

The Truth Tree & The Freedom Quilt



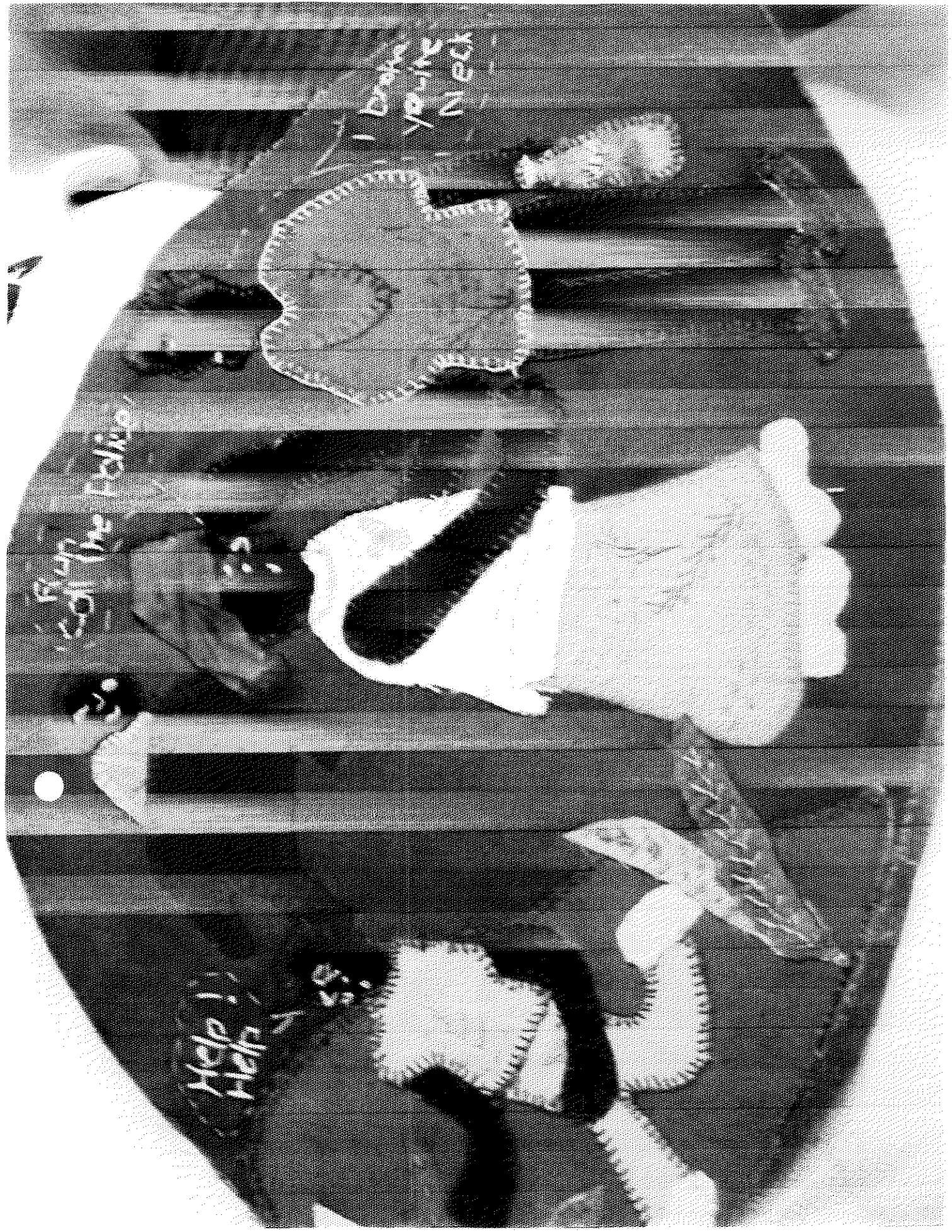
Two quilts made by
the Pomegranate Group
at

The Bethesda Arts Centre

Nieu Bethesda
Eastern Cape

www.pomegranateartscentre.org





Soft the Rabbit

I broke
your
Neck

Help!
Help!

The Truth Tree

Pomegranate women speak out.

The group began with the idea of a tree of justice, the logo for the court, and a traditional place for people to tell their stories, be listened to, and hope for justice to be done.

As we talked around the subject, the word “justice” became replaced with the words “fair”, and “unfair.” Justice meant a great deal to the Pomegranate women, but for them, the most burning injustices they suffer are mostly in their own homes.

Each of the fifteen women made a leaf, on which she told her own story of injustice. For Millie, being abandoned by her mother at 13 was the story she wanted to tell. For Christelene, the injustice that most distresses her is the knowledge that her children’s teachers sit drinking in class, and hit her children, instead of teaching them, while she is helpless to stop them. For most of the others, the oppression of their husbands’ alcoholic drinking, and its associated violence, along with the waste of much needed money, is the subject of their stories. For Sophie F, she herself is the perpetrator of injustice, and she and Margaret talk about the difficulty for parents in being fair to all their children.

So this Family Tree is not a healthy tree – or rather, represents a mighty tree under attack. The attack is at the roots, where bug-larvae eat away at it under the earth. Stories of injustice in the family are as old as the idea of family itself, and begin in the Judeo Christian tradition with Cain and Abel. Other traditions are equally rich in stories of injustice in the family. So this is a Family Tree, and also a Story Tree, and most importantly for the Pomegranate women, a Truth Tree. Making the quilt was exciting and fulfilling for the group. Many of them talk about how much they love it, not only because it is beautiful, but because it tells a true story.

*Jeni Couzyn
Director, Bethesda Arts Centre*

The Freedom Quilt and the Truth Tree

The Truth Tree and the Freedom Quilt were commissioned by Judge Albie Sachs for the Constitutional Court at an exhibition in London of work by the Pomegranate Group – the textile-art makers of the Bethesda Arts Centre in Nieu Bethesda, in the Eastern Cape.

The Bethesda Arts Centre is a Community project that works towards self-development through the arts in the village of Nieu Bethesda and surrounding district.

They were made in December 2006 and January 2007, by Sandra Sweers, (principal designer) Delia Swartz, Christelene Jacobs, Rose Jacobs, Yvonne Jonkers, Millie Reed, Maria Tamana, Maggie Jacobs, Matilda Dikeni, Sophie Steenberg, Julia Malgas, Shirlene Davids, Sanna Minnaar, Sophie Femela, and Margaret Swiers – the Pomegranate women. Orla O’Flanagan helped with embroidery techniques, Tarot Couzyn with life-drawing classes and Jeni Couzyn with concept development.

The Freedom Quilt

“The Freedom quilt is about the pool of Bethesda. If you throw a stone into a pool you get ripples, and all the ripples represent something. The first one is Mandela, our ex-president. He is the stone. I think it is because he is the one who did the long walk to freedom. He is the reason freedom is here – he did fight for freedom. The next one is the best one for me because it is about human rights. Because one day you can see what your right is – what you can do and what you can’t. The third one is about our very first democratic election and it shows that everyone over the age of 18 has the right to vote. The very first election many people went to vote, old or young, even sick people went to vote. The last one is about Freedom Day. That one shows how people celebrated Freedom Day in Nieu Bethesda in 2004. One specific thing I can remember is that me and Jeni decided to write a book at that celebration. One thing that was locked up in me for a long time was freed in that book that me and Jeni wrote. So it was Freedom Day.”

Julia Malgas

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The Central panel depicting Nelson Mandela was made by Sandra Sweers, the principal designer and tutor of the Pomegranate team. Each of the other three panels was made by a group of five Pomegranate women, who chose their subject matter according to their personal interests and concerns.

















This is my father's home where I was staying. It's my sister, her husband, and my other sister. They are drinking in the house. So I didn't like the idea that they are drinking in the house, because it was too much for me. They were drinking from Friday till Sunday night, sometimes they fight, so I couldn't stand that. I'm the only person that doesn't drink in the house. So they told me that I'm like a white person, I must move out if I couldn't stand their drinking. Because I can't take it, I talk to them but they don't listen. It made me very sad, my heart was broken, my father was the man of the house, but he isn't here anymore he is dead. He said I can live in the house, but now they have told me I must move out. I was very heartbroken, so I packed my things and moved out to the back. There is a place in the yard – a bedroom and a kitchen. Me and my five children are staying there. There is two small beds but they can't fit in the small bed. There is no space for people to visit me because it is too small. It is safer for me there than in the big house, because they come and bang at the door when they are drunk. I am afraid my children will get hurt. I have managed it for two years. It is very hard, but God is great. He gives me the strength to go on. I can't wait till they build houses so that I can move out and be on my own, do my own things. Maybe my children would understand me better. When they are shouting there, my children are afraid. Sometimes they are shouting, my children are listening. They say my auntie said this and this. I don't like children to hear that. But they have a strong mother. That is what I believe in.

This tree is about family but they are not my family. So I give them the space to drink. I love this quilt very much. This quilt tells the truth. So it is a truth tree. Sometimes we feel scared to tell the truth but now the truth is coming out. I feel better when the truth comes out.



So this is all about my Mum's house and me. So that year its my Dad and me. Me at work. Me and my Dad are working. I am going home with my salary. My Dad is going to the tavern with his salary. So I come home and my Mum is crying. I ask her why she is crying and she says my dad is drinking all his money at the tavern, so I give her some money. Here is my dad sitting with his friends at the tavern, buying beers and things for them, and here he is coming home with a beer in his hand, drunk, and shouting till 2 o'clock in the morning.

To me it's unfair. I feel that it's unfair because one time he was working, and I asked him to buy a tin of milk for my baby and he said "I didn't make that baby". Now I am working, and I never said to him that I didn't make his children. I have to work for them, keep them at school, and see that they eat. I feel it is very unfair.

I think the quilt is the best opportunity that we ever had at the Centre. I think it is good that our work is going to be in a place where everyone can see, and also to see how creative and artistic we are, and also what we are doing at the arts centre, and what it is there for. I also feel proud to be on that high level we are now, and also hope that justice is going to happen in my house. I also want to thank you for getting volunteers at the arts centre so that we can grow and become professionals.

It's hard sometimes at home but my baby is putting on weight now. So further on I am very happy, and I cope with my Dad. He leaves every job he had to sell stupid owls at the Owl House. He lies to my mum. Those men who sell owls at the Owl House – when one of them sells an owl, they all drink together.

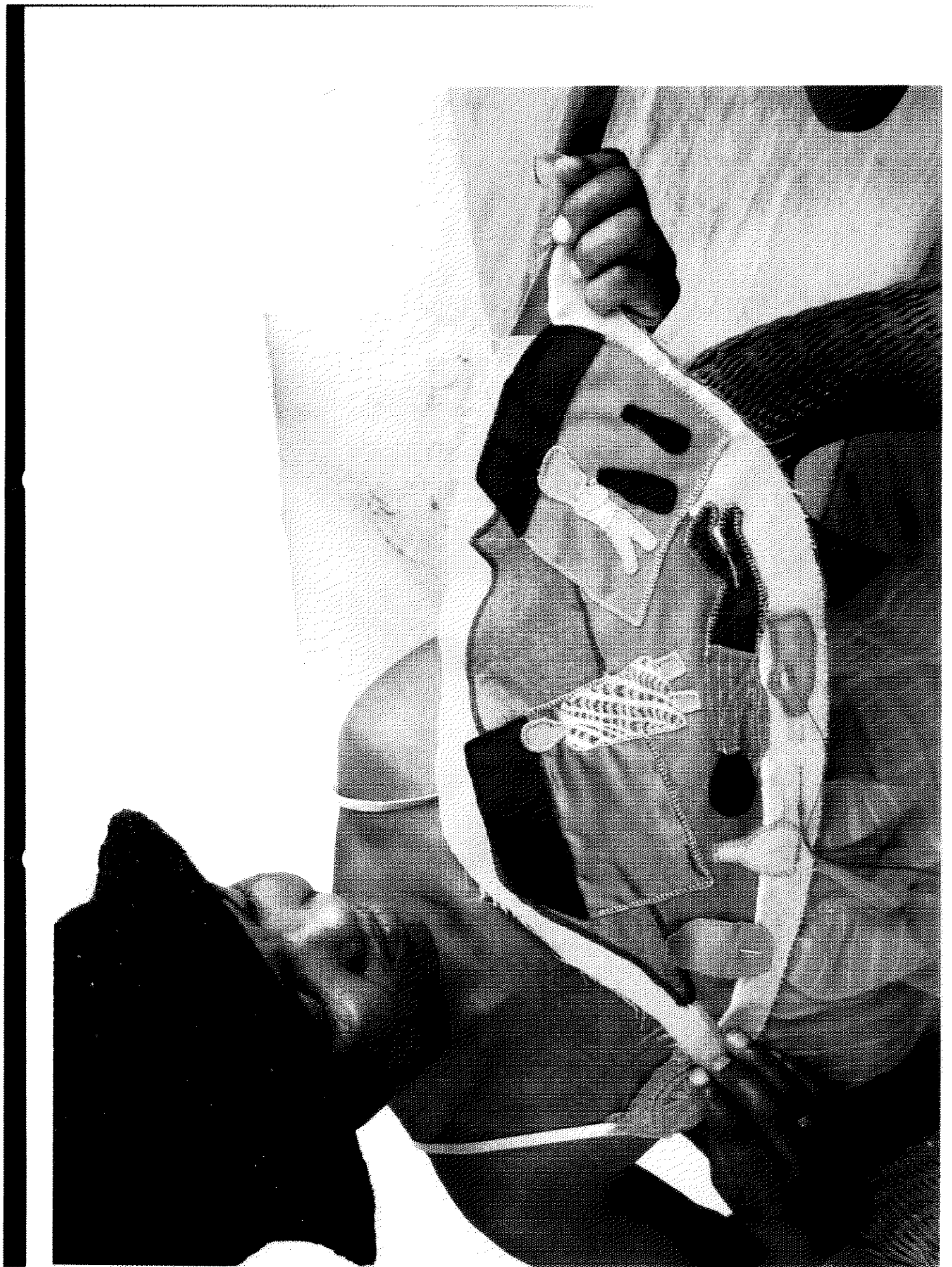


That is the school, and this is the teachers. They are drinking, and the children is playing outside. This is the Graaff Reinet school bus, and it collects children to go to Graaff Reinet to go to school from Nieu Bethesda. It goes at the beginning of the term, because the children have to stay in school. The teachers sit in class drinking. I am not happy about that. They should be learning our children, not drinking. They are unkind. Most of the time when they are drunk they hit the children, and sometimes the children fight, but they don't help the children. They don't look after the children. If the parents say you must look after our children, they shout at the parents. So I prefer to let my children go to a better school so they can get a better education there.

Nelson Straat is a better school than Lettie de Klerk. There is people there who look after our children – comb their hair, wash. My brother's wife is working there – that is why I would like to send them there. I know she is not going to hurt my children.

Teachers must stop drinking in schools. They sent a new headmistress. Now the gate is closed. They sometimes give the children bread and soup at school. They didn't do it before. I love education because I don't have the opportunity to have education, that is why I want it for my children. I am proud of my work on this quilt, very proud. It is a good work that we do. I like it best of all the quilts we have made.

Mrs Archer asked my father-in-law to send someone to work for her in the house and he said he will send me, but my husband said no, I am happy where I am at the Arts Centre. We can learn more things here, and make something and be proud. I am happy here.



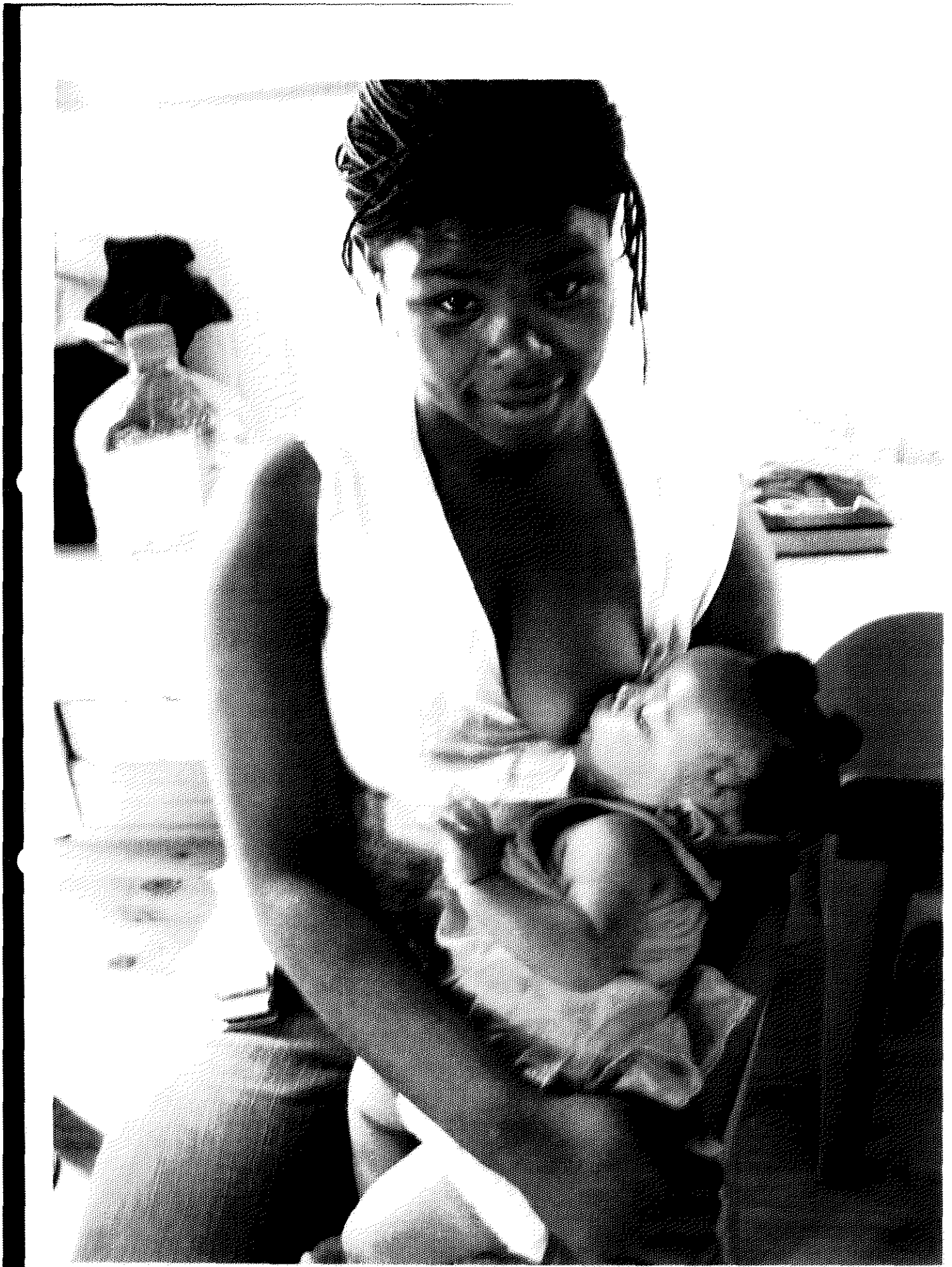
My leaf is about the husband who doesn't give money for food and so on, he drinks it away with his friends in the tavern. You can see he is drunk, he has passed out at the tavern. Around him are all the bottles that he has been drinking. In front of the house I am standing with my baby in my arms. This is our house, that has no food in it. There is one of his friends with beer in his hand. I am going to write the names of the bottles that he has drunk.

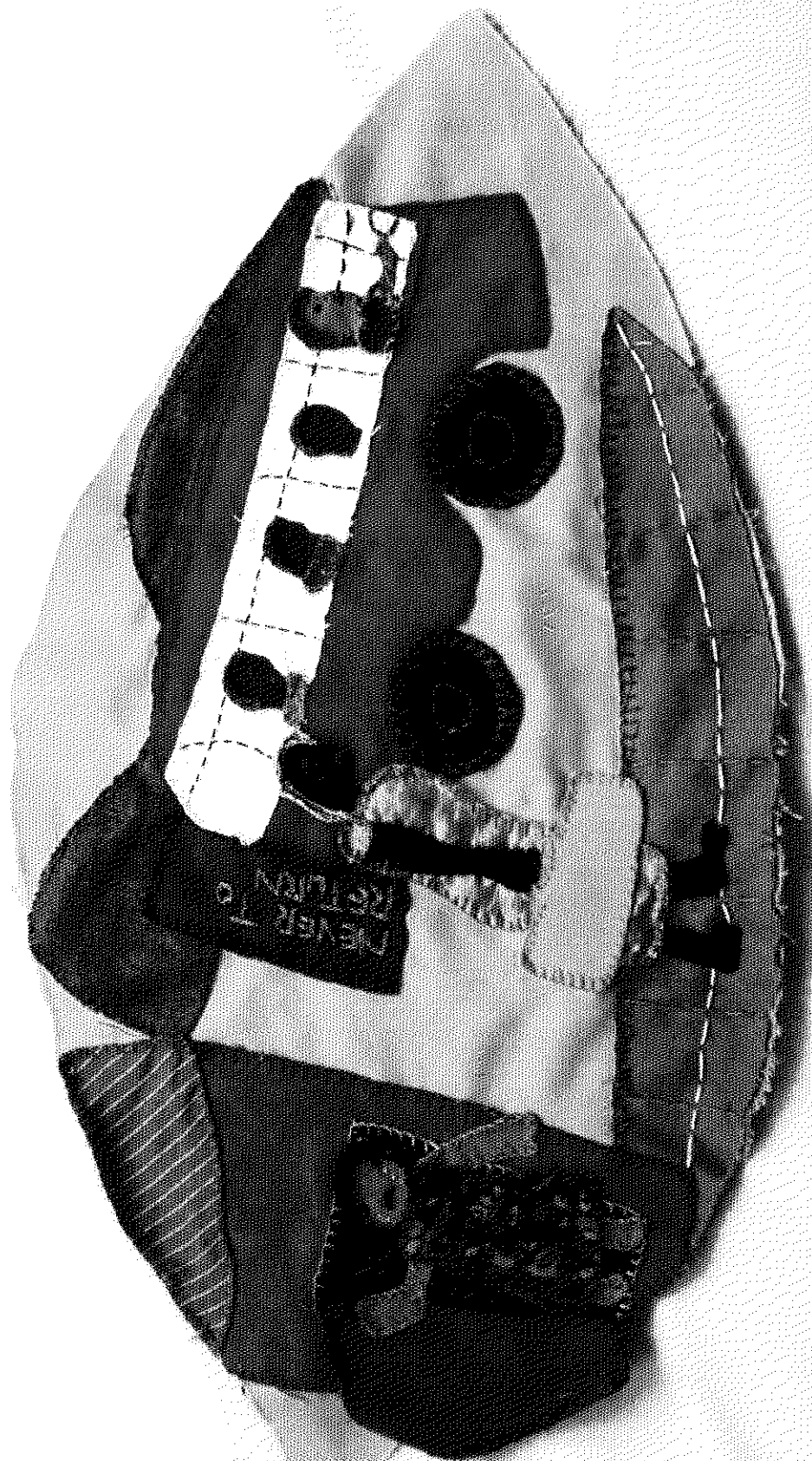
This is what really happens in my life. I am not at peace. I have to work alone for my children. I have five children. One is with her grandmother in PE. The others are with me. I drink, but not a lot but I never drink till I'm drunk.



This is me Yvonne in a green shirt, and I am by the house here. This is Venesree my baby. And this is Venesree's father, coming out of the job, and he shows me the money, and he is going to his friends. And he tells me there is no money for me and my child. These are his friends sitting at the tavern. I feel very bad about this. He should give this money for my child, because she needs an education. Its unfair what he is doing. It is not right. It would be a better world if he gave some money to me, and sit and talk with me for a little while, and then he can go to his friends later. This would be a better life.

My life is not good now. I am struggling with this baby because I have to support her alone. I am living at my uncle's house. We are five girls and one uncle, and four children. There are two bedrooms in the house, and one sitting room, one kitchen. A lot of people. There is cold water in the kitchen but no bathroom. I wish I could earn money every month, not just when something is sold in the gallery.





Handmade by [illegible]



I chose this subject because my Mum went away with a taxi when I was thirteen and she never returned. My leaf shows me in the house crying, because my Mum left the house, and the taxi is standing outside. There are a lot of people in the taxi, and she is walking to the taxi. The door is open, and I am waving to her. She just walked, and she didn't wave back. She is carrying a suitcase. I think she was happy to leave. I think she was happy but a mother shouldn't leave her children like that. She never called, she never wrote. It is no good. I don't know why. She doesn't even know I have my second child now. Last year I was in Cape Town for three weeks. The people I worked for were so miserable, so I just left. I went to my aunt in Strandfontein, and my brother is also there with my aunt's brother. That day before I came home, I looked around, and I saw a man, and I didn't know it was my brother. I asked him where is my mum, and he said she stays in Hadon Park. I asked when is she coming to him, and he said only at weekends if she comes. I couldn't stay because I didn't have money and my aunt found me a lift. The people I worked for said they were coming to fetch me now. I waited for them and then I thought no, I'm going home.

I was kicked out of my Mum's house by my sister. She is fighting every day with me. I am the eldest, and she won't listen to me when I talk to her. I want to get it right in the house. She was drunk that day, and her boyfriend always hits her and breaks the house stuff. That's why I can't stay in that house. I am staying at Dino's father's house, but he is not there. He is in Cape Town – it's OK for me when he is away.



My husband and his friends are sitting drinking in the house. I am coming back from work, with my shopping bag. The house is in a mess, because they are drunk. It is unfair. I have to work alone and he is drunk with his friends. Sometimes it makes me angry. This is a little shelf with my plates. Here is the table and chair, and these are the empties lying on the floor. I have been buying sugar, coffee, milk, and bread flour in small packets. When I married him he didn't drink so much. I don't know why he started drinking so much. He is not working. He wants to work but there is no work. We have been married three years, and we have three children. My baby is thirteen. We have been together a long time, but we only married when I joined Liena's church.



I said that this is my story. A drunk man comes in from the street, with drink in his hand. The man is shouting and hitting, the children are screaming, and if the woman doesn't want to let him in, he begins to get violent. The children run away, or try to hide.

Days before this was. My children ran away when my husband came in. They were screaming, help, help. Now that we are in the church, we don't smoke, we don't drink, we don't have that problem anymore. It is best for me in the church, because it stops the drinking. I used to drink a bit when my husband was drinking so much, and fighting with me, but it doesn't help the problem. I feel very sorry for people in that situation, because I was there myself.

I have a much better life now that there is no-one in my house drinking. We are peaceful and speak together. My children are happy as well. We are climbing a ladder at the centre. In the beginning what we did wasn't so good, but now we begin to see the result. The church people asked me to leave the centre, but I won't. If there was another way to stop the drinking we would take that.



I was going to church, our church is running late. Sometimes you came from church one o'clock, specially this day. And we eat always one o'clock Sunday afternoon. This afternoon I came from church, husband was cross waiting for the food. He asked me where did you come from. I'm hungry. I told him I came from church. He said you're always late. Your church is always late.

It is not right for a husband to speak to his wife like that. He must speak nice soft. Not so loud and shout at his wife. It happens sometime. Not so often. Men should speak to women a better way. Ask her nicely. My husband drinks, but he just asks for food, and goes and lies down, just like a baby. He does piece job at the municipality, loading rubbish on Fridays. I adopted three children. The small one is an aids orphan, and he is HIV positive. I get money from the allpay for them. I knew their mother very well, and I wanted to look after them. When she came from Joburg her family didn't want them, especially the grandfather. So I put the lady with her three children in my house. It has two rooms. They lived there till she died. One day before she died, I was sitting by her sick bed. She said when she died, who will look after her children. I said to her she mustn't worry, I will look after them. She told me herself she had aids. At that moment I was not thinking of money. I wanted to do this for the children. They called me Mama. Many people said it doesn't look like they haven't got a mother because they match very quickly. I did look after them for two years, and after that the welfare gave me money for them. But I didn't feel it before. The lord always sent someone or something to give to them before.

I think about the first Christmas when they were with me. I didn't have money to buy clothes for the three children but someone heard – Frank. He bought clothes for the three children. They were happy. I like Frank very much, and he too is very fond of me.

He always says to me you must leave the meat – because I'm high blood pressure – but I can't. I live with my Mom and she can't work so hard at home. She has the three children and my own daughter and my husband when I am at the Centre. So sometimes I can't come. But I like coming here. It is quiet here.



The story – a true story. I'm the only one in the house who is not drinking. My husband, and my two sons living with me, and my two daughters in law, they are drinking so much. One son has one child. When they drink the child is crying. My son and his wife fight. His name is Roderick, but when they drink he sleeps with me or with his other grandmother Tilla. And my husband still fights, but he is a little afraid for me, but when I talk hard talk he cools off. When they are so rude, making music so loud, then I phone the police and the police talk to them. Then they be still, but I don't know for how long. From Friday, Saturday, Sunday, when I come from church they are like that. They fight, the son and his father. The father breaks a bottle, and wants to put it in his face. The son knocks him on the ground and hits him in the face. Every time I phone the police 8411 608 they come. I am pleased for them. Me and Tilla are talking just now. I said what did she make with that girl? I buy for Roderick tackies, shorts and a top, but they drink their money out. I go to Dora and Carol and tell them about the drinking of money out. They have no problem with food. Tilla and I give them food but they drink the money out. My husband works at the tourist toilet. My other son works on the farm. One weekend a month the baas asks him to work over the weekend, and I'm so pleased because I get a chance to rest from all the noise.

I love this quilt so much. It is another thing we have started, a new style.



This is about a mother with two children who works all day, and then her boyfriend comes home and gives her no money. He is using the money for alcohol. The child is crying for food, saying he is hungry. The mother went to the father to ask where is the money for today's work, because I need to buy some food. She has already done the washing. She is a housewife, and she has a baby on her back as well. When she went outside she saw her husband outside with one of his friends, sitting under a tree. She could see that he bought a lot of wine, but he didn't give her any money for food. Also she could see that he had a friend with him, but usually when he don't have money he don't have friends, but when he do have money, he do have friends.

This is not something that happened to me yet, but it is something I'm afraid of in the future. I do have one son already, and I'm afraid when the new one comes it will be too much to handle if the father doesn't help. I can notice now already that if he don't have money he don't have friends, but if he have money he have friends. Sometimes his friends doesn't give him the best advice there can be, because they know that he has responsibility now, but they tell him to spend the money on alcohol, not on the best reasons there can be. I am afraid that everything is going to depend on me, and that I am going to be the one who has to work for everything.

When his friends come, I can't wait for them to go, because he goes out with them – to the tavern or to their houses. I thought this baby would bring us closer, but there is still a lot of uncertainty and fear in my heart.



This is a time when I was pregnant with Shirley Anne. When my boyfriend saw my stomach, he just left me for another girl. Now the story is that I am phoning him, but he is not answering me. He is just ignoring me. He is too busy with his girlfriend to answer his phone.

My boyfriend is back now but most of the boyfriends don't come back. They leave the girl alone with the child, and they don't give a cent. I don't like it because it not fair. To make a child and then leave the girl like that, because it is both of our responsibility. Most men are like that, specially in Nieu Bethesda. I don't know why. I don't think my son will be like that because he will learn from his father's mistakes. And I learn him not to do that. He knows what it is like to grow up without a father. I was eighteen when I met my father. It is like something missing in your life – a big part. When I met him I told him: "My grandfather is my father, because he was the one who raised me, not you." He did everything in his power to make me feel that I am his child. All those missing years he tried to make up for those years, until he died. I was 21 when he died. I had a father for three years only. I have two children to raise on my own, that's why I must be strong for them. I think women are stronger than men. They stand out pain that men cannot stand out. They don't leave their children – only a few bits of girls do that. I am not going to leave my children. I love them too much to leave them alone. Women love their children more than men do because they are the ones who feel the pain, not the man.

It happens a lot in Nieu Bethesda. One moment you have a boyfriend, the next moment the other one had him. We didn't plan to have a baby. I was two months pregnant before my period stopped. We use condoms but sometimes they break. It happened also to my cousin. People get condoms from the clinic, and not all of them are good. I think they are a bad quality. The ones from the chemist are a better quality.

I am not going to have any more children. One girl and one boy. My mom and my dad also had one girl one boy, so my family is full now. I am still living with my grandparents. It is fine, in between my grandmother's sickness. My boyfriend is working in PE. I don't tell him I have forgiven him. I just hold it in my heart. I will forgive him but I won't forget what he did to me. He came back after Shirley Anne was born. His mother was shouting at him, and his sister in law and brother were standing by. I don't think he is going to do that mistake again. It was very hard. Every night I was crying until I slept. When I saw him it was like I want to kill him. I almost got a miscarriage. He came back when she was four months old. She almost died when I was giving birth to her. The pains stopped when her head was out. The doctor had to give me a drip to make the contractions stronger. When she came out she was purple.

After that I wasn't thinking of him anymore. I was too happy with my baby.



Here is a man with three daughters. He only gives money to one of them. The others ask, but he won't give to the others. He says he loves the one better than the others. This creates problems all the time. The good child wears red. The children in yellow are street people, always in trouble. They have nowhere to live. It isn't right. He could have shared his money. I sit and think. Sometimes my children say that one has more than the other. I try with my children. For Grace I made a big twenty-first. For my son I bought him a present, but I didn't make him a party, and always when I can't give him something he says "You gave Grace a big twenty-first, but not me." I feel bad when he says that. I bought him a cell phone for R800 for his twenty-first, but he lost that. I tell him I can't do more. The price of the cell phone was so high. He is 23 now, and he is still talking about it. He went to the tavern and the cell phone was gone. He takes a beer. My little one is twenty now and she wants everything the others had. She is a problem, she wants money all the time. Being a mother is quite difficult.

When my husband drinks I go to the police station and say, take him, take him. He is a big problem. When he has been drinking, he can't think straight. My niece died of a murder case, and I have her two children with me. Nine and seven. My life is hard, but I am going on.



I am asking for money and he says he has no money. He hits me, then he walks away. It feels sad about this. This usually happens when he is drunk. Then he is in a mess, and behaves like this. When he isn't drinking he is OK. I never hit him back. I'm afraid he will hit me more. He shouts also. I was very frightened often, but now it isn't as bad as it was. It is ugly when someone behaves like that.

The quilt is very beautiful when it is put all together. My sewing is better, only sometimes my eyes are very sore and I can't see well. I should go to the doctor, but perhaps next year when I have money. I am scared of the doctor. I think it is dangerous to cut eyes especially at my age. The doctor said it is cataracts, and I must come back, but I'm afraid. I am old – fifty five. The doctor said I need glasses, but I can't get them till I have the operation, and I'm too frightened.



My panel is very great. Margaret says she is not a big fat lady, but she knows I drew from her.

This is my house, and I have only four children in my house. I give the house to one of my children, and the other three children have no place to stay now. The other children is very cross for me because I give the house to one person. The one child say go out, it is my house. The other children say mother what are you doing now. You give the house for one person, and there is no place for the other three. This is your story mum.

So I must sit and talk now with the children because it is my trouble that I make myself. All what I must do is sit and talk with the children now. All I can say is that the one must give place for the other three. All the children must stay in the house now. I must make a family house now.

This quilt is very important because you can read your stories on the tree. It is now important, everyone wants to buy that. The next quilt we make will be about HIV, so everyone can read the pictures.

