



IN MEMORY OF WARDAH GOLIATH, *The queen of Huguenot Chambers*

Died 31 January 2014

Rob Patrick, Cape Bar

WARDAH Goliath died on New Year's Eve of a heart attack. Completely unexpected. If ever you came to seventh floor of Huguenot Chambers, you would have met her, and will remember her. Wardah was the receptionist, for some 28 years, on the seventh floor.

If you had told me, when I moved to chambers on the seventh floor, seven years ago, that I would find in a Muslim 'Auntie', more or less ten years my senior, a soulmate and dear friend, I would certainly have been surprised. In my mind, a good receptionist is like a good waiter: unobtrusive, self effacing, inconspicuous. Wardah was none of these things, but the best receptionist – and most loyal friend – in the world.

Wardah never wore the same outfit twice. She was one of the most stylish people I have known. She read the *Cape Times* carefully every day, mumbling and grumbling at articles – and there were many – that disclosed offences in her book. She loathed, and vociferously identified, any hint of unfair discrimination.

Wardah argued endlessly, back-chatted compulsively, and inevitably offered unsolicited commentary – always reasoned, passionate and amusing. She took against people – usually because she was not accorded respect as she required. She would repent – upon suitable groveling. She bore grudges – but willingly abandoned them. She was susceptible to flattery. Like Queen Victoria, she preferred her flattery laid on with a trowel. She should have been a judge. She would have been, in a world of equal opportunity. She was the queen of Huguenot Chambers.

Wardah's targeted grumpiness, and grudges, bore disciplinary fruit on occasion. This was never a problem for her however. Most recently, for example, no less than Rosenberg SC (among the most devoted in her fan base) was appointed, by floor senior Mitchell SC (ditto), to deal with a complaint.

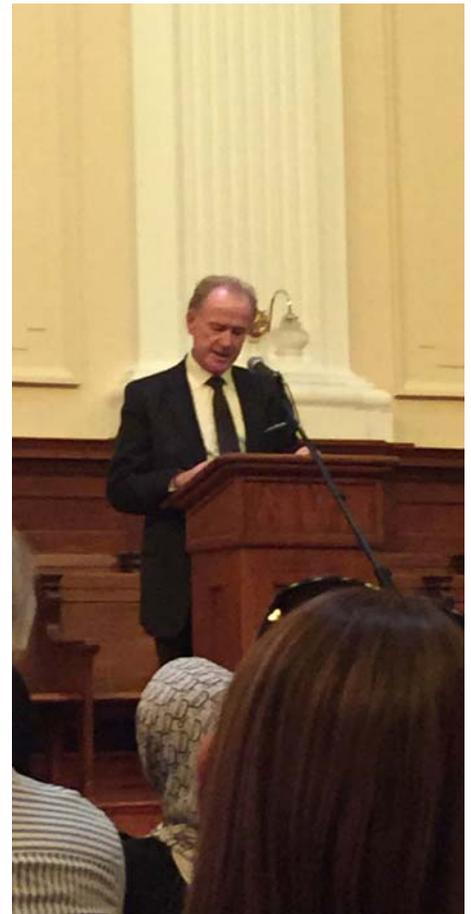
All knew that there was no prospect of the anti-Wardah complaint ever coming to anything. The tribunal was hopelessly biased, in favour of Wardah.

Wardah knew everyone. All of the counsel, attorneys, judges, and judges' registrars. She knew precisely how to deal with each one of them. She was an incurable gossip, with a wildly camp sensibility. She could look at me in the morning, and instantly know just how I was. She laughed at my jokes, so that I always tried to make her laugh. My life became filled with her lovely laughter.

One day, I required a bundle of cases prepared urgently. Wardah ignored my pile of law reports. She made herself tea. Then she was on the 'phone, gossiping and giggling like a schoolgirl. When the conversation had gone on far too long, in my view, I saw red. I came out of my chambers, stormed up to her desk, and cut off the line. She looked at me with big eyes. 'That was Judge Binns-Ward!' she said. I told her I didn't believe her, and to copy my cases. 'I promise you, it was him,' she argued. 'You're going to be in big trouble,' she predicted. Just then, the 'phone rang again. She picked it up. 'Hello, judge,' she said, and paused, looking at me, an evil glint in her eye. I became very afraid. She smiled at me, and continued 'I don't know what happened, it just cut off. It's Telkom.' The conversation went on, at length. My cases waited.

My parents, who live in Knysna, took to 'phoning me at chambers, so that they could talk to Wardah, and no doubt find out from her just how I was. They became friends with her too. For them, no visit to Cape Town was complete without popping into chambers to visit Wardah. She shared my concern about my father's recent illness with me.

THE LAST thing she did when I went off in December, on the last occasion I saw her, was to envelop me in a hug, encourage me to enjoy a holiday filled



Judge Binns-Ward addressing a memorial meeting to mark Wardah Goliath's death.

with sun, sea and sex, and give me cake and a card to take to my parents, for Christmas in Knysna.

So, on New Year's Day at 10 am, I went to Wardah's funeral in the Bo-Kaap. It was a sweltering day. The sloping cobbled street was crammed with mourners. Wardah's body was in her house. Then, while mourners chanted and prayed, Wardah was carried, in front of the crowd, along the street and around the corner to the Dorp Street Mosque. There, the Imam was solicitous to those among us who were not Muslim, explaining the various steps of grieving, and how we should conduct ourselves. Men stood downstairs, shoulder to shoulder, in concentric circles around her body; upstairs, women wept.

If there is an afterworld, I suspect Wardah may be found at its reception desk. I hope so. It's ghastly coming to work without her here. I never dreamt that she would not be here. Her handwriting fills my diary and message book. I want to tell her things all the time. Salaam Alaikum. **A**