



Stidy, '95



THE SHOOTING SEASON HAS RE-OPENED



Left: "I like to take an idea to its logical extreme – I try to make it as abnormal as possible. I just sit and doodle until something comes out."

Left: "The day I drew this I'd lent the car to a friend and had walked in to work through Alexandra Park. There was litter everywhere, they'd just had a cycle meet, I think."



Left: "I was initially influenced by English cartoonists – we always got the Giles annual. But I like Ronald Searle. In recent years I have gone over more to the American style, I find them sharper. I grew up on a farm – hence the chickens."

Above: "This cartoon is a landmark for me. I'm not sure why it has so much detail. I like drawing animals and people behaving as animals and animals behaving as people. It's my farm background."

I BECAME A CARTOONIST OUT OF SELF-DEFENCE

I was brought up on a farm in the Nyanga District of Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands, the fourth son in a family of seven children. My three elder brothers were very down-to-earth practical, scientific types (two became farmers, the other a geologist). Realising I had no hope of ever measuring up to them when it came to fixing tractors or arguing the merits of different breeds of cattle, I turned to the Arts for my salvation.

Ironically, I did not take up cartooning professionally until I was in my early thirties when I moved to South Africa. Up until then I had done a variety of dead-end jobs – including dishwasher, apple picker, turkey-plucker and civil servant – all of which helped sharpen my skills as a daydreamer/cynic/doodler.

My first job in South Africa was as a feature writer/cartoonist with *Scope* magazine which might sound glamorous to some. But I was soon tired of writing facetious pieces about big-breasted women, so when I was offered a job on the newly formed satirical magazine *Laughing Stock*, I accepted. Unfortunately, although it had some great comic talent on board, the magazine never really came up to expectations and soon folded.

After a brief sojourn overseas, I started working for the *Natal Witness* in 1990 as their editorial cartoonist. I like working in Pietermaritzburg because it's slow and sleepy and out on a limb and I think this gives me a different perspective on things.

Probably the best definition of the political cartoon I've read is the one by J N Darling: "It is a humour-coated capsule by means of which the sober judgments of editorial minds are surreptitiously gotten down the throats of an apathetic public." As such, cartooning is essentially about communicating ideas and the better the idea, the better the cartoon usually is. If there is no point of view to be had then we are mere decorators.

I always try to retain the element of surprise by avoiding the obvious joke/punchline. The readers must never expect what you are about to throw at them or the cartoon will lose much of its humorous impact.

Sometimes, if I'm lucky, the idea will come in a blinding flash but usually I have to sweat it out by a process that one humourist called "controlled mind wandering". Lateral thinking, if you like. As James Thurber said: "The hardest part of my job is convincing my wife I'm working when I'm standing staring out the window."

People may see it as a cushy way to earn a living but you often have to do a great deal of research and there is always the terror of the daily deadline. Besides being funny one also needs to be politically sophisticated, with a strong sense of history and an eye for the absurd. Unlike the political writer who can waffle to his heart's content, you have to achieve that telling unity between word and image and communicate in one quick glance often very complex political situations.

What I do like about it is that you can, within reason, be as rude as you like about people you don't



Above: "The local branch of Earthlife is very active in Pietermaritzburg. I drew this at the end of 1994, after Dawie de Villiers hadn't objected to toxic waste entering the country."

Below: "This is a variation on a theme. I did a similar one to this of them sitting on a branch of a tree, sawing off the branch, but sitting on the wrong side of the saw. I've always seen them as cutting themselves off from Africa."



like (and, like most other cartoonists, I have a very low opinion of politicians. Liars to the last.) with usually no come-back.

As the British cartoonist Ralph Steadman said: "Cartooning is not a business. It's a cause. It's the next best thing to shooting somebody."

I was a little worried after the election because everybody was being so nice to each other and I felt it would be churlish of me to continue pulling tongues so for a short while I went very PC. Fortunately, the honeymoon now seems to be over and, with the likes of Boesak, Winnie and Buthelezi stirring up the mud, it's back to business as usual.

I guess you can say the shooting season has reopened and, unlike our four-legged friends, the politicians are still in plentiful supply.

The Natal Witness published a book of Stidy's work, *Riding the Rainbow*, in May, simultaneously with an exhibition of his drawings at the Tatham Gallery in Pietermaritzburg. Stidy has worked on three books with author Gus Silber: *It Takes Two to Toyi-Toyi*, *Braai-voles of the Vanities* and *The Naked Pun*. A fourth book is due out at the end of the year.

Below: "This was a bit of a mixed image. I'm not sure now why I used the mine, maybe because the Democratic Party was hoping to get their share of the ore at the elections."



Above: "In Pietermaritzburg this topic comes up every year with reports on the bacteria level, the ecoli count, in the Dusi River before the race."

Below: "I've always had a love of children's literature, always liked stories of the dragon slayer. I'd like to illustrate a children's book someday."



THE END.