

Tributes to H.W. van der Merwe

Hendrik W. van der Merwe (1929–2001)*

*Louis Kriesberg***

Hendrik W. van der Merwe (H.W.) died March 5, 2001. He was born June 24, 1929, in rural South Africa, about 130 miles east of Cape Town and he died on his farm near his birthplace. But he had travelled far in his life and helped bring his country with him. In the Foreword to his memoir, *Peacemaking in South Africa: A life in conflict resolution*, Nelson Mandela wrote about H.W.'s 'long journey from a rural conservative and Calvinist environment as an Afrikaner farm boy to the cosmopolitan, multicultural rainbow nation of the new South Africa'. Mandela continued, 'These memoirs tell the story of the gradual development of a Calvinist dissident to an anti-apartheid activist and a Quaker peacemaker whose religious commitment and academic insights enabled him to reach out to all sides of the conflict in South Africa'.

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** Prof Louis Kriesberg (Ph.D. 1953, University of Chicago) is Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Maxwell Professor Emeritus of Social Conflict Studies, and founding director of the Program on the Analysis and Resolution of Conflicts (1986–1994), all at Syracuse University.

Louis Kriesberg

Hendrik received his B.A. in 1956 and his M.A. in Sociology in 1957 from the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. He was awarded the Ph.D. in Sociology in 1963, by the University of California, Los Angeles. He returned to South Africa to teach Sociology at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, 1963–68. In 1968 he became the founding director of the Centre for Intergroup Studies, based in Cape Town, and remained its Executive Director until 1992, serving as Senior Consultant for two more years. He retired in 1994. In 1992, he became Emeritus Honorary Professor of the University of Cape Town. He visited and lectured at many institutions in Europe and the United States, including Northwestern University (1969–70) in Evanston, Illinois, and Woodbrooke College (1986–87) in Birmingham, England.

He pioneered in the development of conflict resolution and peace studies in South Africa. In 1981, he organised the first training courses in handling community conflicts and led by organising conferences and associations related to conflict resolution methods. He acted to advance integration, playing a leading role in forcing the whites-only South African Sociological Society to become integrated in 1976.

He organised many regional, national and international workshops where he brought together political opponents who otherwise did not meet. Thus, he arranged the first meetings between government supporters and the ANC in exile in 1984. He developed strong links with the Mandela family and visited Nelson Mandela in prison. He mediated in local, regional and national conflicts, including those between Inkatha and the United Democratic Front in Natal in 1985–86 and he arranged the first meetings between the ANC and the Afrikaner Freedom Foundation in 1992.

Hendrik's research and writing were closely related to his peacemaking activities, as indicated in his publications that include: *Peacemaking in South Africa*, published in 2000 by Tafelberg in Cape Town, 'Restitution after apartheid: From revenge to forgiveness,' in the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 1994 (8:2) and 1995 (9:1), 'Principles of Communication between Adversaries in South Africa,' in *Conflict: Readings in management and*

resolution, by J.W. Burton and F. Dukes, eds., (1990, St. Martin's Press), and *Pursuing justice and peace in South Africa* (1989, Routledge).

He also published *Legal ideology and politics in South Africa*, with J. Hund (1986) and *White South African Elites*, with others (1974). He co-edited *African perspectives on South Africa* (1978) and *Race and ethnicity: South African and international perspectives* (1980).

He is survived by his wife Elsbeth Siglinde Woody of Bonnievale, South Africa and Sillaching, Germany; his daughter Marieke O'Connor of Oxford, his sons Hendrik of Cape Town, and Hugo, of Johannesburg, children of his marriage to Marietjie, who predeceased him in 1992; and his brother Laubscher van der Merwe of Bonnievale.

Hendrik's life was characterised by straightforward honesty and passionate moral convictions. His courageous work against apartheid and as a mediator contributed significantly to South Africa's peaceful transformation to democracy. He was brave and tenacious, too, in his long struggle with cancer. His life is inspiring.

