

Water Wheel (September/October 2005)

Letter (pg 4) English Translation

W(h)ater People?

People are fascinating. They amuse you, frustrate you, or they just plain drive you up the wall. This must be why our fellow human beings (and I suppose myself included) are always the topic of discussion and why they are sometimes compared to things like the weather, books, rabbits or diamonds.

Due to the nature of my (wettish) career, people in my mind can often be compared to water-related objects. Water people are found all around us, even among my friends and family. Without much investigation I have found windmill neighbours, tap-like cousins and dam mates. And this comparison is getting all the more interesting.

Firstly, there are the windmill people. They are as happy as clams (and just as lacklustre) having their roots stuck firmly on one piece of ground with no desire to explore the world or broaden their horizons. Wind is needed to get any kind of reaction out of them: the winds of peer pressure, a friendly slap to kick-start them into motion. Thus they are mostly dependent, stick-in-the-muds that are full of hot air. On the other hand, it is also these people who, after yeaars of losing contact, still wait at the same spot for you at a reunion with all the latest gossip and scandal.

The water people I probably know most of are the tap people: reliable, stable and within easy reach. And usually very predictable. Be aware though – here and there you do find the gilded Cobra heirloom. Unfortunately there are also the leaking taps: incessant, irritating, requiring constant attention. But let someone just dare fiddle with their pipes – then you can prepare yourself for a backwash!

The next group of water people are the river folks. They are the most fickle creatures. Today they are full of themselves and tomorrow they are merely small streams flowing unobtrusively through sandbanks and willows. They do, however, have the potential to cause great flood damage with selfish deeds and hurtful words. But look closely, because somewhere in a tranquil stream you might find a glittering diamond of friendship...And how wonderful it is to refresh yourself in those gleaming characteristics! The most dangerous of this lot are those who flow ever so gently and just around the corner plunge thunderously straight down stone walls. (This would aptly describe my Afrikaans teacher on a Monday morning).

The dam people (not necessarily dumb or damned) are an interesting bunch. They are very prominent and make everybody aware of their presence. You can even see them from the air, and you even find them on maps! If there is one thing they know a lot of it is to store things - from shoe boxes to love letters to garages full of potential emergency supplies. I also see these people as introverts. They only let out of themselves selectively – just enough to keep bystanders happy. But the day the dam wall breaks all is in chaos: the stored emotions pour out and flood everything in its path. En then there's nothing left. Only a broken wall. And an empty dam.

Much more exciting are the groundwater people. Mysterious. Not always in the spotlight and at the forefront of everything (but just give them a chance!) They are probably the '007s' of the water race: underground and secretive. And just before you forget they exist, a fountain bubbles out somewhere there where you least expect it. They are difficult to locate, however, once your water stick is turned on to them you find a hidden treasure that will influence many a life (and this is the best water with your Whiskey..) But as wonderful as they are they can also cause a lot of headaches: just as soon as you think you know where you stand with them they disappear and leave you in the dust. And nobody said they are an easy bunch to get on with. Introvert group number two!

Please don't make hasty assumptions – I've don't have anything against water people. There are most certainly river and dam people in my circle of friends, even a windmill flatmate here and there. And it is these variations that help us survive the waterfalls and mud pools. I love living and working with people that can handle winds of change, that are always there with advice, can flood me with support and love and stand with me for a good cause.

Maybe each of us is only a drop of water that as life goes on passes through the whole water cycle. From the stuck-in-a-rut windmill phase, through the nagging tap phase to the I-want-to-be-alone dam phase. To then be formed and shaped in the river phase and eventually to feel life flowing deep inside us in the groundwater phase.

(So maybe I'm a little prejudiced..)