And then I realized, but this woman must be hungry, that's why she's making drink, selling drink, to the blacks. And then, for many years, every midday at lunchtime, I put a plate of food there on the wall, for many, many years. And then she stopped such things. It wasn't for long. It was just in that grape season.*

*You can very easily criticize another when you don't know what's going on in their situation, can't you? She always called me 'Kinnie' - I'd put the plate there, and then when she came to fetch that plate, she'd return yesterday's plate to me, and there was always a note with it. The loveliest, loveliest notes in which she thanked me for the food which I gave her every day. She had very lovely handwriting.]*

Mrs Hartzenberg said, 'Helen told me all her problems. I never put her down, I always listened.' When asked what sort of problems Helen needed to talk about, Mrs Hartzenberg replied that it would be about such things as Helen not wanting to look after her mother, who was apparently very difficult, or 'the Hattingh thing'. 'The Hattingh thing' was the married man named Mr

Hattingh, who lived:

*... at the top of the village near to the commonage gate. They were friends for a long time. 'Helen's fancy' - we all called him that. Everybody knew about her relationship; they never criticized her because they took everything for granted. He was a big, quiet man. He did everything for her - he was a wonderful person to her. He enclosed her whole yard with netting to keep her birds in. She depended on him very much. (Interview Hartzenberg, 1989).*

Jill Wenman confirms that Mr Hattingh was - *'the great love of Helen's life; she loved him very much.'* It was in 1940 or 1941, between three and five years before her father died, and possibly even before the death of her mother, that Helen's long and important relationship with Johannes Hendrik Hattingh began. This information was gathered from Mr Hattingh's daughter Mrs Machteld Maria Kruger, youngest of his five children (letters/interviews Kruger, 1993).

The Hattingh family came from Peddie, where Mrs Kruger says her father was *'dié ryk jongman van Peddie'*, [*'the rich young man from Peddie'*] and *'my pa se mense was skátryk'*, [*'my father's family were extremely wealthy,'*], but later, in 1927, went to farm in Middelburg. They moved to Nieu Bethesda in 1939, at the time of the outbreak of the second World War. In 1932 while busy with building work on a roof in Peddie, her father was struck by lightning and thought to be dead, until someone saw slight signs of life. This person called the doctor, busy resuscitating another man, to attend to him. Unbelievably, Mr Hattingh was struck by lightning yet again seven years later - and yet again, he lived to tell the tale.

*Hy was besonder lank. So 'n lang man is maklik deur die weer getref. Die tweede keer was net kort voor ons Bethesda toe getrek het. Hy was 'n lang man, en toe hy op die dak was was hy die hoogste punt. Die tweede keer was hy in die veld in Middelburg. En daar in die veld loop daardie lang-man; dit tref hom maklik.*

*[He was particularly tall. Such a tall man is very easily struck by lightning. The second occasion was shortly before we moved to Bethesda. He was a tall man, and when he was on the roof, he was the highest point. The second time he was in the veld at Middelburg. And there in the veld that tall man was walking; it struck him easily.]*

After the first lightning strike, Mrs Hattingh - back at home in Middelburg - read in the newspaper that if her husband lived he would never again be 'normal', and for months he suffered from excruciating headaches. Mrs Kruger says that according to a well-known psychiatrist, her father should have died from the lightning strike, and as a result of it underwent a total personality change:

*Hy het heeltemal verander. Hy het geen geheue gehad nie, en hy het altyd met 'n boekie geloop en hy het lysies gemaak dat hy kan onthou. En hy was vreeslik humeurig, hy het baie gou kwaad geword, baie kwaad. En hy sal vandag met iemand bevriend wees, en net 'n paar maande later het hulle 'n groot uitval. En dan is hy nie meer met die mense vriende nie. My ma het absoluut by hom gestaan.*



*[He changed totally. He had no memory, and he always walked with a notebook and made lists to help him remember. And he was terribly moody, he got angry very quickly, very angry. And he'd be friendly with someone today, and then have a great fall-out with them a few months later. And then he wouldn't be friends with them any more. My mother stood by him completely.]*

Neighbours and the children helped with the farming; however, in 1938 Mr Hattingh was bankrupt and the farm was sold. His daughter wrote:

*Op 4 Sept 1939 (uitbreek van oorlog) trek ons na Nu-Bethesda waar Helen ons pad kruis. Groete! (letter Kruger, 1993).*

*[On 4 Sept 1939 (outbreak of war) we moved to Nu-Bethesda where Helen crossed our path. Greetings!]*

She said, again with strong feeling, that Helen Martins:

*was 'n baie lelike mens, sy was baie slinks. She knew how to twist him around her finger. Die mooi karakter in dit was my ma. (Interview 1993)*

*[was a very ugly person, she was very sly. ... The nice character in it all was my mother.]*

The affair started when Machteld Kruger was in Standard VII, went on for 21 years, and as a result, *'In my lewe was 22 jare gemors'. [Twenty-two years of my life were wasted.]*

Mrs Kruger also mentions Helen's brewing episode, from her family's viewpoint:

*Eenkeer het sy, Helen brandewyn gestook, verkoop, geld gemaak. Gevang, 'n hofsak te Graaff-Reinet en hy gaan getuig vir haar. My Ma kon slang vang, oók ek, wat toe daar op skool was (1943 óf 1944)!! Koerante berigte ens!! Skande vir "ons"! (letter 20-11-1993)*

*[Once she, Helen, brewed brandy, sold it, made money. Caught, a court case in Graaff-Reinet and he went to give evidence for her. My mother was furious, me too who was then at school (1943 or 1944)!! Newspaper reports and all!! Disgrace for "us"!]*

Coming to Nieu Bethesda at a time when the external world was launching into the turmoil of an international war; when his personal life, identity and security had fallen around his ears; having undergone a major personality change, unable to relate to his family as he had done previously; and having so recently experienced the profound shock of a second lightning strike, Mr Hattingh must have been confused and at a low ebb in his life. In this small village he would sooner or later have come into contact with Helen - herself solitary and lonely, and also set apart from other people in the community.

Mrs Kruger said:

*Sy was 'n alleenloper, en toe kom hy. And they carried on like that. Sy kon aangenaam wees, sy bedien jou met tee. Sy was altyd so vinnig en gejaagd, nervous. Sy was 'n kunstenaar. Ek dink sy kon interessant gesels het, maar ek weet nie. Hulle*

*het so aangecarry, maar dit maak nie sense nie. He was not himself.*

*'n Mens het maar geweet daar is meer as vriendskap daar, van die begin af. Ek kan verstaan dat sy aangetrokke was tot hom; hy was sterk en groot en so aan. Wat tragies vir my pa was was dat daardie weertreffery hom 'n heeltemal ander man gemaak het. (Interview Kruger, 1993)*

*[She was a solitary person, and then he came along. And they carried on like that. She could be pleasant, she would serve you tea. She was always so quick and flustered - nervous. She was an artist. I think she was interesting to talk to, but I don't know. They carried on so, but it didn't make sense. He was not himself.]*

*One knew there was more than friendship there, from the beginning. I can understand that she found him attractive; he was strong and big and so on. What was tragic for my father was that that lightning strike made him become a completely different person.]*

With his experience as a builder, Johannes Hattingh first started helping Helen with odd jobs round the house, and it is known that as time went on, 'after the deaths' (of her parents) 'and unhappiness' (interview le Roux, A. 1986), she started to break out walls and insert clear or coloured glass to let in the light, and then started on covering walls, ceilings, and almost every other possible surface with ground glass. Johannes Hattingh was involved from the beginning with this quest to introduce light into her life. He was said by many people, including Mrs Hartzenberg to have been very good to her.

His daughter, Mrs Kruger, said:

*He did the building work for her - he did the main work, not that boy. Ek dink dit het in 1940 begin, ek sou sê haar ma en haar pa was altwee daar, hy het vir haar gaan bouwerk doen. Hulle het seker met gewone bouwerk begin. Maar daardie spieëls en alles het hy gemaak. My pa het seker met my ma daaroor gepraat. Dit was 'n besigheid. Sy [Helen] het hom betaal, maar ek twyfel of sy hom ooit betaal het. (Interview Kruger, 1993)*

*[He did the building work for her - he did the main work, not that boy. I think it began in 1940, I would say her mother and father were both there, he went to do building work for her. They probably started with ordinary building work. But he made those mirrors and everything. My father spoke to my mother about it. It was a business. She [Helen] paid him, but I doubt if she ever paid him.]*

Mrs Kruger is convinced that it was the lightning strikes which were responsible for her father's relationship with Helen, and which otherwise would have been totally out of character for him:

*En ek so seker as wat ek hier sit, daardie laaste keer wat die weer hom getref het, was kort voor ons Bethesda toe getrek het, en daar, net 'n paar mande later, het daardie vriendskap begin. Daardie weertreffery is verskriklik belangrik om te verklaar waarom hy so 'n vriendskap aangegaan het, wat teen sy beginsels is en alles. Sy eie suster kon nie verstaan hoekom hy dit doen nie.*

*Maar wat vir my so snaaks was, waarom het hy nie van my ma geskei nie? Hy was tog te vas aan sy vrou en kinders. Hy het nooit geskei nie, maar hy het tog*

ook **nooit** wou daardie vriendskap los nie. Dit het aangegaan, ek sou sê, van 1940 al tot, en met, sy dood van Februarie in 1963. Dit was baie onaangenaam, baie onaangenaam. Sy het altyd probeer om hom weer terug te kry.

Maar eintlik wat nou gebeur vandag, ek as volwasse mens, ek sal sê dat hy het gesoek vir erkenning, want dit was na die weertreffery dat hy van nuuts af moes begin het, en sy het gesoek na erkenning, want elke mens wil 'n suksesspiraal hê in die lewe. Hulle moes aanklank gevind het by mekaar. Sy was natuurlik ook soort van 'n dinamiese persoonlikheid in 'n sin, en sy het die kuns verstaan om hom te vlei en die soort van dinge jy weet. Dat hy is 'just it'; dat hy is ook wonderlik. En dit het hom natuurlik gevang. Sy het verstaan hoe om hom te laat groot voel. En dis wat hy baie graag wou hê. En daar het dit begin. (Interview Kruger, 1993)

[And I'm as certain as I am sitting here, that last time that the lightning struck him was shortly before we moved to Bethesda, and there, just a few months later, that friendship started. That lightning strike is terribly important to explain why he got involved in such a friendship, which was against all his principles. His own sister couldn't understand why he was doing it.

But what I found so strange, was why didn't he divorce my mother? He was just too attached to his wife and children. He never divorced her, but he also never wanted to abandon that friendship. I would say it continued from 1940 until his death in February 1963. It was very unpleasant, very unpleasant. She was always trying to win him back.

But today, as an adult, I'd say that he was looking for recognition, because after the lightning strike, he had to begin again from scratch, and she was looking for recognition, because every person wants to climb the ladder of success in life. They must have found that they had much in common. In a way she was of course a dynamic kind of personality, and she had mastered the art of flattering him and that kind of thing, you know. That he was 'just it'; that he was wonderful. And he fell for it of course. She knew how to make him feel important. And that was what he wanted. And that was where it started.]

As adults, Mrs Kruger and her sisters sent money to their parents, but she said that she sent it specifically to her mother, because anything she sent to her father would be given to Helen. She described in detail the various jewellery which her father gave to her mother in their early married life, including ruby and diamond brooches and rings, and a: 'Goue borsspeld in vorm van 'n ou plaashek, wat oopmaak, en daar staan geskryf 'Ever Thine'.' ('Gold brooch shaped like an old farm gate which opened and inside was written 'Ever Thine'.') (letter/interview Kruger, 1993) There was also:

'n rooi sjokolade-dooos - helder rooi-fluweel, met 'n spieeltjie bó-op! - té pragtig wat hy vir haar (my Ma) gegee het, op 23 Julie 1915 (ek gebore 23 Julie 1927!). Hierdie juwele en veral Sjokolade-dosie wou Helen so gráág hê maar my Ma en ek het haar nogeens weér getroef! My Pa wou maar alte graag hê dat sy dit kry!! My ma en ek sê, "Not a damn". My ma het altyd haar briewe daarin gesit, en haar jewellery. Dit was iets besonders.

[a red chocolate box - bright red velvet, with a little mirror on the top! - too beautiful, which he gave to her (my Mother), on 23 July 1915 (I was born on 23 July 1927!). Helen wanted this jewellery and especially the Chocolate box so badly, but

*my Mother and I trumped her yet again! My mother and I said, "Not a damn". My mother always kept her letters in it, and her jewellery. It was something very special.]*

It is significant that of all these items, the one which Helen most desired was that with no real monetary value - a chocolate box with a mirror on top, and covered in red velvet (red was one of her favourite colours). John Moyle said: *'Half of her was a person who'd go for kitsch curios, but the other half was the authentic artist.'* (interview Moyle, 1993). However, it would be difficult to differentiate between what is art and what could be classified as 'kitsch' in the case of The Owl House; to Helen, every object that resonated in her was an object of beauty and to be translated into her artistic expression.

Machteld Kruger continued elaborating on the important role her father played in the development of The Owl House, changing the earlier understanding that it was Helen and the three workmen who were responsible for The Owl House and the Camel Yard, and that her father had only helped with some of the structural alterations to the house and enclosing the yard with wire netting to keep the birds in:

*Maar hy is die een wat daardie spieëls gemaak het. En daardie draadbeelde. Hy kon wonderlik met sement werk en alles. Daardie boys het net onder hulle gewerk. Hy het gedurig daar gewerk. Jy weet, op sy sterfbed het hy gepraat van 'Jonas, Jonas', sonder ent. En toe dink die ander mense daar dis 'n boer van Peddie. Maar ek het geweet wie dit is, dis die boy van Bethesda; hy praat van hulle. (Interview Kruger, 1993)*

*[But he was the one who made those mirrors. And those wire statues. He was a wonderful worker with cement and such things. Those boys just worked under them. He worked there continuously. You know, on his deathbed he spoke incessantly of 'Jonas, Jonas'. The other people there thought it was a farmer from Peddie. But I knew who it was, it was the boy from Bethesda; he was speaking about them.]*

She also elaborated on the relationship between Helen and her father:

*Hulle wou bekend wees in hul lewe, en erkenning kry, en dit kom na hul dood. Vir hulle - hulle was nooit volmaak nie; sy was nie, en my ma, en ook nie my pa nie.*

*[They wanted to get well known in their lifetime, and receive recognition, and it came after their deaths. For them - they were never fulfilled; she wasn't, nor my mother and nor yet my father.]*

She said that her father's move back to Peddie in 1947 was a blind. Her father used to say there was nothing going on, but they all knew and her mother was very unhappy. He knew that people talked about his relationship with Helen and his wife saw what was going on, so he took her to Peddie, and then he was always going back there to Nieu Bethesda, for two weeks at a time or so. Her mother didn't want to divorce him, because she said she still loved him.

*Hy het jare daar gewerk. En hy het natuurlik daar met haar in die huis gewoon. Dit*



*was absoluut abnormaal dat hulle so 'n vriendskap gehad het al die jare, en ek dink dit was moordend op my ma, om al die jare te leef met so 'n ding. Al drie van hulle was eensame mense.*

*Daarna het ek geen verhouding met my pa nie. Ek het nie eers met hom gesels nie, want ons het niks gehad om oor te praat nie. Ek dink hy was 'n bietjie hartseer daaroor.*

*[He worked there for years. And of course he stayed in the house with her. It was absolutely abnormal that they had such a friendship for all those years, and I think it was hell for my mother to live with such a thing for so many years. All three of them were lonely people.*

*After that I had no relationship with my father. I didn't even talk to him because we had nothing to talk about. I think he was a bit sad about that.]*

Mrs Kruger said that her sisters would never have spoken to anyone about this subject, and she couldn't even mention Helen's name to the sisters today:

*Dit was vir hulle 'n groot skande. Maar ek sien dit nou as iets wat was en is nou verby - dis geskiedenis. Dit vergal jou hele lewe as jy 'n kind is.*

*[For them it was a terrible disgrace. But I now look at it as something that was and is now past - it's history. It embittered your whole life when you were a child.]*

In one of her letters, of 20-11-1993 she writes:

*Vroeg in Des. 1947 trek hulle terug. In óns huis, as gevolg van sy "gesigsbelemmering" het my Ma altyd die pos oopgemaak en gelees. Dis 22 Desember 1947. Die pos kom. Ook twee briewe van Helen, vir hom. Ma begin lees en dit verander in 'n nagmerrie toe sy lees hoe Helen skryf ... Alles het swart geword.*

*[Early in Dec. 1947 they went back. In our house, as a result of his "sight impediment" my mother always opened and read the post. It is 22 December 1947. The post arrives. Also two letters from Helen, for him. Mother begins to read and it changes into a nightmare when she reads what Helen writes ... Everything became black.]*

To maintain a correspondence under such circumstances, let alone one of an intimate nature must have been extremely difficult, and it is not known whether this correspondence continued or not.

Helen's surprising second marriage, at the age of 54, to Jacobus Johannes Machiel Niemand aged 67, a widower of 'no occupation', also from 'Nu Bethesda', took place on 4 July 1952 in the Graaff-Reinet Magistrate's court. Mrs Claasen, the former postmistress, said:

*He was a pensioner. She married him sometime after the death of her parents, and divorced him after two or three months. He was not her intellectual equal. (Interview Claasen, 1985)*

Mrs Gertie Retief remembered Mr Niemand fondly:

*Ou Niemand het ek goed onthou. Niemand was 'n baie oulike man, 'n dierbare man. Daar was niks met ou Niemand verkeerd nie. Hy was 'n kort ou mannetjie ook gewees. Hattingh was 'n langer man - hy was lank. Ons was baie lief vir Niemand*

gewees. (Interview Retief, G. 1993)

*[I remember old Niemand very well. Niemand was a sweet man, a dear man. There was nothing wrong with old Niemand. He was also a short old man. Hattingh was a taller man - he was tall. We loved Niemand.]*

Jill Wenman says:

*She told a hell of a funny story about how Niemand proposed to her and they got to the church twice, and when they got there she changed her mind. She didn't want to be a Niemand (nobody) for anyone! (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Annie, Helen's sister, commented dismissively:

*Niemand! He was just a flash in the pan. She said she was sorry for him because he cried. (Interview le Roux, A. 1986)*

Mrs Hartzenberg told how Helen and Mr Niemand went to the magistrate's office, and when they were eventually married, she left him, went home, and never actually lived with him. Why it ever happened was hard to imagine, but Mrs Machteld Kruger, daughter of Johannes Hattingh, has probably the most plausible explanation for this otherwise inexplicable marriage. Apparently Helen 'threatened' to marry Mr Niemand on more than one occasion before the marriage actually took place:

*Sy het met Niemand getrou om hom [Mnr Hattingh] te dwing dat hy tog sy vrou moet los. Sy was net ses weke met hom getroud toe los sy hom. Sy het net met hom getrou om die pa van my te kry. (Interview Kruger, 1993)*

*[She married Niemand to force him [Mr Hattingh] to leave his wife. She was only married to him for six weeks, and then she left him. She only married him to get my father away from my mother.]*

The couple were married out of community of property, by an Ante-Nuptial Contract drawn up by Mr G B Smit, an attorney in Graaff-Reinet at the time (interview Smit, 1993). Records in the Cape Town State Archives show that on 9 January 1953, Jacobus Niemand instituted proceedings against his wife Helen Elizabeth Niemand for restitution of conjugal rights, failing which, divorce. On 20 January 1953 the attorneys, C H Maasdorp and Smit, wrote to her from Graaff-Reinet:

*Ons skryf aan u op las van u eggenoot mnr. Jacobus Johannes Machiel Niemand van Nu Bethesda aangaande u kwaadwillige verlating van hom op Kersfeesdag laas jaar, dit wil sê die 25ste Desember, 1952. U het op daardie dag u gesamentlike huis verlaat en tot op hede het u nie weer na u man teruggekeer nie.*

*[We are writing to you on instruction from your husband Mr Jacobus Johannes Machiel Niemand of Nieu Bethesda regarding your malicious desertion of him on Christmas day last year, that is the 25th December, 1952. On that day you deserted your communal home and until the present you have not returned to your husband.]*

On 14 April 1953 Helen wrote to these attorneys as follows:

*Waarde Heer,*

*In verband met u brief van 10 april, wens ek u mee te deel dat ek nie van voornemens is dië saak teën my ingestel, te verdedig nie.*

*Ek dank u vir u brief van kennisgewing.*

*[Dear Sir,*

*In connection with your letter of 10 April, I wish to inform you that I have no intention of defending the matter which has been brought against me.*

*Thank you for your letter of notification.]*

The final order of divorce is dated 21 May 1953. 'I don't think she spoke *about* either of her husbands with much regret,' said Jill (interview Wenman, J. 1988). Helen herself said in an interview with Blignaut de Villiers for *Dagbreek* in 1970:

*Martins is my nooiensvan. My twee mans wat ek gehad het is vooraanstaande mense. Ek wil nie hul name gebruik nie. Miskien hou hulle nie daarvan nie. Ek het die hoogste dunk van die twee mans in my lewe, veral my eerste man. (Interview De Villiers, 1989)*

*[Martins is my maiden name. The two husbands that I had were prominent people. I don't wish to use their names. Perhaps they wouldn't like it. I have the highest respect for the two husbands in my life, especially my first husband.]*

The initial transformation of the house which was begun with Mr Hattingh soon after Helen's father's death, with assistance from Jonas Adams, and Piet van der Merwe, followed by Koos Malgas, continued after Johannes Hattingh left Nieu Bethesda in 1947. He would have been directly involved whenever he came to visit her, which his daughter said was frequently. Helen and these three men continued on their own in his absence. After Mr Hattingh's death in February 1963, Helen worked for a further 13 years, until she died in August 1976, mostly with Koos Malgas who said that he was with her for approximately 12 years.

Piet van der Merwe recounted how Helen would walk to his house every morning to fetch him to come to work. His hours were from 8 am to 5 pm. He said that he was responsible for the moon gate, the large arch, the towers and churches, the glass and painted 'snow' on the front verandah, the large glass owl on the wall of the verandah, the glass in the kitchen floor, the gate with the arch off the back stoep with the wheel and chain, the coloured glass windows inside the house, the cement bath in the bathroom, the red glass in the back door, the fish on the front of the kitchen hearth, the pyramids, the table with the snake support in the long bedroom, the table supported by horns in the kitchen, some of the cut-out metal stars in the yard, the large cut-out sun with red perspex mouth and blue perspex eyes, and some of the camels and owls.

*We worked from pictures in a book. She had a plan. I bent the anchor wire [heavy duty wire used for fencing] like this, and we used just wire and cement. She directed the whole process (Interview Van der Merwe, 1989).*

Piet is emphatic that there was an even earlier worker in Helen's property, called Frans

Olifant, who did just a few things. 'Hy was 'n herder gewees.' ['He was a shepherd'].

As Helen became increasingly involved in this creation, her bodily needs became less and less important to her. Food, as previously mentioned, was not a priority in her life. Mrs Hartzenberg says that many years earlier, Helen had thrown her stove out into the yard. She used to supply Helen with milk every day, and she would sometimes leave her a plate of food.

This is also evident in the fact that the many bottles of home-preserved fruit that adorned the pantry shelves were not consumed. Helen probably saw them as solely ornamental, lined up along with her bottles of sorted coloured glass, and did not even think of them in terms of food. This is confirmed by Barbara Shaper who said that Helen was probably a very good cook in her time, but that she had said that the preserves she made 15 or 20 years ago were too good to eat, and were just to look at! Amongst Helen's papers are a number of letters thanking her for 'delicious' tammeletjie (which is a sweet preserve made from finely minced fruit, often quinces, mixed with sugar and left to dry in flat sheets in the sun), so she also saw this as a way of giving to people.

Koos Malgas said:

*Miss Helen het nie baie gekook nie. Al wat Miss Helen vir haar gemaak het was 'n eiertjie vir haar gaar met die tee. Ek het elke dag gaan koop 'n paar brood by die winkel. (Interview Malgas, 1988)*

*[Miss Helen didn't cook much. All that Miss Helen made for herself was an egg with her tea. Every day I went to buy a couple of loaves of bread at the shop.]*

'Koos was very good to Helen', said Mrs Hartzenberg. It is evident that there was a mutually close relationship between the two of them.

Both Jill Wenman and Peggy Delpont said that Helen was crippled with arthritis in her later years, and Koos, being the only person around most of the time, would assist her with such activities as getting dressed and cutting her hair.

When interviewed in Worcester in 1988, Koos said:

*My hart was seer vir Miss Helen. Sy het vir my 'n lekker lewe gegee - 'n lewe wat ek nie vandag het nie. 'n Lekker lewe met Miss Helen. Miss Helen het nie omgee wat sy my betaal nie. Miss Helen het niemand my laat hinder as ek 'n beeld maak nie. 'Koos is baie dringend besig en gee hom net 'n kansie.' Sy het my per beeld betaal. As ek 'n beeld vir Miss Helen klaar gemaak het, gee sy vir my R50, R60 of sy gee vir my R70. Sê nou ek maak nou twee uiltjies of drie uiltjies in 'n week klaar, gee sy vir my R60 vir die drie uiltjies en betaal my R10 of R20 'n uiltjie. Sy't mos baie gehou van uile. Ek kan nie sê ek het R60 'n week by Miss Helen gekry nie, want Miss Helen het my baie meer as dit betaal, somer baie meer as R100 party slae in 'n week, of ek kry R130 betaling. Sy het my vernaamlik as dit 'n mooi groot beeld is wat ek maak, dan betaal sy my baie goed. Dan werk ek twee weke of so aan 'n beeld.*

*Maar ek het baie lekker gewerk by Miss Helen. Daar's niks klagte nie, wragtig. Lekker. Party daes praat ons tweetjies niks. Ek werk net en sy werk net. Sy was met die glassetjies besig. Om skoon te maak, of te kap, stamp met die klip.*



*Sy gooi dit in daai groot wit emmers en dan was sy die glasies skoon. Sy hou die glasies in bottels vir die beelde, maar dit het haar hande verniel.*

*[My heart was sore for Miss Helen. She gave me a good life - a life that I don't have today. Miss Helen didn't mind what she paid me. She didn't let anyone worry me when I was making a statue: 'Koos is very busy - just give him a chance.' She paid me per statue. When I was finished one she would pay me R50, R60, or R70. Say now I made two or three owls in a week, she could give me R60. It might be R10 to R20 for an owl. She really liked owls very much. I can't say I got R60 a week from Miss Helen because she paid me much more than that, sometimes much more than R100 in a week, or I could be paid R130. She would pay me much more for a lovely big sculpture which could take two weeks or so to make.*

*But I worked very happily with Miss Helen. There were no complaints at all - truly. Some days the two of us didn't talk at all - she just worked and I just worked. She was busy with the pieces of glass; cleaning, breaking, crushing them with a stone. She then put them in those large white buckets and washed the fragments clean. She kept the glass in bottles, ready for the sculptures, but it really messed up her hands.]*

Many people have commented with horror at the state of her hands. Stella Swiers said that her hands were like a man's:

*Haar hande was baie grof, en haar vingers was baie skeef. Haar hande was lelik; ek dink dis van die werk, die sement en die glas. Sy het met haar kaal hande gewerk. As sy vir ons [kinders] tammeletjie gee, het ons dit altyd opgelet. As sy met jou praat het sy hard aan jou gevat met haar growwe hande, en dit was grillerig. Dit het ons kinders bang gemaak. En sy het 'n baard en hare op haar lip gehad. (Interview Swiers, 1993)*

*[Her hands were very rough, and her fingers were very crooked. Her hands were ugly; I think it was from the work, the cement and the glass. She worked with her bare hands. When she gave us [children] tammeletjie, we always noticed them. When she talked to you, she held on to you hard with her rough hands, and it gave us the creeps. It made us children frightened. And she had a beard and hair on her top lip.]*

Blignaut de Villiers, said about her hands:

*You should have seen her hands; they was about twice the size of mine, her fingers were twice the size of mine - they were big. They were cut to ribbons. It was because of all the wounds that she would get working with the splinter glass. And you know, she would glue the walls, but she's not using proper tools, and now she's got to get the splinter glass on to it. And then she would just press it with her hand also, and pull her hand off and it's all covered in blood and cut to ribbons, and it would just heal by itself again. And the next time more wounds came and more healings came, and her hands looked terrible. But she couldn't be bothered. (Interview De Villiers, 1989)*

However, from early years, her sister Annie recalled:

*I remember when she was at school she covered up her hands, she wanted to keep them white. Later she was so verwaarloos - so verwaarloos! [so neglected - so neglected!]. I don't even want to remember. (Interview le Roux, A. 1986)*

Koos said that Helen always worked on a cement table on the back stoep, where she would put out her crushed glass to dry in the sun and the wind. He also said that Helen was very fond of her cactus plants which she planted amongst the sculptures so that children or adults who came to look at them wouldn't venture too close.

*Miss Helen wil nie hulle moet aan die goed vat of die kinders moet aan die mure vat nie.*

*[Miss Helen didn't want people to touch them, or the children to touch the walls.]*

Neither Helen's own created surroundings - her house or her statues, or even her plants, were for touching and pleasure for the body; they were all for the sense of sight, and their meaning was on a metaphysical dimension. The interior of the house was filled with materials such as the crushed glass and mirrors which reacted to light, and objects such as lamps and candles which created light. This was light which Helen could both create and control; even the sun and moon, to a large degree, did her bidding or were used for her purposes inside the house. Colour - which is of light - was another important element that appealed to the eye. This also only appeals to the eye. In the Camel Yard the statues do not encourage the viewer to stroke any smooth sinuous lines or curves; they are rough and not appealing to touch. But they are visually exciting and tell complex fascinating stories to the mind which is open to discover and follow the path of mystery along which they are walking. The cactus plants are extremely painful and even dangerous to touch. But the voluptuous, delicate white flowers which unexpectedly emerge at night from these spiky and rigidly upright stems can be seen as miracles of transformation, and surely was one of the reasons why they appealed so strongly to Helen.

It would seem that she became more and more of a recluse as time went on and she lived ever deeper in her own fantasy world. Blignaut de Villiers quotes her:

*Sy sê: 'Ek is nie mal of gek nie. Ek is net dom, want ek lees nooit 'n koerant of boeke, of luister na 'n radio nie. Ek weet niks van wat buite my huis aangaan nie. Hier in my eensaamheid is ek gelukkig.' That's why I say when I visited her there, there was always this happiness and charisma. She was an unhappy woman, but in her 'Little Glory' it was different, because there she could be herself. Maar sy sê: 'Oor wat die mense sê bekommer ek my nie; ek weet hulle wil nie hier kom nie. Hulle sê mos ek is gek.' And it's true, people were telling me she's crazy, people in Bethesda. It hurts her what people say. (Interview De Villiers, 1989)*

*[She said: 'I'm not mad or crazy. I'm just stupid, because I never read a newspaper or books, or listen to a radio. I don't know about anything going on outside my house. Here in my loneliness I am happy.' ... 'I don't worry about what people say; I know they don't want to come here. They say I am crazy.']*

Mrs Erika Cloete, neighbour, and wife of the dominee, wrote:

*It took considerable time to get to know Helen, albeit rather superficially. On visiting*

*her, she would not open the door on our knocking, but she made her way from the back of the house towards a gate at the side of the stoep. Only after seeing who her visitor was, would she open the door.....To win the friendship of Helen took a long time and I don't know whether we ever won her confidence. I mention this because she never told me anything about her marriages, divorce and abortion but this information we got from the community. (Letter Cloete, 1988)*

Helen herself corroborates this in a letter which she wrote to poet and writer Don MacLennan after he had come across The Owl House on a visit to Nieu Bethesda. He gained access initially because Helen was attracted by his very young daughter looking through the fence with her father. In the letter, dated 3 August, 1975, Helen wrote:

*I am shy of all people I like; I am frightened of mankind; and I am afraid of children.*

*I am cursed with an over-sensitivity - a perpetual awareness of my unsightly appearance; I prefer to avoid people; should they find me, I am bound to make the best of my job.*

'Helen seemed to be very wary of men', said Barbara Shaper (interview 1986). 'She could be very rude to people, and wouldn't let them in or answer the door,' said Annie (interview 1986). But Jill Wenman has a totally different viewpoint:

*The Owl House was always a tremendously hospitable place for me, even though they speak of Helen as a recluse. I'd travelled miles to get there. I was always treated with immense hospitality. I would be given tea and biscuits and we'd go out into the garden and look at how it had grown. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Amongst the letters in her house were many appreciative ones from people whom Helen had welcomed into her house, and some of these were complete strangers. Others were children who were evidently entranced with what she had created. A number of people, such as Stan Wenman who assisted Helen with detailed illustrations of the Easter Island figures; Blignaut de Villiers who obtained lamps and mirrors for her; Jill Wenman and Francie Lund who went searching to buy her glitter, tinsel and coloured sunfilter materials; and the couple who wrote the following letter, all obviously cared, and wished to help Helen acquire the things or information which she needed for her work. The dates on the letters also help in certain instances to pinpoint when particular sculptures were made.

*Yeoville, Johannesburg.  
June 1974*

*My dear Mrs Martin,*

*It's been a long time since Bernhard Thiel, my fiancée and husband-to-be, and I visited you. To be exact it was Easter this year.*

*Time flies and I had promised to drop you a line and if possible send you pictures of Mecca. Well, I am writing, however although I have looked, I cannot find anything of Mecca or similar. But - I shall continue looking and I'm sure I will find*

*something you will be able to base one of your ideas on.*

*Which brings me to a very important point: Bernhard and I would like to thank you most sincerely for your heartwarming hospitality. You didn't know us - yet without hesitation and with such enthusiasm you showed us over your very, very original house and let us into the secrets of your treasures. Dear Mrs Martin - how sweet of you. Once again please accept our grateful thanks. I shall keep on looking for a picture of Mecca or similar for you.*

*Our love to you  
Elizabeth and Bernhard*

*P.S. You may not remember us - we popped in during Easter. We were staying with the Van Heerdens.*

Louise van Vuuren wrote from Graaff-Reinet on 10 February 1974:

*Liefste tannie Helen,*

*My hart voel glad nie lekker nie, want ek sit nou weer in die skool. Ons moet ook so hard leer.*

*Ek hoop tannie is tevrede met die klein uiltjie wat ek gestuur het. Ek wil dit so graag aan tannie stuur omdat tannie so lief vir 'n uil is.*

*Ek dink persoonlik dat tannie se huis baie mooi is. Tannie behoort trots te wees op tannie se huis.*

*As Francois my weer saam met hom huis toe bring, sal ek en Gerda weer kom kuier. Dit is baie lekker om by tannie te kuier. Francois praat net van tannie se son teen die kombuis se dak. Dit is baie mooi.*

*My nuus is nou op maar tannie moet vir my terugskryf. Ek sal baie bly wees.*

*Liefde groete.*

*[Dearest auntie Helen,*

*My heart doesn't feel nice, because I am back at school. We also have to work so hard.*

*I hope auntie was pleased with the owl which I sent. I so badly wanted to send it because auntie loves an owl so much.*

*Personally, I think auntie's house is very beautiful. You should be proud of your house.*

*If Francois brings me home with him again, Gerda and I will come to visit. It's really nice to come and visit you. Francois speaks only of your sun on the kitchen ceiling. It is lovely.*

*My news is finished, but auntie must write back. I will be very glad.*

*With loving greetings.]*

And from Grahamstown, on 1 July 1970 Penny Elliott wrote:

*Dear Aunt Helen,*

*I am really terribly sorry I was not able to say good-bye to you, but there just wasn't time.*

*I really liked your camels and walls, they were too beautiful. I think you are a wonderful person to be able to do that beautiful work.*

*Yours sincerely.*



Tony, Jan, and Fenella Webb wrote from Kempton Park on 26 January 1972:

*Dear Miss Helen,*

*We want to thank you very much for your gifts to us when we were in Bethesda recently. It was very kind of you to think of us and we do appreciate it. We hope your new woman/camel is going well. I wonder when we will be in Bethesda again to see it. Thank you again. Best wishes.*

Over the years there were obviously increasing numbers of visitors who heard of Helen's work, and came to see it. Mrs Hartzenberg says the Director of Publicity from Graaff-Reinet would come to her with visitors wanting to see The Owl House. Although Helen needed this recognition, she was always unsure as to its motivation - whether it was appreciation or idle curiosity. An undated note from Tiny Hartzenberg found among Helen's papers confirms this:

*Dear Miss Helen,*

*I've told you over the years that your work is so much appreciated and you must not listen to criticism of the locals. You would not get so many visitors to see what you've done if it was not appreciated. Keep a visitor's book and a box with a slit in just inside your front door and see how the people will react. The lady who sent you the owl is evidently an artist. It is very real and I'm sure you will treasure it. Love T H.*

Jill expanded on this in conversation:

*People used to come and see her place - Mrs Claasen used to barge in and insist people have a look and be very sweet, and behind her back think she was a cranky lunatic. She knew that, and was quite sad but also quite funny about it. I used to feel very frustrated with her inability to be able to set her limits clearly with the people in the valley. I felt that she was messed around quite a lot by them, and she was fairly ingratiating, sort of timid, in their presence. When they were gone there would be this humour of someone having viewed it all from another perspective. She had a hell of a sense of humour. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Although the three little Malgas daughters liked Helen very much and enjoyed visiting The Owl House, Koos Malgas said that the other children of the village were frightened of her and called her a 'heksekunstenaar' [witch-artist] (interview 1988). Helen became desperate with children throwing stones at her stars and moons and statues. Stirling Retief, son of Gertie Retief, next-door neighbour of Helen's since 1946, and owner of the Bethesda Trading Company (which celebrated its century in October 1993), said:

*The children would come and throw stones on her roof, and she'd come running at three in the morning and knock on my door - she wasn't properly dressed - and ask me for help. The police caught them, it was little children. She was a real artist, but artists are different from other people and do things their own way. People here didn't understand her. (Interview Retief, Stirling. 1993)*

He continued:

*In the day you'd never see her. She'd scuttle out at 5 am to the post office with her letters. She'd be busy all day in the Camel Yard. Her windows [from the long bedroom] looked out onto our garden. You would see her moving around her house at night, and then she would be walking round among the statues with her lanterntjie [little lantern]. She was very quiet, except when her lover was there - Hattingh.*

Elsie Hendriks who grew up in Nieu Bethesda, said that everybody in the village, the white and the brown communities, thought that Miss Helen was mad,

*... and now everybody from all over the world comes to Nieu Bethesda because of what she made. I thought that what she made was beautiful. (Interview Hendricks, 1993)*

Architect John Moyle, who visited Helen for the first time in 1973 or 1974, said:

*She was self-deprecating to an absurd and embarrassing extent; she had relationship problems, and was aware of them. There was an extraordinary contrast between her tremendously deferential attitude, like hiding away when visitors came - a genuine shyness - and yet her commitment to her work transcended it completely; she was totally involved in her work. While talking to you, she would suddenly dart across the room to move a piece of mirror on the windowsill to catch and reflect the sunlight. She was shy and vulnerable and it was up to you not to invade or make her feel intruded upon. (Interview Moyle, 1993)*

In spite of Helen's shyness and reserve, she had an enormous need to communicate and reach out to people. She seems to have spent a great deal of her time writing effusive notes or letters to a number of friends, neighbours, acquaintances, and those who evinced any interest in or admiration for her work. Mrs Cloete wrote further in her letter:

*It seemed that she had a liking for me and sometimes wrote short letters, just to share something (always written "in haste"). She once sent me an Afrikaans translation by Langenhoven of the Omar Khayyam. (Letter Cloete, 1988)*

Helen apparently took little account of her appearance. Mrs Cloete continues in this letter:

*Usually her appearance was not very tidy. She did not care for dressing and always had beach thongs on her feet. And her hair also was rather untidy. She made the impression of an eccentric person, rather reserved, but intelligent.*

The artist Peggy Delport, whose family has had a holiday home at Nieu Bethesda for many years, had the following to say about Helen:

*She dramatized and played roles. The initial approach to me was from Helen's side, because she knew I was an artist. She sent notes with Koos, to which I would reply, and then there would be a very ornate and flowery response. She had this tremendous reach out to people, and played games - everything was so elaborate. She also used to send huge bowls of Queen of the Night cactus flowers to me with Koos. (Interview Delport, 1986)*

Jill said about Helen's letter writing:

*We were friends for three or four years. From the time that she met me till she died,*

*she communicated with me three or four times a week. I became frantic because the letters would pile up and her writing was so small that it was exhausting to read. It created tremendous pressure. I would visit her and that would clear the decks for a while. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

In amongst Helen's papers in the house, the largest remaining collection of correspondence (numbering 24 letters and two cards), was from Mrs Estelle van Schalkwijk in Graaff-Reinet. Her husband was Dr Johannes van Schalkwijk who had treated Helen, and also her mother and father before they died. Estelle van Schalkwijk was herself an artist, and these caring and interesting letters, commencing in 1957, continued until 1968. Many started by thanking Helen for the latest little gift which she had sent over, be it *'the lovely tammeletjie'*, *'beautiful fresh honey'*, *'little basket of eggs'*, *'wonderful gift ... that lovely pink moon'*, *'such a wonderful, wonderful gift, so beautiful and Elizabeth Arden of all extravagances'*, and *'I love pretty hankies, and these match my different dresses. How very generous you are.'*

Her warmth and sense of humour comes out clearly in one letter dated 22-6-1958:

*My dear Friend*

*How sweet and unselfish of you to part with eggs when they are so rare - more precious than gold at this time and such a blessing to me with my children all coming home - not all but seven all told ...*

*My fowls - six - have not laid an egg for months but I talked nicely to them this morning and said they must get busy. I said it in English but may be I should have said it in Afrikaans: Ek ken nie hoenders se taal nie. [I do not know fowls' language.]*

*This reminds me of my early married life when I tried to tell an old lady that I'd made a nice pie for my husband of "klein honders" ("little dogs" - it should have been "hoenders", meaning fowls). Their faces were a sight to behold and I guess they were very sorry for their doctor for having married the wrong woman.*

Right from the beginning of this correspondence Estelle van Schalkwijk continually invited Helen to come and visit her in her house in Graaff-Reinet, and also arranged transport for her with a friend. It indicates how alienated Helen was that she could not even venture in to a home where she would have been so welcomed. On 14-12-1959 Estelle van Schalkwijk wrote:

*My dear Friend*

*I was looking forward to your coming to spend the day with me and every time the bell rang I hoped to see you, but was disappointed.*

Helen even went to visit Dr Van Schalkwijk at his surgery attached to the Van Schalkwijk home in April 1960, and yet still did not visit her friend. Mrs Van Schalkwijk protested in her letter dated 30 April 1960:

*My dear Mrs Pienaar,*

*How can I forgive you for not coming to see me? I was so bitterly disappointed when my husband said you had actually been to our house.*

*You must never never be so naughty again. I thought you would have loved to see our home and my studio and the work I do. And to think you just went away like that. .... next time don't ever pass me by.*

It was evidently a home which would have intrigued Helen, being filled with antiques and treasures, and Estelle van Schalkwijk was certainly aware of this, as she continues in this same letter:

*Now you must be sure to come and see my work when you come again - or I shall feel very hurt. I have collected bits and pieces of china and lacquer and all sorts of books and pictures and the house is almost like a museum which most people find interesting, so do come and let me thank you personally for all your kind and generous gifts and your beautifully written and worded letters. They are quite outstanding.*

*With warmest thanks and love,*

*Estelle van Schalkwijk*

It seems unlikely that Helen ever did grant Estelle her wish for a visit to her home. Her requests continued till at least 4 January 1968 when she wrote from the family holiday home at the Wilderness:

*My dear Friend,*

*Had a visit yesterday from Hilda v H. her daughter and 2 friends ... we enjoy her visits very much in Graaff Reinet when she comes early in the morning . I always hope you will come with her, but you never do.*

*We have a nice interesting old home which I'm sure you would enjoy visiting.*

*Much love, Excuse haste.*

*Estelle*

Estelle was clearly sensitive to the fact that Helen found it difficult to cope at all with visitors to her home, let alone if they arrived unannounced, and so wrote on 17-5-59:

*My dear Friend*

*I am hoping to come up to B one day again, and I will go and see you. If so I'll phone Tiny Hartzenberg and won't take you by surprise. Then you can get out of your gardening shoes etc. You are silly. ...*

*Yours sincerely*

*Estelle v Schalkwijk*

She very obviously regarded Helen's work highly, as shown in these extracts from other letters. The first two are undated:

*Dear Friend*

*I hope one day to explore all your yard and its treasures and interesting things. I'd like to take a friend to "write you up". Seldom one meets such an interesting and artistic person and you apologize for dust etc. Shame on you. Love and best wishes and many thanks. E v S.*



*My dear Friend,*

*My relatives are coming in this afternoon and I'm taking the opportunity to write a note to say the more I think of your amazing work, the more it appeals to me, and anything more original and unusual, I've never seen. It really is a fantastic house and the yard with all those figures really leaves one breathless. The time and energy and the extraordinary art should really go into a magazine like the Huisgenoot or Personality.*

*With love. God bless you. Estelle.*

Box 42  
Graaff Reinet  
30 April 1960

*My dear Mrs Pienaar,*

*I wonder if you and your native boy are making any more figures in cement? I still wonder at all those figures and animals you planned together. I expect it was your idea which he perhaps carried out. Your garden or yard was really such a surprise and revelation to me.*

*With warmest thanks and love, Estelle van Schalkwijk*

There are frequent references to Helen's own attitude to herself, and her feelings of being unacceptable in society. In the letter of 18-7-1958, Estelle van Schalkwijk writes:

*And now about not wanting me to see you in my own home. You are quite ridiculous - and you must get all those silly ideas out of your head. .... Please take a more positive view of life. .... You must not think people dislike you. How can you entertain such a wicked thought? Most people are kind and I am sure you just imagine this.*

She continues at length on this subject in her letter dated 19-11-1958:

*My dear Mrs Pienaar,*

*I am ashamed to have taken so long to write and thank you for your sweet letter and the lovely preserve you so kindly sent us. It was delicious.*

*And now about yourself - I'm glad I'm too old to worry one bit what people think if they find me in a muddle. We all have jobs to do that we can't dress up for and I only wish I could get your help in mixing cement for a bird bath. Mine has twice been broken and I do love to see them splashing in the water which I see from my room. I put all the attractive plants and things where I can see them when sitting at the table.*

*I only remember you in a lovely soft blue dress, looking very active and the one memory is of a lovely light room with a beautiful round table in it - the biggest I have ever seen and how clever of you to have used the feet of an old one! It really is most impressive. It was all so light and sunny. I only wish I could have stayed a bit to talk. I'd love to know something of your life. I believe it has not been too happy, but who is happy to-day? We have lost the art. I try every day to think of all my blessings I can see. I can walk and talk to friends and I have so many things to be grateful for.*

*My one friend is quite blind, another is quite parallized - (can't spell it - so tired and stupid today). Two years ago she rode a bicycle and was a strapping girl -*

*now her legs are quite useless and she is losing the use of her arms - has no money except a pension from Gov.*

*Other friends are lame and decrepit - so I can only thank God for all my health and sight and other blessings. I try not to dwell on the negative things. If one does one feels sorry for oneself and self pity is the most devastating emotion. I just try to forget rudeness and insults and such things.*

*Jesus gave us only one commandment 'Love one another,' in other words 'Be kind to one another' and after all the turmoil of my life with many ups and downs, I am finding some peace at last, so old age has some compensations.*

*You are quite wrong about people disliking you. They all tell me you are so clever and interesting but too reserved and retiring.*

*So, my dear, just dress up and go and visit all the people you think don't like you - and see how very happy you will be.*

*With loving wishes and many thanks*

*Estelle van Schalkwijk*

*You write so beautifully. Have you tried to write anything?*

*I hope one day to sit quietly in your lovely cheerful room and have a good talk.*

*E*

The fact that Helen kept all these letters, and it seems, sent little gifts (usually tammeletjie or eggs) to accompany most of her letters, shows how she valued Estelle van Schalkwijk's warm and outreaching friendship. Intensive attempts have been made to discover if the letters which Helen wrote back still exist, but with no success, and it would seem that they were probably destroyed when Mrs Van Schalkwijk died. They could throw light on much more of Helen's life, as Mrs Van Schalkwijk asks questions, such as:

*I'd love to hear the story of your life if it won't hurt you too much to write it. It was Mrs Pietsie v H. who said that you were so clever, but very retiring and reserved.*

She also refers to certain incidents, which makes it possible to work out when some of the important events of Helen's life probably occurred. Amongst these was the hugely problematical matter of her feet, which led to her having her two little toes cut off. On 9 December 1957 she writes:

*It was very kind and thoughtful of you to send it and to think of us when you had so much pain and trouble. I do hope the feet are behaving well!*

And on 20-4-1958:

*I am so sorry you are troubled with such painful corns.*

On 10 October 1958, she writes:

*It is not true that my husband has retired. He is working here in our home. He will be only too glad to help you if you can see him. He can't advise you without seeing your feet again.*

Helen's feet were, according to everyone who knew or saw her, a source of both great discomfort, and embarrassment to her. She was unable to wear shoes, and either wore beach thongs or went barefoot. In her letter of 3 August 1975 to Don MacLennan, she evidently replies to a question of his:

*My bare feet - it has a sad history and a long one; a very sad history - ... (bone specialist) did the wrong operation to my feet. I possess more shoes than the world's Cuthbert's Shoe Store holds; and yet I am unable to wear a shoe; I have even tried the sandals of my Arabs - Stockings - socks - neither of the two - my poor-feet bore holes right through.*

Helen's own sister Annie said that the family thought the fact that she had had both her little toes cut off, which crippled her and made her walk barefoot, was a very strange thing to have done. Her niece Betty Crous, who is a doctor, thinks that this operation must have taken place in the early 1960s, or possibly the very late 1950s (interview 1994). About Helen's missing toes she said:

*The reason for it occurred quite a few months before my mother (Alida) told me about it, otherwise I would have referred her to the medical council. The problem occurred because of bunions caused by pointy shoes. She saw the orthopaedic surgeon in Graaff-Reinet, and later went into the hospital. The surgeon asked her in her pre-med state: "What are we going to do for you today?" and she answered, "You are going to take off my little toes", and do you know, that is exactly what he did, instead of performing a bunionectomy! With bunions, the toes are already pushed outwards and with the removal of the little toes, the others are pushed even further out. She then couldn't wear shoes at all and could only wear flip-flops. (Letter Crous, 1993)*

Stella Swiers recollected that she and other children always noticed Helen's feet when they brought bottles for her, but this made her very self-conscious. Mrs Swiers said the reason that Helen never opened the gate to them was to prevent them from seeing her feet.

Blignaut de Villiers said:

*The reason she said she lived like a recluse was her deformed feet. That was the reason, the feet. She didn't like people seeing her feet, that hurt her. They looked horrible man. Because you must remember she walked all over with those bare feet. The place must also have been frosted in winter time, and thorns and sharp stones; she couldn't be bothered any more, although she didn't want anyone to see. (Interview De Villiers, 1989)*

Many people in the village also said that Helen was so self-conscious about her feet that if she was walking in the street and anyone approached, she would crouch down so that her skirt covered her feet, and then continue once they had passed. Blignaut de Villiers said that Helen told him this fact himself:

*Maar sy sê: 'Ek is 'n baie ongelukkige vrou. Ek het al plat in die straat gaan sit sodat mense nie my voete moet sien nie.'*

*[But she said: 'I am a very unhappy woman. I've even sat down flat in the street so*



Above: Some of Helen's shoes - the glamorous ones which she never wore, and a home-made pair of sandals fashioned from wood and buck hide. In her latter years she could not wear conventional shoes as she had had her two little toes removed and shoes hurt her feet. As a result she wore either beach thong type footwear, or went barefoot.

Below: In the wardrobes were numerous elegant dresses, some delicately made from lawn and lace, which Helen never wore, and also many pairs of shoes fashionable in the 1920s and 30s.



Stewart Lund

Right: Helen, wearing beach thongs on her feet, with Francie Lund in the Camel Yard. Behind her is a pile of bottles to be used either for constructions in the yard or for grinding up to be applied to the walls inside the house.



*that people can't see my feet.']*

Clothes did not have any interest for her. Mrs Hartzenberg recounted that Helen could frequently be found in her garden wearing no clothes at all, and this fact is told by other residents as well. Barbara Shaper said:

*She was a child of nature - she used to walk round in the garden stark naked and was very heavily tanned all over. (Interview Shaper, 1986)*

Don Maclennan described her:

*She seemed poor. She wore a faded floral cotton dress, and had slip-slops on her feet. And it was winter time then. (Interview Maclennan, 1989)*

Johan Vosloo said that in her dress she looked like:

*... a poor white. But not dirty in the real sense of the word. Yes - a poor and a simple person, but not an ordinary simple person. (Interview Vosloo, 1993)*

Although she had access to such a wide selection of very pretty dresses, both her own and Alida's, she did not make use of them. She did not seem to have any sense of establishing her own, personal identity through her appearance. In fact it would seem that her own self-image was very fragile and relied for its very existence on continual outside affirmation.

Koos, merely in the course of conversation, said of her garb that the lovely clothes in the red bedroom were Alida's and that Helen never wore them: '*Sy koop nie duur rokke nie, sy maak maar beelde.*' [*She didn't buy expensive frocks, she just made statues.*]

Another interesting fact is how often different people have compared Helen to a bird when talking about her. And this affinity was not only in appearance and manner, but also in her great interest in, and love of birds. Koos said that she looked after them and cooked mealies for them. Rendo Pienaar, mayor of Nieu Bethesda in 1993, said that he remembered as a child bringing Helen the live birds she needed to feed to the owls in her aviary, and she would pay for them with a handful of unroasted peanuts (interview Pienaar, R. 1993). Her nephew Peter, Annie's son, described her as:

*...very highly strung and very active. She only sat when she was exhausted. She was like a little bird fluttering around; she was quick in her movements. (Interview Le Roux, P. 1986)*

Don Maclennan compared her voice to: '*a bird scratching on glass*'. When Jill Wenman discussed her own association with Athol Fugard prior to his writing *Road to Mecca*, she said:

*My original perception of Athol was of a warm, exuberant, funny person - very like Helen in a way - who seemed to understand her. The same bird-like qualities and the underlying vulnerability! (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

It seems that Helen had a sense of humour; for those who knew her anyway. Jill says:

*She used to make me laugh like very few other people have. She would mimic the people in the valley. She was quite a sensual person in a lot of ways, with a wicked sense of humour on that sort of level.*

*There was a hysterically funny letter she wrote me, about having penises fitted to the statues, and how difficult it was to decide on a price/size payment basis with Koos!*

It is interesting to note though, that there are only a couple of cement babies that ever actually acquired these attributes. It transpires this was due to Koos's sense of propriety. When asked why almost all the nude statues are not shown as sexual beings, Koos explained that Helen *had* in fact wanted him to make them true to life, but it was *he* who demurred, concerned that people in the village would strongly disapprove (interview Malgas, 1993). So it was, contrary to expectation, Koos who had prevailed, in deference to local sensibilities, on a crucial aspect of portraying the nude human body.

John Moyle said that in a number of ways there were curious anomalies in Helen.

*She was an ordinary country woman in a way, but there was a sense that she'd seen a bit of life too. I got the impression from her that she had been around a bit. Although she was an old lady, there was an underlying sexuality. (Interview Moyle, 1993)*

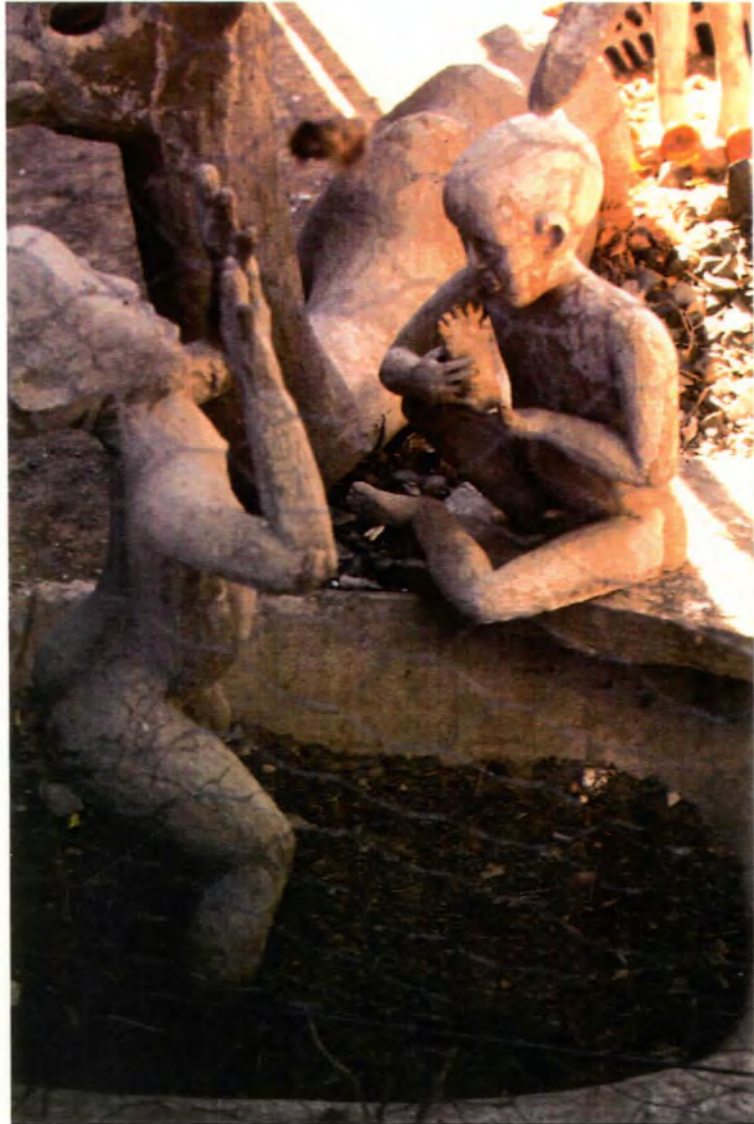
Helen needed to find or affirm her identity through other people's recognition and acknowledgement of her work, yet she persisted without it. Work became her method of communication instead of dialogue. From observations by aware and creative people, such as artist Peggy Delpont, and writer and poet Don MacLennan, she was not interested in other people or their work except in what they reflected back to her. Don MacLennan says that she made excessive claims on him, and wanted constant reassurance and recognition of her work. This was to the point of his exasperation and withdrawal.

Apparently Peggy Delpont once brought that great master of eccentric artists - Walter Battis - to meet Helen and see her work. Helen wouldn't let this strange man into her home, and later, on learning that he was a well-known *artist*, was most upset not to have met him. This was indeed a lost opportunity; such a meeting could have been very important to Helen. Peggy said: *'I was an artist, but she wasn't interested in my work.'* In other words, Helen was mostly interested in making contact with Peggy Delpont as an artist, for Peggy's potential role in recognizing *her* as a fellow artist. Without that reflection back to her, she did not believe that she had identity or value.

Jill Wenman, who was one of the people who most loved Helen, said about their communication:

*She used to talk such a lot, that it was difficult to interrupt her, so I just used to listen when I came to visit.*

In the opinion of Peter le Roux, Annie's son and Helen's nephew, although Helen had much



Two of the babies in the Camel Yard. The baby attempting to put his foot into his mouth is one of only two nude male figures represented with a penis.

love and sympathy from Annie,

*she couldn't share her artistry with her. If she hadn't had Jill, she might have ended it all much earlier. (Interview Le Roux, P. 1986)*

Although Helen so desperately craved recognition as an artist, she could not actually believe, or accept it, if she was given it. In a letter dated 15 July 1975, written to Don MacLennan after he had given her 'this most precious and costly transcript, Omar Khayyam', which he inscribed: 'from one artist to another', she writes:

*Never, never; never before, has anything so wonderful and so truly good, come my way; and instead of feeling happy; indeed the happiest soul in this globe; I am weepy and tearful - why?? For the reason that I deserve not so much honour; praise, as proved me, by you - I note that you award and credit me the title of an 'artist' - how can you, when I am a dud; an ignorant soul, who knows nothing - I do not remember "dates," nor do I remember "names," nor "faces"...*

How very much she needed this recognition and human contact can also be perceived in another letter to Don MacLennan, dated 3rd August 1975, which starts:

*Thank you so very much for nice thoughts of me expressed in your highly esteemed letter which I whisper to myself, like a Prayer - And how it carries me throughout the hours while I am at work!*

There were a few people who were fairly regular visitors to Helen's home, so in fact she was by no means isolated. She was very lonely though - the people with whom she felt she could deeply communicate and relate to were the rarities. Jill was the person who was closest to her over the last few years of her life. Koos Malgas said of their friendship:

*Foeitog, hulle was vertrou aan mekaar daai tweetjies. Julle kan sien dit. Hulle loop hande aan mekaar. Miss Jill was haar beste vriendin. Miss Jill was lief om daar te kom - baie. Elke end van die jaar Miss Jill was daar. (Interview Malgas, 1988)*

*[Shame, those two were devoted to each other. You could see it. They walked hand in hand. Miss Jill was her best friend. Miss Jill loved coming there - she came at the end of every year.]*

He also said of Helen:

*Sy was nie snaaks nie, sy was slim. Foeitog, sy's vol misverstand. Sy was altyd alleen. Sy het nie vriende nie - net Frances van Rijn [van der Ryst].*

*[She wasn't strange, she was clever. Shame, she was so misunderstood. She was always alone. She didn't have any friends - only Frances van der Ryst.]*

He continued that Frances van der Ryst, who was an old resident of Nieu Bethesda, came to visit Helen every afternoon. And then there was Jill, who came often.

Peggy Delpont related that Frances van der Ryst visited Helen every afternoon at about 3 pm:



*Helen hated Frances, and Frances didn't like Helen's work at all. They dramatized - played roles.* (Interview Delport, 1986)

Frances van der Ryst scolded Helen frequently about the damage working with the glass was doing to her hands, said Koos, but Helen would not take any notice of her. Jill said about the relationship between Helen and Frances van der Ryst:

*It was quite a difficult relationship. She was quite a sour old dame. There was a dependency relationship between them I think. I asked her why she allowed her to come around, and she said 'It's always been like that'. She was Helen's one contact with the outside world.*

Jill also felt that one of the values to Helen of their own relationship was that Jill formed a link with the world for Helen.

*It reinforced her idea that the world outside wasn't only hostile - that there were people around who did actually like what she did, and didn't want to break it - so she started inviting more people in. A lot of the more recent pieces [statues] were ones inviting people in.* (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)

Apparently Helen was very embarrassed about being seen to collect a pension, and would go to the post office clutching a magazine. Postmistress, Mrs Claasen, would wait until everybody had gone and then give her her pension which she concealed in the pages of the magazine. Koos would normally be sent on errands, and if Helen ventured forth, it was usually under cover of night. Peggy Delport said that Helen used to 'scuttle down the road', and Mrs Claasen recalled how Helen told her that she had admired Mrs Claasen's pink lamp glowing out into the dark street one night.

Mrs Lettie Kritzinger (also one of the Pienaar family, and sister to Norah van Niekerk and Rosalie Briers), was one of Nieu Bethesda's longtime residents. Both of her sisters told of how, after Mrs Kritzinger's husband died, she was very lonely, and 'asked Helen to go and sleep with her of an evening' (interviews van Niekerk, 1993; Briers, 1993). Mrs van Niekerk said:

*But Helen, as someone once suggested, was just like an owl. She never left her home before it was dark, and in the morning when it was still dark, she left Mrs Kritzinger's home to go back to her own. And when she went there my sister kept dinner for her and warmed it up, because she lived on dry bread and tea. She was mad about her tea; a pot of tea was too little for her. And my sister always said, 'I don't know how she could have eaten all that', because she kept a pie dish full of vegetables and meat, and a big pot of tea, and she said she finished everything. She never took the trouble to cook for herself. Lettie was very good to Helen, and she went there for a very, very long time.* (Interview Van Niekerk, 1993)

Elsie Hendriks said that Helen used to walk down the side of the road, in the bushes, and not where people usually walk - in the middle of those wide dusty streets where there *are* no pavements. She did not often come out of her house and walk the short distance of three blocks to the post office. She also said that Helen was shy and didn't look at you but walked with her head down (interview Hendriks, 1993). Stella Swiers remembers that Helen would walk quickly to and from the post

office, first looking up and down the street to see who was around. And she would also go out of her home with a bucket to get water from the river which ran in front of her house.

The post office was her important link with the world; from there she collected her extensive correspondence and vital pension, and despatched her letters. Koos was sent to buy bread and any other requirements while neighbours also provided food. Apart from these expeditions however, she seldom left her domain; although Jill recalls that she once accompanied her into Graaff-Reinet to buy paint for her camels and wise men. If Helen seldom left her home to venture into the village, she could hardly bear to be away from the valley. Annie said that Helen came to visit Alida and Annie in their house at Warner Beach in Natal, which they shared after their husbands died. Helen had a tremendous inner conflict - wanting to be with Annie and her family, and not being able to break away from her home and work.

*She was no sooner there than she wanted to come home. She was never at rest - she wanted to be at home among her things. And she couldn't relate to the world outside Nieu Bethesda - she didn't belong. (Interview Le Roux, A. 1986)*

Jill says:

*She couldn't tear herself away from The Owl House because it had become so much a part of her.*

Helen once went with Jill to visit Annie. Apparently when they arrived, Annie put Helen in a bath, and made her wear a dress. Jill said:

*... she usually wore jeans. Annie was appalled at how unkept she looked. She used to bully Helen! (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Koos commented on this expedition saying that when Helen returned she told him that she was never going away again, and that her back was sore from the long car journey.

A loss which affected Helen profoundly was the death of Mr Johannes Hattingh on 16 February 1963. He had developed cancer behind the eye, and was in great pain, but would still travel from Peddie to visit Helen in Nieu Bethesda, the last occasion being in October 1962. According to his daughter, Machteld Kruger, the pain finally became too great and he returned home to Peddie to be nursed by his family. He had asked his wife to let Helen know when he died, which she did. The torn half of an undated telegram - a poignant memento - was found amongst Helen's papers, postmarked Peddie, saying 'Hattingh oorlede' ['Hattingh deceased'] and signed 'Hattingh'. Mrs Hattingh must have asked her other daughter to despatch the telegram, as Mrs Kruger said:

*My sister was very angry when she had to do with Helen again and let her know that my father had died. The telegram would have read: 'Mnr Hattingh oorlede'. [Mr Hattingh deceased'.] She [Helen] thought of him and his cancer when her eyesight was failing, and I am sure that that is why she committed suicide. (Interview Kruger, 1993)*

Helen had evidently told Mrs Van Schalkwijk about Mr Hattingh's death in a letter. She replied on 21-4-1963:

*My dear Friend*

*I was really so sorry to hear of your sad loss. Your letter sounded so heartbroken and desolate. I just hope the pain is easing by this time. One of the compensations of old age, (tho' you are not nearly there yet) is that one suffers less and for a shorter time. If you have corresponded over the years, as I feel sure has been the case if your friend has lived far away, then you will be missing the letters and the link that binds you. One looks forward so eagerly to letters and feels so rich after reading them.*

*What a wonderful thing it is to be able to read and write. It opens worlds unknown and brings far friends right into one's house.*

As in so many other letters, Mrs Van Schalkwijk continued trying to share with Helen interesting aspects of her own life, presumably hoping to coax Helen out of herself. This particular letter ended with a description of her own early tragedy of losing a much-loved brother in the war. She wrote another caring letter from the family holiday home at the Wilderness on 23-10-63:

*Dear Friend*

*I hope this year will be a better one for you and heal your aching heart. Time is kind to one as a rule otherwise we could hardly face life and its trials. I hope your brother from Kenya, who I heard was expected, has been a blessing and a comfort.*

*Every blessing and good wish, Estelle v S.*

Having played a major role in her life for 21 years, Johannes Hattingh's death must have been extremely painful for Helen, and it is unlikely that she had anyone immediately available with whom she could really share that pain. Five years later, in 1968, she had to face the death of another person who was of great importance in her life - that of her sister Alida. '*Helen was distraught after Alida died*', said Betty Crous, Alida's daughter (letter Crous, 1993). Estelle van Schalkwijk died in September 1971 said her daughter Andrée du Plessis (telephone interview Du Plessis, 1993), and Helen must have sadly missed this link, through correspondence, with a very caring person. Then in August 1972 Mrs Lettie Kritzinger died, and Helen no longer had the much-needed companionship that she had known when she went to sleep at her house, nor the regular evening meal which Mrs Kritzinger had always kept for her.

The deaths of so many of these important people must have intensified her feelings of aloneness and alienation. Then, a year or two later - quite unexpectedly - two vital young women, Jill Wenman and Francie Lund, came into her world. Both played an influential, probably even a critically important, part in the three or four remaining years of Helen's life. They had come to stay with friends from Cape Town who had a holiday house at Nieu Bethesda, and thereby met Helen.



Johan Fotgjeter

Helen had two young friends, Jill Wenman (above) and Francie Lund (below), who played an extremely important part in the last few years of Helen's life, and showed great interest in, and appreciation of, her work.



Stewart Lund



There are many letters written by Helen which show how very much their company, interest and involvement in her work, meant to her. Professor Eleanor Nash suggested that Helen might have projected her ideal self onto these two young, free women, and that she may also have seen them as imaginary daughters - the two daughters she never had (interview Nash, E. 1989).

In her letters to Jill and to Francie, Helen constantly begs for reassurance of their ongoing love and that they would not leave her. Jill said that during the time that she knew Helen, there did seem to be a slowly growing trust, even if it wavered, in the fact that not everything of importance to her would vanish or be taken away. She illustrated this with the analogy of a number of injured geese which Helen used to care for, choosing to stay and not fly away, even when they got well. This was a significant sign for Helen that trust was possible and would not always be betrayed.

*I think that was also what happened with the friendship; I was also one of the people that stayed and didn't just fly away again. When you live in an isolated place I think that becomes a fear.*

Jill also said:

*Part of the reason that one dies, and part of the reason that she died the way she did, was that she couldn't accept change - couldn't have things being different. I mean she could have left here, but she didn't know that. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Although the moon and sun were both important to her, Helen's real and most important world was a world of night and mysterious night lights - lamps, candles, the moon, stars, and even the Queen of the Night cactus flowers, which have an almost luminous quality in the dark. Jill described the scene:

*The special times were at night. We used to come and have tea in the garden. These huge white cactus flowers were out - scented and very heady. You had the image of walking through this garden where all the images came much more alive at night. It's the same with the house; you don't see the dowdiness. There's much more of a sense of mystery about the house, and garden, at night. It's almost ghostlike. She used to look out for the moon; a fickle companion that came and went. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Helen told Jill that one of the most magical times in the garden was when it had snowed and all the owls stared out at one from beards of snow.

*When I came back here after her death, that's exactly how the garden was - magical. It was full of snow and all these creatures stared out at you through real beards of snow, just as she had said.*

One of Koos's many memories of Helen was:

*Miss Helen staan in die nag op. Dan loop sy daar tussen die beelde rond - sy het so 'n klein lantertjie met 'n rooi glasie. Miss Helen kan 'n mens baie groot dinge vertel van die nag en natuur. En sê sy my, 'O Koos, dit was lekker om daar tussen die beelde rond te loop.' En ek sê, 'Maar slaap miesies dan nie?' En sy sê, 'Nee*

*Koos, ek kan nie slaap nie. Ek kyk my beeldjies, nie slaap nie. Ek kyk my beeldtjies.’ Foeitog, Miss Helen! (Interview Malgas, K. 1988)*

*[Miss Helen used to get up at night and walk round between her statues carrying a little lantern with red glass. Miss Helen could tell a person lots of wonderful things about the night and nature - everything. She was very clever. She would say to me: ‘Oh Koos, it was lovely walking round among the statues.’ I would ask her if she didn’t sleep, and she replied: ‘No Koos, I couldn’t sleep; I just looked at my statues; I looked at my statues.’ Shame, Miss Helen!].*

The reason that she had so many stars made in the garden, Helen told Jill, was because so often at night in Nieu Bethesda the skies were cloudy or dark, and it was nice to know that there were still always stars there. Her humorous quip was:

*And you don’t want the wise men to lose their way!*

Apart from walking round her garden at night for pleasure, Helen also spent many anxious nights watching because of the threat to her treasured creation of damage from snow - a potential winter occurrence in that part of the Karoo. She describes it very movingly in the letter of 3 August 1975 to Don Maclellan:

*I am living in literal dread and fear of its impending visit; as I am fully aware what is lying in store for me within the coming months; I could narrate of many consecutive anxious nights of past years, when I made every endeavour in preventing the roof of my back yard; (which, at that time, was all fenced with netting wire, serving as a roof to that enormous expanse) from sliding down, owing to layers of so-called "dry snow" which generally (packs up) during the dead of night. Shall I ever forget those anxious nights of bitter cold and heavy snow, when, at length, I took to eating sweets - (mostly chocolates) in order to keep warm as well as keep awake: and how the sweets caused a frantic indigestion, which overwhelmed me to such an extent, that I failed to keep awake any longer. And as the lights around me grew dim and each disappeared in its turn, and a silence fell over the village; I was reluctant to go indoors, and seek refuge with my bed -. And then, to wake the following morning and to find that the entire roof of my backyard had sunk down to the ground - pillars fallen down, expensive Mirror Stars, crushed and broken to bits; a lovely nude; another nice figure; another model - (a labour of many days -) ‘Snow’ - strange, I love the sight of it, so much; and yet it has brought destruction; - well over hundreds of Rands - . How I should love to see it at the foot of Mount Hebron, when it was all snow white.*

Helen’s focus was in all likelihood spiralling further and further inwards towards her own fragile centre. The number of people who were of importance to her had dwindled through deaths. The only person with whom she was in daily contact, and to whom she felt close, was Koos Malgas; all through the long nights she was alone. This catastrophe which she described to Don Maclellan, and the prospect of others, must have had a detrimental effect on her, and particularly in her isolation. Her own health and strength were failing her, and all of these factors must have contributed to causing depression. A human being has three major needs: for love, control and inclusion. If

these are not being met a person can become suicidal, and none of these three needs were being met in Helen's life.

Dr Johan Pienaar was District Surgeon in Graaff-Reinet from the mid 1960s, and was the doctor who would have treated Helen if required. He said:

*To live on your own for a long time has an effect in that people become self-sufficient, their own company becomes sufficient for their needs. For someone who was maybe psychologically disturbed, different, her own world would have become more important for her, otherwise she wouldn't have created all these figures - there was quite a wide variety of animals. She must have become virtually happy in that surroundings. She would have been unhappy if she was taken out of it. She was at an age when most people were in homes being looked after, not fending and looking after themselves. ...*

*The Nieu Bethesda Clinic fell under me. ... I never really knew her. In the sense that I saw her two or three times, and the sister asked me to go and see her in the house when she wasn't feeling well. But on no occasion did I see her when she was really ill. ... She was a very retiring person; she didn't want to bother anybody. And she really didn't feel comfortable seeing me at all. I mean she was hesitant to talk. ... I never had the opportunity to have her on the couch and examine her. ... She sat in the chair and the sister was there. I think if she really had a problem she didn't want to complain medically to a professional person. She was very nervous about seeing me; from her attitude and appearance, and how she twisted her hands. I got the impression she was really uncomfortable in the presence of somebody who was really a stranger. She would have been far more comfortable with the sister. I should imagine she would have been far more comfortable with a woman in that position than a man. (Interview Pienaar, J. 1993)*

The despair that led to Helen's suicide can only be guessed at. Dr Pienaar said:

*I was not really aware that she was depressed at the end. From what happened, she must have been depressed, but I can't really say. I can't remember how long before this happened I saw her; it could have been months.*

There could be a number of reasons. Her deteriorating health would have been a significant factor. Her psychological condition must also be taken into account. The decoration of her house interior was complete. The space left in the yard was by then without doubt limited. Peggy Delport said that she had become paranoid, and was saying that some of the women in the village, who *were* concerned about her welfare, were stealing her possessions. This view is supported by Stirling Retief, next door neighbour at the time of Helen's death:

*My mother [Mrs Gertie Retief] used to give her a plate of food every day for about 15 years, and then one day she [Helen] said she must stop - she thought that my mother was putting poison in it. My mother was very upset. Then later she came again and said she was hungry and my mother made her food again. She was very fond of my mother - she called her 'Kinnie'. (Interview Retief, S. 1993)*

According to Annie, Mrs Claasen, and Jill, Helen was also becoming paranoid about her dear Koos Malgas (of whom she was so fond), and thinking he might wish her harm, or was pressuring

her for money. Annie said Helen wrote in a letter that she wanted to get rid of Koos, as he was becoming too bossy, and interfering too much, but didn't know how to go about it. She said in this letter to Annie that she was afraid and didn't want to stay alone. She asked her to come and stay. Annie replied agreeing to come. The letter was found lying unopened in Helen's home when the family arrived after she had committed suicide (interview Le Roux, A. 1986).

Mrs Barbara Shaper said that she was with Helen the day before she died, and that she was terribly depressed. She suffered from high blood pressure, which might have affected her eyesight. This was obviously of great concern to Helen, as her whole meaningful life was visual. Koos says he had asked her why she didn't go to the doctor to see if he could give her stronger spectacles. Helen told him she didn't trust doctors, as one had once taken off her two little toes, and now she could only wear sandals as shoes hurt her.

Blignaut de Villiers confirms Koos' words:

*The story goes that she thought she was going blind. I doubt whether she was going blind; I think perhaps her eyes were just weakening because of age, and if she'd gone to a specialist for an eye test and got spectacles it would all have been different. But we must also bear in mind that at that time she's a much older woman and she's living alone - no one to confide in, and she had to make up her own mind about things.*

*She told me of the time she had to go to Graaff-Reinet for the operation on her feet, and she dreaded that, being amongst people, and lying on the bed, and being helpless. (Interview De Villiers, 1989)*

Mr W S Rayner from Graaff-Reinet, who was the optometrist who treated Helen over a number of years, confirms that Helen's failing eyesight was not just in her imagination:

*She was slowly losing her vision and there was nothing I could have done about it then. ... I saw her a number of times. I last saw her at least two years before her death. ... Cataract formation was her major problem. It started very slowly. I suggested an operation but she wouldn't hear of it. If you had that operation then you had to have very thick glasses [and] they only gave a field of vision of 21 per cent. It was just beginning then, two to four years before she died. It was a slow progression in her days. From being able to detect a visual problem until she couldn't see at all would have taken from three months to forever; you couldn't determine how long it would take.*

*I tried my level best to get her to have this operation, but she categorically refused. When somebody's going blind, you try to help. ... She was definitely depressed, but then she lived by her sight. Her card was eventually destroyed about 10 years after her death. (Interviews Rayner, 1994)*

In the opening paragraph of the first of six letters (19-11-1993), Mr Hattingh's daughter Machteld Kruger's cryptic statement was illuminating:

*... en in hiërdié 'vriendskap' lê selfs die rede vir haar selfmoord wat betrekking het, met swak sig, opgesluit.*



*[... and in this 'friendship' alone lay the reason for her suicide, which had to do with weak sight.]*

The possible loss of her sight was exacerbated by her sorrow at Johannes Hattingh's death and an awareness of the pain that he must have suffered, not only from the tumour but from the loss of his own sight. But if this was a factor, it was probably only one of a number of factors which contributed to her suicide. Helen's niece, Dr Betty Crous, wrote to Helen every month for eight years, enclosing the regular cheque that her mother Alida used to send to Helen before she died. She said that Helen often wrote to her about her health.

*She used to complain to me in letters about her excess facial hair, and ask what she could do about it. She also used to complain about her great sleepiness. But in the last few months before she died, she never complained about her eyesight. (letter Crous, 1993)*

Helen wrote a letter to Francie Lund, which she only received the day after Helen died, in which she said that her health was a problem and confirms Betty's observation:

*I still love my work very very much, but my health has given way; and I am afraid I shall have to (recline); while I am just about half way (upon my road of dreams). ... Our Domine's wife (a kind woman) has talked me over and she has booked me for Tuesday, when our District Doctor (Clinic) will come over to my house, to see me - my strength seems to have given in; a dead sleepiness overwhelms me, I cannot keep my eyes open, not for anything - Should the Doctor advise that I should leave off working, then I shall die; and directly. ... Maybe there is nothing the matter with me either; maybe it is sheer laziness - if only that dead, dead sleepiness would not overcome me at all hours of the day; and then my heart seems to fail me as well. Never mind. I am just hoping for the best and that the Doctor will have nothing serious to say to me. (Letter Martins, H. 1976)*

Helen's last known will dated 31 May 1976 (Appendix 9), drafted with Jill Wenman shortly before she died, was unwitnessed and therefore invalid. Parts of it, if read by someone unconnected with Helen and her thinking, sound decidedly strange - if not extremely eccentric. One such extract reads:

*1. My body is to be removed through the red door in the long bedroom and out through the zinc gate in the yard - not through the front door. I have my reasons.*

The straightforward explanation to this seemingly bizarre stipulation is, according to Jill, because:

*She said the villagers were so dumb and clumsy that they would rub her precious glass off the walls! (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

Jill also said that Helen wanted her remains cremated and then mixed with the 'precious glass' - the red glass in the pantry given to her by Jill - marked 'Helen', and then glued to her favourite owl in the garden called Oswald. (This is not written in her will.) She wished, as requested in this will, for her remains to be '*scattered in the yard of The Owl House amongst my camels and owls and*

Meccas'.

Extremely pertinent comments made by Helen on the fundamental subjects of living and dying, are recalled by Jill in a letter written to Annie and family after Helen's death:

*When Helen and I were drafting her will during my last visit before her death, I asked her if she was afraid of dying. She responded: "Now, my darling, when you get older you come to realize that **dying** isn't the problem. **Living** is the problem. That is why we must live our lives passionately and to the full. My agony would be to 'live dying' without being able to work". (letter Wenman, J. 1976)*

In the last letter which Helen wrote to Jill, when she was preoccupied with the fear that she was going blind, she exposes her lonely pain and vulnerability:

*I see everything through a mist. The darkness is all around me - I am depressed. Jill, you were so fond of me, you must not leave me now. I have done nothing wrong. I have harmed no one. I am only very depressed.*

*Oh, why should this have come over me? I wonder if Nortje could have felt worse - if only I had a little yellow pill .....*

*Jill, write to me if you still care for me the same as you used to - this is all I wish and long to know.*

Jill explained that Helen was afraid of dying and of being unloved in death, and no amount of reiteration that she was loved and would *never* be abandoned by Jill, seems to have been sufficient to reassure her adequately. The poem referred to by Helen in this letter, and about which she felt so strongly, was, says Jill, by one of South Africa's most promising young poets, an exile, Arthur Nortje, who took his life while still in his twenties. It is called *Notes From the Middle of the Night*. Through it, even from a few brief extracts, one can feel the agony which Helen must have experienced:

*Untold anxieties through the dark  
cannot at random exorcize themselves:  
it is me, black, menaced among the shelves  
of books and intellectual rubble, who loves the both-end candle life with benzedrine  
and must answer to the seven devils.  
A world of memories swirls  
and the gallstones of fear jab at my shredded nerves.*

*inside me blooms a sudden wish  
to calm fright with a little yellow pill,  
lullaby it to a predawn slumber,  
escape by soporific in an orange capsule.  
There blows a flowering death release  
in winds from Lethe, Styx or anywhere  
forgetfulness resides.*

In the long letter from Jill to Annie, her son Peter, and his wife Jenni after Helen's death, dated August 1976, she writes:

*She had a rare zest for living, a sharp wit and a burning enthusiasm for her glitter, wise men, owls, meccas and suns - to mention but a few of the characters that made up her world.*

*Most people in the village thought she was a crazy, old misfit who wasted her money and time. Not that that seemed to bother her - it allowed her to get on with her work without being disturbed. ....*

*Yet she was not unaffected by the remoteness, especially towards the end when she began to get tired and become frail. Then I think she missed some warm companionship and love.*

In connection with the theory that Helen was afraid of Koos, Jill writes in this same letter:

*... there was a lot of affinity between them. ... through him her ideas and inspirations took on form. He gave her more joy in her life than any other single person ...*

*I can believe that Helen may have grumbled to people about Koos and may even have expressed "fear" but I don't think it could have been anything more than an attempt on her part to get their sympathy. Sympathy and understanding were in very short supply.*

Koos recounted that on the last Friday of her life, Helen told him to go and buy bread, and then he could go home. He queried this unusual instruction as it was before one o'clock and he had not done a full day's work. She told him to take for himself a small Blaupunkt radio which was in a box,

*...en sy vat nie meer lus vir die lewe nie. 'As ek nou 'n gun gehad het Koos, wil ek nou laat dat jy my dood skiet'. (Interview Malgas, 1988)*

*[...and she had no more desire to live. 'If I had a gun Koos, I'd want you to shoot me dead'.]*

Koos says he then went immediately to the police to tell them what Helen was saying. He still very bitterly recalls that the police's response was that 'Miss Rina and Sister Alice' (the two clinic sisters) were always telling how Helen said that she didn't want to live any more, and they would look in later. He said with deep feeling that he had told them in time, and that they could have saved her. When he came back, contrary to Helen's instructions, at two o'clock to collect the post, the dominee, the dominee's wife (Mrs Erika Cloete), Sister Alice and 'Mrs Billy' (Mrs Tiny Hartzenberg) were all there.

*Miss Billy het 'n stuk watte in haar hand, en daai blou botteltjie - milk of magnesia.*

*[Miss Billy had a piece of cotton wool in her hand, and that blue bottle - milk of magnesia.]*

He says that on the table were the soda and a spoon, and under the 'kastrolletjie' ['little pot'] a note. Mrs Hartzenberg said:

*She misunderstood the clinic doctor; she thought he said she had cancer. He said, 'If you don't eat you will get cancer.' (Interview Hartzenberg, 1989)*

She recalled what Helen wrote in the note:

*Have taken 3 T caustic soda. Please take me to hospital.*

Mrs Cloete, the dominee's wife, wrote in her letter of 13 June 1988:

*In my contact with Helen she never mentioned the matter of death. I know that the district sister, Mrs Retief, whom you have already contacted, took a special interest in Helen, to see that she would take the correct medication and she also saw to it that Helen got the necessary vitamin tablets. She probably realized that Helen was not getting well balanced meals.*

*What a shock it was to us to receive a phone call from Mrs Hartzenberg saying that Helen had taken caustic soda. It was just past midday and we immediately went to Helen's house, where we found her sitting on her couch, not being able to say a word. By that time others had also arrived and arrangements were made to have Helen taken to the Hospital at Graaff Reinet. But before she left, Helen indicated that she wanted to write a note and therein she explained where her money could be found. It appeared that she had told Koos that she was going to take her life and this he reported to the police. We could not imagine why she should have taken her life, but it was believed she feared she was turning blind and did not want to be dependent on others. We honestly never realized that she was so deeply depressed. We visited her in hospital. She was unconscious, but she appeared serene, dressed in a blue nightie (given by Mrs Hartzenberg) and her hair well brushed and face relaxed. My husband offered a prayer for her and after that we left.*

Dr Pienaar said:

*I happened to be on hospital duty, and they got hold of me when she was admitted, but at that time she was beyond anything anyone could do for her, except make her comfortable. I don't think she was even aware of where she was or what was happening. (Interview Pienaar, J. 1993)*

Athol Fugard, when discussing his play *The Road to Mecca*, and his feelings for the person that Helen was, possibly encapsulated the essence of the tragic ending of her life, in what he said about creativity:

*It's all that justifies your existence on God's earth. ... that dreaded dry period. If my Mecca is finished, then so is my life. (Interview Fugard, 1985).*



## Chapter Nine

### Darkness and light - the Shadow

*Between the conception  
And the creation  
Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the Shadow*

(from *The Hollow Men* by T S Eliot)

Helen Martins' creation of The Owl House and Camel Yard is a raw, unmediated, visual exposure of the unconscious and of archetypes, which, although unrecognized as such by many visitors, nevertheless seem to touch elemental chords in them.

The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung focused most of his attention on issues relating to the second half of life and to the question of meaning. He observed that something else started to happen then; virtually all of his patients who consulted him at that stage had problems which in essence were of a religious or spiritual nature. Jungian analyst June Singer wrote:

*While the first part [of life] is directed toward achievement, the second part is directed toward integration. Where the first part is directed toward emergence as an individual, the second part is directed toward harmony with the totality of being. In the beginning the ego arises out of the depths of the unconscious. In the end, the ego surrenders to those depths. (Singer, 1973: 278.)*

Almost all psychologists say that the first half of life is devoted to developing coping mechanisms and the second half to making sense of life, and Helen Martins' work was undoubtedly an attempt to resolve these very aspects of meaning in her own life. Jung said that the archetype is metaphysical because it transcends consciousness (Harding, 1986: x). Archetypes, comparable to animal instincts, are instincts of the soul as instincts are archetypes of the body. They are primordial images which continue recurring throughout consecutive generations, expressed in world literature in myths and legends, and in the dreams, fantasies, feelings and behaviour of modern man. They are also expressed by artists in visual images. Archetypes are also defined as being '*the primeval content of the racial unconscious consisting of inherited ideas and predispositions*'. (Chaplin, 1975: 34.)

Helen spent her final 30 years of life trying to *create* a world filled with light. The darkness in the end overwhelmed her, and all the external light that she attempted to create could not avail against its invincible power.

*'Unless I face the darkness, I cannot experience the light,'* said Dr Esther de Waal, the well-known English spiritual writer and historian (lecture De Waal, 1989). Helen's light was from the sun, moon and stars which were all-important, as were her lamps, candles, crushed glass and reflective mirrors. It was not the other light, as expressed in Isaiah, chapter 60 v 19 and 20 (Holy Bible, King James version: 1937):

*Thy sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.*

*Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.*

Helen's light was not her own inner light, but a valiant, though inevitably feeble human attempt, to defy the natural laws. It would seem that she was so driven to create light precisely because she could not bring herself to face her own darkness - her 'shadow' in Jungian terminology - and thereby come to terms with it and incorporate it as an acknowledged part of herself.

Because she could never face her Shadow, she could never, through bringing to consciousness, be freed from its power over her - the power which ultimately destroyed her. This raw exposure to the unconscious is what causes many people who enter The Owl House to be assailed by a tangible feeling of foreboding and intense pain or sorrow.

The concept of the shadow is used to denote, within the unconscious, those attributes of which the individual is unaware. These are both positive and negative attributes, which can be made conscious and integrated into the conscious personality. According to Jung, the shadow is:

*...the inferior part of the personality; the sum of all the personal and collective psychic elements which, because of their incompatibility with the chosen conscious attitude, are denied expression in life and therefore coalesce into a relatively autonomous "splinter" personality with contrary tendencies in the unconscious. The positive shadow consists of unknown creative potentialities. (Weinrib, 1983: 164.)*

De Vries defines the shadow:

*It is the 'dark' (primitive, instinctive) side of a personality. If not recognized the shadow tends to project itself on 'evil' persons, adversaries around him, till the whole world around him becomes evil and malignant. (De Vries, 1984: 417).*

Jung's opinion differs from analysts of other schools; he claims that not only is this human characteristic personified but it is also universal.

*In dreams of Europeans, the shadow habitually appears as a figure of the same sex as the dreamer, but usually dark-skinned, 'devilish', or in some sense felt to be evil. (Storr, 1975: 58.)*

The two little golliwog figures lying together on the one bed in the Honeymoon Room are black, as is the door-stop figure in the sitting room. There are no other such figures created in the



Johan Poljeleter

Helen amongst her statues in the Camel Yard (circa 1974).

form of human beings. In the passage bedroom is the sinister, dark hide-covered figure which Helen called her 'Little Devil'. It could be that she tried to externalize her shadow in these figures.

June Singer elaborates on the shadow, saying that it is:

*... a dominant of the personal unconscious and consists of all those uncivilized desires and emotions that are incompatible with social standards and with the persona; it is all that we are ashamed of. It also has its collective aspects which are expressed mythologically, for example, as the devil or a witch. But the shadow also has a positive value, at least in its potential. There is no shadow without consciousness, no darkness without light. The shadow is a necessary aspect of man; he would be incomplete, utterly shallow without it (Singer, 1973: 215).*

Helen personified her shadow in her Little Devil; as the community who saw her as a witch projected their shadow material onto Helen. The darkness, says Cirlot, is regressive; and is traditionally associated with the principle of evil and with the base, unsublimated forces (Cirlot, 1981: 76).

In the last letter ever written by Helen to Jill Wenman, and which Jill only received after Helen had committed suicide, she writes: *'I see everything through a mist. The darkness is gathering around me - I am so depressed'* (letter Martins, H. 1976). She feared she was losing her sight, but there was also another darkness overwhelming her.

Architect John Moyle's impression was:

*In spite of all that fascination with light, and gleaming and glowing, I never felt that it was all sweetness and light by any means. There was a darkness there. (Interview Moyle, J. 1993)*

Helen herself has been described as a 'dark person' - by Mel Hagen, an artist who met her many years ago (interview Hagen, 1991). This impression is corroborated by the response of Professor Bob Romanyshin, Clinical Psychologist from Dallas, Texas, when he visited The Owl House.

*I'm impressed with the desire for light inside the house. She must have been very dark inside. There's always the compensation with the outside world to what is inside.*

*It is a house which speaks to light as spirit, not as body - all that glass is not inviting to the body. She managed to work with the fear of darkness, and transform it into art. Matter - the body - is dark; that she killed herself in such a destructive way is not surprising. (Interview Romanyshin, 1990)*

Although Helen succeeded admirably in transforming the fear of the darkness into art, she did not transform it into light inside herself, which was her most real and greatest need.

Professor Felicity Edwards of the Divinity Department, Rhodes University, said:

*In sticking all that glass inside the house and making light inside it, she was externalizing what should have been happening inside herself - changing from within to the outside. In India it is the concept of being self-luminous; the archetypal person in India is self-radiant. All that energy, for 30 years or so, and at the end,*



*here she was, untransformed! There was no one in Nieu Bethesda to support her in her search for self - pure light. Darkness is the absence of light. (Interview Edwards, 1993)*

Light versus darkness, literally and metaphysically, were the two dominant and opposing forces in Helen's life, which ultimately emerged in 'concrete' form. In trying to understand her work, one is dealing almost entirely in symbolism. Symbols were the only way in which her psyche could express itself and through these, strive for wholeness. In the need in every human being for conscious and unconscious truth to come together ('coniunctio' - the integrating conjunction), they give birth to the symbol, like a child. The goal is the ideal of wholeness, as symbolized in the marriage of male and female.

The conception, or vision, of The Owl House and the Camel Yard were entirely Helen's. However she could bring none of it to fruition by herself; others' hands were needed to give birth to her inner vision. Clinical psychologist, Dr Gill Mudie, said:

*She had no connection with her instincts - it was all in her head. Possibly had she used her own hands, some healing might have occurred - but she used men as prostheses. (Interview Mudie, 1993)*

It is interesting that all those involved in the physical work over the years *were* men. The work required for the creation of her dream was on the whole strenuous, but she would have been perfectly capable of modelling some of the cement sculptures herself, especially in the earlier years. With the assistance of Johannes Hattingh she could have learned how best to make them by herself when he was not there. She could also have worked with the glass which was incorporated in the statues, and obtained assistance when required for larger pieces. There were also many women in the village whom she could have employed to assist her, either in place of the men or in addition to the men. Conventionally, women were employed to do housework and cleaning, and men would have been employed for heavier work and outdoor labour. But as has been clearly demonstrated, throughout her life Helen's actions were not bound by convention.

Professor Eleanor Nash said that the men who worked for her were possibly also shadow material, but kindly forces. They became her hands; the creating hands and the hands which cared for her, as Koos Malgas did in the later years.

*Her animus - the executive part of herself - became personalized in these men who created for her and then cared for her when she became frail. Hattingh was the unrealizable idealized man, who she couldn't marry. He became the animus figure in her life. These men, in this executive relationship, enabled her to create her world. (Interview Nash, 1989)*

An area of darkness for Helen seems to have been her animus; an area which was in shadow. There had always been men in positions of power in her life. First there was her father and always there were the men who officially represented the authority of the church. Then there was Johannes

Pienaar, her first husband. Any action which needed to be taken in the creation of The Owl House and Camel Yard was through a man. She did not take it, literally, into her own hands and Johannes Hattingh, Jonas Adams, Piet van der Merwe and Koos Malgas continued the pattern of all effects emanating from men. Helen did make a stand on many matters crucial to her, such as choosing a life which went against the conventions of the day. However, she did not achieve these matters by openly asserting herself, but by subtlety and default.

June Singer describes the complementary anima and animus:

*...three sets of factors ... contribute to the development of a contrasexual element within the psyche: the archetypal, the biological, and the sociological. Taken together, these factors constitute the basis of what Jung has called the anima in the man, and the animus in the woman. The man's anima and the woman's animus are potentially guides to the depths of the unconscious; they will so function if only man and woman can learn to relate to them within themselves in an open and constructive way. But this is not an easy matter, for animus and anima are unlikely to be experienced directly, since they present a point of view which is opposed to the dominant attitude of consciousness. Therefore animus and anima remain for the most part unconscious, and are experienced primarily in a projected form in relationships with people of the opposite sex. The anima and the animus endow relationships between the sexes with a special quality of strength that transcends nearly all other human feelings. (Singer, 1973: 231-232.)*

*Animus is for a woman that masculine drive which enables her to break through the limitations that being a woman has imposed for centuries on end. It is the vision of the psychological 'other' who is able to think coolly while she follows her natural sympathetic pattern of nurturing. ... Animus in a woman is the aspect which tends toward clarifying the facts, gaining the authority to make the decisions, and implementing decisions with logic and strength and determination. But the animus can also be negative. To the degree that the animus is repressed he may become hostile and inimical to femininity. To the degree that the animus is undeveloped, the animus function may come off as 'inferior,' that is, clarifying facts becomes a voicing of unfounded opinions, authority becomes a domineering manner, decisiveness becomes impulsive whimsy, and determination becomes stubbornness. But to the degree that the animus is accepted and developed as a legitimate aspect of her true nature, this figure in the woman's psyche becomes helpful, supporting, and strength-giving. (Singer, 1973: 241-242.)*

Helen's healing of herself might have been achieved had she been able to establish a relationship with her inner male - her animus - but she did not achieve this state. Her close relationships with significant male figures in her life were also unsuccessful. She had an extremely bad relationship with her father, which would have resulted in her lacking a sense of self, self-worth and esteem. It would also have caused her to have difficulty identifying with her traditional role as a woman, such as the home-making aspects of cooking and mothering. Her three brothers were a great deal older, and do not appear to have played any significant role in her life. Neither of her sisters, Annie and Alida, seem to have accorded these brothers great importance; it was the relationship between the three sisters which was close. What is also significant is that none of the

three sisters had successful or happy marriages, according to Alida's daughter Betty Crous. *'Tommy's [Annie] was a dreadful marriage and my mother's wasn't much better'* (interview Crous, 1994). The two men whom it is known that Helen loved, her first husband Johannes Pienaar and her lover Johannes Hattingh, were both aborted relationships - they did not grow to fullness and fruition. Her brief marriage to Pienaar ended in divorce and Hattingh never chose to divorce his wife for Helen. Johannes Hattingh may also have represented the archetype of the Wise Old Man for her.

Sexuality, and accommodating to society's conventions in this regard, were complex areas in her life. The cement statues in the house and the yard are revealing. Although many figures are depicted naked, they fade away into undefined endings; this is seen most clearly in the many statues of enticing mermaids in the yard, which Professor Eleanor Nash termed *'half-finished young women'* (interview Nash, 1989). Female statues are either nude or clothed, and do have breasts but no other sexual detail is depicted, except for a delicate hint of genitals in one nude figure only, indicated by Koos when this subject was being discussed (interview Malgas, K. 1993). Males are mostly clothed, but the very few nude male statues, such as Adam derived from an illustration in Blake's *Paradise Lost, Temptation and Fall*, are totally sexless and without genitals. The only male statues with penises are two babies, and each is trying to put his right foot into his mouth. The one in the sitting room is seated in one of Helen's double-headed bird bath, cum chair, owls, and the one outside in a little dam. They may even symbolize the two babies which Helen had aborted.

Koos Malgas said that it was his will, contrary to Helen's, that prevailed by *not* portraying the nude figures as sexual beings, in deference to local sensibilities (interview 1993). Nudity, if portrayed at all, must be chaste and modest. If so, then in this area Helen allowed Koos to dominate her will in how her vision was interpreted. From what he had said earlier, in all other aspects, Helen was the decision-maker about how a statue should be depicted, including details such as which way it should be looking, size and dimensions (interview Malgas, K. 1988).

Helen herself went around her yard stark naked on many occasions which would be untoward in South Africa even today, not to mention in that little conventional village of a few decades ago (interviews: Shaper, 1986; Hartzenberg, 1989).

The one statue which is of a bawdy nature is the 'Cock man' - a large figure of a rooster wearing trousers with an unbuttoned fly, which was derived from a picture postcard (interview Wenman, J. 1988). He is situated in a part of The Camel Yard which Helen called the Debauchery Corner, and not far from the entrance to The Lion's Den. Helen had quite a lewd sense of humour, according to Jill Wenman.

Poet and author Don MacLennan, who knew Helen, said: *'Her vision didn't work. There was an absence of sexuality, a sterility, in her work.'* (Interview MacLennan, 1989).

And yet John Moyle's impression is quite the contrary; he felt that even though Helen was



A picture postcard was the source of inspiration for another hybrid figure, the Cock Man. He is positioned in a section of the Camel Yard which Helen called the 'Debauchery Corner', and decorated with red perspex for comb and tail.

an old lady when he met her, there was an underlying sexuality about her *'There is a link between creativity, and being a sexual being.'* (Interview Moyle, 1993).

It was said by many people who knew Helen that she was ill at ease with men and on the whole avoided them although Jill Wenman differs here, saying, *'I didn't sense that'*. Nevertheless, Helen, in her middle years, developed the 21-year long relationship with Mr Hattingh. An interesting point, however, is that this never became a fully realized relationship, as he did not divorce his wife. And yet Helen was prepared to accept it on his terms, even if she did try to force him into a commitment to her by threatening to, and eventually, briefly marrying Mr Niemand.

One must assess what happened in Helen's life to try to make sense of the resultant tragic ending after so much passionate hard work. It is likely that events from her very early life were responsible for her later attitudes and her responses to circumstances, other people and herself, which resulted in her creation of The Owl House. Her difficult parental relationships are critical elements to be taken into account when trying to arrive at an understanding of her later development. Her brief marriage to Johannes Pienaar, about which so little is known, may have been a very traumatic experience for Helen and responsible for much in her later reactions to life. On the other hand, experiences during her earlier life may have been material to the foundering of her marriage.

Helen had an English King James edition of the New Testament in her house, in which she had marked numerous texts or verses. Some of these were indicated using, presumably, a red rubber stamp of a little pointing hand. She also underlined in black (Appendix 5). It is difficult to know how to interpret these particular passages, because she might have marked them at certain stages in her life, when particular events troubled her or she was seeking comfort or guidance. Later they may have become irrelevant to her current situation. However, they do add further insight to a complex person. Reading through the marked texts carefully, one begins to feel some of the spiritual agony that this lonely and marginalized little woman must have undergone. Virtually all the texts are related to healing, forgiveness, faith, the sacrifice of Jesus as a faultless man for sinners, and redemption through belief in Jesus Christ. Out of 221 marked texts, approximately 183 - 83 per cent of them - are on these themes. At whatever stages of her life she did mark them, the fact remains that these issues were at various times of crucial importance to her. Some amongst them are:

**Mark 5 v 28.** *And she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.*

**Matthew 9 v 2.** *And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*

**Romans 6. v 23.** *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**Ephesians 2. v 4.** *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,*



v. 5. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together, and made us sit together in heavenly places with Christ, by grace ye are saved;

v.8. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

**1 Peter 2 v 24.** Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

**Colossians 2. v 13.** And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

v 14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

**Matthew 14 v 36.** And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

Her two abortions, particularly considering the era and circumstances in which they occurred, must be taken into account when attempting to find the most significant reasons for Helen's choice of life-course and work, and these particular events must be connected with many of the passages marked in the Bible. The strange and disturbing sculpture which she called her 'Little Devil' (interview Wenman, J. 1988) and which was her daily companion in the kitchen, was the only statue which she had made herself, according to Koos Malgas (interview 1988). It now lies on the floor in the 'passage' bedroom in the house, under a door with green panes of glass which cast a mysterious and uncanny light onto it. What it represents is unknown. What it expresses and symbolizes is open to conjecture. The upper part is covered in a piece of thick, dark, stiff hide, as if wrapped round a headless body, with one partially formed (or deformed) arm. It is stuffed with some padding. Helen then instructed Koos to make, in cement, the legs and feet which stick out at the bottom. One of these feet is human - the other is a cloven hoof. It creates the impression of something grossly misformed, repulsive, and possibly even mummified.

Jill Wenman said that Helen used to keep it on the floor in front of the stove recess in the kitchen, or it would be pushed against the back door to stop the draft coming through (interview Wenman, J. 1988). It is an object with a definite 'presence', and many people find it causes a greater uneasiness than anything else in both the house and yard. It seems to be a physical manifestation of the unresolved spiritual burden which she carried around with her. Initially it was felt that this symbolized her aborted fetuses. Deeper thought and study, based on further evidence which was acquired, seemed to indicate that this theory still does not strike at the root of the matter.

One hesitates to venture the resultant theory, which cannot be substantiated, but warrants examination. Logic and other indications point strongly to the possibility of some form of abuse - emotional, physical or sexual, maybe incestuous by her father - being at the core of the mystery, and this possibility should be explored in trying to understand the enigma that is Helen Martins. She was emotionally deprived as a baby when her mother was away ill. She knew that she was named as a



The only statue which, according to Koos Malgas, Helen made herself, was the 'Little Devil'. It now lies on the floor of the green passage bedroom with a silver spoon alongside it.

replacement child for an earlier dead sister, and all evidence indicates strongly that she did not relate positively to her father and that she had a very low self-image. Her marriage was brief and questions arise as to the nature of the relationship between her and Johannes Pienaar.

Why would she not bear children? Why did she fear that if she did they would be born with horns - symbolic of the devil? Why did she feel herself so damaged and defiled inside that she believed she would produce children who were deformed? Why would she choose to face the social ostracism and breakdown of her marriage *rather* than bear children?

There were only three rooms in the house to which Helen seems to have given names. These were the 'Honeymoon Room', and the two secret closed outside rooms - 'The Lion's Den' and 'Bluebeard's Chamber'. Jill Wenman, who spent a great deal of time with Helen, says that she was never shown the inside of the latter two rooms.

*The Lion's Den was the one room in the house that she never let me go and see. It was sealed off. She didn't like that room. ... Helen did not like to talk much about her parents. She was never prepared to talk to me about her father at all - that was just a closed book. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)*

One would not normally, in the nature of a close and intimate relationship between two women which was sustained over a fairly long period of time, think that there would be many secrets withheld. It would seem natural for Helen to have spoken about her parents in the course of conversation. The fact that she did not is significant.

There are various degrees of intimacy which we permit with each relationship in which we are involved. Some things can be shared with many people, others with a few, some with possibly only one or two, and some of the deepest, darkest with nobody. To substantiate this, the fact that Mrs Tiny Hartzberg, Helen's neighbour for nearly 50 years, did not know about Helen's abortions says something about the degree of closeness in that relationship. If there had been any form of abuse, sexual or other, and Helen's dear friend Jill did not know about it, then that, to Helen, may have been the one event in her life about which she could speak to nobody. It may have even been suppressed in Helen's own unconscious. Jill said, '*You realize that there are so many dark secrets in families that shape one's consciousness.*'

Helen's sister Annie had made the enigmatic statement: '*There are secrets in her life which no one will ever know.*' (Interview Le Roux, A. 1986).

Another factor to take into account is her father, in his later years, being banished to the outside black-painted and windowless room which Helen called 'The Lion's Den'; and her refusal to tend him. Windows symbolize the possibility of understanding and communication; '*a closed room lacking windows may be symbolic of virginity ... and also of other kinds of non-communication*' (Ciriot, 1981: 274). This may have been Helen's expression of what she felt about herself in relation

to her father, and her need to be restored to owning herself. The name she gave it is alone deeply symbolic. The lion is symbolic of the animus. According to De Vries, the lion is:

*... a solar animal; often has the conventional solar face in art; stands for frenzied desire; the latent passions; and the dangers of the Unconscious.* (De Vries, 1984: 300-302).

Anne Emslie even writes: "*The Lion*" had been a nickname for Helen's father.' (Emslie, 1991: 41).

Outside The Lion's Den there approaches a large cement lion, with motor car headlights for eyes and vicious wire whiskers. Interpretations can however differ. Jill Wenman says for instance that the lion was placed there to stand watch over the sheep which were part of a group in Helen's day (this can be seen in early photographs); in other words, it was there in a caring capacity!

Bluebeard's Chamber is a store room linking the long bedroom in the house to the back stoep, through an outside door. On this outside red-painted door, as Jill Wenman explained, is the uncompleted face of Bluebeard which was still in the process of being painted when Helen died. When asked why Helen gave it this name, she said: '*Because that is where Bluebeard kept his women locked up*'. Jill, who was probably closer to Helen than any other person in the last few years of her life, says she was also never shown inside Bluebeard's Chamber (interview Wenman, J. 1988). Cirlot says that every symbol can be interpreted psychologically. The secret room of Bluebeard for example, which he forbids his wife to enter, is his mind. The dead wives which she encounters in defying his orders are the wives whom he has once loved, that is, who are now dead to his love (Cirlot, 1981: xlvi).

Perhaps the oppressive, red Honeymoon Room was also a place of dark shameful secrets too painful to consciously recall. In the early days it was probably the main bedroom in the house, which would have been Helen's parents' room. From the window peers the sun, ever vigilant, as Helen said, with 'green-eyed jealousy' (interview Wenman, J. 1988). The sun symbolizes the male element, the father (De Vries, 1984: 447); the active principle of the universe, and, according to Jung is a symbol of the source of life (Cirlot, 1981: 317-319). Jill Wenman said that this is the one room in which Helen never slept. The two black golliwog dolls locked in an embrace on a bed are a bizarre and unexpected element. It is significant that they are also dark, possibly symbolic of the shadow.

Jungian analyst Julian David said that as he understood Helen's work, the masculine was demonized and she demonized her father. '*Her way of redeeming her father was through her work*' (interview David, J. 1989).

*'Conservative estimates suggest that at least 20 percent of all persons have experienced sexual abuse at the hands of an older caretaking person,'* writes Dr Robert A. Phillips, the psychotherapist who treated Truddi Chase who was sexually abused by her stepfather from a very early age (Chase, 1987: xii). If Helen had been sexually abused she would have felt inwardly very damaged unless she



Above: The unfinished outside door leading to 'Bluebeard's Chamber' on the back stoep. From the pergola hangs a bunch of cement grapes.

Below: The lion with car headlights for eyes and wire whiskers, stands permanently on guard outside the 'Lion's Den'.





had come to terms with feelings of her own guilt and contamination. There is no doubt at all that this would affect her future relationship with any man who became closer to her than mere daily social contacts, and particularly any sexual relationships. In his book 'Incest and Human Love, The Betrayal of the Soul in Psychotherapy', Robert Stein explains what happens when the deeply ingrained incest taboo in humans is broken:

*When the tension between the incest desire and prohibition is obliterated, fragmentation results and the essential internal union between feminine/masculine opposites is not possible* (quoted Shorter, 1987: 107).

Bani Shorter expands on the implications, which seem very applicable to Helen and her search for the rest of her life to achieve psychic wholeness:

*The rupture of trust does not heal and her own attempts overcompensate on the side of the spirit, for she must find a god who will countenance what has taken place in order for her to endure the injustice of something which cannot be otherwise explained* (Shorter, 1987: 107).

A foetus and potential child which later resulted from a sexual relationship, even within marriage, must inevitably be 'deformed' in Helen's mind before it ever had a chance to 'be'. It is understandable that it would have been very difficult for her to allow it to become a tangible, living reality. Truddi Chase writes: '*Pregnancy made me feel dirty, as if I'd committed a sin.*' (Chase, 1987: 61). Dr Philips elaborates on his previous statement:

*The results of the national tragedy of child sexual abuse, ... are seen in the millions of scarred lives of those adults who were sexually abused as children ... [they] tell me of their fears and anxieties, their inability to trust, their difficulties in marriages or intimate relationships, and their severe sexual problems'* (Chase, 1987: xii).

Sheila Kitzinger who has studied the subject of women and sexuality, writes:

*There is strong evidence that the way the mother reacts to what has happened and her attitude to her daughter can have longterm consequences* (p. 272). *Approximately three-quarters of all mothers in families in which incest is known to have been committed are themselves physically abused by their partners. ... The "profile" of an incest family is similar to that of the family of a battered wife. Both mother and daughter are victims of male violence* (Kitzinger, 1989: 274).

A social worker in Cape Town, Mrs Elzabe Dürr Fitschen, told a Children's Court that:

*'mothers whose partners molest their children often collaborate subconsciously to avoid their own sexual role in the relationship'; and 'that "collusive mothers" were often victims of physical abuse, and did not know how to deal with the abuse of their children'* (Cape Times, 29-7-1994).

*If incest occurs at a very young age, girls tend to block the memory of it, or dissociate, as a means of defense. ... One of the many effects adult women retain of this experience is the inner, accusing voice ... The self-hatred that this voice puts forth on women operates as an effective block to healthy relationships with men,*

*perhaps, too, with other women, as well as to self-actualization in other spheres*  
(Wehr, 1988: 21).

This is one way of trying to comprehend why Helen's life followed such an extraordinary, alienated and inexplicable path, and there could be other reasons. A further possibility is put forward by Professor Eleanor Nash who suggested that Helen, whose own personal identity was not well formed, may have believed that anything formed from either an intimate relationship or the creative process involving marriage, sexuality and babies - was evil, and thus she destroyed her husband's babies (interview Nash, 1989).

Helen's unconscious means of dealing with and trying to symbolize her inaccessible and inexpressible anguish or guilt - whatever it was - may have been through creating the sculpture of the 'Little Devil'. The devil symbolizes:

*... an archetype - the dangerous aspect of the unrealized dark side of man, his 'shadow'. Also instinctive or perverted life; bondage which is imaginary rather than real.* (De Vries, 1984: 134).

This sinister sculpture of Helen's 'Little Devil' represents, in all probability, not the abortions but a part of Helen herself, and is the symbolic representation of her own shadow. Professor Eleanor Nash said:

*Because she exteriorized her shadow, in a way it had form and shape, and then it had less power over her; it was important to give it form and shape. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Calaban represents the loathsome side.*

Further evidence to substantiate the view that it represented her shadow can be recognized in the very strange deformity in the feet of this Little Devil; one foot is human and the other has a cloven hoof. Helen was very self-conscious about her own disfigured feet, which contributed to her alienation from her community. To have had her two little toes amputated was a most unusual thing to have done, and could be seen as more than a mere coincidence.

The foot, in works on symbolism, is of remarkable significance, and apposite in attempting to understand Helen and her work. Cirlot states that we express assertiveness with our feet, standing firmly on our territory. He quotes Jung, Teillard and Diel on this same topic (Cirlot, 1981: 111): Jung considers the foot to be frequently phallic in significance, and the symbol that confirms Man's direct relationship with the reality of the earth. According to Ania Teillard, in the mythology of a number of countries the rays of the sun are compared with the feet, and points out that the foot is the support of the entire person. Diel makes the revolutionary assertion that the foot is a symbol of the soul, possibly because it serves as the support of the body in the sense of keeping man upright. He quotes examples showing that, in Greek legends, lameness usually symbolizes some defect of the spirit - some essential blemish. Maimed beings are connected with the moon and its phases in certain mythologies (Cirlot, 1981: 1). This is corroborated by Jung (Cirlot, 1981: 111). De Vries confirms



Detail of the feet of the 'Little Devil' statue. One foot is human and the other a cloven hoof.

much of what Cirlot writes, and adds the interesting comment that Cinderella came into the Prince's power when he took her foot [in his hands] (De Vries, 1984: 197-198). In the Old Testament, a cloven footed animal is seen as unclean, (unless it chews the cud), and is therefore associated with the devil and sin.

For Helen to have allowed her feet to be mutilated, resulting in her lameness, may have represented - symbolically - a defect of her spirit and what she felt about her soul, her sexuality, her relationship with her animus, and her relationship with the reality of the earth as those around her understood and related to it. She was, in fact, only secure on her own territory, which she had created according to her own rules - very much a dream world.

Jung says:

*The unconscious produces symbols as a tree produces apples, and if a man has the wit to pick and eat them, he will be nourished. If he does not though, they will fall and rot, and he will starve. Possibilities are presented by the unconscious. In the transforming symbol, new possibilities of life and new growing points are presented as choices. These are either accepted and taken up or let go, depending on insight and character. (Martin, 1978: 118-119).*

It is necessary for consciousness to recognize the transforming symbol if it is to have effect, thereby mobilizing the combined energy of consciousness and unconsciousness, and making possible a fundamental change of attitude. (Martin, 1978: 162). If these transforming symbols coming from the depths of the unconscious can be found and realized, the person is able to find a creative middle way between the opposites. Jung calls this living integration of consciousness and unconsciousness the individuation process. (Martin, 1978: 164). Helen continued creating symbols which she did not appear able to interpret for the transformation of her own inner darkness.

Aniela Jaffé observes:

*As Dr Jung has shown ... it is consciousness that holds the key to the values of the unconscious ... Only in an **interplay** of consciousness and the unconscious can the unconscious prove its value, and perhaps even show a way to overcome the melancholy of the void. If the unconscious, once in action, is left to itself, there is a risk that its contents will become overpowering or will manifest their negative, destructive side. (Jaffé, 1979: 257.)*

*The unconscious is pure nature, and, like nature, pours out its gifts in profusion. But left to itself and without the human response from consciousness, it can (again like nature) destroy its own gifts and sooner or later sweep them into annihilation. (Jaffé, 1979: 258.)*

A great tension lay in the fact that Helen could not bridge the gap between her inner image and the creation of it as an outer image alone. Her 'mecca' would have been the ability to create its manifestation herself, not through the hands of other people, her helpers. Helen Martins' vision and creation of The Owl House and the Camel Yard can be viewed and understood in a number of ways. Two possibilities are:

*There are moments in our lives,  
there are moments in our day, when  
we seem to see beyond the usual.  
Such are the moments of our great-  
est happiness. Such are the moments  
of our greatest wisdom. If one could  
but recall his vision by some sort of  
sign. It was in this hope that the  
arts were invented. Sign-posts on  
the way to what may be. Sign-posts  
towards greater knowledge.*

Robert Henri (Henri, 1960: 13.)

or, in two verses from T S Eliot's *The Hollow Men*:

*Between the conception  
And the creation  
Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the Shadow*

*Between the desire  
And the spasm  
Between the potency  
And the existence  
Between the essence  
And the descent  
Falls the shadow.*

(Eliot, 1970)

Probably at various times, both of these extreme positions - the exhilaration of creation and the perception of the shadow's unresolved presence - would have been true. Enthusiasm is one of the words used most frequently by people who knew Helen while she was involved in her creativity. Jill Wenman, close friend and confidante, said:

*There was the sense of unbelievable exhilaration. She used to get onto a complete high when she spoke about this place; she was just transported. And her enthusiasm was so infectious! (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).*

Jean Parker said:

*I have been back to The Owl House since Helen's death, and it's as if you had switched off a light [without her there]. ... She was fey - you either accepted that as normal, or it was totally alien and strange. It was like meeting living people as you went round with her; each of the statues was a living person to her, and there was this total absorption and incredible, naïve enthusiasm. (Interview Parker, 1993).*



John Moyle recollected:

*What stayed with me most - it was the most striking experience of being with someone who, in her enthusiasm for her work, in the most literal meaning of the word, was 'God-filled' - This is My World! One sensed it strongly through her. She'd created it and was living in it much more intensely than most people live in their world. ... Concomitant of a special talent is a special personality. I see her more than anything else as a remarkable illustration of just that - she was special. She went beyond being just a funny old lady who made these things. She actually saw her art as transcending herself. (Interview Moyle, 1993)*

In spite of this transcendence of herself and her circumstances through her work, the urgency and intensity of the creativity, sustained over such a long period of time, the subject matter, repetition of themes, and complex symbolism show a desperate search for wholeness, for reparation, and for unity of the psyche. Whether Helen ever attained this can only be surmised, but the fact that she committed suicide, and in such an agonizing manner, indicate that this was ultimately not so. Dr Avi Bauman, an Israeli Jungian analyst, said at a lecture in Cape Town in August 1993:

*The identity of the ego must be strong enough to come to terms with the shadow, otherwise things fall apart when confronting it. (Lecture Bauman, 1993).*

The use of caustic soda, to achieve a literal and symbolic inner scouring, was a desperate and savage destruction of an inner darkness which she could not eradicate. She finally embraced the darkness because she had no other place to go.

## Chapter Ten

### Expressing the unconscious - sources, subjects and symbols

*All art is at once surface and symbol.  
Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.*

Oscar Wilde, preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

'*Art begins with disobedience*' is the maxim of Indian postmodern critic Gayatri Spivak (Vinassa, 1993: 56). One of many reasons why visitors to The Owl House are so astounded at what they see is that most people have nothing with which to compare Helen Martins' work, and would not think of recognizing such a creation as a work of art. For them, art means paintings or prints framed and hung on a wall, or pieces of sculpture positioned in appropriate settings. To transform an entire house and garden into something so unexpected, and use materials not considered to be conventional art materials, immediately throws their perception of art into total confusion.

*'Her art is a dreaming: an enactment of psychic life. It is a dream which was stated and commenced in the house, which then progressed and was further developed outside in the Camel Yard'* (interview Milton, 1991). Helen's creation of The Owl House and Camel Yard cannot be interpreted by logical, rational means, just as figures in a dream or the unfolding of a dream sequence cannot be explained or decoded through rationality. Albert Einstein said:

*If we convey what we perceive and experience through the language of logic it is called science. If we convey it through symbols which are inaccessible to the rational mind but intuitively comprehended it is called art* (Holdstock, 1986: 8).

Her entire body of work, which could be viewed as fragmented and random, is, as in any work of art, the relationship between the whole and the parts. It must be understood and read as a complete text in its own right, not an assemblage of disjointed phrases and sentences. (It could, however, be thought of as written in a 'foreign language'.) The intention of the whole is something greater than the sum of the particular meanings of individual components. The work is all about mystery and fantasy, and not in the least about facts. In creating The Owl House and Camel Yard it was Helen's 'inner images', the meanings of which were unknown even to herself, that she needed to bring forth, make visible as symbols, and thereby accessible. There are '*two typical features of a symbol: its non-rational character, and its effectiveness*' (Martin, 1978: 116).



Johan Polgjeier

Helen in the Camel Yard next to two statues which according to Jill Wenman represented Helen and Jill. They were a gift to Jill for her birthday, but were to remain in the Camel Yard.

Very few visitors to The Owl House are unaffected by it, be it negatively or positively. Professor Robert Brooks, Head of the Department of Fine Art at Rhodes University, said in a Radio South Africa programme devoted to The Owl House ('Second House' 21-11-1989):

*To gauge a work of art - does it have a profound effect on you? And The Owl House does: it profoundly affects everyone who sees it. It is ineffable - beyond description. It is a great work of art: a balance between technique and content. ... It is a place of pilgrimage. ... One has to go there to see it. ... She did it with passion.*

In this same radio interview, Dr Raymund van Niekerk, then Director of the South African National Gallery, said:

*There is a consistency of purpose and meaning. You'll never forget it when you've visited it. There is no doubt of the power of that work, there is a sort of force. That sort of creative individual, living solo in an environment that's anything but completely sympathetic, will always be viewed with a certain amount of distrust. She must have been a very powerful personality, and very convinced of her purpose.*

In 1985 Dr Cecil Bloch, now Professor of Plastic Surgery at the University of Cape Town, wrote to Mrs Gertruida Claasen, town clerk of Nieu Bethesda:

*I really feel that the extremely exciting work and history of Helen Martins should not be allowed to die and rot in The Owl House. The sculptures and the reasons for them should be known to all South Africans. I feel that if the artist had lived in Europe or America she would be considered to be an important member of the artistic set-up of those countries. Although I am no great judge of artistic merit, her sculptures could be compared with the great surrealists like Dali. I would therefore urge you to try to gain recognition from the Historical Monuments Commission and others who may be concerned.*

The visitors' book in The Owl House, with entries from all over South Africa and overseas, affirms the statement: '*Fascination arises when the unconscious has been moved*' (Jaffé, 1979: 250).

Just some amongst the comments are:

31-3-1991	Andrew, Jenni and Andrea Petersen	Giyani
	<i>A monumental achievement, sinister yet enchanting</i>	
22-3-1990	Robyn and Gary Ford	Canada
	<i>Warped - extremely interesting</i>	
3-5-1990	Ashtor, Mary and Adrai Willcock	Zimbabwe
	<i>Enigmatic and amazing but strangely sad</i>	
28-7-1990	Clinton Adams	USA
	<i>No mere "cultural asset" this is an eighth wonder of the world.</i>	
23-7-1993	Olaf and Lizelle and family	Pretoria
	<i>A driven Spirit</i>	
26-8-1993	Justin Minnaar	Vorna Valley
	<i>I shall pray for her that she may find the peace in death that she sought in life</i>	
1-5-1991	Peter Hayes	Cape Town
	<i>A magical place filled with love and light - being here is a dream</i>	
22-12-1989	C M Widd	Johannesburg
	<i>Obsession breeds madness and greatness - The Owl House possesses both!</i>	
Nov 1990	Bill Wilson	USA
	<i>Weird</i>	

Len Holdstock says that most artists manage to move freely between consciousness and unconsciousness (Holdstock, 1986: 12-13). In the case of The Owl House, however, and the intense responses it evokes, the fascination arises precisely because the responses do not come from consciousness but directly from the unconscious. The Owl House acts as a mirror in reflecting visitors' own unconscious material back to them. *'It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors'*, said Oscar Wilde in the preface to 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'. Jill Wenman expressed the same sentiment, but specifically with regard to The Owl House:

*Helen, because of the strange nature of that garden, has become almost a mirror, and it's a mirror that reflects people's own projections back at them. Her lunacy, her strangeness, her creativity, her weirdness, her shut-offness, her loneliness, her despair: all things that we seem so reluctant to face.* (Interview Wenman, J. 1988)

The house, and an enclosed garden, have always been seen by mystics as the realm of the feminine aspect of the universe. The house is also associated with the human body and thought. Jungian psychoanalyst Ania Teillard says that the house represents different aspects or layers of the psyche, and the outside *'signifies the outward appearance of Man: his personality or his mask'* (Cirlot, 1981: 153). The outside of Helen's house was closed and inaccessible. Even to knock on the door was dangerous because of the rough and sharp texture of the glass covering, and windows are obscured by the painted faces of suns. She prevented most visitors from coming in to her house, and usually did not respond to knocks on the door.

The garden she named a yard. In America this term would be applicable to what is termed a garden in South Africa. But in South Africa, that part of the garden commonly referred to as the yard is the bare, swept area outside the kitchen and back door, where such things as dustbins, washing lines, coal bins, dog kennels and toolsheds are kept. It is the utilitarian section which is usually kept screened from the rest of the garden. Nobody else in Nieu Bethesda, where gardens are tended with pride, would think of calling their garden a yard. Nature is tamed and ordered in a garden, which is enclosed, and thus, Cirlot says, *'is a symbol of consciousness as opposed to the forest, which is the unconscious ... and a feminine attribute because of its character as a precinct'* (Cirlot 1981: 115). There was no 'wild forest' of nature for Helen to tame in her garden though; she grew few plants, and the cactus did not need any care other than occasional thinning out. It was to a large extent a bare, swept area, so the name she gave it was in fact the most appropriate. As Koos Malgas said: *'She didn't grow plants, she grew statues; those were her plants'* (interview Malgas, 1988). Cirlot continues: *'A garden is often the scene of processes of 'Conjunction' or treasurehunts - connotations which are clearly in accord with the general symbolic function [as] outlined'* (Cirlot, 1981: 115). Helen was expressing her unconscious in her yard, and presumably thereby attempting to get to know, and tame it. It was a place where wholeness was sought, and



many treasures can be found along the way by those with eyes to see and understand.

The essence of Helen's work was transformation: transformation of things worldly, trivial, mundane, base, damaged or worthless, through symbolism, into things of beauty, spiritual perfection, and worthy of aspiration. The sources of inspiration for the sculptures and images were often extremely commonplace. Amongst these were the well-known trade images on everyday household materials. The sun's face on the 'Sunbeam' floor polish tin became the model for all the suns on the windows, ceiling, walls and in the yard. The familiar lion trademark on the 'Lion' match box was elevated into becoming the sphinxes in the Camel Yard. The little plaster-of-paris moulds of mermaids found in toy and novelty shops became enticing mermaids in many poses in the yard and on the edge of the bath. Christmas cards, postcards, prints, book illustrations and photographs inspired various sculptures and structures. These were all translated into symbols, which *'whatever the appearance, the effect is essentially the same: they transform'* (Martin, 1978: 116). The materials used for their creation were not the customary artists' ones: oil paints and water colours, or wood, clay and marble. They were basic or waste materials such as cement, crushed and broken glass, household enamel paint, strands of strong fencing wire, wire netting, and galvanized iron. The ultimate purpose of Helen's work however was really about transforming herself; even though it is extremely unlikely that she was ever consciously aware of this. One can only attempt to decipher her creativity through the use of symbols. Aniela Jaffé defines the symbol as:

*... an object of the known world hinting at something unknown; it is the known expressing the life and sense of the inexpressible* (Jaffé, 1979: 263).

Jung says:

*It is the role of religious symbols to give a meaning to the life of man ... symbols are natural attempts to reconcile and unite opposites within the psyche* (Jung, 1979: 89).

Symbols are complex, emerging from the unconscious from mankind's very earliest history. Most writers concur in tracing the origins of symbolist thought to the late Palaeolithic Age. *'Diel rightly asserts that the symbol is a vehicle at once universal and particular. Universal, since it transcends history; particular, because it relates to a definite period of history'* (Cirlot, 1981: xvi). They also carry many meanings, which are both personal and universal. In Helen's case an attempt to make sense of them too glibly would be a grave error. Jung and Freud had differing views on the subject. Freud asserted that a person's unconscious contains material which has either been consciously repressed as it is too painful or too shameful to own, or things forgotten by the conscious mind. Jung said that the unconscious contains, amongst other things, the source of creative material.

*Freud said that the unconscious is a scrap heap consisting of all the unvalued things in one's life that have been repressed ... Jung insisted that the unconscious is also the matrix, the artesian well from which all creativity springs* (Johnson, 1986: 16-17).

Whatever the cause, symbols still remain as powerful and unacknowledged forces in a person's total personality and although active, are out of reach of his or her conscious control. Helen's unconscious was undoubtedly a major source of her creative outpouring and all the intensity, passion and exhilaration involved in her archetypal work attest to this. Esther Harding quotes Jung on the subject:

*... while its power lasts the symbol is the representative of an unknown truth. It rises spontaneously from the depths of the unconscious and expresses or manifests the hidden fact in an image whose meaning can only partly be grasped by consciousness. ... the symbolic creations of the unconscious contain layer after layer of meaning which cannot be exhausted in a word* (Harding, 1986: 64, from 'Psychological Types', 1923: 601).

The process of individuation often commences with a profound turning inwards of psychic energy:

*The meaning goes out of life and one is left stranded. This at best, is an unpleasant experience. It may be a terrifying one. For the psychic energy is not lost. It has gone into the unconscious, is at large in the inner world. The archetypal images are awakened, and the man, unless he is aware of what is happening, is likely at times to have doubts of his sanity* (Martin, 1978: 165).

This may have been what happened to Helen after her parents died, or possibly even earlier. The evidence of her life and work attest to the fact that she did undergo such an experience. She needed to recognize the symbols and assimilate their messages, and her predicament was whether she had the ability to do so. *'The individuation process involves the individual in psychological and spiritual problems of great complexity'* (Johnson, 1986: 3). Individuation is the process whereby the ego, that part of the personality which is conscious, must recognize and incorporate material which is unconscious, thereby growing into the full potential of the total personality - the Self. *'The ego is not the centre of life, but only of consciousness'* (Wickes, 1988: 116).

For the purpose of this study it has been decided to take some of the more obvious themes and images and investigate their meanings more fully. Amongst these are: owls and camels; the heavenly bodies - sun, moon and stars; light and darkness; birds; domestic and wild animals; Christianity and Eastern religions and philosophies; mythical figures such as mermaids and sphinxes; structures such as churches, towers, arches and pyramids; some of the individual figures; mirrors and water. The two major symbols are obviously owls and camels, as stated by Helen in her titles: *The Owl House* and *A Camel Yard*. Two others which are probably of equal, complimentary importance, and feature predominantly, are the sun and the moon. Opposing elements, such as day and night, darkness and light, spirituality and worldliness, continually intermingle or confront each other. It is clear that the tension of opposites and the attempt to reconcile these are major factors in her choice and selection of images and symbols.

However much one might attempt to make an orderly and logical assessment of Helen's creations through dividing them into categories, she immediately defeats one as she herself followed no such rules of logic and order. It may seem appropriate to deal with a particular topic under a certain category, or as part of the internal or external domains. However, it will then be found to have crossed imposed boundaries and re-emerged significantly elsewhere. This conundrum is well expressed by Helen, who quotes from Omar Khayyam in a letter to Don MacLennan (15-7-1975): *'For in and out, above, below - etc. etc. Round which we Phantom Figures comē ānd go - !!!'*

The imagery and symbolism which she used is so rich and dense that once one starts exploring it in depth, more and more levels of meaning emerge. Of the possible ways of reaching an understanding of Helen's work, one is through her own private world of significant associations, but she is no longer present to explain it, even if she would - or could. A second is through the understandings of people who did know her, which has shed some light on certain aspects. Thirdly, some understanding could be reached through knowledge of her environment and community, and the common meanings which certain objects, situations or attitudes would have had then. The fourth way is through studying universal symbolism, from mankind's earliest times and throughout the world. This is also an invaluable guide to understanding Helen's work, and is probably the most enlightening and satisfactory way of doing so.

Although Helen was born and grew up in the Karoo, and that countryside was part and parcel of her being, it is interesting to observe how little, proportionately, African or local symbolism is present in her work. Much of it would not be out of place in Europe, America or the Middle East, and many of her images could be transferred directly to India. This subject will be discussed further in the chapter on other Outsider Art environments.

The house and the yard are linked through numerous objects inside the house which have been translated into cement in the yard. But spatially, the interior of the house and the yard are to a large extent separate: visual links exist only through the large clear picture window in the kitchen, the window in the bathroom, and the red glass pane in the top panel of the kitchen door. All other windows look out onto the street or the neighbour's property, and these windows are virtually obscured by large suns which have been painted on to them. The world outside Helen's own domain was thus effectively excluded. *'Windows symbolize the possibility of understanding and of passing through to the external and the beyond, and are also an illustration of any idea of communication'* (Cirlot, 1981: 274). This shows that Helen's communication was with the realm of her unconscious and fantasy, and the outside world was not welcome to intrude. At night the house shone inwardly with its own light from lamps and candles which were reflected by mirrors and the crushed glass. The sun and moon can and do shine into the house, but in many rooms only through obstructions. *'Everything was always kept tightly closed'*, said Blignaut de Villiers (interview 1989), and the

elements could not intrude in this dialogue.

The Camel Yard on the other hand was totally at the mercy of the elements and their effects: sun, moon and star light, heat, drought, wind, rain, ice and snow. Abiding impressions are of quietness and timelessness; the greyness and dryness of surroundings; the preciousness and scarceness of water and greenery; the rhythms of the seasons; the vastness and loneliness of the landscape; and the knowledge that there is no external sustenance - one must create one's own. Dominating impressions are of the sounds of birds - ducks, geese, fowls, peacocks, hadedahs and other wild birds; donkeys, dogs, sheep and goats; and the voices of distant children. These are all things which do not impinge on city dwellers' lives in the same way, and which would have played a large part in influencing Helen's work.

The inside of the house is the expression of her interior life, not her physical being. It was a place in which she tried to transform the events of her life, and made a refuge from the harshness of the physical external world. It started as a place of darkness and unhappiness and she converted it into a glistening kaleidoscope of bright colours and brittle sharpness illuminated by lamps and candles. It was also a place of night-time sleep and dreams, when the unconscious predominates and the moon, with her reflected light, rules. Within the house are an entrance hall, living room, dining room, kitchen, pantry, bathroom - and three bedrooms containing between them seven beds. This in a house which for very many years was occupied by a single woman, who very occasionally had an overnight visitor. She changed the functions of so many other things in her surroundings; the kitchen was no longer a place for preparing food for instance. And yet, throughout, she maintained these three bedrooms for the purpose of providing sleeping space - or possibly as symbolic places where through dreams, in sleep, the unconscious could reign. Helen herself slept in various rooms in the house, depending on the position of the moon and stars.

One of the pictures in the house which has been recreated in cement and glass in the Camel Yard is of the carpet seller. The text below the picture reads:

*Dreaming of the Golden Road to Samarkand: A Moroccan Carpet-seller, Careless of his Wares, Takes his Midday Siesta Beneath the Burning Sun. ... [he] sleeps, with fatalistic calm, trusting in Allah to preserve his merchandise from robbers.*

The fact that Helen interpreted this picture in the garden, and that she included the words by writing them in twisted wire on the netting fence, indicates how meaningful it must have been to her. In addition to the exotic (which always fascinated her), there are other elements of importance here - sleep and dreams, and the fact of trusting in a higher power for protection. Francie Lund writes of Helen in just such a situation when she and Jill Wenman drove Helen to visit her sister Annie in Natal (letter Lund, 1989):

*Yes, the thing with her was trust. ... She fitted perfectly across the back seat of my*

*old Toyota. That tiny. Took her teeth out. ... She slept in the back of the car. ... Later we drove, in the rain, very graciously, into a ditch ... Miss Helen raised her head:*

*"Where are we darlings? Why have we stopped?"*

*"It's all right, we're in a ditch."*

*"No fine darlings." She went back to sleep.*

The majority of houses in Nieu Bethesda have deep verandahs protecting the exterior walls and windows from the direct sun. Windows are covered with curtains, hanging over lace or net, which effectively serve to exclude the world, heat and light outside from the private world inside. In the brilliant Karoo nights the moon and stars would not be allowed to impinge upon most inhabitants.

Helen attempted to let all these essential elements enter her house by opening up vistas through picture windows and inserting panes of coloured glass between rooms. However, other than the kitchen and long bedroom, and the sitting room during the mornings, most of the house remains gloomy and oppressive. In the dining room, Honeymoon room, passage bedroom and long bedroom, light was actually blocked from coming in through the windows covered with painted suns. Her sun images prevented light from the real sun entering the house.

One of Helen's dichotomies was the need to incorporate the inner, masculine part of her psyche, and yet always being in opposition to it, and she must have had very ambivalent feelings about the sun symbol. A house is the symbol of the feminine - it was Helen's symbol of herself - but it is dominated by this masculine symbol, the sun. Suns watch from everywhere; invading, demanding, enclosing. Mirrors cut in the form of suns hang on the walls. The kitchen, which is usually seen as the centre of the feminine, nurturing domain, is overshadowed by a large, bright coloured sun painted on the entire ceiling. Suns are also outside the house, as bas-reliefs on the walls or the cut-out galvanized iron suns in the yard. A sun engraved on a mirror is positioned above the front door. By painting suns (representing masculinity and the animus) on the window panes she was preventing the real sun, or real masculine from entering her domain: he was blocked by suns which she could control. Many men who visit The Owl House react very differently from the way women do, and find it extremely disturbing. This could be because Helen used feminine symbolism, but in a very ambivalent way. Jill also commented on this fact:

*The different men I brought here reacted to it very negatively: didn't like it. A lot of males who have experienced that house, experienced it differently to women. (Interview Wenman, J. 1988).*

The sun, moon and stars are crucial elements in the whole concept of Helen's creation. The sun - the greater light (masculine), and the moon - the lesser light (feminine), dominate the entire house and yard. The Bible was a major influence in her life, in her early years at least, and she would have been well aware of the creation passage in Genesis Chapter 1 verse 16:



*And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.*

Carl Jung says that *'in many societies, representations of the sun express man's indefinable religious experience'* (Jung, 1979: 22). Much of Helen's symbolism is numinous - filled with a sense of the presence of divinity - and it is likely that this was one of the reasons why she portrayed the sun so frequently. Personalizing it with a face may have been an attempt to make this experience of divinity more accessible. On the other hand, the Sunbeam polish tin image of the sun was the one most easily available to her. This down-to-earth fact may explain quite adequately why she chose to use it.

The sun is light, is constant, and appears every day. The moon reflects the sun's light, is fickle and waxes and wanes. In the world that Helen created she could manipulate reality: even the heavenly bodies and the realities of the physical world did her bidding. Through creating her own suns, moons and stars she could make sure they were present all the time, and play with their reflections and shadows. *'You don't want the wise men to lose their way,'* she said to explain why she made her own stars: on cloudy and dark nights, her stars would always be there (interview Wenman, J. 1988). Helen also needed guidance that she knew she could rely on to find her own way. This she felt she could do through creating her own world, as she so clearly stated, writing in wire in the boundary fence **This is My World**. *'She was always ready to change her reality, make it work for her,'* said Francie Lund (letter 1989). Her procession of camels and wise men were travelling in a southerly direction, but she knew that the destination of such a spiritual quest should be in the east, so she wrote **EAST OOS** in the wire netting of the south fence bordering the yard. Helen thus created her own 'East': the place where the sun and moon rise, and the direction in which men turn in prayer to Mecca and Jerusalem. *'In Blake, the East is the seat of the emotions'* (Singer, 1973: 428), which may explain why Blake's work made such an impact on Helen. The East also symbolized a freedom which she couldn't have, but in her imagination she could travel the universe.

In other ways Helen also manipulated her reality:

*'she also wanted to watch the sun rise **and** set above Spitsberg [Kompasberg]. So she made a Spitsberg on the opposite side of the real one, so she **could** have it both ways'* (letter Lund, 1989).

She may also have had deeper reasons, of which she was unaware, for wanting mountains on both sides of the Camel Yard (she in fact had two mountains constructed in the garden). A *'mountain symbolizes pristine heights where spiritual values are the primary values'* (Singer, 1973: 171), and the *'all-embracing image of totality'* (Cirlot, 1981: 221). In her letter to Don Maclennan, describing how distraught she was at the destruction that a heavy snowfall had wrought on her sculptures, Helen could still write: *'How I should love to see it "at the foot of Mount Hebron, when it was all snow*

white".' (letter Martins, H. 3-8-1975). Hebron may have had for her connotations of a safe and sacred place. Hebron is where Abram 'built an altar to the Lord' (Genesis 13 v 18); was a 'city of refuge chosen for all the people of Israel' (Joshua 20 v. 9); and where David was anointed King of Israel (2 Samuel 5 v. 3).

Spiritual aspirations are reinforced through the many statues of peacocks in the Camel Yard. The peacock was taken into Christian iconography from pagan art, and very early appeared as the symbol of the Resurrection. This was possibly because after it had moulted, it once again became clothed in glorious plumage. On top of the larger mountain in the south-east corner of the garden perch two peacocks. On the second mountain near the moon gate is another peacock and on the adjacent mound yet another. Peacocks are one of the subjects which occupied a place of importance in Helen's imagery: altogether there are 13 of them in the Camel Yard. Cirlot says that the peacock's tail symbolizes the blending together of all colours and the concept of totality, which is why it appears as a symbol of immortality and incorruptibility in Christian art.

*'The common motif of the two peacocks symmetrically disposed on either side of the Cosmic Tree ... denotes the psychic duality of man (related to the myth of the Gemini) drawing its life-force from the principle of unity. In the mystic horology, the peacock corresponds to dusk. In Hindu mythology, the patterns on its wings, resembling innumerable eyes, are taken to represent the starry firmament (Cirlot, 1981: 251).*

These symbolic attributes of the peacock, whether or not she understood them, were all significant to Helen: the attainment of unity, the mystical time when darkness approaches, and the night sky spangled with countless stars. To Hindus the peacock is also a creature of good luck and its feathers ward off evil. In ancient Roman mythology it was the sacred bird of Juno and also of her Greek equivalent, the goddess Hera. In many parts of the world the peacock's mournful cry is meant to herald the approach of rain: thus it is the bringer of good news in dry parts of the country. Peacocks originally come from Asia, and wander wild in the Indian desert state of Rajasthan. They could symbolize to Helen the possibility of more than just survival, but also of beauty and splendour in a harsh, arid and barren situation. Many Victorian homes displayed arrangements containing peacock feathers, often kept dust-free under glass domes. Peacocks do also have negative connotations. They are meant to be the bringers of bad luck, and in many South African homes, to have peacock feathers inside the house or peacocks on the property, is thought to be tempting fate.

Helen brought much spiritual imagery into her Camel Yard, and from many different sources. The Camel Yard is essentially about a spiritual pilgrimage, with interludes, anecdotes and diversions along the way. The spirituality portrayed is eclectic, and although predominantly Christian, shows an openness to the worshipping of a higher being who might encompass all these different religious viewpoints. Buddhas sit impassively meditating in the yard, and the cross-legged figure of a man wearing a turban probably represents Hinduism. Islam is represented in the Meccas and also some

of the symbolism depicted in the frieze based on the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. There are a number of delicate, backwards-bending and ecstatic worshipping female figures. Many of these are poised on towers made from bottles, and one larger figure is curved into a backbend to worship the moon. These figures appear to be rejoicing in the very fact of being alive and having supple bodies which can arch so gracefully to the sun, moon, or whatever deity it is to which they are paying obeisance. These figures can also be regarded as acrobats. Cirlot says that an acrobat, who can flip and bend his body into improbable positions *'is a living symbol of inversion or reversal, ... of that need which always arises in time of crisis (personal, social or collective historical crises) to upset and reverse the established order'* (Cirlot 1981: 3). In Helen's life and work generally this reversing and upsetting of the established social order was exactly what she was doing. This intention is specifically displayed here not only in the fact that many of these little acrobatic figures, instead of worshipping the God of Christianity are worshipping the sun or the moon, but are also depicted in the nude.

There is the sensitively portrayed Christian nativity scene in a stable made from beer and wine bottles, comprising Mary and Joseph, and baby Jesus lying in a manger, with a donkey, beast, lambs, and worshipping figure. The meaning of this Divine child is of immense importance in mythology as well as in Christianity, and as an archetype it occurs in many cultures and religions. *'The archetype of the divine child tends to appear in advance of a transformation in the psyche'* (Singer, 1973: 284). A child is a symbol of the future, and dreams of a child are said to occur when some great spiritual change is about to take place. *'An inner marriage of the male and female aspects of the psyche ... will give rise to the inner child whose birth brings release from the power of death'* (Harding, 1986: 239). *'He is the young Moon who fights and overcomes the same devil who conquered his father. He is thus the "one who goes beyond," and represents the rebirth of hope and the possibility of transcending the past'* (Harding, 1986: 153-154). This child may have symbolized for Helen the fact that her past was not her only and unalterable reality, and if she could heal and make whole her psyche there was the possibility of a new beginning. The fact that the infant image was of great significance to her is demonstrated in that it is another theme which she repeats. In addition to baby Jesus, there are four other babies portrayed: the two little baby boys attempting to put their right feet into their mouths - one of whom is sitting in the upturned-face owl in the sitting room, the other in a pool next to the moon gate; another in this same pool; and the creeping baby near the figures with the clock tower which symbolize the swift passage of time and life.

The Camel Yard is filled with places of worship. Helen used Christmas cards and the church in the centre of the village of Nieu Bethesda as models for the four churches in the yard. These churches she knew from her upbringing, and represented that Protestant, Calvinistic, male-dominated way of worship and aspiring to God. Near the largest church is a cement 'doopbakkie' [baptismal font] and a cement cross. These are, respectively, symbols of purification and acceptance into the



The nativity scene lovingly reproduced inside a shelter of bottles.

church, and of mankind's redemption from sin through Christ's self-sacrifice and the resurrection, and the conjunction of opposites which unite the spiritual (or vertical) principle with the worldly and material (horizontal) domain. These were subjects which had occupied Helen's mind deeply if one studies the passages marked in her New Testament (Appendix 5).

Mecca, the epitome of a spiritual destination, would have represented a spiritual ideal to Helen, but she had no guidance in how to portray it accurately. So instead she created her own imaginative vision of Mecca: glowing domes of light constructed from bottles, inside which lanterns could be hung at night, and through which the sun shone during the day. One of them is surmounted with a large inverted red brandy glass. It is interesting to note that this idealized spiritual goal was entirely translucent and filled with light, and was probably the ultimate to which she aspired. In her depiction of spiritual pilgrimage in the Camel Yard, she was enacting her own spiritual pilgrimage, and 'Mecca' was the one spiritual destination which she created more than any other.

There are at least 29 wise men, or magi, in the Camel Yard, accompanied by their camels on their urgent spiritual quest. The magi were from a tribe which put aside power and wealth to seek holiness and wisdom, goodness and truth. Wise men were the ones who had the vision and the knowledge to reach the spiritual destination, and it makes sense that the more of them that there were in the Camel Yard, the more combined wisdom there would be. They are all wearing cloaks, many of which are streaming behind in the 'wind'. *'Within the symbolism of garments, the cloak is, on the one hand, the sign of superior dignity, and on the other, of a veil cutting off a person from the world'* (Cirlot, 1981: 49). This is appropriate as the wise men were on a pilgrimage which was not centred on worldly matters. Many of them have their arms outstretched or upraised in supplication and prayer and are reaching out towards their goal. The hooked staffs which many carry ascribe a pastoral role in the Church, and are a symbol of faith, divine power and communication (Cirlot 1981: 68). The symbolism of their gifts, of which Helen would have been aware from her religious upbringing, were: gold of obedience which was for kings, representing ultimate human authority; frankincense for priests, who act as bridge-builders bringing God and man together; and myrrh, an aromatic plant used for embalming the bodies of the dead. All of these are inevitable encounters with which one has to deal along the way of life.

Without camels for transport the wise men could not have reached their destination, so they are a vital element in the whole pilgrimage, and Helen portrayed 49 of them in the Camel Yard. Camels are animals which can survive in scorching desert conditions which are hostile to man. The desert is also seen as *'the domain of the sun, not as the creator of energy upon earth but as pure, celestial radiance, blinding in its manifestation'* (Cirlot, 1981: 79). Water (with its own complex symbolism which will be studied later) was essential to camels' survival, and yet they could go for long periods without it. These would all have been meaningful symbols for Helen, who had not only



needed to survive in extremely difficult circumstances and an unsympathetic environment, but also required the courage to continue on her own pilgrimage. She had all the need, ideas, enthusiasm and burning energy to attain her goal, but she did not have the means - finances, independence, strength, courage, personality, social attributes or understanding to do so. She needed to know that there were means of achieving it notwithstanding, and camels could also have sustained her belief in survival and the value of perseverance.

Animals are of paramount importance in symbolism, both with regard to their distinguishing features such as colours, shapes and movement, and because of their relationship with man. *'The primitives' view of animals is ... that while man is an equivocal, "masked" or complex being, the animal is univocal, for its positive or negative qualities remain ever constant, thus making it possible to classify each animal, once and for all, as belonging to a specific mode of cosmic phenomena'* (Cirlot, 1981: 10-11). A symbolic classification, which is accepted as the most generally and fundamentally correct, associates animals with the four Elements: aquatic and amphibious animals with water, reptiles with earth, birds with air, and mammals (because they are warm-blooded) with fire, says Cirlot. Helen would have been very aware of these Elements, as they were an immediate part of her every-day being, and therefore exerted a strong influence on the way she interpreted both her surroundings and her inner responses to it.

Animals whose life-span includes some kind of cyclic alternation, with periodic appearances and disappearances are also classified as 'lunar animals'. Amongst these would be, for example, the worm which turns into a chrysalis and then becomes a butterfly, the tadpole which becomes a frog, and the snake which sheds its skin. Helen portrayed a worm (or caterpillar) and chrysalis in the rendering of a Blake illustration, and there are a number of snakes in the house and yard.

Jung states that animals represent the non-human psyche, the world of subhuman instincts, and unconscious parts of the psyche, and that the deeper strata will be represented by the more primitive animals. *'As in all symbolism, the greater the number of objects depicted, the baser and the more primitive is the meaning'* (Cirlot, 1981: 13). If one accepts this premise, it would mean that Helen's continual repetition of many subjects, and the wide number of objects that she did depict, show at what a deep level she was delving into her own psyche.

Owls are obviously invested with great meaning in *The Owl House*. There have been more owls created than any other subject, and altogether there are approximately 80 owls outside and inside the house. They dominate the exterior of the house: on the front stoep alone there are 10 owls, including one over the front door, while others watch from corners of the roof, on windowsills, and are positioned all over the yard. On top of the moon gate perches the two-faced owl (combining the two important symbols for Helen of owl and moon), which looks both inward and outward, and simultaneously into the past and the future. One wonders if Helen was aware of Janus, the Latin god



The chrysalis and caterpillar on two leaves, faithfully copied from the Blake illustration "What is Man!" - frontispiece to *The Gates of Paradise*.



The two-faced owl, simultaneously looking out and looking in, which perches on top of the moon gate on the boundary of the Camel Yard.

of antiquity, who signified the 'door' or 'opening' and was usually depicted with two faces and looking in opposite directions.

Owls have many symbolic meanings, reaching far back into ancient times, and many of the meanings, from different cultures, are conflicting. It seems to be one of the most ambivalent and complex of all the symbols which Helen chose - which is possibly appropriate for this very complex woman. And because she chose to name her whole body of work after the owl, and identified herself with it, it warrants more attention than any of the other subjects (with the moon following a close second, as again, Helen personally identified with the moon). It would be enlightening to have known from Helen herself how she viewed owls. She used to venture forth under cover of darkness according to people who knew her; Mrs Norah van Niekerk compared her with an owl for this very reason (interview van Niekerk, N. 1993). When walking at night in Nieu Bethesda, one is very aware of owls swooping silently past or hooting invisibly from the shadows of trees. In all likelihood, Helen would also have gone for walks in the mountains and kloofs surrounding the village. At dusk it is a common occurrence for an owl to fly out unexpectedly, almost underfoot, from a rock or hole in the ground, so they would have been familiar creatures to her. In the culture in which she grew up, one of the common meanings for owls is that they are birds of wisdom. In the African culture it is known as a harbinger of death. In the Egyptian hieroglyphic system '*it symbolizes death, night, cold and passivity*' (Cirlot, 1981: 247). It is also known as the bird of darkness. To the Chinese the owl represents '*evil, crime, death, horror and ungrateful children*', and in Christianity: '*Satan; the powers of darkness; solitude; mourning; desolation; bad news. The call of the owl is the "song of death"*' (Cooper, 1990: 124). Those Jews who chose darkness instead of the light of the gospel were represented by the owl; to the Hindus it is the emblem of Yama, the god of the dead; to the Japanese and Mexicans it also stands for death, but in the Greek and Roman traditions the owl was sacred to Athene and Minerva and symbolized wisdom (Cooper, 1990: 124).

The owl is known as '*a ghost-bird because of its being a night-bird and its noiseless flight*' (De Vries, 1984: 353). The owl is also attributed to Christ, who went into the Darkness to save the souls in dark hell and returned as the Light of the World, says De Vries (De Vries, 1984: 353). The owl is described as epitomising loneliness in Psalm 102, v. 6. The King James version reads: '*I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert*'; which in the Good News version is translated as: '*I am like a wild bird in the desert, like an owl in abandoned ruins.*' The daughter of Lesbos, Nyctimene ('of the night'), had intercourse with her father, and was changed into an owl. She fled in despair and in her shame still fears daylight and seeks out dark crevices in which to hide (De Vries, 1984: 354). If it was the case that incest occurred with her father, then this is again a possible explanation for how Helen's life unfolded and why she identified so strongly with owls. '*Identifying oneself with animals represents integration of the unconscious and sometimes - like*

*immersion in the primal waters - rejuvenation through bathing in the sources of life itself*' (Cirlot, 1981: 13). Anne Emslie writes: *'All the owls were alter egos for Helen Martins. She identified with them, saw them as an extension of herself'* (Emslie, 1991: 69).

This could not be better confirmed than in the fact that Helen requested that when she died, her ashes should be mixed with the 'precious' red glass in the bottle marked 'Helen', and fixed to her favourite owl named Oswald, who was positioned in the Camel Yard (interview Wenman, J. 1988). When she was alive, she apparently kept a bone across the feet of Oswald (Emslie, 1991: 69). A bone is a symbol of life (as is also implied in the seed). According to Jewish tradition, it refers to an *'indestructible, corporeal particle, represented by a piece of very hard bone; it is, then, symbolic of the belief in resurrection, and is comparable with the symbol of the chrysalis from which the butterfly emerges'* (Cirlot, 1981: 31). The meaning of the name Oswald, 'Power of God,' is very significant, though one cannot know if Helen was aware of this meaning. The colour red is also of significance. God, as Light, is the source of colour, and red, the zenith of colour, represents the sun, and it would seem, symbolically all that Helen aspired to, and many of the things that she was not or did not have. Red is: *'the masculine, active principle; fire; sun; royalty; love; joy; festivity; passion; ardour; energy; ferocity; sexual excitement; the bridal torch or fire; health; strength; also blood; blood-lust; blood-guiltiness; anger; vengeance; martyrdom; fortitude; faith; magnanimity ... Gods are often painted red to denote supernatural power, sacredness, or solar power'* (Cooper, 1990: 40). Red glass - that which is permeable to light - would have been the fusion of the light of love and the sun, transforming her owl of darkness, death, solitude, mourning and shame into the power, glory and wholeness of God. She had burned herself out internally through swallowing the caustic soda. After her body was cremated her ashes would signify that in her entirety she had been put through the fire of purification. But without the covering of red glass combining Helen herself, literally transformed through fire, she could not become fused with Oswald and all that he signified. Symbolically for Helen's sake, it seems a tragedy that this wish of her's was not carried out.

Live birds were a central feature of the Camel Yard, and birds are a major focus in the iconography of the Camel Yard. Helen, in her very manner of being, has frequently been said to have been 'bird-like'. *'The bird, being a creature of earth yet not entirely of earth, since he can fly, is a symbol for that incomprehensible part of man that is sometimes called "spirit"'* (Singer, 1973: 169). Birds are frequently used to symbolize human souls, some of the earliest examples being found in the art of ancient Egypt. They are the messengers of the gods, and generally speaking, birds, like angels, are symbols of thought, imagination and of the swiftness of spiritual processes and relationships. They also symbolize freedom. Most birds are solar - the yang principle - but particularly the crane, cock and peacock. All three of these birds were portrayed by Helen. Those birds which belong to the higher realms belong to the Element of air and denote loftiness of spirit





Oswald Helen's favourite owl, alongside one of her own inventions, the owl chair cum bird-bath. Her wish was that after her death her ashes should be mixed with the crushed red glass kept in a bottle marked 'Helen' in the pantry and stuck on to Oswald. This wish was not fulfilled.

(Cirilot 1981: 28). Others belong to the element of water, or the primal swamps. Depicting birds is one of the areas in which Helen has used the indigenous or domestic wildlife as a source of inspiration: amongst them are storks, blue cranes, kiewietjies (plovers), doves and domestic fowls - roosters and hens specifically. Apart from owls and peacocks, some other birds which she portrayed are pelicans and ibises. The one magnificent flying stork depicted in a bas-relief on the large, blank, south wall of the Lion's Den would most certainly, on an immediate level, symbolize to Helen the arrival of spring, and thus, new life. In her day storks would have arrived in large numbers in early September (latterly, due to the abuse of pesticides in Europe, their numbers have decreased alarmingly). Storks are traditionally the bringers of babies - again an image of new life and the possibility of new beginnings, and in Greek mysteries *'the stork goddess represented archetypal woman, the bringer of life, the nourisher,'* and also *'new life in the coming of Christ and His Annunciation'* (Cooper, 1990: 161-162). It is a solar bird, and destroyer of reptiles, but as an aquatic creature and a fisher, it is associated with the waters of creation (Cooper, 1990: 161-162). This is appropriate, as symbolically, Helen was swimming deep in the waters of the unconscious, and portraying it through these symbols. Blue cranes, South Africa's national bird, are particularly beautiful and graceful, and always found in the veld in faithful pairs. Helen and Koos Malgas would both have been very familiar with them, and Koos says that these sculptures were depicted from life (interview 1993), though in the kitchen there is a circular biscuit tin with blue cranes pictured on the lid which could easily have been used as a model. *'In cultures ranging from the Chinese to those of the Mediterranean, the crane is an allegory of justice, longevity and the good and diligent soul'* (Cirilot, 1981: 66).

The pelican represents sacrifice, piety and charity as it was thought to feed its young with its own blood. In Christianity it therefore represents *'Christ as nostro Pellicano (Dante) who gave his blood for the sins of the many'* (Cooper, 1990: 128); redemption through Christ's blood sacrifice of himself, and thus the Eucharist. It is also (along with the owl) associated with loneliness in Psalm 102, v. 6: *'a pelican of the wilderness'*.

The cock, as the bird of dawn, is a sun-symbol, and an emblem of vigilance and activity. During the Middle Ages it became a highly important Christian image, nearly always appearing on the highest weather vane, on cathedral towers and domes, and was regarded as an allegory of vigilance and resurrection (Cirilot, 1981: 51). Hens on the other hand symbolize maternal care, providence and procreation. In the *'Ages of Man a hen typifies a woman of 50, with a rosary'* (De Vries, 1984: 248).

In Egypt the ibis symbolized the soul, aspiration, perseverance, the morning, and was sacred to Thoth. It is also an ambivalent symbol, as it is solar in the aspect of destroying reptiles in their harmful dimension; but as it belongs to the watery element it is lunar - sometimes depicted with the

crescent moon on its head (Cooper, 1990: 86).

The plover, commonly called a kiewietjie in South Africa, has a number of meanings. It is the whistler, and to hear it is a death-omen. It can forecast whether a sick person will recover or die, and warns sheep of approaching danger. Plovers are also the souls of the Jews who condemned Jesus to death, and are doomed to wander forever lamenting the misdeed (De Vries, 1984: 370).

In Helen's time the Camel Yard was filled with live doves and geese: the former flying around in the aviaries, and the latter swimming in the many little pools. In Christianity it is a dove which depicts the Holy Ghost, third person of the Trinity; and the Slavic belief is that the soul turns into a dove at the time of death (Cirlot, 1981: 85). The goose is known as a beneficent animal which is often found in folktales, and is linked with destiny (Cirlot, 1981: 120).

Domestic animals found in the Camel Yard are lambs, goat kids, a donkey and beast, dogs and cats. These are all animals which would have been a part of Helen's everyday rural life. The cat, with its variable eyes, is associated with the moon in her waxing and waning, the splendour of the night, and also the varying power of the sun. A black cat is lunar, evil and death, and the familiar of witches. It was sacred to the Egyptian goddesses Isis and Bast, the latter being the guardian of marriage. To the Chinese it is a yin animal and nocturnal. (Cirlot, 1981: 39; Cooper, 1990: 30). There are two cats on the steps of the Lion's Den: one sleeping and the other on guard. *'Like all elementary symbols it [the cat] has a binary aspect, having solar and lunar characteristics; in the cat they are predominantly lunar (as compared with e.g. the lion who is mainly solar)'* (De Vries, 1984: 85). These lunar and female symbols are watching the abode of the lion of the sun, or possibly, by their presence, attempting to correct the balance of the power of masculine-feminine, solar-lunar elements.

*'The ambiguity to be found in all major symbols is to be found in the dog as well; though from old a decidedly feminine symbol'* (De Vries, 1984: 138). The dog is commonly known as an emblem of faithfulness. On medieval tombs they were often depicted at the feet of women, denoting affection and faithfulness (and men were represented with a lion denoting valour and magnanimity). In Christian symbolism the dog is accorded the attributes of the sheep-dog which guards and guides the flocks, and at times becomes an allegory of the priest. It is the keeper of the boundaries between this world and the next and companion of the dead on their 'Night Sea-Crossing', which is associated with the symbolisms of the mother and of resurrection (Cirlot, 1981: 84; De Vries, 1984: 138-139; Cooper, 1990: 52).

The donkey is credited with patience, stupidity and obstinacy (Cooper, 1990: 54). Helen knew donkey carts as being often the only means of transport and for conveying heavy loads for the local coloured people. To her, the donkey would probably have represented endurance and faithfulness under extremely difficult and hard conditions.

Amongst wild animals (which for this purpose is taken as referring to all creatures other than birds - which have already been dealt with) there are giraffes and the lion, and then the underwater fishes and seahorse, and snakes. It seems worthy of note that other than the lion, the seven giraffes were the only wild animals which Helen had made, and that she treated them in an unusual way. They only had heads and necks: the bodies were 'underground' she said, to enable them to reach their food, the grass and little bushes (tamarisk), more easily (interview Wenman, J. 1988). Giraffes represent height-symbolism - lofty thoughts or ideals, inquisitiveness after higher knowledge, eloquence - love of lofty language, gentleness, and coquetry - 'hiding' among trees (De Vries, 1984: 215). These attributes of giraffes were all ones which Helen either possessed or aspired to. She was said to be gentle, and sometimes acted in a coquettish fashion with strangers and men. She was frequently complimented on how well she wrote - Estelle van Schalkwijk often said in letters that she should think of writing - and words were of great importance to her. This will be further explored in the texts which she had written or which were illustrated in the Camel Yard. An original example of her handwriting was analyzed by a Belgian-qualified graphologist (Appendix 4), who beforehand was given no information about Helen. On this very topic of lofty ideals and aspiring to higher knowledge, the graphologist wrote:

*The writer is an intelligent woman, knowledgable, attracted by the realm of thoughts, ideas - but her aspirations are too high and what could be the formulation of an ideal becomes utopia, exalted mysticism with a touch of fanaticism. ... it is not herself which she is keen to assert, but her ideas, of which she is totally imbued and which she would never dream of relinquishing.*

Giraffes, which represent height-symbolism, were immediately limited by Helen through putting most of their bodies 'underground'. It was as if she either unconsciously limited their ability to reach their potential in the higher realms, or otherwise made it easier for them to reach what was available or needed on an earthly dimension. It could also be that their long necks and heads - representing thought, the intellect and ideals, with a long neck to reach them, were all that was important: bodies and legs were earthly and irrelevant. If Helen saw herself embodied in a giraffe, then by putting bodies and legs 'underground', their, and by implication, her mutilated feet would have been out of sight, and not a limiting factor in her life. She was particularly small in stature. By bringing the giraffes down to the size that she did, perhaps she felt that she could relate to their height, knowing that symbolically, the rest of them did also exist. Both Johannes Hattingh and Johannes Pienaar, the two men of importance in Helen's life, were said to be particularly tall, and again, by symbolizing herself as tall, she possibly felt that she would be better equipped to relate to them and hold her own in both the physical and intellectual realms.

The fact that she made seven giraffes is also significant: '*corresponding to the seven planetary spheres, the seven essential virtues and the seven Directions of space*' (Cirlot, 1981: 221).

Seven is also symbolic of perfect order, the number of basic musical notes and colours as refracted in a rainbow, and the number seven symbolizes pain (Cirlot, 1981: 233). *'With the three of the heavens and the soul and the four of the earth and the body, it is the first number which contains both the spiritual and temporal. It is perfection; security; safety; rest; plenty; reintegration; synthesis; also virginity and the number of the Great Mother'* (Cooper, 1990: 117). It would seem that in these giraffes, Helen was again aspiring to a wholeness and completeness, through integrating the physical and spiritual worlds in ideals expressed by words. Again though, she was attempting to do so by altering the realities to suit her own needs, her view of her world, and how she belonged in it.

The lion is *'ambivalent as both solar and lunar, good and evil'* (Cooper, 1990: 99), and from all evidence, this would appear to be how Helen viewed the lion. In Christianity it is again an ambivalent symbol: as the power, might and kingly nature of Christ, the Lion of Judah; or of Christ's power *'to deliver the Christian from the lion's mouth which is the Devil as a "roaring lion"'* (Cooper, 1990: 99). Helen put her old father in the outside room which she called 'The Lion's Den', which means she probably identified him with the lion. Not only does the lion represent the sun in its power of heat and splendour, and have other attributes such as majesty, strength, fortitude, justice, courage and might; but also contradictory characteristics such as cruelty, ferocity, the sub-human attributes of life, and it is ascribed to the gods of war. The lion is the king of the beasts, and is the possessor of strength and the masculine principle. It also belongs to the element of earth. *'For Jung, the lion in its wild state, is broadly speaking an index of latent passions'* (Cirlot, 1981: 190), and *'frenzied desire'* (De Vries, 1984: 301). The rising and the setting sun are represented by the Young Lion and the Old Lion respectively, and the *'solar lion kills the lunar bull'*. In art the lion often has the conventional solar face (De Vries, 1984: 300). In Helen's work, the symbolism of the sun and the lion frequently overlap or confirm what each is implying. The house is guarded by many suns, all with the same stylized face, and the lion *'in his symbolic role as guardian of the door'* (Cooper, 1990: 99) stands watchful outside the Lion's Den.

Creatures which belong under water or underground, such as fishes and snakes, are seen as links with the unconscious. The fish is a complex image, with many meanings ascribed to it in, amongst many others, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Celtic, Indian and Greek iconography and symbolism. It is the self, concealed in the unconscious, and as such *'has a higher authority than the snake'* (De Vries, 1984: 190). The fish symbolizes the renewal of life, and the watery element. It is related to *'all aspects of the Great Mother as genetrix and with all lunar deities'* (Cooper, 1990: 68). It became a Christian symbol, as an anagram deriving from the word ichthys. *'Fish, together with bread and wine, was the sacramental meal of the mystery religions'* (Cooper, 1990: 68). *'Then it came to be taken as a symbol of profound life, of the spiritual world that lies under the world of*





The forest of giraffes' heads, with the little tamarisk bushes in front of them which Helen said they could eat.



A cement fish swims across the stove recess in the kitchen. Behind it is the pitiful cooking equipment which Helen used - little primus stoves. Perched in front of the red glass at the back of the recess is a row of cement owls.

*appearances, the fish representing the life-force surging up*' (Cirlot, 1981: 106-107). It is also intimately connected with sexuality as it is a phallic shape; and with abundance and fertility, as the female fish produces such a vast amount of eggs. One of the signs of Ishtar, first of the Great Goddesses of Fertility, was a *'house with a fish in it'*, or a house filled with fertility (De Vries, 1984: 189). A single fish also portrays a lonely or solitary person, says Cooper. Helen had a large cement bas-relief fish swimming from right to left across the front of the recess which had once contained the stove in her kitchen, and there is a fish sculpture in the yard. Her kitchen, probably more than any other room in the house, was filled with very powerful symbols: the sun on the ceiling, this fish across the hearth, many owls watching from various vantage point, and the 'Little Devil' in front of the hearth or the back door.

Snakes are represented in various places in the house and the yard. There is snake the tempter, entwined round the figure of Eve and giving her the apple. This is derived from the William Blake illustration for 'The Temptation and Fall', from Milton's 'Paradise Lost'. There are two snakes which act as supports for circular tables - these were Helen's invention, and in the yard are two other snakes - one near the back door and the other outside lifting its head from the ground. Snakes have universal and extremely complex symbolism which arises from deep within ancient psyches. In the Far East the serpent and the dragon are synonymous, and there is no distinction between them. Diel says a snake is symbolic *'not of personal sin but of the principle of evil inherent in all worldly things'* (Cirlot, 1984: 286). When associated with the Tree of Knowledge, it is malevolent; but with the Tree of Life, then it is beneficent. It is also the harbinger of consciousness, and, in conjunction with the Tree of Knowledge, created awareness of opposites. *'Coiled around a woman, who is the Great Mother, the lunar goddess, the serpent is solar and together they represent the male-female relationship'* (Cooper, 1990: 148). There are also fascinating connections with the moon which will be discussed later when studying moon symbolism. The snake signifies the primordial, undifferentiated, upsurging life force and instinctual nature. It can be male, female or self-created. It symbolizes death and destruction in its role as a killer, and life and resurrection in its ability to periodically shed and renew its skin. *'It is solar and lunar, life and death, light and darkness, good and evil, wisdom and blind passion, healing and poison, preserver and destroyer, and both spiritual and physical rebirth'* (Cooper, 1990: 146-147). As it lives underground, it is also part of the underworld, and can avail itself of the powers and magic of the dead. The curved ascending snakes are upholding the two circular tables which possibly represent the sun, mandalas, or even the world. Mandalas symbolize wholeness, and these serpents may represent the inner nature of man. The fact that two of the other serpents are represented with apples in their mouths says that in this instance Helen saw them as tempters and not to be trusted.

And then there are the fabulous animals or beings: sphinxes, mermaids (meermin - 'more-

less' - in Afrikaans), and the products of Helen's own imagination: the owl-camel and the Cock Man. The underwater swimmer wearing flippers can probably also be included in this category. Animals are subdivided into two categories when looked at symbolically in art: natural and fabulous. *'Within the cosmic order, the latter occupy an intermediate position between the world of fully differentiated beings and the world of formless matter'* (Cirlot, 1981: 11). Amongst the most important of these are the sphinx, winged horse and the dragon. The wings on Pegasus represent the spiritualization of a lower force. Generally though, extremely ambiguous processes of the imagination result in a range of highly ambivalent symbols. Their significance is intensified by an innate belief in the power wielded by these beings, and also the supernatural importance of abnormality and deformity. There are other animals, such as the pelican, phoenix and salamander which, although not at all, or only slightly fabulous in appearance, carry the connotations of supernatural qualities as the result of a symbolic projection.

It is interesting that the camel may possibly also be viewed as a mythical or fabulous beast. It was *'traditionally considered in curious relation with the dragon and with winged serpents, for, according to the Zohar, the serpent in the Garden of Eden was a kind of "flying camel". Similar allusions are to be found in the Persian Zend-Avesta'* (Cirlot, 1981: 37). Fabulous animals are powerful agents of psychological projection. *'The combination of different characteristics suggests other possibilities of creation and potentialities, also freedom from the conventional principles of the phenomenal world'* (Cooper, 1990: 62). Those that Helen made must have been very important for her, on an unconscious level. As she had not studied psychology nor yet undergone analysis one can be virtually certain that she would have been unaware of her reasons, on that level, for creating them.

Between them, Helen, Jonas Adams and Koos Malgas made 14 mermaids, some of which are sitting in little circular pools made from bottles, some are perched on the edge of the rectangular cement pool attached to the water tank, one sits inside on the corner of the little cement bath, and others are seated on the bare ground in the yard. These mermaids are mostly active figures, and are involved in wordless communication - pointing, directing, beckoning, enticing or preening. Mermaids are one of the most popular of legendary figures, and stories of them are very likely to have been part of Helen's childhood. A mermaid is described as *'half-woman, half-fish; a divinity of the waters'* (Cooper, 1990: 64). They were reputed to live in an underwater world of great splendour to which they lured their victims and kept their souls prisoner. Mermaids long for a soul, and since early Christian times tradition has it that they can only acquire one through marrying a human man (De Vries, 1984: 319). They have the power of prophecy and are said to grant wishes: hence no doubt the three on the edge of the cement pool indicating to visitors that they should put money into the pool before making a wish. Anne Emslie writes:



Mermaids sit on the edge of a water trough next to the cement water tank, indicating that visitors should place a coin in the hand of one of them, and then make a wish.



*Koos Malgas remembers how Helen Martins always ensured that there was a coin in the outstretched palm of the mermaid sitting on the rim of the pool. The mermaid was indicating to visitors that they should first pay and then make a wish. (Emslie, 1989: 53).*

Being a creature which belongs in part to the element of earth, and in part to the element of water, mermaids symbolize the half-formed, emerging consciousness, which is still held in the realm of the deep, formless unconscious. The ocean which they inhabit symbolizes chaos and formlessness, and also the sea of life which must be crossed. (Cooper, 1990: 121). Mermaids are also manifestations of the anima - *'the feminine and chthonic part of the male soul.'* (De Vries, 1984: 319). *'To love a mermaid is fatal: a man who listens to her music either becomes mad or falls asleep. 'She then carries him off to a desert place, and wants his love on penalty of death; or she kills him off anyway.'* (De Vries, 1984: 319). There is a story of a mermaid who, for the first time in her life really fell in love with a human being who used to bathe near the rocks where she sat combing her hair: *'But she was a mermaid, she could not love as a human woman would. For all her longing she could never become a "real maid." All she could do was to lure her lover to a watery grave.'* (Harding, 1986: 123).

Esther Harding elaborates on the theme of the mermaid in relation to current perceptions: *'The "mermaid" phase of the modern woman may denote a complete lack of psychological development, the woman having remained in an animal-like at-one-ness with nature, which has never been broken by any human awareness, or, perhaps more often, the woman of today comes into this state because she has found the conventional ways of behaving entirely sterile, dry, infertile, like the Wastelands of the Grail legend.'* (Harding, 1986: 123).

She says that once a woman can accept the power of instinct within her, recognize it as belonging to the nonhuman or the divine domain, and relinquish any claim to possessiveness of it, she achieves a transformed relationship with herself. What before was an instinctual state of being, *"I want, I must have"*, is succeeded by the ability to love. *'And the woman, instead of being merely a manifestation of nature, a mermaid, is reborn a human being with a human spirit.'* (Harding, 1986: 152). Helen could not achieve this state, however hard she tried through her creativity, as she could not reconcile the opposites within her and progress to a wholeness of 'self' as opposed to the ego and an undifferentiated state of being.

The meaning of the symbols which she used, as can be seen continuously throughout her work, intertwine in a complex fashion. Mermaids have a bond with the moon: in myths and also in primitive beliefs the Moon Goddess herself was sometimes represented as half fish, in which form she is perhaps the forerunner of our own mermaids. (Harding, 1986: 54). They are associated with the moon, which rules the tides, and which is often represented by the mermaid holding a mirror. None of Helen's mermaids are holding mirrors (one holds a yellow plastic comb in her hand), but

the circular pools in which many are sitting - in Helen's day filled with water - would have created the effect of each one actually being herself in the centre of a mirror.

The bas-relief female swimming figure, with long hair and wearing 'frog-feet' flippers, is another image which Helen repeated. In its ability to swim in the underwater realm it must be linked, symbolically, with the mermaid. The mermaid has come up out of the watery depths into the human domain, but cannot survive there. Helen here metamorphosizes a female human to become an underwater creature, enabling it to move into, and explore, the realm of the unconscious. However, she could not survive under water, but would, if she desired, still be able to remove her flippers and resurface above the water. This is yet another example of how Helen manipulated reality to suit her purposes in her own private world. There are four of these figures: one above the bath in the bathroom, on the wall opposite the window; the second on the outside wall of the Lion's Den, swimming low down below a large glass-encrusted sun and a Mona Lisa; the third outside above the large picture window in the kitchen; and the fourth on the wall of the back stoep, to the left of the door from the green passage bedroom, and again underneath a large, glass-encrusted sun. All these four figures are moving from right to left - as is the fish on the hearth in the kitchen and the stork on the outside south wall of the Lion's Den - but the one on the back stoep is also swimming diagonally upwards, towards the sun which is directly above her. It is unusual in art, particularly in Western cultures, to find such a consistently strong movement from right to left. Because the written word goes from left to right, people are unconsciously trained to think in that directional flow; possibly this evolved as it was the most natural direction in which to move. This must therefore be another meaningful factor in trying to understand Helen's symbolism.

The right side, the direction from which these female figures are swimming, is *'usually the solar, masculine, future, outward-going principle. In the West, and in Christianity, it is the side of honour ... In Chinese symbolism the right is the yang, masculine, strength, but the left, yin, is the side of honour since strength tends to violence and thus to destruction and dissolution'* (Cooper, 1990: 138). In Nepal, a country where both Buddhism and Hinduism are practised, a mound of sacred tablets is always passed by on the left hand side, keeping the mound on the right. *'The left side is usually the sinister, dark, illegitimate, lunar, inward-looking aspect and represents the past'* (Cooper, 1990: 96). On the day of Judgement in Christianity, the goats are on the left hand side and the sheep on the right; and in scenes of the crucifixion, of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus, the good thief is shown on his right and the bad thief on his left. Helen's figures, which probably represented herself, are swimming, in the unconscious, away from the solar, the masculine and the future. They are turning inwards towards the lunar, dark, secret world, and trying to make sense of past darkness. But yet again, the dominating sun hovers over all.

The winged owl-camel, with the nude woman with 'ruby nipples' standing on its back, is an

immensely complex creature, and obviously loaded with symbolism for Helen. It is a central figure in the Camel Yard, and probably one of the most significant of the sculptures. It combines the mythical elements of the camel, which in symbolism was associated with a dragon; as Cirlot says, *'the serpent in the Garden of Eden was a kind of winged camel'*, together with Helen's alter ego, the owl. In this figure she brings together the two elements of her creation - the interior, nighttime domain of *The Owl House* and the exterior daytime domain of *A Camel Yard*. As Pegasus, 'a lower force', was spiritualized through having wings, Helen was possibly attempting to reach higher planes through this creation. And on the creature's back stands the proud nude female figure, with arms outstretched before her. Her 'ruby nipples' were two pieces of red glass, and it would appear that in this figure, Helen was celebrating the beauty and power of uninhibited femaleness and sexuality. The hands are bent upwards, palms to the front, *"to shield her eyes"*, Helen said, *"from the brightness of the light"* (Emslie, 1991: 48b). In all her self-confidence, this figure is still paying obeisance to the source of light as the great power, and unable to look at it directly. This figure may be depicting Helen's ideal of personal aspiration, transformed through the amalgamation of her conflicting opposites.

Another of Helen's imaginative creations is the Cock Man which appears in the 'Debauchery Corner', and was derived from a picture postcard. This sculpture is not a figure of respect, but aims rather to expose the character of such a person. There is probably also a strong element of humour thrown in. It is of an uncouth figure with the head, wings and feet of a rooster, standing with his trousers unbuttoned. In its name there could be a play on the coarse term of 'cock' for penis. The other roosters in the yard are treated with affection and respect for all their positive characteristics. In the Buddhist cosmological view, *'The cock, with the pig and snake, are at the centre of the Round of Existence, with the cock as carnal passion and pride'* (Cooper, 1990: 38). This seems to be what Helen was portraying in this particular cock. Cooper also writes that the cock and the lion are often portrayed in opposition, which is interesting as this Cock Man is positioned in the corner outside the Lion's Den, and facing the cement lion with wire whiskers and car headlight eyes.

Yet another infinitely complex symbol is the sphinx, of which there are four in the Camel Yard. *'Being the supreme embodiment of the enigma, the sphinx keeps watch over an ultimate meaning which must remain for ever beyond the understanding of man'* (Cirlot, 1981: 304). This profound statement makes even more ironic the sphinxes' humble origin in the Camel Yard: the lion depicted on the Lion matchbox. Traditionally, the sphinx has a human head, the body of a bull, the feet of a lion and wings of an eagle. It thus *'combines the four elements and symbolizes the mysterious, the enigmatic and solar power. ... an all-lion bodied sphinx, without wings, signifies power'* (Cooper, 1990: 64). Being based on the lion on the matchbox, lion-bodied is what Helen's sphinxes were, though probably by default rather than by choice. The sphinx is also said to be *'an*

*unconscious manifestation of the libido, especially in a state of repression, where the childish representations of the instinct appear at the same times as attributes of the parents, who, in turn, appear in animal form'* (De Vries, 1984: 435). It is a possibility that unconsciously the sphinx was yet another representation of Helen's father, associated with the lion, or at least a representation of the male principle.

There are a great many structures in the Camel Yard, amongst which are 15 pyramids. The influence of Egypt, with all the sphinxes, pyramids, camels and a number of birds, played a large part in the creation of the Camel Yard. In Helen's house is a well-worn, beautifully tooled and coloured leather writing case containing old family photographs and letters. Among the many Egyptian scenes depicted on it are lions, ibises, camels, the sun, Egyptian gods, and birds which appear to have the body of an owl and face of a human. It is interesting to see the variety of potential objects which she could have inspired her from this writing case, but which she did not choose to use. Subjects such as bulls, the Egyptian half-man half-animal gods, boats to the underworld, chariots and bowmen obviously did not strike chords within her. Traditionally, Egypt symbolizes the animal in man. *'Hence "to go out of Egypt" is to abandon the sensual and the material and to progress towards the Promised Land across the Red Sea and the desert: to progress towards a superior, transcendent state'* (Cirlot 1981: 94-95). Of course it is not possible to know what Helen's purpose was in repeating these Egyptian motifs so frequently (and, as has already been stated, it is unlikely that she understood it either). But it may have been that, symbolically, she was attempting to 'go out of' her own internal 'Egypt' and become a superior, spiritual being. Almost any theme which she followed, when it is studied more deeply, seems to lead to such a conclusion.

*'The basic symbolic meaning of the pyramid could have been that it was the primeval hill rising from the waters of the beginning'* (Lurker, 1986: 98). Cirlot says that the mountain can be the all-embracing symbol of totality, which is *'also symbolized by the pyramid-symbol'* (Cirlot, 1981: 221). Pyramids were built so that the tomb chamber faced west - towards the Kingdom of the dead, and the temple intended for the cult of the king lay on the east side, from where the sun rose. With all these pyramids, and the mountains which Helen had made in the yard, there is a powerful thrust towards purity, fresh new beginnings and reaching to the spiritual heights.

The towers, spires, steeples and pillars which occur all over the yard, as well as the Queen of the Night cactus (*Cereus peruvianis*) are all pointing heavenwards. These indicate aspiration to the heavenly realms, as well as being phallic symbols. Jung makes it clear that, to primitive minds, phallus was not to be literally equated with penis; but meant the generative life force, the libido, which is the whole driving force of man's will. The symbol penetrates the unconscious *'in order to activate and enrich that which it penetrates'*... [It is a] *'symbol of the Self (e.g. in dreams) where there is undervaluation (repression etc.) of sexuality'* (De Vries, 1984: 363). De Vries also says that

a tower is a '*common location for a moon or sky-goddess*' (De Vries, 1984: 471), and a spire is a '*bridge to heaven ... related to Pyramid ... the holy phallus , or holy tower-tree of words*' (De Vries, 1984: 436). Once again, on this occasion with the pyramid, there is a significant symbolic link with other objects Helen has portrayed. This serves to corroborate and support previous interpretations. The particular variety of cactus which Helen planted grows to between two and three metres in height. It is impossible to touch it is so full of thorns, and yet, so surprisingly and secretly, it produces the magic of exquisitely delicate flowers in the darkness of night. She probably chose to grow cactus plants as they do not require watering. However, there is another species of cactus also easily available in Nieu Bethesda, which produces similar flowers, but it grows in squat little clumps instead of reaching heavenwards. Although seemingly random, everything in the house and yard has been selected with a purpose, and it is very likely that she chose this upright variety on purpose.

Symbolically, illumination comes from the East, and the East was Helen's symbolic destination. It is in the east that the sun and the moon rise, to the east that the wise men followed the star that led them to the baby Jesus, to the east that Muslims turn to pray and to the east that they make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Radiance symbolizes new life emanating from the divinity: light was the first thing which was created and is also the power which dispels darkness and the forces of evil. Light symbolizes the life of the spirit as opposed to that of the emotions: '*Light and lust are deadly enemies*' states De Vries (De Vries, 1984: 297). '*The experience of light is the encounter with ultimate reality*' (Cooper, 1990: 96); a perception which is confirmed in all the great religions of the world. In Christianity, Christ is the '*Light of the World*' and '*the Father of Lights with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*' (James 1 v. 17). In the Islamic Qoran, '*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and of the earth*'. Helen's entire house was devoted to light, but it was light that she created or manipulated herself to dispel the darkness, whether it was internal or external. Light also symbolizes wisdom - which links it to the owl that is such an important symbol in The Owl House - intellect and direct knowledge. It is also the masculine principle - to which, through her choice of subject matter, Helen appeared to be reaching. It is ultimately the '*manifestation of non-being*', and unity (Cooper, 1990: 97).

It was through paraffin lamps and candles that Helen created her light. Much of the symbolism of light is also applicable to lamps. Lamps denote the '*presence of a (light) deity, and protection against dark demons*' (De Vries, 1984: 290), intelligence and the spirit. On an altar they signify the light of the presence of divinity. They symbolize the stars as well as the light of divinity and the transitoriness of individual life. (The latter was a theme which appealed to Helen in the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. From this book she created the frieze on the back stoep and wrote many of the texts in wire on the fences around the property). In Christianity a lamp placed before the tomb



of the dead, or his image, represents *'the soul, which helps to recreate the spirit'* (De Vries, 1984: 290). In Psalm 119, verse 105, a lamp represents guidance: *'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, a light upon my path'*. In the story of Alladin, a lamp was the source of good fortune and wealth. Helen did not use this story in any of her imagery, but probably knew it, and with her love of things oriental, such a connotation for the lamp may very well have had meaning for her.

A lighted candle, like the lamp, symbolizes *'individuated light, and consequently of the life of an individual as opposed to the cosmic and universal life'* (Cirlot, 1981: 38). With great determination Helen asserted her individuality, but she also seems to have been reaching towards individuation and cosmic life. Cirlot also says that the candlebra is a symbol of *'spiritual light and of salvation'* (Cirlot, 1981: 37): the passages marked in Helen's Bible indicate that this was what she aspired to (Appendix 5). Lamps and candles as sources of light are not dependable, whereas the sun and the moon are. Lamps rely on a sufficient supply of paraffin, and candles can be blown out or burn down. Lighting them all in The Owl House was a major undertaking, and to go to all that trouble Helen would have had a great need or desire to create light. In most rural houses a couple of lamps or candles in a room would have been sufficient.

Mirrors were one of the most important elements which Helen incorporated into The Owl House. As seems the case with most of her major images, they are also a very complex symbol. Most people perceive themselves through interaction with others, who act as mirrors for them. Helen Martins had very few people to act as meaningful mirrors for herself. This became increasingly the case in her latter years, as significant individuals died. As her life became more and more reclusive she was perceived by many to be crazy, or at least excessively eccentric. The mirrors may have served the purpose of confirming the reality and significance of her being to herself; she could always be aware 'I am; I exist'. They would have affirmed her place in the centre of her universe. She was not receiving the recognition she so badly desired from the public in general, and artists specifically. It seems likely that this was a contributory factor in her filling the house with so many mirrors, in addition to permutating the possibilities and varieties of light and light sources. They also expanded space and her universe, created illusions of reality, or acted as her instruments for manipulating reality.

A mirror reflects existence - the temporal as opposed to the spiritual world. In its ability to reflect the visible reality of the world it is the symbol of consciousness, or in other words, self-knowledge. (This is also one of the symbolic meanings of the snake). The moon is as ambivalent as a mirror, and both are passive. The moon and the mirror both have the cyclical, fluctuating element of the feminine. The moon waxes and wanes and at times disappears altogether. A mirror seems to absorb images as well as reflect them. Without the existence of the sun the moon could not reflect light, and as the moon receives the light of the sun, so does the mirror receive images. A

mirror reproduces objects in the same way as the moon reproduces the sun's light, and can be either vacant or peopled depending on circumstances over which it has no control.

The way in which Helen utilized mirrors in The Owl House was to reflect image to image; one mirror received images from another mirror and passed these on to yet others. In this way, illusion and reality, the tangible and the reflection, the permanent and the ephemeral, became totally confused. It was a narcissistic way of looking at her world, where all started from and reverted to the centre of her vision. Through careful angling of mirrors she ensured that what was behind, in front, and round the corner could all be reflected and viewed from a fixed position. This way of looking behind her though did not enable her to discover what was in her past which may have affected her future view of the world, and determined her method of coping with it.

As in Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, at times a mirror can take '*the mythic form of a door through which the soul may free itself "passing" to the other side*' (Cirlot, 1981: 211). Such a belief may well explain the custom of draping mirrors or even turning them to face the wall on certain occasions, such as death in a house. Helen may easily have felt that through a mirror she could be part of or aspire to another form of reality than that of the physical, material world.

*'Hand mirrors, in particular, are symbols of truth'* (Cirlot, 1981: 212), and based on the little hand mirror in the house, Helen had many large mirrors cut in this shape to hang on the walls in her house. In Chinese symbolism, a square mirror represents the earth and a circular mirror the heavens. She had mirrors made in a multitude of shapes, including rectangles, circles, crescent moons, suns and hearts. In the Islamic belief, *'God is the mirror in which thou seest thyself as thou art his mirror'* (Ibn Arabi) (Cooper, 1990: 106). Cirlot states that primitive peoples often regard their shadow, or their reflection in water or a mirror, as the soul or a fundamental part of themselves (Cirlot p. 290-291).

Water is another element with the ability to reflect, and Helen used water as an important component in the Camel yard. Water represents the unconscious domain. In terms of effort, maintaining the presence of water in all the pools was probably one of the most costly items in the Camel Yard, which shows what an important role it played in her vision. Helen's only supply was from tanks which caught rain water off the roof. Drought is endemic in the Karoo, and when the river, a fair distance from the front of her property, was running, water could be laboriously carried in buckets. But it is usually bone dry for most of the year.

In eastern cultures water was regarded as the source of life. The Chinese consider that all life comes from the waters (Cirlot, 1981: 164), and in the Vedas water is referred to as *matritamah* (the most maternal), because, in the beginning everything was like a sea without light. Water, which circulates throughout the entirety of nature in the form of rain, sap, milk and blood, is considered in India to be the preserver of life. *'Ancient cultures made a distinction between "upper waters" and*

"lower waters". The former correspond to the potential or what is still possible, the latter to what is actual or already created' (Cirlot, 1981: 364-365). A 'doopbakkie' or baptismal font is one of the objects Helen had created in the Camel Yard: baptism by immersion in water symbolizes the return to the primordial waters of life, innocence, transformation, renewal, protection, and is an act of rebirth (Cooper, 1990: 87). Although certain animals, such as the duck, the frog and the fish display marked differences, they are all intrinsically related to water and therefore to the concept of 'primal waters'; thus they can also stand as symbols of *'the origin of things and of the powers of rebirth'* (Cirlot, 1981: 11).

The ocean - the domain of her mermaids, fish, swimmers wearing flippers - was also important to Helen, and she had large collections of many kinds of shells on a number of shelves and windowsills in her house. The ocean is primordial, contains all potentials, and is the source of all life. It is also the *'anima mundi, the Great Mother'* (Cooper, 1990: 121). Shells echo much of the symbolism of water: the feminine, watery principle, birth and regeneration. They are often used for sprinkling baptismal water - again symbolizing rebirth. Mollusc shells are symbols of the moon and virginity. They can also denote love, marriage and fertility - analogous with the vulva, and shells such as clams, in which the two halves are held tightly together, can also denote sexual passion (Cooper, 1990: 151-152).

All the little bottle-lined pools in which the mermaids are seated, and most of the others, are circular, and act as mirrors reflecting the sky and heavenly bodies, as well as figures positioned in them or leaning over. The circle is a shape which Helen used a great deal, not only in these pools, but also in the meccas, moon gate, suns and moons. The mandala, a Hindu term for circle, is:

*'above all, an image and a synthesis of the dualistic aspects of differentiation and unification, of variety and unity, the external and the internal, the diffuse and the concentrated. It excludes disorder and all related symbolisms, because, by its very nature, it must surmount disorder. It is, then, the visual, plastic expression of the struggle to achieve order - even within diversity - and of the longing to be reunited with the pristine, non-spatial and non-temporal "Centre", as it is conceived in all symbolic traditions'* (Cirlot, 1981: 201).

In looking at the influence of the moon and its symbolic meaning to Helen in her work, one is yet again aware of the constant intertwining of meanings in the numerous symbolic images which she chose to create. As the fish and water birds are linked with water symbolism, so are the snake and the fish linked with the moon's symbolism, as well as mirrors, fans, and mermaids, amongst many others. An interesting point is that the mirror and the fan are both feminine in character. There are a multiplicity of meanings which can be ascribed to the moon. As the sun is the masculine principle, so is the moon the feminine principle; depicted together they represent wholeness, *'the hieros gamos, the sacred marriage of heaven and earth, king and queen, gold and silver, etc'* (Cooper, 1990: 106-107). Animals identified with the Moon Goddess are 'yin' animals, to use the

Chinese word, demonstrating various aspects of feminine instinct. The primitive understanding of the moon, with the potential to both endow fertility and to destroy life, was slowly succeeded by a more mature ritual and myth regarding the feminine principle as embodied in the Moon Goddesses, who were virgin, or complete, whole, '*one-in-themselves*' (Harding, 1986: 126).

The moon represents the rhythmic, recurring cycles of nature: birth, death and renewal, as well as enlightenment and eternity. It controls all waters: tides, rain, floods, and also the seasons. There is the mysterious relationship between the moon and the physiological menstrual cycle of women, of which mankind, from early times, has been aware. Darwin believed that animal life originated from the deep waters and this imposed a rhythm on life which continues to this day. Moon goddesses are sometimes represented as bathing, and it is significant that Helen made so many female figures, such as the mermaids and the swimmers with frog flippers, as if they were either seated or swimming in water. One of the many figures of the Mona Lisa, which is bas-relief on the cement watertank, is entitled 'The Stream'. The moon represents Nature's dark and unseen aspect: also the intuitive, irrational, imaginative and magic way, and inner knowledge. (The sun on the other hand represents reason, objectivity and reflection). It is likely that all of these facets of the moon's meanings would have had resonances with Helen. The moon was of great importance to her (interview Wenman, J. 1988), and the one verse written in wire on the boundary fence of the Camel Yard starts "Ah, Moon of my Delight ..." As much of her life was spent outdoors the phases of the moon would have been very much part of her daily life, and the ebb and flow of her menstrual cycle would also have been associated with the moon's rhythmical cycle. Helen was drawn to the mystical, the fantastic, the romantic and the mysterious; all of which were, to her, attributes of the moon.

The moon is not a constant, but waxes and wanes, changing from a complete sphere to a thin crescent and sometimes vanishing entirely. The full moon indicates '*wholeness, completion, strength and spiritual power. The half moon is funereal; the waning moon the sinister, demonic aspect, the crescent and waxing moon is light, growth, regeneration*' (Cooper, 1990: 107). The crescent moon is '*the ship of light on the sea of night*' (Cooper, 1990: 44), which is what Helen seemed to be trying to create. It is the symbol of Islam, and the crescent together with the star depicts divinity. The combined crescent moon and star Helen recreated from the illustration for Quatrain 71 in her copy of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, together with figures in the frieze on the back stoep. The verse reads:

*I sent my Soul through the Invisible,  
Some letter of that After-Life to spell:  
And after many days my soul return'd  
And said, "Behold, Myself am Heav'n and Hell:"* (Fitzgerald, 1974: 128).

The moon, in its different phases, is subject to the same stages of growth - from youth to maturity and maturity to old age and death - as are humans. This concept Helen depicted in the

Camel Yard with her group of the two figures trying to hold back the hands of time on the church tower clock face, together with the creeping baby and the old man. There is a mythic belief that the invisible phase of the moon corresponds to death in man, and therefore that the dead go to the moon. In those traditions which believe in reincarnation, they then return. The three days of the moon's disappearance corresponds to Jesus' descent to the underworld before his resurrection three days later.

For a number of reasons a close association has always been made between serpents and the moon. Because of the ability to change or renew his skin, the serpent was credited with the power of self-renewal; a power felt to be analogous to the power of the moon which, after its seeming death, renewed itself month by month. Both the moon and the serpent have thus, at times, been accorded the attribute of immortality. The serpent is also associated with the moon because it lives in holes and cracks, and the dark, subterranean region which to ancient peoples was the underworld. They have both always been considered to be related to this domain and to the shades of the dead.

In primitive cultures maimed beings were believed to be connected with the moon and its cyclical phases, and to possess supernatural powers. Belief in magic powers of abnormal objects, such as '*amulets shaped like a six-fingered or a four-fingered hand*' for warding off malevolent influences is also connected with the symbolism of the moon (Cirlot, 1981: 1-2). This cannot but make one think of Helen with her maimed feet with only four toes on each foot - yet another symbolic link with the moon which could affirm her strong affinity with it. Jill Wenman confirmed that Helen saw the moon as of far greater importance in her life than the sun (interview Wenman, J. 1988).

Another important aspect of the moon is its close association with night, which is seen as the maternal, enveloping and unconscious, but also as being ambivalent because it is both protective and dangerous. Its pale light illuminates objects indistinctly. The voluptuous and fragile white 'Queen of the Night' cactus flowers only appear during the night; they have a luminous glow by moonlight, but wither in the light and heat of the sun. Helen loved them so much that she planted them throughout the yard and gave bowls of them to certain people (interview Delpont, P. 1986). They must, for her, have been closely linked to the moon itself, with resultant identification. Esther Harding calls the moon 'Queen of the Night', writing:

*... the Moon, goddess of women, is Queen of the Night, and the dark moon leads even to the underworld. ... The moon stands, indeed, for the great principle of transformation through the things which are lowest. That which is dark and cold and moist, which hides from the light of day and from man's enlightened thinking, holds also the secret of life. For life renews itself again and again, and when at last, through his repeated experiences, man understands, he will grasp the inner meaning which until that moment lies concealed within the very texture of the concrete happening* (Harding, 1986: 151).

This hope, that the vanished moon will reappear even when all outwardly seems lost, and also that



there are limitless opportunities to try again, may have been reasons why Helen identified so closely with the moon. It may also partially explain why she repeatedly made certain images, in the unconscious hope that through continuous duplication she would be freed of her own limitations. Quatrain 51 from *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (Fitzgerald, 1974: 78), which is written in wire in the Camel Yard, indicates that Helen felt once something was done there was no way in which it could be altered or redeemed:

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all the Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

The constant renewal of the moon would hopefully have taught her that some things are not immutable, in spite of outward appearances, and that not everything is necessarily cast in concrete.

Lunar objects can be viewed as those of a passive or reflecting character, such as a mirror, or those, such as a fan, which can vary their surface area. Fans feature quite prominently inside The Owl House: these are the characteristic Western folding fan which is associated with the phases of the moon. Its symbolism also relates to imagination, change and femininity. *'The changing pattern of phenomena, as shown in the rhythm of moon-phases (non-being, appearance, increase, full being, decrease), is expressed in terms of erotic, allegorical fan-language'* (Cirlot, 1981: 101-102). Fans were but one of many items for female adornment which Helen displayed conspicuously in the house. Fans can also symbolize theatrical devices, such as stage curtains or to create illusions of presence and absence. They can be used seductively or for concealment, and it is possible that she would have identified with fans in all of these roles, especially with her earlier love of and experience in the theatre.

The shape of the fan, which flares out from the narrow junction, typifies the course of life, commencing at the rivet point and unfurling as experience of life spreads out. The folding fan depicts lunar changes and feminine changeability. The waving of a fan serves to ward off evil forces. In African symbolism a fan often indicates royal dignity, and to the Chinese: authority, royal dignity, *'the power of the air which can infuse new life into the dead'*, delicacy of feeling. In Taoism it is identified with *'birds and flight as a means of liberation from the formal world and release into the realm of the Immortals'* (Cooper, 1990: 65).

Fans can conceal what is behind them; hoods even more so. There are a number of mysterious figures wearing hoods in the Camel Yard: amongst them are the shepherds and the strange hooded figure taken from a Blake illustration. These, yet again, are complex and multi-faceted symbols and may give important clues in the attempt to understand Helen's work. Hooded figures are archetypal and characteristic of the Cabiri, which have attributes of the Trickster. The Cabiri belong to the Great Mother and are symbols of creativity (interview David, J. 1989). Figures

in ancient and medieval iconography were often depicted wearing a hood or a cone-shaped hat. Jung says that a hood comes to symbolize the highest sphere, or in other words, the heavenly world, since it envelops practically the whole of the head and is almost spherical in shape. Covering one's head signifies invisibility, that is, death. Diel says that the hood is a '*symbolic agent of repression or that which renders the psychic content invisible*' (Cirlot, 1981: 150-151). Helen's psychic content was invisible to others as well as to herself, and much in her psyche was repressed, so she may, unconsciously, have identified with these little figures. There were many times when Helen seems to have attempted to be invisible, such as when unknown visitors came to see The Owl House and she pretended that there was no one at home, or when she had to scuttle down the dusty main street in the village to the Post Office and felt shy about her unkempt appearance and mutilated feet. In addition, through being identified with the Great Mother and the spiritual dimensions of life and death, as well as being symbols of creativity and the Trickster, these little hooded figures could have been of significance to Helen. She made three hooded shepherds as well as the Blake figure, so it is one of the symbols which she felt important enough to repeat.

Transformation and reconciliation of the opposites is ultimately a private journey which a person must accomplish, or attempt to do so, alone. '*Jung's notion is of an end-point of integration or balance within the individual mind itself, without overt reference to relations with other persons at all.*' ... '*the reconciliation of opposites is a theme which runs right through the whole of Jung's work*' (Storr, A. 1975: p. 10-11). Another Blake illustration which has been created in cement in the Camel Yard, is entitled '*What is Man!*', from the frontispiece to *The Gates of Paradise*, and portrays two leaves, one bearing a pupa, or chrysalis, and the other a caterpillar. It shows, once again, a situation of metamorphosis and transformation. '*The chrysalis precedes the cicada; simply by changing its shape, it becomes the cicada. When the soul leaves the body, it resembles a cicada which leaves its chrysalis in order to become an insect.*' (Cirlot, 1981: 46). A mask is equivalent to the chrysalis, as metamorphoses must be hidden from view. Cirlot says that anything which becomes something other, while at the same time remaining what it was, is filled with ambiguity and equivocation. Therefore all transformations are intrinsically both filled with profound mystery and shameful, and must take place in secret. '*Secrecy tends towards transfiguration: it helps what-one-is to become what-one-would-like-to-be; and this is what constitutes its magic character, present in both the Greek theatrical mask and in the religious masks of Africa or Oceania*' (Cirlot, 1981: 205). It could be that Helen was aware, but unconsciously, that any transformation which took place in herself had to occur in secrecy. She may also have felt that the whole process was shameful and at the same time extremely painful. Even if she did not consciously think about the meanings of her sculptures, her choice of symbols was not arbitrary. '*The unconscious, through dreams and through its manifestation in everyday life, provides all the information we need to know. The unconscious, with*



The doorstep in the sitting room is a black doll which has as a base a weighted bottle. Below is a kitchen dresser with a monkey's head adorning a tea cosy. The only other dolls in the house are the two embracing golliwogs lying on one of the beds in the 'Honeymoon room'.

*its ingenious way of symbolizing, sets the picture before us* (Singer, 1973: 172).

Dolls, but not the traditional type of doll played with by little girls, also feature in The Owl House. There are the two black golliwog dolls lying on one bed in the Honeymoon Room; there is the bottle doorstop in the sitting room, with the figure of a black woman on top of it; and in the kitchen a teacosy with a little monkey-like figure on top of it. Then the figure of the 'Little Devil', the only statue in the entire Owl House and Camel Yard which was made by Helen herself and was kept in the kitchen to block out drafts from under the door, could also be regarded as a doll.

*The doll, as a symbol, appears more often in psychopathology than in the main stream of traditional symbolism. It is well known that in a number of mental diseases the patient makes a doll which he keeps carefully hidden. According to J.-J. Rousseau the personality of the sick person is projected into the toy. In other cases it has been interpreted as a form of erotomania or deviation of the maternal instinct: in short, a hangover from, or regression to an infantile state* (Cirlot, 1981: 84).

If any of Cirlot's hypotheses are applicable to Helen, the two which could be relevant are: firstly that of the personality being projected into the toy - in other words the 'Little Devil' represented a part of Helen and could have been her Shadow; or, secondly, as a deviation from the maternal instinct, the 'Little Devil' could symbolize her two aborted fetuses. All the other doll-figures are dark, can be felt as sinister, and represent the dark unknown and the Shadow.

The Camel Yard is populated with, amongst numerous subjects, many human figures. Many of the female figures are depicted nude; many of them would appear to be early adolescents, with very little sexual detail shown. By contrast there are very few nude males, with the exception of Adam and a few babies (two of which are clearly boys), and the other male figures which are nude are not portrayed as sexual beings. This may have been in deference to local sensibilities, although mostly Helen remained true to her vision despite public opinion or censure. Male figures feature chiefly in a religious context, except for the Cock Man, the drinking man, and the sleeping carpet seller. Women are depicted in a number of attitudes or roles, such as being gentle, delicate, welcoming, rejoicing, worshipping, serving or enticing. Men were either idealized and part of the spiritual quest, as in the wise men, or represented as very coarse and base in the 'Debauchery Corner'. Through her statues Helen seemed to be idealizing many situations, which in reality were potentially very difficult for her, and it is almost certain that one of these areas of difficulty was sexuality.

Helen created in The Owl House a quality of feminine allurement. All the cosmetics, perfumes and soaps, pretty, delicate clothes, silk scarves, shoes, bangles, necklaces, fans, purses and bags throughout the house, conflict with the reality of what she wore every day - her mundane clothes and either bare feet or beach thongs or home-made wooden sandals - and yet she could have used all these items to adorn herself. She did not care for her body, in fact quite the opposite: even the

bottled fruit was left to fossilize. It was all for the eye rather than for the body, and entered into the realm of fantasy rather than that of reality.

In choosing to portray Adam and Eve, copied from the illustration *Temptation and Fall* by Blake in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Helen has taken the two figures which in myth symbolize the origins both of humankind and also of the two sexes. They also signify original sin and the fall from the idyllic world of Eden. Adam represents Primordial Man; the name is derived from the Hebrew *adama* (= earth), and is understood as representing the vast power of the universe. In both the Bible and the platonic doctrine of the androgyne, Eve is presented as being cut out from the first being, which integrated sexual duality. '*... in the rôle of persuader, she appears as a mediator between the serpent (the source of evil, which William Blake likened to energy) and man, who would have been free and indifferent, and who would have "fallen" only under pressure*' (Cirlot, 1981: 4). Eve is a symbol of the material dimension of life, or '*mother-of-all-things. From the spiritual point of view, Eve is the inversion of the Virgin Mary, or the mother-of-souls*' (Cirlot, 1981: 99). Adam and Eve probably represented for Helen many of the difficult areas in her life (which in fact are common to most people), such as the concept of sin and wrong-doing, and reparation for sin; also temptation, the power of sex, the potential guilt of sex, and her difficulties in reconciling and integrating the opposites within herself.

The famous Mona Lisa is a painting which has been reproduced more than any other, in various forms, in cement in the Camel Yard. There are four prints of this Leonardo da Vinci painting in The Owl House, and it was obviously of great significance to Helen. '*Leonardo was the painter of the blissful maternal smile*', writes Fuller (Fuller, 1980: 41).

It is not known, however, what its significance was to Helen. She may have identified with the Mona Lisa as an enigmatic and eternally mysterious figure, or aspired to her ascribed beauty and aloofness, or maybe to her '*maternal*' qualities. It could be that the Mona Lisa epitomized for Helen the pinnacle of 'high art', and she wished desperately to be acknowledged as an artist, even though she did not see herself as such: '*I note that you award and credit me the title of an 'artist' - how can you, when I am a dud,*' she wrote in a letter to Don Maclennan, dated 15 July 1975.

Fuller writes:

*I recognized the "iconic" status these works [the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo] had achieved as trademarks or tokens for art itself ... If I wanted to write a history of the Mona Lisa, ... I would have to analyze the different ways in which it was seen at different historical moments. The history of the painting would encompass not just the development of critical and verbal responses to it, but the kind and number of the copies and reproductions made of it. The meaning of the Mona Lisa no longer belongs uniquely to the canvas hanging behind bullet proof glass in the Louvre. The frequency of its reproduction has fragmented its meaning into many meanings, in part generated by the shifting context of postcards, ash-trays, popular art books,*





Johan Potgieter

The Mona Lisa was a subject which Helen repeated frequently, both in bas-reliefs and sculptures. On the water tank behind Helen are a number of bas-relief figures; the one directly behind her is a Mona Lisa.



According to Koos Malgas this rendering of the Mona Lisa was one which particularly pleased Helen, although it is far cruder than a number of others in the Camel Yard.



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real secret behind  
your smile?



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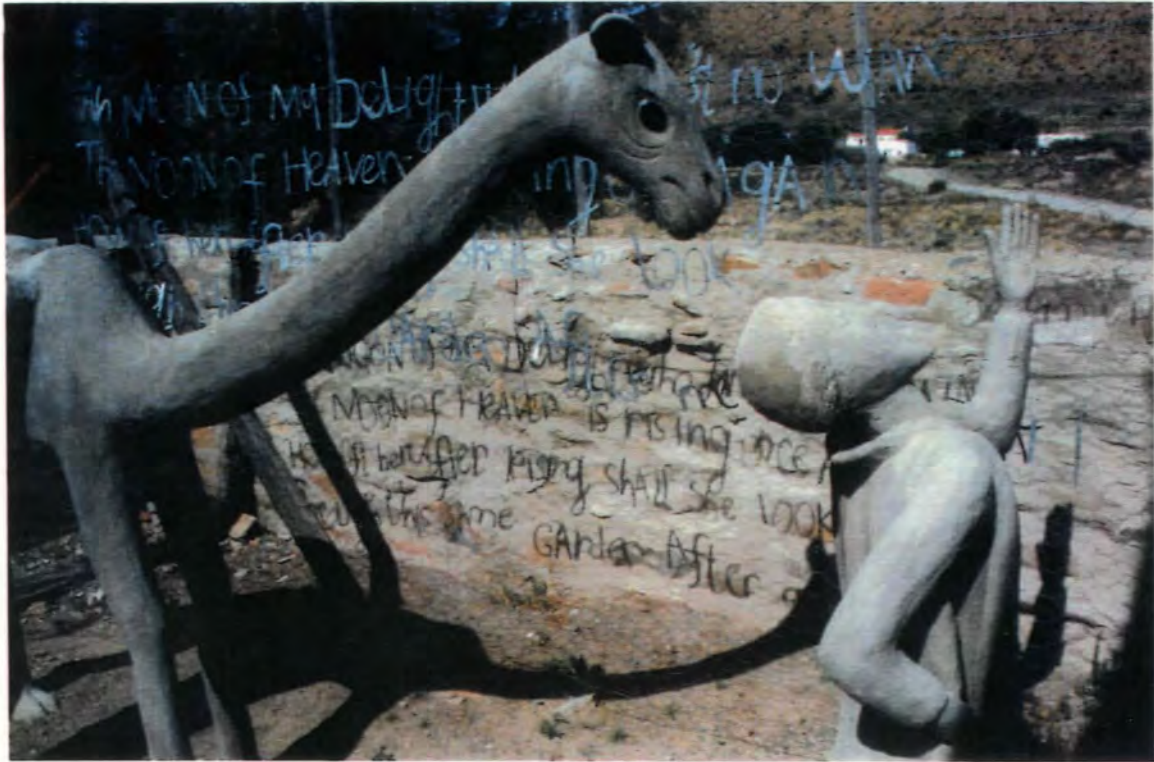
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Tel 51-7076

The Mona Lisa has come to be seen as the epitome of 'Art'  
or as a symbol for the elusive, the desirable or the priceless.  
It is used in an incongruous variety of ways, including  
advertisements which in no way relate to the original  
Leonardo da Vinci painting.





Above: A verse from Omar Khayyám which was particularly meaningful to Helen, was written in wire on the netting fence looking west:

*Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane,  
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again:  
How off here after rising shall she look  
Through this same Garden after me - in vain!*



The answer to Helen's seemingly unresolved quest could lie (below) in Quatrain 46 from the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, translated into the two cement figures (at centre) on the back stoep; she ended her life by drinking caustic soda:

*So when at last the Angel of the darker drink  
Of Darkness finds you by the river-brink  
And, proffering his Cup, invites your Soul  
Forth to you Lips to Quaff it - do not shrink.*

*newspapers, tea-shirts, advertisements, and even postage stamps in which it is reproduced. In a sense the original has been drained of all meaning but one, which has to do with what it is rather than what it depicts: a "priceless" painting, the icon or epitome of "Art" (Fuller, 1980: 95).*

Helen would have seen the Mona Lisa as that which was accepted as 'high art' - art which had 'made it'. And it was to that which she aspired. So in fact it probably represented herself, but also that which she wished to become and be recognized for - a true artist. Perhaps she hoped that by association, by repeating the Mona Lisa so many times, she would become what the Mona Lisa was - the epitome of art and the epitome of the beautiful and enigmatic woman. In its enigmatic quality, the Mona Lisa links with another symbolic image used by Helen and mirrors the enigmatic sphinx.

The word seems to have held enormous power and significance for Helen. Even as a young schoolgirl she had looked up in her dictionary, meanings of all the words in her school reading book, which to her classmates was unusually zealous (interview Van Niekerk, N. 1993). It was words which inspired many of the works in the Camel Yard, and words which she had woven into the wire netting surrounding the perimeter of the yard as well as the interconnecting sections of the aviaries in earlier days. The words of *Omar Khayyám* were particularly meaningful to her. Jill Wenman said she would read the words of some of the verses aloud, specifically Quatrain 74, which is written in wire on the west-facing fence looking out to where the moon would set (interview Wenman, J. 1988):

*Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane,  
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again:  
How oft here after rising shall she look  
Through this same Garden after me - in vain!*

In a letter she spoke of the poem by Arthur Nortje, *Notes from the Middle of the Night*, which had struck chords with her and Jill Wenman (quoted in Chapter nine). The combination of word and image was also significant for Helen. A number of sculptures, and figures in the frieze on the back stoep, are all derived from the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* and William Blake, in both of which works text and illustration are associated. The texts congruent to the particular illustrations are frequently written in twisted wire in the adjacent fences. Many of the framed pictures in the house have verses or captions below, and, as in the case of the carpet seller, this text has been copied in twisted wire above the sculpture derived from the illustration. Other figures are associated with words, such as 'The Young Lady of South China', and the Japanese healing effigy with a long section of text below it, as well as the Mona Lisa with 'The Stream' written underneath her. In the recess of her church tower, along with two cement praying hands, is the well-known verse which starts '*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change ...*' Helen communicated extensively through the written word; there are still many letters from Estelle van Schalkwijk among her papers, and Jill Wenman said that she used to receive three to four letters per week from Helen (interview



Wenman, J. 1988).

*'The Word, or Logos, is the sacred sound, the first element in the process of manifestation'* (Cooper, 1990: 195). Speech has creative force and a Saviour is always the embodiment of the Word. The Word - Logos - is reason and logic and belongs to the Apollonian, thinking and rational dimension in contrast to the Dionysian, sensual, feeling way of being. In Hinduism and Buddhism the Word as the Dharma is the ineffable. The well-known Biblical words in the first four verses of John Chapter 1 must have been a part of Helen's early upbringing, where the church played a major role. This passage links the Word both with life and with light:

1. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
2. *The same was in the beginning with God.*
3. *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*
4. *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

Maybe because Helen was emotionally deprived she created a particularly rich world of her own. She seems to have attempted to fill and people all of her physical space with statues - presences - to fill an internal and an external emptiness. She was not nurtured by close, ongoing and intimate human relationships, although she must at times have received a great deal of emotional nourishment from Johannes Hattingh, Jonas Adams, Piet van der Merwe, Koos Malgas, and later Jill Wenman and Francie Lund. This filling of her space was not selective, and covered seemingly random subjects and themes. However, even though the choice of subjects might have seemed random, they were the expression of archetypes through the workings of her unconscious.

This filling of her spaces could also have another explanation though. It is possible that she felt her life had proved to be such a disillusionment that she would create her own private world of the theatre, make-believe and illusion, in which she could direct, act and be in sole control. She had her own stage - the house and the yard - for which she created the lighting, the set, the costumes, the cast and characterization and a multitude of plots and scenes. In her young years the theatre played a very important role in Helen's life and the fact that the well-known Afrikaans actress Wena Naudé was her cousin would also have been influential. There are still some posters featuring Wena Naudé in The Owl House, and other members of the family mention her with pride. The Owl House and the Camel Yard became Helen's own private theatre where she created her world of fantasy.

Helen had an enormous fear of abandonment, which she expressed so painfully in letters to Jill Wenman and Francie Lund. The symbolism of abandonment can be equated with the symbolism of death and resurrection. To feel oneself abandoned is, *'essentially, to feel forsaken by the "god within us", that is, to lose sight of the eternal light in the human spirit'* (Cirlot, 1981: 1). She seems to have aspired to a union with a spiritual lover, which for her was possibly epitomized in the two



Right: Quatrain 46 from the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam* is depicted twice on the back stoep; (top left) once as a three-dimensional sculpture group at the far end of the stoep and (bottom) once in bas-relief to the right of the kitchen door.

*So when at last the Angel of the darker drink  
Of Darkness finds you by the river-brink  
And, proffering his Cup, invites you Soul  
Forth to your Lips to quaff it - do not shrink.*

It may be that the message implied in this verse foreshadowed Helen's decision, horrific to contemplate, to commit suicide by drinking caustic soda.

pictures entitled 'Reunion' in The Owl House. Underneath one of the pictures the following text was glued:

*REUNION*  
*Guess now who holds thee*  
*"Death" I said; But There*  
*The Silver Answer Rang.*  
*Not Death, But Love.*

The figures represent Psyche flying upwards in an embrace with winged Eros, the Greek god of love. Psyche was the Greek personification of the human soul. In mythology, she, a human, was beloved of Cupid or Eros. The jealous Aphrodite tried to keep the lovers apart, but eventually they were reunited. Ultimately this brings us back to the possible goal of Helen's quest, which seems likely because of all the evidence gathered; to make, but in her own way, light in darkness, to redeem the past, to unite the disparate parts of her psyche, and to discover, and make her own, the god within her.

Correctly surmised or not, Helen's suicide, achieved by drinking caustic soda, indicates that in all likelihood she did not achieve her goals, whatever they might have been. Perhaps in Quatrain 46 from the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (Fitzgerald, 1974: 115) (which is depicted in two free-standing figures at the end of the back stoep), Helen found the terrible answer to her unresolved quest:

*So when at last the Angel of the darker drink*  
*Of Darkness finds you by the river-brink*  
*And, proffering his Cup, invites your Soul*  
*Forth to your Lips to Quaff it - do not shrink.*

## Chapter Eleven

### The concept of Outsider Art

*The 'Dream Spaces' that individuals create for themselves, are intuitively produced creations. Whatever its form and wherever it is found, a common thread exists; an art produced by an inner compulsion, with no regard for commercial considerations or art conventions and fashions. It may be secretive and private, or expansive and public, but it has its roots deep within the human imagination and a manifestation that often reaches heroic proportions.* (Raw Vision 1, 1989: 4.)

The Owl House, which is the best known example of Outsider Art in South Africa, makes a profound impression on most people who visit it and causes many to return, often frequently. It has also inspired a number of people to write plays, theses, short stories and countless articles, create drawings, paintings and poster series, compose music and make films and videos about it.

Blake, whose work was much admired by Helen Martins and some of whose illustrations were recreated in her Camel Yard in the form of cement sculptures, wrote:

*I must Create a World, or be enslav'd by another Man's.  
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.* (Cubb, 1994: 82).

This seems to capture the dynamics of Helen's Owl House which she doggedly created in spite of increasing alienation in her community. She could not conform to the norms of society and instead wove her own world of fantasy in cement, glass and light.

There are many other examples in the world of these 'Dream Spaces'. The people who create them are the true dreamers, not trapped by the routine of everyday life, who dream a dream onwards and live their dream. They are people with the courage to go it alone, oblivious or innocent of public opinion, not constrained by restrictions of logic and practicality. Most of the Outsider works described in the following chapter encompass the makers' domestic environments. Those which have been recorded and become well known - particularly in France and America - draw increasing numbers of visitors. In South Africa most people are unaware of these overseas examples, let alone that many such unusual sites exist in their own country. Most of these are largely unknown and therefore undocumented.

Wendy Ross, UNISA History of Art lecturer, said in a lecture at the SA National Gallery in

1993:

*Journeys into dreams made tangible in stones, bottles, etc. ... made by these eccentric and extravagant decorators of homes ... are the remainders of a humanized and personalized world in contrast to the impersonal machine world of today.*

There are at least two possible explanations as to what causes an increasing fascination with this form of artistic expression. One is that we do not know how to understand it - our education system does not provide answers for such curious and original creations. It is an artistic expression which has escaped category and opens the viewers' eyes to the unexpected. The education system efficiently classifies things, putting them into schools, systems, periods and styles so that we know where to file them and how to understand and interpret them. Before anyone ever visits great art works such as the Parthenon, the Mona Lisa, the Sistine Chapel, they have been figuratively processed and pre-wrapped. The result is that it is very rare to ever come upon something without preconditioning and find that it makes its own immediate and unfiltered impact. We do not often have the opportunity to discover something for ourselves, and assimilate the instant feelings and impressions, before being told how to look at it, what to think about it and in what category or as what concept it should be classified. Personal associations and reactions do not have a space in this system. Therefore each encounter with Outsider Art make its own fresh and direct impact with even greater meaningfulness.

Secondly, these works speak so immediately from the unconscious that they touch viewers at levels which are difficult to understand rationally. In the scientific and analytical world of today this art expresses what is going on in that area with which modern and western humanity has become almost totally out of touch: the unconscious realm of our being, as Jung described it. Psychiatrist and art historian Dr Hans Prinzhorn, who was an early pioneer in the study of the art of the insane and whose research was very influential on Dubuffet, said: *'A primal creative urge belongs to all human beings, but has been submerged by the development of civilization'* (Cardinal, 1979: 24). It is extremely unlikely that Helen Martins could have given a rational explanation as to why she spent so many years making such a magical and very strange place of her house and garden - it welled up directly from her unconscious.

These handmade universes are usually created by elderly individualists, and are fundamentally symbolic, not utilitarian. They seem to be created by people who are either in touch with their unconscious, or feel they have a visionary mission, and images and symbols pour out of them; or by those who have been seriously hurt, injured or alienated through life or circumstances, and in whom, through their art, the unconscious is trying to achieve a wholeness, a unity of the psyche.

There are still very few books on the topic of Outsider Art, but increasing numbers are being published, which attests to the growing fascination with this form of creativity, and for the desire to



try to make sense of and understand it. This fascination though will continue precisely because it is not really possible to define and categorize Outsider Art. Outsider Art, or 'Art Brut' - the latter a French term coined by Jean Dubuffet and meaning 'raw or crude art' - is a term given to what *cannot* be circumscribed by a definition; by its very essence, Outsider Art defies classification. Each work is unique and follows no particular fashion or school. Because it is not bound by any rules, due to its very nature any attempt to define it immediately produces contradictions. *'It is an upsurge of singularities and intensities of unknown origin.'* Dubuffet meant an art unadulterated by any form of instruction or formal teaching. *'True art is always where you least expect to find it. Where nobody thinks about it or utters its name,'* said Dubuffet (Thevoz, 1976b: 15). It is also an art in open conflict with culture (understood as a collective system of values, myths, styles, etc). *'In relation to his cultural milieu, and cultural context, the maker of Art Brut remains fundamentally asocial,'* said Michel Thevoz, director of the Musée de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, Switzerland (Thévoz, 1976a: 60). Generally speaking, communication with an audience and concern for the effect of the work on others is not a relevant factor in this form of creativity - it is rather an intensely personal dialogue between the maker and his or her work. However, to contradict this statement in the same breath, some works *are* created with an audience very much in mind, and others, once created, attract an audience which can be very gratifying to the artist. (Some Outsiders have been taken up by commercial galleries and their work is promoted and sold. This raises fundamental questions as to whether their intrinsic source of creativity will be compromised and change the essence of what their work initially was all about.)

Professor Roger Cardinal, who has written extensively on the subject and coined the widely used term 'Outsider Art' in the 1970s, says about these artists:

*Instinctive and independent, they appear to tackle the business of making art as if it had never existed before they came along. What they make has a primal freshness; it is the product of an authentic impulse to create and is free of conscious artifice .... They bring us face to face with the raw process of creation.* (Cubbs, 1994: 87).

Jean Dubuffet made an intensive study of Art Brut over a period of many years. His collection of Art Brut works is now housed in the Musée de l'Art Brut, Chateau de Beaulieu, in Lausanne, Switzerland, and opened in March 1976 (just five months before Helen Martins committed suicide). He defined it further as:

*works of every kind ... presenting a spontaneous highly inventive character, as little beholden as possible to the ordinary run of art or to cultural conventions, the makers of them being obscure persons foreign to professional art circles.* (Thevoz, 1976a: 9-10).

In contrast, 'conventional' art is that which is created with an audience in mind; which might be sold, and exhibited in a gallery; usually uses materials and methods accepted as traditional means of expression; exists within a cultural tradition; and is intended to communicate with the viewer.

Outsider Art must also be clearly distinguished from naïve or folk art, or Sunday painting, where artists try to copy what they see, emulate their peers, and by so doing produce cosy comforting images which are at once repetitive and familiar, and many of which have a practical use. It is art to which the viewer can relate. Outsider Art calls up a nagging sense of disquiet and unease which naïve, folk or child art does not do. Work by these artists invokes a sense of being taken beyond safe and known boundaries into an unknown and uncharted realm, or as Thévoz wrote: *'They invite us to take a journey into the "distant interior" from which we cannot return unscathed'* (Thévoz, 1976b: 13.)

The creators of Outsider Art are frequently found among working or marginalized people. Many of them are educationally and socially disadvantaged, some are illiterate. In general they know little of cultural history or of the tradition of fine art and work outside of the mainstream, hence the term 'Outsider'. They draw their inspiration from within themselves: the rules and taboos which trained artists cannot help being aware of have no meaning for them. They work spontaneously and often with prodigious energy to produce images of remarkable power and freshness which make a profound impact on the viewer: markedly so on those with a conventional art training or background, including art historians. One of the common strands found in very many Outsider environments is the incorporation of written text, either as part of the design or seemingly arbitrarily, as the case may be. Sometimes it is used to name various aspects of the work; it could be fragments of well-known texts or verse, or has a meaning which is known only to the creator.

It is a body of work which not only dispenses with the limitations of communication within a defined social sphere, but rather has the effect of protecting the creator from emotional, semantic or analytical intrusion; and does not conform to an artistic pattern. It is compulsive, often started in the second half of life, and is usually continued over a period of anything from 12 to more than 30 years.

Materials frequently used are those most easily available, such as cement, enamel paint, wood, domestic waste materials such as broken glass and china, wire, plastic, cardboard, rags, discarded household utensils or artefacts, industrial waste such as slag, machinery parts, and so on. They are usually very different from those conventionally regarded as art materials.

Outsider Art is a fundamental expression of human creativity. A known, very early visionary environment which is still in existence, is the strange Villa Orsini at Bomarzo, near Viterbo in Italy, which was created in the mid-sixteenth century. It was built by Vicino (Pierfrancesco) Orsini and features huge laughing masks, a leaning building and temple, colossal stone beasts such as bears, monsters, elephants, mermaids, and giants that reside in a *'sacro bosco'* (sacred wood), as Orsini called it. The architect was Pirro Ligorio, an archaeologist and painter. Running entirely contrary to the current ideas of symmetry and proportion in a Renaissance terraced garden, Orsini lavished

considerable energy, care and expense upon making the irregular valley below the castle, which was strewn with great rocky outcrops, into the centre of attraction. The rocks were sculpted into every inconceivable type of gigantic figure, human, part-human, animal and purely fantastic. The sources of inspiration were wide:

*Built on various literary references of the period, the tufa dragons, tortoises, and monsters were strewn through a garden built 'to satisfy the heart' of the designer and to astonish all others* (Messervy, 1991: 80).

Written text also appears here; frequent inscriptions in the garden make reference to it as this 'sacro bosco', and the inscription continues: 'which resembles itself and nothing else'. ... 'Other inscriptions anticipate the astonishment of the visitor who arrives at such a place and, comparing it to the marvels of the world, claim that it surpasses them' (Masson, 1987: 144-145).

A craze for folly-building captivated the British Isles in the eighteenth century. Barbara Jones describes over 830 examples of these, many of which were designed and executed by professionals, in her book *Follies & Grottoes* (Jones, 1974).

*... no gentleman's estate was complete without an eye-catcher, sham ruin, prospect tower, hermitage, pagoda or grotto. A duke might have a complete set. To have no eccentricities in the park was itself an eccentricity.* (Jones 1974: Front cover fold).

Follies continued to be a rich man's occupation until approximately the middle of the nineteenth century, and elaborate shell-encrusted grottoes were a fashionable part of this concept. Ship loads of shells were brought into Britain for the purpose, or sent by 'distinguished officers serving abroad' (Jones, 1974: 154). However, regardless of transient fashion, genuinely eccentric individuals have always existed throughout the world. It is interesting to note that although some of their creations are also listed in Jones' book, no distinction is drawn between these authentic eccentrics and the fashionable pseudo-eccentric extravaganzas of the rich. And shells, though remaining in favour, changed class, leaving the grottoes of the rich and later adorned only the outside of cottages in the gardens of ordinary British people.

*The vernacular folly when it began did not merely stand in a corner of the garden - it swallowed small gardens whole, just at the time when follies were leaving the big gardens of the rich. The favourite materials were the aristocratic ones, flint and shells again, all over the bottom of the cottage, the garden walls, edging the paths, covering urns and seats, eked out with [and given here is a crucial clue - the use of waste materials and bizarre elements in the creation of Outsider Art] broken china, glass and coal, reaching in at least one place the climax of a brass bedstead set among the shards.* (Jones, 1974: 252).

These were undoubtedly examples of Outsider Art, although not recognized as such. Jones claims that there must be one or two of these gardens in every town in England. Her descriptions of these gardens resonate with many similar ones which have been visited in South Africa, France, India, Switzerland and England, which are described and illustrated in the following chapter. She



One of the earliest known visionary environments is the sixteenth century Villa Orsini at Bomarzo in Italy, built by Vicino Orsini. It featured a leaning building and temple, and colossal beasts sculpted from huge rocky outcrops residing in a 'sacred wood'.

Photographer unknown







Photographer unknown

Shells were extensively used in nineteenth century Britain for decorating the follies of the rich. They later changed class and adorned the outside of cottages, bowers, and other structures made by ordinary British people.

Above is the Shell Garden created by George Howard, and below, the Shell Gallery, a La Ronde, at Exmouth.





Bridget Rose

Further examples of Outsider Art creations. Above: The Little Chapel, Les Vauxbelets, in Guernsey, and below, the castle made from bottles at Clarens in the Free State.

comments that although the element of water is often present as a pond in these gardens, poor people found it too expensive to utilize water for movement and so the element of air was harnessed instead.

*Wind-toys take the place of fountains, vanes and propellers spin to replace the curve of the water and creak on their posts to replace its sound.* (Jones, 1974: 253).

She mentions bowers of broken china inland, or of shells at the seaside, enclosing Kitchener, or George and Mary, or Churchill; concrete sculptures in back gardens; a wooden aeroplane on a wireless mast; garden sheds encrusted and castellated. David Doughty (1866-1938) at Yarm made, amongst many other items, concrete knights; a church with '*leaning Gaudi-esque tower*' on a mound of shells, rock plants and stones; a castellated screen to the coal shed with cherub's head, and concrete caryatids. At Leven in Fifeshire is a large decorated shell garden, started during the First World War by Walter Bissett. He died in 1964 at the age of 95, having devoted the last 20 years of his life entirely to the work. Some of the contents of the garden were a form of circular tram rail made of shells, with many varied objects alongside it, such as arches, towers, a china hen, and a chunk of distorted wood standing on a shell pedestal set with shell eyes and teeth. There is also a huge bullock's head with '*real horns and a third unicorn spike made of a twisted shell in the forehead*'; a bas-relief of Burns; approximately 200 '*pop-eyed spaniels*'; an entire single-decker bus '*with a Special sign on the direction indicator and a shell coat that even includes the wheels, has a bird cage for passenger*'. Also in the garden was a small menagerie consisting of goats, monkeys and pheasants. (Jones, 1974: 254-255).

A combined-effort garden which Barbara Jones describes is one at Mount Stewart in County Down, started in the 1920s by Lady Londonderry. She designed the animals and they were carved by Thomas Beattie. Amongst the figures are a gnome, two lions, cats with a kitten, an owl, two baboons, the Mermaid of Moher, a dinosaur, a fox, a horse and a monkey. (Jones, 1974: 258).

The Shell Cottage at Carton in Kildare was an old thatched cottage transformed by Emilia Mary Duke. It is approached by a red wooden bridge over a cascade with its eaves supported on cast iron tree trunks set in a beautifully inlaid pebble floor and an elaborate shell room with dome. '*Entrance is by 6 feet of passage elaborately worked in bark, wood and shells with a mirror door to bewilder*' (Jones, 1974: 155-156). Amongst other materials used are wool, coral, tufa, tiles, insets of mirror, pine cones and varying sizes of birds' eggs.

Barbara Jones writes:

*The bold freedom with which an amateur will turn to an entirely unsuitable medium, beat it to its knees, and produce a masterpiece, must always be infuriating to professionals. ... At Hautrives, a French postman made a palace from an olla podrida of stones, village rubbish, coal and bottle-ends; again successfully.* (Jones, 1974: 157).

This is the Ideal Palace of le Facteur (Postman) Ferdinand Cheval, which is one of the most

extraordinary and best known examples of Outsider Art in the world.

In the creation of Outsider Art there frequently seems to be a seminal event which can be said to have precipitated the creativity. In the case of the postman Cheval, it was a chalk stone which he later referred to as his 'pierre d'achoppement' or his stumbling block. This stone enabled him to believe he was capable of creating his, until then, unattainable dream, even though he was neither a builder nor an architect.

*Worked by the waters and hardened by the strength of time, it becomes as hard as pebbles. It presents a sculpture as odd as it is impossible for man to imitate; it represents all species of animals, all species of caricatures. I told myself: Since nature wants to make the sculpture, I myself will make the masonry and the architecture. (Danchin, 1994: 111).*

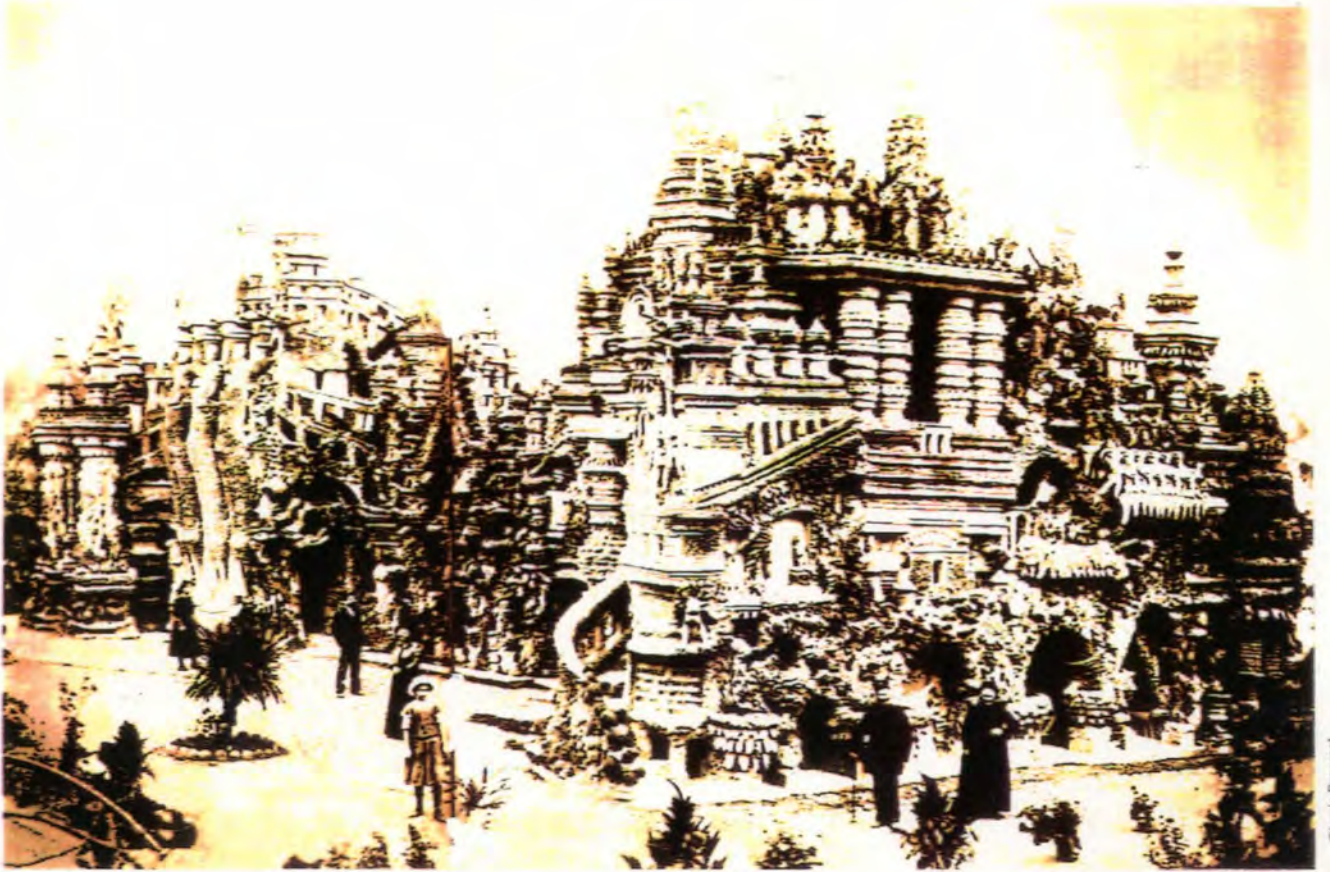
For the next 27 years Cheval laboured after work every day at building his fantastic visionary palace, which in 1984 was attracting more than 100 000 visitors a year. For another well-known Outsider artist Scottie Wilson, who used to collect pens, it was one particular pen with a nib which reminded him of a bulldog which started him on his extraordinary drawing career. With Dirk van der Mescht, a South African artist living near Alexandria in the Eastern Cape whose cement statues along a lonely railway siding will be discussed in the following chapter, in addition to total boredom it was possibly the realisation that he had a problem with alcohol:

*The day that he started his sculpture, he stopped drinking. Creativity in his case was not a conscious cure for his alcoholism, therefore it cannot be viewed as art therapy as such. The extent to which it became a conscious therapy, from this time on, was that if he felt the craving for liquor, he would start working and become involved in his own world. (Cowley, 1991: 37).*

For Helen Martins, it was in all likelihood a number of incidents which can be identified as landmarks in the commencement of her work. One of these was her love of owls which she had modelled herself from clay in her earlier years (interview, Le Roux, A. 1986). Then it was the idea which came to her, after an illness in her dark and lonely house, of covering all the surfaces with ground up glass to bring some light into her dull life (interview Le Roux, A. 1986). When Koos Malgas started working for her, she got him to fashion a little clay face within the frame of an empty sardine tin; it was copied from the illustration on a pill container. This was the start of Koos' impressive career as a cement sculptor who interpreted Helen's ideas and visions. (Interview, Malgas, K. 1988).

Waste materials are used by the poor the world over for building shelters. These can be seen in the squatter settlements in South Africa where plastic, cardboard and discarded sheets of corrugated iron are utilized, or the vast areas swathed in black plastic which cover the homeless on the roadsides of India. Head of the Dutch Heineken brewing company, Alfred Heineken, when visiting one of his major markets, the Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao, noticed the shacks in which the people lived and the surrounding rubbish which included Heineken beer bottles. He had the bottles redesigned in





Clovis Prevost

Joseph Ferdinand Cheval, *Ideal Palace*, Hauterives, France

a more rectangular shape, called WOBO (WORLD BOTTLE), so that they could be used as building blocks (Schuyt & Elfers, 1980: 24). In Botswana, where the soil is extremely sandy and cattle dung is too scarce to be used as a binding agent, empty aluminium beer and cooldrink cans are used for constructing rondavels, thus reducing the need for a large volume of mud. These will also act as very good insulating material. All of these examples are however of materials used solely for functional purposes to provide refuge from the elements and a modicum of safety for the inhabitants and their possessions. The Outsider creations on the other hand are not primarily functional; it is a matter of using whatever comes most easily to hand to express an inner creative compulsion.

What made a great impact on the writer after visiting many of these extraordinary and compelling creations in various parts of the world, and reading about many more, was the fact that there are major similarities in the subjects and themes depicted and in the use of materials, and that these similarities seem to cut across cultures, continents and time. Many of the sculptures could be taken from one environment to another, even to a different continent, and not appear out of place or incongruous in that alternative setting. It appears that the artists have tapped in to a very deep level of the human psyche and a possible explanation is that they are producing archetypal images emanating from the Collective Unconscious.

Another conclusion which has been reached after studying a number of these works is that there are basically different urges relating to their creation: one form is a playful return to the magic and illogical world of childhood, where anything and everything is possible. These works have an essential lightness and quality of fun about them. Others convey a sense of dark complexity and compulsion, or in an even deeper area, of fearsome forces waiting to engulf the creator - and possibly others who also become too deeply involved. In between these two extremes are the works of people who are creating an alternative and extremely unconventional living environment, and of others who have a mission to advance their own religious message. On the other hand, the work of some artists, such as Jim Pritchard's **Place of the Witch Pigs** in the Transvaal, is a conscious defiance of the traditional world, as well as being a fulfilment of their own vision.

Outsider Art remains a Cinderella of the art world: unconventional, poorly understood or appreciated, and frequently scorned by society and the traditional art world. It is, however, highly original and creative and can allow viewers to explore new and challenging dimensions, both in the unconscious realms of the human creative spirit as well as in their own selves.



## Chapter Twelve

### Other Outsider Art environments

*[With the exception of Nukain Mabusa's painted rock hillside in the Eastern Transvaal and Gaudí's work in Barcelona, Spain, all of the following works have been visited and recorded by the author, and the creators, or other knowledgeable and involved people - wherever possible - have been interviewed.]*

Outsider Art works exist throughout the world. When describing or attempting to define Outsider Art, a difficulty could be the question: 'Where ultimately does one draw the boundaries?' Wherever they may be, and although each is peculiarly unique, linking them are numerous resonating, often fragile threads. Amongst these are a sense of being set apart from the tangible, material and socially interactive world in which our consciousness usually lives; an indefinable atmosphere of enigma and unknown influences - dark or light as may be - which they evoke; as well as recognition of similarity of subject matter and materials used for the creation. Although virtually impossible to define in the abstract, once a person has become aware of this genre of artistic creativity it is easy to recognize when encountered again, and there is usually no doubt that it is Outsider Art. There is almost always the sense of mystery and a driving, irrefutable passion behind the work. There is about such a creation an intimation of touching on the edges of another and unknown world.

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The *Cement Menagerie* at Branxton, Cornhill-on-Tweed, Northumberland, England, is an example of a playful garden where there is no evidence of dark shadows lurking in the background. Upon his retirement at the venerable age of 80 in 1961, Master Joiner John Fairnington (snr) embarked on this ambitious new venture. In a pamphlet his nephew gives, in his own words (which it is felt captures an essence of the social milieu and the personalities involved in the work most meaningfully, and has thus been quoted fairly fully), the background to this charming and immaculately kept garden filled with cement statues and various other items. It is interesting to note the similarity in methods used in making the cement statues with those of Helen Martins in The Owl House as well as others described in this chapter.

*He [John Fairnington] had married late in life and had an only son who unfortunately was somewhat an invalid, a happy go lucky lad but required very much attention. Soon after retirement his wife died suddenly and he re-married after sometime her sister.*

Empty cool drink and beer cans used in the construction of rural dwellings in Botswana. This is a practical use of waste materials but could not possibly be called Outsider Art.







Above: Two of the sphinxes in the Camel Yard. The model for their design was the Lion match box label.

Below: Some of the items on a window sill in The Owl House: shells, plaster of paris mermaids made from a rubber mould, and a nude statuette.





Outside, above the kitchen window, (at the centre of the photograph) is a bas-relief of a female swimmer with frog feet. Stylistically it is reminiscent of an early Egyptian painting. In the foreground are a number of wise men and camels wending their way to the 'east'.





Photographer unknown

Helen's hybrid figure invention, the winged owl-camel. Riding on its back is the woman with 'ruby nipples', her hands stretched out both in homage to the sun and to shield her eyes from its rays.



On these pictures it is interesting to note echoes of some of Helen Martins' subjects: a peacock, a water feature, a camel, and also the incorporation of the written word with the statues.



*The Cement Menagerie, Branxton, Northumberland, England*





*The Cement Menagerie, Branxton, Northumberland, England*

*During the period from retirement and mainly to amuse his handicapped son he started making Cement or Concrete Animals, at first on a very small scale - the interest though grew, he had quite a large garden and with the help of another retired person a Mr. William Collins the development started to take shape. The partnership though didn't last too long, Mr. Collins leaving the district and a hole in the wall so to speak.*

*Fortunately at this time one of our own employee Joiners retired, a Mr. James Beveridge who took on the missing role and discovered he had a talent the foundation really on which the present Cement Menagerie was built.*

*My uncle first of all had the brainwave of what he wanted and drew each model actually to living size, he had the drawing gift from many many years in his life profession here as a Master joiner, in those days Architects were not so important, we produced our own plans from a chicken coop to a mansion. From drawing board then to the actual making and this was now mostly done by our new man Mr. Beveridge, the animal and notable personality side which followed he first formed to shape in galvanised wire netting then stuffed the inside with paper and refuse and cemented over making sure every detail was as it should be. When dry the model was paint or emulsion paint finished. Smaller models were made in workshop before being sited, larger models had to be made actually on chosen site, Personalities, Giraffe, Hippo, Elephant and Buffalo, plus all the minors from Rabbit to Mouse all had their turn.*

*In conjunction with all the model making of course paths had to be formed and concreted, garden seats fixed around, trees, hedges, shrubs and flowers planted and also the surrounding buildings erected as required. There is a Memory Corner (to his son), a large Greenhouse, a Summerhouse, a Visitors Room for book-signing, an Antique Show Room, Wishing Well and Fish Pool with waterfall and fountain. A Visitors Toilet is also there as a general necessity.*

*Add to all this a small Tea-room serving Tea, Coffee, Lemonades, Biscuits etc. and Ice Cream, this very ably operated by my present Garden house (The Fountain) tenants a Mr. and Mrs. L.A. Ford.*

*Might I mention that gradually the garden became too small for my uncle's imagination and more ground had to be acquired to continue with operations.*

*During the period from roughly 1962, my uncle's first wife Mary died in 1963, his invalid son Edwin (aged only 36 years) followed in 1971 and his second wife Lilley in 1979. Old John as we latterly called him we thought would make his century - 100 years, unfortunately this was not to be his past losses were too great, he died on April 7th, 1981 only a few months from his 99th. birthday.*

*What is left now belongs to myself, his nephew, for the record his Will left everything to Charity and to keep this unique creation as a visitors showpiece I had all to purchase from those 6 No. Organisations.*

*The Garden or Cement Menagerie is still looked after by Mr. James Beveridge who now in his late seventies does a very good job indeed, he knows every nook and corner and every move is at his finger tips, actually unreplaceable.*

As with The Owl House and some other Outsider Art creations, the Cement Menagerie was a co-creation resulting from more than one person working together. It is without doubt a garden which was conceived and made by people who were at peace with their world - there is no angst evident. Animals are portrayed in pairs, or a mother with its baby. Quotations and sayings are written in front of or underneath many of the figures or groups. For instance, under the zebra

standing next to her foal is written:

*The kiss of the sun for pardon  
The song of the birds for mirth  
One is nearer God's heart in a garden  
Than anywhere else on earth*

and next to a pillar supporting frogs, owls and squirrels:

*For it is by giving that one receives.  
The simple things in life are free.*

And under a cow:

*This has been a famous coo  
Ten calves in 12 short years  
Her carcass should make savoury stew  
Here is no cause for tears*

A moose stands surrounded by a border of shells, and as predicted by Barbara Jones in *Follies & Grottoes*, there is a figure of Winston Churchill, with cigar in mouth making his famous V-sign. There is also a deer bearing authentic horns. This device is seen in a number of gardens: some of Dirk van der Mescht's cement statues at Zuney in the Eastern Cape have real horns. There is also the element of water in the very ornamental pond, and many birds are another subject which also featured prominently in Helen Martins' work. Subjects here which are also found in her Camel Yard are a peacock, and a camel with rider. Underneath the camel is written:

*The desert's own  
ship and she's  
aye on the trip*

There is the Lamb which shall lie down with the lion (see illustration), which is a subject which Helen Martins also portrayed. Her lambs were with the lion with wire whiskers, as seen in an early photograph but unfortunately the lambs later disappeared.

Outsider Art is fragile and its maintenance, let alone preservation, is by no means assured. It is often only due to the passionate involvement of a few people who realize the value of such works, be they family members or members of the public, that money and curatorship is found. Many eventually crumble away due to neglect, and also due to the essentially fragile materials with which they are constructed - often with no regard to the best and most practical construction methods. John Fairnington's nephew concludes his pamphlet on the Cement Menagerie on this critical matter:

*Upkeep which is considerable - we rely on Visitors Donations for which a special box is provided on entry. ... The future for the Cement Menagerie to date is reasonably good, so long as I exist myself plus Caretakers and the volume of visitors and their generosity provides the necessary upkeep funds, at least the near future has few problems. The very long outlook though at the present time I have no idea.*

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A delightful garden, which sadly has not survived, was created by a reclusive couple, **Connie and Len Dredge**, around their house at Bakoven in the Cape Peninsula over a period of nearly 40 years. Unfortunately, after Connie's death in 1991, the property was sold and the new owner destroyed the intricate terraced garden filled with literally hundreds of statues of varying sizes and depicting a wide range of scenes and events. The figures were made from a wide assortment of materials - chiefly cement painted with PVA, but also using plastic and porcelain toys and trinkets, plastic bottle tops, string, wire and many other waste materials, and making use of natural features in the garden. They ranged in size from approximately 10 cm to one-and-a-half metres in height. The only remaining record of this entrancing creation, in which the element of play is also dominant, are many photographs taken by the author, a few of the sculptures which were given to her to keep as a record, and a video made by a Technikon film student.

Connie, who was born in 1910, died aged 81; her husband Len had died about five years previously. The couple came to South Africa from England after the war. Connie left school at the age of 14, which was common in those times, and had been a dairy maid before she got married. Although Len worked as an estate agent in Cape Town and both were musical - Len played the violin and organ and Connie the piano and organ - the couple were not sociable and kept very much to themselves. Her neighbour and close friend Rose Holtman, who 'inherited' the statues in the garden on Connie's death (but found it impossible to move or accommodate them), said:

*We were 'waving' neighbours for about 21 years until her husband died, then she came out of herself and took on a new phase in her life. I think he suppressed her. She missed him though. They were always together - never apart. They had no children and no pets, but did have a dog in earlier years. They didn't want any children; they were a world unto themselves and didn't want any intruders. It was difficult to get close to her. Her emotions were kept in a box - totally under control.* (Interview Holtman, 1991).

Another friend who knew her for about 35 years, Ann Chichester, said that Connie Dredge was a reserved person and difficult to get to know. Although wealthy, the couple were not used to giving. They had no family and did not share with anyone else. Neither did they travel. *'They never went anywhere. She died a millionairess. Len played the stock market.'* (Interview Chichester, 1991). *'They lived a very frugal life'*, said Rose Holtman.

Both worked in the garden, which they started in approximately 1952, and built it together (interview Chichester, 1991). *'The way I gathered it, they'd go out and buy cement and then work on statues. I would guess it would have been Len's idea. It gave them lots of pleasure,'* said Rose Holtman.

Connie Dredge was apparently a very precise person. She phoned Rose Holtman at 7.15 every morning, a Scotch call which rang three times, just to let her know she was all right. Every day for years she recorded the weather in a note book. She was thin to the point of concern, and for



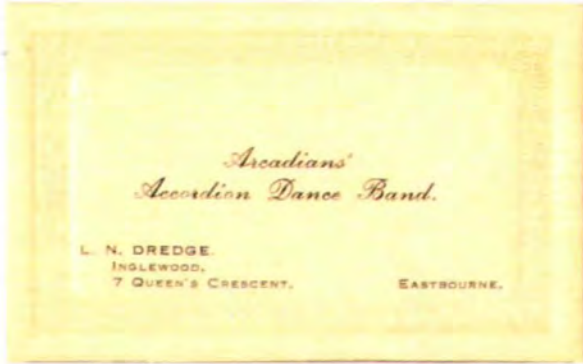
one month made a list of everything she ate for Rose - *'she wrote it all down religiously'*. She was apparently a perfectionist in all things - eating, sewing, embroidery, playing bowls etc, and *'very regimental'*. For the last 48 years, every Monday, she went to the League of Health and Beauty.

*She never had any help in the home. She hated blacks. She kept to a rigid schedule. It was heavy; she never ever bent. She was a dressmaker; as a business she sewed Health and Beauty broekies and shirts. She never threw a single thing away; she had eight to ten black plastic bags full of tiny pieces of material, millions of buttons and I threw out about 200 cotton reels. She kept things in case she needed them. Her weekly rubbish was in one Pick 'n Pay packet. She had five wardrobes jam-packed with clothes - her dresses which she'd brought out from England. (Interview - Holtman, 1991).*

(This reminds one of Helen Martins who had wardrobes full of delicate and beautiful clothes which she never wore.)

Ideas for statues came from many sources - Connie and Len's imagination and also local scenes and TV characters. Subjects were very wide and based on such things as fairy tales and real life incidents in the couple's past or present situations and environment. *'Once Len died, she maintained them but didn't make any more.'* The garden, which sloped up steeply behind the house, had one level in front of the house and then five levels behind. Topics were grouped, but there was not necessarily a logical link between one subject and adjacent ones. It would seem that Len Dredge played more with soldiers, often using tiny plastic toy soldiers together with cement figures in his scenes, as well as many other subjects such as a complicated freeway system with cement motor cars. Sports scenes featured, including tennis courts and a soccer field, and the Sea Point swimming pool measuring approximately 1 x 1 metre and 60 cm in depth, complete with swimming and diving figures suspended on wires in or over the water, reclining bikini clad women, and aeroplanes suspended overhead. There were also strongly romantic and artistic elements, portrayed in ballerinas poised on their points, courtesans in crinolines, a man in a top hat and dress jacket. The Arcadians orchestra was a dance band in which Len once played in England, and each member of the orchestra was depicted in cement, wearing green-painted jackets, white shirts and ochre trousers. Voluptuous nudes reclined seductively, and there were a number of small and delicate bas-relief sculptures. There is also a scene where Snow White is grouped with nine dwarfs at some social occasion where most of the dwarfs are playing musical instruments. One of them is the conductor and others are depicted holding pipes, bottles and glasses. Elsewhere Little Boy Blue is present - but with his trousers painted green!

A rock in the garden was transformed into a miniature Table mountain. On it were a conglomerate of figures and situations, with many climbers and the two cablecars suspended on wires. One of the cars had a plastic soldier on top of the roof and a cement figure inside. The passengers in the other were a plastic dwarf, one small rough cement figure and one delicate little Chinese



Dredge's family album



Dredge's family album

Connie and Len Dredge, Bakoven, Cape Town.

Top right: The Dredge's house in Victoria Road, Bakoven. Centre right: The young couple with piano and violin and (bottom) later at the piano. Top left and middle left: The Accordion Dance Band, translated into cement in another continent from its origins, years earlier in Eastbourne, England.



Connie and Len Dredge, Bakoven, Cape Town

Top right: A crinolined lady; Middle right: Table Mountain including the cable car and a parachutist; Bottom right: Horse and rider with plastic doll behind; Bottom left: Snow White and the Seven Dwarves; Middle left: Connie in her fairyworld garden; Top left: 'Henry', the elephant flanked by British soldiers and followed by a rhinoceros.



Dredge's family album



porcelain figure. Amongst the figures on the mountain were a plastic Zulu warrior, soldiers, a rubber scorpion, a parachutist and crashed aeroplanes. Below was the sea made from a mirror with a cement arched road bridge over it and five plastic ships sailing on the 'water'.

A complete miniature village filled one raised section of the garden. Amongst the buildings were a Cape Dutch house, 'Ye Olde White Horse Inn', and a church which had four golf tees on top of the corners of the spire. Outside stood the clergy with other tiny figures. As well as a road system there was a cement train, and also plastic horses ridden by cement riders.

Castles and minarets stand behind 'Dirty Dick' - a roguish gap-toothed dwarf-like figure who holds a plastic trumpet and has a small cement identifying label between his feet. Once-popular TV character Haas-Das, with black electric flex to make his spectacles, stands at a dias talking into a microphone. An ochre-painted rhinoceros contrasts with a cement aeroplane which has four plastic bottle tops for jet engines. Many of the sculptures were labelled with small cement plaques with their names inscribed on them, such as a cat named 'Sweetie'. A cement redcoat soldier clutches a trumpet made from the tapered top of a nail polish top, while other figures have hats made from little plastic bottle tops tied on with pieces of wire. One tiny woman leans backwards on a seat made from a 'doppie' (a .22 bullet case) holder, under a cement beach umbrella. Some small figures were made with a spike of wire sticking out below their feet to anchor them in the ground. A quite large cement elephant named, on a cement disk, 'enery' transports a driver and six passengers on his back, and seated further behind, attached by a piece of wire, is a mouse-like figure. The label attached to the rider says 'Coons'. Next to the steps leading to the front verandah was a horse and rider, with an incongruous plastic doll appended, with many pieces of plastic coated wire and string securing or making the reins, saddles and stirrups.

It was a great tragedy that this garden, which was probably known by very few people during all the years of its existence, could not have been preserved to give pleasure to many people after the creators' deaths. However, the site is one of the prime seaboard properties on the Atlantic coast and apart from lack of knowledge of its existence by the general public, financial considerations would have made this almost impossible.

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Alert train travellers along the lonely railway line linking Port Elizabeth with Port Alfred and East London in the Eastern Cape would be astounded to look out of the windows and see, flanking the tracks, some painted cement statues standing, seemingly, in the middle of nowhere. This is in fact an isolated railway siding named Zuney not far from the village of Alexandria. **Dirk Cornelius van der Mescht**, interviewed at the age of 70 in November 1990, has created a remarkable Outsider Art environment of at least 60 sculptures along both sides of the railway tracks and into the garden

of his adjoining humble home.

He was born in Graaff-Reinet (which is the closest town to Nieu Bethesda, but he had no knowledge of Helen Martins and her Owl House), as the eldest of 12 children - two of whom did not survive. Possibly of great significance in attempting to understand something behind the reasons for making his extraordinary creations is the fact that one of these siblings was his twin brother, accidentally killed as an infant by another young child.

*Though he can hardly have been aware of the tragedy, the age of his twin - three months and twenty-nine days - at the time of the tragedy, is very clear in Van der Mescht's mind. Even though he will not admit it, the loss seems to have affected him strongly. This is seen in his refusal to discuss the subject; and his withdrawal at any mention of it by Sarie, his wife. According to psychologists, a remaining twin feels a persistent sense of loss. (Cowley, 1992: 26).*

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Helen Martins was a replacement child, named after a dead sibling, and it is felt that this knowledge could have played a major role in her later development, and similarly could have affected Dirk van der Mescht's unusual departure from a life as led by others living in comparable circumstances.

The family later went to Port Elizabeth. His education was minimal and he left school in Standard 4 because he *'had to work'* (interview Van Der Mescht, 1990). He had no art training, but *'as a child, he had always made things with his hands, such as woodcarvings, "draadkarretjies" and "bokwaentjies" [wire cars and goat carts]. He neither drew or painted.'* (Cowley, 1991: 27). He also did woodcarving.

Van Der Mescht and his wife Sarie had 12 children; three girls and seven boys survived. He worked on the railways as a manual labourer. Since 1960 the family has lived at Zuney railway siding (he is now retired) where he was a porter and *'off-loaded trains and kept packages and freight for the farmers to pick up'*. This was a very lonely and isolated life, and he says he got bored because only one train a day a went through. In approximately 1978 it was this boredom that started him making statues. He then became so carried away with what he was making that he would work till 2 or 3 am by the light of a Coleman lamp. This excitement and obsession, to the exclusion of all bodily considerations such as food, warmth or sleep, was also found for instance in Nek Chand with his Rock Garden in Chandigarh, India, who would work at night by the light of burning tyres; Raymond Isidore with his Maison de Picassiette in France who also worked at night by lamplight; and Helen Martins who would walk around the Camel Yard at night with her *'lanterntjie'* when she could not sleep.

Dirk van der Mescht - as was the case with so many other Outsiders, such as John Fairnington with his Cement Menagerie and Helen Martins with her Camel Yard - made most of his sculptures from cement on a wire netting base; he stuffed his with straw. He knew clearly from the



Dirk van der Mescht, Zunev, Eastern Cape

Mr and Mrs van der Mescht standing proudly in their house (top left). Adam and Eve (top right and lower left), are subjects which Helen Martins depicted, but here are fully clothed.





Dirk van der Mescht, Zunev, Eastern Cape

The 'station master' at the Zunev siding (top left), the rabbit made from a stone found in the veld (top right), Sampson and a rooster (middle right), a semi nude figure (bottom right), man holding fishing net floats (bottom left), and the witch from 'Hansel and Gretel', (middle left).



onset what he was going to make. He started with the large animals, and later got on to making human figures. He then painted the statues with bright coloured enamel paint. One of the reasons for making human figures, he says, was that because they were smaller they used less cement and were also therefore cheaper: paint and cement are expensive and his pension was small. Cost of basic materials and insufficient funds was also an ongoing hindrance for Helen Martins.

His subjects are varied and include animals such as a giraffe, two elephant, buck and cattle with real horns, bikini girls and semi-nude women. Most of these sculptures are rather crudely executed. Arms usually end in undifferentiated blobs as he evidently had difficulty in making hands. Then there is a cottage with a witch standing defensively before it, but from which he said the statues of Hansel and Gretel have been lost. A surprisingly well executed Sampson stands nearby, with a rooster cut-out of metal, and a few cement owls. One figure leans, with hand outstretched clutching a bicycle reflector, to slow down traffic on the dirt driveway approaching his house. There are also people riding animals, a fisherman - who has lost his wooden fishing rod, and a fish, amongst other statues. Aeroplanes, biplanes and windmills, true to Barbara Jones' prediction in her book on unusual English gardens (Jones, 1974), spin and rotate on poles in the wind. These are constructed from wood, cans and plastic bottles. There are ponds with figures round them, including one which has the head of a plastic doll - a somewhat disconcerting device, seen in many similar environments, such as the Dredge's garden in Bakoven and that of Chomo near Fontainebleau in France. One fairly large work alongside the railway line is made from a stone he found in the veld which reminded Van der Mescht of a rabbit, so he painted in details to complete the image. A witchlike figure with clutching fingers peers over a large rock near the fisherman.

Van der Mescht has created Adam and Eve, flanking the cement path to his front door, Adam carrying a sphere - the world - on his head,. They are both fully clothed but their genitals are clearly delineated. Eve even has nipples painted on to the outside of her dress.

*The idea for ... "Adam and Eve" originated from thoughts about the Biblical Adam and Eve and the creation of the world. Humorously, he linked the married couple - his wife and himself - to the very first couple on earth as part of a continuous theme connecting the Creation with marriage. (Cowley, 1991: 41). He believes that 'women should have children; that God made them that way.' (Cowley, 1991: 33).*

This is in total contrast to Helen Martins' depiction of a nude and yet sexless Adam and Eve, and also to her attitude towards bearing children - for her a deeply-loaded topic.

As seems the case with many Outsider artists, the love of and natural presence of birds is manifest in Van der Mescht's work, both through representation in sculptures and also in the many tame domestic birds, such as turkeys and chickens, found running round the property. It could be that many of these works are created in unsophisticated or rural environments, where domestic and wild birds are naturally part of the environment, but without any doubt they play a large part in the

general atmosphere. After photographing many sites, one becomes aware that live domestic fowls, ducks and turkeys as well as wild birds feature markedly in addition to the sculptures of birds found in most sites. Amongst these are Chomo's Village of Preludian Art near Fontainebleau in France, Richard Netshipise's Garden of Redeem in Venda, and Sibusiso Mbhele's Aeroplane site near Bergville, Natal. This observation has again been underlined when playing through taped interviews made on site during research for this work, and particularly at The Owl House. Dominating background noises are birds of all kinds, both wild and domestic, and this presence permeating the atmosphere must have played a large influence in the work of these Outsider artists. Whether live or sculptured, birds, to the Outsider artists, would seem to have been symbolic both of the unconscious and of the possibility of transcending the earthly, material dimension to the higher realms of imagination and spirit, which it would appear was happening through their work.

Another important and notable link with Helen Martins is the fact that as her eyesight was of paramount importance to her, so was Van der Mescht's to him. He said that '*God must take him should he ever lose his eyesight. To him it is inconceivable to live in a world that cannot be seen.*' (Cowley, 1991: 39).

Strongly held religious or spiritual beliefs are frequently part of the motivation behind Outsiders' creativity. This phenomenon is to be found in many of the artists examined here, such as Nek Chand in India, both Chomo and Raymond Isidore in France, Nukain Mabusa in the Eastern Transvaal, Jackson Hlungwani in Gazankulu, and Dirk van der Mescht. '*He says that one just has to look around to realise that there must be a God, and that there must be a reason for it all*' (Cowley, 1991: 33). Helen Martins' work was largely a spiritual quest, as evidenced in the writings on the fences around and in her property, the depictions of many religions and the processions of pilgrims to Mecca and the Nativity scene in the 'east'.

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**Sibusiso Mbhele**, a shy and reserved young man who lives in the rural Bergville district in Natal, has created an extraordinary environment which revolves almost exclusively around aeroplanes and helicopters. What makes it all the more surprising is that it is so out of context standing amongst traditional thatched Zulu rondavels set in rolling grassveld and ploughed mealie patches. The approach is along a dirt road with the dramatic Drakensberg in the background and eventually a large structure, looking somewhat like a helicopter supported on rough wooden poles, comes into view. Closer inspection reveals that it is made from the side panels of wrecked kombis and motor cars and other scrap metal. Hanging from a pole next to the wire gate is a beautifully made aeroplane model of a South African Airways jet. The scale of his creations varies from small models of less than one metre in length to his helicopter which is large enough to be lived in.





Sibusiso Mbhele, Natal

Sibusiso Mbhele with some of his creations made mainly from scrap metal, in the Bergville district of Natal. He stands proudly next to his 'fish helicopter'; nearby are a motor car, and a South African Airways plane suspended from a wire. Below is his working drawing for the construction of his helicopter.





Known as 'Punch', Sibusiso was born in 1969 (interview Mbhele, 1993). He says he attended school until Standard 7 and started making wire and metal cars and carts at the age of 10. He has many photographs of his works, including some of himself pushing little children in his cars and carts. He started drawing in 1984; his drawings are mainly architectural with perspective playing a large part in them. Some drawings are from what he sees, others come from his imagination. The drawings often have framed headings giving the name of the place depicted. Aeroplanes are frequently drawn suspended on poles in front of the buildings, and the subjects are rigidly contained by gates and fences. The coloured pencil drawings include houses and buildings, cars, kites and aeroplanes. He has also done other more imaginative drawings of subjects such as trees and scenery, but these are not of the same high standard as his architectural drawings.

In 1986 he started making aeroplanes. They are all made from flattened metal obtained from objects such as sunflower seed oil and paraffin cans, wrecked motor vehicles, wire and wood. He has a good set of tools with which he works, with great skill and pride. Some smaller aeroplanes and helicopters are made with the intention of selling them so that he can buy parts of wrecked vehicles for his larger permanent structures. One aeroplane is '*to drink beer in*', which would seem to indicate that social life is important to him. Of the fish-helicopter, the sixth aeroplane which he has constructed, he proudly says: '*This is my room*'. He was very clear that the interior was his private domain, but later volunteered to open the door for a brief inspection from the outside. Inside stood a half-finished aeroplane.

The contrast between his idealized image, as can be seen in his careful drawings, and the reality of execution due to lack of sophisticated tools and materials, and local conditions, is poignant. In the drawing his fish-helicopter stands sleek and streamlined high up on straight supports. In reality it is much closer to the ground, supported on rough-hewn wooden poles. He says the wind is too strong for it to be too highly elevated or for the tail to be as long as he would wish. Identifiable parts of wrecked vehicles do not feature in his smoothly finished drawing of the building, but cannot be ignored in the actual construction.

Because of Sibusiso's extremely unusual creations he cannot but be very conspicuous in the district and within his local community, where traditional values prevail. When he was offered drawing materials, paint and photographs of the visit and his work to be posted to him, this was vehemently rejected. He said that they could be brought on a further visit, but that he did not want to receive anything through the post. He did not elaborate on this statement, but it could be that excessive or unusual mail, other than occasional letters as received by other people in the district, could make him seem yet more conspicuously different from his neighbours in the community, and he wished to play this down as much as possible. His form of creativity, on the other hand, is something that he obviously has to fulfil and which matters to him more than anything else, whether

it alienates him from his community or not. This is a marked characteristic of Outsider artists.

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An Outsider Art environment well-known in France is **La Maison de Picassiette**, created by Raymond Isidore, who was born in 1900 and lived near Chartres. He worked for a short period in a metal foundry and thereafter as a sweeper at the local cemetery. He died in 1964.

Isidore, also known as Picassiette, bought land on the outskirts of Chartres to build a home for his family, and then extended it firstly with a chapel and then a second house. Later he bought the adjoining plot and built a barn against the house and his 'Tombeau de l'esprit' (Tomb of the Spirit). He first started decorating the outside of his house in 1923 with intricate mosaic designs made from broken china and crockery. This was collected during walks in the surrounding countryside after finishing work in the evenings. He then progressed to the interior, and finally created a series of little courtyards and shrines outside.

Over time, and working at night by lamp light, he used about 15 tons of broken pottery to create his vision. When asked how he had achieved his work, he explained that he had first built his house to shelter his wife and himself, and that if afterwards he had become an architect and sculptor, it had been under the guidance of a spirit. This is reminiscent of Facteur Cheval's explanation as how he came to create his Ideal Palace in Hauterives, France.

The subjects were religious and fantastical scenes found in books, newspapers, postcards and the Post Office calendar, as well as local landmarks such as Chartres Cathedral, and, further afield, the Eiffel Tower. Using illustrative material from just such sources was how Helen Martins chose her subjects and showed the men who made the sculptures for her what she wanted to achieve.

On entering the property, a mosaic flower-filled path leads along the outside of the house. Mosaic and decoration cover all external and internal surfaces - walls, ceilings, floors and furniture - including beds, stove, sewing machine and radio amongst them. In The Owl House, Helen Martins covered every possible internal surface with ground up glass applied to geometrical painted designs.

Picassiette happily blended cultures and styles in an eclectic fashion. In the centre of scenes evoking the French countryside a caravan of camels travels towards a mysterious oriental city in the depths of a desert. There is also a large mosaic Mona Lisa on one interior wall. Both of these topics were very important and of symbolic significance in Helen Martins' choice of subject matter. Picassiette, through his work, could transform his daily real world of cemetery employment into a multicoloured palace to contain '*ses songes de prince oriental et mystique*' ['his dreams of oriental mystic princehood'] (Arz, 1990: 90). Helen was attempting to transform her drab and lonely life into something which was filled with colour, light, presences and mystery, which was possibly leading towards some goal.



*La Maison de Picassiette, near Chartres, France*

(Top left) The Black Court with black mosaic-topped tomb supporting a replica of Chartres Cathedral. (Top right) Interior view. (Centre left and bottom left) Inside the house all the walls are covered in painted and mosaic murals, Even the chairs, bed and sewing machine are encrusted with mosaic designs. (Centre) Detail of some of the mosaic work. (Centre right) A corner of the garden traversed with paths. It is immaculately kept, and filled with beds of flowers which resemble yet more mosaic designs. (Bottom right) Helen Martins was not the only Outsider artist to depict the Mona Lisa.



Picassiette also had a great need to transform his life. He created another unusual space - the Black Court presided over by a tomb which is a large block of stone covered in black mosaic and the support for a scaled-down replica of Chartres Cathedral. It is ornamented with a series of symbols: a madonna clad in blue, a rose window representing the sun, and an interrogation point between two hands opened towards the sky. In front of the tomb is a large chair covered in shards on which he liked to sit and relax and think on his sweeper life and related social status which he bore as a terrible humiliation. He used to say:

*On m'a mis balayeur dans un cimetière, comme quelqu'un qu'on rejette parmi les morts.* [I have been set to sweep in the cemetery as someone rejected to live between the dead.] (Arz, 1990: 91).

He developed his own personal belief. Of his chapel - a simple vaulted, mosaic decorated room, evoking the interior of orthodox churches, with an unsettling black Christ indicating with his finger the tree crosses of Golgotha, Picassiette said:

*C'est une réalisation de ma croyance personnelle, non de croyances apprises. J'ai fait ainsi une chapelle pour moi.* [It's the realization of my personal belief, not of the learnt beliefs. I have created a chapel just for me.] (Arz, 1990: 90).

Through a narrow path filled with birds and giant butterflies, one arrives in a garden populated with statues ranging from La Fayette to the Great Goddess, Mother Nature. On the wall which surrounds the property frescoes representing the French countryside are punctuated by painted cement masks. The last part of this extraordinary garden is a geometric floor dominated by the throne of the sky spirit in blue cement, topped by a monumental mosaic of Jerusalem. Behind the blue throne is the grotto of the throne of the spirit, a sacred space with a halo of celestial light and on a central pillar is inscribed:

DIEU JÉSUS MARIE

Joseph

ici l'étable de Bethléem

ICI

REPOSE

L'ESPRIT

[GOD JESUS MARY

Joseph

here is the stable of Bethlehem

HERE

RESTS

THE SPIRIT]

Picassiette was so absorbed with creating his inner vision that he was indifferent to his success. His work was a serious passion and an obsession, and had none of the playfulness or intention to mock the establishment displayed in some of the other sites discussed in this chapter. His work has the intensity such as seems to be found in Helen Martins' Owl House in Nieu Bethesda, Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh, India, Chomo's Village of Preludian Art near Fontainebleau in France, Jackson Hlungwani's New Jerusalem in Gazankulu, and Nukain Mabusa's painted rocks in the Eastern Transvaal.

*Mon jardin, c'est le rêve réalisé le rêve de la vie où l'on vit en esprit dans l'éternité.*  
- [My garden is the dream come true, the dream of a life where one lives in spirit eternally] - Raymond Isidore, called Picassiette (Arz, 1990: 90).

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**La Frénoise, or L'étrange Musée** was created by Robert Tatin at Cossé-le-Vivien, near Laval in France. Tatin, who was born in 1902, only attended school until the age of 11. However, unlike most other Outsider artists, he did have an artistic training. He started his apprenticeship as a house-painter, proving to be very skilful, and then went to Paris where he worked as a painter of letters and a decorator, and studied further at night school. He worked as a master builder in Laval and also travelled extensively in Europe, North Africa and the United States. After the war he became a ceramicist in Paris, then moved to Brazil for a period of six years, where he won a first prize and a gold medal at the first Biennial in Sao Paulo for his 'grand feu' sculptures. Back in France he exhibited regularly at home and abroad, and won awards for his paintings.

In 1960 he started La Frénoise, which he created with the assistance of his third wife. Seven years later this architectural unit was recognized as a museum by Mr Malrauz, writer and minister of General de Gaulle's government. From 1970 until 1982 he worked continuously on the completion of the museum and also on his paintings. He died in 1983.

Tatin's enigmatic work, although expressing symbolic concepts and complex, personal ideologies, has been very consciously contrived and extensively explained by himself. It is not, like most Outsider artists' work, an expression of mostly unconscious processes. The large and complicated environmental work begins with the Avenue of Giants, a series of larger than life sculptures of personal heroes - amongst them Pablo Picasso, Suzanne Valladon, the verb Etre and Toulouse-Lautrec - which leads to an open-mouthed dragon guarding the entrance to Tatin's temple-like structure. On the topic, Cooper writes: *'The gaping jaws of a monster signify the gates of hell or the entrance to the underworld'* (Cooper, 1990: 63). He continues on the topic of Fabulous Beasts: *'Frightful monsters represent the evil or chaotic forces in the world or in man's own nature, or they can be symbols of pestilence or destructive forces'* (Cooper, 1990: 62-63).





Robert Tatin's *La Frénoise* or *L'étrange Musée*, Cossé-le-Vivien, France

(Above) The approach along the Avenue of Giants.

(Centre) The quasi-mystical imagery of the inner courtyard is dominated by The Door of the Sun, the Door of the Moon, the Tower of Notre-Dame-Tout-Le-Monde, and water.

(Below) The open-mouthed dragon guards the entrance to the temple-like structure, representing the gates of hell or the entrance to the underworld.

Within the courtyard the quasi-mystical imagery of the facades and colonnades is dominated by the Door of the Sun, the Door of the Moon and the tower of Notre-Dame-Tout-Le-Monde. Water is an important feature of this inner courtyard.

In spite of his much more calculated and intellectual approach to the creation of this work, Robert Tatin was expressing basic precepts which were similar to those of other Outsiders - a yearning for spiritual wholeness, for unity and for an understanding and harmony of deep basic principles of existence. Main themes in Helen's work, as discussed earlier, were the sun and the moon, a balance between feminine and masculine principles, and a spiritual quest. She was interested in and represented both Eastern and Western religions in her work. Tatin espoused both Oriental and Occidental philosophies in his work and his writings. His Door of the Sun has the two giants, Yin and Yang - feminine and masculine - sustain the sky where the Wheel of Destiny turns between the urns of imagination and reason. The central pillar represents the Unity Adam-Eve/Eve-Adam. On the tympanum the sundial distributes its energy of bright rays of pure yang to celebrate the union of Yin-Yang. The Door of the Moon is erected in front of the creative fairy who reigns over the waters of the basin. On the tympanum of the door is the Muse of Unity, and seated on her knees are a boy and girl feeding at the sources of creative vitality. Notre-Dame-Tout-le-Monde is the axle of the Frénouse. At its foundation is the five-branched star of the three wise men which predicts the existence of *'a gleam even in the deepest hell, which can be revived and then grows into a star which can light a new and marvellous road for mankind.'*

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In Switzerland, Bruno Weber has made an extensive and quite remarkable world, **Weinrebenpark**, which is first seen as shining glass and gold spires emerging from the surrounding forest in the semi-rural outskirts of Dietikon. He built his fantasy world on the property belonging to his parents, where they had farmed. This is an area where everyone else works in their little garden plots containing neat wooden tool sheds, and cultivates tulips and vegetables.

Weber was born in 1931. Like Tatin he was also trained as an artist - he studied in Zurich and Rome - and his art is his full-time occupation. However, he conducts his life and expresses his creativity in a totally unconventional manner, through making one of the most bizarre and complex dwellings imaginable, surrounded by a wild forest garden filled with monsters, lakes traversed by convoluted serpent bridges, and playful figures. It is self-conscious, obsessive and extremely eccentric. Complex eastern and western symbolism and mythology are depicted, as well as many dream and imaginary images.

This is a place which has been well-documented and he has available colour brochures,

written in German, as well as a range of postcards depicting various aspects of Weinrebenpark. Visitors are invited to pay to enter, though this is not compulsory, warmly welcomed by his vivid red-headed wife who speaks English - he does not - and allowed to explore the entire multi-story structure which is the family's home, as well as the extensive forest which constantly produces unexpected discoveries around every corner. There are also a number of other buildings surrounding the main structure, including the dual 'Pyramidheadhouse'. Once through the garden entrance there is a long row of abutting cement chairs looking like assorted seated Oriental men, entitled 'The Wise'.

Every possible surface is decorated and embellished. Inside the house some light fittings are made from a conglomeration of materials, including paper plates. Elaborate mosaic mirrors, one in the form of an owl, hang on walls and glass owl sconces light the kitchen. No single feature of the interior of the house is conventional, let alone the exterior. There are four symbols in the living room: fire, water, air and fertility. A large model of a woman has two doors in her middle which acts as a dumb waiter to bring up food from the kitchen situated below. In the dining room, large white plaster leaves grow up the walls and splay out on the ceiling. The circular bed in the main bedroom has playful figures of the sun and moon on the enclosure above it. The two daughters have their own bedrooms in the glass tower, and finally, after climbing up precipitous stairs and ladders one emerges at the top of the glass tower with a bird's eye view of the entire conglomeration of fairy tale, monster and myth below, and out over the surrounding countryside.

In the forest a pergola of bent fingers confronts the wanderer, and round a corner is a vast monster, inside which some visiting children have ascended to emerge on its back. A winsome cement and broken ceramic decorated group - 'Flower woman with child' - stands under the forest trees, and nearby is a picnic area of cement and broken china - a 'Paradise bird table' surrounded by little mushroom-like stools.

Unlike most other Outsider artists work, this ambitious creation would appear to be a grand public statement by an eccentric and unusual person rather than solely an expression of his own personal and private vision, in which he combines his own interpretation of mythology, fairy tales and mystery of the orient. He enjoys and actively encourages visitors and the resultant publicity.

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Frank Pritchard consciously mocks the establishment and conventionality with his **Place of the Witch Pigs**, situated near Lanseria outside Johannesburg. Described by Weekly Mail journalist Alex Dodd as '*this temple to irrelevance ... caterpillar shaped and covered with pigs on broomsticks*' (Dodd, 1993: 45), this building stands conspicuously on top of a hill in the midst of a wealthy rural area not too distant from Johannesburg's city centre. Originally it was intended to provide accommodation for the black staff on the property; it is now leased out as a tea-room-cum-tourist-





Monsters support the fantastic structure of the house, which has a glass tower up which visitors may climb (top left). A bird's eye view of this extravagant dream-world can be obtained from the top of the glass tower. A notable feature is the dual 'Pyramidheadhouse' (top centre). A playful 'Flower woman with child' made from cement and broken ceramic decoration, are encountered in another section of the forest (top right). Lakes, still in the construction stage, are traversed with convoluted serpentine bridges (middle left). At the entrance to the property is a long row of cement chairs with inscrutable oriental faces, named 'The Wise' (middle right). Looming in the forest is an enormous monster. Children have climbed on to its back by means of stairs in one leg (bottom right).



Bruno Weber's *Weinrebenpark*, Dietikon, Switzerland





Mythological cement monsters dominate the area in front of the eccentric castle-cum-house (top left and top centre). The extravagantly decorated main bedroom is dominated by a circular bed (top right). Massive mythical beasts loom over the dining room table with their wings appearing to support the ceiling (centre left). The bathroom is completely covered with ceramic designs. Above the mirror is a sun-shaped mirror which reflects the ceramics on the opposite wall (centre right). Bruno Weber and his wife (below right).



Bruno Weber's *Weinrebenpark*, Dietikon, Switzerland





Frank Pritchard's *Place of the Witch Pigs*, Lanseria, Gauteng

(Above and right) Two views of the broken tile mosaic-covered structure.

(Below left) Frank Pritchard and his sister stand in front of the 'Transvaal Gothic' factory, also named 'The Studio'. The central clock tower was not yet completed when photographed.

shop and called 'The New Vaalie Farm Store'. His explanation was: *'I suppose I did it as a shriek of protest against South African architecture.* (Dodd, 1993: 45).

*'What is it for?' asked the municipal authorities. I answered: 'It's not for anything.' As long as it has no purpose, you keep them confused and they can't do anything! The mosque is a plaything, a folly. It was a screech of rage against pondoks. I got the hell in with the South African four straight walls, with iron on the roof and stones to hold it on. I used tiles because I thought it would be hard-wearing, then I found that Antoni Gaudí had used it years ago. I had no plan; I just made a circle and curve and then it grew. The dome was made with a wooden mandril, an armature of wire, and dagga on top, building wire netting and reinforcing with cement. The ears are to stop the rain running into the windows. The pigs are from Dov Fedler's cartoon. He drew one for me.* (Interview Pritchard, 1992).

The name, *Place of the Witch Pigs*, came about through Pritchard's extremely unorthodox way of dealing with matters. He wished to acquire the adjoining property but it was too expensive. So he put up a sign saying that he intended constructing a piggery on his land, and all prospective buyers of the neighbouring property were made well aware of his intentions. Eventually the price dropped so low that he was able to buy it. When asked about the piggery, he raised a jutting eyebrow, and said, 'Which pigs?'

This is not the only building on the property however. There is also his double-story home which has decorative cutout barge boards which reminded him of houseboats on the Thames. He has also designed and constructed his 'Transvaal Gothic' style Factory, or 'The Studio', complete with clock tower - to manufacture plastic artifacts which are invented by his partner-neighbour Dave Atkins. The rondavels where his staff are accommodated are double-storied, with the bedrooms upstairs.

*I have a hang-up about modern architecture. Diagonal Street in Johannesburg is full of hideous buildings; flat concrete slabs - Bauhaus gone bananas. The Wits architecture school love it [that work]. I am planning a railway line, it's about a mile from the house to the top of the hill on the other side. I have put down the tracks, on concrete sleepers, and Dave Atkins will make the train. I have got another dam on the go, because I want to build a dam. It is below the first one [which took him three years to construct]. I am going to put a bumper boat on it.*

Frank Pritchard's greatest driving force however is not his desire to be nonconformist, but instead his great passion to build - in his own unique way. *'If I couldn't build, I think I'd die. ... You could call me a cement-junkie.'* (Dodd, 1993: 45).

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**Cashelmara** at Noordhoek in the Cape Peninsula, is a strange environment created by Jim Kennedy, who for many years was a set-designer and propmaker for CAPAB (Cape Performing Arts Board).

Coincidentally, it was Kennedy who made the copies of the sculptures in The Owl House for the CAPAB production of *Road to Mecca*, Athol Fugard's play based on the life of Helen Martins.

*Some people have compared my place with The Owl House, and others to a place in America. ... The amount of work that went into making the statues in the Camel Yard was prodigious, because cement is a very difficult medium to work in and you can't just slap it on - for instance on the underside of an arm or a face looking downwards - it would just slip off. I make very strong metal armatures for my work. (Interview Kennedy, 1991).*

He compared himself to Helen Martins:

*I see parallels in our lives. Like her I am an isolated, secluded loner. Like her, I have spent the past seven years single-handedly filling an acre of my Noordhoek place with a scale model of a castle, with pillars, fountains, rock arches and statues, including a life-size one of Atlas. Also like Miss Helen, I do this just for my own pleasure and not to sell. ... I've tried to get involved with the creative spirit of Miss Helen, yet not to get too involved. There is almost a horror quality about it. I can sense the tragedy in her work. (Chisholm, 1989: 4).*

He started building his own stone castle-like edifice in 1981, whilst living in a caravan in the midst of the thick milkwood forest on his property. He said that much of his work done building sets was temporary, existed for a while and then vanished, unless it was preserved on celluloid, and he wanted to create something in cement which would last and outlive him. The 'why' is another matter; he says it's something he just has to do.

*There is no meaning - I have to say something when people ask what it is and why I'm doing it and what it means. So I answer: 'It's my divine mission'. (Interview Kennedy, 1994).*

He has called this fantasy world Cashelmara which means, in Gaelic, tower by the sea, but as there are now more than one tower it should be called Cashelmarae. In relief against the inner side of each gatepost at the entrance to the property are the cement 'Guardian Angels' or 'Angels of the Lord', holding swords and with electric light bulbs on their heads. On the right of the entrance is a little cottage with turrets and flags on top of the walls. Ahead is an oval enclosure made from stone walls, with two towers at the lower end. Flags reminiscent of the prayer flags of the Buddhists flutter from the top of every turret and bust and lamp projecting above the walls. An interest in eclectic Eastern religions, classical mythology and the evolution of mankind's creativity are motivating factors in his work. He said that on one section of the walls is the 'Wall of Time', basically taken from Helen Gardner's art text book, and showing, through inlaid stones, ceramic inserts and hand-incised text, his chart of mankind's creative progress, incorporating the ancient rocks from the Chapman's Peak mountainside which dominates that area.

Inside this oval enclosure and at the highest point is a cement statue of Atlas from which water can run into a small pool. Beyond is a larger pool. At the left is the 'Tower of Light' which contains a lavatory and basin. At the right is the 'Tower of Truth' containing a meditation room with





Jim Kennedy's *Cashelmara*, Noordhoek, Cape

(Above left) Jim Kennedy in front of a truck with a false front which he made as a prop for the musical *My Fair Lady*. Behind is the outdoor workshop where he does his cement work.

(Above right) Atlas carrying the world on his shoulders. Jim Kennedy used himself as the model over which fibre glass was carefully draped to make a mould for the cement statue.

(Below left) A view of Cashelmara showing the 'Tower of Light', and some of the busts on top of the surrounding walls, as well as fluttering flags.

(Below right) A section of the 'Wall of Time', showing Kennedy's chart of man's creative process using, amongst other objects, inset stones, ceramics and text.

styrofoam on the walls and filling the two tiny gothic window openings. On a lower level outside the towers are two storage spaces.

On the plans, to keep building inspectors happy, he designated the central pool as a swimming pool, the smaller one as a children's paddling pool, the 'Tower of Truth' and the 'Tower of Light' as changing rooms, and the one room at the bottom of a tower as a pump house. The cottage at the entrance was designated as servants' quarters and garage on the official plans: to maintain the illusion, mock garage doors hide the actual entrance door and window. On the door of a second cottage is a **National Monument** plaque, which he has made from a mould - again his manner of humorously mocking the establishment. In the cottage is what was the original stone 'tower', functioning now as a Norman castle-type fireplace.

He collects stones, as he needs them for the building work, in the surrounding mountains or during his travels in areas further afield. This is the same way in which the Postman Cheval collected material for his Ideal Palace in France, as did Nek Chand for his Rock Garden in India. *'I just collect wherever I am, and then it is no hassle.'* said Kennedy. He also made the cement blocks for the construction, working in all weathers under an outdoor corrugated iron shelter filled with cement, fibreglass and metal objects.

Kennedy now makes cement garden ornaments, such as benches, birdbaths, statues, fountains, tables, and owls which he sells under the tradename 'Classical Concrete'. Much of his current work is *'a CAPAB co-production'* he comments humorously, as he still uses many of the styrofoam models and methods which he used in those days.

His work, although in its own way as unconventional as Frank Pritchard's, and also covertly defying the establishment and officialdom who demand that plans should be passed and approved, is also an expression of a need to create his own very personal and eccentric vision. There is a great deal of symbolism, spiritualism and mysticism in Kennedy's work - both conscious and undoubtedly also unconscious.

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In the Eastern Cape village of Bedford is a small but interesting example of Outsider Art made by a woman who felt alienated from, and persecuted by, her community. **Magda Labuschagne**, now retired, is the daughter of a policeman who came to Bedford in 1939. She later became a teacher and inspector of education. *'She was strange, with odd ideas. She was eased out,'* said an established resident of the village.

During the time of the Group Areas Act, black residents of certain parts of the village were forcibly moved out to the surrounding townships, and sub-economic houses for whites were built in place of their homes. It is in one of these houses that Magda Labuschagne lived a reclusive life. She



had a yard filled with piles of bricks and other building materials. The house was filled with rubbish and clutter, with hardly space to stand on the floor in the only room which I saw, let alone a chair to sit on. It was difficult to enter the front door, which she then locked behind us.

In the yard is a rondavel; its thatched roof has been covered in galvanized iron. Magda Labuschagne said she cut the iron to shape herself by laying it out in the road. She then placed it over the thatch to protect it from '*being burned by the blacks*', who she thought were vengeful because of the history of the area (interview Labuschagne, 1991). To add to the protection afforded by the metal roof she painted it bright blue, covered with many religious signs and symbols - amongst them a dove, snakes, the Bible, and Xhosa words.

In the garden there are also 12 slabs of stones positioned in a circle on the ground, which she says symbolize a clock. This reminds one of Helen Martins' clock tower. As very many other Outsider artists do, she has made some 'explanatory' signs, which are however, actually more confusing than what she is trying to explain. She said that Margaret Thatcher had sent her a book on Emily Hobhouse. On the back of a Gunston cigarette poster she had made a sign, on which she wrote the words *Hob by House* in a circle, and then in the middle of the 'by' had put a picture of a horse jumping over a bar. She said she made this sign because people drove past on Sunday afternoons and stared, and thought she was crazy.

*They were people from Bedford, Adelaide and Somerset East, especially the younger ones, or the women coming out of a neighbour's Bible Study or prayer meetings over the road. They would stand, and you could see the body language. And they'd point, and they thought I was mad also.*

This is also how Helen Martins thought people viewed her, and in fact how many did see her. And yet if she did not feel threatened or mocked, Helen was deeply grateful to people who seemed to enjoy and appreciate her work, and delighted in sharing it with them. Magda Labuschagne was very open to discuss her work and appreciative of a genuine interest shown in her.

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**Jeff Masemola** was a PAC member and a teacher from the Transvaal who was one of the political figures imprisoned on **Robben Island** and responsible for making the **statues in the inner courtyard of D Section**.

In his youth he was taught by Germans who had emphasised both academic and handwork skills and he emerged as an excellent carpenter and sculptor. He was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1963.

Two factors are particularly unusual in this situation: firstly that he wished to make sculptures in a prison and secondly, and even more so, that the prison authorities not only allowed him to do so, but after his release maintained them in excellent condition. This was until, shockingly



Jeff Masemola,  
D Section, Security Prison, Robben Island

The painted figures made from cement in this inner courtyard of the security prison are a man holding a bow with a dog sitting next to him, a woman stamping mealies, and a springbok. According to Govan Mbeki the straw hut surrounded by stones symbolised the San people. It is not known who painted the tree stump to look like the heads of birds and a hog.



Magda Labuschagne, Bedford, Eastern Cape

The thatched rondavel is covered with a second roof of galvanized iron, painted blue with various signs and symbols on it. Amongst these are a dove, snakes, the Bible and Xhosa words.

and inexplicably, they destroyed these works sometime after the writer had visited them in 1991.

*All the figures including the hut were made by Jeff Masemola. The figures were constructed with cement. The hut symbolised the San people or "Mthwa" as they are known in Xhosa. (Mbeki, 1991: 26.)*

The straw hut is surrounded by stones. The painted cement figures are a springbok, a man holding a bow with a dog sitting next to him, and a woman stamping mealies. There was also a large ballistic shell. Very little is known about this creation, but there is a great deal of nostalgia and longing in the work, as well as a strong statement of identity and physical presence. They make a cohesive unit in a very alien situation. By creating and introducing all the important elements of a domestic environment - man, woman, dog, hunting equipment, quarry and home - in such a situation, he was in fact making something, an ideal and fantasy, which was outside his present reality.

The statues were made from the cheapest and most easily available materials, which, as is so often the case, were cement and paint, as well as the straw and stones.

At the far end of the courtyard is a tree stump which has been worked and painted to bring out the remarkably lifelike heads of a hog and various birds. The paints used are white, terracotta and black - probably those which were available at the time in the prison - as the statues are also painted in the same colours. It is not known who made it, but there is fantasy and imagination to be found in the way in which the figures have been brought out of the wood. The same ability to see creatures in stumps or broken branches is found in Richard Netshipise's Park of Redeem in Venda.

Jeff Masemola was released in 1987 at about the same time as Govan Mbeki. When the riots were settled in Uitenhage in 1990 he was one of the PAC negotiators, and then tragically, he died in a motor accident.

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#### **Riebeeck-Kasteel, cement ox - Great Trek Centenary 1838-1938**

This cement ox commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Great Trek, in the village of Riebeeck-Kasteel, which is situated near Piketberg in the South-western Cape. It was made by Mr Stoffel Basson and is entitled 'Getroudheid' ['Faithfulness']. In its simple, even naïve, manner of creation, and in the materials used - cement and paint - this could very well fit into many of the Outsider Art creations studied in this work. If it were to be placed together with Jeff Masemola's statues on Robben Island, in the Cement Menagerie in Northumberland, or with Dirk van der Mescht's figures in the Eastern Cape, it would not look out of place in the least. Yet there is no question of it being Outsider Art. It was a single figure, made for a specific, commissioned, commemorative purpose. This example is used to demonstrate that single items could seem part of this form of creativity and yet it is the total environment and the driving spirit behind the creation of the works which are

important.

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Near the city of **Ahmedabad** in India there are some mud huts where the exterior walls are decorated with bas-relief designs and broken pieces of mirror depicting various events and occurrences in the daily lives of the people. Although this is not Outsider Art, it has been included to demonstrate the universality of some symbols and methods of decoration and that upon finding them one should not assume that one has discovered other examples of Outsider Art.

Another such example was found at the **Ajit Bhawan Palace in Jodphur, India**, which is now run as a hotel in this desert state of Rajasthan. The maharajah is an extremely imaginative and creative person. Each cabin in the grounds of the property has been individually built and decorated with whimsical details; some are built around trees, with contoured cement walls and roofs draped around the branches; another represents a tent in the desert. In some ways this place could be designated Outsider Art. However it is in fact too rationally and commercially conceived, by a man who is able to develop his creativity and at the same time make a living from it, to qualify for inclusion in this category of art.

A little wall, studded with various decorative objects, stands in the grounds, and is strongly reminiscent of the mosaic walls of Raymond Isidore's *Maison Picassiette* in France, and Jim Kennedy's *Wall of Time* in his Cashelmarra at Noordhoek in the Cape.

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**Jackson Xidonkani Hlungwani**, a Tsonga, was born in 1923 near the village of Mbhokoto, which is not far from Elim, in Gazankulu. He was ordained as a priest in the African Zionist Church in 1946, and started a church: 'Yesu Galileya One Apostol in Sayoni Alt and Omega'. He says that the name Xidonkani, which he has taken, means the colt or donkey. It was the donkey which carried Jesus. '*And now, I am that colt!*' (Burnett, 1989: 62). He dates his calling from a dramatic healing experience when Christ with two companions appeared to him in a vision and healed him from a severe leg disability, round about 1978.

In his daily life Jackson Hlungwani combines the roles of visionary, preacher, healer, woodcarver and builder in stone. He never attended school and says his only teacher has been Christ. He is a self-taught artist, who learnt from his father to work with wood, initially making domestic items. For many years he was regarded by local villagers '*... as a lunatic eccentric*' (Geers, 1990: 8). He believes in divine inspiration and creates remarkable woodcarvings of numerous Biblical figures, especially Old Testament characters. He is possibly most widely known for his sensitive and





(Above) A little wall studded and decorated with all manner of objects and relief designs at the Ajit Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur, India. However, this was purely a whimsical indulgence on the part of the maharajah - an astute business man who enjoyed creating many eccentric and unusual aspects at what he now runs as a hotel.

(Centre) This solitary painted cement ox was made to commemorate the centenary of the Great Trek in 1938 at the village of Riebeeck-Kasteel, western Cape.



(Below) Near the city of Ahmedabad in India some mud huts are decorated with broken pieces of mirror and bas-relief designs. They could very well appear to be Outsider Art. However, here this is part of local custom and not uniquely different from the customs and culture of the area.



Three isolated examples which do not qualify for the term 'Outsider Art', although they could easily be mistaken for this genre of art.

diverse carvings of fish. Fish are part of his environment and also used in the northern Transvaal as a decorative element as well as featuring in Tsonga proverbs. Art reviewer Kendall Geers described Hlungwani's fish in *The Star*:

*'Large flowing fishes weave their way through space with such grace that they can only be compared with Brancussi's "Birds in Flight".'* (Geers, 1989: 11).

There are other particularly notable subjects, such as Christ playing football and God holding a ball. Hlungwani also carves altar pieces, thrones, maces, animals, bowls, birds, human figures, panels - amongst many other subjects. Birds and snakes are images which have multiple meanings stemming from Hlungwani's dual heritage. Many of his Biblical figures have a monumental presence. He does not so much create something from his own imagination as bring out what is already inherently in the wood, as if he is in touch with the soul of each piece.

Acting on divine instruction he has created his *New Jerusalem* from rock and earth on top of a hill which overlooks the surrounding countryside. He first moved to the site in the early 1950s. Hlungwani says the oxidised dolerite boulders with which the site is strewn are baked *'like bricks in the ground by God.'* (Rich, 1989: 27). He has developed this site by working and bringing out its intrinsic qualities, in the same way as he works with wood to bring out the image contained within it. The large scale of the stonework, and manner of its construction, is in some ways reminiscent of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins.

*The New Jerusalem is a pilgrimage route - where mortal life is viewed as a journey.* (Rich, 1989: 27). The approach is up a long path, with various circular stone enclosures - open air rooms - ahead. Egypt, or the Temple of Jupiter, lies further up another stone ramp, and the site for a Golgotha, still to be constructed, is right at the top of the hill. New Jerusalem is an open air sanctuary with ramps, platforms, healing rooms, Christ's office, modest living quarters, and the chapel area which contains the knee-high circular stone platform which is the Altar of God - the women's altar - upon which are many free-standing sculptures. From amongst them towers up the Aerial of God. Nearby is the Altar of Christ - the man's altar - which is a two-metre high circular stone platform. His sculptures of Christ, Gabriel and Cain, amongst others, are an unusually powerful cohesion of local tradition and the Christian faith.

Two pits with a diameter of just over half a metre are carved into the stone of Christ's altar. Hlungwani explains that the right-hand one is *'the pit of Christ'*, which is in the direction of the rising sun. The other, left-hand one is the *'pit of the devil'*, and the setting sun. The rising and the setting sun, Christ and the devil are all elements which also played a critically important part of Helen Martins' work. The sun is also central to Chomo's whole ethos and motivation in creating his Village of Preludian Art in France.

Hlungwani later started rebuilding the village, which he calls *'Kanana'*, or *Canaan*, down in

the lowlands, at the place of his birth and near the grave of his father. This he says is the abode of his ancestors, while the *New Jerusalem* is the place where '... *everything begins and ends, the centre of the world, at the meeting point of heaven and earth, east and west.*' (Schneider, 1989: 58).

It seems, from information gained from Jackson Hlungwani, that prior to 1980 he had only produced a few pieces of woodcarving. The early work dates back to the 1960s. The vast body of later work is the result of a sudden and intense outpouring of inspired creative activity. He states unequivocally that '*his sculpture is a "God-given task" and that all his God-given tasks were assigned at the time of his vision.*' (Burnett, 1989: 31). This vision seems to have redirected a competent though sporadic carver into someone with a driving passion and a mission to fulfil through his work. '*Hlungwani's art illustrates a very personal and deeply religious vision, which is in the tradition of artists like Blake or Beuys.*' (Geers, 1989: 11).

He seems to move with great ease between Christian symbolism and local tradition, between God and the gods, between the Father and the ancestors, between the sacred and the mundane, the spiritual and the material dimensions of life. This state can even be seen on his person: together round his neck he wears a crucifix and a traditional medicine bottle. His world view, depicted through religious metaphor, is composed of opposites: life and death, good and evil, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, left and right, male and female, vertical and horizontal, interior and exterior. Helen Martins' work, although completely different, also speaks very much about the conflict between, and need to reconcile, opposites.

Hlungwani's Aerial of God, in addition to possibly also combining elements of his vision of a crucifix, is in some ways reminiscent of Helen's multitude of poles, many surmounted with stars, reaching up heavenwards, and her towers and spires. Stars feature prominently in some of Hlungwani's work, such as in his *Wisdom Circle* made as the cover for a new translation of the Book of Proverbs. Another seeming similarity between Hlungwani and some other Outsider artists, is described by Aggrey Klaaste:

*He did not care to know who I was and what my interest in him and his work was. He seemed eager to pour out his philosophy to this total stranger.* (Klaaste, 1989: 24).

This same attitude to interested strangers, by all accounts, was found in Helen Martins, who would take kindly disposed visitors around her Owl House and Camel Yard with enormous enthusiasm. (Interview Moyle, 1993). But she displayed no interest in finding out about her visitors, even if they themselves were artists (interview Delpont, 1986). This was also the case with both Chomo, at his Village of Preludian Art in France, and Jim Kennedy at his Cashelmara in Noordhoek. They were delighted to show visitors around and to explain their work and philosophy, but showed no interest in who the visitors were.



Sandra Summerfield



Sandra Summerfield



Sandra Summerfield

Hlungwani's Aerial of God at the top of New Jerusalem (top left). Portrait of Jackson Hlungwani (top right). A monumental wooden figure standing alone in the veld with a hut and chickens in the background. (bottom left). This is the site of Kanana, the seat of his ancestors (bottom left). Among boulders and trees on top of New Jerusalem are many powerful carved wooden figures which emanate a strong presence. (centre and bottom right)

Jackson Hlungwani's, *New Jerusalem and Kanana*, Gazankulu

Hlungwani uses indigenous wood. He prefers not to fell trees for their timber, but rather to use the wood of trees already dead. Amongst the tools which he uses, adzes are:

*... the most frequent, eloquent and trusted extensions of Hlungwani's hands. These are always home-made and differ from the traditional Tsonga adze, which is made of wood, and a hand-forged blade. Hlungwani constructs his most important tools from 'found objects'. The handles are made from bicycle frames, pipes and other extrusions while the blades are made from old car springs, planes, screwdrivers and rasps. In one instance a blade has been welded onto an old spanner body. (Rossouw, 1989: 63).*

This is again a trait of Outsider artists, to utilize readily available scrap material for their work and to make as much as possible themselves, without relying on other's expertise or knowledge.

The source of most of Hlungwani's ideas is the Bible, yet in it there are intimations of the entire body of humankind's artistic creativity, coming from all ages and all countries. This same phenomenon seems to be found in many examples of Outsider Art throughout the world - as if they are expressing the collective unconscious of mankind. This is probably one of the main reasons why the work of these Outsiders makes such a profound impact on viewers.

Chomo preaches that the material world is coming to an end and only those who follow his way will be saved. Jackson Hlungwani is driven by his message which he has been entrusted to deliver to the rest of mankind.

*According to him the old world is coming to an end. In its place will rise the new world symbolically and literally figured in the Hlungwani rock temple. (Klaaste, 1989: 25).*

Hlungwani's work has been widely exhibited and is found in many galleries. A major one-man exhibition, which travelled to various centres in South Africa was held in 1989. John van Zyl wrote in *The Star* about this exhibition: '*It is ... the most important sculpture exhibition yet held in South Africa.*' (Van Zyl, 1989).

As with all Outsider Art however, if individual pieces are taken out of context and seen not as part of an entire, cohesive body of work, they will lose some of their essential qualities which make the whole unique. A few of Helen Martins' sculptures or those from the Cement Menagerie or the Dredge's garden in Bakoven, placed in another arbitrary setting, do not emanate the magic which is found in their original sites. Powerful artistic works such as those of Hlungwani will stand on their own merits in any setting. However, they will still be diminished by being removed from the magic of their designated place of creation. Marilyn Martin, Director of the South African National Gallery, wrote on these lines about Hlungwani's work in the *Weekly Mail*:

*Ironically, the fumigated and oiled pieces which will be carefully cared for by private collectors, museums and institutions will never have the quality and patina of those which live among the stone walls on the hill. Exposure to the elements and creatures of nature somehow adds to these images of startling clarity and universality.'* (Martin, M. 1987).



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**Noria Mabasa**, born in 1939, is one of many outstanding woodcarvers living in Venda. What makes her unusual is that clay is the traditional medium used by women in Venda and it is only the men who are woodcarvers.

She has worked in clay since 1974 and also in wood since 1981. She said she dreams her sculptures and then goes out and finds an appropriate piece of wood with which to express her dream. Her dreams are similar to those of a sangoma, or traditional healer. Her wood carvings are remarkably complex and powerful, sought after by galleries as well as private collectors, and her work has been widely exhibited.

Noria Mabasa decorates the surrounds of her homestead, which consist of the traditional rondavels as well as a western-type house with metal framed windows, as a cohesive unit, using clay as the medium. Standing guard, or welcomingly, on either side of the low wall to the entrance forecourt to the house are two figures. These are made from clay, and being unbaked, need constant attention to stop them from being destroyed by the elements. On first visiting her in 1987 there were figures of two bare-breasted girls flanking the entrance. In 1991 there were dress-suited gentleman in their place. As can be seen in the illustration, wood was used as an armature for the arms, from one of which the clay has fallen away. The surrounding walls are shaped and decorated in the local traditional fashion and painted with black, white and terracotta paint.

Plants form an important element in Noria Mbasas overall design, and unusual and imaginative use is made of the human figure to create planters. Some of these are of the lower half of a kneeling female torso, filled with soil, in which plants can grow. Other figures, either made from clay or wood, are to be found half concealed in the plants which surround the house. These may be entire figures or possibly only a bust. Noria Mabasa has a keen sense of observation, and creates various types of people in clay, such as a Scotsman wearing a kilt, a business man in suit and tie, or a soldier in uniform, as well as those of the local population in traditional garb. The figures are then painted, and many are sold to tourists at a local art and craft centre.

Noria Mabasa's work in her domestic environment is mostly restful and not disturbing, whereas some of her woodcarvings, which lie around the yard or house in various stages of completion, are of complex mythological subjects which challenge and unsettle the viewer. She will explain, often with actions, the reasons and vision behind the work, the combinations of figures or animals, and of how she was given the visions in dreams. On the whole, her work in clay arises from her surrounding material world, whereas her wood carvings emerge from her unconscious in visions and dreams.

Both Noria Mabasa, and Richard Netshipise in his Park of Redeem, have expressed themselves in a manner unusual in their culture, where it is not customary to create a decorative



Noria Mabasa, Venda

Clay sculptures, some of which are ornamental and others also functional, at well-known sculptor Noria Mabasa's home in Venda. Some of these sculptures are painted, and many are incorporated into the garden or the architecture of the house and surrounding clay walls.







Noria Mabasa, Venda

Noria Mabasa demonstrates how she envisaged the wooden sculpture she carved (top left). The figures being admired by some of the young villagers, are made of clay.





Richard Netshipise's *Garden of Redeem*, Venda

Richard Netshipise created his *Garden of Redeem* at a rural village in Venda. Even the small shrubs in the garden are decorated with paint, and found pieces of wood are painted to show figures suggested by their shape.



garden. The norm is to grow vegetable crops and fruit trees and the area surrounding the home is hard, packed earth swept clean. The customary decorative elements in Venda are confined to decoration of the walls of the rondavels and the low walls linking huts which define an outdoor courtyard area between the huts.

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**Richard Netshipise** is the creator of the **Park of Redeem** and the **Year of Redeem** garden, found near Sibasa in Venda. On first discovering his garden in 1987 he was not at home. His garden was very conspicuous, firstly because of all the colour introduced through paint, and secondly, unlike all the surrounding gardens and plots on which food crops were being grown, his was totally decorative. The ground surrounding his rondavels and between each bed was neatly swept and each bed was outlined with stones splashed with white paint. The stems of small trees and bushes had been painted with diagonal stripes of various coloured paint; metal drums were painted and planted; tree stumps were painted to bring out figures of animals which could be found in them; items were created from household goods, such as some two-litre plastic bottles cut and painted to resemble sharks or voracious fishes and hung from branches in the shrubs or on pieces of wire, and other plants were clipped into a fairly sophisticated form of topiary.

As in so many other Outsider Art surroundings, signs are a prominent part of the whole design. Held between the two 'front legs' of a black and white tree stump 'dog', with red nose and mouth, is a bright sign announcing 'Year of Redeem'. Twisted bits of metal stick up into the air, and hanging baskets of plants are suspended from branches. Many of the beds have dead tree branches or stumps in the centre of them, painted in yellow, black and white stripes or black and white spots. At the top of one dead stump a sign says 'Park of Redeem'. Chickens run around the garden, as is common in rural areas, and was found in so many of the sites visited for this research.

However, on a return visit in 1991, Richard Netshipise was home on holiday from the city where he works. He sounded quite surprised, and then pleased when I said that I had liked his garden so much and photographed it four years earlier, and had now come back specially to find him and look at it again. This, however, is a good example of the transitoriness of Outsider Art. He obviously gave no importance to the garden he had created earlier and it had now become mostly a conventional garden, growing mealies and some trees and flowers, with chickens and children running around in it.

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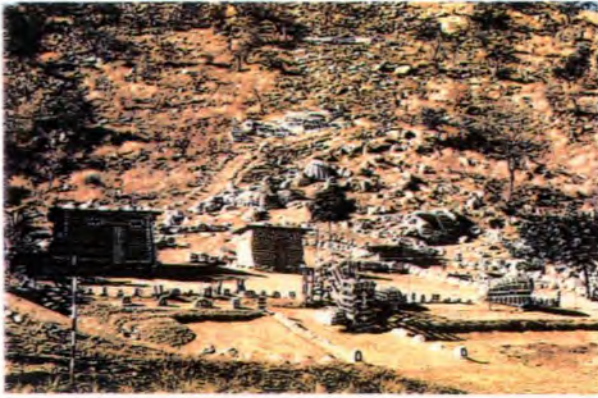
**Nukain Mabusa's painted stone garden** is situated on a farm called Esperado at Revolver Creek near Barberton in the Eastern Transvaal, where he was employed as a labourer. He was born in southern Mozambique. In 1976 his age was estimated to be in the mid-sixties, but he claimed to be 100 years old. Although he had had no schooling he was considered to be an intelligent and interesting person. He was unmarried, and lived alone as a somewhat eccentric person within the community of labourers employed on the farm.

Within a period of approximately 15 years, commencing in the late 60s, he created his unique vision of a garden, encouraged by the owners of the farm. For hundreds of holidaymakers driving past on the way to and from the Kruger National Park it became a major tourist attraction and landmark. They would stop and gaze at his remarkable creation. He had painted all the rocks, stones and boulders on the sloping hillside where his home was situated in bright geometrical patterns consisting of dots and stripes.

The homestead consisted of two single-room huts. A splitpole fence decorated with stripes formed one of the boundaries, a wire fence another. He called a triangular area of land surrounding his home his 'garden', from which he cleared the vegetation, exposing all the rocks and partially buried boulders. The bigger rocks were manipulated and propped up to face towards the road and stones were moved to edge and define paths between other open sections, and also leading up from the road towards a decoratively painted stile surmounting the bordering fence. Further similar paths led up the hillside behind the huts towards groups of painted rocks and boulders. These and the others in his 'garden' were all decorated with paint in a variety of patterns.

The urge to decorate started privately in and around his home. He first carved initials into two upright dining room chairs, and then decorated them and the interior of his huts with yellow paint applied in dots, squares and stripes. The remaining paint was used on the stones outside the door. The seed was sown and soon he began venturing further and further into publicly visible domain, transforming the rocks and boulders with which the area was strewn with crudely painted stripes in black, white, yellow and red. He also decorated the facades of his huts.

As with most Outsider artists, financial considerations, other than to cover basic living expenses and to buy materials for his work, were of little importance to Nukain Mabusa. He bought paint and brushes with his wages and tips he received from visitors, but never attempted to charge visitors for entering or photographing his property. He was also not interested in creating souvenirs for sale. Kindly disposed people would help him by giving him the occasional tin of paint. However, in 1976 a donation of 50 litres of paint from a paint manufacturer was arranged for him by a well-wisher, and this gift changed his life. This, augmented by tips from visitors, enabled him to give up working as a labourer and work full-time as an artist. He received encouragement and



Peter Cooper



John Clarke



John Clarke



John Clarke



John Clarke



Renee Lion-Cachet



Gert Coetzee

Nukain Mabusa's *Painted Stone Garden*, Eastern Transvaal Lowveld

Top left: Nukain Mabusa's home 1973

Top right: The 'altar' boulder to the right of the huts, 1982.

Middle right and third down on left: Part of the stone garden, late summer, 1985

Second down on left: An elephant painted by Nukain Mabusa.

Bottom right: Nukai Mabusa in his 'studio' hut, 1975

Bottom left: Nukain Mabusa standing on top of the stile in front of his hut, 1975.



support from his employers for this step. It also meant that he was then publicly acknowledged as an artist. There were many more colours in the paint range than he had used previously. Instead of expanding the gardens as had been expected, he began retouching his earlier work, adding more richness, subtlety and texture to his work. The rocks in his triangular 'garden' he kept solely black and white, but those further up the hillside became more and more colourful. There was a strong sense of balance and design in his use of pattern and colour and the results were aesthetically striking and pleasing.

He used to invite visitors into one of his huts, which was embellished in geometric patterns in black, white and yellow paint, with various items such as photographs and newspaper cuttings stuck to the walls. John Clarke, who did extensive research on Mabusa, quotes a reporter from the Nelspruit newspaper *Vulamehlo*:

*Step inside Mr. Mabusa's shack, an array of colour strikes one. Cherubs and the Premier Mr. John Vorster stand shoulder to shoulder with King George VI and his royal family, General Smuts and Captain Devil, while several brightly coloured wall-hangings pose grave questions such as what a house without a mother would be worth. (Clarke, 1992: 27).*

Such decoration is reminiscent of many other works that have been described here. In the Cement Menagerie wise, trite and homely sayings were written and distributed widely throughout the garden. There was a multitude of pictures in the Owl House which combined incompatible subjects, many with quotations printed below them (see Chapter Six). Noria Mabasa combined incongruous elements in three-dimensional form in her clay sculptures, such as a man in an army uniform together with one in full dinner jacket regalia, and a Scotsman in kilt - and this all in the midst of rural Africa.

Mabusa then introduced simplified, almost symbolic animal and bird motifs into his rock decoration in the early 70s. These blended admirably with the geometric patterns. Amongst them were a lion, giraffe and elephant, buck, and birds - both flying and walking. The only human figure which he ever depicted was a simplified, life-size self-portrait of a man holding a paint brush, painted with a broad, partially dotted line.

He also created two crucifixes; one was painted in black and white on a rock half-way up the slope, and the other was a free-standing one made from scrap metal, and painted in dots and stripes. Unfortunately, nothing is known of Mabusa's religious convictions, but this Christian symbol features in many Outsiders' work, including that of Helen Martins. Since mankind's earliest origins, rocks and stones have been associated in most cultures with spiritual, religious and mythological events and places. Stonehenge is probably the most well-known example. In Buddhist countries, such as Nepal, travellers place rocks on mounds and offer prayers as they pass by on the left hand side of these mounds. Mabusa was working with an element with which he evidently deeply identified. By all accounts he had created a heightened yet intangible aura in his work, which would



be part of the reason for its strong attraction for visitors. This was described by John Clarke: *'The hillside of painted stones and boulders as created by Mabusa, did have a compelling atmosphere, which may be described as magical or spiritual.'* (Clarke, 1992: 33).

About his work Mabusa said: *'I have the most beautiful garden in the whole world. If I had enough paint I would paint the whole mountain.'* (Clarke, 1992: 28). Mabusa was of Tsonga or Swazi origin, and yet no tradition of creating decorative domestic gardens is to be found in either of these cultures. He created his own unusual 'garden' in a situation not conducive to making a conventional garden. There was no water supply available for irrigation, the rocky and sloping land was unsuitable for cultivation, and he had little money. However, it is unlikely that Mabusa ever wished to make such a garden. His was a deep and intuitive need to decorate his immediate environment in the most expressive way possible. As with most Outsider artists he used what was readily to hand, and in his case it was his home - the two huts - and then the natural materials abounding in the vicinity - rocks and stones. These were simply and dramatically transformed with the use of paint. What he used initially would have been discarded remains of tins of paint. Neighbours and visitors also gave him the odd tin or two. Mabusa later even decorated his clothing in the same fashion, in patterns similar to those painted on the rocks, thereby becoming himself part of the entire art work. This showed how very closely he identified himself with his creation, and if he could not be part of it, it is likely he would have lost all reason for existing.

As seems the case with so many Outsider artists, and for no discernable reason, Mabusa's creative urge suddenly terminated. This may have been because he felt he had completed his work and there was nothing more to be done. Although evidently in perfect health, in 1980 he announced, inexplicably, that he had tired of life, was ready to die, and wished to be buried next to his huts. In other words, it appears that he wished, in death, still to remain part of his work. This wish created great dissension amongst his fellow farm workers, as it would have been totally contrary to local custom, and he was told that it was not possible to dig his grave there. Deeply affronted, Mabusa's reaction was to leave his home. He went off and, moving from farm to farm, started working again as a labourer. However, a year later he committed suicide. Helen Martins is a prime example of another death occurring tragically in this manner.

Today not much remains of Mabusa's bright and vibrant stone garden. The huts, fences and stile have long since fallen into disrepair, the hillside has again become covered with vegetation, and after 14 years of exposure to the elements, the painted rocks have become faded. Even if it were to be restored by art students, as has been suggested, the essential creative spirit of this garden has gone and it is most unlikely that the original essence could ever be recaptured.

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**Roger Chomo**, known simply as 'Chomo', was born in 1907 in a small village in the north of France. He is the creator of the extraordinary **Village of Preludian Art at Achères la Forêt**, situated near Fontainebleau in France. Chomo's work is not only that of an artist, but of a man who is also an eccentric visionary, a philosopher, an architect, a poet and a musician, as well as being a sculptor and painter. He feels he has an urgent message for the world: to leave materialism behind before it is too late and replace it with spirituality.

In his formative years he was introduced to spiritualism by an aunt, and showed talents in the realms of both art and poetry. He was trained as an artist but said he later had to 'unlearn' everything he had learned then.

*I attended art school in Paris. Schools are useful to begin with. Afterwards you've got to get rid of all you've learnt - get all the mud off you. (Interview Chomo, 1994).*

He married, had children, and was working as a carpet designer when the First World War broke out and he was deported to Poland by the Germans. On his eventual return to France he moved to live on the property which his wife had bought during his absence, situated in the middle of a forest near Fontainebleau.

*He suffered a lot as a prisoner of war. When he came back he knew he had a mission in life. His wife had bought the land. He liked it and knew he had to start his mission there. It was a turning point in his life and it was from here that he knew he'd been chosen as a 'sacrifice person'. (Interview Chomo's female companion, 1994).*

From the road the entrance to the property is difficult to find, but the inconspicuous horizontal row of motor car tyres with a line through them, attached to the overgrown fence, denotes this as an unconventional boundary marker. Later one finds this same motif of circles intersected with a line repeated on Chomo's garments. A narrow winding path through the forest is punctuated by the broken debris of discarded childhood and domestic life. Various dolls are tied to trees with pieces of wire, and items such as a vacuum cleaner, a stove, a fridge, and numerous cryptic signs written in French mark points along the way, accompanied by trailed thin strips of curling white plastic tape. Finally one emerges at a gate adorned with many dolls, amidst other objects. Here one pays his devoted female companion-cum-acolyte to enter, and is subjected to an impassioned explanation, in French, of the master's philosophy and his work. She says she knew him in another life:

*He believes in reincarnation. He's now in a superior state of being. He says 'why have I been put on earth as material - I who have evolved so far? It's so I can wake up the earth. Why are we on earth? That's the question. The answer is simply because we have to combat and overcome matter. His first message was: 'Halt consumerism'. Chomo said to people: 'Be careful, it's an easy way, it's a trap.' He shouted and no one heard him. He suffered with his message for 60 years and was not heard. (Interview Chomo's female companion, 1994).*

There are a number of buildings on the property, each serving a specific purpose. Then interspersed between trees and buildings are many hundreds of sculptures, paintings, trees decorated with tinfoil, or with items suspended from them. There is a cross decorated with old shoes, human figures or busts made in a large variety of media and styles, and mythological or imaginary animals and figures. One is the large tortured figure of an ox or cow with melted plastic covering some of the wire mesh framework. Some figures have eyes made from hub caps and wheels of toys.

The buildings comprise three temples, one large and two small, called the 'Church of the Poor', the 'Refuge' and the 'Sanctuary of Scorched Wood'. The latter is one of the smaller temples furthest from the entrance and was created to contain the different burnt wood sculptures. Then there is the 'Corridor of Dreams' - sections of underground tunnel reminiscent of trenches in the war. One has sculptures of a spider and a frog inside. The house is not much more than a shack. The large temple is made from wooden poles, chicken netting, white plaster studded with bottles which act as stained glass windows, and a corrugated iron roof. It contains hundreds of statues created in a multitude of different styles. His companion explained more about the purpose and method of construction:

*It is not a cathedral, it's a temple. It is built with an armature of chicken wire and the figures inside are people - angels. There is plaster in between the bottles, and the bottles that are coloured blue have paper or plastic inside. (Interview Chomo's female companion, 1994).*

Lying around are huge pile of bottles, reminiscent of the similar stores of bottles which can be seen in earlier photographs of Helen Martins' Camel Yard. Bottles are used to edge some paths or other areas, and also in building walls.

Materials that he has used include chicken netting, plastic and melted plastic, cement fondue, copper oxide, tin foil, tyres, broken toys; household utensils such as stoves, fridges, a vacuum cleaner, and a wheelbarrow; waste material such as bottles, broken pieces of glass and tiles.

Chomo's work combines sophistication and a facility in using a great variety and range of materials, with a deep mysticism and visionary quality. His entire body of work is essentially an intricate, complex whole; although appearing random, each of the parts contributes to a monumental vision.

He said the sun is the essence of everything. The Africans were in direct contact with everything and the white people had damaged all this; they should have sent the white people, who are bandits and thieves, away.

*The people are much purer in Africa, and I am pure. I am very energized by cosmic forces and at the age of 88 I just work with the sun. There's only one hope left on earth - the sun. Religions don't exist anymore. Without the sun, we've had it! At the moment I'm doing solar signs to protect different people.*







Chomo's *Village of Preludian Art*,  
Achères la Forêt, France

Bottom left: Chomo's female companion permits visitors to enter the inner and main area after the forest path. Broken dolls and other objects are tied to the fence. Centre left: The inside of the temple where the effect of stained glass windows is successfully achieved by using coloured bottles. Top left: A cross with a face and old shoes hanging from it, and thin white plastic strips swirling in front of it. Top right: The side of the house with burnt wood sculptures and free-standing sculptures, many swathed in plastic protection from the elements scattered in the grounds. Centre right: Another view of the house - note stove chimney on right. Bottom right: Tinfoil figures against a tree, plastic swathed statues, giant canvases in the background and a live chicken.

Again, like so many other Outsider artists discussed in this chapter, his work grows spontaneously and intuitively and is not pre-planned.

*I work all alone. There's no system in what I'm creating; no system behind it - it's permanent creation. When I was younger there was a system in everything, like music - doh, rey, me etc. Now there's no system. Now we're going into the cosmic realm of music. I've got a special room of laser music. I want to be like Noah who built his ark and I would save people. That's why I'm making all these protective sun signs to save people in the future. (Interview Chomo, 1994).*

Chomo's companion, who emphatically stated that he was not a creator of Art Brut, elaborated on his work and philosophy:

*He is not an artist; he's here with a religious message which he has to transmit to others. He liberated himself from art as such. After art school he went back to the source, back to the beginnings. Because he went to art school, is why you can't put him into the category of Art Brut, and also because he has a message to convey. In Art Brut they go the public rubbish dump and create art with what they pick up.*

*In 1960 he held his first, and last, exhibition to try to get his message across. It wasn't a success because there was a gap between what he wanted to convey and what people could understand. He started work with his bois brulé [burnt wood] statues, and then used other things. For the last three years now he's been liberating himself from matter through drawings showing vibrations. He's entirely liberated himself from matter now - he's got one foot on the other bank - and through sound he's starting the new world. Now he's stopped vibration drawings and he's only working with sound. He's starting his work as a prophet. (Interview Chomo's female companion, 1994).*

Chomo does not believe in God, but rather in the sun, the 'great light'. *'Religion is an invention by adults who still want a father and mother when they haven't got them any more.'* (Danchin, 1989/90:45).

Since his one and only exhibition in Paris, he has resolutely refused to sell any of his work. Instead he chooses to live frugally on what he receives from the public who come to see his work where it naturally belongs, in the forest and as part of a greater whole.

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### **Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh, India**

What must be the largest, and one of the most remarkable examples of Outsider Art in the world is Nek Chand Saini's amazing Rock Garden, constructed in the city of Chandigarh, India. It is built on a scale and with a scope that defies imagination; it covers approximately 60 acres. His dream vision, which started in secret, was officially opened to the public in 1976. Since then approximately 12 million people have walked round in delighted wonder, and an average of 5 000 people visit it every day.

It was a miracle that this garden, made mostly from waste, survived in the first place. The

model city of Chandigarh, sited in the Himalayan foothills in Punjab and designed by the French architect Le Corbusier, was India's great pride and symbolized the new, free India. It had been commissioned by Prime Minister Nehru in 1947, at the time of the political partition of colonial India into the independent nations of India and Pakistan.

Nek Chand was born in 1924 and educated up to matric. He worked as a road inspector in the Chandigarh Public Works Department and was put in charge of a warehouse and dump on the land which is now his Rock Garden. His great interest was the remarkable forms he found in natural stones. He used to roam the foothills of the Shivalik mountains, select stones which resembled human, animal and abstract forms, and bring them back on his bicycle. There are more than 20 000 of these rocks in the garden. In addition to these, over a period of seven years he collected vast amounts of urban and industrial waste, as well as rubble from 24 villages which had been demolished to make way for the new city. He took it all to a hut concealed in the Monsoon Gorge in the thick forest. From 1958 to 1974, during the day he worked at his mundane job and then at night, either alone or assisted by his wife, worked creating figures from his dreams. He burnt bicycle and motor car tyres to chase away myriads of mosquitos and to provide light. His great fear was that if his creation was discovered by officialdom it would be destroyed.

Fortunately, when this network of paths and interleading courtyards filled with hundreds of sculptures was accidentally stumbled upon, by an anti-malaria party on reconnaissance duty in the forest, the unique value of his work was recognized. The government of Chandigarh took Nek Chand off road work and put him in charge of it as superintendent, with a salary and 100 unskilled labourers to assist him. Later he was made Curator-Director, with 300 people working under him. This was assistance on a far greater scale than any of the other artists whose work has been discussed had, but he was and still is the essential driving force and creative spirit behind it all.

In 1990 the Rock Garden covered 25 acres. A further 35 acres were being developed and were nearly ready to open to the public. Apart from his natural rocks and cement, all his work is constructed from waste. He has developed a wide network of garbage recycling and many of the city's institutions now unload their waste at the site. Amongst items used for sculptures and structures are bicycle frames, seats, electrical fixtures and factory waste, mudguards, forks, exhaust pipes, marbles, coke bottle tops, broken clay pots, burnt brick powder, slate and cowrie shells.

Nek Chand is a warm, gentle, modest and accessible man. There is no sign of ego whatsoever in his being. Although he has a constant stream of overseas and local visitors coming to see him, he was quite happy to give the greater part of two days to showing us around and on departure presented us with a Nek Chand cement and ceramic bird, gaily wrapped in multi-coloured rags, to fly home to South Africa. He is recognized and greeted affectionately and with immense respect by many local visitors, and welcomes some of them to have tea with him in his pebble-lined

office situated in a bridge over one of the recessed walkways. Life-size figures made from scrap materials, adorned with medals, sunglasses and other ornamentation stand against the walls.

Nek Chand Saini has been described as '*the untutored genius*'. When asked how it all began, he replied: '*From childhood I was in the habit of creating these things and these habits continue.*' (Interview Nek Chand, 1990). He used to be fascinated by his mother's stories of kings and queens, gods and goddesses, and as a child he built castles and forts in a stream bed near his village. His dream was: '*to build a kingdom as an offering to the gods and goddesses of the world ... a secret, sacred trust.*'

*I have no theories about art.... It comes from my heart and my imagination. I remember God all the time. Whatever I do is not in keeping with any design. I work by intuition and inspiration. I wanted to build a holy place where the universal meaning of all gods, Jehovah and Christ, Buddha and Lord Krishna, is respected.*  
(M.Arch Thesis, S.S. Bhatti)

He has used the natural topography of the area, with its stream, slopes, undulations and elevations in a wonderfully sensitive manner. Nek Chand incorporates plants as an integral part of the entire design and has established a large nursery for this purpose. He plants trees such as mulberries, guavas and oranges with children, birds and animals in mind. All the plants are raised from plants discarded in the city's wealthy areas or seedlings recovered from the city's garbage dumps.

On entering the Rock Garden the first stage is largely devoted to his remarkable rock collection, with background walls of many textures. These incorporate such items as foundry slag, broken porcelain insulators, clay pebbles threaded on upright wires, smashed tiles, crockery and river stones. The textures of leaves often serve to heighten contrasts of colour and shapes. The route through is along winding walkways, flowing with the natural gradients of the site, to various wide arenas or courtyards. The sides slope gently upwards, starting at shoulder height, to display broad expanses of nearly life-size figures. Some of them are mythical creatures, others a marching horde of queens, with broken glass bangles used for their saris and real hair collected from village haircutters which has bleached to a reddish colour in the sun. Then there will be subjects such as an army of soldiers, fanciful figures from his imagination, many different types of animals - known or imaginary - Indians in traditional dress, peasants, kings and queens, dancers and teams of football players. Some have teacups on their heads as hats, and others hold trays of beverages for a party. This reminds one of Helen Martins' Debauchery Corner in her Camel Yard. Some hold troughs of pot plants in front and others lean forward carrying their plants behind them.

It is the scale of the entire complex which is so awe-inspiring, and the remarkable range of his imagination. This is a holy place: to enter one area from another the visitor stoops down through a low archway, as if paying obeisance to the royal and divine presences which people the Rock



Garden, or otherwise becomes small like a child to enter into his magic dream-world. One archway is surmounted by a giant slag waste bear and visitors grasp a shiny steel cross-rod to swing low, between the bear's legs.

Not only has he made these huge areas containing over 5000 human and animal figures, but he has also constructed 25 metre high waterfalls, cascades, cupolas, minarets and even steep cliff sides with realistic twisted cement roots of cement trees clinging onto them. A canyon leads to a Greek-style amphitheatre where dance, drama or musical productions can be held with seating for 700 people.

With no qualifications or training, Nek Chand has alone created an integral whole of immense complexity and power. His intuitive sense of the cohesiveness of the seen and unseen elements, the past, the future, the spiritual and material dimensions of life, the transformation of waste into new possibilities, are what make this Rock Garden the indefinable wonder that it is. If it had been commissioned and planned as a project, it would have required the combined talents of architects, electrical, mechanical and civil engineers, artists, sculptors, landscape designers, horticulturalists, quantity surveyors and administrators to become a reality - not to mention a furniture designer and doll-maker. It would still lack the vision of Nek Chand though. A young visitor said: 'He is a child at heart - he has a child's vision.'

S S Bhatti, principal of the Chandigarh School of Architecture wrote his masters thesis on Nek Chand's work. He said:

*People didn't take Nek Chand seriously. But I think that is the whole point about the garden - that it is outside the academic level. I found his work more interesting than all the education I had in college. For three long years I visited him as if I were going to a temple and each time I came away with a new idea. His work is as significant as the Taj Mahal. There is nothing of importance in between.*

Nek Chand draws on local everyday existence as well as Indian mythology and his imagination for his subject matter. His symbols and images are recognizable to everybody, and the result is, he says, that he does not plan ahead but allows his work to unfold naturally and organically. He has the added freedom that his creativity is not filtered through the inhibitions of a formal art education.

He has been honoured widely internationally. Amongst others, in America, the city of Baltimore awarded him Honourary Citizenship in 1985, and the Mayor of the District of Columbia, Washington DC, proclaimed October 5 1985 'Nek Chand Saini Day'. This was because he had created, over a period of five months, a permanent Fantasy Garden for the Capitol Children's Museum. 'We took 50 tons of material to Washington,' he said, 'twelve tons by plane.' (Interview, Nek Chand, 1990). He was awarded La Grande Medaille de la Ville de Paris in 1984; the Padma Shri Award from India; and was the first Indian to receive the Swiss Rolex Honourable Mention



**Nek Chand's *Rock Garden*, Chandigarh, India**

(Top right) Drums were used as moulds for the cement wall surrounding the *Rock Garden* surmounted with ceramic-covered cement birds.

(Left) Visitors marvel as they progress along walkways between sloping sides on which stand thousands of figures - amongst them real or fabulous animals, soldiers, soccer players, imaginary figures, etc.

(Centre right) Nek Chand stands amongst an army of soldiers.

(Bottom) A myriad of cement women wearing saris made from broken glass bangles and on their heads human hair collected from hairdressers' shops.







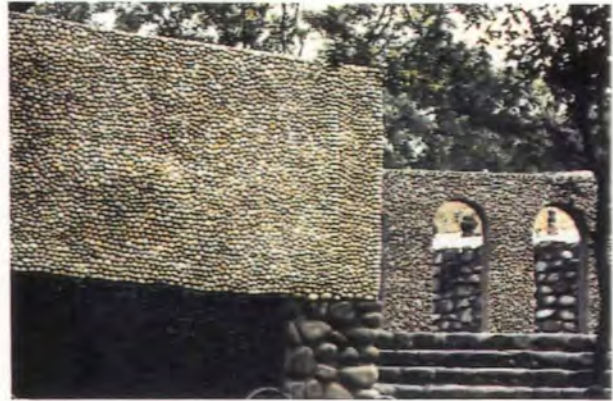
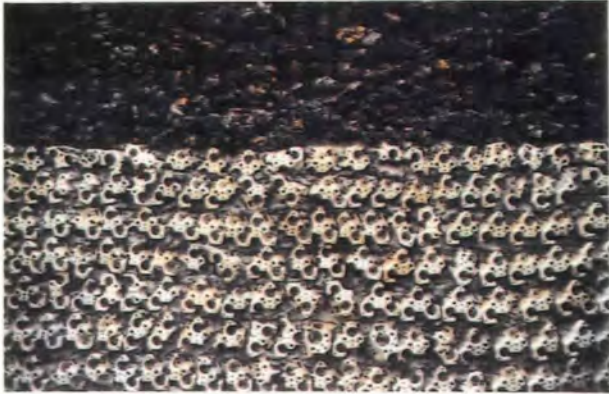
Nek Chand's *Rock Garden*, Chandigarh, India

Details of various sections of the Rock Garden, including a row of giant cement trees.



Nek Chand's *Rock Garden*, Chandigarh, India

Some of the many grandiose structures, including pavilions, waterfalls and cascades. An exciting range of texture details are obtained from using, amongst many others, items such as broken porcelain insulators, slag from iron foundries, and smooth river pebbles.







Nek Chand's *Rock Garden*, Chandigarh, India

Birds covered in broken coloured glass bangles; a bear made from foundry slag; a chair in one of the pavilions covered in brilliant scraps of material with some figures in alcoves behind; another group of figures covered in broken crockery, some of whom are carrying trays of tea; and Nek Chand in his study. The study is situated on a bridge spanning one of the walkways and the walls and ceiling are covered in smooth pebbles. Behind him are some of the many figures made from assorted bright fabrics. These are sporting dark glasses, rosettes, badges, strings of clay beads and various other trinkets. On the wall behind hangs an old battered doll.

Award for Enterprise in Individuals in 1990. In addition to the USA, he has had his work exhibited in Russia, Spain, France and England over the past decade.

P S Knight, an English sculptor, said:

*I have long suspected that an education in art could possibly be detrimental to a truly talented person. Mr Chand's creation pleases me all the more because his Rock Garden confirms my suspicions a thousand-fold. The element most impressed on my memory will be that of the multiplicity of styles, styles that, if taken out of context, would be acclaimed as strongly European! And yet everything in the garden complements and lives in harmony with everything else, modern and ancient, 'European' with traditional Indian. Perhaps this is the great success, that everyone can identify everything in the garden as being present in their own life, regardless of nationality, admiration and praise. (Raw Vision 1, 1989: 25)*

This brings to mind Roger Chomo's comments about having to unlearn everything he had learned in art school, and the fact that many of the most compelling of the Outsider artists' works looked at in this thesis come from people who have had no art training.

The range of Nek Chand's subject matter, and the multiplicity of styles, materials, textures and scale, means that everyone is able to relate to aspects of his creation, whatever their own background may be. Stemming from Punjabi peasant origins, where art is accepted as a natural part of life, Nek Chand's work has a raw earthiness, and grows directly from an organic and instinctive base.

Work from many of the Outsider Art environments discussed here could very easily be transposed across cultures and continents without seeming out of place; on a greater scale, Helen Martins' sculptures could easily become part of Nek Chand's rock Garden, and equally, many of the Rock Garden sculptures would not be out of place in the Camel Yard which itself contains such a wide range of subject matter and incorporates the worlds of major religions.

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The only work known to the author that is comparable to Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh in India, in the monumentality of its vision and proportions, is that of **Antoni Gaudí, in Barcelona, Spain**. Although not generally regarded as an Outsider artist, he was a man who defies neat categorization, and there is much about both him and his work that pertains to Outsider Art. He was trained as an architect and worked on commissions, and yet his work differs completely from any other architect working at the same time, or for that matter, ever since. His work was the outcome of an all-consuming vision arising from deep religiosity and his belief that architecture defies nature; it was served by, but in no way subservient to, his professional skills. Had he received no training whatsoever, he would, surely, like Sibusiso Mbhele in the foothills of the Drakensberg with his

helicopters and aeroplanes, visualised through perspective drawings, and have found ways of exploring that driving inner creativity which could not be denied. Nek Chand also created his Rock Garden regardless of the reality that he totally lacked training in many seemingly essential disciplines. Although executed by many people, the creations of both Gaudí and Nek Chand arose entirely from the passion and inner vision of these two men alone. For neither was personal gain the motivation for their work.

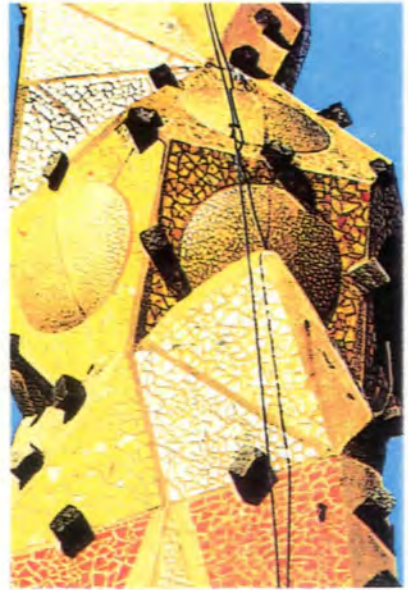
Gaudí was born in Catalan in 1852. He used materials in plastic and wholly unconventional ways; his buildings often appeared to have been sculpted and moulded rather than built by methods that are generally understood in western culture. Amongst materials he incorporated were ceramic tiles - also much favoured by many Outsider artists. He showed great mastery of unconventional design, and is recognized as the sole Spanish representative of the Art Nouveau movement, which spread throughout the world between 1880 and 1910. With flair and audacity he adapted and remoulded elements from architectural styles ranging from medieval to Gothic, Arabic, Baroque, and revolutionary concepts of Cubism. What he produced were completely new creations differing in essence from anything ever seen before. He experimented with bold design concepts far in advance of most architects of his time. According to the prestigious Swiss publication *du: atlantis*, Gaudí did not produce his designs in the manner of other architects:

*'It is all the more astonishing to think that Gaudí did not design at the drawing-board but, trusting to a sure instinct, sought to give his visions solid shape with traditional materials like stone and brick.'* (Rotzler, 1966: summary p. 2).

For a professional architect this was an extraordinary manner in which to work, and must have been extremely disconcerting for his fellow workers. Nek Chand said that he worked entirely by inspiration and instinct, and his work grew under his direction without the need for plans and scale models. This is also true of probably all the other Outsider artists' works examined here, with the exception of Sibusiso Mbhele who drew idealized designs for his aeroplanes and helicopters, and the statues at the Cement Menagerie in Northumberland which were first drawn by John Fairnington.

Much of Gaudí's work is symbolic and related to religious themes. The Church of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona is probably the project for which he is best known. He started working on it in 1883 and continued for 43 years. It thus shows many of the different phases of his architectural development and interests. The towers show elements of Cubist influence. It was (and still is) largely incomplete at the time of his accidental death in 1926. The building was financed entirely through donations and for him the work was completely an act of piety. In his later years Gaudí withdrew into himself and concentrated almost solely on building the Sagrada Familia. He was viewed with reverence as a saint amongst the local population, living in a modest builder's hut amongst the poorest of the poor in the shadow of the 'Cathedral of the Poor.' He became





Edifici al Escudo De Oro, S.A.



Zueras



Francisco Casanelli

Antoni Gaudi, Barcelona, Spain

Details of some of Gaudi's remarkable fanciful architecture, with (top centre) the famous Sagrada Familia, and (bottom row) the Porter's Lodge at Güell Park and one of the play relaxation areas.



increasingly involved with the work, even to the extent of sharing the financial worries of the project.

*A photograph taken in 1924 shows Gaudí, a man of small build with snow-white hair and beard, carrying a tall candle in his right hand and joining the other faithful in the Corpus Christi procession. This man of genius and bold vision, one of the outstanding architects at the turn of the century, had become a retiring and humble servant of God. (Rotzler, 1966: summary p. 2.)*

While work on the cathedral proceeded, Gaudí was involved in many other projects. In 1904 he was commissioned to design a new facade for an apartment block in Barcelona called Casa Batlló. Here he created a facade filled with vital organic forms captured in ceramic and sculpture.

*The iridescent tiles recall the foam of a breaking wave, while the ironwork of the balconies looks like masks. The roof appears to be an enormous ceramic dragon, its scaly feet hanging over the eaves, which symbolizes St. George, the patron saint of Barcelona. (Schuyt, 1980: 125).*

His work was more that of a sculptor than an architect and he created wondrous plastic forms. A joyous expression of Gaudí's eccentricity is Güell Park, a garden city on the outskirts of Barcelona. It was commissioned in 1900 by Eusebio Güell who wished him to create a village set in a landscape which was to be reminiscent of an English garden. The project did not succeed however, and the only part of the plan which was executed was the park. It remains today a design of genius in which Gaudí's mature ideas are expressed in his own individual form. Over a period of 14 years Gaudí built viaducts, galleries, park benches and three of the 60 planned houses. The benches and viaducts 'meander through the park like a caterpillar.' (Schuyt, 1980: 126). The colourful and exuberant benches are made from the ceramic mosaics which Gaudí so enjoyed using. Materials such as broken ceramic mosaics have been used by many Outsider artists, including Raymond Isidore at his Maison de Picassiette, Frank Pritchard at his Place of the Witch Pigs and Nek Chand in his Rock Garden. Gaudí lived in the Güell Park from 1906 until shortly before his death.

Ultimately, what Gaudí created was more than functional structures in brick and mortar. He saw his buildings as sculptural entities and his vision was first and foremost a plastic one. Although not described as such in many eminent architectural publications, his work would not be out of place included amongst Outsider Art. This is confirmed, in another manner of speaking, by Willy Rotzler in the *du: atlantis*:

*'... there are many hints, especially in the sculptures of the Sagrada Familia and in the tile epigraphs of Güell Park, that over and above plastic form ... Gaudí was concerned with things transcending architecture, sculpture and surface decoration. Here we catch a fleeting glimpse of a Gaudí from whose secrets the veil is not yet lifted ...' (Rotzler, 1966: summary p. 2).*

When the elderly and shabbily dressed Gaudí died, having been knocked down by a tram in the vicinity of his beloved Cathedral of the Sagrada Familia, tribute was paid to his passing by a procession of mourners half a mile long - builders, workmen, local people who loved him, artists and

intellectuals. At the time his death was of no consequence to the rest of the world; it was not until 1950 that both the work of Antoni Gaudí and the Art Nouveau movement started to arouse wider interest, and this *'strange and wilfully individualistic character has been saved from oblivion and the mists of legend'* (Rotzler, 1966: summary p. 1).

## Chapter Thirteen

### Outsider Art in society

*'I am an artist and I am just expressing myself. I do not want to offend anybody, but then the Council should stop offending me.'*

Leslie Goldman

One of America's best known examples of Outsider Art is Simon Rodia's Watts Towers in the Los Angeles suburb of Watts. Rodia came to America from Italy at the age of 10. He later worked as a night guard, construction worker and tile layer. He wanted to build 'something great' and in approximately 1921 began constructing his Watts Towers on a triangular piece of land he owned. By then he was already over the age of 40. He bought cement and steel, covering the bent steel rods with cement and then inlaid them with small fragments of glass and pottery, mosaic tiles, broken pottery and sometimes entire bottles which he had collected, and built three towers, the tallest of which was more than 102 feet high.

It is unknown what motivated him. His neighbours did not understand his eccentric creations and treated him with hostility, while he became more and more isolated. The city of Los Angeles wanted to demolish the towers in the late fifties and this made news headlines. A committee of interested parties was formed to fight the city, and the towers were examined to determine whether they fulfilled building requirements. Fortunately they passed. However, if he had used scrap metal instead of buying steel rods, which many Outsiders would have done, the city would have had an irrefutable excuse to demolish them. Rodia lived to see books and films devoted to his work, but as is so often the case, and including Helen Martins, died before the towers were accorded national monument status.

In South Africa the whole issue of Outsider Art, including the rights of the artist, the rights and attitudes of neighbours, the general public and the authorities, was peculiarly and intensely exposed around the controversial work of a Johannesburg sculptor, Leslie Goldman, during the 1970s and 1980s. This must be one of the most widely publicised cases of conflict between an Outsider artist and society that has occurred, certainly in South Africa. It is interesting to look at the way in which Leslie Goldman and his work were treated, compared with how other Outsider artists have fared in their own communities.

The sculptures created by Goldman (1935 - 1985) in his garden in the Johannesburg suburb

of Fairwood were labelled 'junk art' by many in the media and public. In his spare time after working hours, he made his sculptures from a wide variety of scrap materials. This work caused a great deal of contention amongst the neighbours. The contretemps commenced early in 1974 and continued on and off until his death in 1985 at the age of 49. In 1974, as a result of objections by neighbours, the Johannesburg City Council instigated court action to force him to remove a large sculpture called the UFO from his front garden.

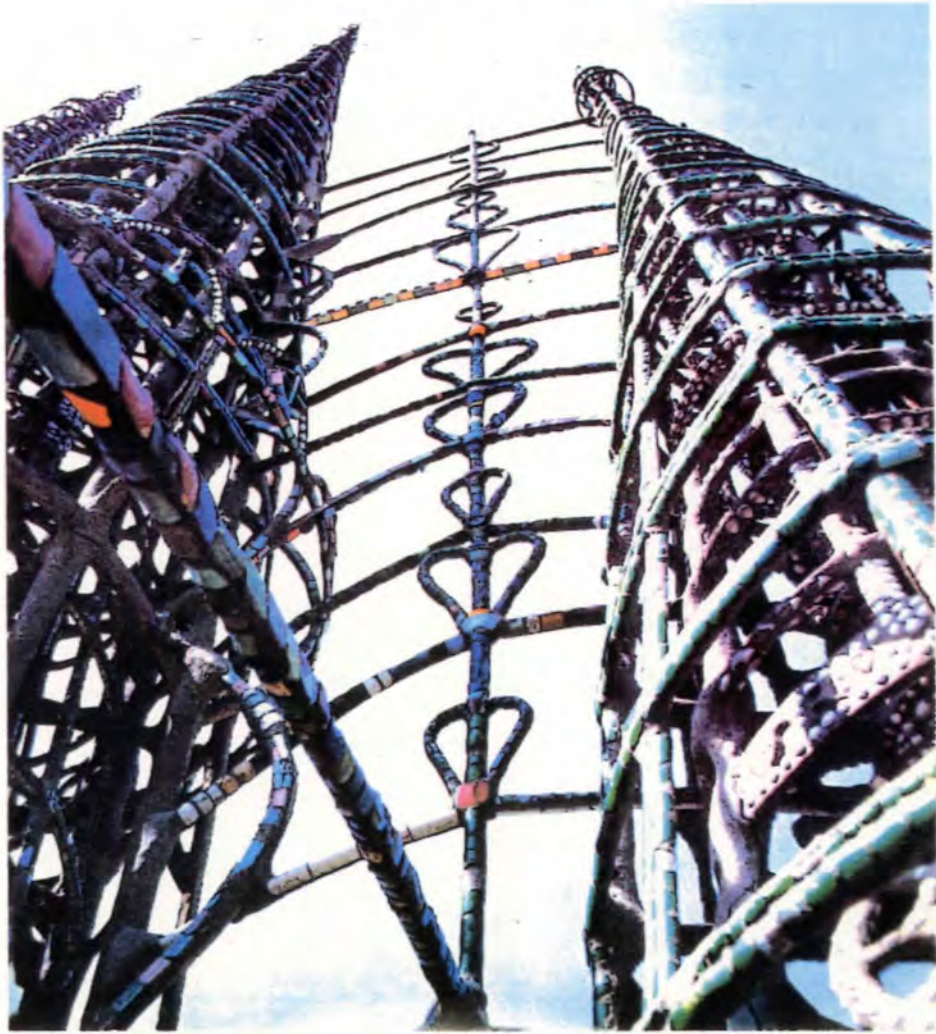
This prolonged saga, at times both bitter and farcical, was about more than just neighbours' rights and their assertion that his sculptures devalued their properties. It threw the spotlight on such contentious topics as 'what is art'; who has the right to decide, let alone prescribe, what a person may do or make in his or her private property; and what are accepted as artists' materials?

Over the years literally hundreds of articles about Leslie Goldman's art and his confrontations with authority appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout the country, including two leader articles in *The Star* and a number of cartoons. At this time there was little or no public awareness in South Africa of the existence of other Outsider artists, let alone of their importance. The recognition awarded to them could therefore not be used in his defence during the Johannesburg City Council's court battle against him. However, many of South Africa's prominent artists rallied to defend Leslie Goldman's right to create his art on his own property, and he himself obtained over 1 000 signatures in support of his work. The criterion being used by the City Council's 15-man aesthetics committee was '*are they art or are they just a pile of junk?*' (*The Star*, 15 February 1974). The outcome of the court case was that he was instructed to dismantle the UFO by a certain date. However, the night prior to this, unknown people tied a rope attached to a motor vehicle around it and drove off, crashing it to the ground. Soon thereafter Leslie Goldman set about reconstructing it, and it became a structure even higher than the first one.

He called his home *Goldman Gallery*. The family later constructed an impenetrable two-and-a-half metre high wooden gate and precast concrete wall, and kept large alsatians '*... after he was severely harassed by neighbours who didn't approve of his art or their exposure to it*' (McGregor, 1983). Today his widow Jofiah Goldman keeps her home as a memorial to her husband's work and the family's war against conventionality and imposed authority. The house is still filled with his paintings and smaller sculptures, some made from wood, plaster-of-paris or various other materials, and the garden with his metal sculptures. She has a vast collection of media cuttings about her husband's work and the saga of the protracted court case. She harbours great resentment against the art establishment that he has not been accorded the recognition she feels he deserves as an artist, and also against the authorities for the prolonged years of harassment.

Leslie Goldman first started to draw whilst working as a clerk, and his first 'sculptures' were copper jewellery he fashioned for his wife when he became an apprentice electrician. Later he

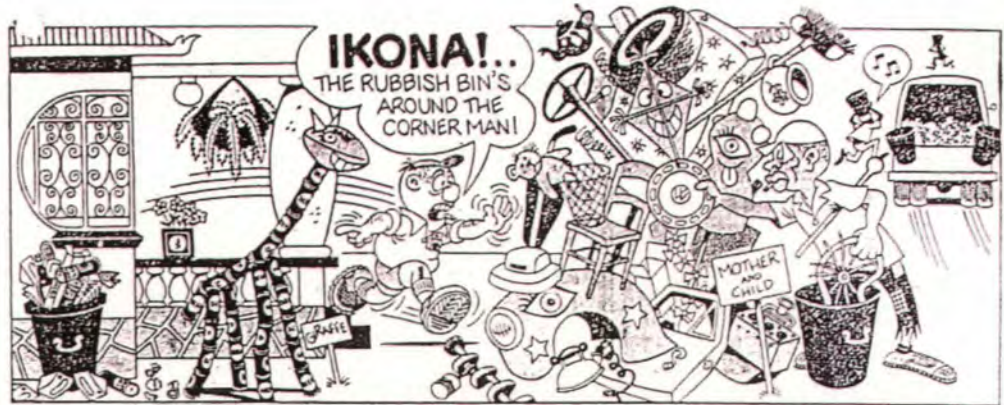




Michael Schuyf



**flip  
foster**  
by  
Keith & Lorna  
Stevens



STAR JOHANNESBURG SATURDAY AUGUST 24 1974



David Goldblatt

**smith & abbot ink**

RAND DAILY MAIL, Monday, July 22, 1974.



Leslie Goldman, *Goldman Gallery*, Fairview, Johannesburg

The U.F.O. dominates the front garden of *The Goldman Gallery*

worked as an electrician at Baragwanath Hospital. Encouraged by his wife, who also paints, he attended part-time classes at the Johannesburg College of Art and studied drawing, printing and textile design, and in 1972 joined evening classes in metal sculpture. *'But I had a difference of opinion with my teacher when he threw my work over a precipice.'* He said that although he admired the work of Henry Moore, he was more influenced by Marcel Duchamp (Gough Berger, 1974). Mrs Goldman is reported as saying: *'My husband is a serious artist, not just a dabbler. You should see all our art books. We're intellectuals.'* (*Sunday Express*, 17 February 1974: 10).

At weekends and in the evenings, sometimes working through until 5 am, he constructed sculptures in his garden, some reaching to above roof height. He scoured scrapyards and refuse dumps for the materials he used: amongst these were old plastic buckets, crumpled wastepaper baskets, rusty paraffin tins, discarded toys, dressmakers dummies, parts of motor vehicles and refrigerators, orange pockets, plastic bags, yoghurt containers, bicycle wheels, guttering, rusted bedsprings, polystyrene, bottles, gramophone turntables and electric switchboards.

His neighbours initially protested against the visual impact of his work, but later claimed that his work was devaluing their properties. Neighbours and other residents of the suburb of Fairwood drew up a petition with 22 signatures asking the city council to legislate against the *"supposed specimens of sculptures" which ... were devaluating properties in the neighbourhood.*' (Murray, G. 1975).

Meanwhile Leslie Goldman described himself as:

*... a happy artist who loves spending his off-work hours creating exciting shapes from scrap iron.*

*"I do not want to fight with anybody. I am an artist and I am just expressing myself. I do not want to offend anybody, but then the council should stop offending me. Why doesn't the council just leave me alone to do my own thing," he asked plaintively.*

*"A visitor from New York said that I was adding colour to a drab city. I keep a little book with people's comments - and let me assure you that a lot of people support me.*

*"A neighbour even donated a scrap car for me to use in my sculpturing."* (*Rand Daily Mail*, 6 July 1974).

The full force of the Johannesburg City Council was rapidly involved. After being studied by the aesthetics and town planning committees, and after Leslie Goldman had opened a public exhibition of his work in his *Goldman Gallery*, three other council departments were called in. *The Star* reported:

*... the problem of Mr Leslie Goldman's "junk" sculptures has been referred to senior council officials for reports.*

*The town planning committee yesterday heard complaints from five neighbours, and decided to ask the Medical Officer of Health, Dr A H Smith, the Noise Control Officer, Mr G H Winter-Moore, and the Chief Traffic Officer, Mr C J Strauss-Smith to report. (The Star, 4 April 1974).*

The issue evidently had more aspects to it than just the visual impact on neighbours and passers by:

*A neighbour of Johannesburg junk-sculptor Mr Leslie Goldman says that for 15 months he has had to bear hammering noise and floodlights outside his bedroom window in the middle of the night.*

*"Mr Goldman gets out tools whenever inspiration strikes him, which seems to be mostly between 10 pm and 2 am," said the neighbour, a Fairwood man who did not want his name published.*

*"I am tired of being made out in the papers as the villain of the piece. I did not put up a garden wall to hide the sculptures, I put it up for privacy. Mr Goldman is welcome to his statues until he's an old man, but he must leave us alone." (The Star, 20 March 1974).*

The common, and seemingly irreconcilable complaint of both sculptor and neighbour was: 'leave me alone.' Mr Goldman's son Sarron said he could sympathise with the neighbours' complaints in this regard. 'He would wake me up at 2am with his arc-welder.' (Interview, Goldman, S. 1995).

This habit of working late into the night after the normal day's work is complete is reminiscent of many other Outsider artists, such as Dirk van der Mescht in the Eastern Cape, Nek Chand in India, and the Facteur Cheval and Raymonde Isidore in France.

In spite of the powerful opposition - possibly even stimulated by it - Leslie Goldman continued making his sculptures. He explained his philosophy and work in his manifesto of 1974:

*Art is the expression of my joy of living. When an artist creates he projects his own personal vision into the work. ... I am using a new approach in the creation of open-air sculpture - it is to be seen in the front of my house. Art is an important facet of society and should not only be found in the galleries. I feel there should not be a dividing line between painting and sculpture. I have bridged the gap and combined the two mediums. The source of my material are the ready made and found objects of our environment. I use a system of construction and balance when working and a lot of aggression goes into my sculptures. I use almost any medium for its own intrinsic worth or a combination of mediums. I have created sculptures in a completely new idiom. I do not weld pieces together. Different objects are pushed, hammered, forced or fastened together thus bringing together different objects and material into a singular new context.*

*... My main work UFO also has a studio in space. There are steps leading up to the studio. I sometimes sit there and form part of the sculpture.*

*Adjacent to the UFO is the Peace Ship. An old car body is used for the armature.*

*Another of my sculptures is The Guitarist. This is an unusual figure that stands twice life-size.*

*Rhino or Second Class Taxi is a work one can sit on and ride in. It jingles and jangles, clangs and bangs. It symbolises city traffic, endless and noisy.*

*Near to this is Man and Woman. The male figure is basically a wheelbarrow frame; a bucket forms the head. The female figure is less rugged, but more colourful.*

*Further away is Man and Woman Walking. The triangular head of the woman has realistic features painted on shiny aluminium. One breast is a record player turn-table and it really turns.*



*I recently completed a new sculpture entitled *Nude on a Flying Bicycle*. The *Nude* is represented by a shop dummy.*

*There is sometimes a visual incongruity in the blending of dissimilar objects. This is a challenge I have taken up and I will continue to create.*

Lucy Gough Berger described the sculpture which he called 'Rhinoceros' as being made from '... metal drain piping, an old sewing machine, a dog's plate peppered with holes, empty bottles and crumpled-up, rusty bedsprings.' She said that by hanging out of the bedroom window and pulling various cords like puppet strings, Leslie Goldman achieved the effect of the rhinoceros actually lumbering, accompanied by a jangling crash of metal on metal. (Gough Berger, 1974).

He said that 75 per cent of his inspiration came from his wife Jofiah, and the female form, which he considered very beautiful, occupied a great deal of his attention. He also sculpted combinations of men and women "because that is the perfect partnership." (McGregor, 1983).

Although expressing himself very clearly in his work and his writings, it seems that he was not particularly good with words or at ease socially.

*He's a bent little man, dressed in neatly nondescript clothes. The bushy beard and longish hair shot through with silver the only outward sign of artistic eccentricity.*

*No glamorous CIC Warner artist, this. He's a shy, shuffling, inarticulate little man with a strong South African accent; every phrase of his conversation is punctuated with a diffident "ya know".*

*... "I think I've expressed myself in my own individual way, using all kinds of material in a way that it is not normally used." (McGregor, 1983).*

Jofiah Goldman confirmed some of this viewpoint when interviewed after his death:

*"He was a man of very few words," said his wife. "He wasn't one for idle chatter or inconsequential talk.*

*"He loved reading and was a very scholarly man - we have a big collection of books at home." (The Star, 26 June 1985).*

The persecution continued. In June 1975 *The Star* reported that after a year of city council pressure, which resulted in the UFO being dismantled, the Johannesburg City Council was still not satisfied and wanted Leslie Goldman to remove his other sculptures as well. The tallest of the remaining structures was the height of the front veranda roof. Chairman of the town planning committee, Mr Eddie Magid, said that Leslie Goldman had been ordered to remove all the structures which caused neighbours to complain.

*Mrs R Pecci, who lives next door, said Mr Goldman's behaviour would never have been allowed in Italy from where she migrated.*

*She said she would only be happy if all the structures were removed. (The Star, 24 June 1975).*

Although his work was vilified by the some of the public, media, critics and authorities, it was greatly admired by others.

*He is in fact Johannesburg's 'junk artist' and his art is so alive that the onlooker*

*cannot but come away impressed by the intense vigour, vitality and sense of creativity that abounds in it. ... Yet while Goldman's art has a child-like quality, his work is not naïve. He understands and loves shapes. ... His work lacks perfection which is perhaps why it is so intensely stimulating. (Matz, 1984: 9.)*

Many established and respected artists wrote letters in support of Leslie Goldman's right to continue creating his sculptures. Founder member of the Artist's and Writer's Guild of SA, Walter Battis - surely one of South Africa's most controversial and unconventional artists himself (who once made an unsuccessful attempt to visit Helen Martins) - made a statement on behalf of Leslie Goldman:

*As an artist Mr Goldman has every right to erect sculpture in his own garden. His neighbours need not look at it if they don't want to. ... Art is of all kinds - including junk. Long live junk.*

Cecily Sash wrote, also under the banner of the Artist's and Writers' Guild:

*I would support Mr. Goldman in principle.  
A man should be able to put up what he likes in his own garden.  
So many people have ugly little gnomes in their gardens. These are repellent - but I suppose it's a matter of where your standards lie.*

Cecil Skotnes wrote two letters:

*They [his sculptures] are the result of a serious hobby and whether or not they can be considered art is of no consequence at all. ... So august a body [the Aesthetics Committee] must be composed of intelligent and cultured persons and their consideration of this complaint seems hardly justified. (Letter Skotnes, 19 February 1974).*

*The question is not primarily whether Mr. Leslie Goldman's garden sculpture called UFO is art, or not. It is that to force him to take down what he considers art could create a very dangerous precedent.*

*We might then in the future have the spectacle of untrained persons demanding the removal of works of art of great value simply because they don't consider them art. (Letter Skotnes, 12 August 1974).*

Bill Ainslie wrote a letter, addressed 'To whom it may concern':

*... I consider his work creative and my chief reasons are:*

*1. It falls within that important category of activity in modern sculpture that finds its material in the waste products of our technological society and converts them or rather transforms it into objects of a different order. Although it is called 'junk art' this refers to the medium and not the result.*

*2. One of the continuing impulses in the creative arts throughout history has been that of the sculptor/architect. The man who has wished to re-mould his environment so that it is in closer accord with his inner needs. I am sure Mr. Goldman is using 'junk' to do this. And there are many people all over the world who re-create technological and industrial waste in this fashion.*

*3. A delight in inventive play is another important part of the creative activity that informs Mr. Goldman's work, an ingredient which links it with all good art work.*

*In conclusion it should be made clear that I am aware that the work does not fall within the narrow confines of sculpture that most people think of when condemning it. The fact that it is not a three-dimensional self-standing object looking like a man or animal or some other recognisable object, does not mean it is not*

*sculpture.* (Letter Ainslie, 14 August 1974).

Chairman of the Writer's and Artists' Guild, Peter Wilhelm, added a strong statement:

*... My view of Mr Goldman's work is that it adds a positive dimension of adventure and community involvement to his neighbourhood. There is no doubt that Mr Goldman is an ambitious if unsophisticated artist and that what he has achieved in an essentially drab area is to add colour and even drama to his house and garden. This is true individualism, and my observation is that, in fact, Mr Goldman's house is now one of the sights of Johannesburg. In other words he has enhanced the amenity rather than the opposite.*

*It would be a grave loss to the city if he was forced to remove the UFO sculpture. Mr Goldman's work is a cheerful protest against uniformity; it is the kind of thing, in my opinion, which must be encouraged. The city itself will be richer for it.* (Letter Wilhelm, 16 August 1974).

If Leslie Goldman had been encouraged, or at least left alone to get on with his work instead of being harassed and persecuted, Peter Wilhelm's prediction could very well have come true, and the Goldman Gallery become a drawcard which enhanced the neighbourhood and *increased* local property values rather than causing them to depreciate. This very effect has occurred in a number of out of the way places where other extraordinary creations are found, and which are not as easy to visit. This is the case at many sites in France and the United States. The Owl House, once considered dismissively, if at all, and thought to be the work of a 'mad woman', has not only put Nieu Bethesda on the map but caused property values there to rise sharply. It is increasingly becoming a tourist destination. Poet, writer and artist Breyten Breytenbach made a detour to visit it on his first trip around the country after his prolonged exile. In his book *Return to Paradise* he writes glowingly of his impressions and of Helen's '*fragile dreams*' (Breytenbach, 1993: 116-118).

Fiona Wilson, in a long article in *Personality* magazine, also propounds such a viewpoint:

*But however cross and ashamed you might get if someone like Mr Goldman played the same trick on your neighbourhood - you couldn't disprove the possibility that, in years to come, the name of your street could be famous and you could double your selling price just because a great man had lived nearby.* (Wilson, 1975).

Art critic Joyce Ozyński wrote succinctly:

*Mr Goldman's works are not random accumulations, but deliberate, consciously controlled, imaginative creations.*

*It is merely a question of taste whether one finds these works pleasing or not.*

However, sculptor and painter Armando Baldinelli disparagingly said: '*It's rubbish, it's provincial,*' while fellow sculptor Eduardo Villa commented: '*You can't judge at all from photographs - sculpture is three dimensional.*' Leslie Goldman's own unequivocal statement was: '*I don't think art should be explained. It's exploratory art.*' (*The Star*, 15 February 1974).

A person living in the nearby suburb of Bellevue, A Adamos, wrote a convincing letter in support of a person's right to express him or herself in his own property as he wishes, and not only in the artistic field:

*If Mr Goldman wants to do his sculpture in his own yard, why should anybody force him to stop doing it?*

*If "they" find means and ways to destroy the "right" of Mr Goldman to build his sculptures, as he wants them to be, then they may as well destroy the "right" to any citizen to grow a prickly-pear [sic] tree in his yard, because the prickly-pear tree cannot make roses. (Letter Adamos, A. Undated).*

A young admirer, Visco van der Merwe, made another salient point about the materials Leslie Goldman used:

*Your medium comes from our current nature - pollution! This is nothing to avoid, we live in it, see it every day and even eat it? Why not sculpting it?*

*Mr Goldman, if you need any eager witnesses - please contact me. (Letter Van der Merwe, V. 9 July 1974).*

The Artists' and Writers' Guild of South Africa issued the following statement:

*The Guild regards the order to Mr Goldman as a blatant case of interference with a citizen's freedom to attempt art in his own home.*

*Whether it was issued as a confused aesthetic response or for the protection of over-delicate property values, it expresses the kind of gross intolerance that finally suppresses individuality. (Rand Daily Mail, 10 July 1974).*

The respected Johannesburg evening newspaper, *The Star*, thought the topic worthy of sufficient attention to devote two leader articles to it during 1974, but did not express such liberal attitudes as those of the Artists' and Writers' Guild. That of 21 February states:

#### **Junk art**

*It really doesn't matter whether a Johannesburg City Council committee decides Mr Goldman's junkyard sculpture creations are art or not. What matters is that he has offended his neighbours - who might not know much about junk, but they know what they like. Seeing that Mr Goldman's creations (like many of Mr Picasso's) do not seem to satisfy the viewer he should now do one of two things. Either put a high wall around his sculpture garden, and enjoy his creations in private, or take them down. (The Star, 21 February 1974).*

This article promotes two surprising views: the first being that the rights of the mass should supercede those of the individual. The second is possibly even more startling. By introducing an artist of the calibre of Picasso with whom to compare Goldman's work, it would seem to suggest that Leslie Goldman's work could possibly be of a similar standard, as well as suggesting that Picasso's work also should not have been permitted to be exhibited in public.

The second leader article was published in July that year:

#### **Scrapping junk**

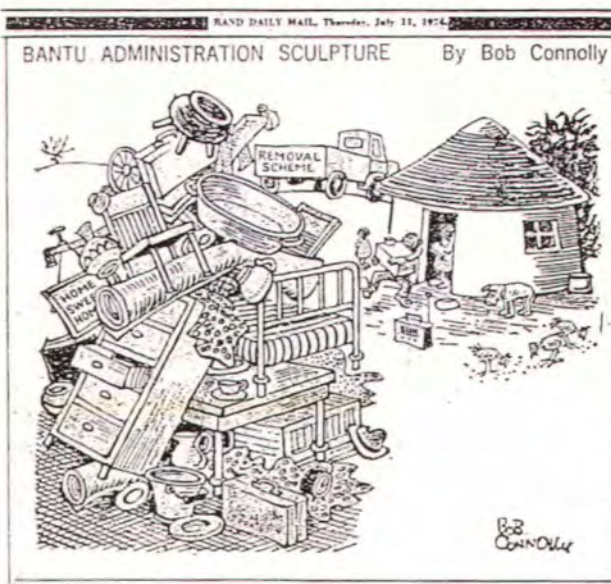
*Johannesburg's Town Planning committee has no doubt done its duty in upholding neighbourhood complaints about "junk" sculptor, Mr Leslie Goldman. Free artistic expression and attempts to beautify an ugly city should be encouraged but highly controversial efforts such as this ought to be practised in private. The mind-boggling scale of Mr Goldman's giant scrapyards, which no normal wall can hide, makes them very public indeed.*

*Now what about some of the other statuary and architecture around town*





AFRICAMERA



photographer unknown

Leslie Goldman, *Goldman Gallery*, Fairview, Johannesburg

Top left: Leslie Goldman seated with some of his paintings and sculptures in his house, 1975.

Bottom right: Lesley Goldman stands at his gate post below the sign saying *Goldman Gallery*, and behind him is the U.F.O.





Goldman family album



Goldman family album



Goldman family album



Goldman family album



Goldman family album



Goldman family album

Above left: Mrs Leslie Goldman and one of her two sons displaying some of her late husband's work inside the house; Above right: A portrait which Leslie Goldman painted of his wife. Middle right and bottom right: Some of the indoor sculptures and paintings, incorporating found objects. Bottom left and middle left: Outdoor sculptures positioned in various parts of the garden.

*which the City Council has approved? If they don't know much about art, they should at least know by now how to recognise junk. (The Star, July 1974, p. 26, date unknown).*

In addition to reiterating that Leslie Goldman should conduct his creativity in private, screened from public view, the paper introduced a new element to the debate: that judging from past performance in selecting and purchasing art works, the City Council was perhaps not best qualified to judge on the merits or otherwise of art, taste and aesthetics.

In 1976 Leslie Goldman finally felt vindicated as he won the S A Association of Arts first prize for his sculpture 'The Soldier'. It was also made from 'junk' materials; a paddle, old water pipe, milk crate and a broken loudspeaker 'creating an unusual effect.' (Hayden, 1977: 11). However, the controversy continued and prejudices and preconceptions were maintained. *The Rand Daily Mail* commented on the award:

*The much maligned sculptor, Mr Leslie Goldman, has finally won an award with his sculpture entitled "Soldier". But is it art?*

*Mr Francois Oberholzer, chairman of the Johannesburg City Council's management committee, does not seem to think so.*

*When he heard the news he said, "Well, wonders will never cease."*

*Asked if the council would ever again allow Mr Goldman to erect his junk art in the front garden of his Orange Grove home, Mr Oberholzer said: "We would never allow him to put it up again.*

*"Not only was it unsightly but it was also a health hazard - rats could nest in it. And it was a fire hazard."*

*Mr Teddy Winder, the "Mail's" art critic, could not take the "Soldier" seriously. "Perhaps it has a certain line in places. But unless it had been named I wouldn't recognise it for what it is supposed to represent," he said.*

*But the South African Association of Arts, conveners of the exhibition, said: "His work is a contribution to the art world."*

*An association spokesman said even Rodin was laughed out of the Paris Saloon when he first exhibited his sculptures. (Rand Daily Mail, 3 August 1976: 5).*

In 1980 Leslie Goldman again received official recognition when Justinus van der Merwe, head of the Pretoria Technikon's Department of Art and Design, included Leslie Goldman's work in a presentation he gave at the International Sculptural Conference held in Washington D C from 1-7 June.

In his later years Leslie Goldman devoted much more time to his paintings, which fill every available space in the house. His untimely death, at the age of only 49, occurred in 1985. This meant that it was not possible to see how his work would have developed and in what directions his creativity would have moved, let alone if he would have gained wider acceptance as an artist of consequence and not just an oddity. However, through the controversy and resultant publicity which his work caused, it probably reached a far wider audience than it might have done otherwise. His work has probably also played its part in the gradual but growing awareness of the general public, as well as the formal art world, that Outsider Art is of significance and must be taken seriously.

## Chapter Fourteen

### Conclusion

Both Outsider Art and Outsider artists are fragile and by their very nature likely always to remain so. They are not part of a system and therefore do not have the support of like-minded people. Outsider artists are often loners, if not alienated from society, and usually viewed as 'strange' at the very least. Their dialogue through their work is not with the public; it is an inner dialogue with the unconscious. The materials which they use are usually makeshift, home-made and those most easily to hand. The idea of utilizing up-to-date technology in construction to ensure long-lasting qualities is usually not considered or it is otherwise not affordable or not easily available.

Within the mainstream of art, works are maintained and displayed in optimum conditions, such as galleries, private homes and public spaces. And artists are usually accorded at least a modicum of respect and a position in society. Few, if any, of these conditions are applicable to Outsider Art and artists.

However, a crucial element in the survival of both these art works and their creators is how they are viewed and treated by the communities in which they exist. Helen Martins, although marginalized in the Nieu Bethesda community, was never persecuted because of her work, other than by mischievous children throwing stones at the statues. She then protected them by erecting a high netting fence around her property. At no time did she have anyone in authority attempt to force her to demolish her work, but she did become more and more reclusive and misunderstood by villagers and wary of any visitors.

The attitude of the public can impact very heavily on the artist, or his or her family. Sarron Goldman, Leslie Goldman's son, said that although he was interested in and proud of his father's work, as a child it was for him very traumatic to be made so conspicuous while the controversy, reported in the press, raged on about his father's 'junk' sculptures. *'It was dreadful when strange children came walking, uninvited, into our garden to look at, or laugh at, the sculptures.'* (Interview Goldman, S. 1995). Leslie Goldman's widow, Mrs Jofiah Goldman, lives behind a high, impenetrable wall and triple-locked gate, with no doorbell. It seems that the main purpose of her life is to preserve her late husband's memory and work and try to get him the recognition which she feels very strongly he deserved.

Curator of the Outsider Archive in London, Monika Kinley, says that unlike in France, where



on the whole such unusual creations are at least tolerated, and frequently promoted, people in Britain view them very differently. The families of people who create such eccentric works are often the ones who obliterate them as soon as possible after the death of that person. This is because they are ashamed of them and of how their strangeness reflects on the family (interview Kinley, 1990). Most of the other examples of Outsider Art which have been described in Chapter Twelve do not impinge on their neighbours - either because they are in isolated areas, on peripheries of villages, or are not conspicuous from outside the property.

Since Helen Martins' death an organization called *Friends of the Owl House* has been formed to maintain and preserve Helen's work, and funds and sponsorship have been raised from PPC (Pretoria Portland Cement). Koos Malgas, who was the main creator of the cement sculptures, was brought back to Nieu Bethesda to work at The Owl House maintaining and restoring the entire creation. In 1989 The Owl House was accorded provisional National Monument status for a period of five years. Whether this will be permanently granted still remains to be seen. Thus the short and medium-term future of The Owl House has been reasonably assured. However, both the house and all the works in the Camel Yard are extremely fragile and their long-term preservation is dubious.

Outsider artists sometimes collaborate with assistants in creating their visions. However, the creator's vision and inspiration is what provides the essential spark. In spite of the experience of working under the direction of Helen Martins, none of the three men - Piet van der Merwe, Jonas Adams and Koos Malgas - has produced his own original artistic creations since her death. Helen's flame was the crucial element. Piet van der Merwe, at the age of 84 in 1995, was still working as a builder. Although he is a fine craftsman and makes objects such as small tin trunks which are sold in the local craft shop, that is the extent of any creative work. Jonas Adams retired to live with his daughter near Nigel in the Transvaal before his death. Even Koos Malgas, who without doubt produced the finest and most sensitively modelled work in the Camel Yard, went back to earning his living as a labourer in Worcester after Helen's death. While there he did make some copies of statues from The Owl House, and a few were sold. When he was brought back to Nieu Bethesda by the Friends of The Owl House, to care for and restore the statues, he again started making copies of some of the statues, such as owls and mermaids, which are sold to tourists. But he has not made any original pieces himself. Over-the-top artist Beezy Bailey collaborated with him on a joint exhibition in 1994; Koos made in cement, on a wire and chicken netting armature, sculptures to Bailey's sketched designs. These were exhibited in Cape Town, very highly priced, and not very well made. Some had cracks or breaks in them even before the exhibition had closed. However they were more a novelty than anything else, and this was based on Beezy Bailey's reputation for audacity linked to Helen Martins' fame, with Koos Malgas as the connection.

In the village itself two other homes not far from The Owl House each has a moon gate like

Helen's in their own gardens. Each has a commercially produced statue of a small black child peering out through the moon gate. One of the gardens was that of Mrs Gertruida Claasen, former postmistress and town clerk. The other belonged to Mrs 'Koekie' van der Merwe who also has a large green painted crinoline-clad cement statue of a woman near her moon gate. It is not known whether Helen was the first to have a moon gate, but it does not matter. The fact remains that Helen's was only a small part of a greater concept; if the others copied her, that was implicitly a compliment. As has been shown, Helen's sources of subject matter were eclectic. She may easily have taken these ideas from her neighbours and then woven them in to be part of her greater design. But none of these people, or others who dot cement gnomes around their gardens, can or would create an Owl House, or a Cement Menagerie, or a Maison Picassiette. They lack the spark of a unique, passionate, driving vision; a relentless purpose, to the exclusion of any other considerations, or whatever it may be which unmistakably sets Outsider artists apart from conventional society.

Although she would probably have found it very hard to believe, Helen Martins' legacy of work has made an unimaginable impact both on what she knew as a lethargic little village, as well as the thousands who now make a pilgrimage to her 'Mecca'. It is a popular and well-known tourist destination, guest houses abound, houses are at a premium and there are many more people living permanently in the village. Athol Fugard's play *Road to Mecca*, and the subsequent film of the same name were inspired by Helen's life and creativity and helped to create a greater awareness of the existence of the Owl House. Helen's vision, revealed so powerfully in her work, has made an impact on almost everybody who has visited The Owl House. Many people have been inspired to create their own art, sculpture, literature, drama, music, films, photography, poems and festive events after being exposed to her work and the indefinable atmosphere which pervades The Owl House and the Camel Yard. There have also been a number of academic studies undertaken based on her life and work, in the fields of both fine art and psychology.

Outsider artists exist for themselves. It is of their essence that they create in the first place at least, for themselves. But do they have significance for society? I believe that they do. The world is a better place for what they create and what they leave us. What all Outsider artists seem to possess is the ability to allow the viewer to recollect the unrestricted world of childish play and imagination where anything is possible and the rules, responsibilities, constraints and logic of adulthood do not apply. In our scientific, technological world the elements of joyous play and an increasing awareness of the unconscious and spiritual dimensions of life are sorely needed. Aggrey Klaaste editor of the *Sowetan*, wrote of Jackson Hlungwani:

*An elite, a mystic that in retrospect cannot be dismissed, should not simply be indulged. What meaning does he have in these testing times?*

*He crosses many cultural barriers yet he has found a unique identity. He, by virtue of his convictions and inspiration invites us to reassess our preconceptions. He invites us to*



Top left and centre left: This cement lady clad in a green crinoline and the moon gate with the statue of a little black child just visible through it, in the garden of a home one block away from Helen Martin's Owl House. Top right: Mrs Gertruida Claasen also made a moon gate on her garden's boundary, and also had a statue of a black child peering through. Her home was very close to The Owl House. Bottom left: Koos Malgas with two members of his family making some statues to the design of unorthodox artist Beezy Bailey. He also makes replicas of Owl House statues to sell to visitors. On a shelf behind is a mermaid. Bottom right: One of the Beezy Bailey designed statues completed and ready for an exhibiton in Cape Town.

*enjoy, to be educated by the free creative spirit in a man.* (Klaaste, 1989: 25).

What he said of Hlungwani and his work could well apply to many other Outsider artists, and the rest of us can only but be enriched by their startling and unexpected visions which reveal new vistas for those who are open and willing to see and enjoy them.

The research involved in this thesis has led the author on a long journey of discovery, adventure and personal growth. It has been a privilege to meet with people who ignored or flouted imposed limitations in a world of specialization where appropriate qualifications for so many jobs are paramount, and who have allowed their imaginations to soar free and untrammelled. The remarkable freshness and unconventionality of Outsider Art is a sheer delight and, by its nature, is always unpredictable. However Outsider Art is more than just unconventionality. It accesses both for the creators and the viewers other levels of reality, to which, unfortunately, most people's perceptions are dulled through socialization and education. It is the means through which some rare individuals tap into the essence of their spirits with a directness and a rawness denied to most of us.

At the beginning of this thesis, big, and at the same time simple questions were posed about Helen Martins and her art. Is 'The Owl House' art, and does Helen Martins deserve to be placed in the ranks of great artists? Arguments and examples have been presented to substantiate the strongly affirmative answer in both cases.

William Coldstream said that *'all great art is in the nature of an autobiography'*. In the telling of Helen Martins' life story it is self-evident how this influenced the work that was produced. Helen Martins deserves to be placed in the front rank of artists. Outsider or otherwise, and 'The Owl House' can certainly be regarded as a great work of Outsider Art, both nationally and internationally.



## Chronological History of the Martins Family

Compiled from information from Annie le Roux (née Martins);  
records of the Nieu Bethesda D R Church;  
Estate records in the office of the Master of the Supreme Court, Cape Town.

- Father:** Petrus Jacobus Martins, also entered in the Church registers as Pieter Jacobus Maartins and Petrus Jakobus Maartens  
Born 11 January 1856  
Died on 1 February 1945 (Annie said aged 93, but according to these dates, and a letter from Helen in the Supreme Court Masters office, he was 89)  
Estate Ref No. 97968 (vaults in basement, Master's office, Cape Town)
- Mother:** Hester Catherine Caroline (née van der Merwe) also entered in the Church registers as Hester Catharina Cornelia  
Born 26 November 1862  
Died 10 January 1941 (aged 79)

### Ten children were born, of whom four died young

- 1 William Henry (died young)  
no dates known
- 2 **Peter (Piet) van der Merwe**  
born 20-7-1883  
died - date unknown
- 3 **James Henry (Koos)**  
no dates known
- 4 Hester Catherine Caroline (died young)  
born 20-9-1886
- 5 **Philip (Flip)**  
born 2-6-1888  
died - date unknown
- 6 Helen Elizabeth (died young)  
born 21-1-1891
- 7 Susan Mary (died young)  
born 20-8-1892
- 8 **Anna Francina (Tommy, or Annie)**  
born 28-9-1893  
died - date unknown, but post 1987

- 9     **Alida**  
born 8-3-1895  
died 1968
- 10    **Helen Elizabeth (Joodjie)**  
born 23-12-1897  
died 8-8-1976

**Martins family history, supplied in 1986  
by Annie le Roux, elder sister of Helen Martins**

**Father:** Petrus Jacobus Martins  
died aged 93 during World War II (in fact he was aged 89 when he died)

**Mother:** Hester Catherine Caroline (née van der Merwe)  
died 1941

**Ten children were born, of whom four died young** (Annie did not have the order correct according to the D.R. Church records)

- 1 William Henry (died)
- 2 Piet van der Merwe
- 3 James Henry
- 4 Helen Elizabeth (died)
- 5 Susan Mary (died)
- 6 Hester Catherine Caroline (died)
- 7 Philip
- 8 Anna Francina - born September 1893
- 9 Alida - 1985-1968
- 10 Helen Elizabeth - 23-12-1898 - 8-8-1976 (according to the DR Church records, Helen was in fact born in 1897)

Brother Philip spent most of his life in Kenya, where he grew Pyrethrum. He retired to South Africa, and missed Kenya very much "he used to cry". He was very attached to Kenya and Uganda. He was married twice - his first wife died.

**Martins' family history, according to: Doop Register der Ned. Geref. Kerk te Nieuw Bethesda**

No. 95  
 Familienaam. Martins  
 Doopnamen. Peter van der Merwe  
 Wanneer Geboren. 20 Juli 1883  
 Wanneer Gedoopt. 26 Aug. 1883  
 Waar Gedoopt. Nieuw Bethesda  
 Door Wien. Ds. H. F. Schoon  
 Namen der Ouders. Petrus Jakobus Martins  
 Hester Catharina Carolina van der Merwe  
 Namen van Doopgetuigen. Jakob P. Naudé  
 Suzanna U. van der Merwe

No. 173  
 Familienaam. Maartens  
 Doopnamen. Hester Catharine Caroline  
 Wanneer Geboren. 20 Sept. 1886  
 Wanneer Gedoopt. 19 Des. 1886  
 Waar Gedoopt. Nieuw Bethesda  
 Door Wien. Ds. F. P. du Toit  
 Namen der Ouders. Petrus Jacobus Maartins  
 Hester Catharina Carolina van der Merwe  
 Namen der Doopgetuigen. Izak Johannes Dawel  
 Johanna van der Berg

No. 221  
 Familienaam. Martins  
 Doopnamen. Philip  
 Wanneer Geboren. 2 Junie 1888  
 Wanneer Gedoopt. 15 Oct. 1888  
 Waar Gedoopt. N. Bethesda  
 Door Wien. Ds. F. S. du Toit  
 Namen der Ouders. Petrus Jacobus Martins  
 Hester Catharina Cornelia v. d. Merwe  
 Namen der Doopgetuigen. Johannes Philippus Lehman  
 Dandelina Margaretha Jubilius  
 Stephanus Potgieter  
 Jacoba Helena van der Merwe  
 Johannes Gerhardus Naude

No. 272  
 Familienaam. Martins  
 Doopnamen. Helen Elizabeth  
 Wanneer Geboren. 21 Januarie 1891  
 Wanneer Gedoopt. 19 April 1891  
 Waar Gedoopt. N. Bethesda



Door Wien.	Ds. A. A. Weich
Namen der Ouders.	Pieter Jacobus Martins Hester Catharina Cornelia v.d. Merwe
Namen der Doopgetuigen.	Helena Elizabeth Martins James van der Merwe
No.	313
Familienaam.	Martins
Doopnamen.	Susan Mary
Wanneer Geboren.	20 Augustus 1892
Wanneer Gedoopt.	20 October 1892
Waar Gedoopt.	N. Bethesda
Door Wien.	Ds. A. A. Weich
Namen der Ouders.	Pieter Jacobus Martins Hester Catharina Cornelia van der Merwe
Namen der Doopgetuigen.	Francois Retief Davel Anna Francina Fouché Helena Elizabeth Martins Helena Elizabeth Burger
No.	351
Familienaam.	Martins
Doopnamen.	Anna Francina
Wanneer Geboren.	28 September 1893
Wanneer Gedoopt.	24 December 1893
Waar Gedoopt.	N. Bethesda
Door Wien.	Ds. A. A. Weich
Namen der Ouders.	Pieter Jacobus Martins Hester Catharina Cornelia van der Merwe
Namen der Doopgetuigen.	Anna Francina Fouché Daniel Johannes du Plessis
No.	386
Familienaam.	Martins
Doopnamen.	Alida
Wanneer Geboren.	8 Maart 1895
Wanneer Gedoopt.	19 Mei 1895
Waar Gedoopt.	N. Bethesda
Door Wien.	Ds. A. A. Weich
Namen der Ouders.	Pieter Jacobus Martins Hester Catharina Cornelia van de Merwe
Namen der Doopgetuigen.	Anna Susanna Coetzee Willem Johannes Pienaar Elizabeth Catharina Pienaar

No.	447
Familienaam.	Martins
Doopnamen.	Helen Elizabeth
Wanneer Geboren.	23 December 1897
Wanneer Gedoopt.	6 Februari 1898
Waar Gedoopt.	N. Bethesda
Door Wien.	Ds. A. A. Weich
Namen der Ouders.	Pieter Jacobus Martins Hester Catharina Cornelia van der Merwe
Namen der Doopgetuigen.	Philip van der Merwe Martha Viviers

**Ledematen Register  
der  
Ned. Geref. Kerk  
te  
Nieuw Bethesda**

No. 3  
 Familienaam. van der Merwe  
 Doopnamen. Hester Catharina Cornelia  
 Geboren. 26st November 1862  
 Aangekomen. 3de Maart 1879  
 Bevestigd. 20st April 1879  
 Plaats. Bethesda  
 Door wie Aangekomen. Ds. A. H. Hoffmeyer  
 Gesterven. 10-1-1941

No. 88  
 Familienaam. Maartins  
 Doopnamen. Pieter Jacobus

No more details filled in.

No. 361  
 Familienaam. Martins  
 Doopnamen. Helena Elizabeth [sister of Helen's father?]  
 Geboren. 31 October 1871 (18)  
 Aangekomen. 29 Maart 1890  
 Aanmerkingen. Met Cert van Lidm. Vertrokken naar Potchefstroom 15 Maart 1895

No. 901a  
 Familienaam. Martins  
 Doopnamen. James  
 (all crossed out in pencil)

No. 915a  
 Familienaam. Martins  
 Doopnamen. James Henry  
 Geboren. no date filled in  
 Aangekomen. 6 Februarie 1915  
 Bevestig. 7 Februarie 1915  
 Plaats. Nieuw Bethesda  
 Door wie Aangenomen. Ds. R. J. B. Feenstra  
 Aanmerkingen. Buitengewoon  
 ...? na Barberton

No. 921  
Familienaam. Martins  
Dooptnamen. Anna Francina  
Aangekomen. 22 September 1915  
Bevestigd. 30 Oktober 1915  
Plaats. Nieuw Bethesda  
Aanmerkingen. Aangenamen to Graaff Reinet  
na .....?  
Namen der Doopgetuigen.

No. 970  
Familienaam. Martins  
Dooptnamen. Helena Elizabeth (19)  
Aangekomen. 17 September 1917  
Bevestigd. 6 Januarie 1918  
Plaats. Nieuw Bethesda  
Door wie Aangenomen. Ds. P.K. Albertyn  
Aanmerkingen. Aangenomen to Graaff Reinet

No. 972  
Familienaam. Martins  
Dooptnamen. Philip  
Aangenomen. 21 Junie 1918  
Bevestigd. 23 Junie 1918  
Plaats. Nieuw Bethesda  
Door Wien. Ds. F. J. B. Feenstra  
Aanmerkingen. Buitengewoon. Na Oos Afrika



**Nieu Bethesda Huwelik 1881-1922**

**Origineel Huwelijks Register**

1920

1920

Huwelijk bevestigd te Nieuw Bethesda, in the Parochie van Nieuw Bethesda, in het Distrikt van Graaff-Reinet.

**No.**  
144

**Wanneer Getrouwd.**  
7 Januarie 1920

<b>Namen en Toenamen.</b>	<b>Ouderdom.</b>
Willem Johannes Pienaar	27
Helen Elizabeth Martins	22

**Staat.**  
Jonkman  
Jongdogter

**Rang of Beroep.**  
Onderwyser

**Woonplaats tijdens het Huwelijk.**  
Nieuw Bethesda

**Na Huwelijks - geboden of met Licentie.**  
Geboden

**Toestemming, door Wien gegeven, of op order van die Regter.**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

Getrouwd in 'n private woning, te Nieuw Bethesda  
voormeld na Huwelijksgeboden door mij

**R J B Feenstra**  
Seraar du N G Kerk

Dit Huwelijks is voltrokken tusschen ons

**W. J. Pienaar**  
**H. E. Martins**

In de tegenwoordigheid van  
**W. J. Pienaar**

**P.J. Martins**

1. **Record of Helen Martins Divorce from W. Johannes Pienaar and**
2. **Case Brought Against Pienaar by her Brother, Piet van der Merwe Martins**

**Pretoria State Archives**

**Illiquid Case**

Martins v Pienaar	TPD 5/240	85/1926
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**Opposed Case**

W J Pienaar	TPD 8/519	127/1928
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# ARGIEF

## Ned Geref Kerk in SA

ARGIVARIS: Ds A Strydom  
Tel: 021 - 24 9131

Die Argivaris  
Ned Geref Kerkargief  
Posbus 3171  
KAAPSTAD  
8000

Ned Geref Kerksentrum, Grey's Pass (Bo-Koningin Victoriastraat)

AS/AW

2 November 1993

Die Hoof  
Staatsargief  
Roelandstraat  
KAAPSTAD  
8001

Geagte dr De Wet

### TOESTEMMING AAN VR S ROSS I.S. FOTOKOPIE

Toestemming word hiermee verleen aan vr S Ross i.s. fotokopieëring van p 144 uit die huweliksregister van Nieu-Bethesda (1881-1922).

Hartlike groete en seënwense

ANDRÉ STRYDOM  
ARGIVARIS

# O R I G I N E E L   H U W E L I J K S   R E G I S T E R .

1920

*Huwelyk bevestigd te Nieuw Bethesda, in de Parochie van Nieuw Bethesda, in het Distrikt van Graaff-Reinet.*

1920

No.	Wanneer Getrouwd	Namen en Toenamen	Ouderdom	Staat	Rang of Beroep	Woonplaats tijdens het Huwelyk	Namen Huwelyks-geboden of mee-licentie	Toestemming door wien gegeven of op andere wijze
144 H	7 Januar 1920	Willem Johannes Pienaar Helen Elizabeth Martins	27 22	Joukman Jougedochter	Ouderwyf —	Nieuw Bethesda	Geboden	—

Getrouwd in 'n private woning, te Nieuw Bethesda voormeld na huwelyksgeboden door mij

Dit Huwelyk is voltrokken tus-  
schen ons

W. J. Pienaar  
  
H. E. Martins

In de tegenwoordigheid van

R. J. de Vries  
 Leraar des N. S. Kerk.  
 W. J. Martins  
 W. J. Pienaar



## APPENDIX 2

## Key to plan of The Owl House and A Camel Yard

Structures, statues and bas-reliefs in The Owl House, the Camel Yard and on the front stoep of the house. These total approximately 520.

## Statues and structures in the Camel Yard and The Owl House

Key No	Subject	Quantity	Key No	Subject	Quantity	Key No	Subject	Quantity
1	Baby	4	20	Sleeping carpet seller	1	85a	Killed tree	2
2	Cement pond	3	20a	Cement and glass 'carpets'	3	86	Figure from Omar Khayyam verse (with 'loaf of bread, glass of wine,' etc)	1
2a	Bottle pond	2	21	Cross	1	87	Loaf of bread	1
2b	Pool, one layer of inverted glass bottles	2	22	Doopbakkie (baptismal font)	1	88	Jug of wine	1
2c	Small pond	4	23	Kneeling wise man	9	89	Drinking vessel	1
2d	One-tier dumpy pond	2	23a	Kneeling figure, outstretched arms	1	90	Stepped pyramid	10
2e	Deep pond, green bottles	2	23b	Wise man	6	90a	Glass encrusted pyramid	1
2f	Two-tier deep, brown dumpy beer bottle pond	3	24	Seated dog (thin)	1	90b	Smooth sided (not stepped) cement pyramid	1
3	Camel	15	25	Church with clock on tower, open at back	1	90c	Pyramid with brown glass round tower on it and blue top ('braaivleis' place with 'chimney'- Koos Malgas)	1
3a	Camel kneeling	17	25a	Church with silver roof and spire (red star on roof)	1	90d	Small pyramid	2
3b	Glass encrusted body mound with camel's head	1	25b	Church with black roof and spire with black roof, coloured windows in spire	1	91	Sphinx	4
3c	Camel (body was formerly behind iron water tank which rusted and has been removed)	1	25c	Little church with spire, with rooster on top	1	92	Standing figure	1
3d	Camel head	1	26	Leaf with caterpillar) William	1	93	Sideways seated Helen (little toe missing)	1
4	Camel and rider	6	26a	Leaf with pupa ) Blake illustration	1	94	Goat kid	2
4a	Seated rider on kneeling camel, brown and green glass on cloak	1	27	Head (body vanished)	1	95	Brown glass structure with green & brown roof	1
4b	Camel and wise man	7	28	Old man	1	96	Stable with one lamb inside, car headlight at front, three windows one each side and one at back. Floor covering outside whole flat bottles on sides, half-filled with coloured ground glass	1
5	Stork	2	29	Two male figures tying to hold back lime	2	97	Mound, coloured glass encrusted, with camel head (pyramid on back)	1
6	Mound (with peacock)	1	30	Star	5	98	Mound, glass encrusted, with camel head (Buddha on back)	1
7	High figure on brick pillar	1	30a	Star on pole or wire	38	99	Buddha on back of 98	1
8	Peacock	13	31	Eye (and serpent with apple) Blake illustration	1	99a	Meditating Eastern figure, on back of 100	1
9	Kiewietjie (plover)	5	32	Adam - Blake illustration	1	100	Mound, glass covered	1
10	Farewell figure	1	33	Strange man	1	101	'Dutch' girl on two tiers of bottles	1
11	Low stone wall (made by Helen Martins)	1	34	Hooded figure with crook and worm (Blake illustration)	1	101a	Small 'Dutch' girl on one tier of dumpy bottles	1
12	Bushman	1	35	Giraffe head on long neck, no body (it was 'underground')	7	102	'Spitzkop'(Kompaasberg)	1
13	Blue crane	4	36	Sea horse (horizontal relief)	1	102a	Smaller 'Spitzkop'	1
14	Long Ears	2	37	Little nude boy	1	102b	Surround of pile of rocks	1
15	Owl	57	38	Red brick tower (white perspex star on top)	1	103	Strange figure - Bushman	1
15a	'Two-faced owl'	1	39	Seated hooded shepherd (holding lamb)	3	104	Donkey	1
15b	Upturned-face double-headed owl - 'bakuil'	7	39a	Shepherd and crook	9	105	Beast (small)	1
15c	Bakuil on metal pole	2	40	Lamb	18	106	Joseph	1
15d	'Oswald' the owl	1	41	Woman with enamel candlestick, leaning out of tower window	1	107	Mary	1
15e	Owl on pillar	1	42	Nude woman on plinth	1	108	Nativity scene - structure made from clear, green and brown bottle sides, flat galvanized iron roof with brown bottle structure and star	1
15f	Broken piece of owl totem pole	1	43	Pelican	4	109	Crib with baby Jesus	1
15g	Owl on top of bottle carrying candle on head	2	44	Real tree	1	110	Little bird	6
15h	3D bas-relief owl, glass encrusted	2	45	Winged owl-camel with ruby nipped woman	1	111	Little Devil	1
16	Water carrier	1	46	Red crescent moon	1	112	Server figure, female, constructed on top of a bottle	5
17	Moon gate	1	46a	Crescent moon on wire or pole	3			
18	Edifice of green bottles surmounted by a little sun-worshipper	1	47	Man in fez guarding inside of arch	2			
18a	Five green bottles surmounted by a sun-worshipper	1	48	Brown bottle structure up on pole - two tiers	1			
18b	Sun-worshipper on two-tier green bottle base supported with two iron standards and wooden cross bar	1	48a	Three-tier tower of green bottles	1			
18c	Three tier green bottle sun-worshipper, no support	1	49	Lion, with wire whiskers and car headlight eyes	1			
19	Headache lady - free standing cement slab bas-relief	1						



## **Cement figures inside The Owl House**

### **Kitchen:**

- 5 owls
- 2 owls on bottles
- 2 server ladies on bottles
- 1 fish, bas relief across hearth

### **Honeymoon room:**

- 1 server lady on bottle

### **Sitting room:**

- 1 double-faced owl chair, with outstretched wings, encrusted with large pieces of glass
- 1 baby boy attempting to put his foot in his mouth, seated in above

### **Passage bedroom:**

- 2 serving ladies on bottles

### **Long bedroom:**

- 2 double-faced owl chairs
- 3 serving ladies on bottles
- 1 circular table with curved cement snake base

### **Bathroom:**

- 1 mermaid on bath edge
- 1 frog footed, swimming girl bas relief on wall

## **Bas Reliefs in a Camel Yard**

### **Front verandah:**

1 Owl - large glass-encrusted

### **Back-stoep**

#### **Back door (north facing):**

3 figures - 1 to left and 2 to right of door, inspired from Omar Khayyam.

#### **Long wall (east facing):**

2 springboks on windowsill (from figure silhouetted in fanlight in window above).

13 figures inspired from Quatrains from Omar Khayyam.

1 frog-footed female swimmer in profile.

1 sun, glass encrusted.

1 glass-encrusted owl, with outstretched wings.

#### **End wall (south facing):**

1 large Mona Lisa

#### **Cement circular table, with snake support:**

1 Male figure - repeat of scene from Omar Khayyam below red window of long wall.

### **Lion's Den**

#### **South wall:**

1 large flying stork

1 large sun, with projecting spikes of clear glass around perimeter.

1 water carrier - from photograph in Long bedroom.

1 woman with hands to forehead - from pill container and first made from clay in a sardine tin. On free standing cement slab leaning against wall.

#### **East wall:**

2 Mona Lisas

2 suns

1 frog-footed swimming woman, in profile

#### **South (kitchen) wall:**

1 frog-footed swimming woman, in profile



**Cement watertank**

- 1 Mona Lisa, with glass fragment sleeves
- 1 woman with hands to forehead, from picture on pill container
- 1 Mona Lisa (The Stream)
- 1 Young Lady of South China
- 1 Japanese 'witchdoctor'
- 3 Owls on branch

**On main arch**

- 1 Sun - on left of arch, low down
- 2 Owl - on right of arch, low down

## Totals of bas-reliefs

Owls (two counted in Camel Yard tally)	6
Figures from Omar Khayyam	16
Springboks	2
Frogfeet swimming girl	4
Sun	5
Mona Lisa	5
Stork	1
Water carrier	1
Headache lady	2
(note: one already counted in Camel Yard as number 19)	
Young Lady of South China	1
Japanese healing effigy	1

## Totals of some specific subjects, including bas-reliefs, windows and ceilings

Owls	74 plus 6 bas-reliefs	80
Camels		49
Wise men (including 14 on backs of camels)		29
Shepherds		12
Mermaids		14
Pools		19
Pyramids		15
Giraffes		7
Babies		4
Peacocks		13
Churches		4
Stars		43
Lambs		18
'Dutch' ladies/'Meisies' (including smaller figures)		9
Sphinxes		4
Snakes		5
Mona Lisa		7
Total birds (excluding owls)		41

R. 10.

DEPARTMENT OF



PUBLIC EDUCATION.

Cape of Good Hope.

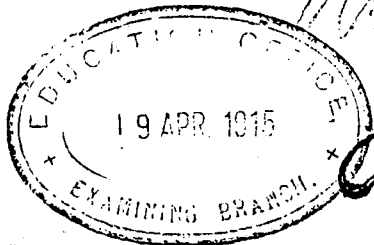
This is to Certify that in the Year 1914

*Helen Elizabeth Martins.*

obtained a Second Grade pass in NEEDLEWORK.  
STANDARD VII.

*James Rodger*  
Superintendent-General of Education.

*James Rodger*  
Registrar.



D33/60262.5000.7.14. C.T.Ltd.—D3078.



Department of Public Education,

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE.

DIVISION *Graaff-Reinet*  
SCHOOL BOARD *D.*  
NAME OF SCHOOL *Kew Bethesda*  
*A.P.*

STANDARD VII. CERTIFICATE.

This is to Certify  
THAT

*Helen Martins*

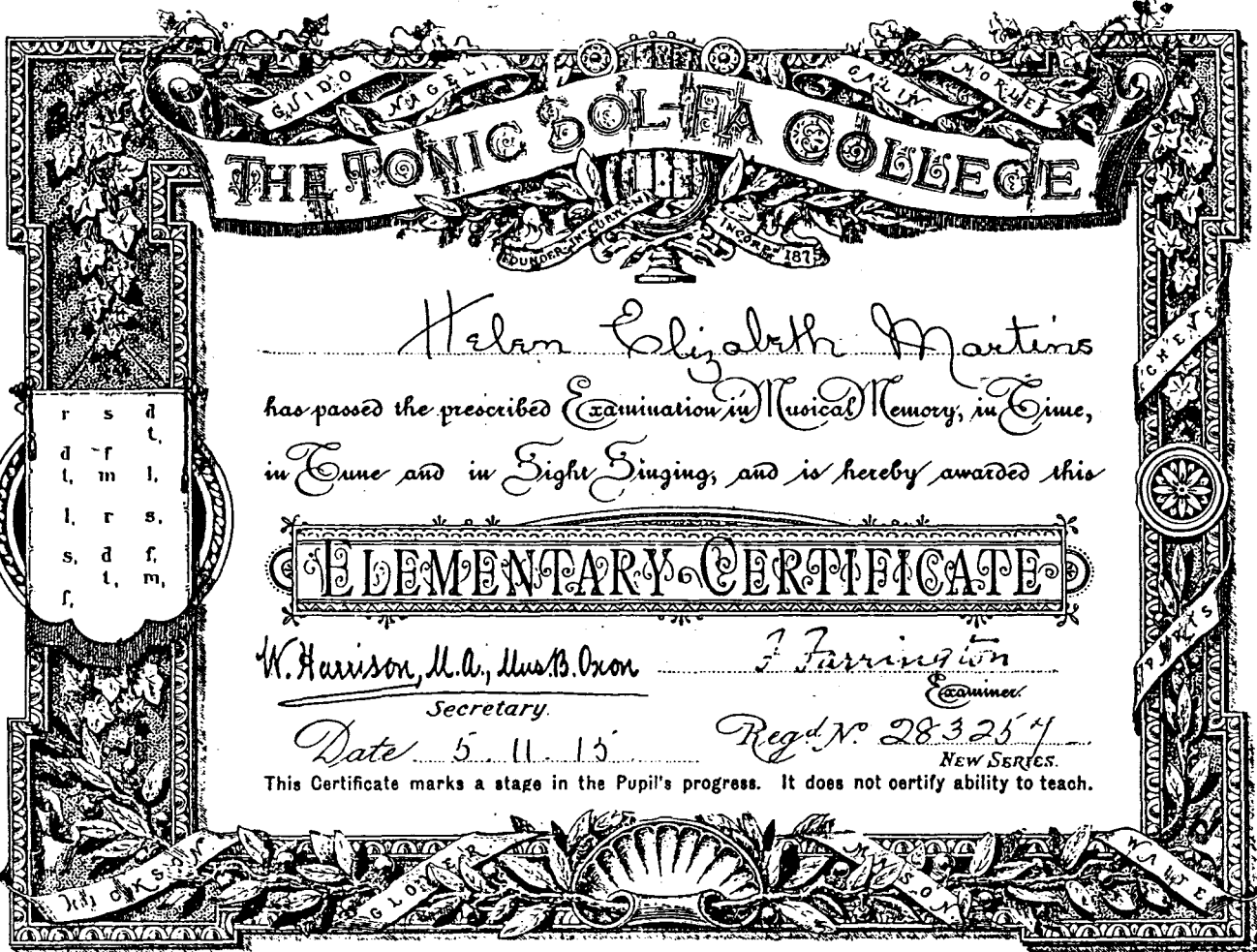
passed in the Subjects required for Standard VII.  
at the Annual Inspection of the above School  
held on *3-5 November, 1914*

*J. Anas.*  
DEPUTY INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS.

D4195.2000.12.11.

C.T.Ltd.—D8039.

Copies of Helen Martins' educational certificates  
and letters of recommendation



THE TONIC SOLFA COLLEGE

Helena Elizabeth Martins  
has passed the prescribed Examination in Musical Memory, in Tune,  
in Tune and in Sight Singing, and is hereby awarded this

ELEMENTARY CERTIFICATE

W. Harrison, M.A., Mus.B. Oxon  
Secretary.

J. Farrington  
Examiner.

Date 5 11 15

Regd. No. 283254  
New Series.

This Certificate marks a stage in the Pupil's progress. It does not certify ability to teach.

r s d  
d f t  
l m l  
l r s  
s d f  
f t m





Gape of Good Hope.

This is to certify that in the Year 1915

*Elizabeth Helen Martins*  
obtained a First Grade pass in

SECOND YEAR DUTCH.

*Charles Murray*

ACTING Superintendent-General of Education.

*James Rodger*  
Registrar.

240



Gape of Good Hope.

PUPIL TEACHERS' EXAMINATIONS.

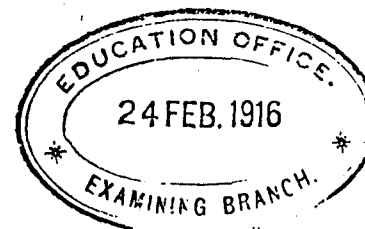
This is to Certify that at the  
FIRST YEAR SENIOR Examination held in  
December, 1915.

*Helen Elizabeth Martins*  
passed in the SECOND GRADE.

*Charles Murray*

ACTING Superintendent-General of Education.

*James Rodger*  
Registrar.



DEPARTMENT OF



PUBLIC EDUCATION,

Cape of Good Hope.

*This is to Certify that in the Year 1915*

*Helen Elizabeth Martins*

*obtained a Second Grade pass in*

**DRAWING, STANDARD VI.**

*Charles Murray*  
ACTING Superintendent-General of Education.

*James Rodger*  
Registrar.

DEPARTMENT OF



PUBLIC EDUCATION,

Cape of Good Hope.

*This is to Certify that in the Year 1916*

*Helen Elizabeth Martins*

*obtained a Second Grade pass in*

**THIRD YEAR DUTCH.**

*Charles Murray*  
ACTING Superintendent-General of Education.

*James Rodger*  
Registrar.

R. 9.

DEPARTMENT OF  PUBLIC EDUCATION,  
Cape of Good Hope.

This is to Certify that in the Year 1917

*Helen Elizabeth Martins*  
obtained a First Grade pass in  
THIRD YEAR DUTCH

*Charles Murray*

ACTING Superintendent-General of Education.

*James Rodger*  
Registrar.

R. 10

DEPARTMENT OF  PUBLIC EDUCATION,  
Cape of Good Hope.

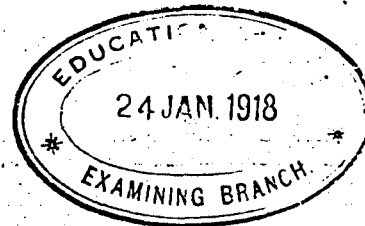
This is to Certify that in the Year 1917

*Helen Elizabeth Martins*  
obtained a Second Grade pass in The  
Second Year Senior Pupil Teachers Examination

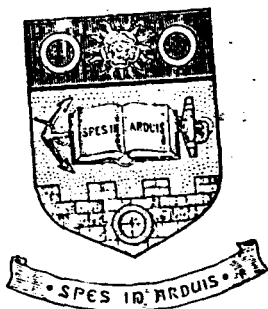
*Charles Murray*

ACTING Superintendent-General of Education.

*James Rodger*  
Registrar.



# UNIVERSITY OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE.



## EXAMINATIONS IN MUSIC.

[CONDUCTED BY EXAMINERS OF THE ASSOCIATED BOARD OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC  
AND THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC, LONDON.]

---

### MUSIC CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION.

---

PASS CERTIFICATE.

---

*This is to Certify that at the  
Music Certificate Examination held in the year 1917*

*Helen Elizabeth Martins*

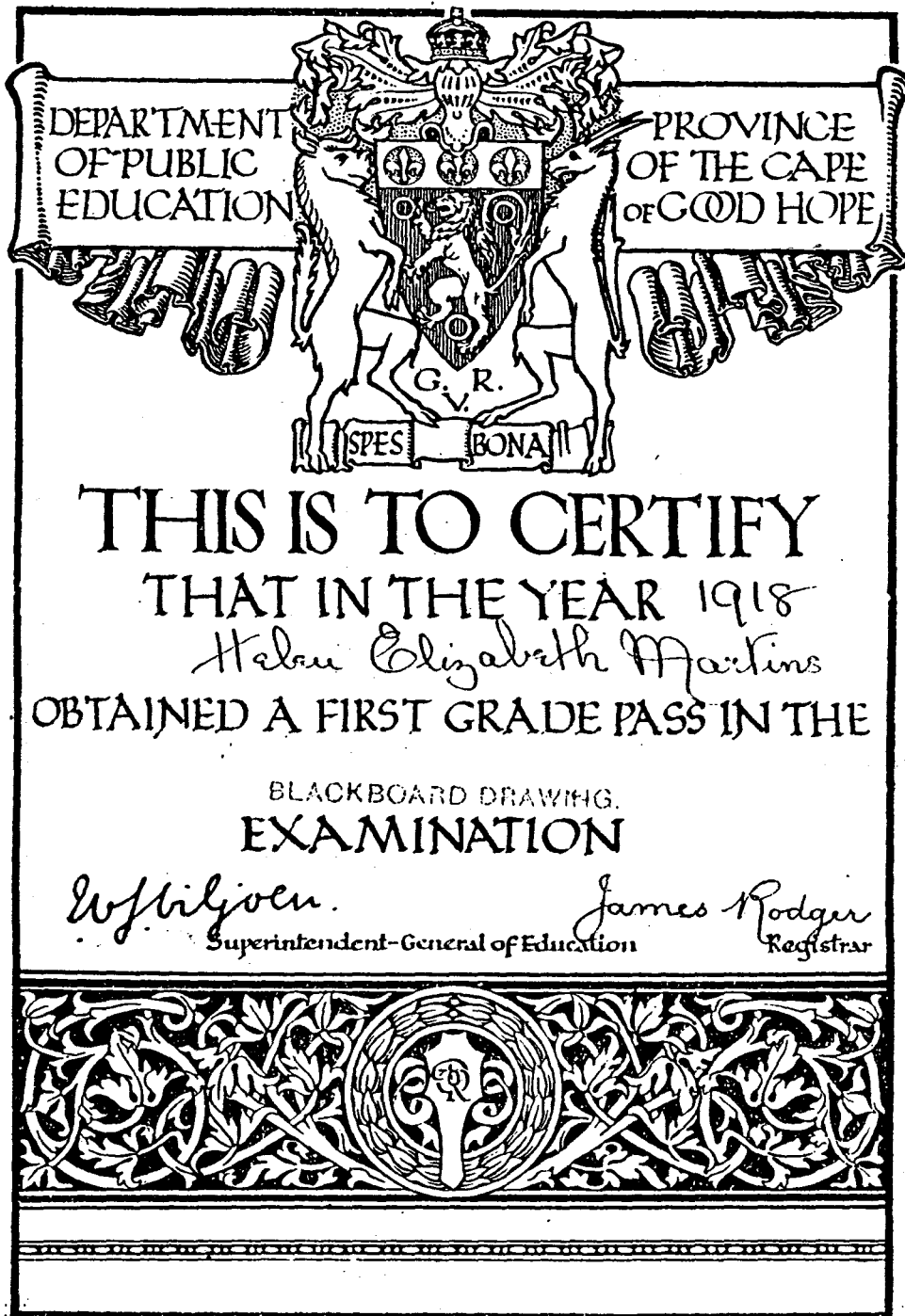
*passed in*

PIANOFORTE:  
HIGHER DIVISION.

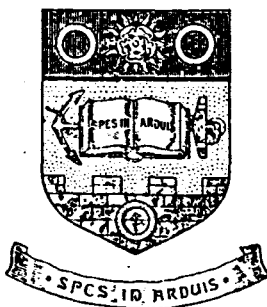
A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'W. Thomson'.

REGISTRAR.





# UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA.



## MUSIC CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION.

[CONDUCTED BY EXAMINERS OF THE ASSOCIATED BOARD OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC  
AND THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC, LONDON.]

### PASS CERTIFICATE.

*This is to Certify that at the  
Music Certificate Examination held in the year 1918*

*Helen Elizabeth Martins*

*passed in Pianoforte (Intermediate Division).*

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, likely belonging to the Registrar.

**REGISTRAR.**

INDO-ORIENTAALSE  
AKADEMIE



EKSAMEN KOMMISSIE    &    DE Z.A. TAALBOND

## EKSAMEN HOLLANDS.

HOGERE AFDELING.

1918.

*H. E. Martius*

*heeft dit examen met goed gevolg afgelegd  
in de Tweede Klas.*

*A. Monn*

Voorzitter Z.A. Akademie  
en Z.A. Taalbond.

*g.w. J. Malan.*

Sekretaris Z.A. Taalbond.

Minimum voor de Tweede Klas: 50 pct.

# DEPARTMENT



## OF PUBLIC EDUCATION, CAPE OF GOOD HOPE.

### THIRD CLASS TEACHERS' CERTIFICATE (SENIOR).

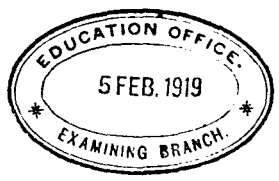
This CERTIFICATE of the SECOND GRADE is awarded after examination to

*Helen Elizabeth Martins.*

Passed in
Higher <i>English</i>
Lower

*W. J. J. J. J.*  
Superintendent-General of Education.

*James Rodger.*  
Registrar.



THE

# TONIC SOL-FA COLLEGE

FOUNDER—JOHN CURWEN.

President—Sir WALTER PARRATT, C.V.O., M.A., Mus. D. Oxon.

(Master of the King's Music. Professor of Music in the University of Oxford, &c.)

INCORPORATED 1875.

## STAFF NOTATION EXAMINATION.

*Helena Elizabeth Martine*

Having passed the prescribed Examination, including Tests in the Memory of Tune, in Time, and in Singing at Sight, is hereby awarded this

### CERTIFICATE OF THE FIRST GRADE.

*Walter Harrison, M.A., Mus. Doc. Oxon.*

Secretary.

*F. Farrington.*

Examiner.

DATE *7th April, 1910.*

REGISTERED NO. *27346*





DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWIJS. TRANSVAAL.

---

VOORLOPIGE ONDERWIJSERSERTIFIKAAT.

---

Hierdie voorlopige sertifikaat Derde Klas word ooreenkomstig die  
bepalinge van die Departement van Onderwijs, Transvaal, uitgereik aan

*Helen Elizabeth Pienaar*

*J. E. Hendrik*

1076 *Direkteur van Onderwijs, Transvaal.*

Datum *18. Januarie 1921.*

Hierdie sertifikaat kan deur die Direkteur van Onderwijs ingetrek word, wanneer hij nie oortuig  
is dat die houder trag 'n volle sertifikaat te behaal nie.



THE TRANSVAAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

---

TEACHER'S PROVISIONAL CERTIFICATE.

---

This Provisional Certificate of the Third Class is awarded in accordance  
with the regulations of the Transvaal Education Department to

*Helen Elizabeth Pienaar.*

*J. L. Hend*

*for* Director of Education, Transvaal.

Date *18<sup>th</sup> January 1921*

This Certificate may be withdrawn at any time if the Director is not satisfied that the holder is endeavouring to qualify for an unprovisional Certificate.

Ref. No. E.1/22702

# The Transvaal Education Department.

P.O. Box 432,

PRETORIA 25 FEB 1921.....19.....

Miss H.E. Pienaar,

Cullinan Government School,

P.O. Box 114,

PREMIER MINE.

**SINCE** MADAM,

I am instructed to remind you that, in accordance with Section 75 of the Education Act, 1907, it is necessary that all teachers in schools maintained or aided by the Government should hold a certificate or licence to teach issued by the Transvaal Education Department.

I am instructed, therefore, to inform you that for your legal protection a Third Class Provisional Certificate is issued to you dating from the 18th January, 1921, in accordance with Section 18 of the Regulations for issuing Teachers' Certificates, a copy of which is attached.

If you consider that your qualifications entitle you to a higher certificate, you are required to submit your claim to the Secretary to the Transvaal Education Department Pretoria, on the enclosed Form of Statement, completed, with the affidavit signed before a Justice of the Peace and stamped with a 1s. stamp. (If you have already submitted an affidavit in connection with your original application form, the statements made on the accompanying form will be regarded as covered by that affidavit.)

I am to add that the object of the Department in awarding the provisional certificate is merely to regularize your position in the Department. Your claim to the certificate to which you may consider that your qualifications entitle you will be considered after you have supplied on the accompanying form the exact details which are necessary for its determination. The information originally supplied on their application form by candidates for employment is often not complete or definite enough to enable an immediate issue to be made of the certificates to which the applicants may be justly entitled by their qualifications.

I have the honour to be,

~~SIX~~ Madam,

Your obedient Servant,

B.M.

H. S. SCOTT.

Secretary to the Transvaal Education Department.





DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS, TRANSVAAL.

ONDERWYSERSERTIFIKAAT  
DERDE KLAS.

Hierdie Sertifikaat

word ooreenkomstig Skedule I ~~(1)~~ (2), Bylae  
3, van die Sertifikaatregulasies van die Departe-  
ment van Onderwys, Transvaal, uitgereik

AAN

*W. J. van der Merwe*

*J. E. H. van der Merwe*  
Direkteur van Onderwys, Transvaal.

*24 Junie 1921*



THE TRANSVAAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

TEACHER'S  
THIRD CLASS CERTIFICATE.

This Certificate

is awarded in accordance with Schedule I ~~(1) of~~  
(2), Appendix 3, of the Certificate Regulations  
of the Transvaal Education Department

TO

*Ms. Elizabeth Pienaar*

*J. E. Adams*  
Director of Education, Transvaal.

*S. H. ...*



The Transvaal Education Department. Departement van Onderwijs, Transvaal.

P.O. Box 432,

POSTBUS 432,

PRETORIA, .....

PRETORIA, 7 - SEP 1921 .....

REGISTERED.

AANGETEKEND.

...Miss. H. E. Pienaar, ..

...Cullinan School, .....

...P.O. Box 114, Premier Mine. ....

~~XXXXXXXX~~ MADAM,

MIJNHEER, MEVROUW OF MEJUFFROUW,

I am instructed to inform you that the Director of Education has pleasure in awarding you a

Mij is opgedragen u mede te delen dat de Direkteur van Onderwijs het genoegen heeft u een Certifikaat

.....Transvaal Teachers' Third.....

Class Certificate in accordance with toe te kennen, overeenkomstig

.....Schedule I.(2). Appendix III.....

of the Certificate Regulations.

van de Regulaties op Certifikaten.

The actual Certificate, which dates from the

Het Certifikaat zelf, gedateerd

.....24th, June 1921.....

is attached, and I am to ask that you will be so good as to acknowledge its receipt.

gaat hierbij, en ik moet u verzoeken de goede ontvangst wel te willen berichten.

I have the honour to be,

Ik heb de eer te zijn,

~~XXXXXXXX~~ Madam,

Mijnheer, Mevrouw of Mejuffrouw,

Your obedient Servant,

Uw dienstwillige Dienaar,

Secretary, The Transvaal Education Department.  
Sekretaris, Departement van Onderwijs, Transvaal.



# Getuigskrif.

Die ondergetekene sertifiseer hiermee dat.....  
*Helen Martins*.....die klasse van die  
Graaff-Reinetse Opleidingskool vir...*4*...jaar bygewoon het. Ge-  
durende hierdie tyd het *sy haar* werk *altijd*.....met  
*die grootste getroutheid, ijwer, en belangstelling*.....gedoen.  
*Haar werke*.....lesse in die dorpskole en in die Opleidingskool  
*het getoon dat sy uitstekend goeie werk sal doen*  
*als onderwyseres. Sy is 'n entoesias en haar*  
*werk was gekenmerk deur deeglikheid en erns.*  
*Sy sal vooral slaag met die kleintjies*  
*Haar karakter is onbesproke en ek is oor-*  
*tuig dat haar invloed op kinders 'n*  
*goede sal wees. Sy sal nie alleen kennis*  
*wil medeel nie maar ook besiel*  
*Ek verwag veel van haar.*

*Ben Louw BA O.T.*

Hoofonderwyser,

*sy is 12<sup>de</sup> in 'n klas van 76.*

Opleidingskool,

Graaff-Reinet.

*11.11.18*

# Petsingbrief

Die oudorgetekende sertifiseer  
kerme dat Helen Martius die Klasse van  
die Graaff Reinetse Opleidingskool vir  
4 jaar bygewoon het. Gedurende hierdie  
tyd het sy haar werk altyd met die grootste  
getrouwoord, ijwer, en belangstelling gedoen.  
Haar werk en lesse in die dorpskole en in die  
Opleidingskool het getoond dat sy uitstekend  
goeie werk sal doen als onderwyseres. Sy is 'n  
entusias en haar werk was gekenmerk deur  
degelikheid en erus. Sy sal vooral saag met  
die Kleintjies. Haar karakter is onbesproke  
en ek is oortuig dat haar invloed op kinders  
ten goede sal wees. Sy sal nie alleen kennis  
wil medeel nie maar ook besel.  
Ek verwag veel van haar.

Bee Tante B.A. 07

Hoofonderwyser,  
Opleidingskool,  
Graaff Reinet

Sy is 12<sup>de</sup> in 'n klas van 76.

11.11.15

Nieuw Bethesda  
30 Nov. 1918

Undergetekende getuigt hiermede dat  
hij Mej H. Martius voor meer dan  
8 jaren kent, dat zij vriendelik en aangenaam  
is in haar omgang, van goed gedrag en  
karakter, Christelike handelen en wandelen.  
Hij meent dat zij getrouw en ijverig zal  
zijn in haar plichtsovervulling.

A. J. B. Feenstra  
Leraar van Nieuw Bethesda

De ondergeteekende verklaart hiermede dat hij Mej. Hela  
Martens kent als in jonge dochter van goed zedelyk en  
christelyk geslag en beveelt haar derhalve gaarne aan  
voor een betrekking als onderwijzeres waartoe zij zich  
alhier laat opleiden

Graaff Remel  
28 Nov. 1918

Bro. Heek  
Predkant N.G. Kerk



Intern. School, N. Bethesda,  
11 Dec. 1918.

### Getuigschrift.

De ondergetekende verklaart hiernede dat Mej. Helen Martins tot ongeveer drie jaar geleden een leerlinge was aan bovengemelde school. Voor haar vertrek uit de school passerde ze Staud. VII.

Ze was altijd een stil en gehoorzaam kind, en onderscheidde zich door vlijt in haar schoolwerk. Zou ik haar ken is ze een dame van onbesproken gedrag.

Theo. C. Pauw,  
Hoofdonderwijzer.

## **Analysis of Helen Martins' Handwriting by Graphologist Solange Poswick**

(11 Peddie Road, Milnerton 7441, Cape Town. Tel (021) 52 4133)

She was given an original letter written by Helen Martins, but told nothing about the identity or history of the writer.

### **HELEN MARTINS**

Interesting personality - due to the complexity of her character - a complexity however which does not reveal itself in one's first impression of the writer.

Beneath an apparent simplicity of being, modesty, discretion, stirs a strong streak of passion, which she constantly attempts to control.

The writer is an intelligent woman, knowledgeable, attracted by the realm of thoughts, ideas - but her aspirations are too high and what could be the formulation of an ideal becomes utopia, exalted mysticism with a touch of fanaticism.

A rigid education seems to have stamped her youth and this has left a mark. Stemming from way back there are remnants of childish claims, unresolved problems which pervade her unconscious.

Opposite tendencies confront each other. part of her doubts herself and a deep-rooted feeling of insecurity permeates her being. She suffers from a feeling of being personally and emotionally unfulfilled.

And yet one also finds in her an inner strength, and intensity - but these are not well channelled. Sometimes an excessive control stands in the way of a healthy liberation and utilization of her strength, which in turn brings about an inhibition of normal instincts and this creates a breeding ground for neuroses.

Unconsciously she wishes to overcome her feelings of inferiority: she has a desperate need to assert herself in whatever manner possible. She wants to be acknowledged.

And yet it is not herself she is keen to assert, but her ideas, of which she is totally imbued and which she would never dream of relinquishing.

One must not be fooled: this timid, at times gentle woman can be quite authoritarian and will not allow herself, under any circumstances, to be led astray from her aims and ideas. She can become quite aggressive, verbally as well, if one chooses to cross swords with her in this department.

Further dualities in her life:

- \* Her inner life which transports her into intense excitable mental spheres
- \* Her daily existence, her work, her routine which are very important to her. She accomplishes her duties honestly and scrupulously. She is also finicky and attributes exaggerated importance to unimportant details: her scruples border on mania.

Paradoxically, she is not devoid of a sense of reality. Awareness of the concrete and the practical is present. Prudent and careful, she tries to organize her life to the best of her knowledge. she is not a spendthrift.

The writer is emotionally vulnerable and highly sensitive. She can be pleasant, there is a certain warmth about her, but she does not seem able to establish an authentic contact with her fellow-being, due to difficulties experienced when trying to adapt herself to others: she is too rigid in her attitudes and too one-sided for a true interchange to take place.

She will only relate to a restricted group of people selected by her and will only experience a real attachment to a chosen few.

Though she can be generous and helpful it will not be through her love for her fellow-beings but out of a sense of duty.

There is little emotional fulfilment in her life (if any ...).

The writer's sense of morals is very developed: She is straight forward, direct, honest and one can trust her.

Serious, conscientious, she is not after her own comfort and pleasures and lives rather ascetically.

To sum up: the writer lives in a permanent state of confusion and frustration. She attempts to escape into a make-believe world into which she can pour - in the form of spiritual fanaticism - her vital forces, which are compressed, repressed and with 'a lid on' in her every day life.

She in fact suffers from mental anomalies - but the excitability connected therewith is only rarely apparent in her behaviour: her control keeps it in check.

(extracts from letter from Tineke Honig who made the contact with Solange Poswick with the letter by Helen)

P O Box 115  
Stellenbosch 7600  
3-12-1989

Dear Sue

Here is the analysis and I hope you are happy with the result. Solange and her friend found it a fascination handwriting and spent quite a few extra hours on it. The friend translated from French to English, which Solange then copied.

*They did not have any idea who H.M. was and didn't want any information on her until after they finished.* I must contact her now as she is dying to hear more about her.

Love Tineke Honig

[Author's italics]

## New Testament in The Owl House

The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

London: Henry Frowde  
Oxford University Press Warehouse Amen corner

Marked Bible texts - marked in red on side with red pointing hand, and passages underlined in black.

**Matthew 9 v 2.** And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said (unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

**Matthew 11 v 28.** Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give thee rest.

**Matthew 14 v 36.** And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

**Matthew 15 v 28.** Then Jesus answered and said unto her: O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

**Matthew 16 v 26.** For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

**Matthew 18 v 3.** And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as-little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

**Matthew 18 v 11.** For the Son of man is come to save that which is lost.

**Matthew 20 v 28.** Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

**Matthew 27 v 35.** And they crucified him, ....

**Matthew 27.**

v 38. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

v 39. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

v 40. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

v 41. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,)

v 42. He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

v 46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My god, my God, why has thou forsaken me?



v 54. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

#### Matthew 28.

v 5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

v 6. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

v 7. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him; lo, I have told you.

#### Mark 1.

v 40. And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

v 41. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

Mark 2 v 5. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

Mark 2 v 17. When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Mark 5 v 28. And she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.

Mark 5 v 29. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.

Mark 5 v 34. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.

Mark 5 v 36. As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.

Mark 6 v 56. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

Mark 8 v 36. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

#### Mark 9.

v 22. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

v 23. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

v 24. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

Mark 10 v 45. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Mark 12 v 6. Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.

**Mark 15.**

v 13. And they cried out again, Crucify him.

v 14. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.

**Mark 15.**

v 27. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right and the other on his left.

v 28. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.

**Mark 15 v 31.** Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.

**Mark 15 v 34.** And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

**Mark 15 v 39.** And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

**Mark 16.**

v 6. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

v 15. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

**Luke 5.**

v 20. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

v 32. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

**Luke 6.**

v 48. He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

v 49. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth: against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately if fell: and the ruin of that house was great.

**Luke 7.**

v 42. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

v 48. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

v 49. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

v 50. And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.

**Luke 8.**

v 48. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.

**Luke 17.**

v 13. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, master, have mercy on us.

v 19. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

**Luke 23.**

- v 4. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.
- v 13. And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,
- v 14. Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him:
- v 15. No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him.
- v 21. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him.
- v 22. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.
- v 33. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.
- v 41. And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.
- v 47. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.

**Luke 24.**

- v 6. He is not here, but is risen; ...
- v 46. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day;
- v 47. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached, in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

**John 1 v 12.** But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;

**John 3.**

- v 3. Jesus, answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
- v 7. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.
- v 15. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
- v 16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
- v 18. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
- v 36. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

**John 5 v 24.** Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

**John 6.**

- v 29. Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.
- v 37. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.
- v 40. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
- v 47. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

**John 8 v 24.** I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

**John 9.**

v 35. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, **Don't thou believe on the son of God?**

v 36. He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

v 37. And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

v 38. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

**John 11.**

v 25. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

v 26. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

v 50. Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.

**John 12.**

v 27. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.

v 32. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

v 33. This he said, signifying what death he should die.

**John 14 v 6.** Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

**John 15 v 13.** Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

**John 17 v 20.** Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

**John 18.**

v 13. And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.

v 14. Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

v 29. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?

v 38. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

**John 19.**

v 15. But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

v 16. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.

v 17. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:

v 18. Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

v 30. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

v 35. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.

v 36. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.

v 37. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

#### **John 20.**

v 25. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

v 29. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

v 30. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

v 31. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

#### **Acts 3.**

v 14. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

v 16. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

v 19. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord:

#### **Acts 4.**

v 10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

v 12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

#### **Acts 10.**

v 36. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: he is Lord of all:

v 42. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

v 43. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

#### **Acts 16.**

v 30. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

v 31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

v 34. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

**Acts 26 v 18.** To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

#### **Romans 3.**

v 19. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

v 20. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.



v 22. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

v 23. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

v 24. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

v 25. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

v 26. To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

v 28. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

#### **Romans 4.**

v 3. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

v 4. Now to him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of **grace**, but of **debt**.

v 5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness without works.

v 13. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

v 16. **Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace;** to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

v 23. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

v 24. But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead:

v 25. Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

#### **Romans 5.**

v 1. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

v 6. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

v 7. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

v 8. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

v 9. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

v 18. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

v 19. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

#### **Romans 6.**

v 1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

v 2. God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

v 6. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

v 23. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### **Romans 8.**

v 1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

v 32. **He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us** all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

v 38. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,  
v 39. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### **Romans 10.**

v 4. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.  
v 9. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.  
v 11. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

**1 Corinthians 1 v 23.** But we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

**1 Corinthians 3 v 11.** For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

**1 Corinthians 6 v 20.** For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

#### **1 Corinthians 15.**

v 56. The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.  
v 57. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**II Corinthians 4 v 5.** For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

#### **II Corinthians 5.**

v 17. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.  
v 19. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.  
v 20. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.  
v 21. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

#### **Galatians 1.**

v 3. Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,  
v 4. Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

**Galatians 2 v 20.** I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

#### **Galatians 3.**

v 13. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:  
v 22. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.  
v 24. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

#### **Galatians 4.**

v 4. But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

v 5. To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

**Ephesians 1 v 7.** In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

#### **Ephesians 2.**

v 4. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

v 5. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together, and made us sit together in heavenly places with Christ, by grace ye are saved;

v 8. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;

v 13. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

**Ephesians 4 v 32.** And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

**Ephesians 5 v 2.** And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

#### **Colossians 1.**

v 20. And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

v 21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.

#### **Colossians 2.**

v 13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

v 14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

**1 Timothy 1 v 15.** This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

#### **1 Timothy 2.**

v 5. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

v 6. Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

#### **Titus 2.**

v 11. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.

v 13. Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

v 14. Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

**Titus 3 v 7.** That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Hebrews 2 v 3. How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

#### Hebrews 4.

v 2. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

v 6. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

#### Hebrews 9.

v 11. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

v 12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

v 22. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Hebrews 10 v 17. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 11 v 1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

#### Hebrews 12.

v 1. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

v 2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

#### 1 Peter 1.

v 4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

v 8. Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

v 18. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conservation received by tradition from your fathers;

v 19. But with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

1 Peter 2 v 24. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

1 Peter 3 v 18. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

#### 1 John 3.

v 16. Hereby perceive we that love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

v 23. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

**1 John 4.**

v 9. For this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

v 10. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

**1 John 5.**

v 1. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

v 10. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

v 11. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

v 12. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

v 13. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

**Revelation 1 v 5.** And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

**Revelation 5 v 9.** And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue and people and nation;

**Revelation 7.**

v 13. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are those which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

v 14. And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

**Revelation 22 v 17.** And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.



**Family History of Willem Johannes Pienaar  
first husband of Helen Martins**

Extracted from:

**Doop Register der Ned. Geref. Kerk  
te  
Nieuw Bethesda**

No.	311
Familienaam.	Pienaar
Doopname.	Willem Johannes
Wanneer Geboren.	30 Mei 1892
Wanneer Dedoopt.	18 September 1892
Waar Dedoopt.	N. Bethesda
Door Wien.	Ds. A. A. Wiech
namen der Ouders.	Willem Johannes Pienaar Hester Catharina van Aswegen
Namen der Doopgetuigen.	Willem Johannes Pienaar Catharina Jocomina van der Merwe Susanna van der Merwe Hester Jacoba Pienaar
No.	375
Familienaam.	Pienaar
Doopnamen.	Jan Gerhardus
Wanneer Geboren.	28 September 1894
Namen der Ouders.	Willem Johannes Pienaar Hester Catherina van Aswegen
No.	432
Familienaam.	Pienaar
Doopnamen.	Jacomina Susanna
Wanneer Geboren.	28 September 1886
Namen der Ouders.	Willem Johannes Pienaar Hester Catharina van Aswegen
No.	528
Familienaam.	Pienaar
Doopnamen.	Hester Catharina
Wanneer Geboren.	20 November 1901
Door Wien Gedoopt.	Ds. A. C. Murray

Namen der Ouders.

Willem Johannes Pienaar  
Hester Catharina van Aswegen

Extracted from:

**Ledematen Register  
der  
Ned. Geref. Kerk  
te  
Nieuw Bethesda**

No.	966
Familienaam.	Pienaar
Doopname.	Willem Johannes
Geboren.	30 Mei 1892
Aangekomen.	26 Desember 1917
Bevestigd.	6 Januarie 1918
Plaats.	Nieuw Bethesda
Door Wien Aangenomen.	Ds. R. J. B. Feenstra
Aanmerkingen.	(crossed out in ink) Sertf na Oos London 11-9-37

**Inscriptions on gravestones in Nieu Bethesda graveyard**

(possibly parents of Helen Martins' first husband, Willem Johannes Pienaar?)

Ter Gedadtenis aan  
my dierbare vrou  
en ons moeder  
Hester Catharina Pienaar  
gebore 13 Junie 1859  
Oorlede 27 Dec. 1935  
Ons lig is uit ons huis gegaan  
Een geliefde stem is stil  
Een plek is ledig in ons huis  
Dat nooit kan word gevul.

Opgerig deur haar Eggenoot  
en Dogter Hester

**PIENAAR**

Ter Gedagtenis aan  
my vader.

Willem J. Pienaar  
Geb. 16 April 1866  
Oorl. 16 Feb. 1953  
Sac heen gegaan

Opgerig deur  
Hester, Alick & Tannie

## List of Interviews

- ABRAMOWITZ, CAROLE** Jungian Analyst  
1995 Interviews: Cape Town
- ADAMS, JONAS** Born 31-5-1900. Worked in The Owl House  
March 1991 Interview: Alra Park, Nigel, Transvaal
- AXE, JOHN** Senior English master, St Andrew's College, Grahamstown  
11-9-1989 Discussion: Grahamstown
- BARTLETT, VAL** Librarian at Cullinan Library  
December 1993 Telephone interview, letter and documents, Pretoria
- BRIERS, ROSALIE** Contemporary of Helen's sister, Annie, Born 8-12-1883 grew up in Nieu Bethesda, and left for training college in Wellington before marrying. She turned 100 on 8-12-1993, did not look or act as if she was more than in her eighties, and had a perfect memory.  
7-11-1993 Interview: Paarl, 'Otterkuil'
- BROOKS, ROBERT (Prof)** Made a film on the Owl House with John Peacock in 1978.  
1984 - 1995 Interviews: Grahamstown, Cape Town
- BÜHRMANN, VERA (Dr).** Jungian analyst and author  
30-7-1990 Interview: Cape of Good Hope Centre for Jungian Studies, Cape Town
- BURGER, TERS** His parents, aunts and uncles grew up in Nieu Bethesda, gave further names and addresses to contact  
23-11-1993 Letter: Bloemfontein
- CHICHESTER, ANN** Friend of Connie Dredge, Bakoven  
9-6-1991 Interview: Bakoven, Cape Town

**CHOMO, ROGER**

Creator of Village of Preludian Art

June 1994 Interview: Achères la Forêt, near Fontainebleau, France

**CHOMO'S FEMALE COMPANION**

June 1994 Interview: Achères la Forêt, France.

**CLAASEN, GERTRUIDA ('Tant Japie')**

Former Town Clerk and Postmistress of Nieu-Bethesda. Knew Helen Martins well for many years

29-12-1985 Interview: Nieu Bethesda

**CLOETE, ERIKA**

Wife of the dominee in Nieu Bethesda in the last years of Helen Martins' life; was summoned when Helen drank caustic soda

13-6-1988 Letter and telephone interview

**CORKE, CORINNE (née Landsberg)**

Was taught English by Piet Martins and history by Johannes Pienaar in Volksrust, was 12 years old at the time. Lives in Durban now

18-11-1993 Letter and telephone interview

**CRAIG, CYNTHIA (née Griffiths)**

Used to live in Nieu Bethesda. God-daughter to Mrs Tiny (60 in 1990) Hartzenberg who was Helen's backdoor neighbour from 1927.

21-11-1989 Telephone interview

**CROUS, BETTY (Mrs Johan)**

Doctor, and niece of Helen Martins, daughter of Helen's middle sister, Alida

08-11-1993 Telephone interview: Krugersdorp

30-11-1993 Tape response to letter

**CUPIDO, MATTIE (née Meyer)**

Grew up in Nieu Bethesda, sister of Sister Alice Meyer, sister at the Nieu Bethesda clinic. Aged 65

10-12-1993 Telephone interview: Cape Town, Mitchell's Plain

**DAVID, JULIAN**

Jungian Analyst, from England, at the Cape of Good Hope Centre for Jungian Studies, for four years from 1989-1993.

28-9-1989 Interview: Cape Town

08-3-1993 Discussion: Cape Town



- DELPORT, PEGGY (Archer, Mrs)** Artist, and has had a holiday home in Nieu Bethesda for many years.  
1-1-1986 Interview: Nieu Bethesda
- DEGENAAR, JOHAN (Prof), and JETTY** Retired Professor of Philosophy, University of Stellenbosch  
30-9-1989 Discussion: Stellenbosch
- DE VILLIERS, BLIGNAUT** Editor *Windhoek Advertiser*. He was, as far as is known, the first journalist to interview Helen Martins, in 1969 or 1970, for an article which appeared in *Dagbreek en Landstem* of 30-8-1970. He corresponded with her, and visited her fairly regularly.  
9-5-1989 Telephone interview: Windhoek  
28-8-1989 Taped interview: Windhoek
- DE WAAL, ESTHER (Dr)** British spiritual writer and historian  
February 1989 Lecture and discussion: Grahamstown
- DU PLESSIS, ANDRÉE** Daughter of Estelle van Schalkwijk, wife of the doctor in Graaff-Reinet who Helen Martins and her parents consulted, and with whom Helen maintained a long correspondence.  
November 1993 Letter and telephone conversation.
- EDWARDS, FELICITY** Associate Professor, Divinity Dept, Rhodes University  
7-11-1993 Interview: Cape Town
- FLETCHER, JILL** Author, critic, puppeteer  
November-December 1995 Interviews: Cape Town
- FRONEMAN, GERHARD L** Historical Homes Commission, Stellenbosch. Twenty year connection with Nieu Bethesda and Graaff-Reinet  
20-12-1993 Telephone interview: Stellenbosch  
Dec 1995 Interview: Cape Town
- FUGARD, ATHOL (Dr)** Playwright, author of 'Road to Mecca'. Has a house in Nieu Bethesda  
27-3-1985 Interview: Sardinia Bay, Port Elizabeth  
October 1993 Discussions: Nieu Bethesda

- GOLDBLATT, DAVID**      Photographer and editor. Has studied Dutch Reformed Church architecture and Afrikaners extensively  
October/November 1993 Interviews: Nieu Bethesda, Cape Town
- GOLDMAN, JOFIAH**      Widow of Leslie Goldman, sculptor  
1994 - 1995 Telephone interviews
- GOLDMAN, SARRON**      Son of Leslie Goldman  
17-12-1995 Interview: Cape Town
- HAGEN, MEL**              Artist  
1991 Discussion: Cape Town
- HARRISON, PEARL (née Jubilee)**  
Aged 86, January 1994. Former pupil of Piet v d Merwe Martins (English Std. 7, to matric) and Johannes Pienaar (history) at school in Volksrust.  
January 1994 Letters, and 10-1-1994 telephone interview
- HARTZENBERG, 'TINY'**      Lived as Helen Martins' back neighbour from 1927 until Helen's death in 1976. (died March 1989) Aged 87  
5-2-1989 Interview: Graaff-Reinet, Red Cross Old Age Home
- HEEGER, AVIS**              Town Clerk of Nieu Bethesda  
October 1993 Interviews: Nieu Bethesda
- HENDRIKS, ELSIE (née Tamana)**  
Grew up in Nieu Bethesda  
31-10-1993 Interview: Nieu Bethesda
- HERHOLDT, ALBRECHT**      Dept of Architecture, UPE. Wrote report on conservation status of Nieu Bethesda, and The Owl House  
3-12-1993 Interview: Port Elizabeth
- HOLTMAN, ROSE**              Friend of Connie Dredge, Bakoven  
9-6-1991 Interview: Bakoven, Cape Town
- KENNEDY, JIM.**              Maker of Cashelmarra, Noordhoek, Cape Town  
12-5-1991 Interview: Cape Town  
17-9-1994 Second interview and photographs: Cape Town

- KINLEY, MONIKA.** Curator of the Outsider Archive, London  
 April 1990 Interview: London  
 May 1994 Interview: London
- KRUGER, MACHTELD MARIA (née Hattingh)**  
 Daughter of Johannes Hendrik Hattingh, Helen's married lover for approximately 21 years  
 19-11-1993 Letters and telephone interview: Port Elizabeth  
 5-12 -1993 Interview: Port Elizabeth
- LABAUSCHAGNE, MAGDA**  
 Maker of painted rondavel roof in Bedford, Cape.  
 19-8-1991 Interview: Bedford
- LE ROUX, ANNIE (née Martins)**  
 Eldest sister of Helen Martins then aged 92  
 28-3-1986 Interview: Manzini, Swaziland
- LE ROUX, JOE**  
 Elder son of Annie le Roux, nephew of Helen Martins  
 28-3-1986 Interview: Manzini, Swaziland
- LE ROUX, JENNI**  
 Wife of Peter le Roux; niece-in-law of Helen Martins  
 28-3-1986 Interview: Manzini, Swaziland
- LE ROUX, PETER**  
 Younger son of Annie le Roux; nephew of Helen Martins  
 28-3-1986 Interview: Manzini, Swaziland
- LUND, FRANCIÉ**  
 Young friend of Helen's during the last three or four years of her life; regular correspondent and visitor.  
 1989, 1993, 1994 Interviews: Durban and Cape Town
- MOBASA, NORIA**  
 Maker of clay sculptures and woodcarvings  
 March 1987 Interview: Venda
- MACLENNAN, DON (Prof)** Professor of English at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. Knew Helen Martins and corresponded with her. He gave her a copy of 'The Rubiyyat of Omar Khayyam'  
 10-1-1989 Interview: Grahamstown
- MALGAS, KOOS**  
 Maker of much of the work in The Owl House, and with Helen Martins for the last 12 years of her life  
 28-12-1988 Taped Interview: Worcester  
 October 1993 Taped interviews and Discussions: Nieu Bethesda  
 October 1995 Discussions: Nieu Bethesda

- MARTINS, HATTIE** Daughter-in-law of Peter v d Merwe Martins, married to his son Theo, former MEC for Wakkerstroom, living on a farm at Volksrust.  
10-1-1994 Telephone interview: Volksrust
- MARTINS, MARIECHEN** Daughter of Roelf Martins, and granddaughter of Piet Martins (Helen's brother)  
13-1-1994 Telephone interview and letters: Bloemfontein
- MBHELE, SIBUSISO** Creator of aeroplane environment  
16-4-1994 Interview: Bergville district, Natal
- MILTON, CHRIS** Clinical psychologist  
1989 Interview: Grahamstown  
29-5-1991 Discussion: Cape Town
- MOYLE, JOHN** Architect UCT. First visited Helen Martins in 1973 or 1974, with Jill Wenman  
29-11-1993 Interview: Cape Town
- MUDIE, GILL (Dr).** Clinical psychologist and trainee Jungian analyst  
August 1993 Discussions: Cape Town
- MULDER, COOSIE** Grew up in Nieu Bethesda  
14-12-1993 Telephone interview: Goodwood, Cape Town
- NASH, ELEANOR (Prof)** Associate Professor, Dept of Psychiatry, Groote Schuur Hospital  
16-12-1989 Interview: Cape Town
- NETSHIPISE, RICHARD** Maker of Park of Redeem and Year of Redeem garden  
March 1991 Interview: Venda
- PARKER, JEAN** Knew Helen in the 1970s. Wrote an article about her in 1978 for Landbouweekblad, in conjunction with John Warner.  
2-12-1993 Interview: Cape Town
- PIENAAR, ANDRÉ** His father was a cousin of Willem Johannes Pienaar. He used to spend holidays with his grandfather and help Helen with cement work  
20-11-1993 Telephone interview

**PIENAAR, BAREND ('Rendo')**

Mayor of Nieu Bethesda. Knew Helen and her family  
25-10-1993 Interview: Nieu Bethesda

**PIENAAR, 'DAN' (Willem Johannes)**

Cousin of Helen Martins' first husband, Willem Johannes Pienaar  
15-11-1993 Telephone interview: Port Elizabeth  
04-12-1993 Interview: Port Elizabeth

**PIENAAR, JOHAN (Dr).**

Former District Surgeon in Nieu Bethesda; attended to Helen Martins when she died  
19-10-1993 Taped interview: Graaff-Reinet

**PIENAAR, NELDA, (Mrs)**

Secretary to the Nieu Bethesda Dutch Reformed Church  
October 1993 Interview: Nieu Bethesda

**PIENAAR, SHARWOOD**

Resident of Nieu Bethesda. Has lived there all his life.  
30-10-1993 Interview: Nieu Bethesda

**PIENAAR, SUZETTE**

Sister at Nieu Bethesda Clinic. Went in ambulance with Helen Martins to hospital in Graaff-Reinet. Married to Stirling Pienaar (nephew of Mrs Norah van Niekerk), and farms at Aasvoël Krans, where Helen's father used to farm.  
6-10-1993 Interview: Nieu Bethesda

**RAYNER, WILLIAM SHEPSTONE (Buzz)**

Optician, Graaff Reinet. Treated Helen, and last saw her about two years before her death. Her card was destroyed 10 years after she died, so her records no longer exist.  
9-1-1994 Telephone interview: Graaff Reinet

**RETIEF, GERTIE**

Huis van den Graaff, Old Age Home, Graaff-Reinet. Aged 88 years. Grew up in Nieu Bethesda, and returned in 1946. She was then Helen Martins' next-door neighbour until Helen's death.  
19-10-1993 Taped interview: Graaff-Reinet

**RETIEF, RINA**

Sister at Nieu Bethesda Clinic. Neighbour of Helen Martins, married to Stirling Retief.  
31-12-1985 Interview: Nieu Bethesda



- RETIEF, STIRLING** Owner of Bethesda Trading Store CC. Neighbour of Helen Martins. Married to Rina Retief, and son of Gertie Retief.  
25-10-1993 Interview: Nieu Bethesda
- ROMANYSHIN, BOB (Dr).** Clinical Psychologist, visiting from University of Dallas, USA  
August 1990 Interview: Grahamstown  
11/12-8-1990 Interview: The Owl House, Nieu Bethesda
- SAINI, NEK CHAND** Creator of the Rock Garden at Chandigarh, India  
March 1990 Interview and visit over two days: Chandigarh, India
- SHAPER, BARBARA** Formerly on the Nieu Bethesda telephone exchange, friendly with Helen Martins at the end of her life.  
16-1-1986 Telephone interview: Aberdeen
- SIEBERHAGEN** Lived in Nieu Bethesda after Mrs Coosie Mulder left  
14-12-1993 Telephone interview: Strand
- SMIT, G B** Retired attorney from Graaff-Reinet. He drew up the ANC between Helen and Mr Niemand when they got married.  
17-11-1993 Telephone interview: Port Elizabeth
- TAINTON, ANDREW** He grew up in Nieu Bethesda, knew Helen, and left in 1948 at the age of 8 or 9.  
20-12-1993 Telephone interview: Somerset West
- THERON, DANIE (Prof)** Dept Architecture, UPE. Regional Chairman, E. Cape, National Monuments Commission.  
4-12-1993 Interview: Port Elizabeth
- TORR, PEGGY** Lives at Middelburg  
18-11-1993 Telephone interview: Middelburg
- VAN DER MERWE, PIET** First man to do major work with Helen Martins, essentially a builder.  
4-2-1989 Interview: Nieu Bethesda
- VAN HEERDEN, KAREL** Semi-retired attorney in Cradock. He grew up in Nieu Bethesda, leaving in 1940.  
28-11-1993 Telephone interview: Cradock

**VAN DER MESCHT, DIRK** Maker of sculptures at Zuney railway station.

November 1990 Interview: Zuney, Eastern Cape

**VAN NIEKERK, NORAH (Olivia Leonora, neé Pienaar)**

Aged 93 in 1993. She grew up with the Martins sisters, but was two years younger than Helen. Her sister, Mrs Rosalie Briers, turned 100 on 8 December 1993, and was in the same class as Helen's eldest sister Annie (le Roux). Her father's farm De Toorn was one farm above Helen's father's farm Aasvoël Krans. The Pienaar family are still prominent and numerous in Nieu Bethesda. (They were not related to Helen's first husband, Johannes Pienaar).

8-10-1993 Taped interview: Graaff-Reinet

**VOGELMAN, ROZELLE**

Researcher, who was working for Athol Fugard with 'Road to Mecca' in mind.

17-4-1986 Interview: Cape Town

**VOSLOO, JOHAN**

Freelance journalist, former news reporter and political editor of *Rapport*. He interviewed Helen Martins for feature article in *Foto-Rapport* of 22-6-1975. Photographs were taken by Maurice Crankshaw.

12-10-1993 Taped interview: Fish River, E. Cape

**WEBER, BRUNO**

Maker of Weinrebenpark.

March 1990 Dietekon, Switzerland

**WENMAN, JILL**

Close friend of Helen Martins during the last three or four years of her life; regular visitor and correspondent

10/11-12-1988 Taped interview: The Owl House, Nieu Bethesda  
February 1989 Interview: Cape Town

**WENMAN, STAN**

Father of Jill Wenman, who also visited Helen Martins

1-1-1989 Interview: Sedgfield

**WOODS, JOHN**

Psychiatrist

October 1994 Interview: East London

**WOODS, PETER**

Psychiatrist

October 1994 Interview: East London

## EXTRACTS FROM HISTORY OF DRC IN NIEU BETHESDA

*Op 'n vergadering, gehou te Uitkyk op 15.12.1874, bespreek hierdie lidmate, almal woonagtig in die Sneeuberge, die moontlikheid van die stigting van 'n dorp op die plaas Uitkyk. .... Daar is besluit (op 9.2.1875) om met die oog op die stigting van 'n gemeente in dié wyk die plaas Uitkyk aan te koop. ('n Eeu van Genade: 2).*

*Charles Murray, destyds leraar van Graaff-Reinet, skryf op 22.3.1875 die volgende brief aan die heer J. M. Martins, "Voorzitter van het Comité":*

*"Waarden Heer, Ik zal het tot ene eer reken dat gij een van die straten van het nieuwe dorp naar mij genoemt. Wat den naam betreft heb ik de volgende voor te stellen, t.w. i) Bethel, dat is Huis Gods of ii) Bethelsdal (zie Gen. 28:19) of iii) Bethelstad of iv) Bethesda, dit is: Huis van weldadigheid. Zie Joh.5:2.*

*Is no. i) wat kort dan zou no. ii) welluidend zyn. Van namen die niet bybelsch zyn heb ik gedacht aan i) Nassau of ii) Nassaudal of iii) Livingstone. Daar het dorp word opgericht om weldadigheid te doen aan de armen zou no. iv) niet onaardig zyn. Het klinkt goed. De keuze aan u overlatende. Ben ik met achting C. Murray"*

*Die naam van die dorp het dus nie sy oorsprong by die feit dat die dorp in so n waterryke kom tussen die berge geleë is, of vanweë die vrugbare valleigrond en die gesonde klimaat soos wat dit met die eerste oogopslag wil voorkom nie en ook deur die oorlewering aanvaar is nie.*

*Volgens sommige bronne en ook volgens oorlewering het ds. Charles Murray by die stigtingsvergadering van die Gemeente Nieu Bethesda op 20.11.1878 die voorstel gemaak: "Laten wij het nu Bethesda noemen", die "nu" dan in die sin van "nou". Volgens hierdie bronne is dit egter verderd genotuleer as "Nieuw" en vandaar die naam Nieuw Bethesda, later Nieu Bethesda. ('n Eeu van Genade: 2-3.)*

### Translation into English of part of Charles Murray's letter:

Dear Sir, I will esteem it an honour that you have named one of the streets in the new village after me. As regards to the name I would like to propose the following, namely (i) Bethel, which is the House of God or (ii) Bethelsdal (see Genesis 28:19) or (iii) Bethelstad or (iv) Bethesda, that is: House of Charity. See John 5:2.

Should number (i) be too short then number (ii) would sound nice. Of names which are not biblical I thought of (i) Nassau or (ii) Nassaudal or (iii) Livingstone. As the village is being established to help the poor, number (iv) would not be a bad name. It sounds good. Leaving the choice to you. I remain faithfully D. Murray. ('n Eeu van Genade: 2-3.)

**Helen Martins' Last Will and Testament (Unwitnessed)**  
**Written with Jill Wenman 31 May 1976**

I, Helen Martins, want the following instructions carried out to the letter after my death:

- 1 My body is to be removed through the red door in the long bedroom and out through the zinc gate in the yard - not through the front door. I have my reasons.
- 2 My ashes are to (be) brought back and scattered in the yard of The Owl House amongst my camels and owls and Meccas.
- 3 A fence must be erected around the entire yard to protect the sculptures and stars from vandals. This is very important.
- 4 The Egyptian geese and birds must be given to Mr Wenman (Box 36, Sedgefield, Cape.)
- 5 I want nothing, either inside or outside the house removed. No mirrors, furniture, lamps, ornaments, trunks, hanging carpets, sculptures, etc (except those listed below) removed or sold for any purpose whatever.
  - a) The antique washstand with the marble top, in the long bedroom (at back), to be given to Mrs Claasen, the postmistress, Nieu-Bethesda. NB. It must not be removed through the house or through the front door. It must be taken out through the red door of the long room and out through the zinc gate. If not removed that way it must not be removed at all.
  - b) The radio is to be given to Koos Malgas who has worked with me these years. He lives in Bethesda.
  - c) To Jonas Adams, who worked with me before Koos, I give two, new pots. His name will be put underneath them. He lives in Bethesda.
  - d) To Lizzie - I give a pot. Her name will be put underneath it. She lives in Bethesda.
  - e) The yellow grass chair in the long room at the back is to be given to Francis van der Ryst. Also to Francis, the picture of a camel hanging on the wall (to the right) just as you open the front door.
  - f) The carpets on the floors to be given to Barbara Martins (\_\_\_\_\_)
  - g) All my correspondence from Jill Wenman to be given to Annie le Roux, my sister (10 Parkes Flats, Merrit Ave, Warner Beach, South Coast).

- h) My books of Omar Khayyam to be given, one to Annie le Roux, one to Jill Wenman (English versions) (1 Long Street Mowbray, Cape Town)
  - i) The translation of Omar Khayyam into Afrikaans to be given to Dominee and Mrs Cloete Nieu-Bethesda.
  - j) The sofa, next to the oval, mirror-table in the dining room that leads into the kitchen, to be given to Mrs Billie Hartzenburg. I would also like to give to Mrs Billie the large, oval, white, plastic bowl (in the pantry).
  - k) One of the large saucepans, outside the kitchen door to be given to Barbara Shaper. Her name will be put underneath. (Nieu-Bethesda).
  - l) The other large saucepan to be given to Suzette Pienaar. Her name will be underneath (Aasvoël Krans - Bethesda)
- 6 My clothes or personal belongings must not be sold or given away under any circumstances.
- 7 All my letters and correspondence (except letters from Jill Wenman to Annie le Roux) to be burnt.
- 8 The three large, hanging lamps (ruby, blue and yellow) in the dining room to be given to Barbara Martins, only on condition that she does not remove them from the house.
- 9 All my Meccas, camels, owls and all other cement works are to be dedicated to my friend Jill Wenman, and my sister Alida Seymour.
- 10 To Jill Wenman I leave behind R300.
- 11 One of the single beds in the long, back room is to be taken out and put in the place of the sofa next to the oval mirror table in the dining room.
- 12 To Annie le Roux and her two sons, I leave whatever money is left over in the post office.



## Quatrains from the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám which are depicted in the Camel Yard

Illustrations from the following Quatrains from the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* which have been used in the frieze on the back stoep of The Owl House, or as sculptures in the Camel Yard, or as verses written in wire on the netting fence on the boundary of the Camel Yard.

### **Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam**

rendered into English verse by EDWARD FITZGERALD

Edited by George F. Maine. Illustrated by Robert Stewart Sherriffs. 1974. Glasgow and London: Collins.

Inscribed:                    *To Mrs. Maartens*  
                                      *To one artist from another*  
                                      *Don Maclennan*

**Quatrain 71. Second Edition 1868. p. 128.**

(Figure with star and crescent moon - frontispiece - depicted on the back stoep)

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,  
Some letter of that After-Life to spell:  
And after many days my soul return'd  
And said, "Behold, Myself am Heav'n and Hell:"

**Quatrain 51. First Edition 1859. p. 78.**

(Written in wire on a section of free-standing netting in the yard, with a pointing cement hand attached to the wire)

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all the Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

**Quatrain 12. Fifth Edition 1889. p. 156.**

(Figures underneath a tree - which has now been chopped down - in the Camel Yard)

A Book of verses Underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread - and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness -  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

**Quatrain 73. First Edition 1859. p. 89.**

Ah Love! Could thou and I with Fate conspire  
To Grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits - and then  
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

**Quatrain 74. p. 89.**

(Written in wire on the west-facing fence looking out to where the moon would set)

Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane,  
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again:  
How oft her after rising shall she look  
Through this same Garden after me - in vain!

**Quatrain 57. Second Edition 1868. p. 121.**

(Depicted in the frieze on the back stoep)  
You know, my Friends, how bravely in my House  
For a new marriage I did make Carouse:  
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,  
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

**Quatrain 46. Second Edition 1868. p. 115.**

(Illustration to the two free-standing figures at the end of the back stoep, pouring)

So when at last the Angel of the darker drink  
Of Darkness finds you by the river-brink  
And, proffering his Cup, invites your Soul  
Forth to your Lips to Quaff it - do not shrink.

**Quatrain 27. First Edition 1859. p. 66.**

(At right hand of back door)

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument  
About it and about; but evermore  
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

**Quatrain 37. First Edition. p. 71.**

Ah, fill the Cup: - what boots it to repeat  
How Time is slipping underneath our Feet;  
Unborn To-MORROW, and dead YESTERDAY,  
Why fret about them if TO-DAY be sweet.

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