THE EIGHTH NELSON MANDELA ANNUAL LECTURE – JULY 31, 2010

ARIEL DORFMAN

WHOSE MEMORY? WHOSE JUSTICE?
A MEDITATION ON HOW AND WHEN AND IF TO RECONCILE

It may seem paradoxical that a meditation dealing with memory and meant to celebrate the life and legacy of Nelson Mandela should start with the confession that I cannot evoke the date when I first heard his name. When he was imprisoned in 1962, I was a twenty-year-old itty bit of a firebrand myself, really of the minor variety I assure you, taking time off from my studies at the University of Chile in Santiago to fight the police in the streets and help organize slum dwellers in the shanty-towns of my impoverished nation. South Africa was in our same Southern Hemisphere, already the symbol of the most unjust and inhumane system in the world, but its struggle was a mere glimmer, resplendent yet distant, on the consciousness of a generation whose heroes were Che Guevara and, closer by, Salvador Allende, who was to become the first socialist elected by democratic means to the Presidency of Chile in 1970. Even from 1970 to 1973 during the three years of Allende's peaceful revolution whose ideals could have been modeled on the Freedom Charter of the ANC, even during those thousand days when we did our best to create a country where no child was hungry and no peasant was landless and no foreign corporations owned our soil and our souls, even then, I can't recall that we specifically protested Mandela's captivity, except as part of a general repudiation of apartheid.

It was only after Salvador Allende died in a military coup in 1973, only after I went into exile and started to wander this earth like a makwerekwere – yes, I was and still am a makwerekwere – that the name of Mandela gradually became a primary beacon of hope, a sort of home to me. By the seventies, of course, he had already solidified into a symbol of how our spirit cannot be broken by brutality, but his significance to me also grew out of the collusion of the twin twisted governments that misruled our respective people. The apartheid government that imprisoned him and his fellow patriots and denied them and millions of South Africans their basic rights, turned out to be

one of the scant allies of the South American dictatorship that banished me and was ravaging my land. Vorster and Botha were the pals of our Generalissimo, Augusto Pinochet – they exchanged medals and ambassadors and pariah state visits, they sent each other admiring gifts, they shared weapons and intelligence and even tear gas canisters. I could continue with many unfortunate and shameful examples, but one intersection of South African terror and Chilean terror should suffice: in 1976, the year of the Soweto massacre, we were suffering a slow massacre of our own, the Chilean junta and Pinochet were making infamous around the world the system of disappearing people, arresting them and then denying their bodies to desperate relatives. Both dictatorships sought to create through violence a world where no rebel would dare to step into visibility, would dare to step forward. So my increasing reverence for Mandela in the seventies and eighties cannot be separated from the fact that his people and my people, the people of South Africa and the people of Chile, were bent on a parallel quest for justice against a brotherhood of enemies who wanted to disappear us from the face of the earth, as if our very memory had never existed. Even so, it was not until Chile regained its democracy in 1990 and Mandela's release that very same year, it was not until both his country and mine and indeed the world began to wrestle with the dilemmas of how you confront the terrors of the past without becoming a hostage with the hatred engendered by that past, it was not until both South Africa and Chile were forced to ask themselves the same burning questions about remembrance and dialogue in our similar transitions to democracy, it was only then that Madiba became more than a legend to me and, with his wisdom and pragmatic compassion, grew into a guide for contemporary humanity. Because those who had struggled against injustice were to learn that it is often more difficult to listen to your enemies and forgive them than it was to suffer their atrocities, we had to learn that it may be morally more complicated to navigate the temptations and nuances of freedom than to keep your head high and your heart beating strong in the midst of an oppression that marks clearly and unambiguously the line between right and wrong.

It is these difficulties and these moral intricacies that I would like to explore this afternoon. And I would like to do so from the perspective of a story-teller, someone who, through the decades of

battling the dictatorship in Chile, came to believe that he had been spared death many times over so he could keep alive the memory of what the powerful wanted to suppress. Let me start, then, with a story, one that complements and also complicates the story of redemption that Nelson Mandela continues to embody. That is what writers do: plunge into the vast complexity of our human condition rather than be content with simple answers that leave us satisfied and comfortable.

A few years back, while giving away books to schoolchildren in a Chilean shanty-town, as part of a literacy program that an NGO had been organizing, I was approached by an old carpenter. “If it’s true that you worked by the side of Salvador Allende,” (remember, the Chilean president) he said, “I have a story to tell you.” Carlos – that was his name, if I’m not mistaken – had been an enthusiastic supporter of the socialist government. Allende had created a program that helped Carlos to purchase his first and only house, Allende had understood why children, including Carlos’s, should have free milk and lunch at school, Allende had filled that carpenter with hope that workers need not be forever dispossessed of a future, and that this could be done respecting freedom for all. Following the military takeover of September 11, 1973 that left Allende buried in an unmarked grave and his image forbidden, soldiers raided the carpenter’s neighbourhood, breaking down doors, beating, arresting and shooting residents. Terror-stricken, Carlos had hidden away behind the boards of one of the walls of his house a picture of the martyred President, where it remained all through the seventeen years of dictatorship. He did not extract it, Carlos informed me, even when democracy returned to Chile and Pinochet had to relinquish his stranglehold over the government. Pinochet might not be the country’s strongman anymore but he still malingered as Commander in Chief of the Army and his disciples still controlled large enclaves in the judiciary and the media, and, above all, among those who had prospered obscenely during Pinochet’s neo-liberal regime. Though perhaps more crucially, Pinochet’s shadow inhabited the nightmares of many Chileans: they still feared his malevolent aftermath, that he would one day come back and seek revenge. Free elections were not enough to release that carpenter from his dread. The state funeral that Allende received was not enough. And not enough either when a Truth and Reconciliation Commission helped the country come to

terms with its past, like its counterpart in South Africa a few years later. It was only in 1998 when General Pinochet, during a visit to London, was arrested for crimes against humanity that Carlos pried back the boards that concealed the portrait of Salvador Allende, and there it was, after 25 years, intact, his *Presidente lindo*, his beautiful President, he said, just as he recalled the man. Taking that picture from its wall changed Carlos. It did not matter that Pinochet was flown back to Chile after eighteen months of London house arrest. Carlos was scared, of course, but this time he gathered his courage and kept the picture of Allende hanging defiantly on the wall. Never again, he said, was he going to hide it.

It is an inspiring story, because Carlos was not a militant, a foot soldier of the revolution sacrificing himself for the common good for the memory to flow out. That makes his gesture all the more significant in that he was not a militant. Nelson Mandela has explained how “at the very heart of every oppressive tool developed by the apartheid regime was a determination to control, distort, weaken, and even erase people’s memories.” Carlos, thousands of miles from South Africa, was rebelling against that very oppressive tool. If that portrait from the past could emerge from its hideout, if it could share the air and mountains of Chile, if Carlos could show it proudly to his grandchildren, it was because Carlos had refused to forget, he had not burned the picture while the security forces rampaged outside but buried it furtively until it could be recovered. If the carpenter could tell me the story at all it was because he had carried that image inside all those outlawed years, nursed and nurtured it.

An inspiring story, yes, yet also sobering.

Memory does not exist in a vacuum. If there had been no justice, if Pinochet had not been made to face judges and answer for his crimes during that year and a half in London, the memory of that carpenter would have remained encapsulated. For the memory to flow out into the open the fear also had to flow out. There had to be a societal space where the portrait from the past could be safe. Memory does not exist in a vacuum. The justice that facilitated the surfacing of those proscribed images and thoughts had itself been the product of many other, more public, more communal memories,

thousands upon thousands who staked their existence, many of them losing their lives and certainly their livelihoods, so that people like Carlos – non-militant people like Carlos - would not consign their past to the dust of incinerated history, so that people like Carlos would find, when he escaped from his seclusion, a country that was created by voices other than those with more money and more guns. Again, quoting Madiba: “The struggle against apartheid can be typified as the pitting of memory against forgetting. It was in our determination to remember our ancestors, our stories, our values and our dreams that we found comradeship.” Carlos was eventually able to bring together his private and his public memory because others risked everything in order for a commons of liberation to exist. For one memory of resistance to persevere therefore it needs to eventually belong to a savannah of commonality, it cannot prevail against violence and censorship if it does not join a vast archive of other forbidden memories. The case of that carpenter is sobering, no matter how fervently admirable his loyalty, because the very isolation and secrecy of his hideaway also reveals how ultimately precarious any merely inner and covert rebellion is.

What if the carpenter Carlos had been killed or exiled or lost his house or perhaps been attacked with Alzheimer’s, so many accidents that could have blocked that portrait of Salvador Allende from seeing the light. Or worse still, decades hence, someone else, some stranger or maybe even a great-grandchild would have been working on the wall, someone other than Carlos tears out the boards and finds the photo, looks at it wondering why is it there? What unfathomable message is it transmitting from the attic of its mystery? I mention the risks of this further act of forgetting because it seems critical, both in Chile and in South Africa, to urgently ask ourselves how we are to transmit the memory of struggle and resistance, sorrow and hope, to the young, how to transfer something more than a piece of paper, a scrap of celluloid, how to transfer the most elusive thing that needs to be handed down to the next generation: experience. Experience: what it meant to live under apartheid in South Africa, what it meant to survive tyranny in Chile. The photo that the carpenter hid away thus becomes a metaphor for both the endurance of memory and its inevitable state of flux. The photo as an object may be there but the carpenter who once suffered to keep that memory alive will pass, as all of us also pass. Memory does not exist

in a vacuum. Unless memory becomes active in the lives of the young, relevant in the lives of the young, it will die as surely as it would have if the security forces had torched the carpenter's house.

Time, alas, is on the side of death and oblivion.

Nor is relentless time the only problem faced by those who struggle against forgetting. A series of questions about reconciliation percolate from the carpenter's story. How to reconcile – and I use the word purposefully – how to reconcile the memory of that carpenter with the memory of the men who would burn that photo of Allende, would burn the body and eyes and hands of the man who would remember Allende, how to reconcile his memory, the memory of that carpenter, with the contrary and powerful and menacing memory of the men who would burn the very shack in which that man lives, burn down the country desperate to bring that memory into the open? Enemies remember the past differently and until they agree in some way on that past, and are able to forge a memory common to both sides, their rivalry will refuse to vanish no matter how much it hides itself. That is why Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, with all their flaws and concessions, all the pain they do not expose and all the crimes that may remain unpunished, are an indispensable step in a transition to democracy after a period of systemic violence. Let me revert again to a story. These inquiries create a version of history that the majority of citizens and especially their children can access, a story that becomes the inexorable frame of reference for future dialogue and discussions. The narrative in which former adversaries can concur gradually turns into the narrative of the nation itself, a form of collective memory that can persevere beyond the life of its original protagonists, even as we acknowledge that this consensual story far too often leaves out too much of the grief, too many recalcitrant stories.

This creation of a shared history through the public airing of a harsh past does not, however, unavoidably lead to true reconciliation. Other steps may be necessary to heal a divided community. Other steps may be needed to reach those who refuse to accept how their own actions have offended our common humanity. Other steps may be vital if we are to keep the past alive for future generations.

Let me revert again to a story, another tale of disputed recollection and even more disputed reconciliation, but more disturbing than the fable of the carpenter and his clandestine portrait.

I happened to be in Chile in 2006 when my nemesis General Pinochet was hospitalized for a heart attack, a stroke from which he would die one week later – that's almost four years ago. But why should I recount this story when I can show it, thanks to the fact that the Canadian director Peter Raymont was filming me for a documentary based on my memoir, Heading South, Looking North. His crew captured the following scenes.

INSERT FILM CLIP – APPROXIMATELY THREE MINUTES.

(*For publication purposes, description of the scene*:

Here is what happened: I find myself circling the back of the Military Hospital where Pinochet is being treated and as I am talking to a group of journalists, a woman passes by and insults me, calling me a dirty communist. I respond with intensity but not aggressively: Why are you attacking me, ma'am? What have I said or done? She doesn't answer and swishes away. I then walk to the front of the hospital and there they were, outside the gates of the medical facilities, a group of women, crying out for their dying leader, led by a small, chubby woman, lips thick with lipstick, fingers clutching a portrait of her hero, a litany of tears streaming from behind incongruous dark glasses. There she was, making a pathetic spectacle of herself for all the world to see, defending a man who had been indicted by courts abroad and in Santiago as a torturer, a murderer, a liar and a thief. And yet, I was paradoxically, inexplicably, uncontrollably moved by her misery. And so, unable to stop myself, I approached the woman, told her how I had mourned Allende and therefore understood that it was now her turn to mourn her leader – but also wanted her to realize how much pain there was on our side.

That is what happened).

This sequence of the film is the one that, particularly in Latin America, calls forth the most criticism. How, people ask, could you do that? How could you validate that woman's grief for Pinochet, honour it as similar to your grief for Allende? How could I extend my sympathy to an enemy who was condoning the misdeeds of

Pinochet, had probably celebrated that someone like me was tortured or exiled or executed by her dying hero? What possessed me? That's what people keep asking.

That's the right word. In effect, I found myself *possessed*. I was inexplicably, uncontrollably moved by that woman's misery, unable to hold myself back, as if some deep turmoil or angel inside had welled up and overwhelmed me.

Psychologists have discovered that a baby will cry more intensely and for a longer period of time when she hears the distressed voice of other children crying than if the doctor conducting the clinical trial plays back the baby's own sobbing voice. Think about it: a baby is more upset by the voice of someone else's agony than by her own troubles. The baby intensifies the cries in solidarity with the other, shares the pain, signals to the other child that he is not alone. For me, this is proof, if we ever required it, that compassion is ingrained in our species, coded inside the circuits of our brain. This is how we managed to become human, by creating the conditions for a social network where the suffering of others is intolerable, where we need to pity and comfort the afflicted. It is certainly not the only thing that defines us as humans: we are also characterized by cruelty and selfishness, indifference and avarice, but each of us can decide what defines our primordial humanity, and I choose the pre-eminence of empathy with others as our most important trait, the base for our evolution, what lay the groundwork for our search for language – language is what makes us who we are – whose very core is the articulation and belief that someone else will accompany us through life, compassion is at the origin of our species-quest for the imagination with which we can smuggle ourselves into and under alien skin. What possessed me, then, was quite simple: I felt sorry for that woman.

And yet, we also ought to interrogate my act. That hysterical woman, after all, rants against those who have "mala memoria", literally, "bad memories", targeting precisely people like that carpenter Carlos who remembers Allende and refuses to forget the crimes of General Pinochet. It is her memory against ours and there is nothing I can do in this world – or doubtless in the next one – to change what she recalls, what she has selected to recall in order to defend the

identity she has built for herself. Her narrative, her most intimate story, the myth by which she has lived for decades, is that Allende was a socialist who threatened her peace and property, so if Allende's followers were put violently in their place by substitute father Pinochet it was in order to save that woman and her family from the hordes, protect her from the barbarians. She starts from the same paranoia as that other woman in the film who, when I first arrive at the back of the hospital, insults me as she strides away, calling me a dirty communist. With this major difference: the mournful chubby woman (with the dark glasses) holding the portrait of Pinochet is willing to listen, is able to at least have a face to face encounter with me, recognizes me as a fellow human, perhaps because I approached her with gentleness and respect, perhaps because I broke down her preconceptions about the enemy. It's hard to open a dialogue with a harridan who slurs invective and then shows us her back. But when her ally, that other woman who was wailing ceased her tirade, I saw a crack in the barrier she had erected and ventured into the potential breech to tell her that though we disagreed on fundamentals, I could still understand her distress. In return, I asked that she try to put herself in my shoes, realize that I was not afflicted by a "mala memoria", bad memories, wrong memories, but merely memories that did not coincide with hers, that might, in fact, be antagonistic to hers, but that this was not a reason to kill or detest one another.

Before that encounter, I had meditated extensively in my plays and novels on the walls that separate us from those who have done us grievous harm, I have compelled my characters to deal with their worst enemies and ask themselves how to avoid the sweet trap of victim hood and retribution, I had suggested that atonement was essential for any significant exchange of ideas to transpire, essential that he who had benefited from a transgression give up his privileges as proof that he was sincere. But when it came to real life I could not wait eternally for that repentance. In real life, I felt the urge, if only for a minute, to break down those walls myself, leap across the divide, imagine a different sort of world.

I was not offering reconciliation and most definitely not forgiveness to that Pinochetista fanatic. For a long term ceasefire to exist some remorse would have had to bite inside, she would have

had to be willing to inhabit my memories, to accept what Carlos the carpenter had been through during twenty-five years trying to keep alive his own river of memory in the midst of the conflagration. I would want her to recognize his right to show his portrait publicly, as she does like he shows it, without fear. I would want her to acknowledge his right to exist, our right to mourn, our right to remember. She is undeniably very far from that state of grace. But we did create, she and I, some minimal space for a minimal understanding, a gentle interlude – and, as South Africa proves, those truces when ardent foes begin to speak to each other can be the start of something miraculous. I use the term “miracle” having earned the right to say it; and you have the right to say it, too. You do not arrive at such armistices effortlessly, you often need to drive your opponents to the table through force and cunning. You cannot suppose that such meetings of the mind will simply happen – each small step is fraught with peril and false enticements and perverse illusions. Let me repeat this: each photo, each memory, does not emerge from its hiding place without struggle and suffering, without an immense social movement behind it, without some form of justice enacted.

It is also true, however, that far too frequently those magical instances when adversaries meet and reach at least a pact not to resort to carnage to impose their points of view, far too frequently those moments close just as abruptly as they open and we often find ourselves yanked back to where we began. I can shatter that wall, open a splinter in time and reside there for the snap of a minute, but there will be no further progress unless the other side, people like that woman who insulted me, like the woman who is closeted in her anguish over the impending death of a tyrant, there will be no real improvement of the social environment unless people like them, like the soldiers who raided the shanty-towns in Chile, like those who profited from the suffering in South Africa, manage to take a step of their own, realize that to admit their own complicity in the crimes is a way of liberating themselves from their own prejudices or hatred forever.

As South Africa has proven, it is not impossible to make exceptional encounters like the one with that woman last longer than a minute, become part of a country’s major reckoning with itself.

In 1997 (this is my third story), on my first, and up till now only visit to your country, I was taken to District Six in Cape Town, that site of conscience that commemorates what happened in a multiethnic neighbourhood torn apart by discrimination. As I toured the museum with one of its guardians, he told me about a recent hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. A policeman of Afrikaner origin admitted killing the parents of a child and expressed regret for his actions. When the grandmother of the boy asked him what would happen when she was dead, who would care for this orphan, and the policeman had answered, after a pause: “Then I guess I will have to take the child home with me.”

It is a wondrous story. So perfect, in fact, that as soon as I was invited to deliver this Lecture – and it took me one second to say yes – I decided to make use of it here this afternoon. And in order to give that chronicle more historical heftiness, I tried to track it down through my friends at the Mandela Foundation, but in spite of assiduous research, no concrete reference was uncovered. Nor could curators from the District Six Museum evoke the anecdote or several journalists and writers, always the same answer: nobody could summon up that story. I cannot, therefore, offer a name now, put flesh and blood on the protagonists. The child, the grandmother and the policeman remain unknown.

Ultimately, however, it may not matter if such a policeman and such a grandmother factually exist, if one said this or the other said that in exactly the way it was recounted to me, it may not matter if my guide at the District Six Museum had heard a garbled version of the tale and then retransmitted it in a different form, because that is how memory often works. Communities give themselves the chronicles they need in order to understand the world just as individuals create for themselves the stories they need in order to survive with a sense of self. If a story is true in its core, tells us a higher truth, something unforgettable about ourselves, then it remains true even if it is partly invented. “Long live writers” is all I can say.

Or can anyone deny that the policeman was expressing a model of behaviour, was informing the grandmother and the eavesdropping world beyond her, that policeman is telling us all here, right now, today, that we cannot undo the damage of the past but

must strive instead to undo the damage to the future, we must prove in our actions tomorrow that we have learned from the terrors and sins of yesteryear? What other way to pay for the taking of the lives of a mother and a father than to bring back home the child whom you orphaned, what other way to pay for a life taken than to give a life back?

It is probable that such a homecoming envisaged by the policeman cannot occur in reality– before a black orphan would be brought into the house of the oppressor, many others in his own community would care for that boy. But as a metaphor, as epic drama, as a pluri-cultural ideal, what more could we ask for, what better challenge to present day South Africa, what better image of a multiracial omni-linguistic home can be offered? Is that policeman not speaking across continents and time to the woman who cried for Pinochet, is he not demanding that she take Carlos the carpenter home with her? Is he not affirming that it is his duty, as a policeman, to protect the carpenter's portrait of Allende, his right to display that portrait on the wall, rather than persecuting him for his memories and his ideas? Are we not being invited to bring into our homes what is concealed behind the walls of our identity: those memories from the thickets of others that we have considered to be alien, hazardous to our integrity? Is it not in that back and forth process of offering a refuge to those who are different that we can find intimations of what it means to reconcile or at least a pale path towards tolerance? Is not that what literature and art do incessantly, invite us into the homes of strangers so we may know ourselves better, create a startling birthplace of common language from which we can explore an enigmatic world?

Above all, however, I would like to concentrate on the homeless orphan and what it might mean to him to be taken care of, to be truly cared for. Because all my words are meaningless unless they reach that child, unless they help fashion a world which that child deserves to inherit, unless the stories I have been telling speak to that boy who has lost his elders. I wonder, in fact, if that child, now grown, is not listening or watching this Lecture, if he will not come forward in the days ahead to claim his public place, emerge from the hazy boundaries of story telling into the history of his country, like the photo of Allende yearned to emerge into the history of my own land.

Think of children like him, boys like him, girls like him, all over the world. Think of them as potentially homeless because of our actions. We may not have murdered their parents, but we have built societies where girls and boys from every latitude and climate are in danger: famines, sicknesses, war, drought, poverty, beatings, pollution, civil strife, refugees and xenophobia, drugs and ignorance, women deprived of their rights, leaders who seem to have no control over events, high officials of governments tolerating thuggery and corruption when they should know better, the compassion of the world's religions hijacked by fundamentalists, are not all of these, crimes against humanity and the future? Worse still, there may be no future: we still have nuclear weapons that can render ourselves and our brother and sister animals extinct; we have blindly allowed this planet of ours to be plundered and desecrated by our greed and our desires and our indifference. How can we take the child back home with us if there is no earth itself to greet him, no home for us all? What message of hope do my three intertwined stories deliver to those children and to a world crying out for concrete solutions to dire dilemmas?

Memory matters. One of the primary reasons behind the extraordinary crisis humanity finds itself in is due to the exclusion of billions of human beings and what they remember, men and women who are not even a faraway flicker on the nightly news, on the screen of reality. One of the ways out of our predicament is to multiply the areas of participation, create veritable oceans of participation. To offer room and respect to those memories and stories is not a merely charitable, paternalistic initiative, but an act of supreme self-preservation. A nation that does not take into account the multitude of suppressed memories of the majority of its people will always be weak, basing its survival on the exclusion of dissent and otherness. Those whose lives are not valued, not given narrative dignity, cannot really be part of the solution of the abiding problems of our times. We cannot afford to wait twenty-five years, like that carpenter did, for each hidden dream to step into the light of day.

For that light to come, we must discover ways to diminish the fear that seeps into every aspect of our contemporary condition. The fear that we will be punished if we raise our voices. The fear that we

will be mocked or derided if we reach out to those with whom we disagree. The fear that our attempt to redress the wrongs we may have committed will be met with rage and the desire for revenge.

Fear, yes, fear is our real enemy and its main victim is always trust.

That may be the central plea of this Lecture: that if we do not trust one another, we shall all die.

It will not be easy. Unless we recognize the need for all the hidden photos and memories of the poorest and most neglected on this earth to find a safe haven, there will be no trust. There will be no trust unless we make efforts to disarm the most powerful, those who believe themselves the exclusive owners of the truth and can therefore, when they are challenged, commit all manner of crimes and misdemeanours in the name of their apprehension. And perhaps we need to start by disarming our own selves, admitting that none among us is so perfect or saintly that we are immune from the temptations of power and dominance, perhaps we should try to conquer the fear of our own nakedness. And then, maybe, who knows, others will trust us.

Can it be done in time? Can we take the children home with us? Before we destroy our planet?

Let us attend then to the message of hope that Nelson Mandela has been sending us.

One of the major pleasures of Madiba during his captivity was his garden. (I hope you are listening, Madiba.) He tells us often of how uplifting it was to plant and harvest under the sun and rain, to be in control of that small patch of earth when he controlled nothing else in the world except his dignity and his memories and his comrades. He tells us of the joy of sharing with his fellow prisoners but also with his jailers the bounty that his labours produced, what he and the land birthed into existence in spite of the injustice and the sorrow and the separations.

Mandela's garden is not a fluke, it's not an exception. Recently I have been reading a book called **Defiant Gardens**, by Kenneth Helphand, who recounts the story of gardens created improbably in the midst of the viciousness of war. The desperate gardens of the Warsaw Ghetto and the stone gardens cultivated by the Japanese Americans in their internment camps during the Second World War, the vegetable beds fashioned in the shadow of the trenches of the First World War, the gardens which flourished minimally, at first hesitantly, then insolently, and always with gentleness, as the bombs fell in Vietnam and as American soldiers prepared to fight in Korea and the Persian Gulf. What is fascinating about this array of landscapes is that these diverse and divergent gardeners do not align themselves on the same side of war; they might even be sworn enemies. And yet, they are all human, they all hunger for flowers and fruit, they all ache to keep alive a hint that something will grow in spite of the surrounding night of destruction.

There is no guarantee that we will ever reach the deep reconciliation we need as a species. Indeed, I tend to think – it may be the transgressive writer in me - that some damage done is irreparable, I notice that when justice comes infrequently the most long-lasting memories are in danger of fading. But when despair visits me, I hold on to the image of the garden. A garden that grows like memories should. A garden that grows as justice should. A garden that grows like true reconciliation should.

And do not forget that for crops and vegetables, for leaves and trees, to grow, we need to sing to them.

We need to sing to the earth so it will forgive us and continue to provide hope.

We need to always remember the multiple, infinite gardens of Nelson Mandela and his people.