MARGARET HIZA – A TRIBUTE

9 March 1947 – 17 September 2024

The story of Margaret Hiza begins in New York in the USA, where she was born on the 9th of March 1947 to parents Margaret and Paul Hiza.

As a very little girl, in Grade 1 in 1954, Margaret's grades at the end of the year were 'A's throughout. Her teacher's report reads: *"Margaret is a lovely child and an excellent student".* This is the first documented note of excellence in Margaret's life. As an 18 year old in 1965, Margaret graduated top of her high school class and by tradition she gave the farewell speech to staff, parents and students on behalf of her class.

We next see Margaret, age 25, finishing her veterinary studies in Pennsylvania. In the bovine hospital of the University Veterinary School she met a young South African intern. When the first tender shoots of a romance sprouted she suggested a sunset walk with him on the Veterinary faculty farm. As it began to get dark she decided we should turn back. And as we stopped to do so, a first kiss evolved. When it ended I looked up over Margaret's head, always easy to do, and there in front of me was a sign that read "University of Pennsylvania - Department of Reproduction". And so developed the family legend of a beautiful young American woman, in a very subtle and nuanced way, seducing a young man from South Africa.

Margaret adapted to the totally different culture of the 1970s in apartheid-era Zululand. Together she and her husband built a Veterinary Practice and expanded a cattle farming enterprise. Margaret bore Julia and Jacqui, two beautiful daughters, and showered them with a mother's love. And Margaret edited and improved almost everything of importance that Peter said or wrote over the next 50 years.

Over the next decades many things changed for good and for ill in Margaret's life. But one thing never changed: her commitment to excellence in work, marriage, parenting, quality of friendships and decades of support for aging and ailing parents, and for her elder sister Paula.

She settled quickly and happily in South Africa as a practising veterinarian for 45 years. Every working day she poured her kindness over animals and the people who owned them. At the end of the day there was always more than enough kindness left over for her children Julia and Jacqui, her husband and other family and friends.

Margaret was a very positive person. She was economically positive. She worked well in a rewarding career, earning her money honestly and spending it wisely and generously. She was also a socially positive person. The love of family and many fine friends here and around the world is proof of that. A goddaughter, Heather Viljoen, wrote:

"There was no other quite like Margaret – a beautiful soul and a wondrous and wonderful lady. Always, always smiling, exuding peace, calm and quiet strength. I looked up to and was inspired by her so very much".

Margaret and her husband were environmentally positive people too. She was disturbed by the severe industrial pollution of air and water in the Mandeni area. She formed an organisation called ROMP (standing for Reduce Our Mandeni Pollution). ROMP worked with the paper and other industries, the Department of Water Affairs and other government agencies to make improvements in our air and water quality and ensure compliance with laws. In being environmentally positive to the end, Margaret wanted to be buried as soon as possible with minimal refrigeration, in a biodegradable cardboard coffin with no varnish, metals, chemicals or plastic. The clothes that Margaret left in our home were donated to the Howick SPCA. She wanted trees to be planted over her. The way of nature for millions of years has been that old life nourishes new life. In this way the good that Margaret's body did in life will live after her in those trees.

Margaret was also a spiritual person who did not follow any single faith or philosophy. We know other people like that. We also know spiritual people who are secure and sincere in their Christian, Jewish, Islamic or Hindu faith. And we know spiritual people who are agnostics or atheists. Margaret and I grouped all of these fine people together and called them our family and our friends.

I would like to count some major blessings in our lives. We felt blessed to have had each other for fifty years. We were blessed with families on both sides who showed huge generosity of spirit and material support in times of trouble and great warmth whenever there was anything to celebrate. We were blessed with friendships old and new. When this plaasjaapie moved from the farm into a town, he was worried about the possibility of neighbours who might be complaining and unpleasant nosy people with noisy dogs, but thanks to fine new friends and neighbours we had nothing to worry about. Friendships are tested for quality in tough times.

Margaret's cancer relapsed in 2019 soon after we moved to Howick after a few years of quiet. Our new Howick friends and our old friends here and around the world have been amazingly supportive throughout our journey. Thank you. Despite being somewhat weakened by her long struggle, Margaret and Peter went to America and England for all of April and May 2024 and visited family and friends in America and in the UK. Margaret gave and received all the love and enjoyed all the fun there was to be had and felt blessed that she only fell ill after they had returned home. The best of the character and spirit of Margaret was still evident during her last weeks, the gentlest, kindest person until she left us on the 17th of September 2024.

"Our dearest Margaret, the risk of loving you is loss and the price of losing you is grief. But the pain of grief is only a shadow when compared to the pain of never risking loving you."

By Peter Ardington