Donkey back in Ios, 1966

Tomato harvesting in Zaria, 1978
Chris Saunders
I first met Bill in Cape Town in the late 1960s when he was researching the Batavian period at the Cape for his Ph.D. When he heard I was returning to Oxford by sea, he asked me to take the material he had collected in Cape Town with him – this was of course long before the age of computers! - as he wanted to travel back to Europe overland. Having assembled a vast quantity of material for my own thesis, I was astonished when he produced one open shoebox in which were a set of notecards. Until I returned the shoebox to him in Oxford some weeks later, I was aware that if anything happened to it his Ph.D would probably never be completed. When I handed the shoebox back, he did joke that it seemed there were fewer notecards than he remembered. How he wrote a Ph.D based on those notecards remains a mystery, but Bill was of course a superb historian, with a great gift for synthesis, and the way he reinvented himself over the decades, exploring so many diverse and difficult topics, should inspire those of us who remain in narrow research ruts. Now I remember him most for his friendship on three continents, which included putting us up in Cambridge, Mass., Leamington and Durban, and, on one especially memorable occasion, taking us to spend some days at Champagne Castle...
Thanks, dear Bill; Go Well...

Francie Lund
Dearest colleague and friend Bill: I will miss you so much, as mentor, with your hugely comprehensive knowledge and your generosity with shared learning; I will miss your being in Davine's and my home at Christmas time and at parties; I will miss your stories about the places you go to, and your own family history(ies). And I will miss, personally, your stories about Durbnan's history. Go well.
Sheila Meintjes
He was a good friend and made an intellectual mark on all those he knew. I first met him at SOAS in the 1970s - when he was still teaching at Ibadan University in Nigeria. His enormous breadth of knowledge, insights and impatience with present politics were refreshing. He was looking forward to the publication of his Memoirs - it is so very sad that he won't be here to enjoy its reception. Rest in Peace, dear, quirky Bill - we will miss you.

Stephen Lowe
So sad to read this - our Wits Politics third years were just about to start reading his recent work on the developmental state in South Africa. What a loss.

Jonathan Hyslop
There was nobody quite like him. A very sad day. Deepest condolences to all who loved him. A great scholar and a unique personality.

Shirley Brooks
Bill's departure leaves the world that bit poorer for his absence. He'll be sorely missed. An erudite, charming, sometimes maddening man who will be sorely missed. I'm finding this hard to come to terms with. RIP dear Bill.

Stephen Sparks
Bill Freund (1944-2020) passed away early this morning. He was a friend, and generous interlocutor for a young scholar and he could be very funny. Like us all, he was challenging to know and think with at times. But there is no question that a giant of African history has fallen. A great mind, of uncommon - & at times unwelcome - honesty and forthrightness. He will be remembered, and he will be missed. Go well, Bill, raging into that unknown night.
Daniel Herwitz:

Bill and I were Americans in happy exile at the same time. His was permanent, mine more transitory. Together in the 1990s we reflected on our youths (Chicago, Boston) with something between nostalgia, irony and a tinge of contempt. We were both disappointed in America, I because of the ideals I'd been given, he because as a child of Viennese refugees and the person he was he felt misfitted. But his brilliant straightforwardness was I think the product of an American education. One day he invited my family to dinner at the old house, a sprawling dishevelled open plan place with a garden about to slide into the pool. He cooked a huge bowl of spaghetti with nothing on it. A true bachelor's meal, made less dry by his endless enthusiasms for African cities, about which he knew so much he could have been a tour guide, were he, well, another kind of person than he was. But his sense of the intricate wonders of cities coated in grime and half dilapidated was marvelous. He truly loved them. After the horrors of Vienna (his parents were Jews), and the alienation of Chicago, tough city of big shoulders, it was here in South Africa (and I write from Cape Town) where he was, I think, happy. And happy to contribute. Let us applaud all he gave to the place where he, for the first time, felt at home.

Michael Chapman

When late on evening I was phoned by a colleague and asked whether I was willing to be nominated as the next Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, I asked whether the members of the Faculty had confidence in me not simply as an administrator, but also as an academic. I was told that, yes, they did, and that I even had Bill Freund’s support – a comment which I valued and which suggests the esteem with which Bill was regarded by all his colleagues.
This image of Sue Parnell, Bill Freund and Steve Gelb was taken at Wits in 1984 at the Bozzoli centre which was a regular site of informal lunch and drinks seminars. Bill had just arrived to take up a position in the African Studies Institute where he started a project on industrial change that would see his enduring engagement with the dynamics of South African cities. Right from his arrival Bill was a central figure in a broad group of anti-apartheid activist-intellectuals who were working with the Unions and civics. Photo from Sue Parnell
In the picture are Bruce Boaden, Sheila Mullen, Jeff McCarthy, Warren (our son, on the back of Bill) and Felicity Kitchin (possibly Midmar Dam). Photo from Mike Sutcliffe
Ben Fine:

I first met Bill in 1987 or thereabouts after I had been requested by the ANC (external branch) to review the work of the Economic Trends group (led by Stephen Gelb). I spent the first night of my trip (my first to South Africa) on the concrete floor of Alec Erwin's place in Durban. He had returned there in the evening after seeking to quell black-on-black violence but was arrested at the airport and had his passport confiscated. Meanwhile I was decanted to Bill's more luxurious house and garden. We have been friends and occasional collaborators ever since, meeting often, either with paths crossing in South Africa around teaching, research or sociability, or whenever he visited the UK when he would make a point of looking me up. We would have long conversations in which I would exploit him mercilessly for his knowledge of issues of mutual interest. Whilst much of the commentary on Bill has rightly emphasised his breadth and depth as a historian, I would also point to his abiding commitment to understanding the present and future prospects in light of that encyclopaedic historical knowledge and understanding, not least in assessing policy proposals. Despite this, Bill remained a scholar and a teacher first and foremost and never sought the rewards from other roles that his skills and capabilities allowed. Uniquely, he brought comparative lessons from Africa to South Africa, ready to learn but more often providing the lessons and the issues overlooked. As an individual and an intellectual, he was full of integrity, warmth, generosity and good humour, his major vice/virtue being his willingness, within limits, to offer these so openly to those with whom he (and especially hardliners) might disagree. He leaves irreplaceable holes in my heart, brain and spirits.
Touch Rugby group
Reunion with Bob Shenton and Tony Humphries, 1993

Lesley Lewis and Bill
Bill’s Retirement and Festschrift Party, 2006:
Henry Bernstein, Jeff Guy, John Wright. In the background:
Raphael de Kadt, John Karumbidza
Mozambique – 1996

Fish River Canyon, late 1997. Bill is with (left to right) Ken Christie (also former UND - Politics), Steve Rockel, Ken’s then girlfriend Penny.

Photo supplied by Stephan Rockel
Bill Freund in 2002 when he was Head of Department of Economic History at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, with seated on his left, Harald Witt and to his right David Moore. Standing behind is from left to right, John Karumbidza – PhD candidate, Debbie Boertje, the department’s secretary, and Buntu Siwisa.

Top row: Stein Nesvag, Harald Witt, Gloria
Bottom row: Bill, Stephen Rockel
Lesley Lewis and Helmut

Dear Bill, in my imagination you were always in Durban, the only place we’d ever met up, but now you’re standing at the confluence of two rivers in the heart of Europe too. We’re so glad we experienced you as the traveller - relaxed and curious, perfectly at home in a tram or old Konditorei, exploring the streets and sights, understanding even Swiss German, while we, your lucky companions, were entertained by your wry, funny observations. Du warst wirklich entzückend drollig, Bill, inimitably so, and we will miss you.

Rasigan Maharajh

Please receive my sincerest condolences on the passing of Bill. Whilst keenly aware of our mortalities, I am still shocked by the loss of Bill. I find it difficult to articulate how different my current circumstances would have been, had I not met Bill all those years ago. Bill epitomises transformation and I am because he cared.
**Steven Friedman**

The one point I hope is made is that Bill's contribution to scholarship in this country is under-estimated. His work didn't attract the kind of academic rock star status which some of his colleagues enjoyed but, in my book on Wolpe, Bill's insights were among the most perceptive (more perceptive than that of many of the people quoted who were rock stars!). He also had a very powerful intellectual influence on many young scholars who went on to become rock stars. And he was very important to Transformation, which has been influential for a very long time.

He was also far less prone to the kind of intellectual warfare with which we are all familiar. Again, his insights in the Wolpe book show empathy for people who it is now fashionable to deride and with whom he disagreed profoundly, such as the activists who joined the SACP in the 1950s. I always found him very empathetic and open to colleagues whose ideas were unpopular.

**Kanagie Naidoo**

I met Bill Freund during his regular visits to the School of Development Studies. However we only forged a friendship after the many changes the institution survived, during which time we had lost most of our friends and colleagues to other institutions. Bill visited me at the office regularly when he was not travelling and we had many interesting conversations. He shared the story of his parent’s life, his life as an only child, the many books he had written, what he was currently working on and he spoke fondly of his travels. He was sure to visit or make a phone call to me on his return from his travels and this would be his words to me, “nothing important, I just wanted to let you know I’m back and had a wonderful trip”.

Go well Bill, you will be missed.
Robert Kriger
One interaction stands out above many when in 2001, I accompanied the global soc sciences editor of what was then CARFAX to solicit publishing partnerships with SA journals. Bill received us in his wonderfully 'disorganised' organisation called an office. After listening attentively to what was on offer, Bill asked, 'And what do we loose ... our independence?' That, he was never going to compromise. May he rest in peace and fulfilment.
Marienbad in 2003, today Mariánské Lázně in the Czech Republic (photo Olivier Graefe)
Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni
Sad news indeed. He helped me and Busani Mpofu when we are editing Rethinking and Unthinking Development. May his soul rest in peace. A great scholar he was!

Matteo Rizzo
Very very sad to hear about Bill Freund's death. A giant of a scholar, until the very last days of his life. Also special, as I know from personal experience, in his commitment to supporting younger generations of radical political economists. Our discussions about Africa, development, labour and cities will remain with me forever. And a lovely and very funny man on top of all this. Rest in peace Bill, wherever you are.

Sara Rich Dorman
Earlier this morning I heard that Bill Freund had passed away. I didn't know him well on a personal level, but his thought shaped my encounter with academia profoundly. The late Chris Youe introduced me to this book in 1991, in my first course that had anything to do with Africa, just after I had returned from my first trip to Zimbabwe. It forced readers - even novice ones like me - to think historiographically, and to engage with and critique literature. Those of you who have read any of my writing, or listened to me teach, will, I think, appreciate how much both Bill and Chris continue to influence me, and my students.

Julie Parle

Barney Pityana
Very sad indeed.
Bill liked animals a lot, especially his beloved Ahmadu who he spoke about often. You can read more about Ahmadu in his autobiography.
Emmanuel Sairosi
Lala kahle Bill. It remains a great privilege to have been taught by this towering academic.

Rizwana Bawa
Bill was a huge influence on me and so many others who were lucky enough to have been taught by him.

Dirk Hartford
I have fond memories of Bill in late 70's at Warwick University in the UK and later in SA. He used to cook up a feast both literally and in the imagination. RIP brother

Alex Beresford
Such sad news. Bill was not only a great scholar but also incredibly generous with his support and encouragement for junior colleagues. He will be missed.

Gavin Williams
A good friend and great scholar, Much more to say.

Sharad Chari
Such a lovely man. We will miss his laugh, his sharp wit, his warmth and also argumentative spirit, and his unrelenting anti-racism, particularly against white saviours. I am fortunate to know you and Jo Beall through him.

Bobby Peek
Really sad about Bill. He was a real character and one of the few academics in the post apartheid 90's who maintained we were right about south Durban. To continue challenge and confront the democratic state.
Julian May

When Imraan told me this morning, I felt quite desolate. Somehow it was yet another important part of my Durban life that had been lost. But you have reminded me of all of the good memories, including Bill holding forth at Ike's Bookstore.
Moses Ochonu
What a loss. He was a towering figure in African history, a bit under-appreciated in my view but very influential. His work on tin mining in central Nigeria remains the reference point in the historiography. May his soul find rest.

Raphael de Kadt
Very sad and unexpected news. Bill and I were colleagues for many years. We'll greatly miss his capacious mind and intellectual passion and enthusiasm. A great historian of Africa - which he grasped and mastered in a uniquely Continental and Global manner. We're all the richer intellectually for having worked with and alongside him, and for having enjoyed his lively intellect and very "present presence ".

David Hemson
Taught with Bill at University of Dar 1979; he gave a lecture on slavery in the Cape to my history class without notes but with every detail and date. His mind was phenomenal, he could read and speak Swahili after 3 weeks! He expected much better from our leaders. Sensing the depths of our decline he returned more rigorously to our economic history as his demarche.

Neil Roos
What dreadful news. I remember Bill from the time I was a postgraduate in Shepstone building. Like you, I share recollections of him as funny, brilliant, often cantankerous and always generous. I owed him an interview about working class childhood in that coastal city. He will be missed.
Christmas Lunch at the Erwin-Greenstone’s 2017 (photo Clive Greenstone)
Imraan Valodia

Another Bill genius trick, which a number of others on this thread will fondly remember. For more than 10 years Bill and I and the other editors of the journal Transformation met for an editors meeting. Over that entire period that I attended these meetings Bill never arrived to the meeting on time. A few times he was two or three hours too early, or 2 or 3 days too early, but mostly late - never ever on time. He would arrive in his very special unassuming way and take us back to agenda items that we had long concluded. Lots of frustration, raised eyebrows, sometimes even anger. But, on every such occasion his comment was so thoughtful, decisive and sharp that, though sometimes frustrated, we all knew how critical he was to what we did in the journal, and that we all adored him. He was just brilliant.

Timothy Burke

So sorry to hear this. It was always interesting to talk with him, and he was terrifyingly knowledgeable about such a wide range of things South African. I will never forget telling him about this mysterious, interesting Jewish Communist shopkeeper I'd come across in the Zimbabwean archives who was around in the 1920s and him replying "Oh, Moses?" and then rattling off the man's entire family tree and their various southern African residences, biographies and so on.
Alison Gillwald
Oh Shireen I’m so sorry for you. You capture Bill so well. I had not seen him for years after leaving Durban, once warmly in Johannesburg many years ago, and then about a month ago I was doing a COVID / digital online seminar for UCT economics department and there he was in the online audience, barely changed, as scruffy and wry as ever, (and how like him to attend something not in his area of specialization but topical and possibly important to the mess we are in). So as soon as I ended and the was a lull in the questions I greeted him and asked him if he had any comment and predictably he asked a very fundamental question about whether all this digital stuff was really as important and enabling as I claimed. - Wryly, smartly and, not that I could have seen, but probably directly from waking from his seminar nap. I’m so grateful for this last little interlude.

Ann Harper
Sorry to hear that Steve. Haven't visited Durban since lock down, so have missed the opportunity to catch up with Bill. Best memories are taking him on a beach holiday to Bazarutto Island with Davine Thaw and Francie Lund. Completely out of his comfort zone and he loved it.

Steve Collins
It is with sadness that I learnt that Prof Bill Freund has died. He was a sweet and considerate Economic History professor who tolerated, even encouraged my lack of academic diligence due to political activities. He taught me a lot. I recall him playing touch rugby and us all being concerned he might die of a heart attack. He survived up to yesterday. MHRIP.
PhD defense celebration of Nadine Wenzel in November 2018 photo Olivier Graefe
Mark Hunter

I first met Bill at UKZN when he gave an incredible lecture on economic history to our Master's class. His breadth and depth of knowledge had not only students' but Mike Morris' jaw dropping. His generosity and curiosity made him a dear mentor-friend, notwithstanding the distance. A really sad and massive loss.

Buntu Siwisa

These were taken in the first semester of 2000, at a Thai restaurant in Durban, when Bill took me out to congratulate me on winning the Rhodes Scholarship. Bill mentored me as an undergraduate economic history student in 1995 - 96; was my supervisor for B.A. (Hons) and M.A. in Economic History and Development Studies at UKZN from 1997 - 2000. I credit him for winning the Rhodes Scholarship to undertake my doctoral studies in Politics and International Relations at Oxford University, St. Peter's College, as he is the one who made me aware of it and encouraged me to to apply.

Rest in Peace Bill Freund. I couldn't have been luckier than to have you as my PhD supervisor, along with the other living legend on the left. An amazing mind, a bibliographic memory, eccentric as hell, sweet as pie. There are not many like you. Rest easy.
Bill and Showers Mawowa at a SDS Seminar, 2014 (photo from Judith Shier)

Bill and Showers Mawowa in Osaka, 2015 (photo from Showers Mawowa)
Denny Thaver
Like losing an enchanted library. God bless your soul Bill. Thank you.

Peter Vale
What a gift he has left us...
This picture of Bill and I together was taken in Place St-André-des-Arts in Paris, in September 2019. Of course, we were meeting for lunch, just as so many of us shared meals with Bill over all the years and usually learnt a thing or two about cuisine as we did so.

I could name few people who have had as large an influence on my thinking, reading, research and even writing as Bill Freund did, though he is not to blame for my imperfections. Over the decades since I first met him in the early 1980s whilst he was teaching at UCT, and read *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, his incredibly wide reading across scholarly and creative literature, reflection on his own and others’ intellectual formation, continuous dedication to research, and endless conversations, could hardly fail to make an impact. His stimulating
remarks and sometimes acerbic critique and frequent chuckle added up to much more than a few words could capture.

Bill spent a couple of years as a researcher at the old African Studies Institute at Wits, at which time I ran the weekly seminar held there. A paper he presented at the seminar made its way into the book of selected pieces from the seminar Organisation and Economic Change which Ravan published in 1989. Very much still worth reading his ‘Social character of secondary industry in South Africa 1915-1945 with special reference to the Witwatersrand.’ I have to say it was tough bargaining with Bill over the editing, for he had strong ideas and defended them with sophisticated thoughts, unless you could mount a very substantial and well supported argument in another direction. As in his spell in Zaria, Nigeria, and Joburg, Bill ploughed deep in each region he came to know in Africa, most of all Durban. And he spread his wings over city studies, as well as the political economy and history from which he had begun.

As everyone knows Bill took up the chair of economic history at University of Natal Durban (as it was) where he became a central intellectual figure in that city and well beyond. He vigorously engaged in the cultural events that the city offered, always pleased that he could also take in such things in other cities on other continents. Bill, who adhered to no religious faith, valued attending and participating in events that connected to his parents’ origins - in a central European tradition of intellectual and cultural breadth and depth - a world before 1940 in which Jewish life was a component of the cosmopolitan, multilingual and progressive parts of society. Those for me are the lasting characteristics that Bill always displayed.

My greatest disappointment is that the project that Bill initiated together with Kira, Monique, Leslie and myself has only just begun, and Bill won't be there in person to help keep it true to his values of superb research, social relevance and dedication to the product. We will continue to work on public housing histories and memories very much in his honour.

A good friend and intellectually provocative colleague for almost 40 years, I will miss Bill's deep and wide knowledge and thinking very much, as others will too. One of his many monuments will be his developmental history Twentieth Century South Africa published last year – and more of his work will yet appear. Many of his students and colleagues will carry forward his legacy.

My son William Mabin who shares Bill’s name, wrote this on social media this week: ‘Bill was a larger than life character. Growing up he was always a family friend and I visited him at many landmark times in my life. He was always generous ... So very well read and knowledgeable. RIP Bill.’

Many other friends and colleagues have expressed their feelings about Bill this week. Here are some:

David William Cohen ‘Oh no. Three days ago I was talking about his visit and talk/s at Johns Hopkins some 35 years ago. Always stimulating.’
Mark Oranje ‘I am really sorry to hear this, and especially for … his very good friends … Thanks to you I got to know him a bit, and even that little bit was fascinating and inspirational.’

Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch ‘Quelle tristesse! Merci de m’associer aux condoléances’

Dilip Menon ‘Oh this is saddening. I learnt a lot from Bill’s work and his interventions in our capitalism workshop were profound and incisive. A great loss.’

Preben Kaarsholm ‘Very sad news... he was a great scholar and a good and loyal friend.’

Achille Mbembe ‘Bill was an extremely generous human being. His knowledge of the continent was exceptional. We thank him for what this great scholar taught us.’

Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie ‘So sad to read this about a very gentle person who was an intellectual giant and kind to everyone he met.’

Nancy Odendaal ‘Very sad news. Bill was a wonderful scholar and a generous colleague RIP.’

Lungisile Ntsebeza ‘The last time I saw Bill was last year in June in Edinburgh, at the African Studies conference. He supervised my Masters and we now and again touched base. What a brilliant mind!’

Kathy Mabin ‘What tragic news. So sorry. I’ll always remember Bill with deep affection.’

Dan Smit ‘Sad to say goodbye to an old friend. Bill was a good man with an astonishing intellect. We will miss him.’

And I can’t do better that these comments in celebrating Bill’s rich life today.

Some more images appended
Bill with Cynthia Kros, Manor Gardens 1985

Bill with friends at Noordhoek beach 1985
Bill at home with William Mabin, Cynthia Kros and Linda Mabin 1992

Book launch 20th Century South Africa at Clarke’s Books 29 April 2019
Bill by Vishnu Padayachee

I was very privileged to know and work with Prof Bill Freund for 35 years.  
He was inspirational in supervising my PhD between 1987 – 1989, at a time when the University of Natal of Natal was still a wonderful home for intellectuals and a collegial place.  
I would, without hesitation characterize Bill as a brilliant economic historian and one of the intellectual giants of our times, not just in South Africa.  
Until the late 1990s academics from the university of natal stayed far away from their colleages at UDW across the M13. Bill made a conscious and sincere effort at breaking this tradition and would make the trip to the Westville campus, frequently missing the turn off, to meet some established scholars including Doug Hindson and John Daniel, who he persuaded to join the board of Transformation, but also younger academics with potential, like Shahid Vawda, Rob Morrell and Goolam Vahed.  
He frequently spoke to me about his concern at the sharp decline in the standards of today’s academics. Too many are no more than narrow clerks of learning he lamented and have lost the critical and enquiring mindset essential to good scholarship. Like good corporations, academics need ideas and purpose. In Bill’s passing, we have lost a great soldier in this battle.  
A few hours before he died he send me a WhatsApp message that read, “missing you, Vishnu”.  
I will miss you too Bill, you are irreplaceable.  
Your friend  
Vishnu
From Shireen Hassim:

I woke up to the news of the death of Bill Freund. In that strange way of international time zones, a whole swathe of his friends have moved from shock to remembrances, and my whatsapp and email box and FB are awash with the news. It feels like an assault of grief.

When my beloved MA supervisor-comrade Jo Beall was forced out of the country overnight by the security police, it was Bill who stepped in and informed me 'I will be your supervisor now.' I was lost and utterly broke and unable to see that I would ever be able to continue. I had followed Jo from UDW to the University of Natal, and I was very much an outsider to it. Bill was a calm believer in me and a lifelong cheerleader. In the late 1980s, he laughed at the idea that I should chuck it and go back to teaching high school, or take up an offer of an office job. He gave me bits of sessional teaching. When I said I didn’t know the material, he said, just read and you’ll get it (it was economic history and I had done absolutely no economics). He gave me his meticulous teaching notes to help and seemed to think this was just normal. It was incredibly rare and generous.

For my MA, a major study back in those days (250 pages! archives! interviews! subterfuge!) He allowed me to do the research that I wanted to do, even though it was a feminist reading of Inkatha and he had his issues with feminism. You’d send him a chapter and he would read it overnight and cut precisely to what was worthwhile and what was ideology. He made me more careful in my phrasing and more open to what my research was telling me, rather than pursuing a fixed (usually ideological) notion that I wanted to prove.

His great ability to read critically and to write with wit and flair made him one of the best reviewers of books; he had it down to an art form. In his own work, he had a genius for synthesising huge bodies of literature and then distilling and applying his insights to his own research on slavery, then on economic developments in Africa, then on Indians and then on cities. These gifts remain.

Shireen Hassim 2/2:

(His other genius trick was to fall asleep in seminars on hot summer afternoons in Durban but then open his eyes and ask the one lucid question that captured precisely what was at stake in the paper being discussed.)
We had a funny interchange a couple of weeks ago in which his eye-rollingly outrageous and honest assessments of petty politics in academia cheered me up and set me right, as he always did.

I think Bill understood what it was to be an outsider, and that is what bound us. He got what it felt like to be not seen. He was white, male, American - all the attributes of power, ne? But he was was never given his full due in either the US Africanist academy nor in South African institutional life.

But he had us, his friends. He was incredibly close to those of us who were his former students, proud when we did well and sharp when he thought I was doing shoddy work.

Around 1990 he told me three things that became a joke between us: 'X will break your heart,' 'the ANC will break your heart,' and 'there is a world beyond South Africa.' He was right.

Hamba kahle Bill. You will never be forgotten.
Remembering Bill Freund (7 June 1944 – 17 August 2020)

This past week a long-time friend and colleague died. His name was Bill Freund and he was an emeritus professor of economic history at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Wits University Press recently described him as one of the grandmasters of South African economic historiography, he was a remarkable and prolific scholar and the breadth of his knowledge on recent African history was extraordinary. While it is true that he was a prolific and important scholar, he was also a friend to many.

I had first met Bill in 1985, soon after he came to the University of Natal. At the time I was a young graduate student, having just started my masters, but at that time more activist and supporter of trade union struggles than student. A large labour stayaway in support of the Sarmcol strikers had been organised and Bill was invited to be part of the small group monitoring this stayaway. I remember him as an outsider to this group of academic-activists, much as Shireen has mentioned in her wonderful tribute to him. But he got stuck into the work of cold-calling factories to get a sense of the reach of the stayaway and when we came to write the article thereafter he countered the ‘ideology’ that some of us were eager to push through with clear sharp analysis. Ready to acknowledge the victory of the stayaway, but not to give over entirely to emotion.

Over time I got to know him better, he always turned up to every seminar at the University of Natal (later UKZN), listening carefully and offering clear, supportive critique, sometimes hard to hear but always spot-on. His questions were extraordinarily insightful. He was part of the group (as was I) who worked on the edited collection Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal – a long project of learning and writing that involved much arguing and debate as well as a number of weekend away seminars, country walks, conviviality, laughter and wine.

Bill was always very supportive of my work. As many other have said he was always available to nurture and invest in young academics. We were in different departments yet he came to every paper I presented both with my masters and PhD – giving me valuable feedback. He would read rough drafts of anything I sent him and provide helpful critical comments within days.

Our lives in Durban crossed in countless ways over the intervening decades, both at the university and socially, until I left Durban in 2014. I have used his books and writing on many occasions both in my work and in my teaching. I am gladdened that we had a short but delightful correspondence earlier this year. I remembered his clarity of thought and expression, his inability to suffer fools, his compassion as well as his harsh critique of university managerialism. Hambe kahle Bill, thank you for your time.

Debby Bonnin
A larger than life friend of South Africa and our continent has fallen

Emeritus Professor Bill Freund

1944-2020

The National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences joins academia in South Africa, within our continent and globally, in expressing its sadness at the untimely passing of Emeritus Professor Bill Freund. A pre-eminent South Africa historian, Prof Freund was a friend who has contributed immensely to our body of knowledge within the humanities, with his seminal works in *The African Worker* and *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, among others.

Many have testified to Prof Freund’s exquisite yet uncanny talent and power to express himself in a manner that was not only original but with a commendable great deal of elegance. His reach is correctly described as having been “long, wide and deep, spanning disciplinary, age and geographical divides”; at best reflecting a “loyalty and intellectual generosity”.

A pioneer scholar in the “new” South African history setting, Prof Freund joins the esteemed company of the great intellectuals and scholars that have shaped the trajectory of this country post-apartheid.

There is no doubt that Emeritus Professor Bill Freund will indeed be remembered as a great mentor, supervisor, friend, comrade, and pioneer of economic histories of Africa and South Africa.

He will be sorely missed, and we are grateful for his prolific contribution with the humanities and social sciences for we are a richer community, because of him.

May his soul rest in peace.
Lindy Stiebel on Bill Freund.

I will remember Bill for his warmth, even ahead of his brilliance. We met in Durban in the 80s when I was a lecturer in the English department at the University of Durban-Westville. Anyone who was anyone - I felt at the time - was Left, Marxist in their literary interpretations. My husband, Paul, was an ophthalmologist at King Edward hospital and outside local campus politics (thank goodness). I often used to judge people by how they treated my very clever, kind - but not 'Left' - husband. Bill was that person who would engage with Paul, and myself, with deep affection. As an 'outsider' from Durban, he intuitively knew what it was to be an outsider in the academic world. We grew to be family friends with Bill always constant in his enquiries about the children's health, supportive when Paul died and an ever-engaged discussant on matters of travel.

Thinking of which, I recall a wonderful moment on the Chobe river when Paul, myself and the children were afloat a small boat viewing a herd of elephant in the water, whilst all around us, other small tourist boats in hushed tones exclaimed how wonderful the sight was. Over the water came Bill's voice hailing me in a loud voice. He was so happy to see us in such an unlikely spot that, no matter the glares and 'hushes', he continued a watery conversation on our latest joint conferences, our travels, his travels, the food, mutual friends and much else. Needless to say, we were not the most popular people on the river that quiet afternoon. Dear Bill...

Of course, we were editors together too for over two decades on *Transformation*. Bill's ability to read papers, comment on them, make suggestions, solicit reviewers from his extensive network and mentor young scholars was dazzling. He was not afraid to venture into other disciplines besides his own and when doing so, would read up, become knowledgeable and have an opinion. He was like that on contemporary South African literature. He would ask me what I was reading, debate pieces from the JRoB, suggest new novels I might like. No one could keep up with his reading and he will be sorely missed by the journal. And not only for his range and brilliance of intellect. I will miss Bill personally for the unhurried smile which he gave us, despite arriving late, at our monthly editorial meetings at one restaurant or another around Durban; for his lack of accompanying paperwork and yet ability to catch up straight away; his attention to the menu no matter when he'd arrived; our post-meeting travel 'catch ups' and our plans as to where we'd be going next for a conference, our research and friends. Bill had, it turns out, a lot of friends, far flung. I count myself as fortunate to have been one of them.
Tributes from some of Bill’s past students

A Tribute to Bill Freund: Dr. Laura Alfers

I first encountered Bill Freund at a distance. I had a scholarship to study at Cambridge University, and was taking a course on the Political Economy of Africa. The Making of Contemporary Africa was the only book listed under “Essential Readings” and I was quite in awe of the person who had written in. So, it was with great excitement that I learned on arrival at the School of Development Studies at UKZN, that Bill had agreed to supervise my PhD along with Francie Lund.

Our relationship got off to a slow start – mainly because I was a bit panicked about what I was to write about for the next three to five years. Bill had told me that I needed a problematique to grapple with. This sent me into a flat spin – not helped by the fact that none of my fellow students knew what a problematique was either (or were, in fact, planning on grappling with one). But slowly things settled down, and as I became more confident and able to submit pieces of writing I came to realize the full value of Bill as a supervisor. He was never judgemental, but always critical. His criticism would come perfectly packaged and clearly articulated in a way that illuminated the problem for me, but crucially, always provided a direction forward. It is the type of criticism which helps you reach clarity and builds you as an analyst, thinker, and writer. For this gift I will be forever grateful, and it is something I strive towards in supervising my own postgraduate students.

Bill and I lost touch for a short while after I completed my PhD and moved back to my hometown of Makhanda (Grahamstown). But it was with great pleasure that at the end of 2019, Bill agreed to come down to the Eastern Cape to give a series of seminars hosted by the Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit on his book Twentieth Century South Africa: A Developmental History. Again, I found myself in awe as Bill sat down and held the room for forty minutes, speaking fluently and compellingly without a single note in front of him. Nobody could possibly have been bored, and the talk was followed by a lively discussion with Bill in his element. I am sad that South African students will no longer have the experience of listening to Bill, and I am so grateful for everything that I have learned from him.

Laura Alfers completed her PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research focused on the politics of inclusion into health policy in Ghana and India, including an analysis of the policies of the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization. Laura held a postdoctoral fellowship in the Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit (NALSU) in 2016 and 2017. She is a Research Associate in the Department of Sociology, Rhodes University and a NALSU Associate. Laura holds the position of Director of the Social Protection Programme of the global research-action-advocacy network, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), and her main research interests relate to social policy and employment (with a specific focus on the informal economy).
A Tribute to Bill Freund: Dr. Buntu Siwisa

My first meeting with Bill on that sweltering February 1995 mid-morning should have been the last. Sweaty, and both fixed at our temperamental ends, we hackled over the anomalous structure of undergraduate Economic History. Looking for a second undergraduate major, I couldn’t understand why it began at Level 2. And he had lost his temper at trying to impress on me that ‘there is no Economic History 1!’, and slammed his office door on my face. From that slammed door, ours somehow metamorphosed into a twenty-five years old relationship. It phased itself from lecturer-student, post-graduate student-supervisor, mentor-mentee. And I dare say it bore friendship and paternal frills, seeing me from undergraduate to a doctoral Rhodes Scholarship.

Bill’s unorthodox sense of simplifying and getting to the core of state-society-economic developmental problems left me both stupefied and enlightened. In my Honours research and methodologies one-on-one weekly coursework sessions in 1997, he customarily gave me two to three books, and three to four separate long chapters to summarise to no more than two pages, in answer to a couple of questions. In one session on the colonial economic history of cocoa farming in West Africa, I read my essay to an absent-minded Bill who petted out in lisping murmurs to himself now and then. At the end of my reading, he asked, ‘Have you ever seen cocoa?’ And then he took up a chalk and drew on the board a cocoa, its seed, explaining the basics of cocoa farming and the attendant farming and trade problems. And that was the end of the session, and put the chalk down. In many ways, it hacked to the core of the fundamental problems raised in literature by a native South African who had never seen cocoa before, and had never been to West Africa.

In that tradition, Bill placed supremacy of practical intricacies and trajectories over theories in understanding South African and African urban development problems. Once in our conversation about post-apartheid South African politics, he had absent-mindedly called himself ‘we’, meaning ‘we, South Africans’. And in that spirit of African inclusivity, he drew me into an Africa with an unorthodox, problematising Afrocentric scholarship uncaptured by the liberation emotionalisms of the day. This was a scholarship world of Mahmood Mamdani, Archie Mafeje, Martin Legassick and others whose dissecting thinking I first came lively across in a conference convened by Mamdani at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 1997.

Bill’s thinking and analysis of political trajectories of the new post-apartheid South Africa then were, to me then held sway by majoritarian liberation politics, unsentimentally heretic. However, now they have come to pass as politically prophetic. And so in many ways, Bill left with us such a confident, yet relaxed, unperturbed simplified understanding of African development, and the nature of political trajectories in post-liberation South Africa. It is quite rare for any intellectual, scholar, any human being to reach such an understanding. And for that, Bill will hold a special place in our hearts.

Buntu Siwisa graduated in 2006 with a D.Phil from St. Peter’s College, Oxford, and has since worked with a variety of organisations in various capacities. (Including the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), Durban; the Department of International Relations and Cooperation; the Centre for Democracy and Development; Accra, Ghana; and the Department of Politics at the Nelson Mandela University, in Port Elizabeth.) He is currently a Research Fellow at the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study (JIAS) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). As a member of the Institute’s ‘African Biographies Project’, he is conducting research on a biography, to be published within a three-year time frame (2019 – 2022).
Tribute to Bill Freund: Nnzeni Netshitomboni

When Bill informed me last year that I could submit my draft thesis after making corrections that he and my second supervisor had recommended, I thought it was time I took him up on the offer he made in 2016. He said that I could visit him any time in Durban if I needed to have a discussion. As we were entering a restaurant to have lunch Bill introduced me to Linda Chisholm as his last PhD student. I asked him later why he was no longer willing to supervise students especially because I thought he enjoyed having students work under him. He replied that he was no longer keen because the work of some of his past students required him to do extra work to assist them, although he could still take on a student in exceptional cases.

Having read a few tributes of Bill which concentrated on his life, scholarly accomplishments and his academic career I have chosen to focus on my interactions with Bill as a teacher and my relationship with him. As his student in the mid-1990s I observed that his door was literally and figuratively always open. My former lecturer at UCT in her recommendation informed Bill that I was a shy student. Bill told me at the outset that he was always available to assist if I needed help.

I soon discovered that he had an excellent memory. He would remember even minor administrative requests regardless of how busy he was when the request was made. I was most impressed by his diligence. In a class of over 30 students having received examination scripts in the afternoon it was customary for Bill to hand back marked scripts the following morning. When he was away in the US for a few weeks after his mother’s death, I was surprised at the high number of theses that landed in his inbox from other institutions that he served as an external examiner.

He facilitated the Honours seminars very maturely and could relate to students at our level in the discussions. Towards the end of my Honours year Bill approached me and said that the external examiner recommended that I should be encouraged to study further and that he endorsed the recommendation. From then on, I worked closely with him first as his research assistant on a project he was working on and secondly through the research proposal stage for my MA thesis.

Bill patiently guided me through what was expected in a typical Masters’ thesis chapter, held very informative and stimulating discussions after reading each draft chapter something I missed a great deal in PhD because I was based in Gauteng. Even here his turnaround times were most impressive, no more than 24 hours. He went beyond just supervising the work to connecting me with the right people, arranging finance where he could, even driving me to an interview for my research. Even after I left university to work as a civil servant we communicated frequently and met occasionally. When Bill discovered that my job was neither intellectually stimulating nor financially rewarding, he ‘racked his brain’ to figure out how he could help me secure a better job.

For my PhD Bill had no doubt I was capable of passing but he told me he wished to see me make a contribution. What distinguished Bill from many was his generosity, unwavering commitment to students’ work and the display of confidence in his students’ abilities. Even as a PhD student I knew I could count on him to assist me navigate university bureaucracy and whenever I alerted him to any problems I encountered, he was always there to offer advice or intervene if necessary. As his student I related to Bill more as a colleague than a supervisor because he managed our interactions with maturity. Any changes he recommended to my drafts were made optional. I felt very privileged when he asked me to comment on a chapter of his last book. With Bill’s passing I lost someone who truly cared about my well-being. May Bill’s soul rest in peace.

Nnzeni Netshitomboni is a senior industry analyst at the Industrial Development Corporation and a PhD candidate at the University of the Witwatersrand. Previously he worked for National Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry.