

# MAN / OR MONSTER

THE PSYCHE OF A CRIMINAL



\*CARLA VAN DER SPUY

## **VIOLENT CRIMINALS: FACE TO FACE WITH 'MONSTERS'**

*Dr Hermann Liebenberg is co-author of this chapter*

Ordinary people of flesh and blood, and definitely not monsters. That's how we often experience violent criminals serving their sentences in the maximum section of a prison. The man sitting in front of you appears to have exactly the same needs as other mortals. He eats, sleeps, laughs, cries and forges friendships. He misses his family and wonders how his kids are getting along. It makes him human, someone we can all identify with. So sometimes we completely forget that he has committed terrible crimes and that there's a good reason for him being behind bars.

Could it be masterful manipulation that makes us feel sorer for some murderers, robbers and hijackers than for others? Do those who possess more charm and are excellent actors hoodwink us, or are they really victims of their circumstances? Why do some prisoners make you feel they would be a good candidate for Adopt-a-Prisoner, someone you could visit on Sundays for encouragement, while secretly thinking that others deserved to spend the next 200 years in handcuffs and that the keys to their cells should be thrown away somewhere in the deep, dark ocean?

It took forever for us to get permission from the DCS to interview five convicted violent criminals in a prison of their choice. Although the prisoners gave us permission to use their names, we decided not to go that route and to rather use pseudonyms for them. There are 136 prisons in South Africa, and we decided not to even mention the prison or the province where the interviews took place in order to protect their identity. Another reason was that they had family members on the outside, and we didn't want to make life difficult for them.

I sent many requests to the DCS beforehand to get permission to conduct these interviews, at which the well-known psychologist Dr Hermann Liebenberg would also be present. The idea was to get their life stories, followed by a psychological analysis by Dr Liebenberg.

It's true that all of us have a story to tell. The same goes for prisoners – one could actually say, particularly so for prisoners. We would try to find out why they had committed such cruel crimes, and how their minds worked.

Tired of trying to get permission, or even a reaction, after the umpteenth e-mail or call, I phoned Sarie Peens, deputy director: communication services of the DCS in three provinces. And so the prison gates finally swung open to let us in. Hermann and I met Sarie one winter's day at a cosy restaurant in Hatfield and explained exactly what our goal with these interviews was. Sarie was petite and feminine, and didn't fit the stereotype of a female prison warden at all. For some reason or other, people seem to think that female prison warders should look like bearded Russian women athletes who train in the shot-put and use steroids on the sly. We laughed and joked about this unfair image of the DCS's women employees. In spite of her full work programme, Sarie went out of her way to get us permission to conduct these interviews, and three weeks later it became a reality.

Of course there was lots of administrative red tape to work through. Five prisoners in the maximum security section of this specific prison agreed to talk to us. Dr Liebenberg drew up letters of permission and explained to each why we were there. It was to listen to their stories for a book.

Each of them had to sign the letters and Dr Liebenberg took them home with him. We would not use the information for any other goal. You should never forget that prisoners have rights, too.

On the day we met Sarie, the conversation naturally turned to her work. She had had such an interesting and challenging career that I asked her if she would agree to an article for the column 'Sy maak 'n verskil' (She makes a difference) in *Vrouekeur* magazine, which tells the stories of women that make a difference in the lives of their fellow human beings. Few people realise that rehabilitation of prisoners by means of job creation and training in order to empower them to earn their daily bread honestly once they've been released is part of the DCS's job description.

'Yes,' Sarie laughed, 'there are many myths about wardens, such as that they're all corrupt and walk around all day waving their batons and big bunches of keys.'

People are often dumbfounded when they meet her, as they'd been expecting a rough-and-ready sort.

As I've written in the story for *Vrouekeur*: 'Don't underestimate her. Dynamite comes in small packages.'

Would just any woman be prepared to travel with 36 hardened prisoners of a Goma from Potchefstroom to Oudtshoorn – even under the protection of male wardens? That, as they say, was ‘all in a day’s work’. Under Sarie’s watchful eye they were taking part in a stage production titled *Sellelied* (Cell song) – a story of the hard reality of life in prison, written by Frans van Rensburg.

At first we talked about prison and convicted prisoners in general, and about the fact that there are 180 000 convicted criminals in our country. Sarie told us that *Sellelied*, which was staged at Aardklop and the KKNK, was one of the highlights of her career.

‘It was about poems written by famous prisoners such as Tokyo Sexwale and Eugene Terre’Blanche, amongst others, as well as excerpts from Nelson Mandela’s book, *Long Walk to Freedom*.’

Sarie believed that this production contributed to making a difference to the public’s perception.

‘Afterwards, people approached us to ask what they could do to make a difference so that released prisoners would not fall back on a life of crime once again.’

Of course Sarie was often asked if she ever felt afraid – after all, she didn’t work with Sunday school teachers.

To which she always responded calmly: ‘Wardens look out for one another and women aren’t allowed to enter the men’s section on their own. You acquire the language very quickly and learn to read the atmosphere, and of course there’s that sixth sense that all women possess.’

This reassurance and responsible attitude of the DCS was encouraging and we started preparing ourselves for our visit to prison. The interviews would be conducted on June 10th, 2011, in the office of one of the prison heads. Dr Liebenberg brought video and voice recorders so that we could check all our facts properly afterwards.

The convicted violent prisoners in orange entered the room one by one and sat down on chairs. The DCS officials were friendly and helpful throughout. We were treated to tea almost hourly. We felt a little bad because the inmates weren’t offered any tea, as they shared the same room and were telling us their life stories.

After getting other information from them, we also asked Marthie Maré, facial analyst from Face Profile South Africa, and numerologist Sandy Smith (remember, Sandy is no fortune teller!), to give us a summary of each prisoner for interest’s sake and to determine whether it matched our

observations. In spite of strong opposition from many scientists, others believe that their fields may well be considered scientific. We gave Marthie photographs only, without providing any further information, and we visited Sandy with some papers containing the names and birth dates of each of the prisoners, as well as a few hand-written paragraphs and their signatures, without providing any other information beforehand. She knew that they were prisoners, but had no idea whether they were petty thieves or even serial killers.

## **Sarel**

Sarel (pseudonym) was the first inmate we talked to under the wary eye of the DCS. Sarel was also present in the office where Dr Liebenberg and I conducted our interviews. She sat down behind a desk and continued with her paperwork.

The idea was to get a peek at the man behind the ‘monster’ that had committed those terrible crimes. How did we experience them as human beings? Did we feel sorry for them, or did they send chills down our spines? Did we experience them as ordinary people sitting in front of us, or as ruthless men of violence?

I had met Sarel previously at this specific prison where he was serving his sentence. That day, he greeted me with a kiss and we were immediately chatting away just as you would be chatting to your neighbour or a gym buddy: good-naturedly and friendly.

But Sarel was serving a life sentence for a cruel murder he had committed.

At the time of the interview Dr Liebenberg and I conducted with him, he had served four years and four months of a sentence of 25 years for murder. He told us that he had run over a man who had threatened his wife with a knife four times with his bakkie. Talk about overkill. The deceased had also been found with his throat slit, and in the course of the trial it was indicated that the vehicle’s undercarriage had been the cause of that.

At the time of the interview Sarel was 43 years old. There was something soft and almost ‘innocent’ about his appearance. He had baby blue eyes, was a real handyman, loved jewellery (he wore three rings – one on each of his ring fingers and one on his thumb, a pendant around his neck and an earring in one ear). It seemed as if jewellery was part of his identity, or perhaps the search for it, Dr Liebenberg later commented.

He was definitely not particularly intellectual or academically inclined. Although he seemed open-hearted enough, I still got the feeling that he

was holding back his emotions. To me he seemed like the typical Afrikaner macho man. But there was something in his eyes that made me feel sorry for him. Sarel sat down on his chair and I got the impression that he welcomed this ‘excursion’ away from his cell. Anything to break the deadline routine and boredom of life in a cell.

He said that he grew up in Johannesburg. We started by asking him about his childhood. Initially he said that his childhood was ‘normal’, but very soon it became clear that he definitely wasn’t part of a happy, stable family. Dr Liebenberg asked him whether he could remember some incidents. Yes, there was a lot of fighting going on in his parental home. Dad used to beat mom. There was violence.

‘I’ll never forget it,’ he said. ‘I still remember it today.’

As the interview progressed, Sarel bared his heart more and more, but he wasn’t exactly forthcoming. His voice softened as he confessed: ‘To this day, I can’t handle it if a woman gets hit.’ He had seen the consequences.

His father abused alcohol. He was a big, strong man, and his mother was submissive towards him. He told us that his father sometimes went ‘crazy’ and would aim gunshots out of the window. Sarel was the eldest of three children and felt that he had to protect the younger ones. He was also the only son.

His father had never behaved violently towards the children or shouted at them, he said at first. But shortly after, he admitted being afraid of his father. He said that he had once spilled black paint on the garage floor and mopped it up with his karate suit before his father could see it. A story of violence unfurled slowly, as he told us that as children they had been hit with a belt or ‘hosepipe’. His father started with him, and then moved on to his sisters, as the blows subsided.

Dr Liebenberg asked Sarel how he had felt about the fact that his mother could not stand up for him against his father. He felt powerless, Sarel admitted. He also said that his father was so angry at a ‘speed cop’ that had pulled him off the road once, that he had started hitting the man.

Dr Liebenberg questioned him about pets in the family, and Sarel told him that they had a dog when he was small. Once they had brought kittens home, but his father threw the kittens onto the road so that the cars would run them over. He also told how his father had once swung a kitten by the tail and catapulted it into the nearby veld. Sarel indicated how much it had upset him, but said that he would never have tried to oppose his father. His eyes shot full of tears when he admitted being crazy about animals – dogs

and cats. His mother also loved animals, but all they could risk keeping were birds.

When Sarel was 17 years old, his father woke up one morning and told them he had 'seen' death, and that he had decided to stop drinking. In the end, Sarel had a good relationship with his father, who came to visit him in prison regularly. He described their relationship as 'close'.

Then we talked about the day of the murder.

Sarel said that he and his two brothers-in-law had been braaing and playing darts at another house on the day of the murder. At 22:00 that night, his wife arrived, 'scolded' him and told him to go home. But he wanted to buy some alcohol first. At a shebeen, of course, not at a Spar, he corrected me. There were accusations that he chased after other women. He said that his father had also falsely suspected his mother of having an affair. When he arrived home, his wife wasn't there.

Sarel said he waited for an hour and then got into his bakkie to go and look for her. While driving around the block, she came running around a corner and told him: 'A black man attacked me with a knife.' His brother-in-law, who was serving a life sentence along with him, was blocking the black man's hands. His brother-in-law claimed he had just arrived on the scene incidentally and hadn't committed any crime. He was innocent. But the knife the black man had allegedly used to attack his wife was never found, and his wife hadn't been stabbed with the knife either, he said.

Sarel then ran down the black man with his bakkie, and the victim fell to the ground.

'After I ran him down with the bakkie, I ran over him another four times. I was very angry. I was shaking.'

Referring to his drinking earlier that evening, he admitted that he was very inebriated.

When Dr Liebenberg asked whether it had felt real, or perhaps as if someone else had committed the deed, Sarel said: 'I wasn't myself. I was very protective towards women.'

Sarel told us that he only realised what he had done when he washed his hands after the incident.

The following Monday, Sarel went to see his lawyer, and that Tuesday he turned himself in to the police. He, his wife and his brother-in-law were all locked up.

In answer to Dr Liebenberg's enquiry, Sarel said that no psychological evidence had been presented during the trial. Dr Liebenberg was very in-

terested in the fact that Sarel had almost incidentally told us of a traumatic hijacking in Durban involving him and his two children two years before the murder. He said that three black men, armed with a pistol, had robbed him of his rings and pendant.

‘While they were holding me at gunpoint and starting to pull away in the bakkie, I grabbed the children and their little friend from the back,’ he said.

And no, he had never been debriefed.

Was it possible he had been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)? The behavioural aspects he told us about undoubtedly indicated that he had been severely traumatised by the incident, and he had exhibited classic symptoms of PTSD, Dr Liebenberg later told me.

Sarel then told us: ‘I never talked about what had happened. I just kept everything bottled up inside. But when I snap, I snap well and truly.’

He then told us of another incident when he had also been beside himself. Apparently a man had told him that he wanted to do him a ‘favour’. And the ‘favour’ was that he would kill Sarel’s wife and children.

‘I hit him with a bottle, and only heard a week later that his skull had been cracked.’

Dr Liebenberg then asked him if, after the incident in Durban, he had been more or perhaps less conscious of what was happening around him, and whether he was drinking more. Sarel admitted that he had definitely been using more alcohol after the incident and described what Dr Liebenberg identified as typical reactions to life-threatening trauma, such as oversensitivity to movement, and anxious reactions to unexpected things happening around him. Sarel had also described behaviour that indicated that he had been extremely sensitive to associated aspects of that trauma. And he recalled the feelings of powerlessness in his mind, Dr Liebenberg later remarked. After the hijacking he had been overly suspicious, and when he had to drive to Pick n Pay, he had always parked in front of the place.

Dr Liebenberg expressed his surprise that, according to Sarel, this incident had never been mentioned during the trial.

‘These are important things that could have had an influence on the case,’ Dr Liebenberg said. He believed there were many psychological triggers that could have led to an explosive situation.

Then Sarel told us that they had appealed against the case, as everything had apparently hinged on a single witness, and he also claimed that no statement had been taken down. According to Sarel, his lawyer had written a statement the day before the verdict was to be delivered, and said he had

signed it without reading the contents. Also, on the advice of his lawyer, he had never testified in court himself. However, he admitted that he was guilty of committing the murder.

‘But the law wasn’t fair. I got life.’

Dr Liebenberg asked him out of the blue whether he had ever cheated on his wife.

‘No,’ he answered.

Then Dr Liebenberg asked him what feelings he had experienced regarding the victim’s family and closest relatives.

Sarel answered: ‘That hurt. Nobody deserved to die like that. But that night I felt nothing.’ He also said that he had had no contact with the deceased’s family and that he didn’t feel a need to talk to them.

‘Who would you like to ask for forgiveness?’ Dr Liebenberg asked.

His tone of voice fell. ‘My parents.’

Asked whether he thought that life had treated him fairly or unfairly, he told Dr Liebenberg: ‘I’ve had my days.’

He also mentioned that he considered his marriage ‘a stupid mistake’. For instance, on the night they got engaged, his wife insisted on going out with friends.

But, he said, he and the others had given their hearts to the Lord, and he believed that they had been forgiven. His family supported him and came to visit him often. To them he wasn’t a criminal.

About his fellow prisoners he said that they got along ‘fairly well’.

‘We all live together. We don’t care what crime the others have committed.’

Then Dr Liebenberg asked Sarel what it was that motivated him to get up every day. His face beamed.

‘Being with my wife,’ he answered without hesitation.

We were dumbfounded.

Then he added that he was engaged – to a 40-year-old woman he had never met. He and his fiancée had been corresponding for four years. She was a prisoner too, but she would be released that August, a couple of months after our interview, after having been sentenced to 13 years for fraud. He was hard pressed to stop smiling while talking about this unusual romance. For the first time, he looked happy to me.

‘Many people tell me I’m stupid, but I’m prepared to take that chance. She wanted a commitment,’ he said. ‘We write each other long letters. It gives us strength.’ He said that his fiancée had also had a difficult life, and that her mother was an alcoholic.

Dr Liebenberg and I were surprised and amazed. You don't say. 'Do you have a photograph of her?' I asked.

'Yes, I have one photo of her,' he said.

'Is she pretty?' I wanted to know.

He smiled from ear to ear.

'Yes, she's cute.'

And does she have photographs of him?

'Lots,' he answered and smiled shyly.

Yes, they got along very well, and he had been divorced from his wife for two years. In the beginning, his ex-wife visited him over weekends, but later she started staying away, he said.

It was almost like Internet and e-mail lovers, I thought. It was just that in this case the communication happened via old-fashioned, hand-written letters. I told Sarel that lots of people outside prison also met each other that way, but we hoped that he would receive regular visits from his fiancée, whom he had never met in the flesh.

Just before we said goodbye, Dr Liebenberg took a photograph.

I noticed that Sarel had a deep dedication line on his forehead. The one Marthie told me about, as described in the chapter about facial analysis. (What was interesting was that I had noticed this very same dedication line in four of the five inmates.) I asked Sarel whether he was a very dedicated person and explained the theory behind the dedication line – that the person on whose forehead the line runs, simply never quits once he's started something. If such people decide on something, they see it through.

(During our interview, Marthie told me never to get rid of my 'beautiful' dedication line by means of Botox.)

I told Sarel that we shared the same facial trait. Then he enthusiastically told me how dedicated he was. That some nights he worked until 2:00 in the morning. 'Inside' here he was also very busy with his hands. He asked me, almost childishly excited, whether I had seen the Jeep he had built, and said that he would rather finish something than eat.

'I've also built jewellery boxes, but I like cars more,' he said.

What, we asked him, did he miss most about life outside the prison walls? There was longing in his voice. He didn't hesitate to answer: 'Being able to work.'

My heart felt heavy.

Man or monster? Sarel had committed a gruesome murder. It made him

a ‘monster’. But why did I feel such sympathy for him? Because he seemed so human? Or perhaps because he was Afrikaans-speaking?

Later, Dr Liebenberg provided me with the following clinical analysis:

‘It seems as if Sarel is the product as well as the result of very big trauma. According to the limited information he provided concerning his childhood, the assumption may be made that his father probably exhibited traits of the antisocial personality type, or those of an alcoholic, or both.’

Dr Liebenberg stressed that he was simply making an assumption here, and could not confirm it due to a lack of evidence.

‘However, it is characteristic of antisocial personality types to tend to show little to no empathy, and often to behave viciously and cruelly in relationships where they exercise total control, and get their way by instilling fear in others. Alcohol abuse is also common amongst such personality types. Based on my observations, there is much less chance of Sarel belonging to the antisocial personality type than his being a product of the cruelty he was exposed to as a child. That is exactly why it isn’t strange that, as an adult, he exhibits a strong sense of responsibility towards the greatest offender from his childhood. Although he indicates that he feels very strongly about protecting women, there is a double meaning residing in these words.

‘Another example of the mixed messages Sarel was exposed to may be seen in the incident where he tried to mop up the paint with his karate suit. This implies that he had karate training. In context, karate is considered a contact sport where control is exerted. If he took karate lessons, he may well have learnt self-control via the discipline inherent in karate. However, it may also be the case that the violence to which he was exposed contradicted the message that physical power should only be used in a controlled environment such as in karate.

‘He was exposed to uncontrolled behaviour and impulsive and explosive acts as a child, and it could be that this behaviour – the opposite of the behaviour advocated in karate – was the dominant message. If his karate training was not advanced, it is possible that he might have had the wrong perception that karate was a way of expressing aggression. Unfortunately a contact sport can also be a bad way of unloading aggression, particularly if it is in a context such as his parental home, for then it would actually encourage aggression at an uncontrolled level.

‘As his father had beaten his mother as well as his sisters, Sarel probably hoped he would never repeat his father’s behaviour, thus his focus on pro-

tecting women. Unfortunately the mixed message is captured in the possibility that he had lots of pent-up anger towards his mother due to the fact that she could not stand up against his father to protect her children, and it's clear that his mother suffered from the acquired helplessness syndrome that generally occurs in relationships where abuse takes place.

‘I accept that Sarel lived in fear of his father’s unpredictable behaviour, which indicates that, as part of his life plan, he would be more prickly and sensitive about aspects he had little or no control over. Therefore, the build-up of several aspects from his past could indicate complicated post-traumatic stress syndrome, a diagnosis that’s much more encompassing and damaging than the more general post-traumatic stress syndrome.’

Dr Liebenberg explained: ‘Complicated PTSD is characterised by very low impulse control or an inability to control impulses. It may include aspects of dissociation, depersonalisation as well as feelings of helplessness and weak control over relationships. Sarel mentioned that during conflict situations characteristic of his childhood he would withdraw and keep quiet to avoid further conflict, especially from his father’s side. This behaviour implies that he has had to internalise his anxiety and fear. Should the opportunity arise for him to be stimulated by possible associations, he would be capable of exhibiting the same behaviour as the father figure in his life, as this was his only frame of reference as a child.

‘There is no doubt that Sarel is guilty of murder, and it’s a pity that the legal system has failed him with regard to a fair trial, where the causal factors which, in my opinion, should be mitigating the sentence, were apparently never heard in court or presented to court. Therefore, Sarel has been failed by both his legal team and his parents in the run-up to his sentencing as well as during the execution thereof.

‘It is not strange that people suffering from complicated PTSD protect, as adults, the person or persons that have hurt them as a child. It’s almost as if the brain thinks that they should spend the rest of their lives trying to prove to that person or those persons that they are worthy of having an identity.

‘Although, within the time frame available to us, we could only discuss limited aspects of Sarel’s childhood, the possible occurrence of other, perhaps even more gruesome trauma during his childhood isn’t improbable. There’s a strong possibility that Sarel, in a state of drunkenness, triggered by his shaky relationship with his wife, his fear of rejection and the association with the helplessness of a woman, could have formed the asso-

ciation that he had to react and protect, as the offender wasn't his father, but a stranger. Such factors could have caused him to go to extremes, and could have led to the memory loss he mentioned, which persisted until he remembered washing his hands after the murder.

'Also, it would not have been strange for Sarel not to remember parts of his childhood. I suspect that the impact of child trauma definitely could have suppressed certain development milestones that are the sensible steps to adulthood. Research has also shown a clear connection between exposure to violence as a child and the occurrence of violent crime in such an adult. Furthermore, research indicates that a passive-aggressive attitude towards a parent or parents as a result of rejection during childhood isn't strange. There is also a big possibility of mistrust in others and their motives, which is often also indicative of fears on an intimate level.

'Sarel's relationship with his fiancée is "safe", as there's a very small chance of intimacy and the distance between them is probably "safe" for the relationship. The illusion of a healthy and intimate relationship can be easier to handle than reality for someone who has never learnt what healthy intimacy looks like,' Dr Liebenberg believes.

'People that have been exposed to rejection as a child also tend to suppress emotions. Therefore my interpretation is that he had experienced high levels of internalised fear, which, with the right incitement or provocation, could have led to an uncontrolled explosion. In this case, murder. It's clear that Sarel didn't commit a murder he had planned, but reacted to the "blueprint" of his childhood emotions, in a situation he had experienced as life-threatening to his wife.'

Dr Liebenberg said: 'There can never be an excuse for murder, but in Sarel's case I am convinced that there were psychological aspects such as an unstable parental home that were never brought into consideration. The factors contributing to the cruel murder Sarel committed are diverse, and are probably best described by the principles of epigenetics.' (Epigenetics, as further described in the chapter about children who kill, is an explanatory model for the combination of our genetic blueprint with environmental factors, which may play a role in who we are and how we act.)

Dr Liebenberg believed distortion regarding people within a certain context might be the result of the foundations on which a child's identity was built.

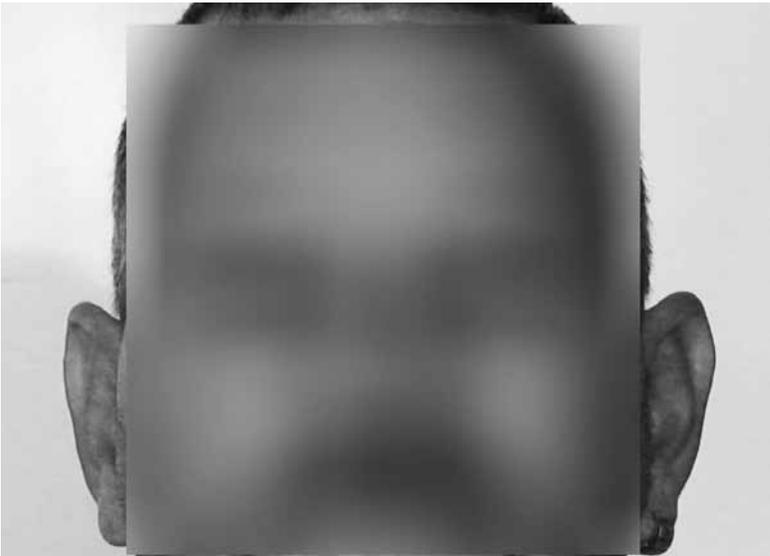
## Facial analyst

Marthie only saw a photograph of Sarel, and no further details were provided. She pointed out that Sarel had a fleshy chin, which indicated an explosive temper.



‘He’ll tolerate situations up to a point, and will then have an outburst of anger. This anger usually comes from pent-up frustration. He also has a vertical dimple on his chin, which indicates that he’s adventurous and isn’t scared of taking chances.

‘The position of his ears indicates that he’ll take calculated chances, and has a good understanding of the consequences of his deeds. The bat-ears, on the other hand, indicate that he goes against rules and regulations, and will therefore sometimes act impulsively with the idea: “Oh well, let’s do this; I know what the consequences are, but that can be sorted out later.”



‘He realises that he’s resourceful and has learnt through experience that he can “think on his feet” in a crisis. This attitude is confirmed by the shape

of his eyebrows; the hair is thicker closest to the nose, which indicates that he exhibits great excitement at the start of projects. As soon as the project is underway, however, he will either get bored or realise that it won't work. Then he'll jump around to manoeuvre the result in order to get the desired effects still.



'His forehead slopes backwards at an angle, which means that he can visualise the end result and therefore has to make a practical plan in a jiffy. He has an independent work style and believes he should rather do things himself, but he would be capable of collaborating with a small group of people.

'He would like to be seen as a leader, but has often been disappointed when assuming this role. In his personal life he shows more tolerance towards his loved ones when projects are started, and he makes them all feel important.

'Sarel has a dedication line, which indicates that he is goal-oriented. He possesses lots of perseverance, and won't give up easily once he's decided to do something.

'Although he likes helping others, he has a need for personal space and may feel uncomfortable when people move too close to him. He's an introvert and his conversations will rarely be self-centred. He finds it difficult to verbalise his deepest feelings, but will psyche others out analytically.

'Sarel tends to believe people easily – he believes in the general goodness of people, but as soon as someone compliments him, he'll feel sceptical and will wonder if it's meant honestly.

'He's a man of few words, and will only enthusiastically partake in a conversation when he feels comfortable in company. He easily feels self-conscious among strangers, and although he won't always admit it, other people's opinion of him is very important to him.

'He can be quite stubborn and his decisions are based on facts. He tends to expect the worst in situations, which possibly results from previous disappointing experiences. The courage lines under his eyes indicate that he's

struggled through difficult times, where it took a lot of courage to stand up and fight back.’



### **Numerologist**

Sandy Smith only received Sarel’s name, date of birth, a few sentences he wrote down, and his signature, as she’s a graphologist to boot. As in the case of the others, she did not know what crime he had committed, and we gave her no further details.

She gave a fairly lengthy description of Sarel, but I didn’t know him well enough to be able to tell if she was on target.

She did mention that he was not an intellectual giant.

She considered him to be ‘anxious, emotionally immature – a tortured soul’.

‘There’s something gentle about him. He hasn’t got sharp facial features at all. He needs emotional support and mothering. As a child, he received lots of attention from his mother and always wanted to be carried around. He’s childish, impulsive and his brain is like electricity if he’s anxious or experiences fear.’

She also believed he was obsessive-compulsive and that small things could make his temper flare. In fact, she believed he was very hot-tempered and could easily react to any trigger.

His signature, which he crossed out, indicated that he felt inferior. Sandy said Sarel possessed a lateral and practical side.

And that his father hadn’t been there for him.

She also said he could sit still in one place and that he needed order and structure. He didn’t ask for much and his needs were few. He was good with his hands.

Sandy talked of ‘earth, metal and wood’. But there had to be a connection with the mind. She found something ‘racist’ in his numbers and considered him to be a person that blamed others and would use physical violence. She also thought he suffered from depression and could possibly be a suicide case. He was a planner and was often lost in thought. He got frustrated easily.

There was violence in his family. She also suspected he had HIV or cancer. His numbers indicated that he could be somebody with a fixation.

Then, out of the blue, she asked: ‘Why was there an overkill?’

What did I think of Marthie and Sandy’s analyses concerning Sarel?

I couldn’t confirm or deny everything Marthie had read in Sarel’s face. But I did agree that he had an explosive temper indeed. The murder he had committed was something that happened on the spur of the moment.

Marthie’s observation that his forehead sloped backwards and that he could make a practical plan had also been spot-on. During our interview it was clear that he was good with his hands. The work he had done in jail testified to that.

Concerning the dedication line, he had told us that he would often work until two in the morning, and that he missed his work most of all.

Regarding his need for personal space and the fact that he felt uncomfortable if people got too close to him, one could only remark that due to his stormy childhood he, as Dr Liebenberg had pointed out, chose ‘safe’ relationships at a distance, such as his relationship with the fiancée he had never met. Granted, there weren’t that many opportunities around in the space he found himself in at that moment in time. (The reasons why women became prison brides – and the same would obviously go for prison bridegrooms – are discussed at length by psychologists and criminologists in the chapter titled ‘In love with a monster’.)

As far as the observation that Sarel was an introvert goes: he had indeed seemed reserved to me. He was shy, didn’t talk about himself easily, and was definitely not as full of bravado and self-confidence as some of the other violent criminals we interviewed. And it was true that he wasn’t very talkative and that at times we had to prod him a little to provide us with more details about his life story.

Sandy’s description of him was fairly accurate, namely that he wasn’t intellectual, but that he was resourceful and quick-tempered (this was clear from the crime he committed).

It was crystal clear that his father hadn't been there for him, that he was practical, and that there had been violence in his parental home.

And that he was very fond of animals.

But what haunted me most of all was Sandy's question: 'Why was there an overkill?'

## **Magic**

A gentle giant. That's the first impression we got of Magic (pseudonym). He towered above his fellow inmates, had a charming smile and was well spoken and polite. His sense of humour and civility surfaced often. It was clear that he was intelligent.

Magic reminded us of the big, strong American basketball players from West Africa. We couldn't help liking him, and we couldn't believe he had killed his lover by shooting her between four and six times.

Magic's expression was grim and serious when he seated himself in front of us – until that sparkling smile broke through. He had big, strong white teeth. He seemed well groomed. He was hyper neat and his shoes shone.

As with the others, we asked him about his childhood.

What he told us was: 'I grew up in a happy Christian family. I was the eldest of five children. I received lots of attention from my parents and didn't feel neglected at all.'

When he was about ten years old, his parents got divorced, but it didn't seem as if there had been a lot of conflict, as the parents apparently had still spent time in one another's company during family get-togethers. He didn't know why they had got divorced, and he had never asked, he said.

From our conversation we deduced that he had been an exemplary child. He said he never smoked or drank.

Magic was in a single cell and was studying towards an honours degree in education and training.

He was definitely not stupid, and just laughed when we said as much. We could deduce that his family wasn't too poor either. He told us that after finishing school, he had helped his father with his taxi business. It had gone extremely well and he had travelled a lot while working in the business.

Magic said he got along well with his parents. His mother died in 2005, but his father was still alive. 'My dad visits me every weekend, and my family supports me and pays for my studies.' He said he even had a computer in his cell.

At the time of our interview with Magic, he still had 18 years of his life sentence of 25 years to go, having already served seven. His trial had taken 18 months. Then he told us sombrely that he was in jail for murdering his girlfriend, after which he openly related what had happened.

‘My girlfriend and I had been together for three to four years, but we didn’t have any children together. She asked me about myself, and said she was going to leave me, as I never told her what was bothering me. I was experiencing personal problems,’ he told us with a serious expression. He stressed that he didn’t drink. Apparently it was his beloved who had the drinking problem. She was also the one who broke off the relationship. ‘I couldn’t accept it.’

Then the unthinkable happened. The murder.

He seemed despondent when he shared the following with us: ‘In 2002 I was standing at the gate to our house one day when she drove past in her car.’

Dr Liebenberg interrupted to ask whether he had known that she would drive past that day, but he denied it.

‘I was angry and jealous,’ he explained. And no, he hadn’t planned the murder. Everything had happened in two to three minutes. He said that his ex-girlfriend had parked in front of the house and that he had taken her gun from the car’s cubby-hole and fired blindly at her without realising what he was doing. He said the gun was usually in the car’s cubby-hole.

He looked heavy-hearted.

‘Later they told me that I had shot her. Things just happened automatically.’

‘How many times did you shoot her?’ Dr Liebenberg wanted to know.

‘Four to six times. I’m not sure,’ he said.

Dr Liebenberg asked a typical shrink question: ‘How did that make you feel?’

Magic answered: ‘I wasn’t normal.’

After the incident, his family had told him that the police were looking for him. He said he had been in a kind of stupor and had gone to his uncle’s house, after which he had surrendered himself to the police.

Dr Liebenberg wanted to know how long after the relationship ended the incident had happened.

‘Shortly afterwards,’ the answer came.

Reacting to a question of Dr Liebenberg whether his victim had been the great love of his life, he answered without a hint of doubt: ‘She was the best girlfriend I’ve ever had.’

Then Dr Liebenberg wanted to know if, thinking back to that day, there were parts he couldn't remember at all, and if he had realised afterwards that something was wrong. Magic referred to the time of the murder as a time he wasn't acting normally.

'I was in shock. I took an impulsive decision without thinking of the future.'

Further questioning by Dr Liebenberg revealed that Magic was a particularly goal-oriented person and liked to plan everything ahead. He confirmed that during his teenage years he also liked routine, planned ahead, kept his room tidy and loved to do routine tasks like cleaning up, and to count certain things in his mind and go over them. Yes, he had always gone over stuff, Magic confessed.

'I always make sure that everything is in its place.'

He also told us that he didn't easily share his emotions with others. He would have to really trust someone. So he kept his emotions around anger to himself.

'I don't like surprises. I like planning everything in my life in detail. I am very focused.'

He also admitted that he liked to follow the same routine every day.

He believed that he had been 'popular' during his teenage years and had socialised with everyone, and that he had been a good student and an obedient child.

Dr Liebenberg again mentioned the routine issue, which had been so important to Magic.

'If I understand correctly, it was a case of your not being in control when your girlfriend broke off the relationship, and that made you feel confused?' Dr Liebenberg asked.

'Your girlfriend broke off this routine that had been so important to you? You had to let go of your control in this situation?' he asked carefully. Magic agreed.

Dr Liebenberg also wanted to know if Magic had a history of physical fighting during his teenage and young adult years. But Magic said he had never been involved in any misdeeds.

The terrible realisation that he had murdered his girlfriend had apparently not sunk in immediately, for Magic said that he had gone to sleep following the murder.

Apparently everybody was astounded about the murder, and the police, who had known him since he was a small child, couldn't understand how

something like that could have happened. 'It's the sort of thing one would expect of people involved with drugs,' they said.

Dr Liebenberg asked a few questions to rule out possible brain injuries. He wanted to know whether Magic had ever had epileptic seizures as a baby or child, and whether he could remember any incidents where his brain had 'cut out'. It had happened once or twice, Magic said. The one incident was when his father sent him to Mafikeng to collect a transport licence. Magic said that at one stage he was driving over a bridge when it suddenly felt 'as if I wasn't there'. The same thing had happened when he had had an accident on his way to Durban.

Dr Liebenberg wanted to know if he experienced any peculiar or strange sensations when such things happened, and he answered that it felt as if he turned cold. He pointed at his legs, as if they were frozen. Dr Liebenberg also wanted to know whether, as a child, he had received a blow to the head, and Magic said he had, but when he was about 24 or 25 years old. He also remembered hitting his head very hard once as a teenager playing soccer.

'Do you remember it?' Dr Liebenberg asked.

'Yes, it was very painful,' he said, at which Dr Liebenberg speculated that Magic could have sustained a concussion.

Asked how many relationships Magic had had, he answered: 'Not many. I'd say about four.'

Dr Liebenberg asked him again why he had committed the murder, and Magic answered that anger and jealousy had driven him to do it. In a serious tone, he said that he had failed to control jealousy and anger, and at one stage had considered committing suicide.

'I feel like a weakling. Weak. I wasn't supposed to do such things.'

He said that he felt a need to talk to the deceased's family about the incident.

'My resolution is to get restorative justice.'

He explained that was part of the rehabilitation process. When the offender felt that he wanted to speak to the victims, the social worker would arrange for the respective parties to negotiate.

He was silent for a little while, and then told us that his family and that of the victim had grown up together.

'The two families are still close, regardless.'

He also said: 'I would like to tell them that I've done wrong, and ask them to forgive me.'

The gentle giant's voice softened. 'I want to tell them I'm sorry. I want to beg their forgiveness.' He looked truly remorseful. 'It has been haunting me.'

Dr Liebenberg questioned him about any thoughts of suicide and Magic admitted that he had considered it earlier. Fortunately he enjoyed the support of fellow inmates, officials of the DCS, and family.

'Should the family be sitting in front of you,' Dr Liebenberg asked, 'could you imagine how they would react?'

Magic's voice choked up. 'Only they know what it feels like inside. I just want to say I'm sorry. It's not easy to find relief from this kind of pain. It will take time.'

Dr Liebenberg told Magic he realised it was important to Magic to be in control, but then asked in his sympathetic therapy voice, what did he do with his painful feelings?

Magic answered: 'I sit down and pray.'

He said he often cried. Wishing he could change things made him cry. He so very much wanted to erase what had happened. He hadn't planned this crime, he told us once more.

Magic said that Siphon (pseudonym), one of his fellow inmates, regularly came to check whether he was eating and washing. And it was Siphon who had taught him about anger management.

What does he fear most?

'I'm afraid that the people outside will commit crimes. I want to warn them.'

Does he consider what he's done a crime?

'Yes, to me it's a crime.'

Dr Liebenberg also asked him if he thought that the 25-year sentence he had to serve was just. To this he answered: 'I would say it's too long, but I've erred. I accept the sentence.'

The gentle giant also had a message that he wanted to share with others. 'I just want to say, a man has to learn that he shouldn't try and control his wife or girlfriend.'

'Have you ever felt like you possessed super powers and talents?' Dr Liebenberg asked.

'I've had feelings like that,' Magic answered.

We asked him about his plans for the future, for he would be in his fifties at the time of his release.

'I want to work in education. I want to warn people against over-hasty decisions.'

## **Dr Liebenberg's findings**

Dr Liebenberg said it was his interpretation that there weren't any criminal factors causing Magic's impulsive murderous behaviour and that other aspects had probably made him susceptible to the coincidences that eventually resulted in the murder of a loved one.

He said: 'This is an almost classic example of a crime of passion. Some of the aspects I've entered into the equation in Magic's case are that he has a history of head injuries, the extent and intensity of which I have no knowledge. If the impact of a traumatic head injury were indeed severe, as I suspect the case may be, the consequences would include aspects such as irritation and neurological episodes (neurologically abnormal behaviour). The other aspect that may be important is the fact that there are enough indications that Magic probably exhibits obsessive-compulsive behaviour. The real extent of it is not known, as he hasn't been evaluated for this, although explicit elements of this are indeed present. There is also a possible link between depression or aspects of mood disorders, and obsessive-compulsive behaviour. These aspects seemed to have indeed occurred in Magic.'

With regard to obsessive-compulsive behaviour, Dr Liebenberg explained that, in a nutshell, it came down to a need to control.

'If a child is born with an underlying obsessive-compulsive personality type, and the child's behaviour is supported by the parents, this behaviour in the adult may have a radical influence on others. It usually develops because of the brain's need for control, and if it were the case that Magic had been allowed quite some control as a child and a teenager, and his parents trusted his sense of control and decision-making, thus obsessive-compulsive behaviour would have been strengthened. It's not uncommon to find that the one big driving force behind obsessive-compulsive behaviour is nothing other than people's fears; the fear of rejection, or of not being good enough, or of being lacking or unsuccessful, to name but a few. Obsessive-compulsive behaviour is sometimes referred to as the "false alarm" of the brain,' Dr Liebenberg said.

It is the brain's need to control. Magic received a lot of control as a teenager and child and his parents trusted him with his control and decisions, this strengthening his obsessive-compulsive behaviour.

'It is clear that during our interview, as during the build-up and execution of the murder, Magic had a fixation or even an obsession with his girlfriend. From our conversation, I could also deduce that he had not eaten

or drunk anything the previous day and night, nor did he sleep up to the moment that he saw her and blindly shot her in a moment of temporary madness.’

Dr Liebenberg explained that aspects of low blood sugar levels and sleep deprivation could agitate the brain excessively. This could have led to Magic, who had a need to control combined with his probably underlying feelings of rejection, experiencing an inability to control his impulses, through which a state of disassociation had been created during the murder. Magic referred to thoughts and feelings of ‘special powers’, which may even have opened the door to an underlying delusional disorder or a combination of other aspects in his behaviour.

‘It almost seems as if the behaviour was automatistic and so was not a planned or calculated murder. Some of the behaviours Magic described exhibit similar characteristics to a possible neurological condition such as temporal lobe epilepsy, which is particularly characterised by moments of “absence”, and even emotional behaviour that isn’t normally associated with the person, such as sudden, impulsive bouts of anger and aggression. Magic describes incidents from which may be deduced that a form of depersonalisation occurred. These aspects, as far as I could make out, were never mentioned during his trial, and there was no psychologist or psychiatrist that testified for him in his court case. Words like “a feeling that he wasn’t there” could indicate the assumption regarding depersonalisation, which he had possibly experienced before.

‘According to the information known to me, he is not the typical criminal, and I suspect that there are aspects of his behaviour and personality type, which I’ve mentioned here, that have probably contributed to the terrible deed he committed. His need to truly ask forgiveness is a further indication that he is probably looking for an explanation for his behaviour himself. A person committing a calculated crime of passion usually plans his acts in the minutest detail. This component of typical planned crimes of passion does not occur, based on the information he provided, which clearly shows that there was no intent or planning behind the murder.’

According to Dr Liebenberg, in spite of the fact that Magic is a strongly organised person who thrives on routine, this murder was unplanned and extremely impulsive, and this behaviour does not conform to his personality profile.

‘In my opinion, the necessary expert testimony was unfortunately not presented in his case, and had it been, it would have changed his sentence

considerably. The fact that he has committed murder is not in contention here, and he gave himself up to the police, which also, by implication, means that he didn't want to run away from his behaviour like a typical criminal. He was prepared to take ownership of his crime, but I don't think his sentence was appropriate, as the court should have investigated and considered all the other aspects as well.'

Dr Liebenberg said there was no indication of lying behaviour in the analysis of Magic's facial expressions during the interview.

'Magic's feedback was trustworthy and honest. The fact that he is busy empowering himself with further studies is his salvation, as I suspect that he could disintegrate if he didn't have a specific routine and focus concerning the sense and meaning of his life. I do consider him a gentle giant who does not exhibit intent and capability of murder. Magic's physical appearance, behaviour and personality composition seems to contradict the murder of which he has been convicted. Another aspect that's indicative of the state he was in during the murder is the fact that he can't remember exactly how many times he shot his girlfriend, and that he was told the actual number of shots after the incident. Aspects of dissociation, denial and a probable break with reality (which probably includes a neurological and/or serious psychiatric problem) could have led to this murder.

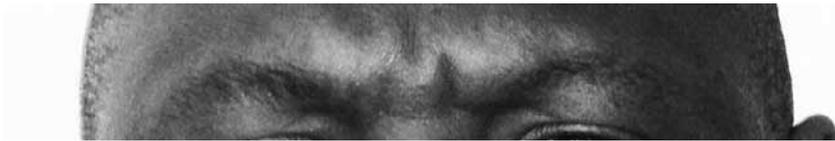
'Most of the facts regarding the murder scene and the events of that day aren't clearly known to him. The details were later filled in by other people, and this indicates serious memory loss, in this case retrograde (memory loss about events before an incident) as well as antrograde (memory loss about events after an incident), with regard to the exact time of the murder. The fact that he went to 'sleep' after the murder could, in my opinion, be significant with regard to the possibility of a neurological dysfunction, a total psychotic breakdown, or perhaps both, or other influences that can only be speculated on. It is not uncommon that patients feel very tired after an epileptic attack or even a psychotic breakdown, and usually prefer to sleep. Neurologically speaking, therefore, there are more questions than answers, which makes it difficult to form a definitive opinion in this case,' Dr Liebenberg said.

## Facial analyst

Marthie believed Magic possessed creative thinking and was incredibly attentive to detail.

‘He’ll notice things that others won’t. He is very self-critical and therefore also has unprecedented great expectations of others.

‘People often have the perception that Magic is negatively inclined because he always considers what could go wrong. His eyebrow hairs grow practically vertically, which means that he is proactive. He’ll provide for the unexpected. He is ready for anything, as well as for what may go wrong. The words, “but what if this or that happens” and “just in case” mull around in his mind. He’ll collect as much information and/or instruments as he can before starting a project. Magic feels very disappointed in himself when he makes a mistake. He tends towards perfectionism and believes there’s only one way of doing something right (usually his way!).



‘Magic possesses a strong will and can be very stubborn at times. He’s not someone you can prescribe to and would rather trust his own abilities. He is sceptical about people and won’t trust others easily, unless they can prove that they are trustworthy. He’ll often test people to make sure that they deserve his trust. He is very loyal towards those he reckons among his friends.

‘He has a generally positive attitude and can be a real joker. Although he is hospitable, he prefers to hang out with just a small group of friends. He’ll appear to be very social, but will seldom talk about himself. He is private and easily feels introverted when there are too many people around him, or when someone invades his personal space uninvited. Then he won’t flinch from showing his irritation.

‘Money is very important to Magic. He experiences emotional contentment when he has it in abundance. He may even be a hoarder or a collector. With his creativity, he could even practice some or other form of art.

‘Magic believes that every situation contains a potential lesson. He has good perceptive skills and often sees beyond the surface. He has a need for recognition and often takes other people’s opinions personally. He can also

be very outspoken and his brutally honest opinion will be disguised by a joke or by sarcasm.’

### **Numerologist**

Sandy looked at Magic’s name, date of birth, handwriting and signature. Just as in the case of the others, she was very outspoken, and it would be impossible for me to confirm or try to deny everything she said of him.

Magic’s life path indicated a number 5. Sandy didn’t like him very much, and called him a ‘liar’.

‘I can actually feel the depression,’ she said.

She rattled off a few characteristics, amongst which the adjectives ‘diplomatic, polite, friendly, someone with good taste’ stand out immediately.

She also thought that he was self-centred, planned his future, possessed strong principles and wasn’t enjoying ‘a good sex life’ at that stage.

She believed he was a good thinker as far as finances went, that he was intellectual and academic, that he didn’t like change at all, had good manners, had academic qualifications under his belt, that he had money – and that he had killed before.

Then she said: ‘His image is that of a gentle giant.’

And that he had experienced a head injury between the ages of 9 and 14.

‘There is power and control in his numbers.’

Sandy’s voice turned almost icy as she said, loud and clear: ‘You don’t leave this man. He leaves you.’

How did I interpret Marthie and Sandy’s findings? I could honestly not reply to all of it, but it was clear from the interview we had conducted with Magic that he was a perfectionist, didn’t want a lot of people around him (which explains the single cell, even though he told us it was because of his postgraduate studies), that he had battled depression previously and that he was diplomatic, polite and friendly. A true gentleman, is the thought that springs to mind. And there is no doubt that he planned his future, for he was doing well with his studies.

Sandy thought him to be a liar, and yet Dr Liebenberg had found throughout the interview that Magic had continually spoken the truth and never diverged from his story.

It was probably true that he was richer than the other prisoners, for he had told me that he had a computer and a television set. I assumed that was quite a luxury in jail.

Sandy had mentioned pertinently that he was intellectual and academic, that he didn't like change and that he had academic qualifications behind his name, which seemed correct to me. She also made it clear that Magic had committed murder. And that he had the image of a gentle giant.

That was the first and the last image we had of him, exactly.

## **Sipho**

We also spoke to Sipho (pseudonym), 44, who at the time of our interview had already served 13 years of the 40 years and six months of his sentence.

Yes, he sighed when questioned about it. He would be an old man of 84 by the time he got out of prison. Initially he had been sentenced to more than 90 years, but for some reason his sentence had been reduced.

Well, that's not going to make much of a difference, I thought. How many people older than 80 are still in jail?

Sipho's expression was grim. He only smiled once – when we told him that he looked just like Robert Mugabe – and his eyes shifted a lot. For some reason I didn't feel as sorry for him as for Sarel and Magic. It looked as if he, in the words of the judges I remember from my court reporter days, possessed 'an impressive record of previous convictions'.

Sipho told us that he was doing time for hijacking, rape, murder and four counts of attempted murder. A dangerous chap, no doubt.

He also told us that he had grown up on a farm in one of the northern provinces in our country and that his parents had worked for a farmer. He was the second eldest of nine children. He sounded almost emotionless as he informed us that his mother drank a lot of beer and was always spoiling for an argument.

'There were fights.'

His father was 'a good man', but he left when Sipho was six years old. It seemed that his father could not stand the drunkenness and fighting any longer, for according to Sipho his father was a 'cool' guy. He never returned and Sipho never saw his father again.

Sipho's story was one of sibling rivalry and favouritism. His brother, he complained, had always been the favourite. He said he had done well at school and had always been first or second in his class, but had left school in Standard 2 (Grade 4), adding accusingly towards his family: 'They did not give me nothing.' Obviously not impressed.

Dr Liebenberg asked him in a sympathetic tone of voice if there was anything he was really good at.

‘Hunting,’ he answered without hesitation. ‘I am good at shooting.’

Dr Liebenberg wanted to know whether someone had known about his talent, and he answered that his brother was aware of it.

Asked how he felt about his parents’ drinking habits (his stepfather was an alcoholic too), he answered that he had kept quiet. And about what he had done with these feelings about their drinking, he simply said that he had concealed them.

Dr Liebenberg asked him whether he had ever done anything impulsive as a child.

‘Yes,’ he answered immediately. ‘Once I played with white children and when a white kid called me a k\*\*\*\*r, I hit him with a spade.’

He also admitted to Dr Liebenberg that he had yearned for recognition as a child, and had desperately wanted to belong to a group. Later he had got involved with fighter gangs at school, but according to him they hadn’t done serious crime.

Dr Liebenberg asked whether he had ever felt safe. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I felt safe with my dog, Lion.’

The story of a loner unfolded. It seemed that the only strong bond with another being he had ever developed was with his dog. Together, it seems, they had been a team to be reckoned with. Dr Liebenberg found it interesting that he had chosen the name Lion to bestow on his dog. A lion was, after all, the king of the animal kingdom – strong and fearless. When Siphon had had his dog with him, it appeared that he had felt invincible.

Dr Liebenberg asked him what had happened to Lion. For the first time it was as if Siphon was showing emotion. He seemed upset.

‘He was poisoned.’

He then told us the gripping story of how he had grieved for his dog, evidently his only true friend.

‘I placed the dog in a special box and buried it in a special place. Every day after school I visited his grave.’

Why did he call the dog Lion?

‘Because he was tough,’ Siphon answered. Lion would take on any challenge. ‘The dog made me feel good.’

How did Siphon feel when Lion died?

Siphon’s face got even grimmer, and his voice fell an octave lower. ‘I was alone.’

At that moment I felt terribly sorry for him. Here we had a lonely child, a victim of alcoholism, and his only true four-legged friend was murdered.

Especially when he told us how Lion had always protected him. With Lion next to him, nobody had dared to cross him. For eight years they had been inseparable.

‘No other dog understood me like him.’

Sipho’s face looked as if it were cut from stone. Almost expressionless.

He also told a shocking tale of premature sexual activity.

He was only nine years old when he had sex for the first time, he said without moving a muscle in his face. The girl was older than he was – 16 or 17, but that didn’t bother him.

Actually he had always preferred his ‘ladies’, as he referred to women, older. ‘They always guided me.’

We asked him about his criminal career. He told us how, as a young adult, he had stolen copper cables.

It was difficult to understand everything he said, as his English wasn’t very good and his vocabulary limited.

He also told a strange story of his wife and two children who had disappeared without a trace. Asked whether he had reported it to the police, he said no, he had spoken to his own as well as his wife’s family about it, but no-one had any clue. So he had lost his whole family and simply never heard from them again? How was that possible?

His criminal career went from strength to strength very quickly, and Sipho told us how he had stolen everything from cars to vegetables to gold. The very first thing he had ever stolen was a tin of condensed milk.

We also heard about his involvement with a hijacking, and how he had grabbed the victim’s keys and kicked him. He and his cronies were supposed to sell the car, but he never saw any money. He even looked disappointed about all his trouble being in vain.

So as far as he was concerned, it was evidently a failed hijacking. Other hijackings had followed, and during one of these Sipho had heard a shot ‘going off’. One of his accomplices had shot the owner of the vehicle, he said, and at first the victim was still alive.

‘We left him there and drove off.’

Now I felt quite confused. How was it possible for someone that could love his dog so much to leave a man dying in the dust – and all that for the sake of a car as booty?

Dr Liebenberg asked Sipho whether this was the incident that had led to his arrest. Sipho confirmed it, adding that he had got less money for the hijacking than he had initially been promised.

After this incident, they had moved to another town in the Northern Province, where he had been involved in a robbery the following day. Siphó's story wasn't very clear, but he referred to a woman who had been undressed (presumably an alleged rape had then taken place). Then they had travelled to two other towns, where an argument had occurred between him and his accomplices. There had been a shoot-out, during which a woman, a man and a dog were shot, he said. But it wasn't clear who had shot whom.

Dr Liebenberg asked him how he had felt when the dog was killed. His expression became sombre.

'It reminded me of my own dog.'

After the shooting, there was tension between him and his fellow accused. It was only during the court proceedings that he became aware of the dog having been shot when he saw the photographs. He led us to believe that he felt more upset about the dog than the human victims.

Dr Liebenberg asked him straightforwardly: 'Have you ever raped?'

He didn't miss a beat: 'Once.'

Then he went to a lot of trouble to explain things about the incident that left us even further in the dark.

Dr Liebenberg later commented that, based on his analysis of Siphó's expression when answering the last question, he deduced that Siphó had been caught unawares by the question, after which he provided 'confidential' information to justify the incident and to conceal other similar incidents.

Dr Liebenberg said: 'The analysis of his facial expression confirmed that Siphó's answer wasn't the absolute truth, and that he had tried to conceal information regarding other possible rapes.'

Based on the video recording made during our visit, Dr Liebenberg believed he could study and analyse similar reactions to provide an accurate indication of deception or lies.

In the course of our conversation, Siphó told us of a watering hole where he had bought a beer for a 'lady'. It seemed that this woman had been his rape victim. She had visited him in jail, demanding an explanation for his behaviour towards her. Apparently she had accepted his explanation of what had caused the incident to occur.

'She was playing with my mind,' was his defence.

Dr Liebenberg asked some more direct questions.

'What goes through your mind when you think of killing someone?' he asked.

Then he put the question even more clearly: ‘What will make you shoot someone and what will make you refrain from shooting?’

Without hesitation Siphon answered: ‘If you do exactly as I say, I won’t shoot you.’

But he added that the presence of animals in the house would definitely influence his behaviour and whether he would proceed.

Dr Liebenberg asked him what he missed most while in jail. His answer? His children. He then admitted that he had more children with another woman.

Dr Liebenberg stirred a little.

‘Have you ever been accused of murdering your own family?’

Although Siphon denied it, Dr Liebenberg was convinced that the facial expression analysis based on the video recording confirmed that this question had not been answered truthfully.

The conversation continued and Siphon told us how angry his mother had been with him when he refused to attend his grandmother’s funeral. We were aware of how important funerals were in black culture, and Dr Liebenberg and I were therefore surprised about his decision not to attend.

Why?

Because he hadn’t wanted to see his grandmother in her coffin.

Asked what helped him survive in jail, and what kept him going, he said that if he hadn’t been arrested, other people would have killed him, as shots had been fired on his house.

Dr Liebenberg asked him directly if he feared death.

‘No,’ his answer came, loud and clear.

Then Dr Liebenberg wanted to know: ‘If you think of the people you have harmed during your criminal career, and you could talk to them, what would you say to them? Would you want to talk to them or not?’

Yes, he would like to talk to the hijack victim’s family and explain to them what had happened that day. Siphon tried to explain that it was about the victim’s bakkie and not about him as a person. It seemed as if he were trying to exonerate himself.

When Dr Liebenberg asked him whether he felt sorry for the victim, he confirmed it.

Dr Liebenberg wanted to know whether he experienced any emotions of love towards others, and how he would define love.

‘I don’t want to be hurt,’ he said. ‘I want to protect myself.’

Sipho repeated that he wanted to talk to the murdered man's children to tell them what had happened.

'I want to explain to them that their father didn't provoke us. He was just at the wrong place at the wrong time.'

### **Further comment by Dr Liebenberg**

Dr Liebenberg believed the possibility existed that Sipho had exhibited antisocial behavioural traits as a child already. The concurrence of circumstances in his childhood provided Dr Liebenberg with more than enough information to deduce that Sipho had not experienced any feelings of safety from those who should have protected him and made him feel safe. That explained the strong bond with his dog that he named Lion.

'The name he gave the dog is almost like a fictitious name linked to a character that's a symbol or icon of protection and power. As a child, Sipho projected his inner need for protection and respect onto the bond he had formed with his dog.'

Dr Liebenberg explained that although the dog symbolised the power and strength of a lion in control of his environment, the fact remained that it was Sipho himself who had projected these characteristics onto his dog, and therefore he, Sipho, remained the author of this fictitious symbol of power, strength and control. In other words, Sipho himself remained in control via an identity represented in his beloved dog.

'It is not uncommon for children to form a stronger association with a pet when other people are too dangerous, too untrustworthy or too abusive to be considered a source of safety. Therefore, Sipho behaved quite naturally by surviving by means of the fictitious characteristics he had projected onto his dog, and by doing so, he had probably also encouraged the dog to act more aggressively than would normally be the case with a pet.

'I can only imagine that the poisoning of Sipho's dog was a stressor that probably damaged his trust in people even further. It's also possible that the death of his dog was a turning point in his life, and probably the best grounds for the further development and flourishing of his underlying antisocial behaviour up to the point when he became the criminal he is today.

'I'm making the deduction that he's a habitual criminal and that his behaviour is so meshed with his identity that his chances of actual rehabilitation are much less than one might think. Based on several parts of the video

that I've studied, I'm convinced that several answers he gave us were lies.

'The concept of facial expression analysis is a very accurate science and according to the principles of the Facial Action Coding System, on which I base my analyses, lies may be indicated quite accurately, scientifically speaking.

'As a child, Siphon was damaged not only by an alcoholic mother, but also by an absent father and an alcoholic replacement father. All of this occurred in an unsafe environment characterised by sibling jealousy, and what probably was also a disregard for and denial of his own existence. These factors indicate the possibility of complicated post-traumatic stress disorder, although his underlying personality image probably manifests stronger than the aspects of complicated PTSD he exhibits,' Dr Liebenberg said.

'It was also possible that the person abused as a child becomes the abuser as an adult, and Siphon's story is, in my opinion, an example of such circumstances. As part of his incredible need for the acceptance and recognition he did not enjoy as a child, it was natural for him to seek acceptance within a subgroup of his culture – even if it was a criminal subculture. In his case, this acceptance within the criminal subculture was not a loving, emotional acceptance of who he was, but an acceptance of his criminal capabilities that were based on financial gain and on control over others.'

Dr Liebenberg further explained that his answer to the question about the disappearance of his first wife and two children could also be confirmed as deceptive based on the analysis of facial expression. Therefore one can only speculate about their fate.

'Unfortunately we couldn't spend more time studying this aspect in more detail, but it is clear that there is much more behind Siphon's answer than that which he gave away through his facial expressions. You only have to ask yourself why he wouldn't enlist the help of the police when his wife and children – his whole family – had disappeared without a trace,' was Dr Liebenberg's opinion.

'Siphon's behaviour during the interview indicated a very self-defensive attitude and even though his command of English is not very good, he tried desperately to project a different image of himself. The most credible thing he said was about his relationship with his dog, and his deep-seated wrath towards anyone who wanted to harm his dog, or eventually poison it.

'When people are too dangerous or too unreliable to trust, those disillusioned by them often turn towards animals. His close relationship with his

dog again stresses the amount of trauma Siphó had to endure during childhood. His criminal image is therefore the result of a combination of neglect and abuse he endured as a child, which together inform the behaviour he exhibited as a young teenager and as an adult, and the persona of a criminal as he is today. Personally, I would consider Siphó dangerous, and I would hesitate to trust him in any way.'

Dr Liebenberg said that, in light of the fact that rape was considered a violent crime, he wanted to mention that research confirmed that the profile of a rapist was similar to that of Siphó. This included antisocial behaviour and the need to experience a feeling of emotional acceptance via a replacement such as material or financial gain. Furthermore, there was the absence of a healthy maternal figure, and the experience of extreme aggression against the mother, a tendency to blame others for what went wrong in life and to shirk responsibility, as the brain had never learnt to take responsibility for certain deeds – in Siphó's case his criminal behaviour. That explained why he acted so defensively and tried to project guilt onto others or to blame circumstances. Nor was it surprising that he mistrusted others, seeing as he had never been able to form a bond with another person that was lasting and stable enough to use as reference.

'It's a question of an external locus and low impulse control, as well as the fact that he comes from a home where he did not experience emotional acceptance. It is not uncommon for rapists to experience a pattern of unusual feelings about their offence after the crime has been committed. That explains why Siphó was prepared to have a discussion with his rape victim.'

Dr Liebenberg said that many of the characteristic aspects of rapists were similar to those of robbers making use of violence. One of these aspects (that occurred in Siphó) was the suppression of emotions as children, as their emotional needs had been rejected by their parents/guardians in any case.

'Research has also shown that it is characteristic of violent robbers to come from a weaker socioeconomic background, or to have been denied certain things during their formative years, resulting in aggression towards those who possess more than they do on a financial/material level.'

Dr Liebenberg said violent robbers also tended to be more extrovert in nature. They were dependent on the acceptance of the subculture within which they were living out this criminal behaviour and could even be sensitive with regard to circumstantial stress. He pointed out that only a few

aspects that were applicable to Sipho had been mentioned above and that there were many more aspects that research linked to violent crimes such as armed robbery, murder and rape.

### **Facial analyst**

Simply based on his photograph, Marthie believed that Sipho was uncannily conscious of everything occurring around him.

‘He prefers to use tried and tested systems and methods and executes them with military precision. He is able to pinpoint problems and although he can manage projects very well, his initial enthusiasm peters out very quickly and he will give up or instruct others to finish the project on his behalf.

‘He’s a good group collaborator and enjoys the support of others, but prefers to play a leading role in a group. He cannot stand it when people ignore or question him. He is analytical and outspoken and won’t flinch from calling a spade a spade.



‘He possesses an unconventional mind and is capable of looking at things from all sides. He does consider people’s feelings when making decisions, but then usually expects the worse to happen. He often plays devil’s advocate, which makes him seem critical, and others are often intimidated or hurt by this.’

Marthie referred to Siphos ears, which were fairly small in relation to the rest of his face. This meant that he didn’t like listening to drawn-out stories. He was easily overwhelmed by too much information. This, in turn, caused him to become irritated, and in the process it was possible that he missed important facts and details. He preferred to see practical proof of what was being said. He would easily interrupt others or finish their sentences for them, but hated it when people did the same to him. He couldn’t stand ‘slow’ people at all, whether they talked, walked or thought too slowly for his liking. He wouldn’t hesitate to hurry them along or to taunt them.



‘He has a dominant chin (horizontal division of the face in forehead, nose and chin parts), which means that he has good physical stamina and can’t sit still for long. He’s always on the go and will probably love sport or even partake in it. He is also hospitable and likes entertaining. He easily sweeps people away with his charm and generosity.’

### **Numerologist**

As with all the others, Sandy received only Siphó’s name, date of birth, a few paragraphs in his own handwriting, and his signature.

She didn’t seem to like him at all.

‘He is totally untrustworthy, dishonest and a liar. He has many secrets, he is depressed, he possesses great powers of persuasion (he could perhaps have been an incredibly good lawyer), he has integrity problems, he’s a skirt chaser and he’s unstable,’ she said.

Sandy also thought that Siphó didn’t hold himself to boundaries and that he was unsure of himself, afraid, racist, extremely sexual, that he abused alcohol, was self-destructive, erratic and reactionary. She also spoke of heart and hip problems in his family.

This man, she believed, thought himself to be above the law. He was a leader, he was provocative and he was a thief.

She saw triple 5s in his numbers, which made him a swindler and a con artist. She spoke slowly and clearly when stating: ‘Triple fives are always habitual criminals.’

What did I have to say about Marthie and Sandy’s findings?

It was impossible, based on an interview only, to confirm or deny all the aspects they had highlighted.

What was clear to me, though, was that Siphó seemed to know what was happening around him. It was clear that he was one of the leaders in the group. Magic had spoken of him with great appreciation about the way he had supported him (Magic).

With the unconventional mind one could certainly concur. What criminal possesses a conventional mind? But enough of that light-hearted note.

Of the prediction that he was always on the go, one could only deduce that he had definitely been very active in the underworld of crime.

Just like Sandy, Dr Liebenberg had also come to the conclusion that Siphó didn’t exactly have a close relationship with the truth.

It was also clear that Sipho considered himself to be above the law, or he wouldn't have committed all those crimes that he had admitted to himself.

Regarding the triple 5s – well, Sandy made it clear that a 5 was the unholyest of all the numbers.

And how pious can a criminal be that is destined to eat pap for the next 40 years?

## **Alfred**

Alfred (41) (pseudonym) looked like a learned guy rather than a hardened criminal. With his gold-rimmed glasses, dignified goatee and well-spoken manner, one could easily mistake him for an academic. Alfred had a habit of blinking a lot and pulling his bottom lip taught over his top lip. At first glance there was something remorseful and intense about him. He also appeared older than he was. Fellow inmates spoke of him respectfully as their 'author and poet'.

Although he had committed terrible crimes, I couldn't help but feel empathy for him. We joked with him about his goatee, and he confessed: 'Eish, I love this beard.'

At the time of our interview he had served five years and seven months of his sentence of 20 years and six months for, amongst other things, armed robbery and illegal possession of a weapon.

Alfred came from a privileged background, from a family in a neighbouring country. His father, he informed us, was a chief inspector in the police.

'I grew up in a nice family. Everything was fine.'

Dr Liebenberg asked him how many children there were in the family, and he told us that he had four siblings. He was a middle child, and the only son amongst four daughters.

'We lived a good life. There was no poverty. We had everything we needed,' he said.

He praised his mother, who had 'a big, open heart', and reached out to others in need. He also confessed to having had a strong emotional attachment to his mother as a child.

'My mom was number one in my life, and I was sometimes called a Mama's boy, but I didn't really mind.'

But Alfred was naughty and had been smoking and drinking by the age of 14. Apparently he had a strong need for friends, and wanted to get in their good books. Dr Liebenberg asked him whether he had ever had the

urge to commit suicide. He confirmed it. Yes, at 16 he had taken an overdose of malaria pills and ended up spending six days in hospital in the capital of the neighbouring country. He said it had happened after he had done ‘something wrong’.

Alfred said he had been afraid of his dad. Even if his dad talked to him in a low voice, he would start shaking and burst into tears. His father had been very strict, for example about the time he had to be home. Although his father had never lifted a hand against him, he had feared him.

Why had he wanted to commit suicide? He told us that he had taken his uncle’s car without permission. And he hadn’t even had a driver’s licence. He had been driving ever since he was 14, though.

Alfred had always been an extrovert with a social, outgoing personality, it seemed. He said he had travelled extensively in Africa – to Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia.

When he’d turned 14, his parents had sent him to boarding school in a town in the north of the country, which had frustrated him no end.

‘I wasn’t used to being away from home. It felt as if they wanted to get rid of me. I’ve always felt rejected,’ he said. He had wondered why he was the only one to be sent away, and not his sisters. Only years later did he realise that his parents had only wanted what was best for him. The school he had attended was approximately 600 km from home, and there had definitely been other schools closer to home. But this school’s standards had been high and it had been mostly attended by white children. He had been one of just a handful of black kids there. He had done well at school, which he described as a kind of technical college, had become a top achiever. He was, in his own words, ‘very intelligent’.

Alfred told us that he had met his first wife at 19. He’d never got to buy her anything. His parents had taken care of everything. Dr Liebenberg asked him how he felt about his parents providing while he was supposed to be the breadwinner. Not good, he had us understand.

His life had made a drastic U-turn when he’d got a skin rash, visited a clinic and found out that he was HIV positive. He’d been tested four times, and the results had been damning. However, Alfred had taken a decision that ‘this was life’, and that he wasn’t prepared to die young. His criminal career had then really taken off, whereas before he had only taken money from his parents’ shop without permission. When his HIV status finally hit him, he’d started spending money left, right and centre on beer and women. He had good qualifications under his belt, for he was a trained motor mechanic as

well as an electrician. It was then that he had fallen into a ‘trap’, as he put it.

He had come to South Africa, where his uncle lived. Here he’d got involved with organised crime and had become a member of a syndicate led by his uncle. He had been the one who had wanted to join the group, he insisted – nobody had persuaded him to do so. And yes, it had definitely been profitable.

He explained that it wasn’t a case of being able to buy a car – you could get it for free. He could make money by hijacking cars rather than fixing them. He added that nobody was prepared to pay more than R4 000 for a stolen vehicle. The most sought-after cars were Mazdas and Toyotas. They’d even got orders for these. All they’d had to do was ensure that they delivered the cars the same day as they received the orders. He also mentioned that it had usually been whites and Indians who had driven expensive cars and worn expensive jewellery.

Talking about jewellery, Dr Liebenberg noticed that Alfred was wearing a nice watch. (Dr Liebenberg is a watch collector.) We all laughed at the suggestion that it might have been part of the loot from a house robbery. Alfred then told us how the house robberies had been planned.

‘We never just rocked up there. We always made use of a “fingerlady” or a “fingerman”,’ he said.

These were people working for the victims. They would tell the robbers everything. Where the alarm system, guns and jewellery were.

‘They could even get you the keys,’ he said.

So-called inside jobs?

Just so.

Afterwards the “fingerlady” or “fingerman” would continue with their work as if nothing had happened.

A house robbery would always be well planned – it wouldn’t just happen in an opportunistic way. Alfred also told us that these house robberies would be executed in the afternoons, when nobody expected it. It was too dangerous to do it at night, for then chances were that the home owner would kill you, the robber. He also said they’d had to go about it very cautiously and make sure that they weren’t seen in the same street more than two or three times.

‘It was better simply to collaborate with the “fingerladies”.’

Dr Liebenberg asked Alfred if he had ever been involved in robberies and hijackings where guns were used, and he confirmed it. Often they would target big lorries. This would happen day and night. They would

first fire at the tyres, but after such shots a lorry could keep going for quite a while. So they also shot at the windscreens, after which the lorries usually came to a stop.

Alfred confirmed that he'd had his own gun, but stressed that he'd never shot at a person. And he had a problem with rapists.

'I hate rapists,' he said and referred to his abhorrence of them time and again. If men wanted women, they could visit a shebeen. It wasn't necessary to rape, he said indignantly.

I later asked Dr Liebenberg why Alfred had opposed rape so vehemently. Was it a kind of 'crook's honour' aimed at convincing us that his crimes weren't as 'cruel'? Dr Liebenberg was convinced that there would be a specific reason why he was so outspoken about rapists, but could only speculate on the possibilities.

'I can't confirm whether he himself was prey or predator. It could also be that he abhors it because he was exposed to similar crimes. Rape is usually considered to be a violent crime, and doesn't relate to the rapist's need for intimacy or sexual intercourse, but to the need for domination and control,' Dr Liebenberg explained.

He asked Alfred what would make him shoot someone during a robbery.

'If someone arrived home and surprised us,' he said.

He had previously shot at one of the syndicate members, but only to 'scare' him. According to him, he had fired at the ground, but had accidentally hit the man in the foot. The reason he had shot at him was that this man, whom he called 'brother', had wanted to rape a woman. He'd also warned him that the next time he would kill him, Alfred said.

Dr Liebenberg asked if Alfred had ever felt afraid during robberies, but he denied it. Their goal had been money. But there had been a lot of in-fighting in his group. So there hadn't been much trust going around? Dr Liebenberg probed.

Nope.

Dr Liebenberg asked him how he would react if the victim in a robbery pleaded for his life, and what that would do to him.

His answer: 'Our group never killed anyone. We had three guns, but they weren't loaded. It was just to scare people with.'

Dr Liebenberg wanted to know what kept him from killing someone, and he said that murder would always haunt you. It would stick to you forever.

Would he really have killed his 'brother' if he'd raped someone? The man wouldn't do it, he calmly answered.

Dr Liebenberg tried to find out if he would have acted differently if he hadn't been HIV positive.

'No,' Alfred said.

Would he have continued with his career in crime if he hadn't been apprehended? He answered in the affirmative.

'I was already a dead man.'

He strongly hinted that he was very generous by nature.

'I always give.'

He told us that children used to run to him, calling out 'Alfred, Alfred, Alfred', and that he had always given them something.

He repeated that he had joined the syndicate willingly, but now he admitted that he had been afraid too.

'I've never shaken off that feeling of fear.'

This fear had to do with knowing that he had done the wrong thing. That's why he used to drink a glass of Klipdrift before a robbery. It had calmed his nerves.

Asked about what he'd done with his money, he answered that he'd lived royally.

He also admitted that most of his friends were dead.

'But I'm still alive. After being diagnosed with HIV, I thought I had 10 years left to live, but I've been living with it for 17 years now.'

When questioned about how he felt about the victims, he professed to feel very sorry for them.

'The victim's children are left without a breadwinner, and their lives have been destroyed,' he said.

Dr Liebenberg pointed out that Alfred had previously said they hadn't killed anyone, and Alfred explained that he had meant that the breadwinner had lost his material belongings.

We couldn't help but pity him again when he told us that he had spent seven years in jail already, and didn't even know if his parents were still alive. His family had no idea where he was. However, he poured his heart into his writing, and had written about 100 poems. His book already boasted more than 300 pages. He wrote about topics like rape. And again he stressed that it was rape that upset him most. Yes, he felt extremely remorseful. Nowadays he carried the Bible with him.

'A person can change. I know I have changed.'

Dr Liebenberg asked him how he would feel if he were released that day and could walk free. He answered that he didn't own one cent. Therefore

he would request that he be given a job. Dr Liebenberg encouraged him to write, as the therapeutic value of writing was high. We asked him what advice he had for others.

‘Crime doesn’t pay. Listen to your parents. Each of us has God-given talents, and God has a goal for you. Nobody is born a murderer or a rapist. These things destroy lives.’

He told us philosophically that he had actually benefited much from jail. It was here that he had discovered his talent for writing.

‘But prison isolates you from others, and whatever happens, you will always be branded a criminal.’

### **Dr Liebenberg's analysis**

Dr Liebenberg said that, according to Alfred’s description of his childhood as well as his development into adulthood, it would seem as if it were characterised by traits that, according to research, were similar to those of robbers.

‘Alfred’s poor relationship, or perhaps his fearful relationship, with his father is significant. It’s clear that there was some kind of overcompensation with regard to acceptance from his mother’s side. As the only son, he definitely benefited culturally, but his fear of this father could have had an inhibiting influence on the development of his identity.

‘As at first he didn’t know why he had been sent away to boarding school, he interpreted this act as a form of rejection, and clearly protested against it rebelliously. He increasingly drank and smoked and had promiscuous relationships in reaction to the dignity of his parental home, 600 km away. Alfred also played the role of the pleaser, probably to protect himself against feelings of inferiority and of not being accepted. The overcompensation regarding the needs of others also has a symbolic meaning in terms of recognition and status. According to research, it is not uncommon for robbers to attach huge value to material possessions, and that they may even exhibit aggressive behaviour towards those that have more than they do.

‘The fear that Alfred felt for his father may be interpreted as a lack of parental security and love, for which his mother tried to compensate. The feeling of rejection is, similarly, not uncommon to personality types observed among robbers, and usually manifests during the teenage years as depression, which may often be accompanied by attempts at suicide, or thoughts of suicide. His behaviour indicates an external locus of control,

which implies that he is very susceptible to others encouraging and egging him on to demonstrate that he's "macho" and can live fearlessly.'

Dr Liebenberg said it was very important to Alfred, in spite of his conversation with us, to exhibit the image of an aggressor, as 'softness' was probably considered a sign of weakness within his frame of reference. He also believed that Alfred was under enormous intrapsychic pressure (intrapsychic refers to fear, tension and pressure that aren't processed and remain with the person), particularly because he initially denied his HIV status, but later used it to punish society. In other words, there was an externalisation of emotions he couldn't process, which gave rise to his strange behaviour of projecting his inadequacy onto others by behaving irresponsibly regarding his HIV status. It also indicated a form of passive aggression towards others, which was probably a very cowardly way of punishing them.

Dr Liebenberg also thought that Alfred was looking for the sense and meaning of life, and that he would become involved in both the positive and the negative, as long as he would be considered worthy.

'At an emotional level, being a robber provided him with a place in the hierarchy of significance. It's clear that his intellect positioned him better to exploit criminal opportunities, although he could have expressed that same intellect in a positive way. He is therefore essentially opportunistic as far as his quest for sense and meaning in life is concerned.

'It's a pity that he used his intellect to pursue crime as a career. Unfortunately he is more dishonest than the image he upholds, as he contradicted himself several times, for example by telling us at first that the weapons they used in the robberies weren't loaded. But then, later, he said that he had fired a shot at one of his mates who had wanted to rape a woman,' Dr Liebenberg said.

He pointed out again that research had indicated that robbers had a greater tendency to exhibit extrovert behaviour, were sensitive to emotional stress, and that material gain was their compensation for emotional inadequacies or a lack of recognition. Although it seemed as if aspects of his behaviour could relate to those of a sociopath, based on the available information Dr Liebenberg was unsure whether this was indeed the case with Alfred.

'Alfred would probably try to make himself stand out even if he had to use lies and deception. For without a mission or sense and meaning in his life, he would not be able to survive. If he could use the opportunities in jail to live transparently, and to create sense and meaning in an honest way,

I believe there could be hope for him, but the opposite could also be true as far as he's concerned.

'Alfred can be a masterful manipulator if the need arises. He has conveniently withheld several aspects of his past in order to put forward a less negative image of himself. Alfred is therefore the end product of a feeling of rejection and fear of his father. He used the vicious circle of rebelliousness to create an artificial sense of identity, which in the end became his only skill with which to create sense and meaning while the HIV sword of death hovered above his head.'

Dr Liebenberg is of the opinion that it had actually benefited him to land up in prison.

'If he uses his skills to benefit others and exhibits real remorse about all the crimes he didn't even mention to us, there would be a chance of rehabilitation, although my instinct tells me that it's safer for himself and for others if he remains inside the prison walls. He probably has more enemies on the outside than in jail, although according to him several of his mates have already died.

'Although his initial criminal behaviour (theft) was attributed to the fact that he wanted to "give to others in need", a component of criminal behaviour remains present in his early teenage years. Unfortunately crime cannot be justified by stealing from the rich to give to the poor. This cannot justify the intent behind the crimes, which usually is to get recognition from people. In such a case, specifically, it indicates an external locus of control. An external locus of control indicates that the person needs the approval and acceptance of the given environment in order to experience an inner feeling of acceptance, just as people with a strong internal locus of control usually create their own approval and have a lesser need for the acceptance or approval of others in order to experience a feeling of acceptance.'

### **Facial analyst**

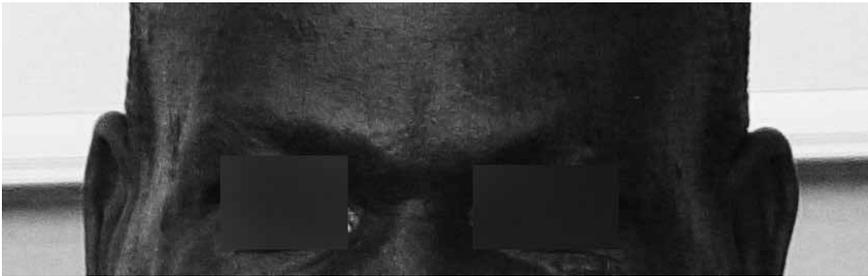
Apart from a photograph, Marthie didn't receive any information about Alfred. According to her, Alfred had very high expectations of himself and of society. He felt that he played an important role in how situations play out.

She said: 'He will often feel guilty about how certain situations have played out and think that he could have handled them differently. He doesn't process disappointment and criticism very well, and will go out of his way to impress people. However, he is very sceptical and doesn't trust

others easily, except if the other person can prove him wrong. He has only a handful of friends, and will be very loyal towards them. He needs a lot of personal space and doesn't like it when people invade his personal space.

'His eyebrows are hardly visible, which indicates that he isn't forthcoming with information. They're called chameleon eyebrows, and just as a chameleon's eyes can turn 360° degrees independently, he will always be aware of everything that's happening around him. People will often feel that they can't get through to him. When you talk to him, it's important to ask specific questions if you want specific answers. His answers will often be very vague, and he'll only tell you what he deems necessary at that particular moment.'

Marthie then referred to Alfred's exhaustion line, which indicated that he felt responsible for the people around him.



'He prefers to do things himself rather than depend on others. His motive will often be attributed to a need to help people. Also, he always wants to be in control of situations and will often act impulsively because he believes that what he does at that moment is the right thing to do. He doesn't like people questioning his outlook and can easily become impatient when things don't happen fast enough for his liking. And he doesn't like to have his time wasted (according to him).

'Alfred will seldom show his emotions to others. He wants people to like him and will always present his best side. His skew smile to the left (private persona) confirms the statement above. He knows how to fit in where social situations are concerned, and he knows what will be expected of him in order to be acceptable to others. He'll go out of his way to prove others as wrong, whether it's in their opinion of him or when they've challenged him in any other way.



Alfred finds it difficult to commit to projects, tasks or even relationships, but when he has finally made his decision, nothing will dissuade him. He gives new meaning to the words “hanging in there”.

### **Numerologist**

As with the other inmates, Sandy based her findings on Alfred’s names and date of birth, a few hand-written paragraphs and his signature.

She said there was something wrong in the area around his hands or feet.

‘He’s treacherous, dishonest, a con, well spoken with good language abilities, and street wise. He’s capable of mapping and planning well, controls all the detail and could sell ice to an Eskimo. You can’t prescribe to him, and he possesses business sense, but he’s lazy and manipulative. He also tries to conceal the fact that he’s emotional and of a sensitive nature. His face gives him away, however.’

She described him as a ‘chameleon’: on the one hand he was afraid of the law, and on the other hand he was convinced he could get away with crime.

He didn’t trust people easily. He was educated, rigid, self-analytical and neat. You couldn’t trust him, but there was also something naive and innocent about him. He was very artistic, and there was fame in his numbers. He landed in trouble at the tender age of 14. He was crazy about music and there were books and films in his numbers. He was running away from something, and he loved cars. His handwriting showed that he was very independent, that people should respect him, that he had many secrets, that he didn’t believe in himself and that he would like to be valued.

How did I feel about Marthie and Sandy’s analysis of Alfred? Again, it was impossible to say if they were 100% on target, but there were descriptions one could not deny. We definitely got the feeling that Alfred wanted to impress us. It was true that he had few friends, for he had told us himself that most of them were dead already. I would also have to agree that he would only tell us what he wanted us to know. Dr Liebenberg even remarked that

he was definitely concealing certain information from us. There was also reference to his Robin Hood-like behaviour – steal from the rich to help the poor. A kind of attitude of ‘the end justifies the means’.

He was definitely well-spoken and also possessed good language abilities, and concerning the bit about being street wise – well, wasn’t that a given for any robber? I couldn’t argue with his ability to plan either, for that’s what house robbers do.

We also got the impression that he, being a writer, indeed had an emotional and sensitive side. To write, he had to be artistic or creative. It was also true that he had got into trouble at the age of 14.

Nor could one fault Sandy’s remark that he was a chameleon, for he had told us intermittently that he feared the law but was fearless.

## **Thabo**

Thabo (pseudonym) was a hardened hijacker, evidently addicted to speed, and boasted that he had once driven a hijacked vehicle 270 km in an hour and a half.

Thabo was 33 years old, short and stocky, and sported a serious expression. He smiled at times. He glowered at us suspiciously and once laughed loudly and scornfully, as if he wanted to let us know he knew we were trying to ‘catch him out’. Whereas some of the other inmates had looked almost ‘bewildered and defeated’, his attitude was defiant and self-confident. Almost swaggering. It was also clear that he was the group spokesman in this specific prison we were visiting. Their leader. If you wanted to speak to a member of the group, you usually first had to talk to him.

Thabo had been apprehended for armed robbery with aggravating circumstances relating to hijackings. He told us that he was serving a sentence of 11 years, of which three years were left at the time of our interview. His sentence was much lighter than those of the other inmates we had seen.

As with the others, we asked him about his life history and childhood. He told us that he was one of only two children and that he had a younger sister. As was often the case in black culture, he had been raised by his grandmother. His father had moved to Pretoria when Thabo was nine or ten years old. (This was another case of a fatherless household.) Initially he had been a very good boy, and his grandmother had been very strict. His mother had had to work elsewhere and couldn’t really look after him.

When Dr Liebenberg asked if he had ever felt rejected, he denied it. No, his grandmother had been very supportive. Not that it meant he could just

laze around. He'd had certain tasks to do when he got home from school, for example washing the dishes. But there had been issues between him and his cousins. He believed they'd been jealous of him because of all the attention and support he got from his grandmother.

Eventually Thabo had decided to move to Johannesburg. There he'd become involved with a Nigerian, and started working as a runner for drugs. Not that he'd been a drug dealer, he said. He told us that clubs had been his hunting grounds, and that he'd also extended his drug network to a holiday resort. He'd approached golf caddies to join his operation. Here he'd met the 'right people' and could sell 20 Mandrax tablets at a time, at R150 each.

Because of his involvement in drugs, he'd also become involved in other crime activities, and had been arrested for burglary and theft. Being behind bars had been exactly the right place for sharing contact details with 'business associates'.

He had known how to 'open up' cars, but had been arrested for car theft in 2002. After he had got out of jail, he became involved in transit robberies.

'This was big money,' he said. 'We're talking about R3,6 million. I realised that I was wasting my time with other crimes,' he confessed openly.

But this raise in 'career prospects' had never been realised, as he'd needed an AK-47 for this, and he hadn't possessed one. Fortunately, the money he could make from hijacking four-wheel drive vehicles hadn't been too bad – he could earn R20 000 per order.

He answered in the affirmative when we asked whether one could say that he had 'progressed' from drug dealing to vehicle theft. But in the meantime he had also started committing livestock theft. We expressed our surprise, but he explained that livestock was expensive – you could easily pay R4 000 per head of cattle. It would have cost him R9 000 to buy two heads of cattle for his grandmother's funeral, while he would have had to pay for four in the case of his uncle's funeral, so he had stolen them instead. And he had been caught again.

Then he added, philosophically, 'In the world of crime, there's no such thing as friendship. Or loyalty. You can't trust anyone.'

Now why weren't we surprised to hear that?

Dr Liebenberg asked why he had stopped committing crime, and he answered simply: 'I was caught.'

'Yes,' he thought out loud, 'You can run, but you can't hide.'

So where did it all begin?

Thabo told us that, as a child, he had started stealing from his mother. At one stage, he had stolen R800 from his uncle, and then run away and slept under a bridge for two nights. But his grandmother had been livid when she found out what he had done. Asked whether his grandmother had ever beaten him, he said yes, usually with a stick. And yes, he had been afraid of her.

His explanation for starting to steal at such a young age was that he had compared himself to children from rich families. For instance, he'd only got R10 for lunch, but he'd needed more than that, he said. So he'd started stealing at home. And things had just got worse from there. Eventually he had been taking his grandmother's pension payout and gambling it all away.

When Dr Liebenberg asked how he felt about the fact that he had become involved in criminal activities, he answered flippantly: 'I enjoyed it.'

Did he experience any feelings of 'emptiness' or of 'acceptance'? He had been accepted and protected by his grandmother, he said. But he admitted that he had a strong need to be accepted and an even stronger need to be in control. He also said that he had never been afraid of committing a crime at the time, but that it had become a 'problem' the next day. Just seeing a police vehicle had freaked him out.

Although we listened attentively to his story, it was difficult to feel as sorry for Thabo as, for example, Sarel and Magic.

Then Thabo made an interesting remark. If there were a child in the car, he wouldn't hijack it.

'I just couldn't take such a vehicle.'

Why on earth not? He told us of an Indian woman who had been the intended target of one of his armed robberies, but that he hadn't gone through with it because she'd had a baby with her, and that had immediately reminded him of a grandmother with a child – in other words, he'd associated her with the protection of his grandmother he'd enjoyed as a child. He'd therefore decided not to go ahead with the hijacking.

In a weird coincidence, he'd later seen this same woman at a shopping centre, where she'd been doing grocery shopping. The woman must have recognised him, for she'd offered him R100 for some shopping. But he wasn't going to fall for that.

'I was scared that she would contact the police in the meantime, and disappeared as fast as I could.'

When asked how he felt about his upcoming release from prison, he said: 'This sentence has brought me a future.'

His explanation was something about taking the wrong things in my life and using them to change the lives of others.

I think he wanted to convey to us that he had learnt a deep-seated and valuable lesson.

‘If you approach the right people, you can get help. It’s all about good contacts, and about your attitude.’

Dr Liebenberg asked if his fellow inmates were afraid of him.

‘No, they respect me,’ he said.

When asked what would prevent a hijacker from killing his victim, he said: ‘Cooperation.’ Like handing over the keys to the hijacker. The fact that most of his victims had cooperated during hijackings resulted in him not having to serve such a long sentence in the end.

He believed most criminals didn’t know how to approach a woman.

What made criminals rape and kill? He believed it was drug abuse that prompted people to commit these misdeeds. As far as he was concerned, he had never raped anyone, he said, and explained that hijackings were only really about financial gain.

He then told us how he’d succeeded in escaping in the hijacked vehicle and getting it to the person who would deactivate the tracking device as quickly as possible. This had prevented the tracking units from following the trail. Only once the trail had disappeared, could they go ahead and sell the hijacked vehicle. He had never been involved in an accident, and didn’t have a driver’s licence, but boy, could he drive, he told us proudly.

Dr Liebenberg asked Thabo if he saw himself falling back into a criminal lifestyle again after his release from prison. For hadn’t he told us himself that you couldn’t trust a criminal? But now Dr Liebenberg wanted to know if he, Thabo, could trust himself. His answer sent chills down my spine.

‘I don’t foresee being able to trust myself.’

He lowered his voice almost ominously when he summed up the reason for this in a single word: ‘Temptation.’

Well, that was honest. One often heard that a criminal would never ever do crime again. That he had seen the light. That from that moment on, he would be as pure as the driven snow.

Dr Liebenberg asked Thabo how it had made him feel when he’d delivered a hijacked vehicle successfully. Had he felt good about a job well done?

He answered that he was ‘always on the run’.

‘You can’t fool yourself. That euphoric feeling definitely doesn’t last.’

He also told us how astonished a criminal's lover could be when she found out that her boyfriend was a criminal. He'd had a 'good time' in the bedroom with the 'lady', after which she'd left the house for a while. When she'd arrived back, she'd been greeted by blue police lights everywhere. He explained that as a criminal, he used to tell his girlfriends that he was a manager in human resources or even a doctor, for example. After you'd landed up behind bars, she'd maybe come and visit once or twice just to convince herself that you really had committed those crimes. And then it would be over, he sighed.

Dr Liebenberg asked Thabo if he felt any sympathy for his victims, but he answered almost inaudibly that as far as he was concerned, the goal of restorative justice might be to ask your victims' forgiveness, but that for him, forgiveness was more about disappointing yourself than the harm done to victims. The online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, describes restorative justice as an approach focusing on the needs of victims, offenders and the community rather than abstract legal principles or punishment for the offender. Victims play an active role in the process, while offenders are encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions. And what explanation would he give to his victims?

'In my case I would say it wasn't about poverty, but because I wanted the same lifestyle others enjoy. Now I realise that one simply has to work hard to achieve that.'

Thabo was the last inmate we interviewed. Some of the DCS staff started fidgeting. Sarie had asked a few times already which of them would accompany Thabo to his cell.

And Dr Liebenberg had started imagining that Thabo was looking at his Pajero, which was parked in front of the prison and was clearly visible through the bars in the interview room, with greedy eyes.

Had Thabo perhaps experienced a flash of temptation? Had he, for a moment, imagined the excitement of the chase? Had he relived, for a while, a situation where adrenalin pumped through his veins while he was racing off in the getaway car, death-defiant?

### **Dr Liebenberg's analysis**

Dr Liebenberg offered the following interpretation: 'The first feeling I experienced when analysing Thabo's behaviour was that he was a narcissist par excellence. His behaviour centred on personal gain, status and prestige. He's a "gatekeeper" in control, and he boasted of his criminal achieve-

ments. The fact that he had the power to decide who would be hijacked and who would not, only serves to confirm the level of narcissism occurring in this criminal. I consider him to be a habitual criminal. The fact that his sentence isn't all that long only means that he hasn't been apprehended for every crime he has committed.

'Although his childhood wasn't peachy, it was still better than the childhood experiences of most of the other criminals we interviewed. I rather suspect that he developed a superiority complex when he realised that his grandmother and other family members considered him to be the "crown prince", a feeling he probably allowed to be carried to the extreme without any chance of reversal.

'It's clear that the death of Thabo's grandmother, probably his greatest supporter, but also the strongest disciplinary figure in his life, triggered a rebellious ruthlessness in him. For Thabo, fear and respect were at the same level when it came to others' opinion of him. He considers himself almost invincible due to the deeds he committed, as well as his ability to flout the police. His boastful tales of the way he could handle a vehicle and the speed he could achieve also indicate how eager he is to create an image of the ingenuity he possesses.

'I assume that although he had his basic needs fulfilled as a child, his ambition was greater, possibly due to the exposure to the luxury he had seen, leading to the desire to one day possess such luxury, including cars, houses and possessions. It was probably part of the fantasy world to which he escaped.'

Dr Liebenberg said: 'As long as Thabo is in control of things, he feels comfortable. The fact that he has stepped up to assume leadership of the group of inmates in the prison we visited is indicative of the manipulation he has managed to create or duplicate within the prison structure. He won't survive in an environment where he has to be subordinate to someone else.

'It is my opinion that Thabo is a dangerous serial criminal, and that he most probably would continue his criminal behaviour after his release from prison. The way in which he stared at my Pajero and Sarie's BMW made me feel as if he was trying to deliver the message, whether subconsciously or via non-verbal bravado: "Your vehicles are next in line". He even boasted that he only needed the number plate details to go and "get" a vehicle, and he was very sure of himself and excited about his perceptions of just how possible it was to do that.'

Dr Liebenberg continued: ‘Regarding the analysis of his facial expressions I’ve done, I believe there were several instances where he lied or tried to conceal the lie so that the truth would sound less incriminating. A facial expression unique to him that indicates specific non-verbal behaviour and is significant in the analysis is his habit of pushing his tongue forward and pouting his lips every time he makes a statement to indicate his superiority – almost like a child sticking out his tongue to say “so there”. It’s a spiteful behavioural gesture that has manifested subconsciously to indicate that he’s in control and that he’s better than anyone else. I am of the opinion that his behaviour symbolises that of a serial offender with a malignant or malicious narcissistic personality type. I would give him a wide berth, as I would only trust him as far as I could toss a baby grand,’ Dr Liebenberg said.

‘Although I always assume that there is hope of rehabilitation, I still need to be convinced of it. Concerning the question whether he would continue his crime pattern after his release from prison – it would probably just be committed at a higher level and with more ingenuity. Prison affords the opportunity to learn a lot about crime, and it also clarifies why, at the start of the interview, he repeatedly stressed that people within the system do not talk about their crimes. That which he told us in detail, however, contradicts this strongly. It was almost as if he wanted to boast about what he knew, and wanted to leave us feeling that he knew even more. That is the feeling I had after the interview. And it again comes down to the perfect enactment of the behaviour of a narcissist.’

Dr Liebenberg did think that Thabo was intelligent and that, if he had applied his intelligence in conjunction with healthy business ethics, he could have been a brilliant businessman. It was, however, impossible for him to determine whether Thabo would apply his talents positively or negatively in the future, Dr Liebenberg concluded.

## **Facial analyst**

Marthie studied a photograph of Thabo’s face and reached the conclusion that he was someone who liked things to follow a specific order.

‘He has the ability to think proactively, and would have planned his crimes well. He would have collected all the information up front, and also have gotten hold of the right tools before he swung into action. His short nose, on the other hand, indicates that he would have wanted to see immediate results. He would have gotten very impatient with projects that didn’t go as fast as he wanted them to go.



‘His ears are small, which indicates that he would have missed important details at times. But he has a dedication line, which shows that he can be very dedicated. These contrasting characteristics would have caused a lot of frustration, and influenced his thoroughness. He then would have become negligent, therefore leaving behind clues resulting in his arrest.



‘Thabo has a round nose tip, which indicates his need for money and/or possessions. He experiences emotional satisfaction through the knowledge that there is enough money, possessions and love. I believe he may even

have collected souvenirs from his victims or crime scenes (I don't know what kind of crime he has committed).



‘Thabo has straight eyebrows, which indicates that he is focused on facts. He isn't particularly sensitive towards the feelings of others. The position of his eyebrows is low, which means that he easily gets impatient with people if they don't get to the point quick enough for his liking, and he will even interrupt them or finish their sentences for them. His right eye is very bulbous, indicating that he won't tolerate someone else interrupting him.



‘His broad nose, in conjunction with the bulbous right eye, indicates that he would like to feel part of a group of his choice. He'll easily get angry when he feels ignored or excluded. His left eye is located deeper into the eye socket, and indicates that he won't easily share his personal feelings with others. At home he would have been shy and more introverted.

‘Thabo's left ear stands out further from his head than his right ear. This indicates that he will fit into public situations and pretend to follow the rules. But the left ear indicates that he can be rebellious at a personal level and that he only follows rules and regulations if they make sense to him. If he doesn't agree with it, he'll replace it with his own set of rules, and act accordingly.

‘His upper lip is much more dominant than his lower lip, which indicates that he has good perception and that people can't fool him easily. He usually knows what's going on behind the scenes. His nose shape is concave, which indicates strong intuition. But he's outspoken and won't flinch from saying exactly what he thinks. He'll often hurt the feelings

of sensitive or emotional people with his brutal honesty (according to his own reality).



‘The well-formed Cupid’s bow of his mouth, emphasised by the manicured moustache on his upper lip, indicates that he uses his considerable charm to convince people to do exactly what he wants them to do.

‘His cheeks are full, which indicates that he enjoys the support of others. His chin shape is straight, indicating that he bases his decisions on facts. It also means that he can be idealistic and can easily become involved in (radical or rebel) organisations and fight for their cause.’

### **Numerologist**

Sandy provided a long list of characteristics that she linked to Thabo, and which I cannot confirm or deny; therefore I won’t elaborate on this. However, she also described him as ‘lonely’, ‘someone living in the moment’, who had ‘moved away’ from his mother and was ‘angry with his father’. She also believed he was a ‘chameleon’, ‘exercised control’, might resort to ‘bully tactics’, ‘didn’t listen’, and was an ‘excellent organiser’. He had an ‘f-you’ attitude, she ventured.

Then she dropped a bomb.

‘With hijackings he would be in the getaway car. The words ‘duck and dive’ come to mind.’

My opinion of Marthie and Sandy’s remarks about Thabo was that I’d definitely gotten the impression that he possessed good organisational skills, was outspoken and had supporters among his fellow inmates. And one couldn’t argue with Sandy’s finding that he exercised control and could be arrogant.

The fact that he always drove the getaway car was 100% on target.

## **'Oom Oor'**



### **'Monster' or tired old man?**

'My sister, I don't know how many people I've killed. I don't want to count them. I don't want to know. And I could have stopped the killing of many others.'

We were sitting in Marietjie Olyn's house in Prieska in the Kalahari, Northern Cape. It was a hot-as-hell day. Barend Oor (59), also known as 'Oom Oor', who had been in and out of prison for more than 40 years, was sitting opposite us. He talked in measured tones. He looked tired. Tired of life. Over the hill. Probably on his way out.

He had Xhosa blood in his veins – his father was a Xhosa and his mother a coloured woman – and appeared to be black, although he spoke like a coloured man. He looked much, much older than his years. Even people of his own age called him 'Oom Oor'.

His appearance was unmistakably that of a seasoned jailbird. The ultimate jailbird. Truth be told, in my opinion he could not be mistaken for anything else. A photograph of him was more eloquent than a thousand words. He reminded you of one of those fearsome characters in the controversial TV advertisement against alcohol abuse that spells out exactly in whose company you would find yourself if you had one or two drinks too many.

There wasn't one centimetre of Oom Oor's body that was not covered by tattoos. Many of these looked like the number 28. Others could not be deciphered. His wrinkles formed deep lines on his rugged face. I could imagine what a reign of terror he must have conducted in his day in the criminal underworld. But today he looked anything but intimidating. He was heart-renderingly thin. Emaciated. Skin and bones. He endured a lot of pain. And apparently he overflowed with remorse. We even felt sad seeing him like that. Before, he had claimed never to have killed anyone. But today he sang another tune.

Could Oom Oor perhaps be a shining example of what well-known criminologist Prof Christiaan Bezuidenhout referred to as the 'regret, remorse and religion' principle? Was he fooling all of us? Oom Oor was an enigma, and also something of a paradox. He wasn't stupid, and neither was he tongue-tied. When he got involved with burglaries as a youth, he stole books.

Yes, books!

Now he had written a book himself. Is that why we felt so much empathy for Oom Oor? Because he appeared to be so harmless and weak, could hardly move around anymore, and seemed more literate than the others, despite his long criminal record? And would we have felt differently about him if he were 30 years younger?

While Oom Oor was telling his story, we listened attentively. He told us that he had once been in jail for livestock theft when some youths committed a murder.

'So then I owned up to it. I pleaded guilty to murder.'

So he had done it to save others? Who on earth, we wondered, would sacrifice himself like that? But I had heard this before – from another convicted murderer in another prison. Who had also taken others' crimes upon himself.

At the time of our visit Oom Oor had been released on medical parole. His body ached. He'd had an operation. Then he told us about all the prisons where he had served his sentences. He had been to jail in Upington, The Point, Port Elizabeth, Irene, Pollsmoor and C-Max – any you could

think of. And every time he had been transferred to the next because they couldn't 'handle' him.

Somewhat boastfully he told us: 'I was sort of well known amongst the who's who of crime, and in the past I was sort of highly respected before I reached the crossroads.'

Most of his fellow inmates were aware of this book he was writing. He added: 'If you want to stop crime, you have to be familiar with it. You have to know how it came to that. The prison community has never been given the right to speak up on its own behalf. The underworld has its own language and its own grapevine. Our youth has no place to go. Some of our youth's heroes are ex-convicts. We have to show them that these heroes have feet of clay.' Words of wisdom indeed.

'Our children can be kept out of jails.'

Again it was apparent that in jail, friendships were struck up across racial borders. He told us of a friend of his, Piet Brilletjies, who was a member of the AWB and had spent 15 years in jail. According to Oom Oor, the man couldn't read or write when he'd arrived at the police station.

'If a woman walked by, he didn't look at her face, but at her backside. But now he's even worse. Many have no family left, and go back to jail because it's the only thing they know,' he sighed.

'I wouldn't say you're safe in jail,' he confirmed many rumours.

But what about his childhood years? Oom Oor told us that he had been born in the Prieska district and that his domestic circumstances hadn't been 'too bad'. His father hadn't been a drinker, but after he died, his mother had had to raise them on her own. He was the middle child.

'We struggled to survive. My mother worked as a domestic.'

Just like some of the other prisoners and convicted violent criminals I had interviewed, he told us that he had done very well at school. But then, at 15, he had started burgling homes with some of his friends. We were astonished to hear: 'I don't know why, but I always stole two or three books with each burglary.'

So he could be called a 'well-read' thief. He admitted that not one of the burglaries he had taken part in had been a success.

'We were caught out time and again, and sentenced to between three and six lashes of corporal punishment.'

It was clear that, as a teenager, Oom Oor had been out of control, for he'd first been sent to an orphanage and then to a reformatory. 'A reform school is nothing but a prison. Nobody gets reformed there.'

After being ‘locked up’, he’d run away every time. Eventually he had 22 convictions behind his name.

He’d been an habitual offender whose crimes had ranged from theft to possession of cannabis, and from assault to murder, he openly confessed. He briefly discussed the gangs he had become involved with in prison.

‘You can’t serve a jail sentence without getting involved with gangs. There are instances where you land up in jail and realise that you don’t have a choice, and then you have to ask yourself the question: ‘Am I going to be maimed, or am I going to join a gang? Then you have to choose between murder and rape. It’s either a number or you have to pull your pants down.’

But some or other number it will be.

He believes that, initially, the idea of numbers in jail had served ‘a good purpose’, but later it had been ‘manipulated’. He told us that number 28 had certain ranks.

‘If I were a 28, I would have to rape a young man.’

His voice became hoarse.

‘If you were a 28, you could never love a woman. For you belonged in jail.’

He told us that the Cape Flats were controlled by a 28.

A 27, on the other hand, would have to stab a policeman with a knife. In Port Elizabeth, in his opinion, 26 and 28 ruled, while 27 was eliminated. And if you received something from someone, you had to give something back again. Not that he thought he had had to contend with a lot of peer pressure.

There was almost something defiant about him as he stated: ‘People were very afraid of me. You see, my sister, the thing is, I understand the numbers.’

He also came up with a surprising claim that sounded like a kind of crook’s honour: ‘When I was young, the numbers forbade killing people.’

He strongly suggested that the numbers weren’t what they used to be anymore. And he looked upset about it.

‘You did what the number told you to do, and you spoke of the number as detached – detached from yourself.’

Oom Oor told us, in a grave voice, how he had been sentenced to death in 1990. But in 1995 the death sentence had been abolished and he’d been pardoned. Now he was free and survived on an allowance of R1 140 per month. He said that in 1994 he’d come to the decision that crime didn’t pay. That was when he’d been converted.

‘These days I go to church on Sundays. It’s how I should have lived all along.’

And if he hadn’t become a professional criminal – how would he have earned his daily bread?

‘I would have become an entrepreneur. Would have created jobs for young people.’

He believed prison made ‘animals’ out of the prisoners as well as the wardens. He considered poverty to be one of the greatest causes of crime. It was also important how Mom and Dad treated each other at home.

It was inevitable that the conversation would turn to remorse.

‘My sister, there was a time in my life that things gnawed away at me. I don’t know how many people I’ve killed. And then there are those I’ve lied to and deceived. Remorse, my sister, it pains you. But I believe God has forgiven me.’

Would he beg forgiveness from the families of his victims? He didn’t hesitate.

‘I would love to. It’s my desire.’

With his heart on his sleeve, he spoke about the families of victims that hadn’t even known he’d been instrumental in the death of their loved ones. And he’d looked them in the eye, knowing he’d done it ...

I asked if I could take a photo of his tattoos. It meant that he would have to remove his shirt. He agreed immediately. Taking off his shirt was a painfully slow process. Then he patiently went to sit on the cement steps in front of Marietjie’s house while the camera flashed.

Members of the community that had once feared him, now took pity on him. He shared a humble dwelling with other people in a dusty road downtown. At first, they were terrified of him, Marietjie told us. Evidently not any more. Now he was just an old man.

A life in tatters.

## **Facial analysis**

I sent the photographs I had taken of Oom Oor that day to Marthie. All she knew was that he was a criminal. I didn’t provide her with any more information. I got the following feedback from her:

‘Here’s my report on Oom Oor. I would love to find out more about his background, for I see an unusual sensitivity in him. I suspect that he’s an habitual offender, but I can’t help saying that what he did, he did “from

the heart” for others. I believe he had a difficult childhood and never had enough to survive. He developed a sense of responsibility to see to it that others would have enough, and that also gave him recognition as a human being.’

Marthie believed that at home he played the ‘macho man’, but at work he was almost a little pathetic.

‘I would have loved to meet him face to face.’

Marthie said Oom Oor was an interesting character that depended mostly on himself for survival.

‘He has an incredibly deep dedication line that indicates that he won’t let anything stand in his way if he’s working towards a goal. He often believes that he doesn’t receive emotional support from others, and has to depend on himself to complete his “projects”. Although this is partly true, there had indeed been collaboration from other people, especially towards the end of his projects. I don’t know his history, but he would have found a way to share with others. He is someone that experiences emotional satisfaction when he feels that he has enough of something (it can be in the shape of money or possessions). He would also tend to hoard things, has a need to look after others, and feels responsible for those closest to him.

‘He is sceptical and doesn’t trust others easily. He would tend to first “test” people to make sure that they’ve earned his trust. It may sound strange, but he can easily feel guilty about situations and would tend to think that the outcome could have been different (better) if he had handled it better. Oom Oor has a need for personal space and may withdraw from society or, at times, even “disappear” to get away from it all, or if things get too much for him. The horizontal lines above his chin indicate a strong need for recognition, and he’ll go out of his way to get approval and even respect for what he does (usually with a great deal of trouble). However, he doesn’t like conflict, and will go out of his way to avoid it, even to the point of sometimes doing things he doesn’t believe in personally. Others’ opinion of him is very important to him.’

Marthie also pointed out that Oom Oor’s deep disappointment lines indicated that he experienced disappointments strongly at an emotional level, and could even take them personally. His eyebrows were scruffy, which indicated that he wasn’t a conventional thinker. In combination with his full upper lip, this indicated that he could be very outspoken, especially about things close to his heart. He would also tend to fight on behalf of the underdog, and would often take emotional decisions. His ears were

positioned quite high up, which indicated that his decision-making could be emotionally based, and therefore opportunistic as well.

‘He doesn’t have a lot of respect for rules and regulations (especially if they don’t make sense to him) and is very ingenious when it comes to rather substituting rules of his own making. He can get very impatient with people that are “slow” in comprehending and will often interrupt them or get irritated if they don’t get to the point quickly. He has deep anger lines, which indicates his frustration and/or anger. It occurs evenly on the left and right sides of his face. It means, however, that he can be very diplomatic when the situation justifies it, or would rather hold his tongue to preserve peace.

‘He won’t give away lots of detail, and over the years, investigation officials must have realised that they had to ask him very specific questions if they wanted specific answers. He would even exhibit an uncommon loyalty to people that had earned his trust, but wouldn’t reach out to others to ask their opinion. He would rather grapple with his problems on his own until he found a solution.

‘The small beard on his face makes his chin appear round, which indicates that he does take other people’s feelings into account when he has to make a decision. The moustache covers his sensitivity, while the hair up against the bottom lip indicates that he has a need to convince people of his outlook.

‘Oom Oor is a sensitive soul who believes that he should do everything in his power to look after those closest to him, and therefore receive recognition. Disappointment and frustrations (probably due to his circumstances) have touched him deeply and could have played a cardinal role in his history of crime over the years. In a strange way, he thought he was doing the right thing, although he was breaking the law, or breaking rules. Everything he did (right or wrong), he did with passion and dedication,’ Marthie said.

I only had one interview with Oom Oor, but I had to agree with what Marthie had said about him, especially the unconventional sensitivity to which she’d referred. It was clear that he didn’t enjoy abundance during his childhood, but this was true of many offenders.

## Numerology

Next in line was Sandy with her controversial numerology, based on merely Oom Oor's name, date of birth and a photograph showing his tattoos and face.

Her analysis read as follows:

Oom Oor – Source: Barend Johnny Oor – 28/11/1952

His numbers are as follows: 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 5, 7, 8, 8, 11/2, 11/2 and 11/2.

'His tattoos clearly show that his three strongest numbers are 2, 3 and 8. The 8 has fairly strong marks crossing it, and looks like an ampersand, which shows that he loves the company of other people and can be quite the entertainer, in spite of the fact that he hates small spaces or people invading his space because it makes him feel trapped.'

She said that in prison terms, the numbers 2 and 3 probably meant that he was the 'woman' and 'mate' of convicts with male energy.

'He doesn't believe in detail, likes to dance, is romantic, friendly and extrovert, but can be shy at times. He loves beautiful things, is artistic and creative, whether he writes or draws.'

She even wondered if he had been responsible for his own tattoos.

Sandy believed that appearance, touch and texture were important to him, that he had 'green fingers' and that he was capable of making things grow and making things happen.

'He has an eye for women and collaborates well with women. During his lifetime, he would turn to his mother or a mother figure.

'He is manipulative and can be abusive, aggressive and a verbal abuser. As far as numerology goes, there is something gentle about him, he is ingenious, appreciates a joke and can be funny and light-hearted. He's given to extremes, can be hard-working, and for him it's a case of all or nothing.'

Sandy also believed that he had a spiritual side and could see the bigger picture, but there was also something traditionally religious about him.

'I'm sure he has the gift of the gab and is good with language. He can con himself out of any situation, although I know he considers himself to be above the law. And that's exactly where he made a mistake, for prison is represented in his numbers. Prison, with its limitations, isn't a good place for him, as he hates small spaces and is crazy about his freedom. Yet I think that wherever he goes, he makes a "home" for himself, even if it's in jail.'

Sandy said that from the age of 54, Oom Oor's health had been going downhill. She believed he came from a family with heart problems and that there was a kind of 'cancer' in his numbers that was spreading throughout his body – near his chest, heart, colon and skin. His ankles, knees and hips would also give him trouble later in his life (he has died since).

'I can tell that from the age of nine, he was fairly independent, and that his problems started between the ages of 18 and 27. I see huge losses, and it's also possible that during this time he was a victim of fraud.'

Sandy said it was strange how money and happiness occurred in cycles in his life.

'Perhaps it happened when he stole livestock and sold it again. But if you don't act "within the law" and your luck starts to turn and you get caught out, the mere fact that you've encountered the long arm of the law, or ended up behind bars, also indicates "bad luck".'

Sandy pointed out that Oom Oor had watery eyes, and that there was a kind of sadness in his heart and soul.

'And yet, I don't think he has too much remorse (he may have his personal, quiet moments of remorse), as his attitude is more of a "let's move on", "so what's next?", "what else is on the agenda?" and "how can I get myself out of this situation?" one.'

Sandy also thought he had bad habits that could include alcohol, drugs or gambling, but it could also mean that he had 'gambled' with his life. He'd had some good luck around the ages of 46, 47, 48, 55, 56 and 57 that had brought him fame, recognition and even money, and as he moved towards the ages of 60 and 61, he would enjoy another two years of recognition and fame, although she believed that money would be a problem.

'At the moment he's without direction. He's free, but not entirely free either.'

## **What is the truth about Oom Oor?**

In reality, it appeared, Oom Oor had started making trouble when he was still a young boy – and it hadn't been chicken theft either.

He had evidently served 20 sentences for 22 crimes, including 11 economic crimes, six aggressive crimes and two drug-related ones, and he had attempted to escape on two occasions. The most important thing was that in 1991 he'd been proclaimed an habitual offender, which meant that the crimes he had committed before that date must have been serious. However, it did seem as if Oom Oor had later slacked off as far as crime was

concerned, for after his 1991 sentence, he'd only received three other sentences.

Of course one wondered about all the murders of which he'd spoken. Had they really taken place? Why hadn't he, except for the murders he 'had taken upon himself', ever mentioned them before?

Sandy also felt sceptical about that.

She said: 'I'm not sure if he has ever killed, and I don't believe he really murdered someone. He's such a bullshitter and, despite his gentleness, also a con man, and he's a master of telling GRAND tales. I wonder if this storytelling of his wasn't part of his survival strategy in jail.'

Oom Oor remained an enigma to me. Did he commit murder or didn't he? Could it be that while some criminals would conceal violent crimes from us in order to create a better impression, others would exaggerate it? Was it perhaps a case of gaining a kind of recognition in an anti-hero sort of way? Even if it were limited to their peer group?

I asked the clinical psychologist Dr Henk Swanepoel about it, and he answered that he suspected that Oom Oor had simply wanted to boast.

'It was probably a question of wanting to impress you, and to show how powerful he was. Remember, these guys create their own reality and their own imaginative world. It's always fascinating, isn't it?'

It truly is a strange world we live in. One can understand that someone would try to make out that he's more pious than he really is, but why would someone want to pretend that he is more evil than he really is?

During our prison interviews that day with five prisoners in the maximum security section, Dr Liebenberg asked the prisoners afterwards if he could buy them something at the prison's tuck shop, just to thank them for their time and the information they provided. They could choose whether they wanted cigarettes or chocolate. Their faces lit up about this little bonus, and they all looked very pleased with the unexpected gift.

Dr Liebenberg treated everyone politely and humanely. He even listened to the most gruesome details of their stories with a poker face, without moving a muscle.

Almost ten months went by after conducting those interviews, and the deadline for the book approached. One day, Sarie Peens left a voice message on my cellphone, saying that there was 'a bit of bad news' regarding the inmates we had interviewed, and that I should call her back.

I did so immediately and heard, to my astonishment, that she had visited the specific prison where we had had our interviews that day, and it became

clear that the prisoners had only now realised that the book would become a reality. They now claimed that they had never given us permission to talk to them. And that the DCS denied having permission forms.

Apparently we had never been there, and neither had they.

Well, then everything was an illusion (delusion) – an optical illusion or a flight of the imagination.

I was upset, but not surprised. At the same time I felt a little bit amused.

Criminologists had warned that the behaviour of prisoners could be very unpredictable. But we wondered what could be behind this transformation. We felt a little betrayed. Did they think I, as the author, was going to be making a ... uhmm ... killing with this book? We had had such good conversations, and they had been so obliging. But we had our suspicions about who could be behind this, and later found out that our suspect had indeed been the instigator.

Granted, perhaps we were a little naïve to feel betrayed, for prisoners weren't exactly known for their integrity, but we didn't want to go through life as cynics either.

Especially when we'd been searching so hard for the man behind the 'monster'.

### **Acknowledgement:**

Sandy Smith, the numerologist, did some of the analyses in collaboration with Michael Gunko in order to confirm her findings, and would like to acknowledge his part in it.