

TREVOR LEVITT 3RD ARMSA PRESIDENT 1997 - 1999



I was privileged to have been nominated by the members to head ARMSA as chairperson for two years from 1998 until 2000 when Hamilton Cele succeeded me. I in turn inherited the reigns from Theo Reed, the first chairperson and Les Wilkens, to both of whom I am indebted as they were of tremendous assistance in establishing the direction that the association was moving. Theo in particular, was an industrious scribe whose standards of excellence and drive were difficult, if not impossible, to emulate. As we were neighbors and I was initially the treasurer I was acutely aware of his extraordinary capacity for working towards getting the association going in the interests of all of us and as I undertook to generate and distribute the newsletters, which were produced at an almost alarming rate, I was hardly able to keep up with his production.

In those days we were entirely dependant on the Post Office for distributing the circulars which had to be reproduced on our old second-hand photocopier machine, one page at a time, with intervals to enable it to cool down, and then hand -collated on the window sills between our offices. To stretch the postal budget the envelopes were compressed with a piece of railway line! It will be recalled also that computers or word processors were not freely available and typists had to be engaged to transcribe the written word in their own time for a fee, which was not handsome by any standards. In addition we had to maintain strict confidentiality in our correspondence, which was difficult in the circumstances, particularly as private facilities were not available.

During 1998 I was appointed to the Magistrates Commission as ARMSA's representative, a term which is only drawing to a close in 2006. At the stage that I took over as chairperson I made a courtesy visit to the then Chairperson of the Commission, Justice van Dijkhorst. Fortunately or unfortunately I never got to attend any meeting whilst he was in office as he was in the same year succeeded by Mr. Justice Ngoepe, whose term of office has just expired. Whilst I believe Mr. Justice van Dijkhorst was understanding of the difficulties facing the magistracy, my experience with his successor has not left me with the same impression and particularly so when promoting the pecuniary improvements to the remuneration of magistrates.

This, together with the long-standing and eventually successful attempts to reinstate the vehicle allowances for Regional Magistrates, occupied the majority of my time and efforts both in the seat as chairperson of ARMSA and in my capacity as member of the Commission. In addition there were a myriad of other

matters, mostly revolving around the betterment of magistrates' conditions of service which needed attention on an ongoing basis. ARMSA was building for itself a solid foundation and name as a true representative of the Regional magistrates and many midnight hours were spent in this regard. Progress was slow for a number of years, particularly until magistrates realized the benefits of belonging to such an organization and the escalation of membership which followed was as much due to the hard work of all successive chairpersons as it was to the founders. Along the way the support given by the members in assisting the executive and promoting the establishment and growth of ARMSA as a well-oiled and truly representative body of the Regional Magistracy has not gone unnoticed and this is an opportunity to thank all for their support and encouragement, often coincidentally given when dark clouds hung over our horizon.

Many meetings were attended in the name of ARMSA. Most had their aim at improving conditions of service, (and also of eventual retirement), for Regional Magistrates but there were also many where it was not so much as what we could expect from our country, but what we could do for it. Most have borne fruit although some may claim that the harvest has not been of export quality.

In hindsight ARMSA made some significant strides during my period of chairmanship, one of which was, as mentioned, an undertaking by Government to reinstate the vehicle allowance, absent for more than two decades. Progress was unfortunately dependant, in the main, on the cooperation of politicians, notably the Ministers of Justice and Constitutional Development, Drs Omar and Maduna and as experience have taught us, on occasion not all promises were kept to the letter.

In conclusion I can state that the period at the helm of this organization was a richly rewarding one, particularly in that it enabled me to get to know so many of you and realize that in essence all of us are inherently keenly steeped in ensuring that the administration of justice in the intermediary courts is maintained at the highest possible standards.

Trevor Levitt.

DURBAN.

10th October 2005.