Richard Patrick

Richard was born in the mid 1950s, in England. He never really gave an accurate date, he never gave a place, he never talked about his past in Britain unless you asked, which I never bothered to do. He wasn't being secretive, or hiding his age; it is simply that for him his life started when he arrived in Swaziland, and everything that had gone before was pretty much irrelevant.

Once a year or so we both went for a weekend to a country hotel, the Forester's Arms. We were involved in a course for training tour guides about Swaziland and had to update the syllabus with the owner of the hotel, Ruth Buck. After a couple of glasses of wine Ruth started asking Richard how he came to Swaziland. Richard seldom, if ever, drank alcohol at home and the hotel owner was skilled in the art of extracting stories from reluctant guests.

Under her subtle probing he unrolled his background. His father had been an electrician in England with his own business. However, Margaret Thatcher raised taxes on small businesses, and so Richard's father decided to emigrate to Cape Town with his wife and two daughters, both older than Richard who stayed behind in the UK to finish his last year of A-levels, then he too moved to Cape Town. He signed up for courses with UNISA, but never completed them. He worked in a bank, got engaged, stopped working in the bank and broke off the engagement.

After the end of formal employment and his engagement he started hitching around South Africa. He worked as a waiter in Spur restaurants for six months or so, then he would travel for six months or so until he ran out of money. He did this for three or four years, he said that he was looking for something, but did not know what he was looking for. This did not bother him, he was confident that he would recognise it when he saw it and the lifestyle was attractive. One day he entered Swaziland in the north-east. It was mid summer and extremely hot, the land there is flat and uninspiring. He was offered a place to sleep in a homestead not far from the road, there in the cool of the evening he talked to the elders. They were polite, spoke slowly, repeated themselves, had a gentle humour. Whilst sitting he felt an extraordinary sense of peace and belonging, he had an epiphany: "Swaziland is the place where I want to die".

So he worked as a waiter for one last time, saved his money and moved to Swaziland. At first he would have appeared to be much the same as many volunteers drawn to a peaceful country, especially when compared to apartheid era South Africa. It had a multiracial society, amiable people, striking scenery, good dope and an easy relaxed attitude to life.

His first job was as an English teacher in a government school in Bulembu, an asbestos mining town in the north-west of the country. The town is remote, set in spectacular mountain scenery at the end of a twenty kilometer dirt steep mountainous dirt road that becomes impassable after heavy rain. He spent three years there in the high school and really enjoyed the experience. It was total immersion in many ways and he learned to speak siSwati.

Whilst at the school he read the history books that were available. The only general history in the mid-80s was James Matsebula's *History of Swaziland*. Matsebula had been King Sobhuza's private secretary and an admirer of the king. The two clans were closely linked and it is fair to say that the book is deeply Dlamini centric, giving little external context and omitted events that did not support Dlamini hegemony. It was of course a product of its time: colonialism had just ended, the book gave the needed backstory and identity for a new country. Yet over the years some readers, including Richard, have seen it as primarily a justification for the status quo, in the tradition of oral history, not a balanced assessment.

I suspect that Richard did not set out to record histories - he set out to talk to people. His initial conversations with rural people continued to be a source of deep pleasure, historical research was the mechanism that allowed the conversations to happen. A family in the Lomati Valley, parents of a student that he was teaching, more or less adopted him, and he integrated into traditional life. Like many converts he probably overdid it, paying obsessive attention to archaic rituals, but no one minded, they liked him for who he was. He in turn completely identified with Swazi society, or rather the traditional component of it. To me, and others, he lived in an idealised kingdom of the mind. He said of this period in his life "that's when I went native" with a smile. He read Kipling and 19th century British classics, in some ways he did not just research the past, he lived it. In Swaziland with its large rural population and royal emphasis on tradition he had found his place in the world and the travelling and searching ended. In the over a quarter of a century from when he arrived to when he died he only left Swaziland twice, and then very briefly. He was proud of staying in the country, and said so several times, for him it was a question of loyalty.

He started his research in the early eighties by feeling his way through it, not from an academic perspective, although he was aware of the gaps in Matsebula. Old people loved to talk about their lineages, and Richard loved to talk to old people. He started to record clan lineages because that is what they talked about and what was important to them, and being a tidy man, filed everything away neatly. His clan lineages helped provide a wider and more nuanced account of Swaziland's past.

After teaching at Bulembu he got a job working for a missionary turned businessman who had an office with several phones on his desk. Each had a separate line for a separate business and the ex-missionary would answer each phone with a different company name. Richard's job there was conducting aptitude and personality tests for other company's personnel departments using material from an internationally known and highly reputable testing enterprise. However, although the questions were real and the results valid, the license was not - the missionary was running a pirate operation. Richard administered the tests until the office computers were seized by customs because import duty had not been paid and the missionary did a 'fly by night'.

Then he got a job as photo archivist at the *Times of Swaziland* at the close of the pre-digital age. He had an office with grey filing cabinets filled with tens of thousands of photos which he filed and refiled according to subject. Journalists would come to him with requests for photos, and he would supply them. But there was a fundamental clash between him and the journalists. Richard thought deeply, but slowly. The journalists thought quickly and shallowly, it was their job in a newspaper which seldom carried out in depth research, but

simply threw most stories together. There was a fundamental incompatibility between Richard and the rushed newspaper business - this sometimes ended up in journalists shouting at Richard because he was slow. The chief sub-editor there once said to me “I think the reason Richard likes rural life so much is that it moves slowly, at the same pace that he does.” But Richard was not bothered about this, he was working on his clan lineages and the newspaper was simply an unpleasant necessity, not his identity.

He published his lineages in the newspaper, and wrote articles on history. He became quite well known and his endorsement of tradition went down well with the conservative political elite. He joined a regiment and was given the name *Mdvumowencwala* or joyful dancer. He absolutely loved being in the midst of the colour and life of the great ceremony of the *Incwala* and observed all the little rituals that went with it. He slept with his shield under his bed to keep it flat, worried about whether the fur was falling out on his *emajobo* (the skins worn around the waist in traditional attire) and weeded the king’s fields when summonsed. Naturally he used these events as an opportunity to meet people, particularly old men, he was serious about ritual events; they were perfect for him. Old men who carried the clan lineages in their heads were usually, but not always, delighted to speak to someone who was interested and knowledgeable. More importantly Richard wrote it all down carefully and then gave printouts back to them at the next ceremony. After ceremonies he often strolled around the royal village of Lobamba in traditional cloth and skins, with a battered black briefcase full of files.

The newspaper articles gained him recognition and he was head hunted by the Swaziland National Trust Commission as a researcher in the National Museum which was run by the Trust. The Trust headquarters are behind the National Museum. He built a very small house in Lobamba, close to the entrance to the royal village where the Queen Mother lived and about ten minutes walk from where he was working. He could walk to work, walk to the royal ceremonial center and do his research, he was in his element.

During this period, he married a Swazi woman, Lungile Ndlovu. They had two boys, Rowan and later William. Then his wife died and Richard was distraught. He was also left with two small boys to look after. However, working in the museum suited him far better than the newspaper, the pace was slower, he was close to his sons, and he did not have to catch a bus every day to work.

The museum was something like a retirement home for the culturally inclined. Several minor members of the royal family were on the staff. There was a house discretely tucked away behind the headquarters for a princess who worked in the Trust and kept an eye on things for the king. Drivers drove the staff about, there were meetings to strategise and prioritise, teams of consultants were hired periodically to produce management plans which somehow were never quite implemented. There were trips abroad for conferences and per diems mostly paid by international organisations – in other words it was a typical Swaziland government department headquarters.

One man on the staff had spent a year in Rome looking at the treasures in the Vatican to train him for this work, there were other similar stories from people with connections, those without connections tended to clean the floors and dig holes in the garden. The curator

knew what should be done to bring the museum up to scratch, but was unable to overcome continual low budgets and other constraints. In all of this Richard was able to carry on his meticulous steady research.

At first being in the museum worked well, but over time the CEO of the Trust who had got him the job, Sinai Mamba, became more and more corrupt. In a society that accommodates nepotism and corruption with numerous folk sayings like 'he who slaughters the cow keeps the skin', Mamba stood out as being exceptionally corrupt. For a long period during the CEO's tenure the Ministry of Finance had cut the budget to the Trust or gave it lower increases than the rate of inflation.

One member of parliament (which is next door to the Trust headquarters and museum) decided to go on a crusade exposing government corruption, using the CEO of the Trust Commission as the main example. He had a point - the CEO was embroiled in several scams. A parliamentary commission of enquiry was formed to investigate the CEO, the newspapers questioned what was going on in the Trust Commission, fed of course by regular updates from discontented employees. There was even a large hole cut in the fence between parliament and the museum. Trust employees could cross into parliament virtually unseen (the hole was masked by a convenient thick bush) allowing them to give evidence in camera against their CEO. This led to internal witch hunts led by the furious CEO trying to find the traitors. It was not an ideal working environment. Eventually the enquiry evaporated in a greater scandal when the MP himself was accused of keeping his cash expense money which should have been returned after official parliamentary trips along with receipts etc etc.

Outwardly nothing had changed, but internally the people who the CEO believed had testified against him in camera were being squeezed out, one by one. Richard had remained neutral in all this, but the infighting meant that two sides developed in the museum. Then another parliamentary commission of enquiry into Mamba was formed, but the CEO managed to delay and dodge - eventually the second commission of enquiry heard testimony in the last week before parliament was disbanded for fresh elections. Again nothing happened until the CEO died suddenly and unexpectedly, the museum staff laughed when they were informed of the news. He was replaced by a competent and honest administrator who improved the situation greatly, but the damage had been done and key staff had left.

Richard's official task was to prepare the annual report for the SNTC, given that it was, and is, a largely static organisation this was mostly a task of dusting off the previous year's report, and then turning mundane operations into achievements and glossing over any failures. He was given this task because he was a native English speaker. He did not rank high in the organisation, he had an extremely hot office with a very low ceiling without any insulation in it. It faced onto a closed courtyard, so there was no breeze either. Someone gave him a fan, but it was stolen. He was much better off than the accounts department nearby who had an asbestos-cement roof and no ceiling at all. In summer the desks looked very oddly placed at strange angles to each other, until you realised they were arranged to miss the drips. You could see daylight through holes in the roof where the nails went in and when it rained steady drips of water came through.

The lack of repairs to the roof were part of a wider problem: the ongoing corruption investigations made the central government very wary of increases, so salaries remained more or less static and the cost of living rose. This caused distress, and salaries that had once been adequate no longer were and people struggled. Nor was money spent on displays or maintenance because there wasn't any, the buildings slowly started to decay.

The museum itself had no overall plan, simply rooms of things, some displays were well designed and well built, others were crude. Many of the captions had been made decades earlier using Letraset, a pre-computer era system that provided neat lettering in different sizes and fonts. You rubbed some special paper with a pencil and a tiny single letter sticker came off, by laboriously repeating this over and over you could build sentences. Letraset tuned out to be a favourite food of fishmoth. As a result, almost all the lettering had been nibbled off very precisely by tiny little jaws. If the lettering had been large, you could actually read the missing words in a white textured nibbled font that contrasted with the creamy surrounding card.

In about 2000 the two of us were asked to compile a list of potential national monuments countrywide. It has been pointed out in the press that Swaziland only had three. When we went out have a look at the three we found that one of them, a colonial house, had disappeared since proclamation, only the front steps and a chimney were left. Richard never learned to drive, so we used my Land Rover to explore the country several days a week for some months. I learned a huge amount of history from him, particularly on landscape and memory in Swazi tradition. He always carried a briefcase with his lunch, white bread and mayonnaise or jam sandwiches, two rolls of Cheryls sticky red sweets and his printouts of lineages for the region that we were going to. I wanted to find potential monuments, Richard wanted to find informants. If he saw an old man with white hair he would say "stop, stop, there is an old man! Look, he has got white hair!" His pleas usually fell on deaf ears, I knew from experience that if we did stop, it would be two hours or so of questioning. Better not to start.

One day we were looking at a celebrated and very remote rock with a mythic past which might be considered eligible for national monument status when our guide's son casually said to me, "this monument stuff is okay, but wouldn't you rather see the Bushman paintings"? The paintings turned out to close to one of God's footprints near Ntfonjeni in the north, right next to a royal village. This is a life sized single footprint in granite, each of the toes are visible and the whole of the sole. To traditionalists this is a footprint left over from when God created the world; that there is ever only one footprint at a time is because God has only one leg. An alternative explanation is that this is random weathering in rock - of the millions of weathering combinations in Swaziland two happen to look like footprints.

Richard knew that Ntfonjeni was the northernmost place where King Mswati II had a permanent military base in the mid 19th century and where his weapons were buried (his body is buried in the south). I guessed that there was a power connection between the footprint, the San paintings and the royal homestead. Richard quite correctly said that there was no evidence. A Swazi who is both in the regiments and an anthropologist, Lunga Dlamini, later pointed out that the deliberate placing of the homestead next to God's

footprint was recounted in one of the regimental songs. This cultural continuity over long periods of time has been observed several times - there is little question that the Dlamini appropriated San sacred places and also ceremonies, like rainmaking, to strengthen their power.

Some friends of mine who were botanists found several stone walled structures high up on the Mdzimba mountains overlooking the Kwaluseni university campus. I took photos and showed them to Richard – the place turned out to be the fortress that King Bhunu had built as a redoubt in his argument with the Boers in the late 1890s. Swaziland was, and is, full of connections that have not been researched, making it fascinating for anyone interested in history and traditional Swazi causality.

I wanted to introduce Richard to Huw Jones, author of *The Biographical Register of Swaziland to 1902*, a book covering the early colonial era, published in 1992 that Richard admired. Jones was an amiable man and as obsessed with Swazi history as Richard was. But Richard would not hear of it, and I was never able to talk him into meeting Jones. I wondered why, thinking that perhaps it was because he had never been to university and thought that he felt that in some way his research lacked authority. Though he was quite happy to write weekly articles on aspects of history for *The Swazi Observer*, a paper owned by Tibiyo taka Ngwane, which covered events like the king arriving back at the airport after official trips and encouraging speeches to youth by the Prime Minister. Their circulation was 15% of their rival, the privately owned *The Times of Swaziland* which blended critiques of the government with sensationalist stories like “Baboon Licks Gogo’s Private Parts”.

Richard’s articles were based on his clan lineages, but he fleshed them out and tied them to known events. Well written, well researched, they were popular and he became a semi-public figure and was approved of in traditionalist circles. The articles brought him a constant stream of school children and students from the university doing research projects. He treated them all politely, but reserved his enthusiasm for the elderly with clan knowledge. Often he read up on a clan before we went out into the field, memorising the names that he spent so much time over.

Then when he was in the middle of nowhere talking to an old man he would casually say, “hmm, that would have been your great uncle Sipho Nkambule who fought in WWII”, or something along those lines. The response was startling; people were amazed at his knowledge and became deeply enthusiastic. He loved it, and I understood why he had chosen his life’s path - something that remained a complete mystery to most white people who saw a balding, aging man with little money, no car, and who was plainly not getting enough to eat. For Richard all that was irrelevant; he was on his life’s mission. Whilst his fieldwork gave him great pleasure, the premature death of his wife affected him deeply, it also caused problems in bringing up two children on his own whilst working.

He hired a nanny to look after his two young sons, this turned into a permanent relationship and Sizakele Vilane moved her own children into Richards house. His sons Rowan and William were not happy at this, the house after all had just a sitting room, two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. After she moved in there were bunk beds scattered in the small building. The tap was outside, behind the house at first, though later they had running

water most of the time. The house was a concrete box with no ceiling, just a bare tin roof. During summer walking into the house was like having an instant lobotomy, the heat hit in waves, quickly dropping visitors into chairs as though they had been hit behind the knees and sucking out all thought and energy. He was given a computer with a German version of Windows by the Goethe Institute so that he could work at home, it shut down constantly from the heat and died soon after.

For Richard this was not relevant, he was living in the royal village of Lobamba, informants were everywhere, he had the excitement of walking to work and back every day not knowing who he was going to bump into and what information they might have. Whilst he was gained satisfaction from research the people around him were discontented – the two families did not get on. The declining pay from the museum meant that he was having to balance a larger family with a shrinking income. Richard's two sons felt that their stepmother ate more than her fair share and they were going hungry as a result.

Sizakele was a granddaughter of King Sobhuza, for Richard this was important. However, Sobhuza had many children, and they in turn had had many children. There are quite probably between one and two thousand grandchildren of Sobhuza. The sole conversation that Sizakele had had with her grandfather the king was a single question from him, "whose one are you then?" No royal favour descended upon Richard from the relationship, there were simply too many princes and princesses. He still walked to work with his packet of cigarettes, roll of Cheryls sweets and two white bread sandwiches.

I think, correctly or not, that it is impossible for foreigners to assimilate into traditional Swazi society. This is not primarily because of racism from Swazis, but that foreigners lack Swazi clan, and so much of Swazi identity is based upon clan and kin that to be without them is to be disconnected. And that he had very little money was more likely to make him appear to many as a failed white man, rather than a researcher leading an authentic Swazi life. Despite all his knowledge and his proper behaviour – and that went unquestioned – to me he was acknowledged, not accepted. Nor was I the only person to think this, several of the museum staff felt the same way, they brought up the subject, not me.

When Richard got to his office he constantly updated his files, adding new data to existing sheets. It is fair to say that his computer skills were not good, nor were those of the museum staff and their whole network crashed. Richard however had a friend, Quinton Reissman, who taught IT at Waterford-Kamhla School and so had everything backed up on several outdated stiffy disks. He gave me a complete set of disks which I kept, they came in useful a couple of times.

Twenty years of meticulous work had given him an encyclopaedic knowledge of even the most minute components of Swazi history. Curiously whilst I thought that he tended to see the present through rose tinted spectacles, he did not see the past that way, giving events critical analysis and placing them in historical context. When I made a 22-meter-long photographic display for the museum using archival photos on the period 1885 to 1968 I knew that when Richard approved it that there would be no comebacks or errors, and in the fifteen years or so since it went up there have been none. He was thorough.

Ten years or so ago I tried getting him sponsorship for his book on praise names, *Tibongo netinatelo temaSwati,* or *Swazi Surnames and their Praisenames,* from the American Embassy. But although two other grants I had submitted on various forms of culture were approved, his was tuned down. This was a major disappointment to him, and he stopped working on his research completely for six months or so. Instead he started a list of the causes of death of the Roman Emperors from the end of the Republic to the fall of Rome. He proudly produced it when finished – clearly the most dangerous people to rulers in a hereditary system with real power and no clear line of succession are your closest relatives, true of the Julio-Claudian house or the 19th century Dlamini.

When he had finished with the Caesars he started on the causes of death of the kings and queens of England. That took quite a while, I did not have the heart to tell him that there was a comprehensive book on the internet written by a retired doctor that covered the subject. As someone who seldom went online he was unlikely to find out. He used an ancient set of Encyclopedia Britannica with several volumes missing as his main source for the death lists. When he finished the two annotated lists, he went back to his Swazi research. What I saw from his excursion into death lists was that his strong taste for listing largely determined what he studied, not the other way around.

Shortly after I found a sponsor for his book and it was published to sincere appreciation from people who now had their clan praise names and lineages as well as taboo foods, he decided to move on. He wanted to write a simple critical history of Swaziland. But he never got beyond twenty pages or so, perhaps the subject was too broad, perhaps it was confidence, perhaps he did not understand how to take a large topic and turn it into a series of smaller achievable chunks. Or it simply could have been that he lacked energy.

He began to lose weight and did not look well at all, and then he contracted hepatitis. Given that prevailing incidence of HIV in the country I suspected that this might be the problem, but said nothing. After recovering from hepatitis, one day he said that he was HIV positive, but that his CD4 count meant that he did not need ARVs yet. I told this to a friend who sent him to a private doctor who agreed with the assessment. Then he got hepatitis again, but the prevailing opinion at the time – it has since changed – was that ARVs should only be administered when viral counts reached specific levels because ARVs are themselves toxic. But Richard was getting secondary infections long before this. I suspected his poor diet of cigarettes, sweets and white bread sandwiches were a major contributor. Despite several people advising him how to achieve a healthy balanced diet he never changed it.

The curator of the museum signed him up for the museum's medical aid scheme against his wishes. A museum vehicle took him to and from home. The question of what would happen to his research came up. He made sure that his backups were in good condition, but there were technical problems. He had typed in the names of his informants and the ancestors using Word, but drawn in the relationships with a pen and ruler. So if you printed out the backups the textual information was there, but the relationships were not, making it frustratingly incomplete. He asked me to look after his material after he died, I agreed to do that. He wanted it to be accessible to researchers as well as to people whose clan histories were described.

When Richard became weak he asked if we could go to the area where he had first taught, Bulembu, and we went for a short walk in the hills. On the way back he visited the homestead where he had been adopted two decades earlier. A few months later he went into a short coma and died after a brief hospital stay in August 2008. After his death people in the museum started to realise what they had lost, that no one else had his knowledge, and he was valued. The museum's death benefit's insurance scheme paid out enough money for his two sons to go to South Africa, stay with relatives and complete their educations, something that Richard could not afford in life.

After his death Quinton Reissman entered the relationship lines between names in Word using a computer printout upon which Richard had carefully drawn the relationships with a pen and ruler. It is this entirely digital edition that has been placed in the 500 Year Archive. It completes his research and his expressed wish to make it publically available.