PART 1

The Corruption Begins…
CHAPTER 1
Unfriendly Tourism

"Something stinks in Knysna. It's unacceptable. People in positions such as the Head of Tourism
and the Mayor of Knysna are not there to be powerful but to accept responsibility
for bettering the lives of us citizens. All races in Knysna need to stand up and demand transparency
from our local government. Bigger than race, culture and political party is the common bond
we share as humans in a town where most are suffering. It's time for change. It's time for answers.
Something smells in the beautiful town of Knysna. We need more toilet paper."

- Mike Hampton (2011)

Nobody getting killed in the first couple of chapters. Everybody gets to keep their
fingernails because there weren't any good cops to do the pulling. In another chapter,
I'll do it myself, rip them off... twist some nipples too... but I'll keep the shock therapy
for you. The longer you read, the wetter the sponges on your head will get, the more
electricity I'll send you. But you've got to get through this first because everything
needs beginning.

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The Democratic Alliance (DA) has tried to make it complicated but it's as simple as
knowing which direction is up and which is down. All Government money, which
means our money, must be used wisely and be accounted for. It's a contract between
us and the politicians, signed for by our Constitution and the Laws supporting it. In
even simpler terms, taxpayers' cash isn't meant to be any government official's or
private individual's piggy bank.

The Constitution states that tourism is a government function. That should be the
religion of a town like Knysna (pop. 74,606) which exists because of it's tourist based
economy. The First Commandment should be: "Don't fuck with Tourism."

But the politicians violated her anyway. Maybe, initially, they didn't fully know what
they were doing wrong but sure did when I told them. And when I wouldn't let go,
some got the notion they had to destroy me. Their bad seed grew into a beanstalk
which I climbed to get a better view of what was happening below.

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My introduction to Knysna Tourism was that I initially scored in 2010. I was unaware
of the company's illegality when I was retained to run eventing workshops for the
disadvantaged communities of Knysna. Eventing was a big part of Knysna and my
goal was to enable more people from the poorer areas to get involved.
The first two workshops were well received. There were thirty-one students between them, and their composition was interesting in retrospect.

They included Chris Spies, spokesperson for the local SAPS (South African Police Service). He was a lot like a politician, becoming an obstructor rather than a communicator. Donovan Pofadder and Rowan Spies would become DA councillors in 2016. Shakespeare Arends joined the ACDP (African Christian Democratic Party) and become the DA's coalition partner in 2017. Our start may have been friendly but they later refused to assist me against crime...

The follow-up community feedback session revealed that coloured and black people were deeply dissatisfied with Knysna Tourism. They justifiably felt excluded from the economy of the town. It was perceived that Tourism's white-only Board of Directors had only white interests at heart. Considering the slow pace of change and that white contractors were getting most of the money, they were probably right. I reported this and more to CEO Shaun van Eck via a cursory email and subsequent meeting. He congratulated me, saying that it was information they needed to consider.

Van Eck was a likeable man with one arm. I admired him for regularly making jokes about the fact rather than hiding something that couldn't be hidden - his recent website was well named as www.singlehanded.co.za. He would sometimes be jokingly referred to as the One-Armed Bandit, and then more nastily as that after I turned Knysna Tourism into full-blown scandal. I wasn't a fan of that insensitive description but now realise it's appropriate reference for the slot machine Knysna Tourism was for a few winners.

Despite the resulting topics, the community session I hosted was well received by the participants and Van Eck. That was strangely contradicted behind my back by Glendyrr Fick, the Development Officer for Knysna Tourism. I felt that whilst she was smiling at me, she was thinking I was cooking in the kitchen of her ambition. That 'kitchen' would later take her on holiday to New York and Jamaica, at the Public's expense, courtesy of Van Eck.

Despite a waiting queue of students, the third workshop was strangely cancelled, one day before the deposit was to be paid. Not knowing why was frustrating. CEO Van Eck refused to answer my queries. I never had a contract which turned out to be standard practice for Knysna Tourism. I sensed that the workshops that were suppose to become empowerment practicals were fading into black economic empowerment (BEE) bullshit. I had no work lined up and never knew how I'd survive the following
month. But I survived and had two more experiences with Tourism over the next 8 months.

I provided the awesome band GoodLuck for the 2010 opening VIP function of the famous Knysna Oyster Festival. And I hosted a small concert with 10 bands during the December holiday season. The latter event failed after Knysna Tourism, without consulting me, moved two previously rained out events onto the same date. It was an obviously disastrous decision for a small town, amplified by the main road being closed for hours. For me, it became a speedy trip into a personal debt which I’ve never paid off.

In the build-up to the concert, I'd wanted to spend more sponsorship money on direct marketing than design of the marketing. I had the solution in one of my best friends being a graphic artist. But the design sponsorship was being paid direct from Knysna Tourism to the design company Van Eck had chosen. He told me I'd lose my full sponsorship if I didn't use them. That made no sense until I realised that 2Heads Advertising & Design, without tendering, got all Tourism's work. So much of it that they'd opened an office next door.

I was been strong-armed by a one-armed man. And he did it so casually and with a smile that I wasn't sure if he realised what he was doing. That made it more disturbing.

Shaun Van Eck recommended I hire Magnetic Storm, a sound and stage company based in Port Elizabeth. They were a reputable company but the distance of 260km made the cost impractical for a show hoping to attract a crowd of 1000. More important was the conflict of interest. Magnetic Storm was owned by his brother, Glenn van Eck. Essentially, the sponsorship I received would have been passed on to his family — taxpayer → Knysna Municipality → Knysna Tourism → me → Magnetic Storm.

Nowadays, after his disgraceful departure from Knysna, Shaun van Eck is an occasional event organiser for the company. And his brother is in partnership with him in a business called The Tourism Coach. And there's more but I'll tell you that just now.

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I began climbing that wicked beanstalk of unanswered questions for a better view of the town below me. My website, KnysnaKeep.org, which was supposed to become a children's charity, instead became full-blown activism with a lot of informative and
frustrated blogs.

In June 2011, I emailed complaint to Tourism's Board of Directors:

"From my experience of Shaun van Eck and some of the staff, I’m disappointed and angry because there is a lack of transparency, professionalism and honesty. I believe that they do not have a team, there’s mishandling of funding, and that a better direction needs to be chosen that better represents the town itself.

As a member of the public, several requests for public information has not been provided after 2 weeks (websites are long out of date). I seek budgets, the latest AGM report and details of community projects (not an advertorial but real information that shows that Tourism is utilising budget wisely). These are essential so as to determine if budgeting has been wisely distributed.

I sent the same request to the Mayor’s office via email but also failed to get a response.

The negative impression I’ve received is undoubtedly shared with some. There’s a bigger picture than my experience. We need to define it and deal with it so as to help our town, especially during this challenging Recession. I believe that it’s imperative that we bring these matters to the public’s eye and ensure that the new municipal government gives it the attention it deserves. Unlike those who are applauding the DA, I believe that they have to prove themselves first. But, before all that, and before I publish more specific blogs, I approach the Board (whose names are not even posted on the website) and members of Tourism for clarity.

As I’ve clearly stated in an email to Shaun van Eck, I don’t wish to deal with him as he’s a liar. That’s bad embodiment for Knysna Tourism. I don’t wish to be a member of Tourism in its current state.

I don’t know who certain Tourism staff have allegiances with so this is an open letter. Your response would be appreciated. Let’s sort."

Instead of the Board responding responsibly, I instead received an email from Van Eck which included:

"...You have a choice to make at this stage. You may withdraw the letter from the Board and suspend your hate campaign and I will walk away from the conflict. Should you continue, I will make sure that the TRUTH reaches every
ear that you reach, and that further every Tourism CEO and Municipal Manager in SA is warned of your modus operandi. As it did in my arbitration, the TRUTH will triumph and your selfishness will be seen for what it is. I seldom threaten, but you are targeting three of the things I hold most dear - my family, my desire to make a positive difference in Knysna, and my morals and life approach based on the example of Jesus."

The arbitration Van Eck referred to was for when he'd previously survived trouble. More relevant now was a disciple of Jesus threatening me. That religiosity would became more bizarre than hypocritical when it was alleged that Van Eck related a dream of his to the congregation of the Knysna Vineyard Church he attended. Therein, he was the biblical Joseph wearing the multi-coloured cloak. Somehow, if it wasn't fabricated, he'd interpreted it as a message to the Church to help him whilst he was being unfairly persecuted.

I had dreams too... well, let's go with the theistic flow and pretend I did.

In mine, the Vineyard Church refused the taxpayers' money Van Eck gave them to bring a Christian speaker to town. A fellow church member never got R6,500 per month for taking photos Knysna Tourism would never own. And other church members never viciously maligned me online and behind my back. One of them, Dr. Martin Young, would never become a DA politician who'd insidiously try tear me apart.

My dreams were of that Church kicking sinners out. Unfortunately, like Van Eck, I was only dreaming despite Section 9 of the the Constitution of the Vineyard Church being about 'Discipline':

"Suspension or expulsion of members for disorderly conduct, erroneous belief or any other justifiable cause shall be by ballot after investigation of the alleged offence and unsuccessful effort to bring about restoration. Private offences should be dealt with in accordance with the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:15-17."

I don't know which bible the Vineyard reads but I consulted the New International Version for the aforementioned chapters from Matthew:

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'
If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

Van Eck and Young left the Church on their own steam, the former because he moved to Nelson Mandela Bay, the latter’s reasoning unknown.

If new Board Chair Mark Dixon and Vice-Chair Greg Vogt had accepted my 2011 offer of “let’s sort” then I’d have been living a different life. I wouldn't have become an activist, wouldn't be in exile, and Knysna Tourism wouldn't have received approximately another R36-million in irregular funding from Knysna Municipality. And the irregular funding model of Knysna Tourism would possibly not have been replicated across the Western Cape, the only province of South Africa where the DA rules.

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Side note. Governments and their auditors like to use terms that dilute or change true meaning. Some are oxymoronic. Think of 'tax relief', 'tax refund', 'smart bomb', 'good war' and 'minor crisis'. My pet hates are 'political correctness' and 'irregular funding'. The truth in this book spits on the first one so let’s address that inappropriate word 'irregular'. When defined as 'to not be regular', it doesn't sound that bad. Like you could take a pill to overcome constipation. Except this is more the enema you’d choke on.

When Government doesn't follow processes governed by law, that's breaking the law. That makes 'irregular' mean 'illegal'. There are exceptions e.g. moving money from the sports budget to emergency funding during a natural disaster is understandably irregular. But that's rare. What happens, more often than not, is someone being bad. And if that person is in a position of Public trust, and knowingly involved in approving irregular funding, that makes them bad poetry, a crook in my book.

I'm a firm believer in white-collar crime not being white at all. We need to use a better phrase for that too. The fraud of billions is a more effective murderer than all the serial killers in the world.

If I haven't rammed my point into your head, tell me which of these these descriptions tells you what's going on:


or
"Crooked government officials and politicians in South Africa were responsible for approving R60-billion in illegal funding to private businesses in 2018. That comprised 75% of the R80-billion in irregular expenditure, the remaining 25% necessary for disaster management."

When government steals money, it means greater pollution, load shedding, broken robots, dangerously potholed roads, less cops, less staff and equipment for healthcare, more shacks, pit latrines for toddlers to fall into etc.

Yeah, now you've got it. Those things get people killed. South Africa's bleeding like a soldier who got his head blown off. It's red-collar crime.

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Knysna's a small town so my blogging and queries drew attention. Especially when I deliberately used controversial post titles such as 'Something Stinks in Knysna' and 'Shaun van Eck is an Arsehole'. I was questioning pillars of the social community which resulted in me receiving insults or the cold shoulder from a lot of people, online and in the street.

But it served a purpose as the most powerful politicians in the Knysna DA finally agreed to meet me. Mayor Georlene Wolmarans, Deputy Mayor Advocate Michelle Wasserman and Councillor Esme Edge promised answers. Notably, Wasserman and Edge doubled as Knysna Tourism directors. Plus Edge was the Chairperson of the Municipality's Section 80 Finance Committee.

For a while, it seemed positive. Edge even changed a lunch meeting to a dinner with wine. But it was obvious that she was more interested in me than the issue.

Ward Committees are one of South Africa's great failures so to be referred to one was obviously meant to cock-block me.

Municipalities are divided into areas called Wards. Each has a citizen Ward Committee acting as a conduit between their area and the relevant Ward Councillor. Knysna had ten at that stage but added another just before the 2016 local elections.

It's mostly a way to address smaller issues; from potholes and speed humps to park benches and broken pipes. The reason for the law stating that Ward Committees cannot be political is because they must serve everyone. It's intended to be about the health of the community, not politics. Instead, it's the first step in a flight of political machinations to control a town.
Ward 10 was my area, more commonly called Knysna Central. It's arguably the town's most important as it contains the central business district, most tourist accommodations, and the seat of local government. The N2, the national highway running along the long East coast of South Africa, passes through it. The other side of the ward makes up for that ugly convenience, hugging the large tranquillity of the Knysna Waterfront and estuary.

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It seems like a lifetime ago that I'd wanted to join the DA. I have bumbling Councillor Richard Dawson to thank for persuading me not to. Before the 2011 local elections, he'd given me a crash course into the incapability of local politicians.

Dawson and a fold-up table stalked the entrance to Spar, the main grocery shop in Knysna Mall. He was attempting to recruit people to the DA.

I'd fallen in love with Knysna, wanting to stay forever. And true love cannot exist without action. I wanted to play my part. And I was under the mistaken white cultural belief that the DA were the party to fight the ANC's growing corruption. I was keen to join.

I told Dawson I wanted to help, and could maybe assist the DA through eventing and fund-raising. That likely made me different to most people on their way to buy bread and milk. I add that because it should have made him more eager to recruit me.

I was keen but not an idiot. I first needed to know what the DA's plan for Knysna was. He responded with generalities about South Africa and the DA standing up for us against the ANC. I repeated that I was enthusiastic but wanted their local manifesto, not a national slogan. He hummed and ahhed some more, I repeated myself until he admitted they never had a plan. I asked if there was somebody in leadership who could provide me information. That's when it got weird.

I'd been courteous so him getting upset was unexpected. He never shouted but he raised his voice as his face reddened. He was over 70 at the time, I thought he may get a heart attack. I'd mistakenly thought he was a conscientious pensioner volunteering. He arrogantly moaned at me for not knowing he was the Chairperson of the Knysna DA Constituency. Or maybe it was the DA Chief Whip. My memory's fuzzy. He may have been both.

Wanting to extricate myself from his self-importance, his bad health and a few curious shoppers, I picked up one of the self-addressed envelopes that came with the
application form. I said I’d seriously consider joining after somebody emailed me info. He snatched the envelope back, saying something like “these things cost money and shouldn't be wasted on people who can't make up their minds.”

Not only didn't the DA know what they were doing, they were petty.

“Irony's a bitch,” is a phrase that doesn't get tired. Dawson would become my Ward 10 Councillor. He'd assume the position of Speaker in Council, a position as powerful as the Mayor's. He'd also become a director on the Knysna Tourism Board. And a couple of years later, he'd file a High Court application against me, wanting to shut me up for criticising him and the DA.

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I'd discover that Wasserman, Edge and Dawson had previously been Ward 10 Committee members before becoming DA Councillors. Wasserman and Dawson would take turns being Deputy Mayor and Speaker.

Kevin Grinaker, a property developer and active DA constituent, was also a Ward Committee member. I'd later use his racism to get rid of him.

Dr Colin Lang would join once Richard Dawson became the Ward Councillor. At a meeting I attended, he was antagonistic and dismissive of me. If only I'd known then that he was the life partner of Dawson. A 2013 Facebook post stated they’d been together for 47 years.

Another, Dee Hollely, doubled as the DA's Constituency Treasurer for years. Whereas I sent a letter to the Knysna Tourism Board calling for Shaun van Eck’s dismissal, she launched a petition supporting him.

It's unsurprising that the Ward 10 Committee wouldn't help me over the following difficult years. They were part of the problem. They weren't allied to the DA. They were DA. I wasted my time being frustrated. Bigger monsters were coming.

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Furthermore, in her letter of obstruction, Mayor Wolmarans accused me of being rude. Of course, she never discussed the issues. Her words were distraction... and pestilential when she stated that all my emails, smses and blogs had been sent to Helen Zille and Alan Winde.

Zille was then the Leader of the DA, the official opposition to South Africa's ruling ANC. Centralising power, she'd doubled as the Premier of the Western Cape since 2009. She was the boss of 5.8 million people, a responsibility as big as the...
governments of New Zealand and the Congo. We need those kinds of comparisons for better assessment of the duty involved... and the power politicians have to lose.

Alan Winde had been dyed DA blue in 1999. The portfolio they gave him expanded so, by the time of Wolmaran's letter, he was the Provincial Minister of Finance, Economic Development & Tourism. That's a lot of clout in one bottle. And now, in 2019, the DA intends him taking over Zille's job.

The title “Minister” normally refers to national portfolio chiefs but that's what the DA calls their lesser Provincial Members of the Executive Council (MEC). I'm going to be South African and, like the other 8 provinces that aren't the Western Cape, refer to Winde as MEC Tourism. It could be considered that his additional role as Knysna's Constituency officer was more important. He was our representative to the Western Cape Parliament.

I considered Mayor Wolmaran's letter to be intimidation. Why else would she act as if I'd done wrong and mention two powerful politicians? And why, if she wasn't going to help me, would she provide them a copy of our correspondence and my criticism?

I was naive to be immensely frustrated at the time. But it was then impossible for me to know I was in a battle that would result in me writing this book many years later. I now realise that Wolmaran's letter was a bonus – it directly sticks Zille and Winde to the shit at the beginning. It's no wonder they appear many more times in this story, trying to be behind the scenes but likely major conductors of it.

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I complained to Premier Zille to no response. A second complaint resulted in her then Chief of Staff, Geordin Hill-Lewis, referring me to MEC Winde. I'd been given a ticket into the circus of Government I've never escaped.

Winde was unhelpful on the telephone. He had his assistant, Lucille Fester, strangely refer me to the Knysna Chamber of Business. It was clear from previous discussions that Chairperson Dave Hendry and Deputy Chair Craig de Villiers were friends of Knysna Tourism and Van Eck, supporters of the DA, and against me. I'd also heard that Hendry’s family were members of the Knysna Vineyard Church.

It was suspicious. Why would an MEC and prominent DA politician, respectively an employee and representative of the Public, refer me to private businessmen? Why would they then deny they’d already spoken to Winde about me, caught out because Winde told me? Did any of this have to do with Winde having grown up in Knysna and having owned several businesses there? And possibly who he was still friends with
being more important than the Public he was paid well to serve? I've no definitive answer to those questions.

One of my rare encounters with accidental justice was the Knysna Chamber of Business closing down in June 2013. Hendry stated on Knysna FM radio that the Chamber no longer had the finances to keep even the "little things" such as the website going. That I was broke and had several websites running said a lot about their skill. Hendry would later get involved with one of the main propagandists against me, a psychopath called Mark Allan.

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Prior to those 2011 local elections that made Wolmarans Knysna's Mayor, Zille had campaigned for her and the DA. Considering Wolmaran's later obstruction, it was ironic that she'd run her election campaign on the promise of accountability, transparency and an open door policy. That's what we all want to hear from those who want to represent us. It had become her mantra, an obvious election strategy but not an intention.

That rally with Zille was held in the coloured township of Hornlee where Wolmarans lived. From the stage, she said, "I will work hard and be accessible and approachable. You can come and talk to me in my house, and I will do my very best for you and for everyone in Knysna."

I was one of a handful of white people there. More notable for wearing a blue DA shirt whilst hobnobbing, was Knysna Tourism CEO Shaun van Eck. When the DA won the election, his niece posted on Twitter: “My uncle is CEO of tourism in Knysna and he is really happy that the DA has won.”

His fortunes would change as my protest accidentally opened a pathway for opportunists far worse than him.

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I possessed the handicap of too much empathy and a worry repetitive mind. I use the past tense as I've gotten wiser and more emotionally mature. Maybe it was the simple choice between falling apart or getting stronger. I've gained more perspective and compartmentalise trouble better. And caring too much is best tempered with a bit of “I-don't-give-a-fuck”. That balancing act helped me during the Great Knysna Fire disaster in 2017. But, back in 2011, I was a mess... and following my nature which was to dive deeper into it. It was the start of a different life.
Eve Ensler, writer of 'The Vagina Monologues', described that perversity of conscience well. "An activist is someone who cannot help but fight for something. That person is not usually motivated by a need for power, or money, or fame, but in fact driven slightly mad by some injustice, some cruelty, some unfairness - so much so that he or she is compelled by some internal moral engine to act to make it better." She may have been right that activism is madness.

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I'd had a few bad experiences before Knysna. I'd become an adult as South Africa became the Rainbow Nation, as people fought for their handful from the pot of gold. Other situations found me in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I'd stood against a sadistic teacher in school, read horrid secret files when doing National Service in the Airforce, got beaten and mugged several times, rescued a guy from being killed, helped my neighbour who'd been stabbed in the lung, witnessed a gang rape I could do nothing about, met corrupt cops, seen underground battles for control of the Durban drug trade, and been told that a steroid-crazy enforcer wanted me dead purely because his girlfriend told me she was breaking up with him (his own people, crooked cops, had him killed him four years later).

Many of you South Africans reading this have likely experienced crime that made you scared. There was a stage in my life where I was scared a lot. Fear never leaves fully after it's paid a visit. It's like a door to somewhere dark opened, and all you can do is erect a security gate inside yourself. Being South African is a security gate industry.

The point is that by the time I arrived in Knysna, I knew bad people always did more bad things unless they were stopped. In the same way, they'd probably already done bad things I didn't know about. You can't teach an ostrich to fly. It's their nature to act a certain way. And if one of them charms you into believing otherwise, they're the one you should be worrying about most.

Knysna Tourism, a private company funded with Public funds, was running at a loss yet receiving more money instead of its CEO and directors being held accountable. Politicians were responsible. I was going to stop them.

But I wasn't prepared for how bad it would get. I'd thought there'd be some application of rules, for the avoidance of embarrassment or political revenge. For whatever reason, I expected someone to help. I was wrong.

My activism nightmare had begun...
Mayor Georlene Wolmarans, Deputy Mayor Advocate Michelle Wasserman & Councillor Esme Edge (2011)