

The answer is quite simple. Of course conscription affects my life as a woman!

Most of us white South African women have brothers, fathers, husbands or lovers who have either done their initial period of compulsory service or who still have to serve in the SADF.

It is not only in relation to the men in our lives that we are affected by conscription. As women we are also affected by the militarisation of our country and society. I believe that we actually contribute to this process both directly and indirectly. Directly we contribute through the increasing numbers of white women who are volunteering for the SADF. Indirectly we contribute through promoting militarism - a set of ideas which accepts war as inevitable and which allows the intrusion of the military into increasing areas of our social, political and economic life. We give our children war toys which teach violence - we are happy to be the defended, the protected - we promote the connection between manliness and militarism. We even promote militarisation through the Southern Cross Fund, through the Ride Safe scheme and through the way in which we secure our homes against "possible invasion". A war psychosis has started to pervade our society.

I know that as long as there is apartheid, there will be conscription; I know that ECC's interim demands may not even be met. But what is important for me is to be able to draw more whites away from their feelings of seeming helplessness, gloom and isolation, to be voices on the side of justice in this country.

ARTICLE SUMMITTED TO THE COSMOPOLITAN

Work is done for now, and there's still time to wip through Checkers for the week's groceries (not that I'm home much to consume more than the odd snack). I notice a fresh contribution of graffitti to the walls near the parking lot -

"Voters have a choice, Conscripts don't!"

Hmm, I think - aren't the graffitti artists a bit slow? The election was months ago.

> I make a mental note of the new public phone enarby. By now I know the best public phones in and around Johannesburg - that is, the ones that work, and don't normally have long queues. I have
> to - its essential for my job that I use phones that are not monitored.

I shop quickly - I'll be able to do some yoga and make a proper supper before tonight's meeting. Driving home is no ordinary task either. The casual yet constant look in the rearview mirror of my car becomes an automatic reflex. Taking stringent security precautions has become essential for my own survival and that of the organisation in the present hostile and repressive environment. My address is a well-kept secret from all but 1-2 people; also essential for my job. In so many ways I'm not such an average working woman then; but then it's hardly an average everyday job.

I have been employed by the End Conscription Campaign as the National Secretary since January this year - a demanding, stimulating, once-in-a-lifetime job, having one's finger on the pulse of one of South Africa's fastest growing anti-apartheid organisations.

> A diverse job - one minute I may be filing press clippings; the next, I might be debating legal strategies with the lawyers because we've been defamed yet again by a right-wing smear publication. An unpredictable job - I may have planned to
> workshop an article with other ECC members, then the press wants - now, this minute - ECC's comment on the latest recommendations from the Presidents Council report on the extension of conscription to coloured and Indian males! A tiring job - long meetings into the night; patient pursuit of the contact person in each of ECC's 9 branches around the country, so that I can continually be collating the developments of each region into a national picture, to then feed back into each centre.

The State of Emergency and its ensuing repression has forced us into such discreet ways of campaigning - ironic for an open, legal organisation set on lobbying for a change in the laws which

force young white men to participate in defending the unjust political system of apartheid against their conscience.

ECC's activities - Just Chem.

It's no surprise that the government try to curtail our work : ECC's appeal is so broad simply because the call-up affects so many people and they are dissatisfied with the present legislation. It's the soldier who has been left with no illusions about what the army is being used for ; it's the girlfriend who has seen her troopie come home a changed and disturbed person; it's the mother who sees her son unwittingly start his military training in cadets and veldschool.

*since S. of A. 70 numbers
been detained & are often*

Sections of the public are seeing beyond that macho notion of the army "making a man out of you!". Also, somewhere along the line, the distinction is being made between patriotism and support of the government policies. A big distinction. The army can be such an emotive issue, service to your country, defending your people against the "external threat" and all that. Since when do those South Africans who live in the townships and who keep the factories, mines and homes going - and who have legitimate grievances - constitute an "external threat".

*members, that
every, is
still in
defection
after 10 months*

One of ~~the~~ *the ECC* campaigns I was involved in last year was "Working for a Just Peace" - construction not conscription. It was exciting to be a part of ~~hundreds of other people as we participated.~~ *something with which we were involved.* *Adrian included* a clinic building, park building in black communities, to prove our point. We can have a constructive, meaningful national service. If we want peace we must work for justice.

I am a speech therapist and audiologist by profession - perhaps another aspect of the socially concerned person that I am. I was involved with POWA (People Opposing Women Abuse) for several years. But the main beginnings of my political involvement began through my involvement in the church in the late 70's : I became aware of several young men who conscientiously objected to military service and who were prepared to go to jail for their beliefs. (The sentence was maximum 2 years then) I was impressed by their courage. I myself was grappling with the issue of non-violent direct action as a force for change in the South African situation. I wanted to find some way of expressing my support for these C.O.'s and for what they were standing up against. I joined the Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG).

I became involved in the End Conscription Campaign at its inception in 1983. The call for the end to conscription came at the May 1983 Black Sash Conference. I attended the fourth annual COSG Conference in July 1983 where this call was again taken.

Those early days of grappling with the issue of how best to structure a national campaign against conscription were filled with endless meetings, but also great excitement as we sensed that we were at the beginning of something big. For the first time a broad range of organisations were coming together around the single issue of calling for an end to compulsory military service. This included organisations such as the Black Sash,

Nusas, DPSC, and the PFP youth. An important characteristic of ECC's work has been its sensitivity to the differences between various constituencies and the ability to put across its message in ways appropriate to different groups of people.

7 I went to the USA for a year on an exchange programme under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee, a traditional peace church. ^{where I furthered my understanding of non-violence} When I returned in July '85, ECC was a fully fledged and rapidly growing movement. One of the drawcards of ECC has been its creativity and high level of energy. I became involved immediately.

What's it like to be employed by an organisation working for justice? My "boss" being the hundreds of people who participate in ECC's branches countrywide? My "office" yet another undisclosed venue in a disreputable suburb? A job where occupational hazards include sabotage to one's car and the real threat of detention. ~~(Not to mention hypertension!)~~ ^{Over 60}

7 The main difference this year is the increased responsibility. Responsibility to maintain high levels of efficiency within the job definition, but then also to be thinking creatively of new avenues, to synthesise ideas with the rest of the organisation, to look for the gaps and to take them. Responsibility to stay out of the hands of the Security Police, to safeguard not only myself, but the rest of the organisation. Responsibility, also, to keep myself in perspective. Any signs of behaving like a "political machine" and I trot off to the hairdresser or movies, or go on a calculated JORL with friends. It can be isolated living alone and in secret. The onus is more on me now to maintain social connections, obviously friends just can't drop in.

7 Temporary sacrifices, perhaps, but then the rewards are great. Working so closely with people under such trying conditions, close and supportive relationships develop quickly. One's understanding of politics and the world is continually being sharpened and broadened, and the diversity of people who become active members ensures a rich think tank of so many innovative ways of campaigning, besides the traditional public meetings, to reach yet more people.

As a woman involved in the ECC, I am often asked: "What has conscription got to do with women?" and "Why are you so involved in what is primarily a man's issue."

The answer is quite simple. Of course conscription affects my life as a woman!

Most of us white South African women have brothers, fathers, husbands or lovers who have either done their initial period of compulsory service or who still have to serve in the SADF.

It is not only in relation to the men in our lives that we are affected by conscription. As women we are also affected by the



militarisation of our country and society. A war psychosis is starting to pervade our society, particularly within the white community. This affects our lives in so many ways: it affects the way we relate to each other, it affects our economic and political future, it affects the way in which we secure our homes against "possible invasion."

I know that as long as there is apartheid, there will be conscription; I know that ECC's interim demands may not even be met. But what is important for me and those who work within ECC is to be able to draw more whites ~~in~~, away from their feelings of seeming helplessness, gloom and isolation, to be voices on the side of justice in this country.

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Directly we contribute through the increasing numbers of white women who are volunteering for the SADF.

Indirectly we contribute through promoting militarism - a set of ideas which accepts war as inevitable & the intrusion of the military into increasing areas of our social, political & economic life. We give our children war toys which ~~teach~~ teach violence - we are happy to be the protected, the defended - we promote the connection between manliness & militarism - we promote militarisation through the Southern Cross Fund, the Ride safe scheme, through

Provide support

CONSTITUTION OF THE END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN

1. NAME

The name of the body is the End Conscription Campaign, hereinafter referred to as the ECC.

2. OBJECT

The object of the ECC is to campaign and organise around the demand for an end to conscription into the South African Defence Force and to oppose militarisation. In this way we shall contribute to the struggle against apartheid and help build a just peace in our land.

3. STRUCTURE

ECC is a national body consisting of regional committees which function with some degree of autonomy.

3.1. REGIONAL COMMITTEES

Each regional committee is a coalition consisting of member organisations/subscriber organisations/active members/honorary members/associate members.

3.1.1. MEMBERSHIP

The following types of membership may exist within each regional committee (RC).

a. Member/Affiliate/Subscriber organisations who would :

- * Pay an annual subscription fee
- * Participate in decision making in general body meetings or other suitable forums by as many representatives as the organisation deem necessary
- * Have their names used publicly by ECC
- * Be on the mailing list
- * Possibly receive a newsletter
- * The admission of any new member organisation to the RC shall be subject to the approval of the existing member/subscriber/affiliate organisations.

b. Honorary Membership (which would uniformly be confirmed on our VIPs)

- * Not pay subscription fees, but could be approached occasionally for financial assistance
- * Have their names publicly used by ECC
- * Not participate in decision making
- * Be approached for advice, comments, suggestions and support
- * Be on the mailing list

c. Active members :

- * Pay an annual subscription fee
- * Participate in an ECC sub-committee or existing ECC structures
- * Participate in decision making through general bodies/sub-committees
- * Receive all ECC media/mail

d. Associate membership :

- * Pay an annual subscription fee
- * Not participate in decision making
- * Receive ECC media/mail
- * Help with campaigns through the distribution of media and attendance at public meetings.

3.1.2.FUNCTION

a. The activities of a RC shall be formulated by the representatives of the membership, member organisations and participating organisations of that RC

b. The RC may appoint an executive and/or co-ordinating body which will be appointed subject to the procedures agreed upon by each RC

3.2. NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The national conference shall be the forum where national policy decisions are formulated. It shall consist of duly mandated members of each RC.

3.3. NATIONAL COMMITTEE

a. The National Committee (NC) shall consist of at least one representative from each RC, and extra representation shall be at the discretion of each RC

b. The NC shall meet at least twice per year

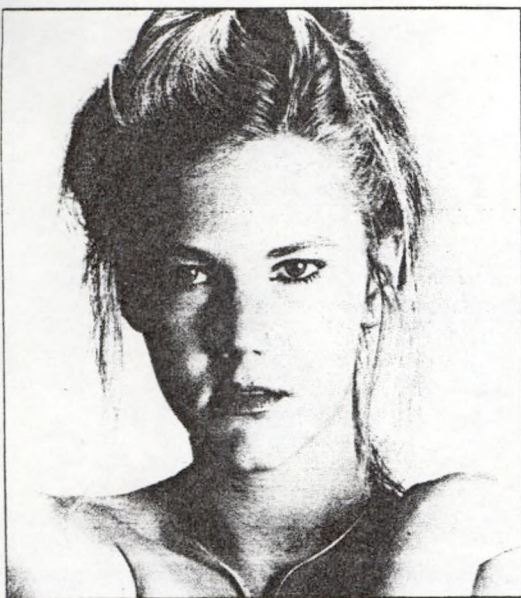
c. The major task of the NC shall be the co-ordination of national ECC projects

d. NC shall co-ordinate the establishment of new RC's subject to the approval (unanimous) of existing RC's

e. The NC may make policy decisions if the representative from each RC is mandated by the RC's and if the RC's have discussed that particular issue under discussion

f. The NC may make emergency decisions eg: campaign decisions, if the representative from each RC is mandated by the RC's to do so.

g. The NC shall be responsible for the national finances of the ECC



PEGGY NICOLL PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAMIE LAVAL

My Short Career as a FASHION MODEL

'Oh dear,' Dale Green said as she studied my photos (that's one of them on the left). 'You still have a lot of baby fat. And I'm afraid the style now is for little button noses . . .' By Peggy Nicoll

MY FLING WITH high fashion began in Denver, Colorado, where my cousin Ione, a well-known model, introduced me to her agent and a few photographers. Before a year had passed, I was seeing myself in the pages of local magazines – skipping through wheat fields in plaid polyester suits or clunking about a ski lodge in boots and parka. One day, right after I'd shot the box cover for a plastic earring holder, my agent called. 'Dale Green is coming to town tomorrow to recruit new faces,' she said. 'Are you interested?'

I was sceptical. Why would Dale Green, head of one of the top New York agencies, travel 5 000 km to find models? Then I learnt that agency heads often go around the world in the hope of spotting the next Renée Simonsen. The few women who look promising are invited to New York to discover what it's like to struggle along on \$200 000 a year, dress in designer clothes, and, if they really hit it big, move in with a rock star.

Mother Nature had neglected to give me an upper lip, and my 1.65-m frame was five centimetres shy of the minimum height requirement – but I couldn't let a lousy five centimetres come between me and David Lee Roth. Yes, I was interested.

In preparation for my interview with Dale Green, I purchased a pair of 10-cm heels and tight-fitting jeans long enough to cover the 10-cm heels. I then bought a bottle of Wite-Out to cover my pimples, industrial-strength foundation to cover the Wite-Out, and a lip pencil to create the Cupid's bow I should have been born with. I also picked up a steel-reinforced girdle to hide my bulges.

Finally, I edited my portfolio. A top agent needs to see only a few flattering photos. She shouldn't be confronted with love handles or multiple chins.

The Interview

The room outside the office where Dale Green sat was crammed with 20 aspiring Christie Brinkleys. Fearful that the formation of words might ruin our lipstick, we

waited in silence for our turn. Despite the tension, I was confident. After all, I had practised walking on my high heels the entire morning, had even rehearsed several amusing anecdotes to keep the conversation flowing. Yet as one rejected girl after another emerged teary-eyed from the office, my optimism started to erode.

When my turn came, I mustered a smile and walked into the office. 'Nice to meet you,' Dale said as she glanced at her watch. 'Let's see your book.'

She flipped through my portfolio, sized up the photos with a critical eye, and asked for my height, weight, and dress size. I lied smoothly. She looked up and smiled. 'We'd love to have you. Can you come to New York in May?'

A new model is not necessarily rushed off to be photographed by Scavullo the moment she arrives. This was made quite clear to me on my first day at the agency.

'Welcome to the testing board,' said Tina, my 'booker.'

'What's that?' I asked.

'And how long,' I asked, 'does this process take?'

'With your book,' Tina said, 'about six months to a year.'

Taking her prediction into account, I figured I would be wise to start economising immediately and decided to look for a roommate or two or three. Fortunately, Tina knew of a model named Tracy who needed a roommate, and several days later I moved into an eight-hundred-dollar-a-month one-bedroom apartment, inhabited by Tracy and two aspiring young sopranos.

'You'll get used to their singing after a while,' Tracy assured me as she demonstrated the workings of the sofa bed.

A Day in the Life . . .

The next morning I called Tina and wrote down the address of five go-sees. I dressed, put on my make-up and stepped outside onto the hard cement. Twenty-five minutes and three blisters later, I walked into my first New York City photography studio. At first, I thought I'd entered a hall of mirrors. Ahead of me, in an orderly line, stood a dozen or so women who looked

Tracy looked at me thoughtfully. 'Your problem is that you don't carry yourself like a model. You don't glide into a room; you fall into it.'

She explained that this is the entry-level phase most models pass through before being sent on actual job interviews. To build your portfolio to New York standards, the agency sends you on 'go-sees', meaning you go to see photographers. If one of them thinks you have any potential, he or she will agree to take some test shots, setting up a photo session free of charge. Not only do you get experience in front of the camera, but you both get pictures for your books. (In most cases, the photographer is new to the business and needs to upgrade his or her portfolio too.) This process continues until your book is full of professional shots.

just like me. We all had shoulder-length blonde hair and blue eyes.

'Hi,' said a young model. 'Are you with Green too?'

'Yes. How did you know?'

She explained to me that the blondes were usually from Green, brunettes were Wilhelmina's girls, more exotic models were with Zoli, and the youngest from Elite. She also told me that every summer New York is packed with thousands of girls willing to do anything for a contract – which makes you officially part of an agency and might even guarantee an annual income of

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MY SHORT CAREER AS A FASHION MODEL

\$50 000 or more. An agency won't offer you a contract, of course, unless you're absolutely stunning, already have an impressive portfolio (usually from a European modelling stint), or have proved yourself on the testing board.

'Until you sign on that dotted line, you're nothing,' she said.

'And how many women on the board eventually do get signed up?'

'Oh, about one in six,' she said.

So I was not *the* one-in-a-million chosen to dethrone Carol Alt; I was one of a million competing for a place in the agency. And it looked as though I would have a rather tough time succeeding on the testing board.

'Why won't you take my picture?' I asked the fifth and last photographer that day who had rejected me immediately.

'Because I can't tell how well you photograph.'

'Why not?'

'Because you don't have enough pictures in your book.'

'But how am I supposed to get more pictures if you won't even take them?'

He smiled. 'I'm sorry, but I can't spend a lot of time on someone so inexperienced. Come back and see me when you have more pictures.'

I headed home, hoping Tracy would offer some advice. She had been lucky;

she'd left the testing board after only three months and was now making the rounds of advertising agencies and magazine editors. I repeated my conversation with the last photographer.

'That's the model's catch-22,' she said. 'No one will take your picture unless you have pictures. If a photographer decides you're hot, he'll test you right away. If he doesn't like you, he may tell your booker. And too many negative comments can get you kicked off the board.'

Tracy looked at me thoughtfully. 'Your problem is that you don't carry yourself like a model. You don't glide into a room; you fall into it.'

'And you don't even lie like a model.'

'For example?'

'How old are you?'

'Twenty.'

'Wrong,' she said. 'You are 18 for the rest of your life.'

'But what's two short years?' I asked.

'A lot,' Tracy explained that it can take a year to get off the testing board and another year before a model earns enough money for the agency's 15 per cent cut to be profitable. 'And, at the age of 25, your career could be over. If you start modelling at 20, you'll only be making money for three years — hardly worth a two-year investment,' she reasoned. 'Besides, everyone lies about their age. If you tell someone you're 20, they'll think you're 22.'

'Anything else?' I asked.

'You need to lose weight.'

The Fight Against Flab

I reminded Tracy that this was the '80s and that healthy-and-toned was in, skin-and-bones was out.

She reminded me that the camera adds five kilograms, not to mention an additional two for each few centimetres under 1.7 m. And, having found my 10-cm heels under the sofa, she thought I should lose at least nine kilos. 'But don't worry,' she said. 'I have just the diet for you. We'll get that unwanted meat off your bones in no time.'

Tracy's regimen turned out to be as varied as the grapefruit diet. Instead of grapefruit, though, her choice was the low-kilojoule (under 150) potato. Unfortunately, all toppings were forbidden. I had the freedom to bake, boil, or, if I felt really ambitious, mash them, but somehow they just couldn't replace a slice of pizza or a hamburger.

'Believe me, after three weeks you'll be as thin as a reed,' Tracy promised. For inspiration, she put the bathroom scale in front of the kitchen door and a giant-size poster of David Lee Roth on the refrigerator.

Any diet that promises overnight weight loss will have side effects, and the potato diet was no exception. After three days, I found it hard to form sentences and think complex thoughts.

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UNREAL COFFEE PLEASURE

MY SHORT CAREER AS A FASHION MODEL

(continued from page 68)

Now and again, when hunger seized control of my body, I'd sneak into the kitchen. Invariably, I'd stumble into the scale and, like a red traffic light, it'd stop me from going further. Not surprisingly, in two weeks I had lost nearly seven kilos.

Elated, I called the agency.

'Thursday, you have a shoot with Bob Peters,' Tina said, 'Bring your own make-up and some decent clothes.'

To prepare for my photography session, Tracy suggested I head to Bloomie's for a few great-looking outfits. 'You can use my card,' she said. 'Just make sure you return the clothes the next day, with all the price tags intact. If you buy any shoes, tape the bottom so they won't get dirty.'

The Shoot

Bob's studio was spotless, with a large, bare area for shooting. He escorted me to the bathroom, which doubled as a changing room and told me how to adjust the lights around the large make-up mirror.

I put on a pair of black stirrup pants and the Perry Ellis sweater I had charged at Bloomie's and did my make-up.

He looked at me and frowned. 'Your make-up's wrong. Do it again and try to blend it better.' The second time I got it right. I stepped in front of the camera and moved back and forth to the click-click-click, trying out a variety of poses and expressions.

'Look off to the left, now the right. A little more of a smile. Close the fingers, that's right. Shift your hip a bit forward . . . not that much. Good, good . . . That's enough. Change.'

Several hours and outfits later, the shoot was over.

'I think we've really got something here,' Bob said, and told me to come back in a couple of days to pick up the contact sheets and slides.

On Thursday, Bruce, Bob's assistant, told me, 'You can keep them all.'

'He doesn't want any?'

'No,' Bruce said. I noticed that his eyes were carefully avoiding mine.

That's strange, I thought — both Tina

**'I'm sorry,' she said firmly.
'You're just not right . . .'**

and Tracy had told me that photographers always kept a few for their own book. I opened the envelope and peeked inside. My body looked thin. Granted, my nose photographed a little large and my make-up needed polishing, but other than that . . . I wondered why he didn't want to keep any.

My Expulsion

'Oh dear,' Dale said as she studied the contact sheets a week later. 'For someone so skinny, you still have a lot of baby fat. How tall are you?'

I told her.

She measured me without my shoes.

'I'm afraid that this isn't going to work out after all,' she said.

'If it's my height —'

'It's not just your height. We do have a few girls your size, but they're exceptional-looking. I'm afraid now the style is for little button noses — yours is too big. Maybe if you had it surgically shaved, I might be willing to test you again, but I'd have to see how you look first.'

I stared at her in disbelief. 'I'm sure I could learn how to do my make-up a little better . . .'

'I'm sorry,' she said firmly. 'You're really not right for us after all. Perhaps you should try another agency.'

I walked out into the hot sun. Six weeks had passed and my modelling career was over. My only recourse was to head for McDonald's and try to pick up the pieces. I bought a paper and, as I finished my second hamburger, flipped through the Help Wanted ads. One in particular caught my eye. It read: 'Assistant Model Editor. Must be well organised, able to work with bookers, photographers and critique models' portfolios. Send letter explaining why you're the person we need.'

I spent the weekend writing the letter. Today I am the assistant model editor at a major fashion magazine. And while I'm not making the money a top model does, I do go on shoots, work with photographers, and maybe, someday, I'll end up at a party with David Lee Roth.



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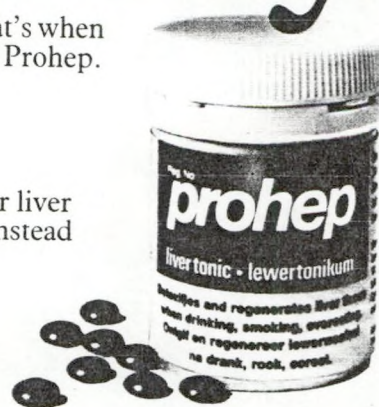
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Take Prohep before a party. And again before bed, so it can work on your liver while you sleep. It's the best way to wake up enjoying the night before, instead of regretting it. Available from your pharmacy.



CHEERS! But don't forget the Prohep.



I FELL IN LOVE and married while I was at university, and my husband was the first person to say, 'I think you might have epilepsy.'

He noticed that I was occasionally unresponsive when he talked to me. Sometimes he would have to call my name several times to get my attention. Because his grandfather had had epilepsy, he was familiar with the symptoms.

My first response was denial. 'No way,' I said, stubbornly. 'It can't be true. That's just the way I am.' I refused to go to a doctor.

Then one night I stayed up late, studying for an exam. It was the end of term, and I was under a lot of pressure. My husband had already gone to bed when he heard a crash. He rushed to the living room and found me beneath an overturned chair, suffering from a grand-mal seizure.

He moved the chair away and put a cushion under my head. Then he sat beside me and waited.

In a grand-mal seizure, an epileptic loses consciousness. Your muscles become rigid, and your body shakes violently. Sometimes there are alternating contractions and relaxations. My attack lasted about five minutes. When I regained consciousness, my husband was there, holding my hand. I felt confused and very, very tired.

'Hi, babe,' he said, 'Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Dostoevsky, and my grandfather. You're in pretty good company.'

The next day I had an EEG, a brain-wave test, and heard the diagnosis. I was 21 years old, and I had epilepsy.

Various incidents in my past suddenly began to make sense. During a bout of chicken pox when I was at nursery school, I'd had an extremely high fever, the only unusual event in my medical history. Epilepsy has been associated with childhood diseases.

When I was a youngster, running around the playground, I would occasionally fall down for no apparent reason. I didn't remember tripping over a rock or slipping on the grass, but there I was with a skinned knee. I would pick myself up and keep going. I thought I was perfectly normal.

Once I found myself on the floor in the empty change room. One minute I was lacing up my tackies, the next minute I was on the floor with a bump on my head. I must have slipped on a wet spot, I'd decided.

And occasionally – not really often enough to notice a pattern – I missed something in class. A few seconds were a complete blank to me. I thought that was normal too.

Then I had an car accident at 19. I was a good driver and proud of my skill. I had been driving for a year without ever coming close to having an accident, and then one day I suddenly found myself in the middle of a tangle of steel and noise and

I LIVE WITH EPILEPSY

My husband had already gone to bed when he heard a crash. He rushed to the living room and found me beneath an overturned chair, suffering a seizure. By Martha Moffett

screams, with no idea how I got there.

'Can you believe I was so switched off?' I asked everybody. 'I suppose I was day-dreaming. Lucky nobody was hurt.' I still didn't see the accident as part of a pattern worth paying any real attention to.

After seizure was diagnosed, I had to pay attention. I was suffering from a disorder of the nervous system shared by 315 000 South Africans, each of us in a slightly different way. Maybe it was a protective device, but instead of getting depressed, I got interested. I tried to learn all I could about my condition. This eventually led me to decide to go to medical school.

Epilepsy is an episodic disorder, not a disease. Between episodes, I am as healthy as anybody I know. It can sometimes be traced back to a birth injury, infection, brain tumour or head injury, but often the cause is unknown.

Brain cells normally communicate by way of electrical impulses. In someone with epilepsy, a brief malfunction in the affected area can cause an unusual discharge of electrical energy. This sudden overload may swamp the whole system, triggering a body response classified as either a grand-mal (convulsive) or petit-mal seizure. Both affect the entire brain, but the latter may do no more than cause an epileptic to forget what she was saying or to stare blankly for a moment without even being aware of the break.

In a simple partial seizure, the person doesn't lose consciousness but may feel numbness or a tingling or jerking movement in an arm or leg. In a complex partial seizure, there may be a feeling of apprehension – it's been described as like being in a lift going down – followed by a total loss of contact with one's surroundings. Sometimes repetitious movements occur at the same time.

After my diagnosis, my seizures became more frequent. And something new: I found myself having a complex partial seizure about every 10 days.

Epilepsy is treated primarily with drugs, sometimes with diet, and occasionally with surgery – if it can be established that the epilepsy is caused by a tumour. My doctor tried several drugs, but I was allergic to

some, and others didn't seem to work except in high doses. I was in a fog most of the time and hated it. The ideal is to take the least amount of medication possible and still be seizure-free. The doctor I went to for a second opinion changed my medication to Tegretol and it worked: I never had another grand-mal attack.

After we moved home and I began medical school, my new doctor increased the Tegretol and added another medication, Mysoline, and I've been able to go about three months between sei-

zures. My goal now is to go for a whole year without one.

Some people still have prehistoric ideas about epilepsy. They think that an epileptic is likely to have a seizure at any time (not so – modern treatment keeps more than half of all patients seizure-free); they think that bystanders are somehow threatened by a seizure (they're not) and that it's a sign of mental illness (it isn't) or possession by supernatural spirits (no, no, no!).

Some epileptics feel that these misconceptions and prejudices are worse than the disorder itself. Job discrimination exists. There are restrictions to deal with, like being denied a driver's licence.

From the first, I have been open about my condition. I wear a Medic Alert bracelet. This organisation has on file my address, my doctor's name, and the medication I'm taking. Once a woman noticed my bracelet and asked, 'What's that for?' When I told her I had epilepsy, she said, 'Oh, I wouldn't tell anyone. Why don't you just say you have diabetes?' I laughed and asked her how it would help me to pretend to have something different.

I tell people for my own safety and their peace of mind. Especially when I was having attacks fairly often, I wanted reassurance that those around me would know what to do in an emergency and wouldn't be startled or frightened by a seizure.

Once I had a seizure when I was riding my bicycle, and when I came out of it five minutes later, well-meaning strangers were doing all the things I tell my friends not to. Someone had called an ambulance, which turned out to be unnecessary, and someone else had stuck something hard – a pen, I think – in my mouth. It's not physically possible to swallow your tongue, no matter what people say.

The best you can do for someone having a seizure is to put something soft under her head – a rolled-up jacket or cushion – and move spectacles or anything with sharp edges out of the way. Above all don't try to restrain a person who is making convulsive movements. The muscles will jerk that way no matter what you do. When the episode is over, you might help the person to lie on her side, which makes breathing

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ing easier.

If the seizure doesn't last more than 10 minutes, and you are sure it's epilepsy, and if the person seems to be recovering and breathing all right and doesn't injure herself, there's usually no need at all — in fact, it's an unnecessary expense — to call an ambulance and send her to the emergency room.

People worry because they think they should be doing *something*, and because a seizure can look very dramatic and alarming. But there's nothing you can do to bring someone out of a seizure. Just see she comes to no harm and stay with her until it's over.

By now I've had seizures in a library, a supermarket, a lab, and on a bicycle. I

don't dread the embarrassment as much as the discouragement if I've gone three months or more without one and I thought I was about to set a record. That disappointment has to be dealt with every time.

I'm always hoping that new developments will come along. Some people with my type of epilepsy opt for surgery if the area of abnormal activity in the brain is small and can be clearly located, if seizures happen so often that normal life is impossible, and if drugs are not helping them. I know someone who had surgery, and for her it worked — she has not had a seizure in a long time. My feeling is that I'm managing too well to risk surgery.

We live a pretty ordinary life. My husband is very involved in his business, and

I am buried in my studies, so eating out is one of the few luxuries we squander time and money on. Yes, I harbour the thought that a special dinner together may be ruined between the vichyssoise and the filet of sole. And sometimes when we are making love, I worry a little about loss of control. The storm in my head that can rattle my bones and snap my jaw might get confused with the tempest that sex itself can stir up when you just let go.

But I try not to be inhibited. I try to take life as it comes and enjoy it. Whatever the goals may be, I'm the kind of person who says to herself, 'You can get there!'

Additional information is available from SANEL (SA National Epilepsy League), PO Box 1070, Springs, 1560, or ☎ (011) 56-1458/9/0.



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WAS I POSSESSED?

The question still haunts me. I buried the memory in a deep dark corner of my mind because of the intensity of fear that would grip whenever I tried to analyse the sequence of events. Now, at last, fear has been replaced by curiosity and a longing has grown to purge the memory. I am using this opportunity as a catharsis to fill the space with beauty and light. Maybe even light a lamp for a stranger who may stumble on to the same path. By Cynthia Hansen

IT WAS SPRING IN NATAL. Blossoms drifted lazily from the trees. The sun was warm and life-giving, denying the evidence that the last chapter had been written. Or had it? I was 10 years old when our family laid to rest a beloved great-aunt. My head was not bowed in reverence as the coffin was lowered. I looked upward and beyond. Striving to glimpse the spirit I was so sure was winging its way, as free as a bird, away from the frail, pain-wracked body left behind.

After the funeral I was accused of heartlessness. Bewildered at the lack of understanding, I simply said, 'But Aunt Maude is not there, she has just shed a suit of clothes.'

When an explanation was demanded for my blasphemous remark, tears flooded my cheeks and the seed was buried to lie dormant for over 20 years until it burst into a bloom of terror.

Was that the beginning or was it earlier in a silly squabble with my brother and sisters? I had proclaimed, 'One day I will walk somewhere else, I will not look like me, but I will be me,' and probably added childishly, 'So there!'

With the brutal candour of the young, I was teased mercilessly and suffered taunts of 'Cuckoo', 'Spook', and other cruel jibes.

I was 31. For the first time in my life I was living alone. My home was a small bachelor flat in the heart of a large city. Transplanted from a life of quiet suburbia, the vast city terrified me. As soon as I returned from work, I would incarcerate myself in my flat.

Restlessly I would pace the small room until one day I realised that this was a unique opportunity to develop latent psychic powers.

I began where most amateur occultists begin. 'Glassy, glassy,' it is commonly called. I cut up small pieces of paper and printed letters of the alphabet on each. A

further two pieces of paper were marked with the words 'Yes' and 'No.' A glass, a smooth table top and my tools were ready.

I was going to find answers to all the strange phenomena that had skirted the fringes of my life for as long as I could remember.

My forefinger barely touched the glass and it moved. Long-dead relatives, a grandfather whom I had hardly known and my beloved Aunt Maude began to visit with surprising regularity.

Their messages were trite but kindly. Some hinted of the evils lurking in the city for the unwary. I never questioned whether my subconscious could be supplying all these communications. I was obsessed.

No scientist on the brink of discovering a unique concept or immersed in the field of research could have applied herself more diligently than I did. Time was of no consequence and I would stagger to bed in the early hours of the morning in a state of exhaustion.

I cannot recall how long it was before a subtle change began to take place. The chitter chatter over the astral hearth was being interrupted by celestial strangers. My excitement knew no bounds. I was breaking into another plane of consciousness. My fever of expectancy was short lived.

One evening I was encouraged to throw myself out of the window eight floors above the ground. While I recoiled from the suggestion, I felt compelled to rise and walk from the room on to the balcony. As I leant over the edge and sucked in deep, clean breaths of air, I felt the first finger of fear. I fought with the desire to learn more and the realisation that I could be tapping at the wrong door.

Turning back into the room with the resolution that I must cease my activities, I sensed evil. Was it my imagination or had the room become thick with unseen forces? I was being crowded. I felt that if I reached

out my hand I would touch — what?

I crawled into bed too afraid to close my eyes and too afraid to leave them open, fearful that I would see what I could sense. I was alone. There was no one to help me. I had no telephone and my legs would not carry me across the crowded room to seek outside help... Help from what?

'The Lord's Prayer,' I thought. I would say the prayer out loud. I tried to open my mouth but my lips were set in a grip of terror. The room was thickening fast. I had to do something. 'I will repeat the prayer in my mind. Would it be as powerful?' I thought in desperation.

'Our Father,' I began. My mind went blank. I couldn't remember the words I knew so well.

I tried again and again. Finally I seemed to break through the blackness pervading my mind. I felt a slight easing of the fear and my lips slowly opened and a faint whisper escaped. My voice grew stronger and the hours of darkness slipped away as I continued to repeat the prayer. The air began to thin and I wept, thanking God for his protection when I knew I was alone at last.

Drained from my experience, I went to work but that evening I was afraid to return home. I contacted my mother and begged her to let me spend the night with her.

Across the dinner table I told her how I had been occupying myself over the past few months. She was shocked when she heard of my experience but tried to convince me that my vivid imagination had conjured up the presence of evil. The long hours spent in this game had played tricks on my mind.

Slowly I began to relax. She was probably right and I promised I wouldn't indulge in this dangerous pastime.

'What you need,' she said briskly, 'is to make some friends. Go out a bit.'

I agreed but how or where could I meet people? I was too shy to approach my colleagues with a view to cultivating their friendship. The matter was shelved. I spent my evenings reading, avoiding any books on the supernatural or macabre.

But the lure of the occult had not ended. Through a casual acquaintance I met a man. He had a good-looking face which broke readily into a smile.

He appeared impressed with my tales of precognition, ESP, sightings of ghosts and clairvoyance.

One evening he shot a question at me. 'Have you ever been to a Spiritualist Church?'

Shaking my head vigorously, I said, 'No ways, I've always been too scared.'

He encouraged me to believe that under the auspices of the church, I would be trained and directed to use my abilities.

My night of unreasonable fear had receded comfortably into the back of my mind and I began to feel a stirring of interest again. My own endeavours had proved a failure; my questions remained unanswered.

Innocently, I was taking a step which nearly cost my reason and even more

terrifying – the loss of my soul and belief in God.

I felt comfortable at the church service. There was nothing to fear. I studied the various mediums. Some appeared genuine. Others I sensed were faking. I kept my observations to myself. I had no right to judge. I was not qualified to assess the depths of their trances.

I attended the church regularly and soon joined a beginners' circle. Each week the circle was opened by prayer. In the centre on a small table stood a cross. The lights were dimmed and we sat, open palms upwards and to set the mood, a subject for meditation was given. A rose, a still pool, green grass or trees.

From the very first, a strange phenomenon would take place in my body. Something was happening in the pit of my stomach! From this faraway place where I now write I can only describe it as if my stomach was distending and when it could not contain the mass forming, it seemed to move upwards filling my body.

I felt as if something was inside me and trying to get out and I knew if it reached my lips, I would begin to speak in trance.

A certain shyness and a built-in caution made me halt the tide. If I was going to be a medium I wanted to be a genuine one – but how would I know for sure? If I lost consciousness and gave a profound message would I be convinced? I wanted to believe that this was my destiny and I had been chosen to impart invaluable proof of life after death. The secrets that I had been born with must become documented evidence.

And I readily agreed to joining a 'Rescue Circle.' We were going to look for the lost, trapped souls whose ignorance had kept them in torment in the darkness.

Like little children playing a forbidden game – we opened ourselves to the damned and tormented.

Where does the fault lie in what happened next? Was the preparation too scanty? Was I too eager to demonstrate my ability? Was the leader of the circle too inexperienced?

Our eyes had become accustomed to sitting in the dark with only the phosphorous glow of the cross in the centre and a dim blue light which was always kept burning.

We held hands to reinforce our power. On either side of me sat two well-built men.

As we waited expectantly, the familiar sensation began. The room grew darker. A rustle of uneasiness stirred the usually silent sitters. A dank smell began to permeate the room. There were soft whispers as nostrils began to crinkle in distaste. Corrupt earth is the only description I can find.

While I was aware of the external phenomenon, I was steadily losing my own battle. The volcano erupted dramatically. What followed was recounted to me later.

A brutal, powerful force had taken control of my body.

I lifted the two men on either side of me right off their chairs and standing up held them briefly in the air, while a rasping voice

spat out the words, 'Hate! hate!'

The circle was stunned into the reality that perhaps before them was something a little too big to handle.

Holding the cross, the leader of the circle flashed it towards me begging the entity to reveal itself.

'Ivan, Ivan,' the tortured voice replied.

The leader misunderstood it to be Yvonne and addressed the entity as a woman. This was corrected violently and now the whole circle was praying loudly and desperately until the violence was subdued and heartbreaking sobs were heard to be replaced by a racking cough. Another entity, a woman whose lungs were being torn apart by painful coughing.

How long did this all take? I don't know.

Consciousness returned and I faced horror-stricken faces. My chest ached and I felt depleted.

What had happened? I felt detached. I sensed disapproval. Then, almost accusingly, I was told of the events.

I was stunned and bewildered. They too, had no answers.

For the next few days, I still had this strange feeling of detachment. I felt as if my feet were not touching the ground. And I coughed. I was a non-smoker yet you would have believed I had been an addict for years.

The medium's wife phoned to say 'Ivan's' presence was being strongly felt. The dank smell of earth was permeating their flat.

I was indifferent. I had my own problems. I would go to work and carry out my duties automatically but reality seemed to be slipping away.

Rod and Jack, two close friends from the circle, were puzzled by my symptoms.

One evening I begged them to stay with me. I was feeling ill and feverish. I wanted their company yet I lay listlessly on the couch.

A slight shudder rippled through my body – my mouth opened and I heard strange sounds. I was singing with the lisping quality of a child. My mouth contorted – my tongue roamed frantically in my mouth. I had a cleft palate – now a hare lip. I was young, I was old and cackled insanely. If I was being used as a channel – a host of people babbled through my lips.

I had no control, yet I was frighteningly aware. I saw Rod and Jack's confusion turn to terror and they bleated they would go for help. My eyes implored them to stay while my mouth rattled incoherently.

But they fled. I was left to win this fight on my own and a cold desolation swept through me. My reasoning mind listened objectively to the passing parade. While I objected strongly to this invasion, I still had a feeling of compassion – for what – souls trapped in darkness? Whispers of my pygmy self?

The brook of sludge was still babbling when my friends returned with two mediums – the leader of our circle and a healer.

The night was over. The tide halted but I still felt very ill and a deep repugnance was growing inside me.

Word got around and I was invited to a special closed circle of the most prominent mediums in the city. A few weeks before, I would have felt honoured by the invitation as they were not lightly given but I couldn't shake off a feeling of apathy.

Prior to attending this meeting, I requested a healing session hoping I would be restored and refreshed after my recent ordeal.

The healer who stood beside the couch where I lay was the same man who had accompanied the leader of the circle to my flat a week earlier. He assured me that he would soon be under the control of his spiritual guide – a doctor. With a few deep breaths he appeared to enter into a trance state.

I closed my eyes and began to pray. I reviewed my motives for my pursuit and found they had been honest. I had only wanted to learn how to use my gift for ultimate good.

Then harsh words fell that burnt into my soul. I was being verbally attacked. Vile accusations were being heaped on my head.

I opened my eyes in disbelief and rose from the table with all illusions shattered. I couldn't believe anyone from the spiritual realms could have so little compassion and understanding. I felt betrayed. Everything I believed in was a deception.

I looked into the 'healer's' face and knew he was not in a trance. I refused to discuss the matter but went along to the closed circle knowing it would be my last encounter with a Spiritualist Church but there was something I needed to know.

Who was Ivan and the other entity? Could I remain in control? Did I still have the power of choice?

The familiar sensation manifested soon after the meeting opened, but I resisted with every fraction of my being. I fought a battle and won and the sensation disappeared. I was in command.

There was an entity trying to take control because he later manifested through another member and remarked on the opposition he had met. Someone received an impression that both Ivan and the woman, his sister, had been tortured on the rack some 200 years ago and she had died from an infection of the lungs. True or false?

I lived with uncertainty for many years. But the questing spirit is resilient.

I have no ambitions to be called a reincarnationist, medium or psychic explorer. I'm just a pathfinder who found that one road I believed would lead me to the Holy Mountain very nearly ended in spiritual and physical disaster.

I don't know for a fact whether I have lived before. I do know that the knowledge I was born with, although unverified, has helped me to overcome insurmountable obstacles – has given me courage to face almost overwhelming odds and over the years I have become good friends with my most priceless possession – my small inner voice – which, when heeded, has always stood me in good stead.

Was I possessed? You be the judge. ☺

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