

### ***Schizostylis*, Kaffir lily, Jesus and equality**

This the first of a series of paintings from photos that Sue and I took on a visit to the national waterlily collection near Weymouth in Dorset where we have been having a much delayed holiday. The last holiday we had, just with the two of us, was to celebrate Sue's 50th birthday. This year both of us will be 64, so it has been a while. That was Kefalonia in Greece, and very beautiful it was too. Sue has about three full-time jobs, for none of which she gets paid, so she and Hannah are also taking a very well earned Rick-free holiday in Northumbria in September.

Douglas is an excellent cook, being highly skilled and experienced at cooking food which originates in a box labelled pizza, so Rick is looking forward to a balanced diet of pizza and Douglas is looking forward to the responsibility for providing the care I need.

The plant in the painting is, as the more observant of you will realise, not a waterlily. It is actually a plant I have seen in books and plant catalogues but I do not think I have ever seen one in real life. They come in pink, orange and red, and we saw all three colours which was exciting and brings us neatly to the point of today's ponder, colour. The plant originates in South Africa where it has the common name kaffir lily. For anyone with experience of that part of the world the name carries shocking historic connotations of white supremacy, because the word kaffir is a derogatory term used by white supremacists for people of colour.

Aged seven, I arrived in what was then the British colony of Rhodesia where my father set up the medical school, still flourishing in what is now Harare, capital of the modern democratic state of Zimbabwe. After a week I had decided I liked everything about the country except for the way that the white minority treated the black majority, at that time imposing strict rules of apartheid. I could see no evidence that the people of colour who I encountered were in any way inferior to the white people I knew. So I intuitively felt that the whole system was wrong.

My dad went there having been assured that approximately one year later the country would hold fully democratic elections in which everyone living there, and old enough to vote, would participate. A year after we arrived the colonial prime minister, Ian Smith, made a unilateral declaration of independence producing, instead of democracy, a sickening white supremacist regime which fairly quickly demanded that all white people sign an oath of allegiance. My parents refused to do this and as the government started arresting people like my father, who was an outspoken opponent of the illegal and immoral apartheid-based regime.

Realising arrest was imminent my father and some friends bought an elderly land-rover and set out north, crossing the border into Zambia at about the time the police turned up at home and shouted a lot because they didn't believe that my mother did not know where my father was. My mother was magnificent, left in the country with three small children, the contents of a rented house and a tired Ford Cortina estate which had spent its whole life being driven absolutely flat out on dirt roads. She arranged for the house contents to be shipped back to the UK, put us in the car and set off south.

It is a long way from Harare to Cape Town. In those days the old road south to Beitbridge and the border with South Africa was poor, and the old N1 which went all the way from Beitbridge to Cape Town was twisty and rough. My mum drove all day and then we would stay overnight in hotels of variable quality. It took a week, but eventually, there was Table Mountain and the Capetown Castle in the harbour ready for its last voyage.

So, as a child I learned about the evils of apartheid and the lies that bolster misplaced beliefs in white supremacy. In the garden of each university house, provided for senior staff like my father,

were one or two cuboid concrete boxes about 3m by 3m, 'for the servants', we were told. After a lot of agonising, Theodore took up residence in one, spending a few hours a week gardening, and the rest of the time studying, because he was one of my father's medical students, who would otherwise have been unable to pay for his studies.

A typical bright autistic child, I was fascinated by Theodore, whose knowledge of biology and chemistry was inspirational. From him I learned a great deal of the basics of the subjects which meant that, when we returned to the UK, I was able to understand A level and then undergraduate textbooks which I hoovered up from second-hand bookshops everywhere we went. Theodore was one of the brightest young men I ever met and I owe him a great debt for his willingness to take time out of his busy life to teach me things the school would not try to teach me for years. I often wonder if he survived the civil war which inevitably came to the beautiful country of Zimbabwe.

It should be one of the richest countries in Africa, with enormous mineral deposits and rich farmlands, but its history destroyed that potential, leaving it in grinding poverty.

Which brings us back to this beautiful flower with its unpleasant common name. Jesus treated everyone he met with the same love and compassion. Even his tirades against the stiff necked and hard hearted Pharisees and other Jewish sects who refused to believe that a country bumpkin from Galilee could possibly be the messiah were underpinned by love and compassion. And the disciples, the Greek word means learner, learned from the master.

And that is why I find myself drawn again and again to the early chapters of Acts, in which the Holy Spirit transforms, as Jesus promised, the learners into church leaders, evangelists and preachers. And so to Acts 10:34-35 in which Peter states one of the fundamental paradigms of Christianity, 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who reveres him and does what is right is acceptable to him'. And as he speaks, for the first time the Holy Spirit falls on the non-Jewish Gentiles listening and launches the universal Church for everyone on Earth.

God loves everyone exactly the same amount, He has no favourites. So my friends, and indeed my enemies, God loves you just exactly as much as He loves me, the Queen of the UK, the pope, the 'vilest offender' [in the lyrics of the hymn by Fanny Crosby]. Everyone. No matter how clever or not, no matter what skin colour, no matter what gender, sex, sexuality the person was born or lives as, no matter if the person's worst sin is stealing paperclips from work and occasionally doing 35 in a 30 limit, or if their worst sin is to take an automatic gun into a school and massacre children and teachers.

So, my first thought on seeing this beautiful flower, which I first heard of in 1964, was 'how beautiful, how sad,' because my brain instantly provided both the Latin name '*Schizostylis*,' and that common name 'kaffir lily'. And I immediately thought of Rev Dr Martin Luther King and 'I have a dream...', of Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks, of Mandela and Tutu, of Sir Lewis Hamilton, Christian, 7 times F1 World Champion, and his plea 'I'm feeling extremely positive that change will come, but we cannot stop now. Keep pushing.'

And so I believe that we must keep pushing for equality for all. Keep pushing my friends, keep pushing. Out of love, light and compassion, keep pushing. Love from Rick the artist