

Fleur Webb (1930–2019)

FLEUR Webb (née Gower), who died on 16 July 2019, will be remembered as a warm and friendly person who enjoyed her soirées with wine, snacks and friends. Fleur had a strong sense of justice and in 1962 joined the Natal Midlands Black Sash. Over the years she took part in many protest stands.

Fleur went to school at Durban Girls High, spent three and a half years at Natal University on the Pietermaritzburg campus where she remembered some ‘really wild political demonstrations’ that she thought gave her the sense of doing something not quite acceptable. Then, in 1951 she was lucky enough to get a bursary to go to France where she continued her education at the Sorbonne, majoring in French and meeting large numbers of foreign students from all over the world who broadened her horizons.

On her return she taught for a couple of years in Pietermaritzburg, followed by a part-time junior lectureship on the University of Natal’s Durban campus. There she encountered a much politicised group of young lecturers, a contingent of them from Cambridge, among them Colin Webb, whom she married in 1960. In 1984 Colin succeeded Denys Schreiner as vice-principal of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Fleur and Colin lived at Isipingo Beach, relatively close to Durban where they both taught at the University of Natal. It was here that they became involved in providing refuge to people escaping from the police special branch, even to the point of driving a fugitive to the Lesotho border.

Later, back in Pietermaritzburg, Fleur became the protest stand organiser for



the Black Sash and spent time getting permission from the authorities, composing slogans, and arranging the printing of posters for Saturday morning protests in Commercial Road next to the cannon. She said that because participants were often nervous, they needed to be reminded not to talk, to look down, and to take no notice of whatever might be flung at them. She recalled a large and threatening Lieutenant Fourie of the special branch who took up a position across the road from them for every stand. She said that people walking past these protest stands sometimes spat, threw toilet paper, and shouted rude and intimidating things, though no one was ever physically hurt.

Pietermaritzburg Black Sash members held frequent tea parties designed to meet women across the apartheid colour bar and Fleur arranged these, finding them hard work, interesting, successful and fun.

Special branch detectives made regular visits to the Webb home and their phone was tapped, which made Fleur feel constantly under surveillance and often worried that her small sons, Jonathan and Nicholas, would be left

alone should she be arrested.

In 1990 Fleur translated Adulphe Delegorgue's *Travels in South Africa* volumes 1 and 2, which made available to English readers the vivid details of a Frenchman's view of the later stages of Anglo-Zulu War. She also translated the

French section of Francois Levillant's *Birds of South Africa*, published by University of KwaZulu-Natal Press and continued her work with this publisher by editing *End of a Dynasty* written by Paul Deleage (2007).

MARY KLEINENBERG