



**UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL**

**ELIZABETH GEORGINA FIRMSTONE:
BIOGRAPHY OF A “GREAT” SOUTH
AFRICAN TEACHER**

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**This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree
of Masters of Education in History Education in the School of Social
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
DECLARATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
DEDICATION	vii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	viii
ABSTRACT	ix
CHAPTER 1: Introduction	
1.1. Background and contextualization	1
1.2. Rationale for the study	6
1.3. Purpose and focus of the study	9
1.4. Thesis outline	12
1.5. Limitations	13
1.6. Conclusion	14
CHAPTER 2: Literature review, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology	
2.1. Introduction	16
2.2. Great Teachers	16
2.3. Life History Research	25
2.4. Principal theories and paradigm	27
2.4.1. Biography	27
2.4.2. Oral History and Memory	30
2.5. Research methodology and methods	36
2.6. Conclusion	40
CHAPTER 3: Growing up in Ixopo: Family, Childhood and Household	
3.1. Introduction	41
3.2. Colonisation of Natal	41
3.3. Family lineages	43

3.4. Childhood and family activities	46
3.5. How the family settled in Ixopo	50
3.6. A history of Ixopo	52
3.6.1. Ixopo or Stuart’s Town	52
3.6.2. Geographical description	55
3.6.3. The setting: Landsdowne and Ellerton Farms	56
3.7. The role of the church in Ixopo life	60
3.8. Coloureds and the “Race” question in South African society	64
3.9. Conclusion	67
CHAPTER 4: The Roman Catholic Church and Education in Ixopo	
4.1. Introduction	70
4.2. The Roman Catholic Church in Ixopo (Natal)	70
4.3. The Roman Catholic Education system	77
4.4. Education in Ixopo: White, Indian, African	80
4.5. Coloured Education in Ixopo: The Little Flower School	81
4.6. Mrs Firmstone’s religious values and beliefs	92
4.7. Conclusion	94
CHAPTER 5: Education, Work, Marriage	
5.1. Introduction	96
5.2. Young Elizabeth’s schooling	96
5.3. From learner to teacher	101
5.4. Meeting Arthur	104
5.5. Little Flower’s Crisis prompts an early marriage	108
5.6. The marriage ceremony	110
5.7. Honeymoon	112
5.8. Household	114
5.9. Conclusion	122
CHAPTER 6: Marriage and family	
6.1. Introduction	123
6.2. An unexpected appointment	123
6.3. The Boarding Mistress	128

6.4. Reflections of a teacher / on a teacher	130
6.4.1. Preparation	132
6.4.2. Discipline and classroom management	134
6.4.3. “Challenging” the learners	136
6.4.4. Gender in the teaching profession	138
6.5. Post retirement: teaching is in her blood	140
6.6. Recognition at long last	142
6.7. Conclusion	149
CHAPTER 7: Conclusion	150
References	159

DECLARATION

I, Ramon Mark Fynn declare that:

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- (ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- (iii) This dissertation does not contain other persons data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Date:

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the unsung and unheard of Great South African teachers who have faded away from our memories over time;

To those teachers who have made a positive impact on the lives of countless learners;

To all the Sisters, teachers, support staff and all those who have passed on, especially Sister Annuncia and Mr Firmstone, and all the learners and past learners at Little Flower School.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
LFS	Little Flower School
Mr	Mister
Mrs	Mistress
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NP	National Party
OBE	Outcome Based Education
ORT	Obshestvo Remeslenofo Zemledelcheskofo Truda, meaning The Society for Trades and Agricultural Labour
SA	South Africa
Sr.	Sister
UCT	University of Cape Town
UKZN	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
UNISA	University of South Africa

ABSTRACT

Press reports and many academic studies suggest that South Africa's education system is in crisis, with the blame often laid at the feet of teachers. The current criticism of teachers goes against my own experiences during my primary and high school education as well as at university level, where I was privileged to be taught by highly motivated and inspiring teachers; teachers who came to class well organised and well prepared, who stimulated us intellectually, knew their subject matter, instilled discipline in the class, but who also showed us love and tenderness. It is through this experience that this study was born. It focuses on constructing a (partial) biography of Mrs Elizabeth Georgina Firmstone, covering her family life, education and teaching career. This study is based primarily on oral history, which includes interviews with Mrs Firmstone and several of her former students. It is through oral history that we see the voice of a teacher who has to a certain extent faded away in the background of our society. This study sheds light on why Mrs Firmstone can be regarded as a "great" teacher while providing a lens to examine broader issues such as race identities before and during the period of apartheid, the role of missionaries in education, and the end of apartheid and what this has meant for education in South Africa. This study provided an opportunity to engage more critically with the craft, possibilities and limitations of biographical writing as we are left with many gaps in the story due to the absence of sources. Finally, the lessons from the life of Mrs Firmstone shed light on what teachers can learn from their predecessors.



Elizabeth Georgina Firmstone 5 December 1926 –

(Naidoo, 2009)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and contextualisation: The crisis in education

Twenty years into democracy and many stories about education in South Africa remain negative. There are media reports almost daily about underqualified or unqualified teachers, `absent` teachers as well as the lack of infrastructure such as clean running water and electricity in many schools. In addition, many school libraries and science laboratories are under resourced and textbooks are inadequate or delivered late to schools. Even more disconcerting are newspaper reports of sexual harassment, rape and violence in schools in which girls are often the victims (Prinsloo, 2006; Bloch, 2009). What exacerbates an already tenuous situation is the multi-tiered South African education system with a wide discrepancy in performance between public and private schools; between public schools situated in urban or rural areas and between those in middle class and working class areas (Hunter and Vahed, 2013).

According to a 2013 report by the Centre for Development and Enterprise at the University of Stellenbosch, just a quarter of South African schools are “mostly functional” and even these are behind international norms for developing nations (Spaull, 2013: p. 7). The report found that grade six mathematics teachers in rural areas were unable to answer the test questions that they set for their pupils. Spaull (2013: p.3) continued:

The picture that emerges time and again is both dire and consistent, however, one chooses to measure learner performance, and at whichever grade one chooses to test, the vast majority of South African pupils are significantly below where they should be in terms of the curriculum, and more generally, have not reached a host

of normal numeracy and literacy milestones. As it stands, the South African education system is grossly inefficient, severely underperforming and egregiously unfair.... South Africa has some of the least-knowledgeable primary school mathematics teachers in sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these math's teachers have below-basic levels of content knowledge. In many instances these teachers cannot answer questions their pupils are required to answer according to the curriculum.

Teachers are often blamed for the poor standard of education in many South African schools. Ariellah Rosenberg, who is head of educator empowerment at Obshestvo Remeslenofo Zemledelcheskofo Truda (ORT), which translated means The Society for Trade and Agricultural Labour in South Africa (SA), a non-profit organisation that provides teacher training and skills development, said:

Education is only as good as your teachers, and our universities are failing to produce quality teachers, particularly in maths and science. Teachers also have patchy content knowledge. We go to schools and find that teachers are only teaching the parts of the curriculum that they are comfortable with (Holborn, 2013).¹

Nomusa Cembali, spokesperson for South Africa's largest teacher union, the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) conceded that many black teachers were poorly

¹Lucy Holborn, 'Education in South Africa. Where did it all go wrong?' NGO Pulse, 11 September 2013. From <http://www.ngopulse.org/article/education-south-africa-where-did-it-go-wrong>. Accessed 26 September 2014.

trained as they received an inferior education as a result of apartheid's Bantu education system, which was designed to make them into hewers of wood and drawers of water.²

This description from a Policy Brief by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transition and Equity (CREATE) captures the situation in many schools across South Africa:

It was evident that many teachers relied on the use of a basic structure to which most lessons seemed to conform – the teacher talked, the learners responded to questions in chorus and, finally, an exercise, limited to simple sentences, was assigned. Note copying was regularly used by teachers as a strategy to avoid teaching. In one observation, a grade four mathematics teacher scolded learners for not studying, instructed them to copy down corrections from the board, and then left the classroom. In some cases, there were long periods of time during the school day where there was no teaching happening; one set of learners were left unattended for an hour and a half. Teachers mentioned that they often attended workshops, sometimes on a weekly basis, and these and other meetings were usually scheduled during teaching time. There were also times, however, when researchers arrived at a school to find teachers lounging outside (CREATE, 2011).

Teaching large classes is undoubtedly a frustrating business. Teachers often spoke with exasperation of the workload required to teach and mark the tests of classes containing well over 40 learners, as well as their inability to provide individual attention to any learner, let alone those who might be struggling. For their part, learners often felt lost in the crowd, and learners in one school indicated that teachers did not even seem to know their names. Researchers observed that group work, a strategy that can be very effective in

²South Africa. Poor marks for education,' IRIN.Humanitarian news and analysis is a service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 11 May 2011. From <http://www.irinnews.org/report/92677/south-africa-poor-marks-for-education>. Accessed 24 September 2011.

large classes, was rarely seen being used in any of the classes though it was not always feasible given that classroom space was often at a premium, with desks crammed together and noise levels high. Some teachers almost exclusively resort to a lecturing style of instruction which may simply have been the easiest approach under the circumstances. But there was more to the lack of variation in teachers' methodologies than just this. Teachers sometimes appeared ignorant of or indifferent to the likelihood that learners had different learning abilities, and assumed that most learners would learn something if they talked to them throughout the entire lesson (CREATE, 2011).

Why have I chosen to study the life of Mrs Elizabeth Firmstone, a retired school teacher?
What is the purpose of this research?

Against a backdrop of national doom and gloom concerning teachers and teaching in South Africa, this study is about the life of a woman whom I have come to regard as a "great" South African teacher. There are many ways to describe a "great" teacher and this is discussed in greater detail in chapter two. Teachers play an important role in the upliftment and transformation of society. They are tasked with the responsibility of teaching, and apart from parents, they are the main source of knowledge and values for children. "Being a teacher is hard work and most teachers do the bare minimum required of them", according to Nontsikelelo Qwelane (92) who has taught for 73 years. She delivered a lecture at UNISA in Pretoria where she lambasted today's teachers and said they were "always tired" and "today's pupils were satisfied with minimum results", class management is becoming poor. It's as if they (teachers) don't know what it means to be a teacher³. "Great" teachers, on the other

³ 'Today's teachers are lazy'. (2013, March 23). City Press. Retrieved from <http://www.citypress.co.za/news/todays-teachers-are-lazy/>

hand, work diligently to create a challenging and nurturing environment for their learners” (Orlando, 2013: p. 1).

While many teachers make important interventions in the lives of learners at school and long thereafter, few get recognition for their hard work and dedication and the majority simply retire and fade away. The purpose of my study is to look at the life of Mrs Firmstone and show how she has contributed to the lives of her learners and countless other people after her retirement.

This study uses the life history method (Denzin, 1989) to construct a biography of Elizabeth Georgina Firmstone, a teacher who positively influenced the lives of countless learners and fellow teachers, and who was inspirational in my own decision to pursue a career in teaching. She actively promoted education over many decades but remains largely an unsung hero though, in my estimation, she meets the criteria to be lauded as a “Great” South African teacher.

Elizabeth Firmstone was born Elizabeth Du Preez in December 1926 in the rural setting of Ixopo in Natal. In 1941, at age 14, and midway through standard seven, she began her teaching career as many male teachers were drafted into the army during World War II which resulted in a shortage of teachers. She continued her schooling part-time and at the age of 55 completed her undergraduate degree at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and then registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) for a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGCE). From 1941 to 1991 Mrs Firmstone taught at Little Flower School in

Ixopo which is run under the auspices of the Catholic Institute of Education but is state funded (Little Flower School Letter, 1994, & Frye, n.d.⁴).

Mrs Firmstone's story features in Jonathan Jansen's book *Great South African Teachers*, and I produced a film on Mrs Firmstone in 2013 which was just nine minutes and twenty seconds long. Even though it was not a long documentary it nevertheless provides a glimpse into her very interesting life. This glimpse into her life convinced me that there was so much more to learn about and from Mrs Firmstone. Jansen's book, understandably, could only accommodate a limited amount of information on the calibre of teacher Mrs Firmstone was, and still is. Jansen's portrayal of this "great" teacher is narrow and sometimes superficial in its scope, partly because of the constraints of space. What should also be noted is that in Jansen's book there seems to be a number of inaccuracies in Mrs Firmstone's story which have yet to be rectified. However, the story has been published despite the inconsistencies in the story, which have been illuminated through my in-depth research with Mrs Firmstone.

This thesis pursues a detailed life history that probes the many facets of Mrs Firmstone's life as a woman, teacher, Catholic, wife and mother and uses her life as a lens through which to examine larger historical processes.

1.2 Rationale for the study

Many teachers make important interventions in the lives of learners at school and long thereafter. Teachers are people who have a hand in moulding the future generations of South Africa and the rest of the world. While some teachers do get recognition, the Trojan efforts of many others go unrecognised.

⁴A letter written by Sr Frye

One exception, as mentioned earlier, is Jansen's *Great South African Teachers*, a book whose origin lay in an invitation in the *Sunday Times* to people to submit their stories about teachers who made an impact on their lives. There was an overwhelming response and the resulting book chronicles the lives of teachers across race, class and gender boundaries. Jansen's study, together with my own experiences and the brief documentary I produced on Mrs Firmstone, underscored for me, the importance of recording the stories and experiences of teachers and others in the education sector in order to appreciate their vocations and contributions to society as well as to help provide a deeper understanding of the education sector in general.

This study is not merely an exercise in recording Mrs Firmstone's story for the sake of doing so, but I believe that it is a valuable historical study. It is difficult to imagine the impact of major historical events and societal changes on individuals. Through a biographical approach, with focus on Mrs Firmstone's life, it allows us to get a sense of the historical developments around her life and to see how broader changes affect individuals' lives as well as to understand how individuals too can shape events. Of interest here are the specific choices and decisions that Mrs Firmstone made and how and why she made them. In other words, this study documents her agency in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

On a personal level, being a Masters student in History Education, I believe that this study is important as the short educational film that I produced on Mrs Firmstone provided a little glimpse into her very interesting life and convinced me that there is much more to learn from her. It is for this reason that I decided to pursue an in-depth biography of Mrs. Firmstone for my Masters in Education (M.Ed) degree.

On a more professional level, for prospective teachers, it is important to understand what makes A “Great” South African teacher. This can be achieved by learning from the experiences of Mrs Firmstone, taking a leaf out of her book and passing it on to others. It is my firm conviction that teachers, being second only to parents in terms of their children`s education, can make a positive difference in children`s lives if they are “great” yet can harm a child`s development if they are mediocre or disinterested in what they do (Hallinan, 2008).

Also of importance is by using a life history approach, we can gain insights into the roles of teachers in educational contexts and how these have changed and perhaps also find way to improve the profession so that teachers can learn from their predecessors those teaching and learning strategies that were successful and for them to be mindful of other strategies that were not.

Also relevant is Barbara Caine`s assertion that, until recently, women were excluded as subjects of biographies. She asserts that:

Those who wanted to know about the lives of women in the past were struck by how difficult it was to do this. Women`s lives had, in the past, been of little interest either to historians or to biographers. Queens and women rulers had certainly been written about, as had important women writers, particularly prominent intellectuals, activists, women engaged in politics, society and political wives, and even some notorious courtesans. But there were few biographies which explored the lives of the many women engaged in local politics, trade unions, education, philanthropy, social activism and feminism who had not attained the standing of a national leader, and almost none which dealt with ordinary women who had

not sought a public life. Little of the existing work offered insights into the private and familial lives of women, moreover, or into the ways in which those engaged in public life combined their feminine responsibilities with their other interests and activities (Caine, 2010: p. 106).

This study will attempt to contribute to the body of knowledge in history where women's voices and roles in society will be documented and promulgated. In so doing, it will in some way open up spaces and fill the void which originated from the focus on a public world from which women were largely absent. The aim, however, is not to construct a biography for the sake of doing so but to present a story that speaks to larger issues.

1.3 Purpose and focus of the study

Given the issues explained in the background and contextualisation, this study will examine, amongst other issues whether Mrs Firmstone should be regarded as a "Great" South African teacher.

Through her inspirational teaching, Mrs Firmstone helped many learners and even in her old age, she continues to live out her passion for teaching. She taught for 51 years, educating several generations of learners and in her spare time embarked on her own studies to complete her schooling, and later undertook further studies to better equip herself as a teacher. She taught through many trying times, especially during World War II (WWII) and in times of extremely dire economic conditions that Little Flower School faced.

It is of course not possible to cover every aspect of Mrs Firmstone's life in this study and choices will be made as to what to include and what to omit. Amongst the broad issues that

this study is concerned with, is whether Mrs Firmstone can be regarded as a “great” teacher and if so, what qualities make her a “great” teacher. The study also explores how the teaching profession and expectations of teachers have changed over time and also how education more broadly has changed over time.

In line with these broad concerns the proposed research will focus on the following questions to construct this biography of Mrs Firmstone:

- Does Mrs Firmstone’s life warrant a study? If so, why?
- What is the relationship between Mrs Firmstone’s life and the social world that she inhabited and inhabits?
- What does Mrs Firmstone’s life show about the transformations, disruptions and constraints resulting from segregation, apartheid and post-apartheid systems in South Africa, on her and the educational processes?
- Were individuals such as Mrs Firmstone able to breach apartheid boundaries in their personal practices and behaviours?
- What new individual and collective identities were produced by these broader changes?
- Is the life of Mrs Firmstone a typical example of her social, ethnic, class and racial group?
- Can an individual life such as Mrs Firmstone’s shed light on the broader processes of historical change?

Through focusing on these broad questions this study will also deal with various aspects of Mrs Firmstone’s life, namely her childhood, family life, education, gender, work, religion, and retirement. More specifically the focus of the research pays attention to:

- Childhood: when and where was Mrs Firmstone born? What did her parents do?
- Education: What opportunities were there for education? What opportunities were there for women to get an education? Were there cultural and gender biases against girls being educated?
- Family Life: How did Mrs Firmstone choose her partner in life? What kind of marriage ceremony / reception did she have?
- Work: What inspired Mrs Firmstone to become a teacher? Where? When? And how did she train to become a teacher? As a woman, were there obstacles in her path as she pursued a career in teaching? What was it like teaching in a male-dominated society? What qualities make a “great” teacher? What attributes should teachers possess in order to have a positive influence on learning and living? What do learners themselves see as important qualities in their instructors, as gleaned from interviews with Mrs Firmstone’s former students? What personal qualities are required to make a good leader at school?
- Education system: How was the education system structured in terms of race? Was the Catholic system different in any way from state schools in terms of demographics and the curriculum? What was the role of education in the Catholic system? What was the balance between religious and secular education? How did the teaching profession evolve over the years?

- Religion: What were the major religious influences in Mrs Firmstone’s life? What are her religious beliefs? How does she approach life in a spiritual sense? How have her religious or spiritual life, values, and beliefs changed over time? What does Mrs Firmstone regard as the most important values in human living? How does she describe her philosophy of life?
- Retirement: Reflections on life after work; apartheid and the post-apartheid period; the state of education; changing roles of women, and any other issues that come up.

Based on these questions and others that may come up during the research process, the study will utilise this information to construct Mrs Firmstone’s biography.

1.4 Thesis outline

This dissertation consists of seven chapters, which are partly chronological and in part thematic.

Chapter one provides a rationale and general overview of the study pointing to the value of biographies of teachers and the dearth of such research, particularly in relation to women. It also outlines the research questions to be addressed in this study.

The second chapter reviews the literature on life histories and biographies, on the relationship between history and biography, on oral history as a methodology, on problems of memory and seeks to provide a working definition on the qualities of “great” teachers. The second half of the chapter outlines the methodology that was employed in this study.

Chapter three traces the family lineage of Mrs Firmstone chronologically, focusing on such things as the family's settlement in Ixopo, a history of the town, her parents' vocation, her siblings, childhood and family life, and the role of the church in in her life and in the life of the people in Ixopo.

The fourth chapter discusses the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Ixopo and the Catholic Education system, in particular the history of Little Flower School. It explores Mrs Firmstone's religious values and beliefs and the role that these played in her life and work.

Chapter five focuses on Mrs Firmstone's education, marriage, and family life while chapter six focuses on her teaching career. The final chapter, the conclusion, draws together various strands of the study pertaining specifically to Mrs Firmstone – education, family, marriage, religion – as well as broader conceptual issues around the writing of her biography. This chapter presents the main findings of the research and its implications.

1.5 Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the researcher is based in Durban while Mrs Firmstone resides in a Senior Citizens Home in Pietermaritzburg where I interviewed her. Although I made maximum use of the times that I spent with her, by familiarising myself with her present home setting so that my study could be more lifelike, it also meant that minor queries had to be finalised telephonically. In addition, Mrs Firmstone has experienced memory loss due to her age and she could not remember some details concerning many episodes and incidents in her life. To therefore overcome this limitation other people were interviewed to validate Mrs Firmstone's account of her life story.

Secondly, I have known Mrs Firmstone for many years prior to conducting the research and interviewing her. I conducted the study from the position of an acquaintance and an admirer as well as a researcher wanting to learn more about her life and work. This may be a limitation in that, despite my best efforts, there were occasions when I was reluctant to ask potentially intrusive and difficult questions. On the other hand, my familiarity with Mrs Firmstone on a personal level made her amenable to an interview and as far as I know there was no awkwardness in our interaction. In fact, the interviews were a smooth process. Furthermore, having prior knowledge of her life made it easier for me to relate to her and I got the distinct impression that she trusted me and was willing to respond to my questions. Knowing Mrs Firmstone could be seen as a limitation in terms of my interpretation and presentation of her life, but I believe that I used this to my advantage to enhance this study.

The last limitation is that the study is specific to Mrs Firmstone and cannot be generalised though we can draw lessons from it. While this is a limitation, it does in fact make the study worthwhile because my argument is that life histories are conceptualised differently depending on the time, space and context. What I mean is that my interpretation of Mrs Firmstone's life history at this time may differ to how others may view her in the future based on further research, new information or even different interpretations. This suggests that the knowledge produced in this study is contingent but, nevertheless in my view, valuable.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter explains the origins and background of this study and contextualises it. Mrs Firmstone features in Jansen's book, showing that she is a teacher who positively influenced countless learners' lives and that of fellow teachers, and can be regarded as a "Great" South African teacher. This detailed biography probing the many facets of Mrs Firmstone's life as a

woman, teacher, Catholic, wife and mother, provides a valuable lens through which to probe a myriad of macro-historical and social processes. The next chapter reviews the literature on life histories and biographies, oral histories, and “great” teachers and outlines the methodology and sources used for this study.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review, theoretical framework, and methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the extant scholarship on teachers and more specifically on what constitutes a “great” teacher. Both local and international sources have been consulted on this phenomenon. The theoretical framework, particularly around biography, memory, and oral history, which is used as a lens to analyse and interpret the generated data, will be outlined and thereafter the methodology employed will be discussed in much detail.

2.2 “Great” teachers

What constitutes a “great” teacher? There are many ways to describe a “great” teacher (Department of Basic Education, 2000; Goldberg, 2003; Orlando, 2013). Just as there are many ways to describe a “great” teacher, so are there many kinds of “great” teachers in our schools, just as there are ranges of good apples in supermarkets. One of the problems is that we are inclined to distinguish and admire only one kind of teacher at a particular time and era (Cruickshank and Haefele, 2001). In the 1990s, for example, those teachers whose learners achieved academically got admiration and in the 1980s, great teachers were those who followed Madeline Hunter's prescriptions for teaching success (Garman and Hazi, 1998; Cruickshank and Haefele, 2001). Madeline Hunter’s prescription of “teaching success” was compared to surgery,

“where you think fast on your feet and do the best you can with the information you have. You must be very skilled, very knowledgeable and exquisitely well-trained, because neither the teacher nor the surgeon can say, ‘Everyone sit still until I figure out what the heck we’re gonna do next’” (Goldberg, 1990: p. 43).

In the twenty first century we should appreciate the various kinds of great teachers (Cruickshank and Haefele, 2001).

The Department of Basic Education (2000) maintains that “great” teachers are separated from their counterparts by their attempts to create a challenging and nurturing environment for their learners (Orlando, 2013). Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major (2014) define a “great” teacher as one whose input leads to improved learner achievement, using outcomes that matter to their future success. Defining greatness in teachers is not easy. Much of the research emphasizes the critical point that a learner’s progress is the yardstick by which teacher quality should be assessed (Coe, et.al. 2014). In other words, in the long run, for a decision to be made about whether teaching is effective and to be seen as trustworthy, it must be checked against the progress being made by learners.

The South African norms and standards for educators as set out by the Department of Basic Education (2000) highlights the teacher’s multidimensional role in the classroom. There are seven key roles and each must be adhered to by teachers in order to become a “great” teacher: These roles include: Learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programs and materials; leader, administrator and manager; scholar, researcher and lifelong learner; community, citizenship and pastoral role; assessor and learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist.

Orlando (2013) takes a slightly different perspective by stating that great teaching is less about the teacher’s knowledge and skills and more about their attitude towards their learners, their subject, and their work. Even though Orlando (2013) does not regard his list as all-

inclusive, he has narrowed the characteristics of a “great” teacher to nine qualities: respect students; create a sense of belonging in the classroom; be accessible, enthusiastic and caring; set high expectations; have a love of learning and inspire students with a passion for education and for the course material; be a skilled leader; have the ability to adapt when a lesson is not working; collaborate with colleagues and maintain professionalism in all areas.

Goldberg (2003: location 3472) concedes that the qualities that make great teachers are not easy to inculcate or duplicate, but “knowing the qualities of greatness can help teachers strive for the highest standards.....”. Goldberg’s (2003) qualities include a willingness to put in the necessary time at work to ensure good preparation and execution of lessons; have a love for the age group that one teaches; demonstrate effective classroom management; inculcate a positive relationship with adults; strive for consistent excellence; make expert use of instructional methods; have in-depth content knowledge; have capacity for growth; show a steadiness of purpose and have a teaching `personality.

Professor Richard Leblanc was awarded the Seymour Schulich Award for Teaching Excellence in 1998. According to Leblanc (1998) good teaching was about having a passion for teaching but also about teaching learners in a method that is relevant, meaningful, and memorable. A “great” teacher in his or her teaching methods must be in touch with the latest methodologies in their field, reading sources, inside and outside of their areas of expertise and being a step ahead of the field. Leblanc (1998) stated further that a “great” teacher knows that every learner and class is different and a teacher should aim to stimulate responses from and develop the oral communication skills of the quiet learners while pushing them to excel. Great teaching, Leblanc (1998) adds, is also about “being human”, respecting others, and being professional at all times. Teaching is not about having a fixed agenda and being rigid,

but being flexible, fluid, experimenting, and having the confidence to react and adjust to changing circumstances. A “great” teacher should create a balance between being dictatorial, on the one hand, and a pushover on the other (Leblanc, 1998).

Leblanc (1998) also believes that a “great” teacher should be humorous and not serious so as to create a relaxed learning environment; caring and nurturing while developing the aptitudes of their learners; display strong and visionary leadership; be able to work with their colleagues and mentor colleagues; and most importantly, have fun and find pleasure in teaching as they cannot imagine themselves doing anything else.

The way in which teachers co-ordinate classrooms is similar to how a conductor co-ordinates a choir. The primary task of a conductor is to produce the best possible music from the members of the choir. Similarly the teacher is tasked to produce the best possible development and learning for learners. In order for the conductor to achieve his or her task, she or he has to teach the choir, research how best to develop the choir, lead and manage the choir and support each and every member of the choir (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2010). Teachers perform the same duties as conductors for their class of learners.

A choir conductor will most certainly have to deal with conflict that arises between individual members or subgroups in the choir. For the best music to be produced there has to be sufficient cohesion and order and co-operation between members of the choir. A teacher, likewise, has to maintain discipline in a classroom and have control over the class. Lastly, a choir conductor is unlikely to succeed if the members feel that they have no say in what is sung, how it is sung, or when they meet. This does not mean that the conductor has no leadership role. If there is to be willing co-operation, the conductor must adopt a democratic

leadership style that encourages appropriate decision-making from members of the choir and this will in due course lead to the best music. This applies just as much in the classroom (Donald, et al., 2010).

Mrs Firmstone's life spanned many decades and it is important to note that the role of the teacher has changed during this period. The profession is larger; it has become more of a vocation than a calling, become more feminised and also more professional. Importantly, the authority and respect that teachers once commanded has also waned.

According to Grearson and Higgleton (1996) in their daily lives, people fulfil roles that have features of many defining characteristics. Some roles are hard to avoid, like a father or mother; other roles may be thrust upon us by positions, such as becoming a student; on the other hand, we choose for ourselves many of the roles we fulfil, such as the profession we choose. The role of teachers has changed over time. From the knowledgeable on the stage to the facilitator and co-ordinator, teachers have been at the centre of a paradigmatic shift that flickers between two instructional environments: student-centred and teacher-centred (Hextall, Gewirtz, Cribb, Mahony and Troman, 2007).

Mrs Firmstone, who started teaching in 1941, has had to adapt to changes over time. Teachers, according to Douglas (2007) play many roles in the course of teaching and this might facilitate learning. Their ability to carry these out effectively will depend to a large extent on the rapport they establish with their students, and on their own level of knowledge and skills.

Since the start of colonialism and into the early decades of the 19th century, the majority of teachers were men, with very few female teachers in the profession (Perlmann and Margo, 2001). Teaching was a career and one would be a schoolmaster¹, but in the smaller and rural schools, the person who stands in front of the classroom would either be a farmer, surveyor or even an innkeeper, who would teach at a school a few months a year in their off-season (Ashby, 2009). Young men were often more educated and ambitious schoolmasters made school a stepping-stone on their way to careers in becoming lawyers or preachers. They made connections with local ministers and school committees in securing teaching jobs which often helped them when they moved on to their real professions (Ashby, 2009). Being a teacher was not necessarily undertaken to educate learners, but the position was sometimes used to benefit a person's own gains in a different career.

In the 1840s feminisation of the profession began. Women were no longer seen as dame-school teachers², though they were not well educated they revealed that indeed women could teach (Perlmann and Margo, 2001). A typical example is that in the United States of America younger women were educating themselves and reformers came to believe that women should be hired because by nature they were nurturing and maternal. Gender thus came to play a role in the decision (Leinster-Mackay, 1976). From the mid-nineteenth century there were thus two key shifts. One was in the role of teachers who were not using teaching as a springboard to making it in another career; secondly women came to be seen officially as also playing an important role in education for the first time.

¹A schoolmaster is a male schoolteacher or head of a school (Gearson and Higgleton, 1996: p. 850).

²A "dame school" is a broad term for a private school with a female teacher during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. The education provided by these schools ranged from basic to exceptional (Perlmann and Margo, 2001).

Over the years, teachers have been told what, when, and how to teach (Lanier, 1997; Johnson and McElroy, 2010). During most of the twentieth century, the requirement of teachers, was to educate learners by data dumping” information to them just to pass tests. Real learning did not take place (Lanier, 1997; Szűcs, 2009; Johnson and McElroy, 2010). In other words, teachers used the same Victorian era teaching methods and emulated that type of teaching method. Many teachers remained the same kind of teachers that their teachers were, by simply standing in front of the class and delivering the same lessons year after year, growing greyer and somnolent through not being allowed to change or not changing what they were doing (Lanier, 1997). They failed to prepare learners for the ‘real’ world. This prompted Johnson and McElroy (2010: p. 1) to state that “the role of the teacher is effective... if only this were 1965”.

There have been a great number of changes in education systems worldwide. Louise Stoll and Dean Fink’s assessment of schools are that “many of our schools are good schools, if only this were 1965” (Johnson and McElroy, 2010: p.1). Within this quote there is sarcasm in that they argue that the education system is not old-fashioned but that most new initiatives and programs are still fixated on perfecting the now old-fashioned school of 1965 rather than transforming the education system to be pertinent in the world we live in today. What we are seeing today is that teachers are using the same techniques to teach, rather than adopting and learning new initiatives and programs. As stated by Finley (2000) despite the fact that there are a few teachers who remain isolated from the influence of current school progress efforts, as in all probability they find it difficult to elude the issue. Therefore many conferences, teaching journals, workshops and the media regard education reform as a major topic of discussion (Finley, 2000).

This is not to suggest that the world and the teaching profession has been stagnant. The Second World War (1939-1945) brought about significant social, political and economic change. Women entered the defence and civilian workforces to supplant the men who were drafted into the war (Ashby, 2009). As men left to go and fight in the war, women such as Mrs Firmstone, filled the void in schools so that children could still receive an education. In Australia, the Women's Employment Board was set up to assist the entry of women into employment (Ashby, 2009). The 1940s teacher is different to the 21st century teacher, in that classrooms demand changes in teachers' knowledge and classroom behaviours (Veira, 2010).

In the course of the 1970s, researchers shifted their focus to the concepts of 'professionalism' (referring to a professional groups' conduct, demeanour and the standards which guide it) and 'professionalization', referring to an occupational group improving status and standing (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996). At the same time, as a result of this shift in focus, the paradigmatic divisions in the sociology of education followed, demonstrated by the rise of the New Sociology of Education (Young, 1971). These coincided with the weakening of the post-World War II liberal-democratic welfare settlement and the subsequent (post-1979) imposition of the Thatcherite economic and social project concerning the undoing of welfarism and an attack on public sector workers and professionals for their alleged "producer capture" (Hextall, Gewirtz, Cribb, Mahony and Troman, 2007: p.32). It was therefore, according to Hextall, Gewirtz, Cribb, Mahony and Troman (2007), during this period that the study of teachers' roles, identities and professionalism increasingly took different directions.

There were extremely important theoretical and empirical developments in the areas of the interpretivist / interactionist perspectives on teachers' work and the social processes of

schooling (Woods, 1979; Goodson and Ball, 1985; Hextall, Gewirtz, Cribb, Mahony, and Troman, 2007). The other development was in the neo-Marxist viewpoints on professionalism, work and teachers' relations with the capitalist state (Hextall, Gewirtz, Cribb, Mahony and Troman, 2007). What emerged was that there was a determination to develop sociology for teachers' work, which was called for in the edited collection *Schools, Teachers and Teaching* and contained a range of chapters utilizing both of these perspectives (Barton and Walker, 1981; Hextall, Gewirtz, Cribb, Mahony and Troman, 2007).

The 21st century classroom needs are very different from the past. Teachers are expected to be facilitators of learning and initiators of dynamic classroom environments, in which learners can improve the skills they might need at present or in the future (Sue, 2013). We live in an age where technology is a part of our everyday lives, and it is difficult to really understand the roles of teachers. When you view this from one point of view it can seem as if the role of teachers has developed greatly; they are now expected to be technologically-savvy, computer literate and at the cutting edge of education (Veira, 2010). Therefore, it is likely to be seen in the light of technology that the traditional role of a teacher is old-fashioned. This, however, is not quite true; rather, teachers must keep their traditional devotion to learners and hands-on interaction while teaching students how to navigate their 21st century world (Veira, 2010).

The traditional goals of education should, to a certain extent, remain the same but incorporate technology. According to Johnson and McElroy (2010) it is evident that the role of teachers must be redefined to meet the needs and demands of today's culture. In other words the methods that are currently in place in education are "trying to create a new and improved 8-track tape player. It sounds great in theory, in but in reality, although it might have new bells

and whistles, it is still just an 8-track player” (Johnson and McElroy, 2010: p. 2). As a result teachers are using the same techniques that might look different but in practice are similar to those used in the past. Teachers in the 21st century have access to a wide-ranging amount of information about the latest research on how learners learn. They should be knowledgeable and willing to apply such research to their classroom. They should understand different learning styles and be able to identify the learning styles of their students (Veira, 2010).

2.3 Life History Research

Life history research has increased in popularity since the 1980s due to factors such as a turn away from positivism and the objectivity of survey-based studies and preference for subjectivity and positionality; the determination to examine the relationship between agency and structure; concern with lived experiences and how to best reveal it; increased popularity of qualitative research and disillusionment with standardised methodologies of data collection (Ojermark, 2007: p.3).

Life histories can be seen as vehicles of social and political transformation to help individuals develop and move forward as a people by learning from other people’s experiences (Lénárt-Cheng and Walker, n.d.). The value of using a life history approach is that it opens up the possibilities for new insights to be gained in respect of groups that were previously excluded from mainstream historiography and this approach also challenges the notion of knowledge and knowing as being the preserve of the educated ‘experts’ (Lénárt-Cheng and Walker, n.d.).

This study of Mrs Firmstone is based on her life story or life history; two terms that are used interchangeably in the literature and throughout this study. There is a difference between life

history and biography. A life history, Valerie Yow writes, “is an account by an individual of his or her life as recorded in some way, by taping or writing, for another person who edits and presents the account” (Yow, 2005: p.225). A life history is personal and subjective and can divulge the human dimension of public issues and it is from this stance that one can get a sense of what it is like to step into another person’s shoes (Lénárt-Cheng and Walker, n.d.).

A biography, in contrast, uses life history and possibly autobiographical accounts, as well as diaries, newspapers, personal documents, letters, official records, and artefacts such as photographs to fashion “a narrative with a wider historical context than the individual life” (Yow, 2005: p.225). This biography was fashioned from the life history I initially constructed of Mrs Firmstone, based mainly on three oral interviews and numerous telephone interviews to clarify specific points, as well as interviews with her children and some former students.

The word biography comes from the Greek words ‘bios’, which means ‘life’, and ‘graphia’, which means ‘writing’ (life-writing) (Lee, 2009: p. 4). Hermoine Lee (2009: p. 5-6) defines biography as “the story of a person told by someone else”. This contrasts with *The Oxford English Dictionary* of 1971’s definition: “A written record of the life of an individual” and of the 2001 *New Oxford Dictionary of English* definition: “An account of someone’s life written by someone else”. Lee (2009) prefers “story” over “account” because biography “is a form of narrative, not just a presentation of facts”, and “told” over written because biography “involves an oral dimension – the recounting of memories, witness-testimony, much repeated anecdotes”.

All biographies, including Mrs Firmstone’s, can only capture slices of one’s life due to gaps in documentation and memory. In this instance, given that this is a dissertation, there are restrictions and limitations. In addition to missing documentation, the dilemma is how much

of the information can be used and the result is that we only capture glimpses into Mrs Firmstone's life.

2.4 Principal theories and paradigm

2.4.1 *Biography*

Since the 1970s there has been criticism of history's traditional sources and bias towards the 'Great Men'. Life histories, life stories or biographies have become very popular as an important way to recover the experiences and voices of marginalized groups, especially women. The past four decades have subsequently witnessed an expansion in methods of historical research and writing (Caine, 2010: p. 68).

The relationship between history and biography is intensely debated among historians. Some argue that it is limiting to focus on an individual life, while others believe that individual stories cannot only be incorporated within historical writing, but that they in fact enrich that narrative. Life history methodology has also generated debate because it is sometimes misunderstood as 'hero-worshipping' since these studies tend to focus on well-known persons who are portrayed as "heroes" with ordinary lives, forgotten and lost in time (Samuel, 2014).

While a well-written and captivating biography can be art, it is not fiction (Yow, 2005: p. 221). The art in a biography lay in "the creativity in the search for evidence, the arranging of evidence to present an engrossing narrative of this unique life, and the interpretation of it, but biography is also the presentation of an individual life in its relationship to a wider history"

(Yow, 2005: p. 221. However, unlike fiction, the ‘truths’ of a biography must be ‘evidence based’ (Yow, 2005: p. 221).

Biography has come under attack from postmodernists who believe that it is an ‘artificial construct, since it inevitably involves selection and shaping.’ No biographer writes down everything that a subject did, say and thought on every day of their life from birth to death’ (Lee, 2009: p.122). Margarey likewise observes:

The very act of selecting what to include and what to leave out from the vast mass of data that a biographer or historian accumulates, that all those tiny choices of what to put together and what to keep separate, of emphasis, of image or metaphor that the multitude of small analytical decisions that go into the composition of a narrative, do amount to ‘making it up’ (Margarey, 2008: p.16-17).

Biographies attempt to tell an orderly tale that shows continuity and coherence between causes and consequences and search for completeness and closure. It is the biographer who “imposes coherence on the wildly disparate events of a life” (Yow, 2005: p.221). In reality, biographies are made up of more than ‘facts’ and are partial and incomplete even though they generally never alert the reader to the fact that little is actually known about the subject, that what is known is an approximation, and that all biographies are riddled with ruptures (Yow, 2005: p.222; Gelbart, 1996).

Pierre Bourdieu’s description of biography as ‘illusion’ argues that life is not like a road moving in a linear direction, nor is it a progression with a clear beginning and ending

(Spelling, 2008). This was evident in my own research as many details and documents remain outstanding. This is a partial history of Mrs Firmstone's life.

This biography of Mrs Firmstone is constructed within an interpretivist paradigm which allows the subject's voice to be heard and allows us "to acknowledge individual meaning" (Samuel, 2014: p. 9). This perspective views the social world from the subjective viewpoint of the social participant instead of from the perspective of the researcher who may be less subjective (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Literary scholar Ian Donaldson stated in 2006 that

"much can be learnt about an entire society, a wider historical moment, through following with close attention the trajectory of a single life, a single family, a small group of individuals whose lives, though seemingly unusual, are also in some sense exemplary (Margarey, 2008: p.11)

There needs to be a balance between the individual and society. In other words, Mrs Firmstone's life is comprehensible only if it is rooted in the social and political history of South Africa during the period in which she lived. Her story also provides a micro-level perspective on the broader social and historical processes, perspectives that may challenge general categories and transcend established dichotomies. Pierre Bourdieu's 'biographical illusion' warns, however, that we should not take too easily individual lives as 'metonymies for larger things' and see them as reflecting histories of particular epochs or communities (Spelling, 2008: p. 4).

Mrs Firmstone's story is very much her own, but some aspects of these findings are generalizable, as will be pointed out in the chapters that follow.

2.4.2 Oral History and Memory

This study is based on qualitative research to probe the key questions raised in this study. Qualitative research, in its most general sense, involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials namely case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life stories, interviews, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: p. 4-5).

Multiple sources can be used in qualitative research. This includes diaries, interviews, photographs and personal correspondence. This thesis has relied primarily on interviews due to the absence of other sources of information. Qualitative research allows researchers to get closer to an individual's point of view through ethnography and interviewing and helps to produce valuable 'rich' or 'thick' descriptions of the social world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: p.17). The means by which informants convert their experiences into words or narratives, are a vital part of the research process as they allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a situation, while at the same time carefully situating stories and restoring them chronologically. But they must be used carefully and with reflection (Koch 1998: p.1184). Samuel (2014: p.5) notes that the researcher must "analyse, interpret, make sense of how individuals recall their experiences, how individuals make sense of the events, structures of society or patterns of behaviour within their environment".

Qualitative techniques are not neutral since researchers wield power over the process by interrupting informants through the questions they ask while informants are speaking and sometimes even editing the recorded transcript to support their own arguments (Abrams 2010: p.129). During the first interview, I wanted Mrs Firmstone to tell me very generally

about her life so that her voice, more than any other source, could be heard in this study. The interviews that followed were more focused and had a set agenda in terms of the questions that I asked Mrs Firmstone, as my aim was to get her to respond to gaps that I discovered in the previous interviews. The interview process is discussed in the methodology section below.

Gadd and Jefferson (2007, p. 64) tell us to avoid the ‘why’ questions so that people “reveal stories and avoid the premature closure, and intellectualizations, which explanations tend to promote”. It is important to avoid “clumsy intrusions” (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007: p.64). While I tried, as far as possible, to allow Mrs Firmstone to speak and say the things that were on her mind in order to get as much information out of her as possible about her life, there were times when I could not resist interrupting her to get some clarity on some of the things that she was speaking about.

This study is also aware that while oral history may help to democratize the past, it has limitations. Individuals’ information may be incorrect, either deliberately or through failings of memory; they may embellish information to serve their own cause; there is a power relationship between interviewer and interviewee; and the interviewer may assign a different meaning or interpretation to the spoken word when it is written (Abrams, 2010: pp.18-32).

On the question of history and memory, Paul Ricoeur (2000: p.278) has argued that “memory is notoriously fallible and historical accounts, since they cannot represent the past just as it was, are at best only partial and are therefore subject to the charge that they misrepresent, rather than represent the past”. Memory is ‘always bound up with the forgotten. There is always something ... that is left aside, unnoticed, or that has simply vanished. Something of

the past is always irretrievably gone and no actual remembering encompasses everything available for recall' (Ricoeur, 2000: p.278).

From my interaction with Mrs Firmstone, and generally given her demeanour, I doubt very much that she embellished information. However, there were occasions when she did not remember things which have resulted in some gaps in the study.

The weaknesses of oral history have not led to a rejection of the methodology. After all, even written sources have weaknesses. Instead, memory itself moved beyond being an ideological concern to becoming the object of study for oral historians. Alessandro Portelli (2006) has argued that oral histories provide new ways of understanding the past, partly through what is remembered but it can also assist us to note the continuity and change in the meaning that informants give to the past.

Several of my assumptions about oral history research were challenged in the course of this study. One of these assumptions is that interviewer and interviewee have shared understandings of the questions being asked and the responses given. I sometimes found that I had to repeat or rephrase a question as it was not clear to Mrs Firmstone and there were times when what Mrs Firmstone said was not clear to me. I clarified some of these responses through subsequent telephone calls.

Another assumption of oral history is that interviewees will provide an honest assessment of their feelings, which may not always be the case. As Gadd and Jefferson point out:

Subjects are not rationally unitary beings with full self-knowledge, but psychosocial subjects with a split consciousness, constantly unconsciously defending themselves

against anxiety. This affects what and how anything is remembered, with painful or threatening events being either forgotten or recalled in a safely modified fashion; it also affects how such memories are communicated to any interviewer, given that the context of the interview may be more or less threatening. At both stages, the act of remembering and the act of communication, meaning is rarely straightforward and never wholly transparent. The interviewer too is a defended subject, and so the same applies; the meanings of the questions asked and how answers are understood will also be affected by the interviewer's dynamic unconscious with its own 'logic' of defensive investments (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007: p.67).

As researcher, it was important for me to try to understand Mrs Firmstone's whole biography in order to make sense of the parts that were remembered. Once the recorded interviews were completed, these were transcribed into textual data and key themes highlighted. During follow-up interviews in person or by phone we spoke about some of the issues that had caught my attention and I tried to probe these in greater depth. Once the whole story or at least as much as possible of it was recorded, it was easier to make sense of the component parts.

In constructing this biography, as researcher I could use the material selectively to present a particular kind of narrative that I desired. Is this dissertation therefore reliable and valid? While qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, is interpretive and context-dependent, and inductive, it still has to convince readers that it is reliable and valid. While there are no objective means to do so, we can speak of credibility, transferability instead of external validity, dependability instead of reliability and conformability instead of objectivity

to show that the study is reliable and the findings valid (Guba and Lincoln, 2008: pp.274-275).

The next section discusses the methodology employed in this study to construct Mrs Firmstone's biography.

The use of oral history has long been a methodological tool for historians to collect data about the past of about an individual's life, including their health, family life, work experience, and political involvement (Thompson, 1988; Vansina, 1985; and Yow, 1994). From oral history, experience teaches us, we often learn less about the events themselves than their meaning to the interviewees concerned. The advantage is that we are able to portrayal of feelings, emotion, memory and identity of people, which formal documentary sources may fail to address. Another advantage, Haynes (2010: p. 5) states, is that while oral histories focus on individuals, they simultaneously expedite links "between social groups and roles, giving insights into the lives of many, because the narrator weaves their story with those of significant others, such as, in this case, children, parents, husbands and partners, employers and colleagues."

Hammond and Sikka (1996: p.91) point to what they regard as a shortcoming of this methodology. They believes that oral history only gives voice to well-known people and it does not give "voice to the people who have been excluded, oppressed and exploited in the onward march of the institutions of accountancy." While biographical approaches are becoming more common as researchers become acquainted with the rich data that such methods reveal, there is still a suggestion that certain participants are remain 'voiceless' (Hammond, 2002; Kim, 2004; McNicholas, Humphries and Gallhofer, 2004).

This is why oral history has enormous potential in uncovering the experiences of under classes, such as women. According to Haynes (2010) oral history allows women to voice their identities. Kyriacou (2000) acknowledged this in her choice of the oral history method to present insights into the lives of ethnic minority women. Ritchie (2002: p.128) believes that oral history can be “a form of advocacy for groups that have been marginalized, oppressed, or otherwise excluded from the historical narrative.”

But there are weaknesses with oral history. The fallibility of memory shapes the central critique of oral histories, based upon the inclination for participants to overstate, misremember and to recollect past events with any certainty is questioned (Batty, 2009). In other words Batty (2009) is stating that the lived experience is said to be infected by the influential effects of culture and other societal influences over time, as a result making memory more obscure. Whilst these factors do not stop important data from being collected which, though specific, maintains its value when capturing the perceptions and insights into historical events and life experiences.

The open and unstructured conversational approach with oral history, coupled with familiar interview surroundings, create a comfortable environment and generate a plethora of data. On the other hand, when drawing on this experience, there “does not appear to be any clear evidence that intimate interview relationships are significantly different to more formal interview situations” (Batty, 2009: p. 118). It should always be kept in mind that there will be an unknown element in oral histories due to the “conscious or subconscious decisions” taken by the interviewee “during the interview process and how this has affected the data” (Batty, 2009: p. 118).

Batty (2009) believes that the quality of data obtained from oral histories depends on the chosen research techniques. Therefore, it is in line with Perks and Thompson (1998) who suggest the interview techniques, and more significantly, the strength and capabilities of the interviewer, play an influential role in data collection. This study showed the preparation is key. It helped to do background research and have a reasonable idea of the history of Mrs Firmstone, mission schooling, and the Little Flower School in particular. Knowledge of the micro and macro context was important in allowing me to probe certain aspects related to Mrs Firmstone's testimony. The process was facilitated by the fact that Mrs Firmstone was aware of the reasons for the interview and was agreeable to participate. Empathy was critical. While this study was seeking responses to specific issues and questions, accommodation had to be made for digressions to allow Mrs Firmstone the opportunity to state other issues on her mind. This was not wasted as it allowed for a more complete picture to emerge of her life.

2.5 Research methodology and methods

This research was conducted in the interpretivist paradigm in order to understand how Mrs Firmstone makes sense of her life and of the context in which she has lived and worked. Through this interpretivist paradigm I was able to make Mrs Firmstone's experiences speak for themselves. As Wagner-Martin has argued, biographies should not assume that women's` lives can be explained in terms of their roles as wives or mothers, but rather seek to tell women's` life stories from their own perspectives (Wagner-Martin, 1994: p.25).

The first of my three interviews with Mrs Firmstone was exploratory where she spoke mostly about her life. This interview was open-ended and Mrs Firmstone was allowed to speak generally about her life. This interview was unstructured in the sense that I did not confine

her discussion to specific questions and issues. I listened intensely and earnestly and did occasionally ask questions for clarification or to get a better understanding of certain issues.

According to Goodson (2008: p.5) “the best life history interviews are often those with the least interviewer questions in them. Too often, a question leads back to the interviewer and away from the life storyteller’s concerns”. I found a lot of merit in what Goodson states. The prompting and probing of Mrs Firmstone’s story as it unfolded, provided better answers than those given to specific questions. The open-ended interviews allowed her to say what she deemed important as opposed to simply responding to specific questions.

Once the initial interview with Mrs Firmstone was transcribed by me and after the first analysis, the subsequent interviews were cognisant of issues and topics that needed further elaboration and detail.

The interviews were conducted with Mrs Firmstone at the Senior Citizen’s Home in Pietermaritzburg where she currently resides. Mrs Firmstone has her own room at the home, where she is able to keep many of her personal items. She has her own laptop with internet connection and a cordless telephone. I organised the interviews personally with Mrs Firmstone rather than through an intermediary and the interviews were held at her convenience, which was always late morning at around 10 am – 11 am.

Subsequent telephone calls were conducted with Mrs Firmstone when I was unclear on certain issues that arose while I was transcribing the interviews or constructing her narrative. She was very obliging and said that I could call at any time. However, I always called at a time that I knew would be convenient to her. This facilitated smooth communication. The

staff at the Senior Citizen`s Home are aware of Mrs Firmstone`s stature within the Roman Catholic community and more generally among alumni of the Little Flower School, and were always accommodating to the me and the many others who visit her on a regular basis.

The transition of this study from a life story to a life history was achieved through triangulation comprising of the life story in the form of interviews, the few available documentary records, and the testimonies of others. These other sources provided the means to place Mrs Firmstone`s story in the relevant time period, context and social location so that, as Goodson tells us, her story did not fall into “the traps of individualization, scripting and de-contextualisation” (Goodson, 2013: pp.36-40). With my intervention and interpretation, Mrs Firmstone`s life story evolved into her biography.

The interview process began with Mrs Firmstone as she is the primary source of information and subject of this study. It then moved onto other subjects such as Mrs Firmstone`s children, Eileen and Peter, and three past students. They added value to this study through their recollections and anecdotes. Although Mrs Firmstone was 88 years of age at the time of the interviews her memory was relatively sound and she was able to recollect most aspects of her life, even though there remain gaps.

A short biography of Mark Fynn, Wilfred Napier and Leslie Sharpley, who were also interviewed, will be given so that background knowledge on them and their relationship with Mrs Firmstone and the Little Flower School can be presented. Mark Stanley Fynn grew up in Merewent in the township of Wentworth, Durban where he attended the local schools. He was transferred to Little Flower School in Ixopo in 1978 to start grade eight. He matriculated in 1982. Fynn was sent to Little Flower School as it was the hope that he would follow in the

footsteps of his Father, Alan O. Fynn and correspondingly because of the good educational reputation that the school had. Mark Fynn has ties to the Little Flower School as his great-grandmother, Constance Thomlinson taught at the school in her youth. Fynn is currently self-employed.

Wilfred Fox Napier is from Matatiele in the Eastern Cape. He attended the local school in Matatiele up to grade seven and from 1955 attended the Little Flower School from where he matriculated in 1959. He described his time at Little Flower School as “lovely years”. He holds that it was best available school in the region at the time. His elder sisters were sent to the Sacred Heart School in Flagstaff in the Eastern Cape but it did not accept boys in high school. The Little Flower School was a boarding school which offered matric for boys and had a Catholic ethos. Currently Wilfred Napier is a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church and is Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church Dioceses of Durban.

Leslie Sharpley enrolled at the Little Flower School in grade nine and attended from 1956 to 1961. Sharpley was residing in Newcastle with his mother where he attended a local school until grade eight. There was no secondary school in Newcastle and his mother decided that the Little Flower School was best for him as it was a boarding school and had a Catholic ethos, which was “the best place to get educated and disciplined”. He had to take a train from Newcastle to Pietermaritzburg and from there a bus to the Little Flower School. After he had completed his schooling at Little Flower he gave back in service to the school for two years. Currently Leslie Sharpley is retired and resides in Australia.

In addition to oral history, this study also examined archival and secondary records, which were primarily used to construct her family history and chart the evolution of education in

KwaZulu-Natal, particularly Coloured education, and more specifically the history of the Little Flower School. Once the names of Mrs Firmstone`s maternal and paternal parents were confirmed, a search was made at the Natal Archives Repository in Pietermaritzburg for documents on the family. Of special interest were the estates papers (MSCE collection) which contained valuable information on her family. The records of the Catholic Archdiocese of Little Flower School were also consulted but not much was gained from these sources. When examining the sources of the Little Flower School it was found that most historical records had been disposed of by previous principals.

Secondary works by Professor Joy Brain were consulted for an overview of the history of Catholics and Catholicism in KwaZulu-Natal while works such as the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) were used for tracking developments in education in the province more generally. Two excellent secondary studies on education were those by Simon Haw and C.M. Booysen (1949). Booysen, who was head of the Natal Provincial Education Department, edited a short history of education in the province to mark the centenary of the building of the first in the province in 1849. Johannesburg-born Haw completed his BA (Hons) and B.Ed degrees from the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg and taught History at various high schools before being appointed as educational researcher in the Natal Education Department in 1990. It was in this capacity that he published a history of the Natal Education Department in 1993. Both works were informative and very helpful. The archival research was conducted after the interviews.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the theoretical literature around life history and biography methodologies and presented the methodology employed in this study. Life history and

biography methods of data collection are important to recover the experiences and voices of marginalized groups such as women (Caine, 2010).

The material accumulated for Mrs Firmstone's life history, mainly through interviews, is used to document her biography. Such reconstructions are important for including women in history works because in the past, it was 'big people', who are mostly men, whose stories were recorded and this tended to be about 'hero-worshipping' (Samuel, 2014).

A biography, some believe, is an artificial construct, given that it unavoidably involves selection and shaping (Lee, 2009). This thesis contends that it is an important and powerful historical tool in writing history, and if done properly, will stand the test of reliability and validity.

CHAPTER 3

Growing up in Ixopo: Family, Childhood and Household

3.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the family lineage of Mrs Firmstone. This is done chronologically and focuses on how the Du Preez family came to settle in Ixopo, what her parents did for a living and who her siblings were. Special focus is placed on Mrs Firmstone's memories of her childhood, family and household. All of this is discussed against the broader context of the colonisation of Natal, the history of Ixopo and in particular, the role that the Roman Catholic Church played in that town.

Central to this story is race. The land that became South Africa (made up of Natal, the Cape, Transvaal and the Orange Free State before 1910) has a long history of seeking to categorise people according to race (James, n.d.). It differs from most other colonised countries as well as countries like the United States and Australia in one important aspect. As James (n.d.) points out, whereas once the former African colonial regions became independent from the 1950s and the racial noose was loosened in places like the United States, South Africa took the opposite path in that racial segregation in the form of apartheid which achieved international notoriety was imposed more stringently.

3.2 Colonisation of Natal

This section examines white colonisation of KwaZulu-Natal, Mrs Firmstone's family history, with particular focus on race, and especially the making of Coloured¹ identity. English settlers had established an unofficial trading station at Port Natal from 1824. Around 5 000

¹ This is a peculiarly South African term to refer to people of mixed-“race” ancestry.

Boers, unhappy with British rule, migrated northwards from the Cape and arrived in Natal in 1838. The region was under populated during this period as a result of the Zulu wars and most of the Boers acquired extensive land. The indigenous Zulu began returning to Natal after Dingane's defeat in 1838 and numbered 50 000 by 1843. The Boers found it difficult to exert control over Zululand and labour in Natal (Bundy, 1979).

The British, meanwhile, fearing that the Boers would seek the protection of a foreign power, annexed Natal in 1843 (Welsh, 1971). This resulted in the Boers leaving Natal (Bundy, 1979). British settlers began arriving in Natal and the settler population rose from 8 000 in 1857 to 17 821 in 1869 (Thomas, 1952). In addition, the shortage of cheap labour to work on the colony's sugar plantations resulted in the importation of Indian indentured labour. Between 1860 and 1911, 152 641 indentured workers arrived in Natal (Desai and Vahed, 2010). Africans had access to land and were not prepared to work for settlers. Some lived on locations established by colonial officials (the "Shepstone System"), others on Protestant missions and others rented land from the government as well as land speculators (Guest and Sellers, 1985; Atkins, 1986; Marks, 1990).

The British granted Natal self-government in 1893 as they wanted to reduce their financial commitments in Southern Africa. The new Natal constitution did not have protection for Africans, Coloureds and Indians and the government began to institute policies that were racially based (Swanson, 1983: p.421). The policies aimed to force Indians to re-indenture or to return to India upon completing their indenture and to confine Africans to locations (Swanson, 1983).

3.3 Family lineage

Mrs Firmstone was born Elizabeth Georgiana Du Preez on the family farm `Wolseley` on 15 December 1926 to Flora Dimock and Daniel Joshua Du Preez. Her mother, Flora, was born on 17 August 1904 in Newcastle in Northern Natal. She lived to the ripe old age of 88 and died on 27 January 1992. Mrs Firmstone's father Daniel was born on 20 May 1886 in Hubonog in the Cape. He died on 5 April 1958 and was buried on Easter Sunday, which the family, as devout Roman Catholics, saw as a good sign spiritually. The eighteen-year age difference between her parents, Mrs Firmstone noted, was not unusual in those times. Mrs Firmstone's mother was in her fifties when her husband passed on and she dedicated herself to her family and work for the rest of her life.

Mrs Firmstone's maternal grandfather was George Dimock who was born in 1878 in Britain and immigrated to South Africa to take up dairy farming in the Newcastle district. He bred three types of cattle, Friesland, Jerseys and Ayrshire. She remembers George Dimock as a big strong man. She has no recollection of her maternal grandmother, who she believes must have died at a very young age because she knows that her mother was taken to Mariannahill when she was a little girl, by her grandfather, and that is where her mother grew up. The Mariannahill Monastery was established in 1882 and in 1885 the first convent for the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood was opened (Ulwazi, n.d.).

While George Dimock was classified white in South Africa's system of racial categorisation, his wife was Coloured, which made the Dimock children and their children Coloured. The St Francis College Mariannahill Girl's Hostel established in 1885, where Mrs Firmstone's mother was schooled, was an establishment of St Anne's School for girls by Abbot Francis Pfanner. Abbot Pfanner's ambition was to train and educate girls to become proper Christian mothers.

Pfanner said: “I wish to have African girls educated” and it was for this purpose that the Founder of Mariannhill called into being the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood (The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, 2014).

When asked if she heard any stories about her maternal grandmother, Mrs Firmstone replied “No, I didn’t and you know we were stupid, we never asked because they left Newcastle and came to Ixopo and so they all left and we never asked”. Mrs Firmstone added that in the era when she grew up, children asked few questions of their elders, including their parents, as these issues were considered ‘adult’s business’. It was taken that old people died and took their secrets to the grave. George Dimock died in Dundee, Natal, in 1947.

It is also important to note the complexity of race in South Africa’s history. Coloureds who had white relatives were often disowned by these white relatives who preferred not to associate with them and in general had little to do with them (Mokae, 2004; Anderson, 2009). While whites avoided talking about their Coloured relatives out of embarrassment, some Coloureds likewise, from my own experience did not acknowledge their extended white families as they were resentful for being disowned by their white families. Further, there is also another side of the story, where Coloureds also disowned their Black ancestry and the irony is that they did so because they were embarrassed to acknowledge their Black lineage. Many preferred not to mention these relatives (Mokae, 2004; Anderson, 2009).

Mrs Firmstone’s paternal grandparents were of French origin. Her great-grandparents were born in France while her grandparents, Hercules Du Preez and Gertrude Viljoën, were born in South Africa. Their dates of birth are unknown to her and she has no documentation available. Mrs Firmstone has neither memories of them nor knowledge of what they did.

This was because Mr. Du Preez (Mrs Firmstone's father) married a Catholic woman (Flora Dimock) and his family believed that he was marrying the very people who had persecuted them. It is for this reason that Mr Du Preez was disowned and banished by his family.

All that Mrs Firmstone knew about her paternal grandparents was that they were French Huguenots and Protestants and because France was a Catholic country, the French Protestants were persecuted. To avoid persecution, they fled to Holland and then her grandfather and others were sent by the Holland authorities to the Cape in 1688.

The Huguenots were French Protestants who, as a result of persecution, were forced to flee to other countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Bosher, 1995).² According to Mrs Firmstone she was a teenager when her grandparents died. She is not sure of the exact year as there was no contact with the family and her family heard of their deaths through another Du Preez family member. Her parents' relationship with their parents (her grandparents) had been severed because of the marriage.

In reconstructing Mrs Firmstone's genealogy, I relied mostly on her recollections as she has documentation such as passports, identity documents, and birth, death and marriage certificates. An attempt was made to search for some of these names on the website of the National Archives, such as the Master of the Supreme Court Estates (MSCE) records, but I was unable to locate the individuals mentioned by Mrs Firmstone.

² The "Hugues hypothesis" argues that the name was derived by association with Hugues Capet, king of France, who reigned long before the Reformation. He was regarded by the Gallicans and Protestants as a noble man who respected people's dignity and lives. Gray (1983) suggests that the name *huguenote* would be roughly equivalent to *little Hugos*, or *those who want Hugo* (Gray, 1983).

We note that part of Mrs Firmstone's ancestry included some people who would be categorised as "White" by the apartheid government after 1948. But because of the Black and Coloured ancestry in her family, Mrs Firmstone was officially categorised as Coloured. This was a complex categorisation for most Coloureds. As Mrs Firmstone and others noted, being Coloured meant having to choose between the Black and White sides of the family, which in effect meant having to deny one side of one's ancestry. Coloured resulted from miscegenation between two "pure" races, European and African (Erasmus, 2001). Race is a complex and fluid category and Coloured included a mix of various other races such as Europeans, Africans, Khoisan, and descendants of slaves, amongst others.

3.4 Childhood and family activities

Daniel and Flora Du Preez had nine children. Ester was the eldest, then came Elizabeth (who was called Betty "because we were too many Elizabeth's in Little Flower School" then came Daniel, George, Florence, Peter, Hugo, Guy and Blanche. In the words of Mrs Firmstone "in those days we had giant families". Mrs Firmstone describes her eldest sister, Ester, as a woman "with long hair and just a cowboy".

Mrs Firmstone was born in Etterby, Natal, but her family moved, when she was a baby, to the farm Wolseley in Ixopo, Natal, which was about seven kilometres away. She described her house as "a big rambling farm house, a brick house, with a big veranda and a lovely garden all round and we roamed everywhere". Food brings pleasant memories to her. The family ate mainly freshly grown products. "My mother was a very great cook", Mrs Firmstone said of her mother. Most mornings started with porridge and milk for breakfast, but Sunday mornings were a treat of bacon and eggs, with a later afternoon Sunday lunch a tradition in the Du Preez household. Meat was an occasional treat and it was mostly venison. With a

delightful look on her face, she continued, “And in the evening we always had soup and freshly baked bread”. Mrs Du Preez made fresh bread three times a week; therefore whenever she baked bread they would have fresh bread and soup.

Clothes were sewn at home from Tobralco³ or Fuji⁴ cotton. Mrs Firmstone’s mother was a woman of many talents. Not only was she a great cook, but she was also a great seamstress who sewed the girls’ clothes and also did sewing for other people. The garments that she sewed were “beautiful, they kept up with the fashion”. Flora Dimock had learnt to sew at the Mariannahill Convent, where she had also learnt to cook and bake and in general was equipped with the requisite skills to run a household. She describes her leisure time activities as similar to most children of her generation. She said, “We played things called three tins⁵, hop scotch⁶ and rounders⁷.... we used to ride horses, that was not playing... oh wait and we used to play five stones”⁸. The shy giggle and smile with which Mrs Firmstone recalled these games suggested that these recollections clearly brought back happy memories.

The Du Preez family celebrated religious feasts such as Easter and Christmas. They went to church on those special occasions. They also attended church every Sunday. They went by

³ Tobralco was a type of cotton fabric.

⁴ Cotton Fuji is a type of cotton fabric.

⁵ According to Mrs Firmstone three tins was played with two teams, up to six people on each team. They placed three tins (usually baked beans tins as soft drinks were not yet popular), on top of each other. One player would throw a tennis ball from a certain distance in an attempt to hit the tins down. Once the tins fall the players run whilst team member stacks the tins. The other team members attempt to strike you with the tennis ball. You are out if you are struck with the ball. You keep playing until all your team is hit out.

⁶ Mrs Firmstone and her siblings played hop scotch very much as it is played today. This is a game in which each person by turn hops into and over squares marked on the ground to retrieve a marker thrown into one of these squares.

⁷ Rounders is a game similar to baseball.

⁸ Five stones is played by two or more players, using five small stones. The object is to complete a set of eight steps.

horse and wagon to church, which was less than three kilometres away from their home. One of the main days of the calendar year in the Du Preez family home was New Year's day. Mrs Firmstone recalls having a feast at their home on New Year's Day which her father called 'Nuwe Jaarsdag' because Mr Du Preez spoke Afrikaans. "My father's great friends Joe and Katharine Tomlinson and their two children, Connie and Robert, would spend the whole day with us". The Du Preez family had a great relationship with the Tomlinson family and spent every New Year's Day together.

Mrs Firmstone also remembers the family weddings and these are etched in her mind because they were an occasion to gather the family together and have some fun. Weddings were simple, but in her opinion, a lot more enjoyable than the formal affairs that now take place. She remembers her sister's wedding as a very simple wedding, with just a big dinner and a wedding cake. Her own wedding, she says, was a joke. "I got married at school and all the children were the guests. My family cooked food and everyone ate and danced in the evening with the nuns, the priest and the boarder girls and boys". Mrs Firmstone's marriage is discussed later in chapter seven.

In the Du Preez household Flora and Daniel Du Preez were in charge of discipline. They were strict about discipline and all the children, including the boys, were well-behaved. But occasionally they did get into trouble. Mrs Firmstone, a young girl herself, was no stranger to getting into trouble. She said:

I got into trouble sometimes because I refused to ... he [father] wanted us all to ride horses and I couldn't ride well, I didn't like to ride and he

wanted us all to learn to shoot, it was in the early farming days, not to shoot people but to shoot buck and to shoot wild duck and so on.

Mrs Firmstone did not enjoy horse riding or shooting. She believes this was because she was not good at either, while all her siblings were competent at both sports. Mrs Firmstone complained that when she put the butt of the gun against her shoulder it hurt, but recalls that her father insisted that they all learn to shoot to survive the farm life. He explained that they might be required to go to war someday and he also regarded the ability to ride horses and shoot as essential for farming communities. Daniel Du Preez was adamant that if the children learnt to shoot they would never go hungry. The parents expected every girl and not the boys to learn to cook. Mrs Firmstone learnt to cook from the age of six. Being so young, she explained how she would put the chair near the big black coal stove and asked her mother how much salt to put into the potatoes and how to stew meat when cooking. There was a patriarchal household and boys were not expected to learn to cook.

Daniel and Flora Du Preez brought up their children to be neat and tidy at all times, to be well mannered and to be good Christians. According to Mrs Firmstone:

We had to be very tidy, our bedrooms had to be neat, we had to dress tidily, we had to have very good table manners, we always prayed before meals and prayed after meals and on Sunday after lunch we sat and listened to father reading a chapter of the bible to us. Father set clear boundaries for what could be done. We could go down to the garden and to the river but we were not allowed to go further, and we could go to the forest but not beyond the forest. We had definite boundaries. We could visit Mr and Mrs Tomlinson but we hadn't to go anywhere else.

From the way in which Mrs Firmstone related this aspect of her life, it was clear that she did not view the way her parents disciplined her and her siblings as a negative experience. On the contrary, she made it clear that developing good habits of self-discipline came from her parents' expectations and the boundaries that they set. They always explained why these boundaries were set, so her and her siblings were better prepared to cope with the problems, stresses and challenges in life.

Mrs Firmstone came from a family of eight children, all of whom worked, with the exception of her eldest sister. Mrs Firmstone's eldest sister Ester was married at the age of 16 and she was a very good housewife. Mrs Firmstone became a teacher, Daniel was a boilermaker, George and Hugo were builders, Florence worked as a secretary and her youngest sister, Blanche, taught for a few years and later became a driving instructor.

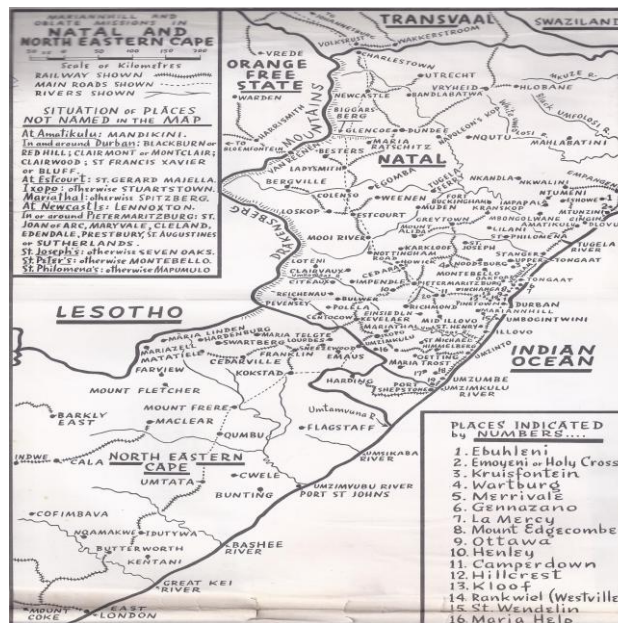
3.5 How the family settled in Ixopo

This was a war in which South Africans of diverse racial backgrounds were called to serve. After the war however, some white soldiers were given a reward in the form of land by the government; a privilege not extended to non-White soldiers (Indian, African and Coloured). According to Saunders (1989) and Mohlamme (1995) around 83 000 Africans and 2 000 Coloured men served in the army. Mohlamme (1995) states that the Cape Corps (Coloureds) were sent to fight in East Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Northern Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa while the Africans did not serve as soldiers, but as civilian batmen⁹ and as labourers in German South West and East Africa. These soldiers did not receive medals for their service in the war. What they did receive was a cash allowance of two pounds, a khaki suit

⁹ In the British armed forces, a soldier who is an officer's personal servant (Grearson and Higgleton, 1996).

that was worth two pounds and a gratuity, rendering the length of service which the government considered to be sufficient. Those who had secured employment had received a bicycle (Mohlamme, 1995).

Map of Mariannahill and the Oblate missions, Natal and North Eastern Cape. Source: Brain, 1982, supplementary



According to Mrs Firmstone, one of these returning soldiers was her father's good friend, Captain Ryan who was given a farm in the Ixopo Division. Captain Ryan did not enjoy farming as he was a military man and Mrs Firmstone recalls that the Captain moved back to Westville just outside Durban where his family lived. Her father trekked with 5 000 sheep and other livestock from Newcastle to Ixopo on foot. He initially managed the farm for Captain Ryan. Mrs Firmstone's mother later followed her husband by train to Ixopo. Captain Ryan eventually sold the farm and the Du Preez family moved to Etterby, a halt (a place for people to stop) along the narrow gauge railway, about six to seven kilometres eastwards from

Ixopo, in the direction of Umzinto. It was a place where farmers would load milk from the cows and other goods that they needed.

After Ryan sold the farm, Mr Du Preez was then given employment by James Foster at Stayton Farm, not far from their new farm Wolseley. He did not give up farming but looked after Wolseley farm and worked for an income. Wolseley farm belonged to Ray T. Foster who inherited it from his father James Foster. This is the period roughly between 1930 and 1940. Mr Du Preez was glad to have work as he was disinherited from his family for marrying a Catholic woman. Mrs Firmstone recalls how her father used to wake up at three o'clock each morning and ride by horseback to work. He had many duties on Stayton Farm but the one that Mrs Firmstone recalls is that her father had to weigh each cow's milk and see how much butter fat they have got. Her father, she says, had a great knowledge of cattle. As children, they did not like the long hours that their father worked because they hardly saw him.

3.6 A history of Ixopo

3.6.1 Ixopo or Stuart's Town

Ixopo, the place where Mrs Firmstone grew up, is a small KwaZulu-Natal town about 80 kilometres south of Pietermaritzburg and 145 kilometres from Durban. The town is set in the exquisite Natal Midlands countryside which lies on a tributary of the Mkhomazi River in the midlands and forms part of an important sugar farming and forestry area. The village of Ixopo was originally named Stuart's Town after Martinus Stuart, who was the magistrate of Ixopo from January 1878 to January 1881, and later was an interpreter during the Boer War. The Zulu name of Ixopo was used by everyone and in time the name Stuart's Town was

dropped (Francis, C.O., 1929; Ixopo and district Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976; Woodley, 1984).

Ixopo and its surrounding area are most famous for its setting for Alan Paton's novel *Cry the Beloved Country*. "There is a lovely road which runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling and they are lovely beyond any singing of it" (Paton, 2002: p. 2). Many residents and former residents, including Mrs Firmstone, feel that Paton's description did justice to the beauty of Ixopo. In 1945 a film was made based on the book, the setting being in and around Ixopo and the Carisbrooke siding on the Umzimkulu road (Woodley, 1984).

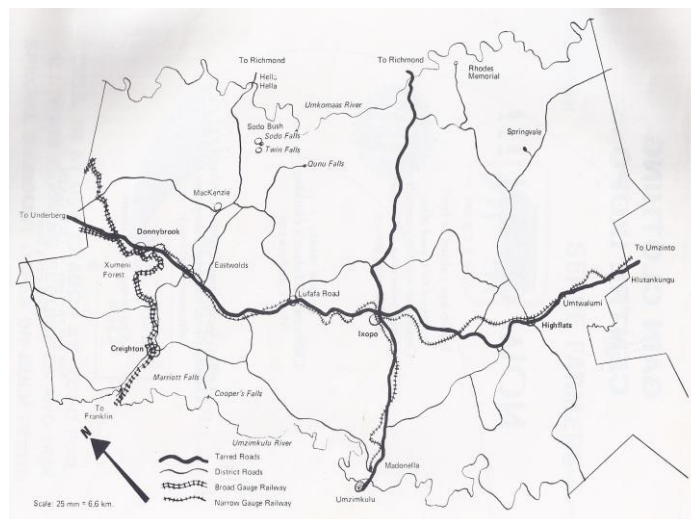
There is little dispute over the origins of the name 'Ixopo' but there is some contestation around its spelling, Mrs Firmstone pointed out. My research, following this comment, uncovered this contestation. In 1929, G.E. Francis a resident of Ixopo since 1886, wrote in his book in 1929 that the name Ixopo, or as it should be spelt in the isiZulu vernacular Ixobo, was the name given by the local people to a stream or river 'which rises upon Mr. MacFarlane's farm and traverses through the farms Landsdown and Ellerton, onto where it joins the Indhlamvini on Oaks farm, thence to Umkomaas' (Francis, C.O., 1929: p.1)

According to Woodley (1984) the name Ixopo should be pronounced with the isiZulu X as eXobho, which sounds like the noise made by cattle as they lift their hooves out of the mud. Ixopo (i-co-bho) is the Zulu name originally given to the stream that flows past the northern edge of the village, and was derived from the sucking noise that is made by the hooves of cattle being withdrawn from the mud, as they were driven through the marshy area in close proximity to the village (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). What is

common to hear is that the name Ixopo comes from the sucking noise made by cattle as they lift their hooves when driven through the nearby marshy or swampy Ixopo River, as Mrs. Firmstone pointed out.

When the Colony of Natal was divided into wards by a Government Proclamation dated 23 May 1874, Ixopo was included in Ward 5 of the County of Pietermaritzburg. By proclamation later that year, Ixopo was part of the newly created magisterial division of Upper Umkomaas. In 1876 Ixopo was separated from Upper Umkomaas and became a magisterial district, but was only proclaimed when government had gazetted it in 1898¹⁰ (Francis, C.O., 1929; Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976; Woodley, 1984).

Map showing Ixopo and surrounding areas, Ixopo and District, Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976, p. 47



¹⁰ The land that would later constitute the town of Ixopo was surveyed and planned by G. Williams in 1878. Its boundaries were defined by Saint Faith's (in the Southeast), Donnybrook (in the Northwest), Umkomaas (in the North) extending to Alexandra Country (Umzinto) in the East, passed Highflats, the Umgwaga and Umzinkulu rivers (in the South); the Polela Division (to the West). There have been changes to the boundaries in subsequent decades.

3.6.2 Geographical description

Ixopo, on the northern side, is bound by the Umkomaas River and the southern boundary by the UMzimkhulu River, and together with these two rivers the Inhlavini, Umtwalumi, Lufafa, Ixopo, Ngudwini and Inkonza rivers are responsible for draining most of the district of over 780 000 acres (or 325, 000 ha).

Ixopo's altitude varies greatly from about 400 metres to about 1800 metres above sea level. There is a western and central undulating plateau, which drops sharply onto the valleys particularly the Umkomaas and UMzimkhulu (Francis, C.O., 1929; Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976).

Primarily because of these varying altitudes, both the rainfall and temperatures are affected. The average rainfall is about 550 millimetres (mm) up to 1250m and with this there is a variety of vegetation (Francis, C.O., 1929; Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). The higher areas of Ixopo experience warm summers and mild winters, with occasional heavy frost and light snow fall, whereas the lower lying areas of Ixopo can become very hot in the summer season, but still experience some heavy frost in winter.

August and September are the exceptional months in that the area is very windy but there is very little wind the rest of the year. During summer and spring heavy mists occur that can last for four or five days at a stretch. According to Powell (1960), in his book *Hancock's Drift. The story of the Great Wagon Road*, Ixopo is explained as an area with frequent mist as they could not trek at night to avoid the heat of the day. There are thunderstorms and occasional hail storms. Ixopo is by and large fertile and has plenty water coming from a number of small rivers, streams and springs mostly in the higher areas.

3.6.3 The setting: Landsdowne and Ellerton Farms

It was around 1850 that several Dutch families settled in the Ixopo area but they came into conflict with the Khoisan and Amabaca from the Drakensberg and East Griqualand respectively, and moved out of the area. Ixopo is mostly a farming region and farms were granted to white settlers from the earliest period (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976).

Originally Stuart`s Town was a sub-division of two farms, Landsdowne and Ellerton. By means of a grant, Captain C.G. Helps obtained Landsdowne and Dr G.G. Helps was granted Ellerton in 1860. In subsequent years both farms were bought by Mrs John Grant and transferred into her name in 1874 with the Landsdowne homestead being converted into a hotel. The plots that constitute Stuarts Town were auctioned outside the Landsdowne Hotel in 1878 (Francis, C.O., 1929; Woodley, 1984).

Some of the original 1820 English settlers settled in Ixopo. The Hancock brothers, Joseph and Thomas, for example, settled near Umzimkulu in 1855 and established a farm called Cromwell, which they named after the great English churchman and leader (Powell, 1960). The following quotes from Hancock`s Drift give us a glimpse into what the conditions and challenges were during the formative decades of settlement:

“Native Wars and rebellion were to become part of our life upon the frontier. We lived in a state of preparedness, and our guns were kept near to hand by day and night. We had so long been accustomed to them, that they were part of our equipped (equipment), and although we were men of peace, we would have felt ourselves at a loss without them. Game abounded

the region, and jackals and lions remained to harass the sheep and cattle”
(Powell, 1960).

The Hancock brothers maintained a custom post in UMzimkhulu for many years until a new one was built in 1976 when the Transkei became independent.

There were some Africans and Coloureds living in the area. Shaka’s army had over-run the district but after his reign, Cekwana a local chief, allowed some his followers to settle in the area overlooking the Creighton Valley (Francis, C.O., 1929).

According to Woodley (1984) and the Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine (1976) the first white settlers were welcomed by the local people and while they traded with them, they did not want to work for them. The local people were mostly from the Baca tribe (part of the Nguni people). They were a people of mixed ancestry who lived on a border area of the Ixopo District (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). The indigenous people were the Cabas¹¹. The first White settlers were welcomed by the local people but it is said that they could have faced some resistance from them as these settlers were foreign to them and wanted to take away their land (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). Therefore one cannot be absolutely sure if indeed the local people did welcome them.

¹¹ In 1873 the Regent Baca Chief that resided in East Griqualand, which was known then as no man’s land, when a dispute arose over the chieftainship. Two brothers where claiming to be chief, Ciqicile was favoured by the Regent Chief while the other brother was favoured by Adam Kok’s Government of East Griqualand. Ciqicile escaped with part of his tribe into the Ixopo Division by crossing over the Umzimkulu River. Word was sent to Field Cornet Thomas Hancock by Adam Kok to put a stop to the Bacas from crossing the river; however Hancock without delay raised a company of the local black people and helped out Ciqicile and his tribe cross over. Furthermore that is how the Baca tribe came to reside in the Ixopo Division (Ixopo and district Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976).

From 1857 a large number of White settlers began arriving in Ixopo, mostly from the Natal side. Land grants were made to White settlers only, to the detriment of the indigenous people. Francis, C.O. (1929) and the Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine (1976: p. 3) make reference to the Coloured community as “a very highly respected group of people” who can trace their ancestry to some of the White settlers and few of whom own portions or subdivisions of the original farms granted to their forefathers. This view portrays Coloureds as owning land due to their European ancestry.

When the magisterial division of upper Umkomaas was created in 1874, Ixopo was included in that division. In March 1876 it became a magisterial division of its own (Francis, C.O., 1929). The first magistrate of Ixopo was H.C. Campbell who was appointed in March 1876. In January 1878, Martinus Stuart was appointed as magistrate of the Ixopo division and he opened a branch court at Highflats in April 1880 (Francis, C.O., 1929). The town’s first hotel, called the Off Saddle Hotel, was opened by the Gold Brothers in 1878.

The only means of communication in Ixopo was snail mail and telegraphs which were introduced in 1881, connecting Natal with the Cape (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). In February 1911, the trunk telephone line¹² reached Ixopo and in January 1914 twenty-five private boxes were installed in peoples` homes. In Mrs Firmstone’s house they had what she described as a `primitive telephone`. For the phone to work, they had to turn the wheel to connect to the telephone exchange which then connected them with the number that they required.

¹² According to the Hornby (2010, p.1601) a trunk call is a telephone call to a place that is a long distance away but in the same country.

Electricity was first supplied to Ixopo by a diesel plant operation in the village. In 1946 the contract with a company whose directors included the Campbell Brothers expired, and Anderson and Massey were contracted to supply hydro-electric power from Glen Bain farm on a 24-hour basis. The Glen Bain Hydro Electric Power Company Pty Ltd. built a high tension line that stretched 11 miles (Francis, C.O., 1929). According to Mrs Firmstone when she was growing up they had water turbines, paraffin lamps and they used wax candles.

The architecture of Ixopo at the time of Mrs Firmstone growing up, was mainly of the Victorian period and of a rather heavy Germanic style introduced by the Trappist missionaries who had come to the area (Francis, C.O., 1929). Mrs Firmstone lived in a brick farm house which, as already stated, she described as “a big rambling farm house, a brick house, with a big veranda and a lovely garden all round and we roamed everywhere”.

The town was not immune to developments elsewhere in the colony. The prison in Ixopo, completed in 1900, was used as a fort in 1906 during the Bambatha Rebellion when most residents formed a laager, using a group of wagons that were put into a circle protect them (Hornby, 2010: p. 829). A number of local chiefdoms were implicated in the uprising over the 'Poll Tax' under Chief Bambatha kaMancinza, head of the Zondi, a Zulu clan that lived in the Mpanza Valley in the Greytown district, and culminated in a pitched battle against the colonial forces at Mome Gorge, where Bambatha and his followers were finally defeated (Redding, 2000). In general terms, the rebellion was a response to the harsh policies that the Zulu population was subjected to by the colonial administration in Natal.¹³ Mrs Firmstone

¹³ In the year of 1895 the Rinderpest epidemic precipitated a major economic crisis for black peasant agriculture in Natal, and in the Ixopo Division. With 80 to 90 percent of their cattle dead a lot of the Africans who depended on transport riding for their livelihood became destitute almost overnight and had to seek out employment in the nearby towns and mines (Ixopo and district Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976 and Ballard,

was not yet born, but pointed out that the effects of the rebellion lingered for decades and her parents' generation would sometimes mention it.

A variety of disasters struck Ixopo over the years. Rinderpest¹⁴ swept through the district, in 1895, killing thousands of livestock (Ballard, 1983). A tick-borne disease, called East Coast Fever, started in about 1906 and the dipping of cattle was introduced¹⁵ (Francis, C.O., 1929). In an attempt to try to contain the disease, government dipping inspectors were brought in, but the farmers saw the officials as a threat and this led to many confrontations between the two factions. Mrs Firmstone made the point that although her father specialised in cattle, as far as she knows, he was fortunate in that his stock was not decimated by any of these diseases.

3.7 The role of the church in Ixopo life

When the early settlers arrived in Ixopo, they brought with them their `home` beliefs and customs, especially Christianity. There were four main Christian denominations established in Ixopo, namely, the Wesleyan (Methodist), Anglican, Roman Catholic and the Ixopo

1983).The Mapumulo Division Magistrate had seriously noted that "there will be no oxen to plough with at the next planting season" (*Natal Blue Book, 1898*). Rinderpest had impoverished many hundreds of "black peasant tenants" (Ballard, 1983, p.13) who lived on the white owned farms throughout Natal and either drove them off the land or made them more indebted to their white landlords. According to the *Ibid.*, Annual Report of the Magistrate of Ixopo Division (1897) the Magistrate of the Ixopo Division had documented the plight of the rent-paying peasants by stating that "The losses of cattle from Rinderpest have been truly distressing . . . and I fancy the Europeans will find it necessary to reduce the high rents paid by many native tenants".

¹⁴ Rinderpest (also known as cattle plague), is an infectious disease that affects cattle especially. It is, caused by a paramyxovirus and characterized by fever, dysentery, and inflammation of the mucous membranes (*Reader's Digest, 1984: 1448*).

¹⁵ In trying to manage the disease, a double fence was put up on the border between Natal and the Cape Province, and extended from the Drakensberg to the coast. The corridors between the fences were patrolled by the Cape Mounted Rifles during the day and at night; there were only two or three points of entry which were strictly supervised. (Ixopo and district Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976)

Masonic Temple – from the earliest times (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976; Woodley, 1984). While this section briefly mentions other churches in the area, its main focus is the Roman Catholic Church of which Mrs Firmstone was a member.

The Wesleyan Church¹⁶ was the first church built in Ixopo and opened in 1879, with nine members. Each denomination represented in the district was given two acres (.81 ha) by Margaret Grant, when the plots were offered for sale at a public auction in 1878. The costs for the Wesleyan society were agreeable and paid by Joseph and Thomas Hancock of Cromwell and the Grange respectively (Woodley, 1984). According to Woodley (1984) when the church was being built, because of looming danger of a Zulu uprising after the battle of Isandlwana in 1879, the church was fortified to a degree.

The original Wesleyan Church, Woodley, 1984: 62



The Anglicans have¹⁷ St John the Baptist in Ixopo, which was built in 1883/4 in High Street, on land that was donated by Margaret Grant in 1878. The church was, at that stage of being built, under the charge of the Springvale Parish. Before the church was erected, the Reverend

¹⁶ Relating to (or characterising Methodism) in its original form or as it has been upheld by the branch of the Methodist Church known as the Wesleyan Methodists (Howe, 1967).

¹⁷ The Church of England and the churches in other nations that are in complete agreement with it as to doctrine and discipline and are in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is also called *Anglican Communion* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).

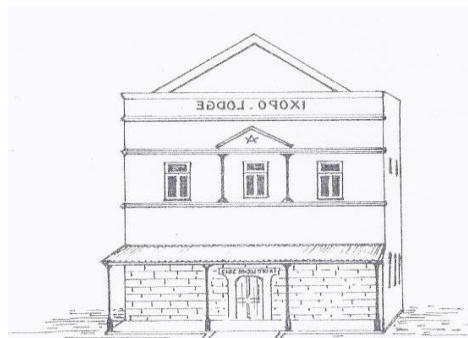
C.W. Greenstock from Springvale Mission, held services in front of the Landsdowne Hotel once a month (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976; Woodley, 1984).

The original Anglican Church, Woodley, 1984, p. 63



The Masonic Temple¹⁸ was constituted in 1894 (Woodley, 1984). In the beginning, members held meetings in the Agricultural Hall until their own lodge was erected in 1901/2 in Margaret Street. The Freemasons were a small group in the Ixopo Division and had a smaller influence than both the Wesleyans and Anglicans.

The original Masonic Temple, Woodley, 1984, p. 66



¹⁸ In Freemasonry, a Masonic Temple or Masonic Hall is the room or structure where a Masonic Lodge meets. Masonic Temple may also refer to an abstract spiritual goal and the conceptual ritualistic space of a meeting (Moore, 2006).

The Roman Catholic Church¹⁹ in Ixopo constitutes a little part of a larger body of this church that is active in and around Ixopo. Mariathal, the Catholic seminary for overseas priests, was established in 1887, which was the first of its kind in South Africa (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976; Woodley, 1984). Priests from overseas came to complete their studies and serve here. It is on the main road to Pietermaritzburg and has remained a mission centre for education and conferences. This mission that lies between Ixopo and Pietermaritzburg was used as a primary school for local children in the area (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976).

The church that stands in Ixopo was built of red brick in 1923 and the third to be built there. In Ixopo the Catholic Church as an organisation includes Little Flower School that was established in 1923, Christ the King Hospital which was established in 1937 and the Sacred Heart Sanatorium Home where the missionary sisters who served in the Ixopo district usually retire to the Sanatorium Home (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976; Woodley, 1984). This church, like all the other churches played an important role in the religious, social and economic lives of the Christian residents of Ixopo (Francis, C.O., 1929; and Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976; Woodley, 1984).

The original Roman Catholic Church, Woodley, 1984, p. 64



¹⁹ The Christian church characterized by an Episcopal hierarchy with the Pope as its head and belief in seven sacraments and the authority of tradition (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).

3.8 Coloureds and the “race” question in South African society

During colonial times, people in South Africa were grouped along the lines of appearance and ancestry around which boundaries were drawn to guard the class privilege and political rights of certain groups (James, n.d.). The most dominant group were the Whites who consist of two main groups, the Afrikaners who are descended from seventeenth century Dutch settlers in the Cape, and refugee French Huguenots, German Protestants and British settlers who began arriving from 1820 (McGhee and Charles, 1989; South Africa.info, 2012).

The largest and most oppressed group were the indigenous Khoisan who were based in the Cape and Africans who comprised of four major ethno-linguistic groups, namely, the Nguni (together with the Xhosa, Zulu, Swazi and Ndebele) who are concentrated east of the Drakensburg; the Sotho (as well as the Tswana, Pedi and Basotho) who live mostly in present-day Gauteng, Northern Cape and the former Orange Free State; and lastly the Venda and Tsonga people of the Northern Transvaal (KZN Coloureds - John Dunn Foundation, n.d.). The third grouping consisted of Asians (Indians and Chinese). A fourth racial group were the Coloureds.

In South Africa, the term Coloured refers to a person of mixed European (White) and African or Asian (Black) ancestry. Black included the indigenous Zulu, Xhosa, the Khoisan, and other indigenous groups, as well as the imported slaves from Madagascar, the Malayan archipelago, India and Sri Lanka, indentured Indians and Chinese migrants (Adhikari, 2005). According to Brown (2002: p.198) the term Coloured incorporates descendants from “Black-White, Black-Asian, White-Asian, and Black-Coloured unions”. Genetic studies show that Coloureds have the highest levels of mixed ancestry in the world (Schmid, 2009; Tishkoff, *et*

al., 2009) with the maternal (female) contribution to the Coloured population coming mainly from the Khoisan population (Schlebusch et al., 2009; Quintana-Murci et al., 2010).

Until the National Party (NP) government came to power in 1948, Coloured was a social category rather than a legal designation. Coloureds occupied an in-between status between White and Black which was a subjective and random classification based on family background and cultural practices as well as physical features (Dannhause, 2006). Many Coloureds, in fact, lived alongside Whites, were mainly Christians and spoke Afrikaans and English. They also interacted intimately with Whites and, in fact, there was much intermarriage between Whites and lighter-skinned Coloureds until the NP came into power.

The NP government's apartheid laws made Coloured into a legal category and introduced laws to restrict their economic, political and social rights. This included the intermarriage and sexual relations with other racial groups. The Population Registration Act of 1950²⁰ required each South African to be classified in accordance with their racial characteristics. Coloureds were further divided into several subgroups namely Cape Coloured, Malay, Griqua, and 'Other' Coloured.²¹

With reference specifically to Natal, approximately fifty Coloureds arrived from Mauritius in 1850 to work in the sugar industry. They were Westernised in culture and outlook (Rankin,

²⁰ This was the legislative cornerstone of racial classification during apartheid. This act divided the population into four main 'race' or population groups, namely 'white', 'coloured' and 'native' (Erasmus & Ellison, 2008).

²¹ "Cape Coloured" was a person of mixed ethnic descent resident in the Western Cape, speaking mainly Afrikaans and being Christian; Malay referred to Afrikaans-speaking Muslim Coloureds found mostly in the Western Cape; A Griqua was a member of a people of mixed European and Khoikhoi origin, living mainly in the Eastern and Western Cape; "Other Coloured" was a person of mixed descent who was not a Cape Coloured, Malay or Griqua.

1986: p.10). Another group of Coloureds arrived from St Helena a few years later and these migrants worked as domestics for Whites but were also westernised. Coloureds enjoyed equal political status to White settlers in the Natal Charter of 1856 and until 1902 were included as part of the category European in the Natal census (Kuper, Watts and Davis, 1958: p.51).

While the Natal government discriminated against Indians and Africans there was co-option and assimilation between Whites and Coloureds. Coloured children attended White schools until 1904, and they travelled on White buses and trams. During the South African War (or Anglo Boer War) of 1899-1902, when Indians formed a separate Ambulance Bearer Corps, Coloureds served in White regiments (Mohlamme, 1995).

It was after the South African War, under British governance, when discrimination started against Coloureds and they were classified as a distinct racial group when the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910. By 1914, when the First World War broke out, Coloureds attended separate schools while Coloured volunteers in the war were made to serve with the Cape Corps in Kimberley. When the NP came to power in 1948 it began to institutionalise de facto restrictions against Coloureds which had gathered momentum over the preceding decades and when they were deprived of the vote in 1955, the colour line was well and truly marked between Whites and Coloureds (Desai, Padayachee, Reddy and Vahed, 2002).

Coloureds did not constitute a homogenous group; on the contrary they comprised of the descendants of Mauritians, those from St Helena and those of local Euro-Africans. Mauritians were considered fairer and more cultured than other Coloureds (Desai, Padayachee, Reddy and Vahed, 2002: p. 161-164). Under apartheid they occupied an in-between position between White and Black, as Erasmus (2002: p. 11) points out:

“This tendency to construct colouredness as a category midway between black and white was given institutional expression in the ambiguous position accorded coloured people in the racial policies of United Party segregation, Verwoerdian apartheid and Botha's tri-cameralism. During the apartheid era coloured people were excluded from full citizenship on the basis of 'race'. At the same time, they were selectively included as partially privileged subjects because they could not fit into the Verwoerdian framework of African black 'peoples'. Apartheid therefore positioned people classified coloured ambiguously between whites as full citizens and Africans as tribalized subjects locked into 'pure' cultural traditions”.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter examined the family background of Mrs Firmstone. This includes the origins of her paternal and maternal grandparents. Unfortunately, we only have scattered information on her family's origins on both the maternal and paternal sides. There are no documents available in the Firmstone archives, while a search of the Natal Archives Repository did not bring up any references.

Mrs Firmstone was part of a big family that was steeped in the Christian religion and more specifically, within the Roman Catholic Church denomination. She came from a family that had just enough materially for them to get by comfortably. They grew up in a home that emphasised discipline, was humble, lived off the land and enjoyed the simple pleasures of life. The 'warmth' that comes through in Mrs Firmstone's description of growing up, is reflected in the food that her mother prepared with such great care and which Mrs Firmstone still fondly remembers.

While accepting Mrs Firmstone's recollection of her childhood, one cannot help but wonder how nostalgia influences memory. The word nostalgia means "homecoming and pain, and refers to a yearning for something or ... an idealized past, for a moment that never actually existed" (Kimmel, 2014: p. 12) Perhaps, as a result of age or the current state of her life, Mrs Firmstone, may be including or overlooking feelings and facts about the past. Recollection of the past "may, in fact, be airbrushed or fictionalized by our memory" (Boeren, n.d.). Hers is largely a very positive story.

In terms of race identity, Mrs Firmstone was legally categorised by the apartheid government as Coloured. Hers was a complicated identity for she grew up with White neighbours, teachers and friends, and did not really know the difference. She noted that over time race identity became more rigid, as was evidenced in her own identity documents. Mrs Firmstone reinforced the idea that Coloureds occupied an in-between status between Whites and Africans. This is similar to what Zimitri Erasmus (2002) writes of her upbringing: "For me, growing up Coloured meant knowing that I was *not only* not White, but *less than White; not only* not Black, but *better than Black*".

While many Coloureds endured enormous hardships under the NP government, Mrs Firmstone noted that being involved in the Catholic Church and Little Flower School shielded her from the most brutal aspects of apartheid and race separation. Hers was a kind of pseudo world for the Church and White teachers did not discriminate against them personally and neither were they forcibly relocated. The one time that she did feel the pain of apartheid was when her daughter was unable to study at the University of Cape Town because of her race.

The next chapter examines in greater detail the history of the Catholic Church and its role in education in Ixopo.

CHAPTER 4

The Roman Catholic Church and education in Ixopo

4.1 Introduction

Mrs Firmstone was part of a large family that was steeped in Christianity, specifically within the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church in Ixopo is an institution that includes Little Flower School, Christ the King Hospital and the Sacred Heart Sanatorium Home, which is a retirement home for missionary sisters who served in the Ixopo District (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976; Woodley, 1984;). The Catholic Church has played an important role in the religious, social and economic lives of the Christian residents of Ixopo, including the Du Preez family. According to Mrs Firmstone, the church played a crucial role in shaping the kind of person that she was to become when she attended Little Flower School which was run by the Roman Catholic Church and which provided an integrated religious and secular education. This chapter examines the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Ixopo and its role in education in the area and how it helped shape Mrs Firmstone's values and beliefs. Ixopo had a large Coloured community and Little Flower School catered not only for Coloured children from Ixopo, but as Mrs Firmstone pointed out, also surrounding areas like Umzimkulu Village, Clydesdale, Rietvlei, Bizweni, and Insekeni. Others like Lesley Sharpley and Cardinal Napier came from places like Newcastle and the Eastern Cape.

4.2 The Roman Catholic Church in Ixopo (Natal)

The Roman Catholic Church was one of several Christian denominations active in the Ixopo area as stated in chapter three. The early settlers in the Ixopo region were staunch Christians and there were four main denominations/churches in the area - the Roman Catholic Church,

the Wesleyan Church (Methodist), The Anglican Church and the Ixopo Masonic Temple. While each of these churches helped shape Ixopo's history, and specifically the religious values of its residents, this section focuses specifically on the role of the Roman Catholic Church.

On 5 October 1850 the vicariate of Natal was created. It was the third in South Africa after the Western and Eastern Cape. During this time what would become South Africa comprised of two Boer Republics, namely the South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State and two British colonies, namely the Cape of Good Hope which had been occupied by Britain since 1806 and Natal, which the British annexed in 1842 (Brain, 1975; 2010). According to Brain (1975; 2010) the new vicariate that was established in Natal was vast. It stretched from the town of Inhambane in Mozambique in the north, to the Kei River in the south, from the Indian Ocean in the east to Griqualand West in the west.

The region of the new vicariate was densely populated in 1850 in some areas, sparsely populated in others, and it had a few towns that were rural in nature. According to Brain (1975; 2010) the reason for the formation of this unmanageable vicariate was that little was known about Southern Africa's geography. At this time only the Cape of Good Hope had been mapped by the Dutch and British cartographers and travellers in the 18th and 19th centuries. The geographical limits of the vicariate were set in Rome and France from where the first Oblates of Mary Immaculate¹ missionaries came, thus there was little information to draw on in the mid-19th century.

¹The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) is a missionary religious congregation in the Roman Catholic Church. The Oblates were founded by Eugène de Mazenod (1782 – 1861), Bishop of Marseilles, on the 25th day of January 1816 (Leflon, 1968, p. 223 and Brain, 1975).

The Roman Catholic Church was brought to Natal by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. They came with the idea of starting up missions all over Natal and spread the Gospel to the Zulu nation (Brain, 1975; 2010). The Natal vicariate was to be started by the missions set up by the oblates and was the vision of the bishop.

The Roman Catholic Church had sent missionaries to minister to the Zulus on 2 January 1855. The missionaries experienced numerous complications among the Amacele chiefdom and it was only three years later that Bishop M.J.F. Allard² was granted permission by the government of Natal to pursue mission work on the Mission Reserve on the Umphambanyoni River in the Highflats to Fathers J. J. Gérard³ and V. Bompart⁴. Both priests worked on the mission doing missionary work by inviting people to the services they held to convert the people in the area. The mission was named after the Archangel Saint Michael and it remained in the Oblates' hands until 1890 when the Trappists⁵ were persuaded⁶ by Bishop C.C. Jolivet⁷ to take charge of it (Brain, 1975; 2010).

² Marie Jean François Allard was born at La Roche, near Brainçon, Hautes Alpes, on the 27th day of November 1806. He entered a seminary at Embrun and was ordained priest in 1830. He served as parish priest at La Rochette from 1829 – 1835, returning to Embrun to teach mathematics. In 1838 he took his own vows as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate and was sent to Lumières. The following year he became professor of Holy Scripture at the major seminary and in 1842 became novice master. After a short time as professor of Scripture at Marseilles he left for Canada, again as novice master, and served at the seminary at Bytown (now Ottawa). On the 13th day of July 1851, he became vicar-apostolic of Natal (Brady, 1952, p. 41 and Brain, 1975)

³ John Joseph Gérard was born at Brouxières-aux-Chênes, Meurthe, on the 13th day of March 1831. He entered the novitiate in May 1851 and was a most satisfactory student in every way. He was ordained into the priesthood 18 months earlier than usual, by special dispensation (Brain, 1975).

⁴ Victor Bompart was born on the 15th day of January 1830 at Rouchefourchat. In September 1851 he entered the novitiate and was ordained to the priesthood in June 1856. He spent a few months in England learning English before embarking for Natal, and arrived in Durban in December 1856 (Brain, 1975).

⁵ A Trappist is a member of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (O.C.S.O.), which is a Roman Catholic religious order of cloistered contemplative monastic's who follow the Rule of St. Benedict. A branch of the Order of Cistercians, they have communities of both monks and nuns, commonly referred to

From the 1870s and 1880s there were intense economic and political changes that impinged on the society of Southern Africa as a whole. With the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold on the Witwatersrand, there was a large population influx and towns developed all over the Witwatersrand, with Johannesburg as the centre and the hive of business activity. The annexation of the South African Republic (Transvaal) by the British in 1877 brought in British troops, settlers and administration. This had angered the Afrikaners and led to the first Anglo-Boer War of 1880-81 whereby the British were defeated (Brain, 1975; 2010).

Imperial ambitions in Britain changed and a decision was taken to withdraw from the South African Republic after the Pretoria Convention was signed, marking the end of the war. This did not change the suspicion and bitterness that many Afrikaners had towards the British and their imperial ambitions and these feelings seemed justified when the British triggered the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 (Brain, 1982; Barker, et al., 1988; Brain, 2010) which led to the defeat of the Afrikaners and eventually to the Union of South Africa in 1910 which brought together Natal, the Cape Colony, Orange Free State and Transvaal. Due to the changes that were happening in the country, a void was left for the Roman Catholic Church to fill as there was an opportunity for it to expand its influence through education.

In Pietermaritzburg there was an Indian population that consisted mainly of free or formerly indentured men and women, some of whom were Roman Catholic by birth. They had come

as Trappists and Trappistines, respectively. In 1664 the order originated at La Trappe in France. They are noted for their rule of silence (OCSO: Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, 2014).

⁶ The Trappists were persuaded by Bishop Jolivet as there was a shortage of clergy and funds in the vicariate which made it impossible for him to give attention to the foundation of missions to the Zulus (Brain, 1975 & 2010).

⁷ Charles Constant Jolivet was born in Pont-l'Abbé, France on January 9, 1826. May 13, 1849, he becomes a priest of O.M.I. September 15, 1874; he is appointed Vicar Apostolic of Natal, South Africa (Cheney, 2013).

mainly from Portuguese enclaves in India. A Catholic school for Indian children was first held in rented premises, and in 1886 was attended by forty children. In 1888, the Holy Family Sisters took over the teaching of these learners (Brain, 1983; 2010). In 1892 the new building was erected. Father Auguste Chauvin had taken over the mission of the Indian community. He made the effort to learn Tamil and the number of Indian Catholics grew to 1671 in 1886 (Brain, 1983; 2010).

There was a shortage of clergy and funds in the vicariate which made it unattainable for the bishop to give attention to the development of the mission amongst the Zulus as he wanted. An unanticipated opportunity was put before the Bishop in 1882, to allow the Trappists under Father Francis Pfanner⁸ to do mission work in the vicariate (Brain, 1975; 2010). The Trappists had been working in the Eastern Cape at Dunbrody and had appealed for consent to extend their mission work to Natal. The Bishop accepted their offer and the work of the Trappists transformed the African missions in the vicariate. According to Brain (1975; 1982; 2010) it was within a few years that the Mariannahill Monastery grew to be the largest in the world and Francis Pfanner became the first abbot⁹ in 1885.

Mariannahill, in present day Pinetown, was the mission-farm and close to the railway that was being constructed, linking Durban and Pietermaritzburg. It was from 1888 that Abbot Pfanner began to purchase farms, each being a day's ride from Mariannahill, and within a few years

⁸ Prior Franz Pfanner of the Reformed Cistercians (Trappists) had planned, in 1882, to begin a Trappist Monastery and commenced the work of evangelisation among local Africans. In 1885 he became Abbot of Mariannahill and he resigned from office in 1893. Abbot Pfanner died on 24 May 1909, and it was around this time that Rome separated the Mariannahill Abbey from the Trappist Order. Mariannahill was constituted as an independent Missionary Congregation with the official title: The Congregation of Missionaries of Mariannahill (CMM) ("Mariannahill Diocese," 2014).

⁹ A man who is the head of an abbey of monks.

mission stations spread throughout southern Natal. One such stop was the church and Little Flower School in Ixopo which was established in 1923. The Trappist missions grew in numbers and in activity, spreading their work in southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe (Brain, (1975; 1982; 2010).

In 1921, a separate Mariannhill vicariate (which until then was part of the Natal vicariate) was established and comprised of the southern part of Natal and all Transkeian territories. In 1930, it was further subdivided and again split in 1935 to form a new vicariate. Those territories now form the Dioceses of Umtata and Kokstad and part of Queenstown. Once again it was divided in 1954, and the territory of the Diocese of Umzimkulu was detached. Civil districts within the ecclesiastical boundaries of the Diocese of Mariannhill comprise Ixopo, Impendle, Richmond, Umzinto, Umbumbulu, parts of Port Shepstone, Camperdown and Pinetown, Polela and Underberg ("Mariannhill Diocese," 2014).

A map of the original boundaries of the vicariate of Natal Source: Brain, 2010: p. 11



Francis Pfanner needed helpers, specifically females as nuns, as without them he believed that his work of evangelisation would be too limited. In order to attract female helpers to support him in his various missionary endeavours, Francis Pfanner published enthusiastic articles in German catholic magazines while also preaching in Europe about his missionary endeavours in Africa (Brain, 1975; 2010; The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, 2014). In these articles he asked helpers to work side by side with the Zulu women and girls in a hot climate. In due course, five young women took action and joined him in Africa which became their permanent home. On 8 September 1885, the founding date of this young congregation of women called the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, appeared in a common uniform comprising a red skirt, black bodice, apron, cape and a white bonnet (The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, 2014). The founder explained that the colour red was to remind them always of the blood of Christ and the mandate of the fledgling congregation.

The new missionary congregation that was created in 1885 rapidly grew in numbers with many women following the call to be missionaries at the Mariannhill monastery. By 1888 there were 117 members of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood who had come from Europe to Africa. Some of these nuns found it very hard to adapt to the hot African climate and for that reason an understanding grew that a house of formation in Europe was necessary. So it was a congregation that was founded on African soil by Francis Pfanner that was established in Europe and then the rest of the world (The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, 2014).

On 2 October 1906 the Constitutions for the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood were agreed upon by Pope Pius X. The first general chapter of the congregation took place soon

after with Sr Paula Emunds, the co-foundress and Abbot Francis Pfanner of the sisters, being elected as the first canonical superior general. In 1923 *The Sacred Heart Home* in Ixopo opened its doors to the sisters who had come to offer their missionary service to the largely Coloured community of the area.

Following the establishment of the school, the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood opened Christ the King Hospital in 1937. It originally registered 32 beds. The distinctive statue of Christ the King was put up in 1938. Formerly run by the nuns at the Sacred Heart Covent, the hospital was then taken over by the province in 1984 (The Department of Health: Province of KwaZulu-Natal, 2001).

4.3 The Roman Catholic Education system

The Roman Catholic Church opened a school in Ixopo in 1923 to uphold and propagate Catholic traditions and values. Although some private schools were established when Whites settled in Natal from the 1820s, the first Natal Government School was opened in July 1849 in Pietermaritzburg, while the first school in Durban was opened in 1850. The Voortrekkers who arrived in Natal in 1837 held schools in tents but education took a back seat due to the wars with the Zulus. The British annexed the area in 1843 and most Afrikaners left the area. It was under British administration that the first school was built (Haw, 1995: pp. 3-4).

In subsequent years, nine government-aided schools opened in places like Richmond, Verulam, New Germany, Ladysmith, York and Greytown between 1853 and 1856 (Booyesen, 1949: p. 17). Impetus for education came when Natal was given representative government in 1857. Governor Scott prioritised education and established a school board in 1858 and

appointed a superintendent (Haw, 1995: p. 8). The result was a rapid expansion of schooling. By 1883, 96 percent of White children were in school (Booyesen 1949: p. 22).

The next key moment in the evolution of education in Natal was Responsible Government in 1893. On 10 May 1893 the legislative council of Natal passed a law to institute a responsible government. This meant that White settlers in Natal could now pursue their own policies independent of the British, and they focused on policies that were geared to meeting local needs (McLean and McMillan, 2009). A Minister of Education, John Robinson, was appointed in 1894 and the Natal Education Department was established in the same year (Haw, 1995: p. 16).

Over time there were five categories of schools, namely government schools, government-aided schools, farm schools, private schools and special schools. From 1910 in view of, South Africa's policies of racial segregation, by the time Little Flower School was opened, each of these types of schools were further divided into schools for White, Coloured, Indian and African pupils (Booyesen 1949: p. 15). A third type of school was the private school. They included expensive private schools like Hilton and Michaelhouse as well the many convent schools in the province.

As far as Coloured education is concerned, the population was always very small and dispersed relative to Whites, Africans and Indians. In the formative years, many Coloured children attended White schools. In 1855, the government introduced an ordinance for promoting the education of Coloured youth in the District of Natal. This referred to Africans and Coloureds more specifically. Coloured education was generally neglected by the government and, as Booyesen (1949) points out, "The real pioneers in providing schools for

Coloured children were the Church Missions". In 1882, the Order of the Sisters of St John opened a school for Coloured children in Pietermaritzburg. In 1901, the Sisters of St John established a government-aided school of the Good Shepherd in Loop Street. Another important school for Coloured children was a school opened in Greyling Street in 1902. The Sacred Heart or La Trappe School was established for Coloured children near Ixopo in 1923. It became a government-aided school in 1926 and in 1929 was renamed Little Flower when a new building was built. Schools were also built in the Midlands, Northern Natal and in the Durban and coastal areas where the Coloured population was highest in the province (Booyesen, 1949: pp. 29-30).

The first school specifically for Coloured children in Durban, St Philomenas, opened in Chelmsford Road in 1896 by Reverend Mother Mary of the Cross. The school eventually began training teachers selected from Coloured pupils in its standard six classes. The first high school for Coloured children in Durban was opened in 1917 in Melbourne Road. It was subsequently relocated to Umbilo Road in 1924 as the Umbilo Road High School and was the only Coloured school until the 1950s to provide education to matric for Coloured children and also served as a Coloured Teacher Training College. In the 1930s and 1940s schools were opened in Clairwood, Harding, Park Hill and Stanger for Coloured pupils. Given the paucity of schools, hostels were essential for Coloured parents who wanted their children educated. By the late 1940s the Natal Education Department had built hostels in Stanger, Umtwalumi, and Ngabeni. The number of Coloured children in school stood at 322 in 1902 and had increased to 6 173 by 1948 (Booyesen 1949: pp. 31-32).

4.4 Education in Ixopo: White, Indian, African

South Africa was racially divided into categories such as Coloured, White, Black and Indian and each racial group had separate schools. In Ixopo, Little Flower School was established for Coloureds; the Ixopo School for Whites, and the Ixopo state-aided Indian School for Indians, and there were several rural schools for Africans. The White community had the Ixopo School that was separated into a primary (class one to Standard five) and high school (Standard six to standard ten). These schools had modern educational and sporting facilities (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). They were given funding by the state over the years to improve their infrastructure, starting in 1894 with the Natal government erecting a school building at the cost of £2 565. Later, the union government built a new school at a cost of £10 000 and further money was poured into the school with renovations undertaken in 1975 at the junior school at a cost of R579 143 and at the high school at a cost of R387 685 (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). In contrast, the other race groups in South Africa were given relatively less money.

Ixopo had a small Indian community and an Indian school was established in the late 1940s in Beechen Hall. It was only in 1952 that a school with three classrooms was erected. In 1967 the school had 25 learners and steadily grew over the years. It was a state-aided school, meaning that Indians contributed half the cost of building the school and had to maintain it (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). The school only catered for primary school learners, who then had to attend high school in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Newcastle and Umzinto.

A number of mission schools were established throughout the district and they, together with government-aided farm schools, catered for the African community. According to the Ixopo

and District Natal South Africa Magazine (1976) farmers usually erected a building that served as a school for African learners but would also be used as a church, and the government would supply desks, tables, and blackboards. The farm school would usually cater for learners up to standard two (now known as grade four) in a single room and one teacher was supplied by the government, while a second classroom taught learners in standards three and four, now known as grades five and six (Ixopo and District Natal South Africa Magazine, 1976). Prior to the 1950s most African children attended mission schools as the state failed in its duty. Mission schools provided a high quality of education. The NP government believed that the programme was too academic and after the Bantu Education Act (No. 47) of 1953¹⁰ the government tightened its control over mission schools by eliminating almost all financial aid, thus forcing churches to sell their schools to the government or shut them down (Global Perspectives on Human Language: The South African Context, n.d.).

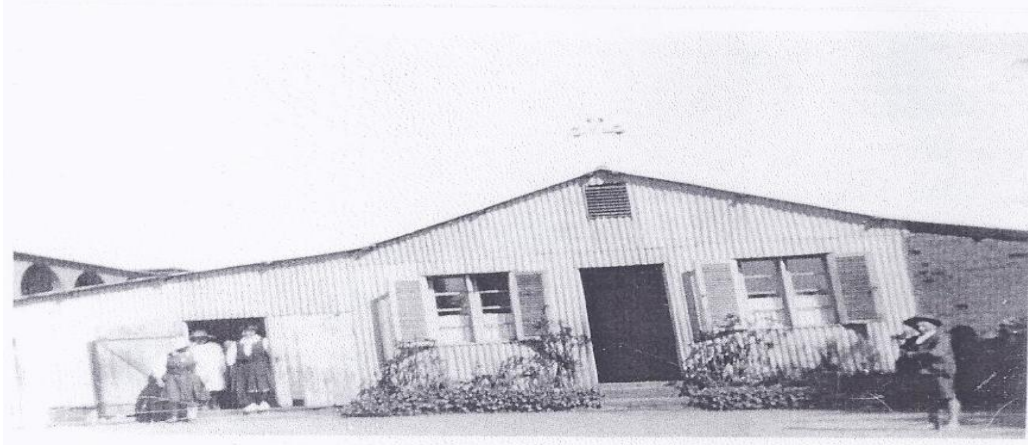
4.5 Coloured Education in Ixopo: Little Flower School

It was the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood who responded to the needs of the Coloured community in the Ixopo area. Little Flower School opened its doors on 31 January 1923. Little Flower School had humble beginnings with an iron shanty being home to the first eight learners of the new school. The school was originally called La Trappe, this name derived from the Trappists (Hunetemann, n.d.). By March of 1923, the school comprised of sub-standard A, sub-standard B, Standard one and a few higher classes, which were all under the supervision of Sr Bona, a lay teacher. The school was growing slowly with, during the

¹⁰The Bantu Education Act, 1953 (Act No. 47) was a segregation law which legalised several aspects of the Apartheid system. Its major provision was enforcing racially separated educational facilities (Clark and Worger, 2004).

month of March 1923, four children arriving as boarders and an old stable was white-washed to serve as a dormitory (Hunetemann, n.d.).

La Trappe School from 1923 – 1929



The first learners acquired skills in practical subjects such as gardening, woodwork, domestic science and soldering. There were limited resources as no contributions were made by the government. The children depended wholly upon the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Often, the most vital necessities were not available, such as food and basic clothing in terms of living conditions, and books and basic stationary in terms of educational resources. In 1926 the La Trappe School became government-aided. A defining moment happened in 1929 when financial aid from the Women's Institute in the USA resulted in a new building being erected in the shape of an `H` and the school's name was changed from La Trappe to Little Flower School (Hunetemann, n.d.).

In 1933 Sr Albertina was appointed principal and a standard six class was introduced with just two learners. Three more classrooms were added to the `H` building, hence creating an enclosed inner square. Under the firm hand of Sr Michaelis there were 76 children in sub-standards A and B. In 1939 Sr Annuncia was appointed principal. The years between 1940

and 1950 were difficult ones because of the war (Hunetemann, n.d.). The school and the sisters were cut off from Europe and were not getting financial assistance. However, the number of learners increased rapidly, to the extent that another dormitory had to be built. It was during these war years that Mrs Firmstone, who was then Elizabeth (Betty) Georgiana Du Preez, as a pupil, was asked to leave school in 1941 and start teaching as many of the male teachers left to fight in the war. The building operations were directed by the sisters as there was no money for a contractor. They carried on with construction until they received a warning from headquarters at Mariannhill, to obtain architectural advice or else the building would collapse. The sisters worked during the night to empty water that had collected on the roofless building (Hunetemann, n.d.).

There was a momentous change in 1943 when Coloured schools were taken over by the Natal Education Department. The sisters and the school were confronted with the fact that either the department would take over all personnel or the school would become a private institution, in which case it would not receive any assistance from the department. The Roman Catholic Church decided that its schools would become private (Hunetemann, n.d.).

The School's Motto below: Virtue alone is true Nobility. A mosaic made by Sr M.

Pientia, decorates the Hall facing east



Another key moment was in 1948 when the Mother Provincial of the Sisters of the Precious Blood requested that the school be closed to boys over the age of twelve because of the difficulty of securing a boarding master. The Director of Education was informed of the decision but E. Halm, who was an inspector, petitioned that this decision take place over time. He suggested that new boys not be admitted but that older boys be allowed to complete their sixth standard. Mr A.S. Firmstone, who married Elizabeth Du Preez, came to the rescue of the school by agreeing to act as boarding master, thereby solving the school and hostel problems for the boys. The Mother Provincial of the Sisters of the Precious Blood then informed the director of education that boys could continue at the school. Mr Firmstone was installed as boarding master, with Mrs Firmstone as boarding mistress (Hunetemann, n.d.). This brought some semblance of continuity to the school.

The years between 1950 and 1961 and again in 1970 were years in which the school's expansion was steady. The number of learners was on the increase year after year. Matriculation was offered at the school for the first time in 1952. As the school was growing, so was the school's boarding establishment. New bedrooms were added to the girls hostel in 1951 and in 1952 a new room was built for the teaching of domestic science. A new wing was built onto the school in 1953, which comprised of four classrooms, an office and a library. In 1954, new bathrooms and a laundry were put up in the girls' hostel, and in that same year, bedrooms and bathrooms were built in the boys' hostel. In 1956 a new dining-room was built for the boys (Hunetemann, n.d.).

In 1959, Sr Annunica was called overseas to a general chapter. She appealed to the Reverend Mother General and her councillors to grant her permission to build a school hall. The request was granted and Sr Annunica raised funds in Europe for the project. The new school hall was

officially opened in 1961 by a papal delegate and inspector C. van den Berg who represented the director of education. Although Sr Annunica did not want any further extensions, her hand was forced in 1964 when the Natal Education Department prescribed a practical examination in biology and the school was forced to build a laboratory. Further extensions from 1972 saw the addition of new infant classrooms, a wood workshop, gymnasium, swimming pool, teacher's quarters, dining-room and storerooms for which financial assistance was obtained from Germany (Hunetemann, n.d.).

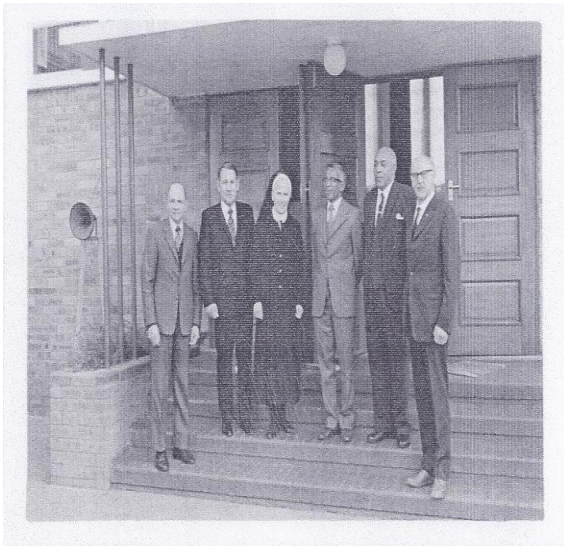


Staff 1956
 Front row l. to r. seated
 Sr. Eleonoris, Sr. Annuncia,
 Sr. Cortona, Sr. Hieronyma, Coelesta
 2nd row: Srs. Cosma, Stefani,
 Thomasia, Hildegard, Harlind
 Miss Norris, Miss N. Ogle
 Back row: Mr. A.S. Firmstone
 Mrs. E.G. Firmstone, Miss D. Swinny
 Miss G.O'Donoghue, E.R. la
 Reservée, Mr. H. Swinny

The coming to power of the National Party government in 1948 and its policy of apartheid which introduced rigid racial segregation had important ramifications. Education was segregated by the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which crafted a separate system of education (Byrnes, 1996). As far as Coloured education was concerned, 1964 witnessed great change as control of Coloured education was transferred from the Natal Province to the Central Government's Administration of Coloured Affairs¹¹ that had its headquarters in Cape Town. This affected Little Flower School which was a so-called Coloured school.

¹¹In 1958, the government established the Department of Coloured Affairs, which served as an advisory link between the government and the Coloured people (Sahistory.org.za, 2014).

While the policy of racial segregation was abominable, it did result in an expansion in education which included the building of schools and employment of teachers in Coloured areas and more learners entering school and completing matric. This is also what happened in Little Flower School. The average number of matriculants in the school had varied between 45 and 65 in 1964 but if the school could accommodate all its applicants the number would have risen to beyond 100. Matriculation examination results were always very good (Hunetemann, n.d.).



Distinguished Visit from Administrator of Coloured affairs. From left to right: Mr F. C. Backman – Inspector of Education, Mr W. Theron – Director of Education, Sr Annuncia – Principal of L.F.S, Mr M. M. Renton – Inspector of Education and Mr S. W. Hayman – Regional Rep. of A.C.A

Little Flower School was a country (or rural) school that had children not only from Ixopo but elsewhere. Mrs Firmstone recalled that “As the school progressed we got more and more boarders so that afterwards we got five busses bringing children from UMzimkhulu, Donnybrook, Highflats, Hlutankungu and the fifth bus from Ixopo. We had five busses and that swelled the attendance at the school.”

Little Flower School was a mission school run under the Roman Catholic Church, by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. It received state funding from the Cape Provincial Administration that was responsible for the education of the Coloured community

throughout South Africa. The school syllabus was the responsibility of Coloured Affairs, therefore all learners wrote the matriculation exams that were set by the Department of Coloured Affairs.

To expose learners to competition in academia, learners were encouraged to participate in the mathematics and science olympiads. This exposed them to being tested against the brightest learners throughout the country and often the learners at Little Flower School came out on top. The teachers, like Mrs Firmstone, put a lot of effort and time into preparing the learners for these tests. Mark Fynn recalls that “All the years I was at Little Flower School, we would always come out on top”.

Little Flower School, being a mission school run by the sisters, many of whom originated from Europe, were able to teach over and beyond what the curriculum required. The learners were also exposed to White teachers who were in support of Little Flower School based on the Roman Catholic Education model. White teachers like Mr Honey and Mrs Boltman who taught English at Little Flower School did not see skin colour of learners they taught but instead saw children who needed to be educated. During 1981 and 1982, Mark Fynn recalls that “A Mr Walthew, a White gentleman and a member of the defence force, taught me mathematics after the assigned teacher was murdered on a weekend away in Durban”. This shows that the White teachers upheld their Roman Catholic Faith and principles, and like Mrs Firmstone, used their talents and bucked the apartheid laws.

Little Flower School did not only cater for Coloured children from Ixopo. Since it was a boarding school, children attended from surrounding areas like Umzimkulu Village,

Clydesdale, Rietvlei, Bizweni, and Insekeni. According to the 1970 census, the Coloured population of these areas were as follows:

Umzimkulu Village	433
Clydesdale	180
Rietvlei	123
Riverside	27
Bizweni	123
Insekeni	6
Strydfontein Farm	7

According to an early 1970s report on Coloureds, the children of Rietvlei attended Little Flower School from standard six (grade eight). The report stated that free transport was provided by the Coloured Affairs Department. The report added that children in outlying areas boarded in the village to get access to the transport and education at Little Flower (Commission Related to Coloured Affairs: Reports from Local Areas, 1970).

From the beginning, Little Flower aimed to offer an education that was different to that offered by state schools, in that it sought to combine secular and religious education. According to a school newsletter, the school day began with the sign of the cross. As far as possible, class teachers were practicing Christians who could pray with the pupils by leading them with a morning prayer and hymn in each classroom. This was normal practice unless there was holy mass or assembly (Little Flower School Letter, 1994).

Wilfred Napier, Archbishop of Durban and a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church, pointed out that the Roman Catholic Church's faith at Little Flower School was built into its weekly

program. These included days when learners went to church (mass) during the week, and when Roman Catholic feasts were celebrated, they, as learners, “were made part of this celebration, for instance the Corpus Christi celebration. I remember they would get all the girls and some of the girls who were working there to set out the route of the procession”. Mark Fynn added that as learners they clearly got a sense that the school was a Roman Catholic school; one that subscribed to the Roman Catholic Education System and this was reflected by the presence of a crucifix in each classroom. Christ and His teachings were at the heart of the school and at the centre of education. Fynn made the point that the teachers emphasised that education was a gift from God.

Learners were given religious instruction by practising Catholics according to a prescribed syllabus. As Cardinal Napier recalls, each class had catechism¹² lessons which aimed to develop learners’ Catholic faith. In addition to religious instruction, pupils were given lessons in family guidance and there was a youth ministry. Mark Fynn noted that most of the teachers were nuns from the convent and there was strict discipline and adherence to Godly principles. Boys and girls were not allowed to socialise unsupervised.

Time was set apart for a holy mass or assembly. In order to achieve religious growth, pupils attended a holy mass once a term. Teachers also attended the holy mass to serve as examples for learners (Little Flower School Letter, 1994). Leslie Sharpley also felt that the school had a very clear Catholic ethos. For example, he pointed out that learners “marched to mass at around 5.30am at least three times a week... and they took part in all prayers”. Wilfred Napier concurred with Leslie Sharpley by stating that “throughout the school day they offered

¹² Catechism is a summary or exposition of doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and it serves as a learning introduction to the Sacraments traditionally used in catechesis, or teaching of children and adult converts to the Roman Catholic Church (Fastiggi, 2010).

different prayers, there were statues and photographs of well-known religious figures, crucifixes in the classrooms, and some of the teachers, especially the nuns, would come and tell you stories if it was a feast day and describe the feast and what it was about and who the people involved in that celebration were and so on.”

As Cardinal Napier, Lesley Sharpley and Mark Fynn point out, Little Flower School offered special opportunities for learners to develop their Catholic faith. Catholic learners received special lessons in preparation for first confession, first holy communion and confirmation. Learners who were confirmed were offered a day’s retreat¹³. The school did not discriminate against other Christian denominations, and ministers of other Christian denominations could arrange lessons with the manager and principal of Little Flower School. Learners were also encouraged to take part in leadership courses and other such special programs. Mark Fynn believes that the Catholic education system provided him with a solid foundation on which to build as he went on in life. He stated that Mrs Firmstone’s advice and the values that she inculcated was always based on the bible. Fynn shared a trying time in his life at Little Flower School when his parents were going through a divorce. He said: “When facing the reality of my parents’ divorce whilst at school, Mrs Firmstone always ensured that I focused on my schooling and that I did not speak ill of my parents”. She would regularly remind him of the Fifth commandment (of the Ten Commandments) in the bible in the book of Exodus chapter 20 verse 12: *“Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”* Fynn believes that the system of education

¹³ In the religious and spiritual sense, when a person says that they are going to a retreat, they mean that they are withdrawing from society to a quiet place for prayer, study, to reflect or to meditate. It is a special time of solitude and silence to engage in adoration or religious exercises. It usually covers a period of a few days and it usually held at a religious house (O'Malley, 1993).

to which he was exposed provided him with a solid secular education but also helped him to grow spiritually.

Cardinal Napier, Lesley Sharpley and Mark Fynn emphasised that Little Flower School inculcated in them compassion towards people in need in the widest sense of the term. Leslie Sharpley pointed to another important feature of the school – it accepted learners of all races even though the laws of the country promoted segregation. Sharpley, who also taught at Little Flower School for two years, stated that “If there was a request for a student to be given a place, and vacancies existed, they were never refused. So we can proudly say that Little Flower School was a pioneer in non-racialism.”

There was a huge responsibility on the principal or manager of the school who had to ensure that the Roman Catholic Church’s education system was upheld, including its values, discipline and syllabus. For this to happen, all the teachers appointed were Catholic. This was deemed essential to achieving the formation of the whole personality of the learner (Little Flower School Letter, 1994). The school must ascribe to the “the basic principles and values of structures and must embrace the ministry of serving humanity” (National School’s Congress, 1992). Individual Catholic schools had little leeway; they had to abide by the education programme and guidelines given by the Roman Catholic Church.

Although the Roman Catholic Education System was structured around the Roman Catholic Church and its teachings, there was a balance between religious and secular education. As Mark Fynn explains, having gone through the Roman Catholic Education System, “there was a good balance in that we were being educated not only on religion but also on the world”.

Those interviewed felt that this made for a richer all round experience than if they were subjected to a purely secular education.

4.6 Mrs Firmstone's religious values and beliefs

Mrs Firmstone was born into a family that belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. As a young child, Mrs Firmstone recalls starting Sundays with breakfast and then travelling by carriage drawn by two horses to attend the Sunday service at the Sacred Heart Home, the same church where Mrs Firmstone would later get married. She also noted that they wore nice and lovely dresses with socks and shoes on Sundays. After the church service, Mrs Du Preez prepared a spread for lunch with a special pudding as a treat.

Mrs Firmstone recalls that as a young girl she and her siblings did not go to Sunday school. After lunch her father would read a passage from the bible, but because he was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, Mrs Firmstone and her sister used to make fun of him and say "Dutch deformed church" as they and their mother were Catholics. Mr Du Preez was not offended and never deprived them of their Catholic upbringing as he took them to church and sat in the back while they engaged in the service.

Mrs Firmstone remains a devoted Catholic. Her mother was a Catholic who grew up in a convent in Marriannahill. Mrs Firmstone stated that as children they were taught to say their prayers at night and that they prayed both before and after their meals, but for a very short while. Mrs Firmstone regards her parents as "a pillar of strength and role models" for them. She said that one lesson that her mother taught her stuck in her mind: "...mother always said if you tell one lie you have to tell another one, so tell the truth straight away and it would be the end". She believes that observing this lesson made her life easier.

When Mrs Firmstone was boarding at Little Flower School she also looked after the girls as she was a teacher. She would wake them up on Sundays and ensure that they were ready on time for church. They had to go to church first and would have breakfast afterwards. Sunday at the school was a relaxed day whereby they played games and participated in sports. In the evening they were allowed to watch a silent film.¹⁴ Mr Firmstone would keep the boys occupied by taking them to play football, while Mrs Firmstone bought the Sunday newspaper for the boys to read. This was different to her childhood, as it was not what she experienced as a child, because she was responsible for the learners.

The practice of Christianity, in Mrs Firmstone's view, has changed over time. When she was a child, she pointed out, it seemed as if there were only Catholic, Anglican, Dutch Reformed and Methodist churches. But now churches are mushrooming. She remembers a statement someone made, that if one wants to be rich they must start a new church. Mrs Firmstone does not believe that the large number of churches is a bad thing. It is, she says, "good in that they all promote good living, they try to help the children to veer away from evil and on a Sunday to give worship to God. Nevertheless, Christianity has changed a great deal".

Within the Roman Catholic Church too there has been change but not a great deal, she points out. One notable change that Mrs Firmstone did not speak about was that the Roman Catholic Church masses used to be in Latin¹⁵ as its medium of communication. The use of Latin in the

¹⁴A silent film is a film with no synchronized recorded sound, especially with no spoken dialogue. In silent films for entertainment the dialogue is transmitted through muted gestures, mime and title cards.

¹⁵ The Catholic Faith, which is expressed in the Holy Mass, was spread by the Apostles and by the early Christian missionaries throughout the Roman Empire. The common language of the Roman Empire was Latin, but in the East, Greek was the vulgar tongue. Thus in the Roman Rite, while both Greek and Latin were used as liturgical languages, the preference was eventually given to the use of Latin, while some use of the Greek was

Roman Catholic Church stopped in the 1960s which is a notable change in relation to present day Catholicism. The notable change not mentioned by Mrs Firmstone is that the service is not held in Latin. The priest, when consecrating the bread and wine would face his back to the congregation, yet now the priest face the congregation when consecrating the eucharist. Mrs Firmstone states that she has not seen much change. One change that Mrs Firmstone did emphasise in terms of the Roman Catholic Church was that “before there were many nuns looking after the priests, while today the lay people look after the priests”. This, she explained, was due to the drop in the number of women becoming nuns.

According to Mrs Firmstone, her Catholic faith played an important role in her teaching career. As Little Flower School was a Catholic school, Mrs Firmstone noted that every school day started with a scripture and all the teachers would do this in their classrooms. Mrs Firmstone added that she helped with supervising the school to ensure that everybody was in school and she recalled how she was touched by a teacher, Laura Ogle, who shared a touching story of the passion of Jesus Christ as she stood by the door. Religion was and remains important to Mrs Firmstone as in her classroom she always started each session with a prayer or a hymn.

4.7 Conclusion

The Roman Catholic Church and Little Flower School cannot be separated as the school was owned by the Roman Catholic Church and operated under the church’s guidance and belief system. Mrs Firmstone was a Catholic and through her schooling life and teaching career she

maintained. It has been the consistent teaching of many Popes, moreover, that Latin has special qualities as a language of worship in the Roman Rite, giving us a common identity with our ancestors in the Faith. Latin is the symbol of the visible universality and unity of the Church that helps preserve a bond of unity with a common center, Rome, *'the Mother and Teacher of all nations'* (Sancta Missa, n.d.).

was educated in that faith and grew in her faith, which was part of her very core and something that she held very dear. The Roman Catholic Church was pivotal in the lives of many in the wider Ixopo community; something that the testimonies of Cardinal Napier, Mark Fynn and Leslie Sharpley attest to. The next chapter examines in greater detail, Mrs Firmstone's teaching and learning.

At the time of writing this dissertation in 2014 Little Flower School had a student body of about 1376 learners who were from a variety of racial, linguistic and class backgrounds. Many come from indigent homes. Little Flower School, though being a state school, remains a Roman Catholic School. Currently at Little Flower School there are 482 Catholic learners and 894 non-Catholic learners. The racial make-up of Little Flower School is about 90% Black, 8% Coloured and 2% Indian/Muslim (Telephone call with LFS principal, 11/12/2014). Little Flower continues to produce excellent results at all levels, despite the fact that it is ranked a quintile two school, the second lowest ranking, by the Department of Education as it caters for extremely poor children.

CHAPTER 5

Education, Work, Marriage

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Mrs Firmstone's education, her entrance into the teaching profession, as well as her marriage and household. Upon examining these aspects of her life, one finds that there was an almost seamless continuity between her education and teaching career because she was given a position as a teacher at the age of fourteen, while still a pupil at Little Flower School. She had not yet completed her schooling but did so part-time after school hours. This may be hard to fathom today, with our emphasis on qualifications and being a credential society, but it was not unusual at that time. The hierarchical progression and training that we see today was not as emphasised and crucial then.

One overriding theme that stands out in Mrs Firmstone's narrative and which comes through so powerfully in the interviews with her and some of her former students, is her love, passion and dedication for education, both as a learner and teacher. She sacrificed her leisure time and family life for the benefit of those whom she taught.

5.2 Young Elizabeth's schooling

As a young Coloured girl, Elizabeth Du Preez attended Little Flower School in Ixopo, the nearest school in relation to where she lived. Little Flower, as pointed out in the previous chapter, was a Catholic school that catered for the Coloured community of Ixopo and surrounding areas. From Mrs Firmstone's utterances during her interviews and what is evident in her school reports, it is clear that during her schooling she was a dedicated learner who enjoyed school. Mrs Firmstone believed that education was the only gift God had given

her. She said: “I could learn very well but I was no good at sport and so on, but in the classroom I was very good. I’ve got some reports that I can show”.

She took great pride and joy in going through her reports. Her Standard six report dated 13 December 1940 shows that she was very good at all her subjects at school. The subjects were English (first language), Afrikaans (second language), Arithmetic, History, Geography, Domestic Science, Nature Knowledge and Art. She received A symbols for these subjects and a 90% pupil average.

Mrs Firmstone claims that she did not have any favourite teachers. She liked them all. One can assume that Mrs Firmstone may have been what we call a ‘teacher’s pet’. She further stated: “... I liked all the teachers”. When probed on this statement, however, Mrs Firmstone conceded that she did have an extra liking for Sr Kantra, her standard seven Junior Certificate 1(JC 1) teacher, who was a young sister in her thirties. Sr Kantra was Mrs Firmstone’s JC1 teacher but she was also instrumental in helping Mrs Firmstone in the early days of her teaching career.

Mrs Firmstone recalls many nuns and teachers who taught her at Little Flower School. She remembers teachers like Mr Da Silver, Sr Annuncia, who was the principal and very instrumental in her teaching career, Mr Thooey, Mr Swinny, Sr Bibaka who taught geography and was a matron at the boys’ hostel, Mr Grey, Mr O’ Bonobhue, Mr Oak and Sr Benebetis, who also helped Mrs Firmstone in her private studies. While all the teachers helped her, it was the sisters in particular whom Mrs Firmstone described as “a positive influence” on her life, as they taught her not only academics but also about “becoming a woman”.

Mrs Firmstone emphasised that she was not being nostalgic, stated that as children they were taught respect at home, and especially to respect their elders and this respect filtered into the school. “In your home your mother and father were your parents and your legal guardians, whereas at school your teachers became your guardians. Therefore school became an extension of our homes.” She believes that there was a strong partnership and close relationship between the community (home) and school. Teachers saw it as their duty and parents expected them to discipline learners in much the same way that they were disciplined in their homes. Learners rarely complained if they were disciplined at school. According to Mrs Firmstone “The threat of your parents finding out that you had misbehaved at school and were punished by the teacher resulted in greater fear than the teachers’ discipline itself”. “Discipline in those days”, she pointed out, “consisted of physically getting a beating with a wooden spoon, cane or belt or you the child had to do some sort of physical labour, for instance they had to clean the court yard or pull weeds out of the school ground. Parents also were not averse to using a wooden spoon or whatever was close by at the time”.

The issue of discipline was not a concern to Mrs Firmstone while growing up, given her disposition. She rarely got into trouble. Most of the girls in her school respected the rules as did most of the boys, although occasionally some of the boys did get into trouble at school. Mrs Firmstone recalls that they “observed the rules and kept the school clean.... discipline wasn’t a problem.”

Little Flower School was a rural school with limited resources. Evidence of this is that the school did not have support staff to clean the school. One form of punishment meted out to both girls and boys at the school was to clean the school. “Children will be children and they will be naughty”, Mrs Firmstone said, “sometimes the boys were naughty, for instance they

would go into the garden to steal fruit and then they were punished”. Mrs Firmstone recalls that children “had to clean the classroom for punishment and wash the windows and sometimes we were given a big yard where we had to pull out all the weeds.” Trying to get a response as to how Mrs Firmstone felt about such punishment, she giggles and states “we just did it.” The two points that emerge from these statements made by Mrs Firmstone were that they respected their elders and the authority of teachers and they abided by the rules without questioning them. But she also felt that this was a constructive kind of punishment as it helped to build character.

Little Flower was a Coloured school in a segregated South Africa. Although there are Coloureds who speak English, Afrikaans and Zulu, the school’s medium of instruction was English. When Mrs Firmstone was a learner at the school, only English and Afrikaans were given recognition, even though learners from other ethnic backgrounds attended the school. It was a multi-racial school but predominantly Coloured learners attended. Mrs Firmstone recalls that “some children spoke only Afrikaans and some spoke Zulu only and some spoke English and in that way we learnt many languages”. While the Education Department recognised English and Afrikaans, the school taught different languages to the learners but it also urged the learners to teach one another their mother tongues so that they could become bilingual or multilingual. Mrs Firmstone recalls that “in the classroom it wasn’t so difficult to learn Afrikaans because we had heard it outside and even if we had heard Zulu at the time..., but the teachers used to tell us to do our best to teach the children English, so very often outside we spoke English”. Mrs Firmstone’s father (Daniel Du Preez) spoke Afrikaans and Mrs Firmstone and her siblings were taught by their father and spoke Afrikaans at their home. Living on a farm, with African people working on the farm, they did learn to speak indigenous languages to be able to communicate with them. It was assumed that because Mrs

Firmstone is Coloured and lived in Natal, that she would have grown up with some knowledge of Zulu.

Mrs Firmstone was enthusiastic to learn different languages but what was even more exciting for her and her peers was learning some of the `funny` isiZulu and Afrikaans terms. Showing excitement and laughing aloud, Mrs Firmstone shared some of these words such as “*verdomderskeptstil* (stupid) and in Zulu we used to like afterwards call one another *slima*, *slima* is a fool, as so we hoped nobody knew what it was but we knew, *slima* is a fool”.

While Mrs Firmstone was in school, the minimum age for leaving school was fourteen years. Mrs Firmstone left school at the age of fourteen, which she describes as a disgrace because she is a firm believer in education as a tool of empowerment. Mrs Firmstone left school in 1941 during World War II. Most of the men had gone off to fight in WWII and this had resulted in a scarcity of teachers. According to Mrs Firmstone, “most of our men had gone to the war although they were not conscripted; there was no conscripting at the time.” The Germans had invaded North Africa and volunteers in Africa fought against them in Tobruk¹ and El Alamein². With the many male teachers serving in the war, Little Flower School, like many other schools, was in crisis. Little Flower, in fact, was facing closure. Sr Annuncia, principal of the school, had very few teachers and warned the learners that the school could cease functioning.

¹ The Siege of Tobruk was a confrontation between Axis and Allied forces that lasted for 241 days in North Africa during the Western Desert Campaign of WWII. The siege started on 10 April 1941, when Tobruk was attacked by an Italo-German force under Lieutenant General Rommel, and continued for 240 days up to 27 November 1941, when it was relieved by the Allied 8th Army during Operation Crusader (Chen, n.d.).

² The Battle of El Alamein, fought in the deserts of North Africa, is seen as one of the decisive victories of WWII. The Battle of El Alamein was primarily fought between two of the outstanding commanders of WWII, Montgomery, who succeeded the dismissed Auchinleck, and Rommel. The Allied victory at El Alamein leads to the retreat of the Afrika Korps and the German surrender in North Africa in May 1943 (History Learning Site, 2014).

5.3 From learner to teacher

With the school facing closure, Sr Annuncia worked tirelessly to prevent this from happening. During World War II Mr Reginald Alfred Bank, who was Director of Education in Natal from 1941 to 1950, faced trying times in managing the education system in Natal (Hosking, 2010). Mrs Firmstone recalled that there were around seventy children without a teacher “and so she (Sr Annuncia) called Inspector C.M. Booyesen”. They had a meeting to discuss the situation and Booyesen asked Sr Annuncia for all the standard seven books in JC 1 (the highest class). “He looked at the English, Afrikaans, Arithmetic (Mathematics) and the test books. He looked through all of the books and pulled out my books and put them aside and said ‘Sister this child does not need to go to school in the morning, she can learn in the afternoon’. Mrs Firmstone was a boarder living in the hostel. She was called down to the office. Recalling that meeting, Mrs Firmstone, half embarrassed and laughing at herself, said that she was “barefoot and my hair was not combed. I was untidy”.

Mrs Firmstone’s Junior Certificate (1942) and Standard 8 School Report (1942)



Little Flower School.
D. C. Isopo, Natal.

Report for ¹⁹⁴² Year ending 2nd July December 1942

Name: Du Preez, Betty

Subject.	Examination.	
	First Term	Second Term
1 Scripture		
2 English	80 per cent	
3 Arithmetic	78 per cent	
4 Dissection Biology	84 per cent	
5 Reading-Domestic Science	97 per cent	
6 History	100 per cent	
7 Geography	85 per cent	
8 Diggins Afrikaans B	90 per cent	
9 Recitation	90 per cent	
10 Writing		
11 Drawing		
12 Sewing (Girls)		
Other Manual Work (Boys)		
13 Honors	Pass obtained	
14 Average Position in Class	16.1 out of 10	

Punctuality Very Good
Conduct Very Good
General Progress Excellent
Promotion

School re-opens 10th August 1942

Sr. M. Aleantara Class Teacher
Sr. M. Annuncia Head Teacher

Young Elizabeth was not aware of the reason why she was summoned to the office and wondered whether she was in some kind of trouble. When she walked into the office, inspector Booysen addressed her as Miss Du Preez. Elizabeth was astounded and stated: “I had never been called Miss DuPreez before; everyone just called me Betty and they didn’t even call me Elizabeth. We were too many Elizabeth’s, five in all, and so we had to choose so someone gave me the name Betty”. Probably because it was such a pivotal moment in her life, the meeting is vivid in Mrs Firmstone’s memory. She recalls that Booysen got straight to the point and said to her, “You will kindly help us with teaching.” Mrs Firmstone maintains that she interpreted that not so much as a request but as a directive. “Not will you teach?” I wasn’t asked I was told and I would start on Monday and it was Friday”.

For a young girl of fourteen to be told that she would start teaching the next school day was daunting. She recalls looking at Sr Annuncia while Booysen went out to get a book from his car. Mrs Firmstone recalled that as soon as Booysen stepped out of the office, Sr Annuncia said “Betty, please put on your shoes...”, for she knew that Betty had her shoes in a little bag that she carried, followed by a firmer “Put on your shoes and comb your hair”. More surprised than Elizabeth, were her teachers and classmates when she was taken to class and the teacher and pupils were informed that she was being appointed as a teacher.

When asked how many learners were in her class, Mrs Firmstone recalled that there were twenty-seven. This included twenty girls and seven boys. That she remembered this so clearly is an indication of how pivotal that was in her life. Mrs Firmstone is a modest woman and did not admit to being the top learner in her class, but she said that she was not good at sports and that she believed that learning and studying was a gift God had given her. Her school reports and the fact that Sr Annuncia and the school inspector chose her to teach, was

evidence of her excellent academic performance. Mrs Firmstone was not sure as to her life ambition as a fourteen year old, but she says that teaching had appealed to her and she enjoyed it very much. When she started teaching in 1941 at Little Flower, she was first placed to teach a sub-standard A class with between thirty and forty children.

Young Betty was taken to Sr Michaelis, the infant teacher (class 1 and 2), who “took me that Friday, the whole day Saturday and after mass on Sunday showing me what to do because on Monday I was to start teaching the infant class”. This was how Mrs Firmstone started teaching, and saw her life change as she evolved from learner to teacher. She was no longer a child but an adult at fourteen.

Mrs Firmstone’s transition from pupil to teacher seems drastic but many teachers during that period started teaching in a similar way because teacher training was not organised systematically. There were, however, important changes in Higher Education in the period after the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Around the time of the Union in 1910, the Natal University College was established. By 1949 it became the University of Natal. A Technical Institute was also established in Durban. In terms of school education, from the time of the Union, the Education Department was one of three main departments of the Provincial Administration and the Superintendent was directly responsible to the Administrator. The building that was once the Government House in Pietermaritzburg became the Natal Teachers’ Training College which, with the University, became one of the main streams of teacher training (Booyesen, 1949: p. 25).

The years after 1910 saw rapid economic growth in Natal and the changes in education reflected this. There were larger schools and more pupils in the education system. Another

feature was centralised control with little authority devolved to school boards. The department controlled teacher appointments. While this bureaucratic system was criticised for being authoritarian, its aim was to ensure that outlying schools were given good quality teachers (Haw, 1995: p. 30).

Edgewood College in Pinetown was established in the 1970s to train White teachers; Springfield College of Education was established in 1951 to train Indian and Coloured teachers, and later Coloureds were relocated to Bechet Teacher Training College which was established in 1956 to train Coloured teachers. There seems to be no college that was established to train African teachers (Pearce, 2013).

It was really only under P.R.T. Nel, who was the first Director of Indian Education and who was the Director of the White Natal Education Department from 1967 to 1977, that teacher training was made more stringent. According to the Education Policy Amendment Act of 1969, all secondary school teachers had to be trained by a university while primary school teachers should be trained by a college working with a university. Thus the University of Natal began working closely with Edgewood College; Springfield College worked closely with the University of Durban-Westville and Bechet College was under the guidance and direction of the University of the Western Cape. In addition, many teachers were able to upgrade their qualifications by correspondence through the University of South Africa (UNISA).

5.4 Meeting Arthur

Elizabeth Du Preez, the future Elizabeth Firmstone, Little Flower School and Arthur Firmstone cannot be disaggregated when we discuss the marriage and family life of Elizabeth

Du Preez. The marriage of Elizabeth and Arthur, as this chapter will show, was also for the good of the learners and ultimately Little Flower School. The young Elizabeth Du Preez married Arthur Stanislaus Firmstone. Arthur Firmstone was born in Newcastle on 13 November 1908 and died on 11 October 1991, just before Mrs Firmstone's retirement when they expected to spend quality time together.

Mr Firmstone got his Roman Catholic upbringing from Saint Vincent Veneziano, in Tongaat on the North Coast. It was at this school where he was baptised and brought up in The Roman Catholic faith. Arthur Firmstone completed his schooling at Zonnebloem Secondary School in Cape Town and studied through correspondence at the University of South Africa (UNISA), taking courses in English, Agriculture, Music and Psychology. It is not clear when he completed his qualification as he studied through UNISA privately on the farm where he resided. He took up the position of music teacher and boarding master at Little Flower School in 1948 and was in charge of the boys' hostel. The way in which he came to teach at the school is both intriguing and romantic.

Mrs Firmstone first came to know of her future husband when she was returning from a trip to Johannesburg and stayed in Newcastle. Some of the boys who attended Little Flower School were from Johannesburg. During the vacation they would travel from Ixopo to Pietermaritzburg and from there travel overnight by train to Johannesburg. On one occasion some of the parents complained that their children were molested on the train by the bedding boys. According to Mrs Firmstone, 'bedding boy' was a term that referred to those who worked on the train and hired out bedding to passengers for the duration of their journey. The aggrieved parents collected money and asked Sr Annuncia to send a teacher along. Sr Annuncia asked for a volunteer amongst the teachers. Mrs Firmstone recalls that they all said

“ooh never, its holiday, we want to be free”. Sr Annuncia turned to Miss Du Preez and pleaded with her to please go with the children. So she went to Johannesburg and stayed overnight at one of the learners` homes.

The following day on her return journey, she went to Newcastle as planned, to spend a few days with George and Marian Greenthompson, who were very close friends of her parents and were the best man and bridesmaid at their wedding. They lived in Ingogo, which is situated about 25 kilometres north of Newcastle and is famous for being the site of the battle of Schuinshoogte (also known as the Battle of Ingogo) which broke out on 8 February 1881 during the First Anglo-Boer War. The name derives from the Ngogo River (Barker et al., 1988). The Greenthompson`s suggested that Betty spend a few days with them. Little did young Betty know that they had invited one of their friends, a farmer in Newcastle, to “come entertain the teacher”. Mrs Firmstone shyly stated: “the farmer was Arthur Firmstone”. He had entertained them well, and mostly young Betty as she recalls, “he sang very nicely and he played a Hawaiian guitar”. Mrs Firmstone recalled that he sang such songs as *Beautiful dreamer* and *How I loved the kisses of Delores*, but as ladies they pretended that they did not really like the singing and songs and Betty remarked: “and it made no difference to me”. Betty and Mavis, wanted to play “hard to get” to see whether Arthur genuinely liked them. This was the case with young Betty as Arthur was singing specifically for her. She enjoyed the singing and the attention but did not want it to appear obvious to him.

Betty would later learn that the Greenthompson`s had plotted to get her and Arthur together: “Mr and Mrs Greenthompson were in their element because things were going fine as far as they were concerned”. Mr Firmstone clearly had an eye for Betty as the next morning he returned to the Greenthompson`s residence “and asked Marian if he (Mr Firmstone) could

take Mavis (the Greenthompson's daughter) and I (Mrs Firmstone) to show us Newcastle as it was my first time there".

The decorum of the time meant that he could not go alone with Betty. Despite Mrs Firmstone being much older at the time of the interview and having memory lapses, her account of the circumstances of her meeting with Arthur, are very vivid. She recalls that he took them to *Beyond the Blue Horizon Bioscope* (cinema or movie house) and that he had bought her a box of black magic chocolates. I said, "oh thank you. I opened it and offered Mavis and offered him. I wasn't going to keep it for myself". Mrs Firmstone also took a liking to Arthur but did not give any indication that she liked him and pretended as if it was nothing special.

After the film, Mr Firmstone took Mavis and Betty home and she thought that she would never see him again. But she was wrong. About two to three months later, Arthur Firmstone drove down to the Du Preez farm in Ixopo. To get to the Du Preez farm you had to turn off the main road and travel down a little way on a dirt road about 500 meters. Mrs Firmstone was surprised and even shocked to see him and her first reaction was to ask him, "What do you want here?" She was more surprised when her mother began talking to him as though she knew him. Both her parents knew him as a little boy from Newcastle in Ingogo.

Arthur and Betty soon became very friendly and then serious about each other, despite the age difference, which was almost nineteen years. Even though Arthur was nineteen years her senior she says "I felt nothing at all, never ever thought about it". When Arthur passed away on 11 October 1991, while she was sitting at his funeral service, she stated that "it was the first time it hit me" and she recalls that the then Roman Catholic Bishop of Kokstad, Wilfrid

Napier, mentioned the age difference between them and that Arthur predeceasing her was something that she should have expected.

Elizabeth and Arthur began courting and he visited her at school. During these visits, Mrs Firmstone used to bring all her friends to meet him and on one occasion Mr Firmstone got annoyed and said to her “Betty, do you think I came all this way to see these girls? I have come to see you”. She nevertheless had fun showing him off. During these visits Mr Firmstone became acquainted with the nuns at the school, especially Sr Thomasia and Sr Annuncia. They became aware that he studied via UNISA and let him know that they were looking for a teacher, particularly a male to run the boys` hostel. Sr Thomasia had a `sweet tongue` and appealed to his conscience. She said: “Oh, the poor Coloured boys that live far away, they have no other boarding school for them and they have to go to Cape Town for matric and the poor ones can` t afford it”.

5.5 Little Flower’s crisis prompts an early marriage

For Little Flower School to have a boy’s hostel that could accommodate and cater for matric boys, it was essential for a male to be in charge of them. After thinking about the proposal for several weeks, Mr Firmstone went to Elizabeth one day and said to her, “Betty, I think I will try to take the boys and supervise them”. Mrs Firmstone was a little disappointed as she did not want him to give up his farm which he was passionate about. She told him in a stern voice “Arthur I have not asked you to come here. I am looking forward to going to your farm in Newcastle. Its near Greytown, Dalton, there’s a Swedish school there in need of someone to teach Arithmetic, Afrikaans and English in the high school and that will suit me fine”. To her surprise, he replied promptly, “No, you haven’t asked me [to come here] but I will try it”.

They arranged for Mr Firmstone to teach at Little Flower in the new year and to look after the boys` hostel, but the Mother Superior insisted that the sister`s have a man there immediately for the last quarter of the year or the hostel would be closed. Betty Du Preez and Arthur Firmstone were pushed into getting married before they would have liked to, as a result of this ultimatum which resulted in Sr Annuncia asking Mrs Firmstone to get married. She told Elizabeth that because they were courting, “Betty you can’t stay up there and Arthur here, you must be close together”. Elizabeth replied, “Sister I won’t bite him and he won’t bite me”, but Sr Aquainer, who was Mother Superior at the convent and at the school, would not hear any excuses and said, “No, it is better that you get married”. At the back of her mind was the concern that their courting may lead to whispers in the community.

Elizabeth was astonished by the request as she did not feel she was ready for this major step in her life. She recalls that Father Laurence Schlessinger, who was the parish priest at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church at the convent, was present when this was being discussed. She told him she could not get married as she did not have a wedding dress, but Father Laurence replied, “I’ll take you to Maritzburg to get a dress”. Elizabeth was shocked at the speed at which things were progressing, and she reflected: “look at this plotting by them against me”. Elizabeth was taken to Pietermaritzburg to buy a wedding dress in Father Laurence’s big Chevrolet. She said that “it was nice in Maritzburg, Church Street and we came to an arcade and there was a store called Hollywood Modes and there I found a dress”. The dress was made of heavy ivory silk, as she describes it, but it had to be altered to fit her.

She recalls how Father Laurence paced up and down outside the shop waiting for her to finish but she took her time making up her mind and asked for more time while the dress was being altered. Father Laurence was so keen for her to get married, that he agreed. Mrs Firmstone

was embarrassed by the dress because “it was expensive but there was no other and I had let myself get it because I said I had no dress but Father Laurence said he would get me a dress”. Mrs Firmstone laughingly recalls that a shop attendant who heard told the others that the Catholic priest is her father.

5.6 The Marriage Ceremony

On 11 September 1948 Elizabeth Georgina Du Preez was joined in holy matrimony to Arthur Stanislaus Firmstone at Little Flower School in Ixopo. They had a religious ceremony at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in the convent and the reception was held in the dining room of the girls` hostel. The priest who officiated over their marriage was Father Laurence Schlessinger, the parish priest.

Mrs Firmstone recalls that on the morning of her wedding she and a few girls scrubbed clean the back square of the tennis court where they would dance after the reception. When they had finished tidying up she washed and dried her hair “and then the girls helped me to dress”. Mrs Firmstone says she had a simple but wonderful wedding. On Monday morning she went back to the girls` hostel and Mr Firmstone went to the boys` hostel, where he had a little room there with a bed. Though newly married they had to stay apart for the sake of the school and its learners. Marriage did not diminish Mrs Firmstone`s commitment to the school and its learners. “Mr Firmstone”, she said, “was sure that our marriage wouldn`t last because I thought more about the school than about him. Mrs Firmstone laughingly recalls that in December 1948, Arthur Firmstone went to Mother Superior, Sr Annuncia and the priest and told them, “I would like to have my wife with me”.

The sisters made a little place for the Firmstones. A one-time stable was converted into accommodation for them. Mrs Firmstone remembers that “there was still grass in the loft when we moved in”. Sr Stephanie recalls that the Firmstone`s lived in a stable that was converted into a home for them. “Their marriage”, she said, “benefitted not only them but the school as a whole as they gave their whole heart to the school and served at the pleasure of the school”.

Mr and Mrs Firmstone’s original marriage certificate

UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA—UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA. Revensus-Inkomste 216.

NUWELIKERTIFIKAAT—MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE.—Ingevolge ooreenkomstige artikel 40 van Wet No. 17 van 1923. **B538531**

No. 13 in 1948 Res/Hupe—Man/Husband Coloured—Vrou/Wife Coloured
 Hierdie bevestiging te/Marriage solemnized at the Firmstone's District 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100 Province/Province Natal

Datum van Date of Marriage.	Volske naam van eggenoot. Full Name of Person Married.	Ged. Age.	Gedoopteplaas. Locality of Birth.	Persoonlike naam. Personal Name.	Deroep. Occupation.	Woonplek ten tye van hewelik. Residence at time of Marriage.	N.º gedeele of deel van hewelik. Part or Special Portion of Estate.	Met wie en op watter dag. By whom Given.	Met wie en op watter dag. By whom Given.	Opmerking. Remarks.
<u>11/9/48</u>	<u>Arthur F. Firmstone</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>Natal</u>	<u>Rachela Jarun Lami Lees</u>				<u>Baums</u>	<u>heruff</u>	<u>Without</u>
	<u>Elizabeth G. du Preez</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>Natal</u>	<u>Spinster Secher Lxapo</u>						

Hierdie hewelik is deur my bevestig op hede die 11^{de} dag van September 1948. In die teenwoordigheid van ondergetekende getuies—
 This marriage was solemnized by me on this 11th day of September 1948. In the presence of the undersigned witnesses—

Getuies: 1. E. G. du Preez 2. E. Schleissinger 3. Rona Cath. Jansen
 As witnesses: 1. E. G. du Preez 2. E. Schleissinger 3. Rona Cath. Jansen
 Marriage Officer. Designation or Magistrate's Office.

Ek, E. Schleissinger, do hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the Original Marriage Register kept in my office, if the marriage is
 I, E. Schleissinger, do hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the Original Marriage Register kept in my office, if the marriage is

Bekragtig onder my handtekening en seël te Die Prinsalpersoon
 Witness my hand and seal at Die Prinsalpersoon
 op hede die 11^{de} dag van September 1948.
 Herein hewelik is teen my
 This marriage was contract-
 ed by us.

Handtekening/Signature E. Schleissinger
 Ampptitel/Designation present in charge

BEDRAG **2/6** FEE PAID

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY OF THE ORIGINAL AND
 NOT RECORDED BY THE REGISTRAR OF THE ORIGINAL
 ORIGINAL BY DEPARTMENT RECORDS

216-10-115
 CLERK OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
 MANAGED BY PUBLIC WORKS
 47 BELL STREET, JOHANNESBURG

Reflecting on her marriage, Mrs Firmstone said that she had intended getting married to Mr Firmstone, but not at the age of 21. Instead, in retrospect, she said, “the school decided, the sisters decided that I must get married”. Mrs Firmstone noted that there was no pressure from the families of Mr and Mrs Firmstone. Mrs Firmstone stated that “Mr Firmstone had no family, no parents, nobody”. Mrs Firmstone was away from home from the age of fourteen, “for seven years I was away from home” she said. She was 21 and it was not too young an

age to get married in that period. Her parents knew Mr Firmstone and they liked him and were pleased with her choice.

5.7 Honeymoon

Elizabeth and Arthur Firmstone's honeymoon was a very practical and unplanned one. Mr Firmstone had to visit his farm at Foreleighs to check that everything was alright as he had appointed a manager when he took up the teaching position. He asked Sr Annuncia if Mrs Firmstone could accompany him and she agreed. Mrs Firmstone recalls that she was glad to go. They left on the Friday for their two-day honeymoon. "Saturday morning, and what do you think I did on my honeymoon?" Mrs Firmstone was taken on a hunt, and not impressed because since she was a child she did not like shooting, but she did not say anything to her new husband whom she was eager to please. Mrs Firmstone sat under a tree watching her husband hunt. She was terribly afraid but did not show it as she did not want to embarrass herself. Suddenly a buck jumped up, "when it was still jumping over ... a shrub he [Mr Firmstone] shot it and it rolled over". While she hated shooting, all Mr Firmstone "wanted to do is show me how well he could shoot". Being out in the wild on the farm in Greytown constituted their honeymoon. But Mrs Firmstone appreciated the time with Mr Firmstone and, looking back, would have had it no other way.

Mrs Firmstone described her relationship with Mr Firmstone as "very pleasant, respectful and loving". She described their lives as serene. They led a peaceful life doing what they loved even though their responsibilities meant that they spent a lot of time apart. Both Mr and Mrs Firmstone were in charge of the boys' hostel, where they took an active role in looking after the boys in the hostel and the nuns were in charge of the girls' hostel. However, because Mrs Firmstone is a woman, it was not advisable for her to look after the boys in high school. This

was a directive from the Roman Catholic Church but her union with Mr Firmstone allowed her to continue to be active in the lives of her boys.

Mrs Firmstone's role in the hostel was to wake the boys up and if there was a church service she would make sure that they were ready and attended mass. Mr Firmstone, on the other hand, had a less active role in the hostel but he would see to their children and make breakfast for them. He did, however, take the boys for sports (football) in the afternoons as he believed that boys should be active. They both had duties to look after the boys and never left them alone. According to Mrs Firmstone, "I used to have my breakfast when he was with the boys; we never left the boys completely alone" and Mr Firmstone would have breakfast with their children. They held this position from 1948 until they retired from the hostel in 1982.

The Firmstone's had to design a clear programme for the boys. For example, "On Sundays Arthur used to take the boys out for football". According to Sharpley, Mr and Mrs Firmstone had a clear routine that had to be followed at the hostel and both had clear rules – one such rule was that "all hostel duties were completed after school and we were all ready at 7.30am to go to school, everyday". Napier echoed Leslie Sharpley's sentiments by adding that:

Mrs Firmstone would be very much the mother looking after this whole group of young boys in the hostel and I say that because I think... in her mind I think it was a distinction between the classroom and the hostel, so if you did something wrong in the classroom you would be corrected there but you'd also get corrected in the hostel, you were reminded that in the classroom you weren't so good.

Mr Firmstone also was like a father figure for many of the learners and was someone for the boys to look up to. Mrs Firmstone said that her husband always believed that boys should be kept busy and they always kept the boys in the hostel occupied and never left them alone. Mrs Firmstone would always care for the boys if they were sick or going through problems. She encouraged the boys to go to confession for their spiritual well-being and offered spiritual advice to them. When the boys were sick, she would constantly monitor them.

Mrs Firmstone remains full of admiration for the work of Mr Firmstone: “He was an excellent boarding master; he said boys need enough to eat, enough sport, a clean bedroom and then school; school is only number four”. He believed that active boys were more likely to stay out of trouble and perform better at school.

Teaching and supervising in the hostel was a full-time occupation for the Firmstones. Even a private family meal could easily be disturbed by a knock on the door. Their children did occasionally get annoyed as they had to share their parents with a number of children. Their daughter Eileen would ask Mrs Firmstone, “Mummy, put a notice on the door, No knocking now”, but Mrs Firmstone would gently explain to her what their responsibilities were.

5.8 Household

The busy work schedule and many responsibilities of the Firmstones made it difficult to manage their household. They had two children but Mrs Firmstone had three miscarriages before then. According to Mrs Firmstone the miscarriages took place in July or December. Her doctor warned her that this was caused by her packing the boys’ suitcases in preparation for their going home for the holidays. She packed sixty bags and placed them in the box room. The doctor warned that the lifting of the heavy cases caused the miscarriages.

Eileen Mary Firmstone was born on 21 July 1951. Mrs Firmstone was just 25 and not prepared for motherhood and so sometimes turned to her mother for advice. She laughingly recalled one incident which is very vivid in her mind when she was trying to stop breast feeding Eileen who was three years old. Mrs Du Preez suggested that she put chillies on her nipple. She tried this but “Eileen went to the bathroom, fetched the cloth and wiped it off”.

The Firmstones were still living in their `stable-home` when Eileen was born. Eileen said that she “was too young to remember our very first abode” but she was told that “it was just two rooms in the boys’ hostel with no cooking area, no bathroom and so on”. The Firmstones’ son Peter Dominique Firmstone was born in 1954 when Mrs Firmstone was 28 and Mr Firmstone 47 years old. Mrs Firmstone and her husband did not discuss how many children there should be, but I did not wish to have a big family as it would have been impossible, we decided to keep our family small”.

It was difficult to attend to the children and after Eileen was born, they employed a nurse, Amelia, to take care of her. Amelia was a helper at the convent at Little Flower School, and was sent by Sr Aquainer to help Mrs Firmstone look after Eileen when she was a baby. Amelia retired from the Firmstones after Eileen had started school as she felt she was getting old. By the time Peter was born, Mr Firmstone had trained a lady named Antonia to cook for the family. The Firmstones had hired two people to help them, one was Helsinker who took care of the children and the other was Antonia who did the cooking and general housework. Antonia was trained by Mr Firmstone to cook as Mrs Firmstone was hardly at home. She was always busy at the school, but Mr Firmstone did cook when he was available to do so. The boys’ hostel was under the care of the Firmstones but the nuns attended to the cooking at the hostel. On the subject of money, Mrs Firmstone made the point that this was never an issue

as they contributed equally to take care of all household expenses. Mr and Mrs Firmstone lived a very simple life, as they both did not earn a great deal of money. Mrs Firmstone reveals that Mr Firmstone did not earn as much as she did, but would not reveal exactly how much. She basically conceded that they had to imagine that they were missionaries. At first Mr Firmstone thought he could keep his farm but he found out later that the boys` hostel was demanding of his time and that it was impossible to keep the farm as he would hardly get the chance to see if all was running smoothly. He sold the farm so that he could take care of the boys at the hostel.

When Eileen was a baby, Mrs Firmstone would leave home at 7.30 a.m. and only breast feed Eileen at 10`oclock, when Amelia would bring her up to the school. Mrs Firmstone remembers how understanding her standard eight class was and they, in fact, became even better behaved: “They used to say don` t make any noise, we mustn` t trouble Mrs Firmstone she is coming to teach us when she has got a little baby”.

They were still living in the stable-house when Eileen was born, but had moved into a flat at the boys` hostel by the time Peter was born. Eileen remembers the flat which she described as follows:

I do remember the small flat we moved into: a kitchen which was large enough to enable us (and often other teachers) to have our meals; two bedrooms of which in the children's bedroom there stood a bin containing sugar for the boys of the hostel; soccer balls were kept in our wardrobe; a small sitting room with the `good` dining table never used because the room was too small; a bathroom with a beautiful copper geyser at the bottom of which a fire was made to heat our bath water. In those days we shared

beds.... I shared with my cousin Dawn for a while, cousin Arthur slept on the other bed. My brother Peter, three years younger, slept on a folding bed in the sitting room. I think all rooms were painted in a light green colour I have never since seen.

One of the sad moments in Eileen's life was when she had to move to the girls' hostel when she was twelve because the nuns raised the issue of an almost teenage aged girl staying in the boys' hostel where her parents had their flat. Eileen remembers the move as follows:

The boys` hostel went through extensive renovations around 1966/1967 and our flat was enlarged and renovated as well. I had a room for the first time to myself. This time we had a more elaborate colour scheme... I had wallpaper (fishes and shells) in my room! What luxury! And now I had to move out of my house and go back to sharing a room.

While they enjoyed a wonderful marriage, the Firmstones disagreed on occasion. Mrs Firmstone, for example, would feel that he was too strict with the boys in the hostel and sometimes even with his own children. Eileen affirmed her father's role in the household. Eileen says that discipline in her home was extremely strict and that it was her father who imposed the do's and the don'ts:

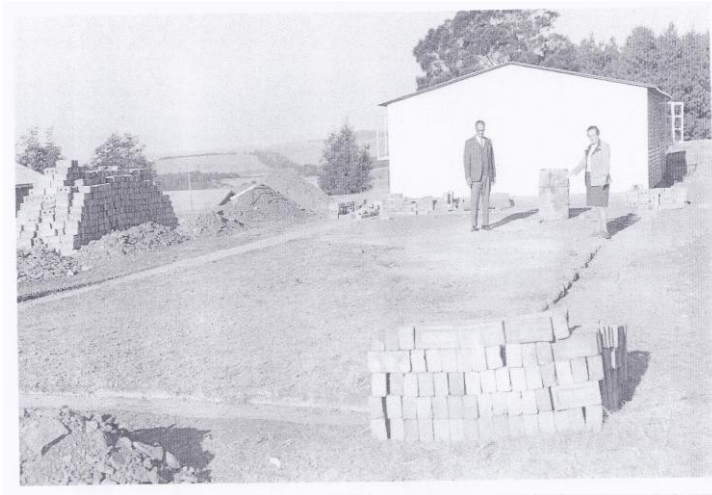
My father often spoke to me about his ideals and his vision of a well-functioning, moral, humane and just society. I can only assume though that as he belonged to the older generation, he was around twenty years older than my mother, and because of his upbringing in a stiff-lipped English household, his methods of moulding his family were only logical. And of

course, being Coloured, he had this compulsion to never let up; never to offer any reason for criticism from the Whites.

Mr Firmstones's father was English and he got his mannerisms and customs from his English background. From Eileen's testimony, it appeared that Mr Firmstone was more of the parent in their home and also took charge of the household in arranging assistance with child rearing and cooking. They may in part be due to his seniority. She also stated that her "mum was busy looking after her boys, so she didn't really play the normal mother part in my bringing up," but she accepted the situation and harboured no grudges. With so many children around, there was no time to be lonely. On the question of attitudes towards discipline, Mrs Firmstone said that she did not argue with her husband as "he meant well and he had seen children go astray and he wanted his children to be straight". When there was a disagreement one of them generally tried to let the other have his / her say so that the disagreement would not escalate.

Mrs Firmstone had to juggle three roles – that of teacher, boarding mistress and mother. Eileen sympathised with her mum who had to perform all these duties every day. Mrs Firmstone conceded that it was difficult to perform her multiple roles as she "was very seldom in my house. School started at 7.30 am and I only came home at 5.30 or 6 o'clock every evening". Fortunately, they had a helper who stayed with them for 35 years and assisted in the home. Mrs Firmstone also had others to call on. Her first port of call was Arthur himself and then Sr Annuncia. Mr Firmstone knew everything around the house and helped with the children. As she recalled, Mr Firmstone "could comb and plait Eileen's hair". During the vacation the children usually went to spend time with Mrs Firmstone's mother, Mrs Du Preez.

Mr and Mrs Firmstone at the site of their developing home on the school premises



It is important to note that Eileen and Peter's parents were both full time members of staff at Little Flower School as well as at the boys' hostel and the family lived on the school premises. As a result of their parents being so active in the school and both the children having been born on the school premises, Eileen and Peter attended Little Flower School from grade one and matriculated at the school. Mrs Firmstone recalls that Eileen was a dedicated learner and she was good in certain subjects like English and Afrikaans and she did well in matric in 1968. Peter also did very well at school, and when he matriculated in 1970 from Little Flower, he came third in the external examinations.

Mrs Firmstone described parting from her children as one of the most difficult things that she ever had to do. When they completed school and left for tertiary education, for all intents and purposes, they had not lived meaningfully together again. Even now, she lives alone in a senior citizens' home as Mr Firmstone has passed on and her children are abroad.

When Eileen and Peter finished schooling in the mid to late 1960s they tried to gain admission to the University of Witwatersrand. By this time, the National Party government was rigidly enforcing its policy of apartheid and had created separate universities for each

racial group from 1960 onwards. The University of Durban-Westville was established for Indians, the University of Western Cape for Coloureds, the University of Zululand for Africans in Natal, and so on. If anyone wished to study at a university other than that designated for their racial group, they could only do so if ‘their’ university did not offer the course and they needed a special government permit to attend such a university (Vahed, 2013).

Eileen was a very talented musician with a flair for languages, particularly English and Afrikaans. She went for an audition at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and was accepted, but the government declined her application. Mrs Firmstone takes up the story:

She went for an audition and she was accepted and the Professor said “leave her here” and we said we can’t she must first get her permit. He said “I will give her a permit” and I said you don’t know your own regulations and laws of your country... We were two weeks back in Ixopo when the letter came that the permit is forbidden and I got into the car and I travelled to Pretoria to go and beg them and when I got to Pretoria the man behind the desk said, “oh it’s very difficult you won’t be able to see the man” ... and I stood there and there was a young white boy standing in the corner and said he is the man who gives it. He refused.

With permission to study at UCT being declined, Sr Annuncia got involved and applied to the University of Cologne in Germany. The application was successful and Eileen, who was only seventeen, left to study in this foreign country, with a language that was also foreign to her. Eileen’s studies were paid for by her parents and it was costly for them but nevertheless a

sacrifice they were prepared to make. Eileen studied music in Cologne and became a music teacher. She still resides in Germany.

When Peter completed matric, he too applied for a permit to study chemical engineering at the University of Witwatersrand. Unlike Eileen, Peter was given permission to study but Eileen, who was very close to Peter, persuaded him to join her in Germany to study as she was lonely. At this point in the interview it was clear that this was a terribly sad moment for Mrs Firmstone and her voice was trembling when she said that it was a “terrible experience I thought my heart would break”. It should be borne in mind that this was before the era of skype; the telephone service was rudimentary and very expensive, and even letters took weeks to reach their destination. However, this was a sacrifice that Mrs Firmstone feels they had to make for the education of their children, no matter how costly it was for them personally. Eileen and Peter have settled in Europe. Eileen visits her mother every year whereas Peter comes every three years.

Losing one’s spouse can take its toll on one’s life and Mrs Firmstone suffered a terrible blow in 1991. According to Sr Stephanie the loss of Mr Firmstone in that year was probably the most difficult time that Mrs Firmstone has faced. He passed away doing something that he was passionate about, and that was fishing. When they could get away from the school, Mr Firmstone would go fishing as he enjoyed it very much. This was a time where they could relax and forget about their school duties. Sr Stephanie adds that his was a very peaceful passing away and that their marriage was a blessing:

I think God blessed that venture very much and He has put some of the best people of that time in this school because without Mr Firmstone being there,

and he had such an influence on the hostels and the school, you cannot imagine at that time that it was really a God sent for the people who they served and that was the kind of people that I know.

5.9 Conclusion

The marriage of Mr and Mrs Firmstone was that of two people joined as one by the bonds of marriage. It seemed the work of destiny for their coming together happened at a crucial juncture in the school's history; it allowed the school and particularly the boys` section to initially survive, consolidate and thrive as it produced several generations of outstanding learners. Family life and school life for the Firmstone's, and Mrs Firmstone especially, was synonymous. They lived at the school and for the school. Mrs Firmstone made enormous personal sacrifices in the name of education and ensured that her learner's (specifically her boys) performed well at school. She recalled that someone once said that "Mrs Firmstone isn't Mrs Firmstone; she is Mrs Little Flower School". That description and title is very befitting. Chapter 6 examines Mrs Firmstone's role as an educator.

CHAPTER 6

The Teacher and Teaching

6.1 Introduction

Having examined Mrs Firmstone's education, her sudden and unexpected appointment as a teacher, her marriage and family life, this chapter now assesses her contribution as an educator for over half a century. It is based on interviews with her and as some of the learners whom she taught.

6.2 An unexpected appointment

When Miss Du Preez started teaching at age fourteen, her mother Mrs Du Preez was very pleased as she was a teacher herself but "she wanted me to finish school first". Fortunately for Mrs Firmstone her school was close to her home and she did not have trouble getting time off to visit home. The distance from home to school was just less than three kilometres and she saw her family every Sunday. Mrs Firmstone would walk to school as she taught with a friend of hers, Connie Tomlinson, who was teaching part time in classes one and two at Little Flower. Miss Tomlinson, who was six years older than her, would tell Mrs Firmstone all the gossip from home, since the two of them did not live far from each other. Mrs Firmstone lived in the hostel at Little Flower School.

When Mrs Firmstone was approached by inspector Booysen to take up teaching, her initial reaction was, "I felt stupid, I thought how will I teach when I am a student? Anyway, I decided I will go and teach". This determination would carry Mrs Firmstone far in life. She did not know that "I will grow to love it [teaching] with all my heart". In her early teaching days she was daunted by the challenges but through her perseverance she developed as a

person and teacher, and many would say a “great” teacher. One key factor in Mrs Firmstone’s development was being mentored by older teachers. Miss Du Preez was supported and encouraged by her fellow teachers. She mentioned by name Sr Annuncia, the head teacher or principal, and Sr Michaelis and Sr Bernadette, who taught the infant classes with her.

Mrs Firmstone taught for 51 years. Her learners included those of her own generation and several others that followed and she witnessed a school that started on a small scale grow into a big institution for both boys and girls. While the school was initially opened for Coloureds, it later included pupils of all races. In fact, some of her pupils became parents and she taught their children. Mrs Firmstone taught Alan O. Fynn, who had married Eugenie D. Kettle, and she later taught his son Mark Fynn.

In the course of the half century at the school, Mrs Firmstone witnessed many changes both at the school and in the teaching fraternity in general. Mrs Firmstone started teaching sub-standard A. While she was teaching she also completed her own schooling, which was conducted after school each afternoon. In 1941 Mrs Firmstone attained a standard six certificate to be admitted to secondary school and in 1942 came first in her class for the Junior Certificate Examination issued from the University of South Africa (UNISA). She passed an examination in bilingualism that was conducted under the patronage of the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kus, doing Afrikaans and English and received a grade one pass in 1962.

At the end of 1982, Mrs Firmstone completed all the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree at UNISA. Her graduation ceremony was held in May 1983. Mrs Firmstone then attained a Higher Diploma in Education (post-graduate) in December 1983 from the

University of Natal, majoring in English, History, Guidance and Afrikaans. She received a Certificate of Merit from the University of Natal for outstanding work in teaching practice. This was affirmation of her qualities as a teacher.

Mrs Firmstone, as a teacher, planned her own lessons, taught them and also completed her own schooling. She, like all teachers at Little Flower, started in the lower grade and gradually developed herself as a teacher and accepted challenges and took on teaching higher grades. According to Mrs Firmstone's teacher's record card she taught English from 1948 until she retired in 1991, History from 1948 to 1980, Guidance from 1968 to 1984, and Afrikaans from 1948 to 1980. Once she moved to the higher grades, Mrs Firmstone taught these subjects to learners from standards six to ten.

Mrs Firmstone's Teacher Record Card at Little Flower School

LITTLE FLOWER SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL
IXOPO

TEACHER'S RECORD CARD

SURNAME (MR. MRS. MISS): FIRMSTONE

FIRST NAMES: ELIZABETH GEORGINA

ADDRESS: LITTLE FLOWER SEC. SCHOOL
IXOPO 4630

TELEPHONE: 118 I. D. NUMBER: 261205 0008 077

PAY POINT NUMBER: 429 228 INCOME TAX NO.: 0345/028/213

TEACHER REGISTRATION NO: 7044135

RANK: Sec. ASSISTANT H.O.D. - 1-1-1985

DATE OF APPOINTMENT TO THIS RANK: JANUARY 1948

DATE OF FIRST APPOINTMENT: JANUARY 1943

NATURE OF APPOINTMENT: PERMANENT/TEMPORARY/ TEMPORARY INDEFINITE

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE OF ADMIN: -

QUALIFICATIONS: (a) ACADEMIC Matric. (+ B.A.)
(b) DEGREE SUBJECTS HISTORY 1,2,3. Zulu 1. PSYCHOL.
ENGLISH 1,2,3. Sec. 1 EDUC. 1
(c) PROFESSIONAL: T. U. + H. D. E.
(d) BILINGUAL RATING: E A
(e) SPECIALISATION: ENG. + His. + GUID.

TEACHING SUBJECTS: 1. ENGLISH 1948 → to Std. 6-10
2. HISTORY 1948-1980 to Std. 6-10
3. GUIDANCE 1968-1984 to Std. 6-10
4. AFRIKAANS 1948-1980 to Std. 6-10

EXTRA - CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:

SPORT: 1. Supervise Soccer SOCIETIES 1. Choir; Organize
2. Tennis, I. Tennis 2. Red Cross
3. Badminton, Karim 3. Chess

OTHER: Magazine N. C. B. S. and Ix. C. W. L.

For Administrative Purposes:
REPORTS to Dept. of Internal Affairs:

1st Year _____
3rd Year _____
7th Year _____

SIGNED: E. G. Firmstone
Date: 01.03.1981

Mrs Firmstone was at Little Flower School from the time she started school until her retirement from active teaching in 1991. She has witnessed enormous changes during this period. Little Flower School opened in January 1923, with an iron shanty as its only building that housed eight learners. Its first principal was Sr Bona Kutzmann of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood (The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, 2014; Hunetemann, n.d.). In 1933 Sr Albertina was appointed the next principal. Under Sr Albertina's leadership, a standard six class with two learners was established, in 1936 three more classrooms were added to the school and the school increased its number of learners to 76 children in substandard A and B (Hunetemann, n.d.).

Sr Annuncia Hunetemann became the third principal of Little Flower School in 1939 and the longest serving principal when the school was under the care of the sisters. Under Sr Annuncia's leadership, the school experienced some challenging times. It had to close at the start of World War II in 1940 and experienced financial troubles during the war years as the school was cut off from Europe (The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, 2014; Hunetemann, n.d.). As Mrs Firmstone recalled:

The war in Europe meant that funding, which the school previously received from Germany, stopped. We were getting more pupils and we had no beds. I remember we had this wonderful carpenter at the school, Constantine Memela. He and Arthur Firmstone made all the beds. He did the planks while Arthur made the springs. I look back at those years with gratitude and often wonder how we managed. The boys in the hostel through the years were wonderful. They would do all the work, from washing dishes to wiping the floors and when we all left for school by 7.30 am, the hostel would be spick and span (Naidoo, 2009).

Sr Annuncia was instrumental in raising funds and building up the school. During Sr Annuncia's principalship, Mrs Firmstone was appointed Head of Department in 1985. Mrs Firmstone described Sr Annuncia as a strict but fair nun and principal.

Sr Margaret von Ohr was the last nun to be appointed principal of Little Flower School when she replaced Sr Annuncia at the end of 1986. Mrs Firmstone retired while Sr von Ohr was principal. After Sr von Ohr's retirement Ian Toohey became principal. John Vezasie, a past learner, is currently the principal of Little Flower School which became non-racial in 1994 and in 2014 had an enrolment of 1 457 learners. An indication of the poverty that plagued many learners is that Little Flower has been a no-fee paying school since 2009 (The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, 2014; Hunetemann, n.d.).¹

Over the 51 years that Mrs Firmstone taught at Little Flower, she witnessed many changes. One such change is the increasing availability of education to the masses of children. From firsthand experience at Little Flower School she saw that many more children went to school. This was due in part, to the provision of facilities, but also in part because people began to see the importance, value and necessity of education. Even beyond her school, Mrs Firmstone notes that presently many more children have the opportunity to attend school than when she was growing up, and she hopes that children would make full use of the opportunities available to them.

Mrs Firmstone recalls that "one of the nicest things that were introduced was compulsory afternoon study". This programme was put in place for the benefit of the learners at Little

¹ In South Africa, schools charge parents a fee which is aimed at improving the quality of education of learners. According to the South African Schools Act (1996), School Governing Bodies of public schools are permitted to supplement government funding by fund raising, including charging school fees. Some schools have been declared 'no fee schools' by the government on the basis of the economic level of the community around the school.

Flower School, both boarding and day learners, so that they could do their homework and the day learners would not have to carry lots of books home. Mrs Firmstone is not sure exactly when the compulsory afternoon study was introduced. She says “it was a very long time ago”, but she states that it was a time for learners to interact with the teachers in charge as it took place after school hours.

Another change that Mrs Firmstone commented on was the introduction of compulsory uniforms which had not been the case when she was attending school. Little Flower primary school uniform for boys was a short grey safari suit, grey socks, black shoes and a grey jersey (optional) with two red stripes on the cuff and the high school uniform was black or navy slacks with a long sleeve white shirt, a school tie and a black or navy blazer. The girls` uniform for both the primary and high school was a grey dress with a white shirt, black shoes and white socks. The only difference was that in high school the girls wore ties. Exactly when school uniforms were introduced in the school is unclear, but she thinks it was in the 1960s. Mrs Firmstone believes that uniforms are good as you cannot distinguish whether children are poor or rich as they are all dressed the same at school and it also gives the children a common identity.

6.3 The Boarding Mistress

Mrs Firmstone`s duties at Little Flower went beyond teaching as she was also boarding mistress at the boys` hostel. Mrs Firmstone was in the hostel when she had started JC at Little Flower and retired from the hostel in 1982. When she was schooling at Little Flower she was living in the hostel, and when she started as a teacher she simply took up duties at the hostel. In 1948, the Mother Superior called to close the school to boys over the age of twelve as it was not deemed appropriate for Mrs Firmstone to look after the boys. A male was required to

be there. During the course of the same year Mrs Firmstone got married and together with her husband, Arthur Firmstone, they ran the boys hostel.

Mrs Firmstone ran a tight ship at the hostel but she was also motherly to the boys. Wilfrid Napier and Mark Fynn share the same sentiments that Mrs Firmstone was like a mother to each of the boys and that she cared for her boys more than her own husband. Mrs Firmstone remembers what her husband said to her and her own children, and as Eileen put it, in the words of Mark Fynn, “Mrs Firmstone was like a mother hen with a brood of chickens. She took care of each boy’s needs”. She ran the hostel with great discipline and order. As Leslie Sharpley states, “there was a routine” and Mark Fynn echoes this. Mrs Firmstone herself recalled meeting one of her former pupils who worked at a meat factory. He told her that he started at 3 am each day. When she asked him, “How do you manage to get up so early?” he replied: “Why, Mrs Firmstone, you taught me” (Naidoo, 2009).

As a house mother, Cardinal Napier recalls how Mrs Firmstone nursed him when he was suffering with asthma. Sharpley described Mrs Firmstone as a mother to him as he was away from his own mother for long periods. Fynn also saw her “as a mother figure in your home away from home which made you want to be around her”.

Mrs Firmstone was a leader in the hostel. She “was instrumental in grooming leaders and chose her prefects on the basis of their ability and the respect that they commanded from the other boys through their example and leadership qualities,” Mark Fynn recalls. Mrs Firmstone had a team to run the hostel and for order to be maintained, each prefect had a section to manage and to ensure hostel duties were duly carried out. This team of prefects helped her to run the hostel and she always kept them informed as to what was to be done.

Mark Fynn recalls that every Saturday after breakfast, Mrs Firmstone would “address all the boys before sending us out to perform our community service chores around the hostel, like cleaning the property and buildings”.

Mrs Firmstone took a personal interest in the children, as Nalini Naidoo, reporter for the *Natal Witness*, discovered when she visited her in 2009:

Conversation with Firmstone is peppered with references to her past pupils. She seems to know where all of them are and what they are doing. If one speaks to her former charges, they will tell you that it is most remarkable how she remembers them. They tell you that although they are older now with altered features, she still recognises them, even on a busy street. She can recall the most uncanny details about them, even their nicknames, and will ask about fellow pupils who were in their class. Firmstone sees nothing unusual in this. “I was their boarding mistress, teacher and guidance counsellor. We were a family at Little Flower so how can I forget any of my pupils,” she said (Naidoo, 2009).

6.4 Reflections of a teacher and on a teacher

Now that the teaching career of Mrs Firmstone has been sketched, the last part of this chapter traces a few key themes and issues about which she and some of the learners that she taught reflect upon. Earning money for the first time was exhilarating for Mrs Firmstone. When Mrs Firmstone mentioned her first wage at Little Flower, she laughed and said it was “just ten shillings”², which she equated to about one rand in today’s value. However, for fourteen year

² A British coin in use until 1971 in the United Kingdom, worth 12 old pence, and was used other British Commonwealth countries (Hornby, 2010).

old Miss Du Preez “it was nice to get money, very exciting, and I didn’t even think it was small. I sent it home to my mother”.

Mrs Firmstone earned very little as she was an unqualified teacher. What seems paltry today was important to her and her family at the time. It allowed Mrs Firmstone to take care of her basic needs like soap and send most of the money she earned home to her parents. Mrs Firmstone is tight lipped about how much money she earned and that she did not do it for the money, but for the love of education. What she does share is that some men earned higher wages but mostly it was an even playing field as some female teachers earned more.

Teaching for the first time was a daunting experience for Mrs Firmstone but one that got easier as time went by. Mrs Firmstone concedes that she was “at first very frightened but as the days passed I grew to like it [teaching] very much”. Mrs Firmstone gave up what her contemporaries at the time were doing, like playing games. She gave up her teenage years for the good of education and to prevent her school from closing. Her childhood ended prematurely while her adulthood or responsibilities as an adult were extended. Not only did she have to complete her schooling part time each afternoon, but she also spent her weekends preparing for the following week`s lessons. Goldberg (2003) states that one of the qualities of A “Great” teacher, is the willingness to put in extra work and time. Mark Fynn noted that Mrs Firmstone was not only a “dedicated and entertaining teacher but also passionate”.

According to Mrs Firmstone, the dress code for teachers was always an issue as teachers were expected to dress in a way that was respectable and commanded respect. As a young teacher, Mrs Firmstone wore the clothes that she had and not the school uniform. In fact, at the time she attended school, the school did not have a particular uniform. Mrs Firmstone’s clothes

were sewn by her mother, who always sought to dress her and her sisters as `little ladies`. She always presented herself as a well-dressed young woman.

6.4.1 Preparation

Mrs Firmstone suggested that it was not her dress but her lesson preparation that gained the respect of learners. “I prepared the lessons well and it was interesting for them and they knew that they had no (other) teacher there for them, everyone knew,” suggesting that initially the learners cooperated as they realised that she was there to assist them and if they did not cooperate with her, they would be stranded. Her observation was that the learners had a real desire to learn and cooperated in a way that made her task easier even though she was young. The lifelong lesson for Mrs Firmstone from her initial experience was that if a teacher was well prepared, “half the battle is won”, meaning that it gives you and the pupils confidence that you know what you are doing and they will respect you for that. Mrs Firmstone believes that if a teacher masters the material to be taught, it will immediately give him or her an advantage and thus reduce the need to use force to impose discipline. Being well prepared also gives a teacher the ability and confidence to make the lesson more interesting to retain the pupils’ interest.

Mark Fynn corroborates this. His view is that a teacher must be passionate about the subject matter; must know the purpose and mission in life, and earn “respect firstly for self in the way you dress and behave at all times even outside of the classroom”. In all these respects, Fynn pointed out, Mrs Firmstone excelled and made a huge impression on her pupils. She did not have to beat them or scream at them, but earned their respect through her dress, conduct and general demeanour.

As a learner, a teenage teacher, and a woman, Mrs Firmstone faced multiple challenges but her recollection is that she had very few problems. She recalls that even when she later taught older boys and many of them were taller than her, they seemed to pity her and did not present many problems. Mrs Firmstone thinks that the learners pitied her “because they wondered how such a little girl can teach us; but when I started teaching them then they were happy”.

Mrs Firmstone took educating learners very seriously. She was always well prepared and put the needs of her learners before her own by always being well prepared no matter what her personal situation was like. Teaching and trying to complete her schooling at the same time was not an easy task and at times Mrs Firmstone felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities and pressures. She pointed to the role of the school’s principal Sr Annuncia, who was a German nun and had a reputation for being strict so as to ensure that she did not experience discipline problems with the learners. According to Mrs Firmstone “I didn’t have any trouble or perhaps they were afraid of the principal. I don’t know she may have told them”. Mrs Firmstone clearly had a very good relationship with Sr Annuncia and she described it as a mother-daughter relationship in the school context. She was instrumental in getting Mrs Firmstone a teaching position and also assisted her in her studies.

Mark Fynn emphasised that that Mrs Firmstone was passionate about her work but also clear about her purpose, which was to educate and she did not waste time on idle activities. He said that the respect she had for herself was reflected in her professionalism in the way she dressed and behaved both in and outside of the classroom. Her demeanour had a positive impact on the learners. Cardinal Napier observed that “she was very business-like and she would get off with the lesson immediately”. Her professionalism reflected the way she treated

her children, that is, without favouritism. As Eileen puts it, her mother had a “wonderful mixture of taking us (learners) seriously, no-nonsense but friendly, scolding but never humiliating a child and of course knowing her stuff”.

6.4.2 Discipline and classroom management

Mrs Firmstone, in turn, said that most of the learners whom she taught were respectful and friendly towards her. Parents regarded teachers as their children’s guardians at school and expected teachers to discipline learners in the same way that they would be disciplined at home. Mrs Firmstone described her most extreme form of discipline: “If someone was naughty I would call her out and make her sit on the floor in front of the class”. She is proud that she has never had to resort to corporal punishment. “I never in my life used my hand ... and I didn’t have a stick”. Corporal punishment was a most common form of punishment for many teachers. Mrs Firmstone once rebuked a teacher older than herself for slapping a learner across the face. She felt that corporal punishment was degrading to a child and there was no place for it in or out of school.

While she could count on Sr Annuncia, Mrs Firmstone did not believe in sending children to the office. She felt that the principal and the learners would construe it as a sign of weakness on her part, so she tried as far as possible to deal with the issues herself by using a variety of tactics. Cardinal Napier recalled that once Mrs Firmstone made him and a girl sit next to each other so that they would neutralise each other as they had very opposite personalities:

There was a girl, Audrey Robson; I remember her name very well because she was also getting into trouble with Mrs Firmstone. So what did Mrs Firmstone do? She put us sitting next to each other. Now, for a boy in those days to have to sit next to a girl, that was really something (embarrassing). It

worked as it calmed us both down. In many ways we were correcting each other in a sense and it was a good psychological move on the part of Mrs Firmstone.

Mark Fynn recalls that Mrs Firmstone used to say “Don’t walk like dirty dishwater running uphill”, adding that to this day he does not quite understand what she meant “but if she said this to you, you would be very embarrassed because all your peers would laugh at you. So you never walked around as though you had nothing to do; she always encouraged us to have purpose in whatever we did”. Mrs Firmstone had great respect for her learners as each one was important to her and she did not see the need to humiliate them by slapping them across the face (Orlando, 2013; Coe, et al., 2014)).

Mrs Firmstone, according to those interviewed, had good classroom management skills. Coe et al (2014: p. 3) state that a teacher’s ability to “manage students’ behaviour with clear rules that are consistently enforced” are amongst those factors that allow effective learning to take place. In her own unique way, Mrs Firmstone achieved this.

Above all, Mrs Firmstone loved children and it was this that allowed her to see the best in them and work hard to ensure they achieved their fullest potential. As Leslie Sharpley put it, Mrs Firmstone “always encouraged us to do better, aim high, she believed in each of us and let us know it.... I wanted to go to her classroom because of the respect she gave us, her emphasis on self-belief and her enthusiasm”. Mark Fynn stated that the learners always had a “huge amount of respect for Mrs Firmstone and not because she was strict but rather in the manner she treated you. We were never afraid to express our feelings”.

6.4.3 *“Challenging” the learners*

One of the qualities of “great” teachers is that they attempt to create both a challenging and nurturing environment for their learners (Orlando, 2013). Mrs Firmstone taught Sharpley English and Afrikaans in standards seven and eight. Sharpley feels that his “background had been easy going, a bit of a dreamer”. Despite this background, he quickly adapted when Mrs Firmstone emphasised to the class that they were “young adults and hard work and learning is expected of you”. Mrs Firmstone’s enthusiasm was infectious. Sharpley was excited to go to her classroom “because of respect, her emphasis on inculcating self-belief in you, and her enthusiastic style”. Mark Fynn and Cardinal Napier mentioned similar qualities when they spoke of Mrs Firmstone who “made teaching and learning interesting because of her vast knowledge of the subject matter and the fact that she had garnered information of her many learners who went before you which made her teaching real and relevant”.

Orlando (2013) points out that as much as their knowledge is important, great teaching also depends on teachers’ attitudes towards their learners, their subject, and their work. In this regard, Mrs Firmstone not only taught her subjects but also shared special life lessons with the learners. Sharpley, for example, said that he lives by a saying of Mrs Firmstone: “Believe in yourself, do the best you can, never give up”. Mrs Firmstone, he said, also encouraged learners to be positive and she would say: “You are as good as anyone”.

Cardinal Napier, as a learner, wanted to go to Mrs Firmstone’s class because “it was the fact that she was always very attentive to each and every one of us”. In his opinion, she was a very good teacher as she explained things very well and felt that every learner was “good by nature; you just got to draw that goodness out of them”. Cardinal Napier added that “her

lessons in class were not just about imparting information or knowledge or understanding, it was also about bringing out the best in the boys”.

Mrs Firmstone not only explained concepts very well but she was also “very sharp” in the questions she asked. Cardinal Napier explained that she would persist in asking questions until she got the correct answer because as in her mind she wanted everyone to do their best and felt that they had it in them and that this potential just had to be tapped into. Of course, she never embarrassed anyone and when she saw that someone genuinely did not know something, she would gently shift the attention to someone else.

Mrs Firmstone’s teaching philosophy, “which she believes kept her focused as a teacher, is that every child has a gift. No child has nothing, all you have to do is get to know the child, find out his or her strengths and abilities and guide him or her along that path” (Naidoo, 2009). One of the qualities that Mark Fynn admired in Mrs Firmstone as a teacher was that she treated all the learners with equal respect and was always willing to listen. Furthermore, he adds, “the fact that she was a mother figure as well in your home away from home made you want to be around her”.

Mrs Firmstone maintained her professionalism even when she taught her own children by treating them the same as any other children. She taught both Peter and Eileen at Little Flower. She recalled that Peter objected to her teaching him for fear of her being harsh on him. Mrs Firmstone says that she never ever took notice of him and treated him as any other learner, only to learn later that he enjoyed her lessons. Eileen, on the other hand, recalls her mother stepping in for an ill colleague to teach History in her class. For many of the learners,

History was uninteresting but her mother “made it come alive....none of that tedious reading page for page”.

6.4.4 *Gender in the teaching profession*

Mrs Firmstone observed that when she began teaching, the profession was very male-dominated and there was a great gender divide between men and women. Just being a male, even if one held the same qualification as a female, the male teacher earned a higher salary. Mrs Firmstone points out that this was common in most professions as men were seen as heads of the household who had the responsibility of providing for the family. The gender roles in the household saw the task of women being that of caregiver, domestic, looking after the children and being what we would refer to as homemakers.

Mrs Firmstone describes her relationship with her workmates as very pleasant. Other senior teachers helped her when she needed assistance and later in life she helped young, novice teachers. She recalls one instance, “If I needed any help on how to prepare a lesson, others would help ... one male teacher even gave up his football”.

In her early career, the teaching profession was very male-dominated. Men’s needs were always placed before those of women. According to Mrs Firmstone, “if there had to be a meeting the men thought it must be men alone, the women just stayed at home...” Mrs Firmstone added that it did not affect Little Flower School, however, because everyone was treated equally: “I have never looked down upon boys and girls because even afterwards I mostly taught boys”.

Mrs Firmstone does not believe there was male domination at Little Flower as the sisters (nuns) ran the school. Sr Annuncia was the principal. As Mrs Firmstone remembers, during her time at Little Flower there was “a very even playing field because there were lady principals and lady deputy principals and the men were just ordinary teachers with us, but of course perhaps sometimes we looked towards the men for protection when the boys were naughty”. Although Mrs Firmstone had a mentor in Sr Michaelis, a male teacher named A.W. Grey, who trained at Mariannahill, helped her and the sisters tremendously in planning lessons. Male teachers at the school did not seek to dominate the classroom or school.

Leslie Sharpley described principal Sr Anuncia as a “tough German” and “outstanding” in the way she ran the school, while other nuns were brilliant teachers in Mathematics and Science. According to Sharpley, Mrs Firmstone was never bothered by gender and held her own against other teachers. He believes that from what he saw, there was gender equality at the school and that everyone seemed interested in “getting the job done”.

Cardinal Napier further made the point that at the time they were growing up, particularly before the 1970s “they were not that conscious of the world being male-dominated. I think the division of labour and the division of the sexes was taken as absolutely normal and natural...”. It was the emergence of the feminist movement from the late 1960s that created greater awareness of patriarchy and advocacy for women’s rights. This was when there were challenges to a male-dominated world. But Cardinal Napier makes the point that he did not think that Mrs Firmstone was ever intimidated or took a back seat to men:

Being somebody whose whole focus as a teacher, as a parent and as the boarding mistress was on boys, for her there was no male

domination, I don't think so, I think what she saw there was a challenge and together with her husband they felt they were going to make these boys into men and they would make them into men who would not be the type that has now been described as male-dominated and patriarchal; that they would be gentlemen. I think that would have been the ideal in her eyes.

6.5 Post-retirement: teaching is in her blood

When Mrs Firmstone retired from full-time teaching at Little Flower School in 1991, her teaching days did not end. She continues to teach, pointing out, "I do it because I like it. I really like teaching". Mrs Firmstone has a passion for education and retiring from teaching at the school was difficult for her as there was a huge "void" in her life. Mrs Firmstone has helped Catholic priests from overseas to speak isiZulu as it is required of them. In addition, "I teach Zulu to White, Coloured and Indian ladies because if they don't know Zulu they risk losing their jobs and they can't lose their jobs, especially if they are in government positions and Zulu-speaking ladies I teach English".

Mrs Firmstone continues to give of her time to help others and would do more but for the fact that she currently resides in a home for senior citizens. Space is an issue at the home so she often assists and teaches others to speak isiZulu over the telephone, "I teach on the telephone and that is a very useful method for isiZulu because isiZulu is a tonal language and that helps very well". Mrs Firmstone used to drive, but sold her car in the early 2000s for health reasons. Lack of transport is another factor that has slowed her down as a teacher.

Mrs Firmstone also helps learners who are schooling in the area around the old age home where she resides with English lessons. She said that learners asked her “such fundamental things such as paragraphs and punctuation and parts of speech and so on, which seems to be very badly taught in the schools or very seldom taught. I should say not badly taught but seldom taught”. This relates to another point that she is passionate about. She is glad that when she “retired in 1991 they hadn’t started this foolish OBE (Outcome Based Education) and they (the government) are leaving it now and going back to our old teaching”.

In the period after 1994 there was an effort to transform the curriculum inherited from the apartheid regime. In 1997 Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) was introduced to overcome the curricular divisions of the past. OBE is a method that encompasses the reorganisation of curriculum, assessment and reporting practices in education to mirror the accomplishment of high order learning and mastery rather than the build-up of course credits (Tucker, 2004). Therefore, according to Butler (2004: p. 3) “the primary aim of OBE is to facilitate desired changes within the learners, by increasing knowledge, developing skills and/or positively influencing attitudes, values and judgment”. Hence OBE expresses the notion that the ideal way to learn is to first determine what needs to be attained. As soon as the end goal (product or outcome) has been determined the strategies, processes, techniques, and other ways and means can be put into place to achieve the goal (Butler, 2004).

OBE was introduced to South African schools in 1997 by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal in the African National Congress led government and it was decided to abandon the system in 2012 (Lombard and Grosser, 2008). The experience of implementation prompted a review in 2000. Mrs Firmstone feels strongly that OBE was a disaster. She asks, “Why change from what has worked and especially introduce a whole new policy that is

unknown to all in the teaching field in this country. We read and hear about various negative issues surrounding education”. If Mrs Firmstone is aware of the problems that learners face, given her experience and that of other teachers, the question arises as to why these teachers are not consulted for advice. Surely there is much to learn from their experiences.

Though Mrs Firmstone is retired, she does not charge any fee for the teaching she continues to do. It is voluntary and out of love and at her age she also does not want to commit to something that she may not be able to maintain, especially if her health takes a turn for the worst.

6.6 Recognition, at long last

Mrs Firmstone taught for 51 years; giving up her time and sacrificing her family life as she put education before all else in her life. She has received some recognition for her contribution to education. The Department of Coloured Affairs gave Mrs Firmstone a thirty years’ service certificate and a wrist watch in 1990. The department only recognised thirty years of her teaching and not the years from when she first started teaching. When asked why her earlier years were not recognised, Mrs Firmstone was unsure but said that it may have been because she did not have a teaching diploma initially and was under age.

Mrs Firmstone’s Long Service Certificate from the Department of Coloured Affairs



Mrs Firmstone, along with her deceased husband Arthur, also received recognition from Pope John Paul II in 1991, for working her entire life in a mission school and for establishing a boys` hostel. The award that Mrs Firmstone received from the Pope was entitled *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* (Latin for Church and Pope medal³). On 23 November 1991 Mrs Firmstone received her and Arthur`s medals from the then Bishop of Kokstad, Wilfrid Napier and the then Bishop of Mariannhill, Paul Themba Mngoma (on behalf of Pope John Paul II) at a service dedicated to them at the St Joseph's Cathedral at Mariannhill, Pinetown. To receive the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* medal, one has to receive a motivation from a local parish priest who then provides motivation to the local bishop and who makes a recommendation to the Pope. The enthusiasm with which Mrs Firmstone spoke of the award shows that it clearly meant a lot to her as it was her church, the Roman Catholic Church, one that she loved and dedicated her life to, that was acknowledging her contribution.

Mrs Firmstone was also bestowed the Order of the Baobab in bronze From the Republic of South Africa government in December 2009⁴ “in recognition of her sterling role and contribution to the improvement of education in our country and for her exemplary, instrumental and influential role in the field of education” (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2010). Mrs Firmstone smiled when she recalled this award: “I got an award from [President] Zuma”. After the award ceremony at the lunch that was prepared for all guests, President Zuma was impressed by Mrs Firmstone as she had taught for so many years

³ The *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* medal is an award of the Roman Catholic Church. It is also known as the "Cross of Honour". The medal was established by Leo XIII on the 17 day of July 1888, to commemorate his golden sacerdotal jubilee and was originally bestowed on those men and women who had aided and promoted the jubilee, and by other means assisted in making the jubilee and the Vatican Exposition successful. It is currently given for distinguished service to the church by lay people and clergy. It is the highest medal that can be awarded to the laity by the Pope (Fastiggi, 2010).

⁴ The Order of the Baobab is awarded to South African citizens for distinguished service which is well above and beyond the ordinary call of duty. It is an award for exceptional and distinguished contributions in business and the economy, science, medicine and technological innovation and community service (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2010).

and she spoke to him in his mother tongue (isiZulu). He asked one of his bodyguards to bring her to him. When Mrs Firmstone got to the table where the President was sitting, he greeted her in English and she greeted him in Zulu and they had a conversation in his home language, isiZulu. According to Mrs Firmstone, he was surprised that she spoke such fluent Zulu and told her that her Zulu was even better than that spoken by some of his children and that she should teach them to speak Zulu.

Mrs Firmstone being presented with the Baobab Award by President Zuma



Mrs Firmstone is a modest woman who does not like to be fussed over. When she was nominated by the main motivator, Winston Middleton for the Orders of the Baobab, her response was that others were more worthy of the award than her. She believes that she had done what was expected of her as a teacher, mother and caregiver to all the learners and that there was nothing extraordinary about this. It was after much persuasion from her daughter Eileen, Winston Middleton and many other boys whom she had taught over the years, that she agreed to the motivation being submitted. She was overcome by the attention she received from the government. Mrs Firmstone recalls how she was picked up by a car rental company from the St Mary's Home for the Aged in Scottsville, taken to the airport in Durban, and was fetched by representatives of the same car rental company when she arrived

at O.R. Tambo International airport. She was taken to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The occasion did not overwhelm her and she spoke very frankly to the president.

After she received the award, a celebration was planned for her in Pretoria by past learners without her knowledge. Plans were made with her daughter Eileen to bring her to the venue and she was surprised and overcome with emotion to see so many of her former learners there. This was a very important occasion that was held on church premises in Pretoria, Gauteng in honour of Mrs Firmstone, in receiving the highest award the state can bestow on her. But it was also a celebration of the “great” teacher that she had been to these learners and on whose lives she had impacted immensely. In attendance at this celebration there were around 200 past learners who had come from all over the world. At this function there was Mrs Kitty Scott from Durban, Mr Darren Tatchell who travelled from Johannesburg, but originally from Ixopo and Mr Edward Van Rooyen from the Eastern Cape. This occasion was pure celebration of their teacher and boarding mistress and not a formal occasion. As such, there were no official speeches; people spoke “off the cuff”.

Mrs Firmstone remains a humble person. Of that celebration Mark Fynn recalls that “needless to say we were chastised for making the fuss and disturbing our lives to be with her. But in the way only she can, she enjoyed the reunion with us”. Mrs Firmstone does not enjoy the limelight, but the celebration was an acknowledgement by her former learners of their gratitude for the positive impact she has had on their lives. According to Fynn, one of the boys whom she taught, Mr De Broise, flew in from the United States. He related the story of how he had planned to surprise Mrs Firmstone with a visit only to have her surprise him at the airport as she recognised him first, after more than thirty years of not seeing him. Mrs

Firmstone was at the airport, on her way to receive the award from the president and Mr De Broise had arrived from the US for the celebration.

The remarkable aspect of her award is that Mrs Firmstone never taught in the new dispensation, that is democratic South Africa. She taught during the era of segregation and apartheid yet the non-racial democratic South Africa bestowed on her the Order of Baobab, the highest award the state can grant, because it recognised that she was already living the ideals of a non-racial South Africa before this was achieved.

Mrs Firmstone`s former pupils, testimonies in their own words.

FORMER city resident Winston Middleton, who is a lecturer at the University of the Western Cape, said that the idea to nominate Betty Firmstone for one of the South African National Orders evolved during a chat with some past pupils of Little Flower School in Ixopo. Middleton wrote the motivation and sent out an e-mail to former pupils asking them to support his nomination. Responses arrived from all over the world. Here are some of them.

Brenda Franks, nee Rieger, ICT system administrator:

“Mrs Firmstone`s teaching gave me a sense of tenacity and for that I will always be grateful”.

Elmarie Aurelia Elizabeth Simons (Williams), daycare owner/operator, Umzinto:

“Her influence continues to offer inspiration in pursuance of success. She was supportive, dedicated and loving.”

Florence Marjorie Barratt (née Stewart), state registered nurse and midwife, Swaziland:

“Mrs Firmstone taught me confidence, independence, hard work and always to set myself the highest goal. I can never forget the extra tuition she gave me outside of lessons when I had difficulties with the Afrikaans language. Since leaving Little Flower School I have realised just how many personal sacrifices were made by Mrs Firmstone for the welfare and education of the children”.

Edward A. Markham, B.Com; CA (SA); certified public accountant, New York:

“After my parents and older brother, Mrs Firmstone was the most influential person in my life. To this day, I carry with me principles, ideals and ethics that she taught me”.

Ralph Clayton, aircraft mechanical engineer (NDT inspector):

“Important advice which she gave to the class in Standard 10: never hate anybody, because you become a slave to that person, consumed with bitterness. I have used this advice in my life, and passed it on to my children. It makes the world a better place”.

Brian Malcolm Gobie, principal building surveyor, Gold Coast City in Queensland, Australia:

“Congratulations to the person who thought this up. This is long overdue. Many of us who were fortunate to have been educated at LFS when Mrs Firmstone was there enjoyed a unique experience. It is not every century that someone like her walks this earth. Many people in their lifetime never meet a person of her calibre. For me and many, many boys and girls, she had a profound influence on the outcome of our young lives and later our careers and adult lives. In 2006 I was fortunate to attend a Little Flower School reunion in Sydney where Mrs Firmstone was the guest of honour. I was captivated by her remarkable memory — she remembered every past pupil by name and very often by their nickname. I could not even remember the names of some of the people at the reunion who were in my class! There were about 150 past pupils”.

Michael William Tissong, general manager: Newspapers at Avusa Media.

“Mrs Firmstone taught me English as a subject and encouraged me to make a career out of my talent for the language. I then studied at the University of Cape Town and, armed

with a degree, I went into journalism at the Star newspaper in Johannesburg. I have pursued a career in media, becoming manager of newspapers such as the Sowetan, the Star, Pretoria News and the Sunday Times. Mrs Firmstone encouraged her pupils to achieve to the best of their potential. She also taught us ethics, morality and principles which became ingrained in everyone she dealt with”.

Maynard Hughes, SAPS, police officer:

“What I learnt from Mrs Firmstone while at school I still apply in my life as an adult and father”.

Shortly after becoming a cardinal, Archbishop Wilfrid Napier was asked in a newspaper interview who had had a great influence on his life. He named his parents, his aunt Lucy Green-Thompson and the nuns at Little Flower School. “The boarding master and mistress at the time - the late Arthur Firmstone and his wife Betty- were good friends of the family and great influences. He was a very upright man with principles, very much like my father. They were like substitute parents”.

Source: *Natal Witness*, 11 Dec 2009. From

http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B_id%5D=32522.

Accessed 10 November 2014.

6.7 Conclusion

The chapter examined Mrs Firmstone’s education and her role as educator and boarding mistress. What emerges is the portrait of a woman who was humble, who dedicated herself to the profession out of sheer love and passion for teaching and for the learners in her care (her

boys), and whose personality resulted in her forming a special relationship with fellow teachers, the principal, and learners. As the conclusion argues, these attributes mark her as “A “Great” South African teacher”. It is difficult to separate Mrs Firmstone’s schooling life from her teaching career. The two are intertwined, as her schooling life flowed into her teaching career. Mrs Firmstone sacrificed her schooling life to help other learners who were desperate for a teacher. She also impacted on the lives of her learners by being both their teacher and being a mother figure to those in the hostel.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

Great role model and motivator

Mrs Firmstone wasn't just a brilliant educator but was a great source of encouragement and a counsellor. She couldn't encourage us enough to be motivated, successful and winners in life. Her adamant urges are still resonant within.

Thank you for your selfless endeavours in the shaping of our lives. May you live long and continue to be blessed

- By Ellen Mthembu, former student (Naidoo, 2009).

Mrs Firmstone gave 51 years of her life to the teaching profession. Countless learners, Ellen Mthembu being one, can vouch for her professionalism, dedication, devotion, sacrifice, and commitment to Little Flower School, to the learners that she taught, the boys in the hostel, her colleagues at the school and education in general. This study undertook to do a biographical study, albeit partial, of Mrs Firmstone. The study raises some interesting questions. While the focus of this study is education, one concern is whether we can understand Mrs Firmstone's life sufficiently without taking into account her family life, religious beliefs, and other aspects that motivate and inspire her. A second concern is whether it is necessary or worthwhile researching a life merely because it is under-researched or there, or whether there should be something special, important and interesting to warrant the research. Do we run the risk of exaggerating Mrs Firmstone's importance by singling her out for the study? What is the relevance of studying Mrs Firmstone's life? Is her life self-evident or is the researcher responsible for creating the final version of her life?

This study is partial and temporary in the sense that it cannot cover every aspect of Mrs Firmstone's life and with new evidence unearthed, the narrative may change. As Hermoine Lee (2009: 140) points out:

The version [of a biography] that has been constructed is bound to be partial and temporary. At the end of all the labour of reconstruction and representation, the biography is left looking at the receding view of the person they have been obsessed with, moving away from them into the silence of the past.

This study does not presume to have any pretensions about covering every aspect of Mrs Firmstone's life. That would be impossible. This is a partial study and as such tends to include aspects of her life story that were accessible via her memory or documents. The other concern in this dissertation includes using Mrs Firmstone's life as a window through which to examine how the teaching profession and expectations of teachers changed over time, as well as to document the broader changes in education during the span of her life. This study also allowed an examination of issues around racial identity, gender, household and family and the role of faith in the lives of many individuals.

What emerged from the story is that Mrs Firmstone grew up in a staunch Roman Catholic home. The Roman Catholic Church and the unwavering faith of her mother played a central role in the spiritual life of Mrs Firmstone and informed and shaped many of the values that she lived by. That her mother was able to impose her faith on her family (rather than her father who was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church at the time of their marriage) points to the strength of women in her family; women who provided positive role models.

Mrs Firmstone's faith was reinforced at Little Flower School which was a Catholic institution and which helped her to build on her early foundations as a Catholic. Joining the school as a member of the teaching staff at fourteen and remaining part of the school and church meant that she continued to receive training in her faith, which deepened her understanding of Catholicism. She remains a committed and practicing Catholic. She also married in the Roman Catholic Church. She and her husband, Arthur Firmstone, took sacred vows of matrimony in the faith and raised their children as Catholics. Eileen, the Firmstone's daughter said that her mother was like her grandmother (Flora Du Preez) who was known for her adoration for Catholic prayers and improvised prayers during journeys in the car. Eileen recalls that her mother's "church going is a personal need and has never been only duty. Having a pragmatic side to her makes her wary of the over religious."

From the time that she entered Little Flower School, Mrs Firmstone, and later her family, made the school their home and the school and its teachers, administrators and learners became part of their extended family. This was especially the case for the boys in the hostel who were close to the Firmstones and to whom Mr and Mrs Firmstone were parental figures. The Firmstone's made enormous sacrifices and were by no means a nuclear family as we understand it. They functioned for the benefit of the school and its learners for whose greater good they made sacrifices.

Mrs Firmstone also married earlier than she would have liked due to the crisis in the boys' hostel but by all accounts her marriage to Arthur, a man almost two decades her senior, was a happy and fulfilling one. Arthur too made a huge sacrifice by giving up his first love, which was farming, and taking up teaching, which he did exceedingly well and to which he was utterly dedicated. Arthur challenged some gender stereotypes and assumptions by taking on

responsibilities in the home. Mr and Mrs Firmstone had a mutual respect for each other. Eileen observed that both her parents were overworked and underpaid and having nuns always hovering around was not helpful. But they were committed to each other and admired and loved one another. And that is what counts after all". Eileen's statement about the low pay is relevant as it meant that the Firmstones remained in the school because of their commitment and also that there was little surplus cash available for holidays and other leisure-time activities.

One may argue that Elizabeth and Arthur Firmstone's children, Eileen and Peter, were sacrificed in the process as they did not get the full love, devotion, and attention of their parents, particularly their mother. But Eileen did not see it this way and looked at the positive outcome for other learners as well as the positive impact of their parents on their lives. When Eileen reflected on how she regards her mother, she replied:

At first she was more teacher than mother, later more mother than teacher. Eventually only mother, with the occasional language lessons she still gave. I admire her greatly for her educational impact, but I love her for being a wonderful mother. I couldn't have it better!

Little Flower School was established to educate Coloured children as dictated to by the racial policies of South Africa, but it was progressive in its treatment of women. The school had a woman, Sr Annuncia, as principal rather than one of the males who taught at the school. Men and women also received equal pay.

Mrs Firmstone was a teenager when she started teaching and had little knowledge of teaching methodology, the psychology of learners and other aspects related to teaching and education

more generally. She did not have a professional qualification and learnt under her mentors, particularly the sisters who were teaching at the school and who had taught her. She drew inspiration from her former teachers who were now her colleagues, especially Sr Annuncia. She had admired these teachers and sought to get the best ideas from them and emulate them where possible. As the years went by, although she continued to draw inspiration from her mentors who played a critical role in shaping her early career, she also drew from the experience and knowledge that she accumulated over the years to impose her own personality, methodology and disciplinary techniques to enhance her teaching career. This allowed her to develop into and become A Great South African teacher.

The title of this study proclaims that Mrs Firmstone was indeed A Great South African Teacher. Given her achievements as a teacher and the testimonies of various individuals, it is with conviction that this thesis argues that Mrs Firmstone is A Great South African Teacher. Goldberg (2003: location 3472) concedes that the qualities that make great teachers are not easy to inculcate or duplicate, and states that “knowing the qualities of greatness can help teachers strive for the highest standards....”. Amongst the qualities and hallmarks of a great teacher that Goldberg (2003) puts forward includes effective classroom management, positive relationships with adults, consistent excellence, expert use of instructional methods, in-depth content knowledge, capacity for growth, steadiness of purpose, and teaching personality. Mrs Firmstone’s commitment and the testimony of former pupils suggest that she would score positively in all respects. Coe, et al., (2014) state that a great teacher is one who has a high quality of interaction between the teachers and learners and the teachers’ outlook is the need to produce a classroom that is continuously challenging, but still nurtures and encourages learners’ self-worth. What Coe, et al., (2014) posits is that the teacher must be a

challenge for the learners but it must be able to make them grow. It also involves attributing learner achievement to effort rather than capability and valuing resilience to failure.

There is no need to reiterate all of Mrs Firmstone positive qualities as a teacher. From the testimonies of her children, her peers and her teachers it is clear that she has most of the attributes regarded as essential for being lauded as a great teacher. She saw the positives rather than the negative qualities of learners as she tried to bring out their full potential. She created a classroom environment that was conducive to learning. Her lessons and forms of assessment were clear; she gave sufficient time to learners to learn concepts before introducing new learning. She taught humanistic values and inspired a passion in learners in the subjects that she taught. Mrs Firmstone, this study has shown, was undoubtedly A Great South African teacher even though she features in Jansen's vague collection. Her achievements and qualities as a teacher speak for themselves.

Mrs Firmstone continues to have a great passion for education and for teaching and learning. In the 51 years that she taught she had constantly renewed herself in her teaching practice as a professional in her quest to provide her learners with the highest quality of education. She was not afraid of change. Another way in which the school was different was in regard to gender. In the mainstream schools, higher positions were dominated by men who also earned higher salaries. It was different at Little Flower where the principal, Sr Annuncia, did not encounter any differences in the wage structure. This study has also been important in showing the complexity of race in twentieth-century South Africa, particularly with regard to the racial category Coloured.

Biography as History

Little Flower School has a rich history and tradition. The school started from humble beginnings but thousands of learners eventually passed and still are passing through its doors. Despite this rich history, few records or relics of the past can be found that speak to its history and achievements over many decades, or documentation and records to show who attended the school or taught there. Most of these records were possibly deemed unimportant and thrown away or even disposed of because of lack of space.

Given this void, oral history was an important methodology in constructing this narrative. I was fortunate that my interviewees were cooperative. They had different reasons for being cooperative. Notwithstanding their cooperation, there are many gaps in this study which I have not attempted to paper over but left as queries for a future study as it is my intention to pursue a doctoral study on the history of the Catholic education system in Natal. Perhaps in conducting that research, I may be able to fill some of the gaps.

One of the issues to consider is why Mrs Firmstone's life warrants a study, aside from my own desire to uncover and record hidden histories, or as Virginia Woolf (2009) put it: "These infinitely obscure lives that still remain to be recorded". This biography is important in the first instance in recognising her as teacher and her contribution in the field of education. We can also be mentored by Mrs Firmstone through her stories and extrapolate ideas of what makes a great teacher. Beyond that, however, this thesis shows that biography can play an important role in contributing to historiography while also underscoring the power of human beings and the importance of the human personality. Biography is an important way to illuminate history. Mrs Firmstone had some unique personality traits, undoubtedly, but she also had to work within and abide by certain structures as she was not operating in a vacuum.

This story points both to those qualities that allowed her to excel as a teacher as well as the constraints which confined her, such as being a woman during an apartheid era, which meant that her skills were confined to a particular racial group for a large portion of her life. She shaped the lives of her learners to the extent possible under those circumstances.

This study makes us aware that there needs to be a balance between the individual and society. Mrs Firmstone's life is only comprehensible when it is contextualised in the social and political history of South Africa in this period. Her biography provides a micro-level perspective of the broader social and historical processes and perspectives that may challenge general categories and transcend established dichotomies (Von Oppen & Strickrodt, 2012).

This research allowed me to present the story of Mrs Firmstone without outside influence from her family or friends. I did the research, analysed it and presented it. There was no pressure from any others as to what I should present or how I should present it, or what I should include or exclude. However, having family that attended the school, being part of the Roman Catholic Church family and being an admirer of Mrs Firmstone, the narrative presented here is no doubt influenced by a certain amount of bias. I could, perhaps, have been much more critical of the church for not taking a more open oppositional stance against apartheid and of Mrs Firmstone and other teachers for not protesting against an inferior apartheid education. On the contrary, many in the Catholic Church initially sought to be conciliatory with the NP government in an attempt to retain control over its network of schools and welfare institutions. I have some empathy for Mrs Firmstone and knowing her and having met her, during this research is not hagiographic. It clearly presents her, and rightly so, in a positive light. In any event I do not believe that one can be entirely neutral in writing a biographical narrative.

This biography of Mrs Firmstone is a study of time and period and not just a person. It illuminates the ways in which the education system was racialized and changed over time, how race was figured and configured in South Africa over time, how apartheid shaped people's life opportunities and how individuals excelled despite the oppressive nature of the apartheid regime. One shortcoming is that this study does not really get into Mrs Firmstone's inner life. To understand her hopes, dreams, and fears it would probably require a self-reflective journal or memoir. The focus is also more on her work life than her inner life. This is important strategically and politically because too often the lives of women are presented in terms of their private lives.

There is a need for more mentors and role models in our education system in view of the perceived or real crisis in South African education. One way to accomplish this is to study the lives of past teachers considered excellent by their peers and students. We can learn much from studying the life stories of famous people (Spelling, 2008) namely their personality traits, outside influences, and work habits. Studying the life of Mrs Firmstone and other such inspiring personalities can aid in the mentoring of in-service teachers as well as prospective teachers. This micro-history also emphasises that similar contributions of countless other teachers in different parts of the country, particularly those who operated under different educational environments, should be captured to add to the historiography on education in South Africa.

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Pictures

Little Flower School Photo Collection

E. G. Firmstone collection

Interviews (Occurred over a period of 6 months between May and October)

Mrs Elizabeth Georgina Firmstone (Three interviews)

Mr Leslie Sharpley (past pupil of Little Flower School) – one interview (over email)

Archbishop Wilfrid Fox Napier (past pupil of Little Flower School) – one interview

Mr Mark Stanley Fynn (past pupil of Little Flower School) – one interview

Eileen Mary Küpper (Mrs Firmstone daughter) – two interviews (over email)

Sr Stephanie (Past secretary at Little Flower School) – one interview

Telephone calls

Mrs Elizabeth Georgina Firmstone – 10/11/2014, 03/12/2014, 12/12/2014, 15/12/2014

Mr John Vezasie – 09/12/2014