

Valedictory Address: Dr. Douglas Hey (23.11.1914-18.3.2008)
Pinelands Presbyterian Church (Wednesday, 26th March, 2008)

Dear friends and colleagues of my parents, dear family members, I wish to express my thanks to all who have come to bid farewell to my father to-day: you, who have known him in many different contexts and capacities, through personal friendships, a long career in Nature Conservation, through membership of this congregation – all have walked part of the road of life with him, and have some shared experience in common. A particular word of thanks and appreciation is due to those at Riverside Manor who took such good care not only of him but also of my late mother, rendering them both invaluable service in their last years of extreme frailty, and also to his friends and colleagues from Pinewood Village who are with us here to-day: to the management, the sisters, the nurses and to all of the staff of both of these remarkable havens for the elderly my deepest expression of appreciation. This I also wish to extend to his faithful housekeeper of many years, Mrs. Eugenia Nqina. I also express my thanks to members of my family who have done so much for him, in lieu of my brother Anthony and myself, who live so far away – *non in loco parentis sed in loco filiorum*. To the Rev. Mr. Matt. du Preez for responding so quickly and so readily with his offer of assistance not only to-day but consistently throughout the last difficult months of my father's life – for his role as spiritual mentor to both of my parents, as Minister to this Pinelands congregation. To a colleague of my father's of many years standing, Mr. Laurie Alger, retired Assistant Director of Public Works of the Cape Province, now also a resident of Riverside Manor, my warmest thanks for most helpful assistance with my father's affairs.

This gathering indeed offers the opportunity to give thanks to God for a life now passed, and to reflect on the meaning and purpose of that life. My father's early love of nature arose from a childhood spent in the small towns of the Eastern Cape, where my Grandfather, Sydney Hey, a postmaster in his professional life, spent his free time angling in the rivers and fresh-water streams, and gathering material for his now classic work, *The Rapture of the River*. After completing his zoological studies and research at Rhodes and Stellenbosch Universities, my father started his career in Inland Fisheries in the beautiful Jonkershoek Valley near Stellenbosch, also spending time studying limnology in Belgium and the fisheries projects in the Belgian Congo. In 1952, the new Department of Nature Conservation of the Cape Province was founded, with my father as first Director. a position which he held until his retirement in November 1979 This was followed by a brief period as head of the National Monuments Council. During these years, in which numerous nature reserves and natural areas were proclaimed throughout the Province, my father paid particular attention to public education, with his attractive pocket-sized field guides on protected Fauna and Flora. We should briefly try to recall the size of the Cape Province at the time, stretching to Kokstad, Matatiele and Swartberg in the East, and to the banks of the Orange River in the North. My father's regular tours of

inspection thus entailed a huge amount of driving over his 28 years as Director. Some may still recall his popular radio programme *Talking of Nature*, shared with a team of naturalists which included Dr. Geoff McLachlan and the late Professor Gerrie Broekhuizen of UCT, his regular column entitled *Bewonder en Bewaar* in *Die Burger*, and his many popular books on nature, produced in both English and Afrikaans, including *Wildlife Heritage (Natuurerfenis)*, and *Water, Source of Life (Water Betower My)*, to name just two – books in which my late Mother, who was far more punctilious in matters of grammar and syntax, played an important role. I should mention that Mrs. Eileen Kent, who is present with us to-day, rendered my father invaluable editorial assistance with *Water, Source of Life*. Included in his brief of Nature Conservation was museum services, where he introduced the sensible recommendation that each museum, rather than attempt to build general collections, should aim to represent aspects unique to the particular area in which it is situated. Thus we have, for example, the 1820 Settlers' Museum in Grahamstown, the Shipwreck Museum in Bredasdorp, the Museum of Farming Implements and Equipment at Albany. My father's gifts in this area were, however, not those of the historian but of an efficient and imaginative organiser, a builder of successful teams and scientific collaboration. In the course of his work, friendships arose with a number of remarkable people, such as the naturalist Dr. S. H. Skaife of Hout Bay and, at the East London Museum, Dr. Marge Courtenay-Latimer, the discoverer of that lost species of primaevial fish, the *caelacanth* [She is a leading personality in a wonderful book, by the way, *A Fish Caught in Time*]. I should also mention here his services to the international cause of Nature Conservation through a long association with the *World Wildlife Fund (WWF)*, whose foundation came about in part through the efforts of the late Dr. Anton Rupert. My father's work was well recognised through the receipt of numerous medals and awards, both from this country and from overseas, which included the Cape Tercentenary Foundation medal, the freedom of the City of Cape Town, and the State President's Award for Meritorious Service. I shall not attempt a list of these here, but rather mention that he considered these as awards, not so much to himself alone, but to the teams of enthusiastic co-workers and colleagues which he had built up throughout the years. Towards the end of his official career in Nature Conservation, he was particularly proud of the service which he was able to render to this city through the Table Mountain Commission of 1978, and its report of recommendations for the preservation of the entire Table Mountain chain right down to Cape Point.

Now for some words on the guiding principles behind his efforts in conservation: man's curatorship and stewardship of nature: our duty to exercise care, and to act responsibly, in the use we make of the Earth's resources. This we may readily recognise as part of the principle of doing unto others as we should have them do unto us, applied here to the responsibility of one generation towards a succeeding one, a principle beautifully and poetically set out in the introductory chapters of the Book of Genesis: the idea that, in terms of its

natural richness, beauty and diversity, the Earth was indeed once a paradise, in which we had been placed to live our lives by a set of guiding principles: that we are indeed therefore answerable to God for our abuse of His Creation. My father discusses these ideas at some length in his autobiography, *A Nature Conservationist Looks Back*. I must shake my head now when I think of the common misconceptions and faulty judgments of several decades ago, by people who held the illusion that the world was literally ‘our oyster’ and there to exploit exactly as we wished: that Nature, no matter what, could recover somehow from the ravages of mankind’s carelessness and callousness towards our fellow creatures on behalf of whom we were supposed to exercise the duty of stewardship. We have once again passed the Lenten period of penitence and self-examination for the errors of our ways, which surely must include our attitude and our behaviour as the human species towards the natural world. How will mankind emerge from the looming crisis and at what cost? Fears for the future of life on this frail planet (the only one in our solar system, and as far as we still know, in the Universe which is habitable by life) are now all too well grounded. The inconvenient truth of our failure is now there for all who have eyes to see: Like King Balshazzar in Babylon of old, we have feasted too well on the earth’s resources in selfish unconcern, and we have profaned the sacred vessels of our natural heritage: the moving finger has now appeared to write in the air we breathe, in the water, and on the land, *Mene, mene, tekel u-Parsin: Man, thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting in thy stewardship*. Although the time left for corrective action on the part of all people may be very short, this imperative task dare not be shunned.

In this short address, I have not attempted a sketch of my father’s personality; each of us will remember him in his or her particular way. His last journey, on which he has now embarked, was long overdue, and should not be a source of sadness. A long, fulfilled and rewarding life, for many years healthy and happy, was his, and he has joined my mother at last. He asked that two passages be read at this service. The first are some lines by the author and naturalist Rachel Carson, penned in the evening of her days : *It is a natural and not an unhappy thing that life comes to an end, when that intangible cycle has run its course. For all at last return to the sea – to Oceanus, the great ocean river, like the ever-flowing stream of time, the beginning and the end.*

The second are some lines by an anonymous poet:

*If I should die and leave you here awhile,
Be not like others sore, undone, who keep
Long vigils by the silent dust and weep.
For my sake turn again to life and smile,
Nerving thy heart and trembling hand to do,
Something to comfort other hearts than thine.
Complete these dear unfinished tasks of mine,
And I, perchance, may therein comfort you.*