



# WHAT REMAINS

Volunteer Memories of the Jagger Library Salvage Operation

DR DUANE JETHRO & JADE NAIR

"A  
VERY  
STRANGE  
SOCIETY"

Allen Drury



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**MICHAELIS**  
**GALLERIES**

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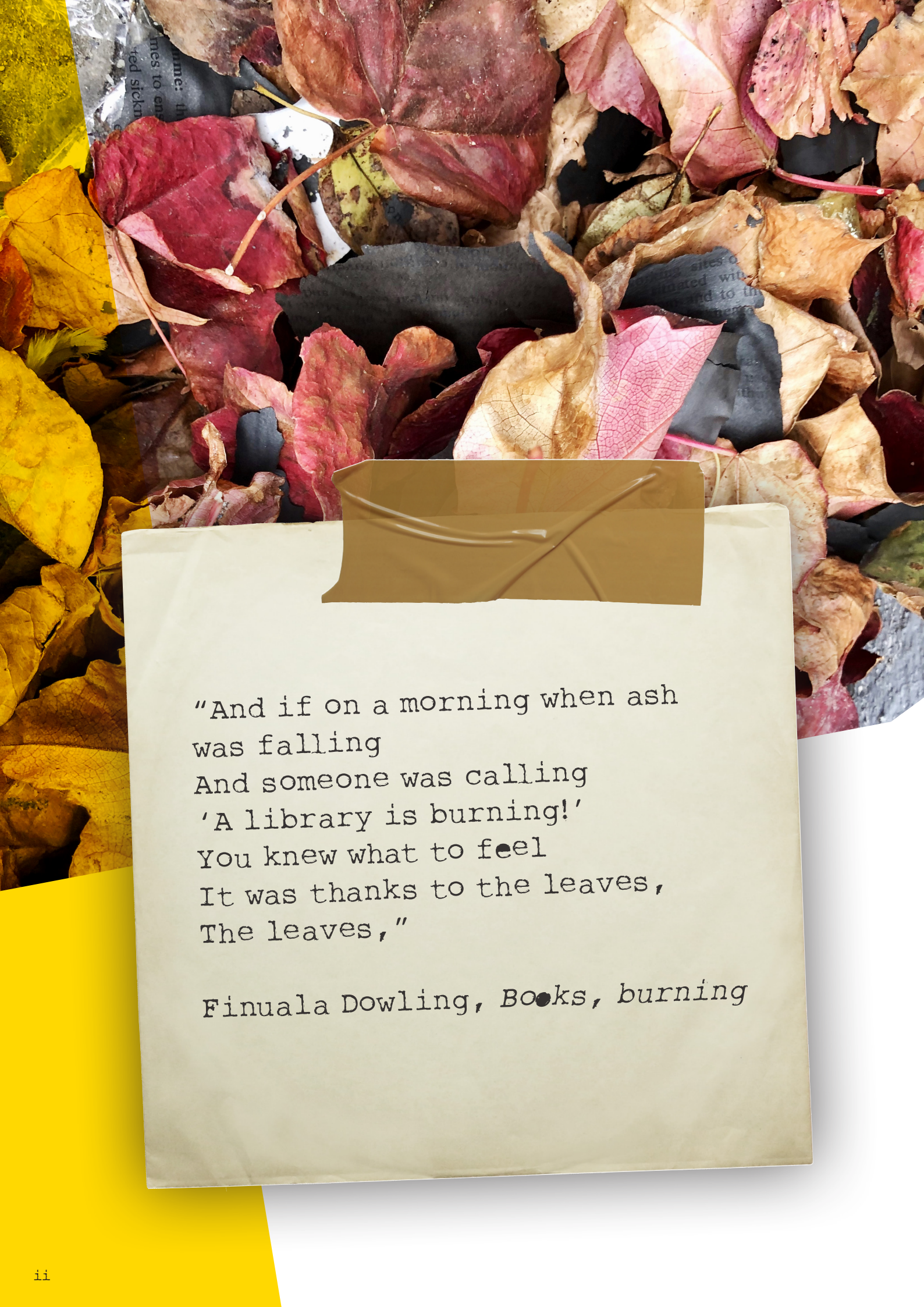
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"And if on a morning when ash  
was falling  
And someone was calling  
'A library is burning!'  
You knew what to feel  
It was thanks to the leaves,  
The leaves,"

Finuala Dowling, *Books, burning*



## INTRODUCTION

The fire that consumed Jagger Library on 18 April 2022 dealt a devastating blow to the University of Cape Town (UCT), the South African intellectual community and all those who felt a connection to the university and its archives. This collection is a set of largely unedited reflections by volunteers who participated in the Jagger Library salvage operation that followed, and serves as an accompaniment to the heartfelt reflections shared by current and former UCT Libraries staff on the Jagger Library Support website. Initiated as an emergency disaster measure by UCT Libraries, the salvage operation was the most immediate, labour intensive response involving volunteer members of the public.

Operationalised on 22 April, the volunteer programme involved intensive clearing and conservation work and ran until the 17th of May. On site, volunteers were briefed and coordinated by UCT Libraries staff to assist with a range of salvage related activities, including the systematic extraction of Special Collections books and archival deposits from the Jagger Library basements, drying, cleaning and treating wet items as part of the emergency assessment and conservation of materials in the Triage tent. Volunteers remark fondly about their experience at all of these points in the salvage workflow.



In an attempt to document some of these memories we worked with UCT Libraries and developed an open call with which we reached out to all the volunteers on their database. In saying that, many specialists from Cape Town, South Africa and elsewhere who arrived in the first weeks of the salvage operation and volunteered their time and expertise with the emergency conservation, were not captured on this database. In our invitation we posed a set of questions that we were especially curious about; What motivated you to volunteer; What was your experience of that time? What memories do you hold on to?; and What did the salvage mean to you? We wanted to invite volunteers to reflect on their personal connection to the disaster. The call resulted in over 30 moving, diverse responses, from young school learners, Sea Cadets, former UCT Librarians and members of the public. They span contributions such as poetry, short reflections, many photographs and art works, much of which we have tried to include here.

Sifting through the responses we observed a distinct set of themes arise. Volunteers frequently highlighted the professionalism and efficiency of UCT Library staff and the mettle they showed in managing the disaster aftermath. Often an earlier personal loss was a motivating trigger, pushing volunteers to participate in the salvage. Working through the materials at

Jagger therefore seemed to double as a way of working through the personal experience of grief and loss. A personal connection with the Jagger Library either as a student, academic or as a former university employee, is another frequently cited source of motivation. In these reflections, the devastation seemed to char a volunteers' personal, cherished memories, with the salvage serving as a way of helping the institution to heal. As Gwynne Evans puts it in her reflection, it was "a small way to assuage the personal pain I felt at the destruction of the library".

Images of the library inferno and the burnt matter left in its aftermath was a major trigger, signaling the loss of precious knowledge resources that could possibly never be recovered. The horror of burnt books and archival materials was especially evocative, motivating volunteers to 'do something'. That it was the African Studies materials that were destroyed were also remarked upon as an especially painful tragedy. Salvage was about clearing up the messiness of grief of personal loss, but also institutional loss, and attending to its remains scattered at the burnt out Jagger Library site.

More than loss, the salvage was remembered as a time of togetherness and common purpose, as signaled in Ann Ellis Brown's contribution, who says it led to "a great camaraderie developing amongst the volunteers". In these reflections we therefore get a glimpse into the energies of civic duty in response to disaster.

Informed by the intimate nature of the reflections shared, the style of this publication references personal manuscripts such as diaries, scrapbooks and notebooks. Paying homage to the messiness of memory we settled on the scrapbook format, that we believe gives

each contribution the freedom and space it deserves while making up an elegantly unfinished whole.

These reflections are a snapshot of the attachment the UCT community, residents of Cape Town and intellectuals and scholars from around the world have with UCT and the Jagger Library. They are one set of perspectives, complemented by many, now and in the future. UCT has for a long time had a reputation for being an ivory tower, sitting high up on a hill, and access to its resources in spaces like the Jagger Library came with restrictions accorded by privilege, which in the past included race. They informed the fringe opinion, shared on social media at the time, that it was timely that the Jagger Library burned. In the urgency of salvage, the diverse set of recollections show, these historic power dynamics gave way to common purpose and fellow-feeling.

It is bitterly ironic then that it was the African Studies collections that suffered the greatest loss since moves have been afoot since 2015, following the Rhodes Must Fall Movement, to structurally and symbolically transform UCT. Certainly, the African Studies Library, as Jagger served, was always a space of unfinished debate, but also a font of knowledge from which to chart the path ahead. This loss makes that project harder, more complex but ever more urgent.

As space opens up to reimagine the site, we present this collection as a contribution to the Jagger Library of the future, as one set of accounts about the effects of a fiery disaster, the deeply felt grief, the energy and liveliness of salvage and the will to recover.

*Duane Jethro and Jade Nair*





VOLUNTEER SUBMISSIONS

ERICA WIERSMA

Books burning to●  
- a sequel -  
by Erica Wiersma (25April21)

(##)  
\_after Books burning by  
Finuala Dowling 21Apr21)\_

...  
'A library burning'  
You knew what to feel  
It was thanks to the leaves,  
the leaves (##)

And Tears.... at the thieves,  
the thieves

Who stole from the future  
the bridges to Connection

While Knowledge is consumed...  
by Fires of Greed Rage and de-  
struction...

and instead of growing minds,  
understanding of Greats  
We salvage from burnt offerings, what  
we can into Crates

And groan at the Idiocy of loose  
cannons to blame..  
For the ruin of centuries of  
preservation  
that built up the name  
Of International acclaim

The Jagger Reading room...  
You shall rise again...

Like a Phoenix from the Ashes  
untouchable and proud...  
As we digitize the Rests for a far  
reaching crowd

(In honour of all evolved involved)

## ANN ELLIS BROWN



I thought it would be heartbreaking and it was somber to begin with, but it was fascinating too and a great camaraderie developed amongst the volunteers.

One elderly lady said she'd just had her hair done and refused to wear a hard hat for that reason - she kept us laughing all day - what a character.

There are also two teen boys who stick in my memory of that day - they did a lot of running around and heavy lifting. At the end, when we were in line to hand in our hard hats etc, they told me that they were fasting. It was thirsty work and they'd done it all on empty stomachs, and they were coming back the next day too.

It was wonderful to be part of something so important and to meet so many lovely people. Thank you for letting us help.





## CLAIRE STANNARD

“ What motivated me? I live in Lovers Walk just below the University. Although not an alumnus I was on the joint staff working in radiation oncology at GSH. My husband, 4 children and so far 2 grandchildren all went to UCT so I have always felt very much involved. The first horror was the library on fire and then concern for other buildings and my house. When I heard that they wanted volunteers, I phoned a no. that was given, never got an answer but just went up to UCT and got swept into the salvage operations.

The experience at the time: I was very impressed with the librarians who are not disaster managers but had to do just that. With

great efficiency and a sense of humour they organised all of us to do an amazing job clearing out everything that could be salvaged, forming human chains, loading the trucks, unloading the trucks, stacking books in temporary shelves etc. I normally exercise each day but got all the exercise I wanted with a walk up Stanley Rd, arm exercises in the human chain and walks up and down to triage in between. Then there was the camaraderie with everyone else involved especially after the relative isolation of Covid.

Memories: the horror of the devastated library, the willingness of people and the way we were looked after and made to feel special and worthwhile. Tom and Bev stand out as people who, though devastated by what had happened, got on with the job and worked through the place methodically. The variety of jobs made it interesting and one learnt a lot.

What did salvage ultimately mean to me? Although much valuable material was lost and that is tragic, I think we were able to save a great deal and it was wonderful to see so many people who felt a connection with the university come for a day or weeks and do whatever they could. It felt good to be there and I would happily have continued for longer and would be able if needed to restore the books to their shelves when that can happen.



## BONITA ALICE

“ During the Jagger salvage operation I worked with books and documents in folders newly retrieved from the building, at the earliest stage of the preservation process, wiping away visible mould and spraying documents with anti-mould solution.

As a child I suffered personal loss due to a fire and the Jagger project struck me as an opportunity to make a gesture by being involved in something like a restoration, a “putting right”, a process I felt might, in a very small way mitigate the helplessness I felt as a child, a feeling that has followed me all the way into my middle age.

I’m a Michaelis graduate, MFA, 1990 under the late Prof Bruce Arnott. I taught Sculpture for many years, including at Wits Technikon in Jo’burg (now UJ), and am an active producer and exhibitor of both 2 and 3-dimensional artworks. My practice for many years has centred on my own species’ role in the destruction of the natural environment. Within this area of concern, I’m particularly interested in the role of the human unconscious as a way to understand our apparent inability as a species to grasp the fact of our hand in the destruction we witness and experience directly in the external world. It seems we simply refuse the connection leaving us as helpless to behave healthily and constructively in our



stewardship of the natural world as we often are in our personal relationships.

So via my work I've often hinted at a parallel between emotional and environmental crisis, because I believe that at some point they are actually connected. Occasionally I've used smoke and fire as metaphor.

I've attached images here of a work called How Fire Works. The work comprises 9 wooden dinner plates each painted with a different fire image painted to resemble a decal, like those people used to stick on their bathroom or kitchen tiles. Each plate is 27.5cm diameter. The plates are hung separately directly onto a wall, so the installation size of the whole work is variable.

The beautiful Scandinavian plates introduce the idea of our hubrus and vanity. Historically we have viewed ourselves as being separate from and above the rest of the natural world, offering our adornments, refinements and technical skill as proof of our primacy.

I wish the Jagger team all the best and hope that a lot was saved. It was an incredible operation and I was happy to play a very small part.

”



## GLENN VON ZEIL

“ As a result of devastating fires on the slopes of Devil’s Peak on Sunday, 18 April 2021 where several University of Cape Town academic, residences, administrative and the Jagger Library were damaged, the Chief Librarian Ms Ujala Satgoor, put out a call for volunteers to assist in retrieving items.



Ten Sea Cadets under the command of Ensign Ruben Pillay were volunteered from TS Woltemade to assist UCT Jagger Library with the removal of books, journals and manuscripts.

Upon arrival the Sea Cadets were COVID-19 screened, received face masks, gloves and hard hats before proceeding to a Health & Safety briefing.

The Sea Cadets received practical experience to complement their maritime training iro the devastating effect of fire, managing the aftermath, Health & Safety, teamwork & working on confined spaces as onboard ship.

Instead of passing the victuals or ammunition hand to hand these crates contained the knowledge of the nation. It is ironic that the crates contained children’s books.



Many of the Sea Cadets expressed an interest to study at UCT including Marine Biology and Engineering.

During their visit the Sea Cadets also met several senior students and staff, amongst them Mhlahli Pikashe, a Residents Association Treasurer from Groote Schuur Residence, who encouraged them to follow their dreams as these can become a reality.

Thank you to these TS Woltemade Sea Cadets from various Cape Flats schools and suburbs for volunteering their time and energy when most needed:

- Sea N Brown - Mondale High
- Sea B Bull - Steenberg High
- Sea L Golden Lomb - Steenberg High
- Sea L Hartogh - Manenberg High
- Sea J Heyburgh - Grassdale High
- Sea J Holies - Ocean View High
- Sea A Jam - Oval north High
- Sea R Johnson - Muizenberg High
- Sea J Richard's - Crest Way High
- Sea R Rossouw - Sibelius High



Perhaps their peers, schools and communities will recognise their leadership in stepping up when needed to perform voluntary civic duties. Could this be what the leaders of the future will embody? Bravo Zulu Sea Cadets.

For more information on the South African Sea Cadets see [www.seacadets.za.org](http://www.seacadets.za.org).



WENDY PAISLEY



“ I went to help 2 or 3 times and enjoyed being of help.

It was good to meet new people with the same commitment.

I worked at UCT in the Botany Dept from about 1987 till the end of 2001, and was devastated to learn of the fire in the PCU where I had worked for Prof Richard Cowling for this period. I was also most fascinated/concerned to see a palm tree next to the building which had caught fire, and might have caused the fire in the PCU, when I walked to see the building.

”

## FRANCES JORDAAN

### WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO VOLUNTEER?

I heard about the volunteer request on CapeTalk. As I recently moved to Cape Town, it felt a good opportunity to do good and get to know the university campus.

### WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE AT THAT TIME?

I enjoyed it very much. Especially the diverse group of people working together. And we were amazed at the wonderful books passing through our hands in crates. The Health + Safety induction was also very thorough.

### WHAT MEMORIES DO YOU HOLD ONTO?

Students shared their experience of the fire. Friends that volunteered together talked continuously whilst working. I got lost on the way to my car after the session and this allowed me to walk past a few faculty buildings I might not have seen otherwise!

### WHAT DID THE SALVAGE ULTIMATELY MEAN TO YOU?

I love reading and learning is a life-long journey. It was a privilege to help salvage so many precious documents and books for future generations. A big thank you to all the university personnel that worked so hard. We appreciate it.



**TARYN GREEF**

To whom this may concern,

I participated as a volunteer for the clean up of the Jagger Library fire. This is what I wrote after my day of volunteering as well as the photos I was able to take.

I was able to volunteer some hours today to help remove the years and years of archives that have sat below the Jagger Library, that burnt down. These archives were on their way to being digitalised, before the fire and if they weren't damaged by the fire they were going to be damaged by the water. It was so amazing to see centuries of archives be brought to the surface of our new world. There were leather backed books dating to the 1880's, world maps that only feature the Atlantic Ocean, Old Law books and VCR tapes and of course so much more. I definitely didn't know the extent of the damage done by the fire but being on campus and next to the Library you can see just how hot and how devastating the fire really was! It was encouraging to see the different types of people that came to help, a lot of older men and women, some in their mid 60's to early 70s picking up crates that weigh at least 10kg. Super proud of the UCT and Cape Town community this past week.

What motivated me to volunteer was the thought that the University of Cape Town had been my dream university, with the most picture perfect campus. Knowing that the campus

I love and admire had been damaged by the fire broke my heart. I wanted to help in any way possible so I volunteered.

My experience at the time was one of awe and shock. I had never been to the Jagger Library, I had only ever walked past it and so clear the archives and seeing the hundreds of thousands of archive was mind blowing. I didn't realise how significant and how long the collection and the restoration of the archives were.

The memories I hold onto from my time volunteering would be the people, I met a number of people some lecturers, some students and some civilians that just wanted to help out. I also remember the smell of the campus and the archives, the smell of smoke, and coal and water mixed together.

The salvage ultimately meant to me that I was making an impact, I was helping the university and the people who spent years working in and around the library. It allowed me to feel connected to the university and the campus when I felt most disconnected during the time of online learning.





## LINDA MESSARIS

### WHAT MOTIVATED ME TO VOLUNTEER?

I graduated from UCT in 1973, nearly fifty years ago, and had not been up to the UCT campus since then as I moved overseas for a few years and then to Johannesburg. UCT is entrenched in our family history. My father, Dr Alfred Husband, was a UCT medical graduate in the early 1950s and as an Orthopaedic Surgeon had done some lecturing and examining up at the Faculty of Medicine. One brother, Dr Richard Husband, also studied Medicine at UCT; another brother, Peter Husband, studied Architecture there, I met my husband Arthur Messaris whilst we were both UCT students (he studied Architecture and myself the Humanities - and I became a teacher and taught for 40 years). My daughter Anastasia Messaris also studied Architecture at UCT and after a decade of working is now studying for her Masters in City and Regional Planning. We have a strong loyalty to our beloved university and as a UCT alumnus I was heartbroken to see the devastation wrought by the fire.

### WHAT WAS MY EXPERIENCE AT THE TIME?

It was an experience of very mixed emotions. I was distressed at the devastation and damage caused by the fire but extremely

heartened to see the efforts of the university and the public to attempt to salvage as much as possible. The salvage efforts were well organised and the volunteers were efficient and friendly. It was heartening to see different people of all ages and professions involved in the rescue work - young students from all over Africa (even some from overseas), elderly folk like myself who were ex UCT students, members of the public who wanted to "do their bit" for the university. Another aspect of being up at the university that made a huge impression on me was how well maintained the UCT campus is. The Arts Faculty was spotless and all the public facilities were clean (something you don't often find in public institutions in Johannesburg!), the grounds and avenues are all well maintained. In every way, the experience turned out to be a positive one.

#### WHAT MEMORIES DO I HOLD ON TO?

It was an uplifting and positive experience. In the face of much of the negative press that UCT receives in the media and by the "chattering classes", it was very meaningful to me to realise that the university remains one of quality, progress and upliftment.

#### WHAT DID THE SALVAGE

#### ULTIMATELY MEAN TO ME?

I felt proud to be able to offer some small assistance to the university and wish I could have done more. The salvage experience reinforced my belief that every small action performed by an individual can assist in the positive development of our beloved country and its very special people.



## NIGEL WORDEN

Emeritus Professor of History, University of Cape Town,  
in an interview by Robyn von Geusau



Like so many people, I was shell shocked to hear about the fire at UCT library. I used to work a lot with the collections there, so I knew that the destruction of unique material is a disaster.

It is especially catastrophic that the African Studies and manuscripts collections were burnt. It's not about their financial value, it is rather that tapes, photographs, manuscripts and other materials about African histories, languages and culture have been lost. It is especially disastrous that such material has been destroyed at a time when South Africa's indigenous heritage is at last being properly recognized.

The library asked for volunteers to help salvage what has survived. Apart from the flames, a lot was damaged by smoke and water, and many colleagues and students have helped the librarians carry hundreds of crates out of the basement. Experts from the library are now carrying out urgent restoration work, in particular to prevent the spread of mould and drying out waterlogged books. Volunteers are helping where they can. My job is to dry each page of eighteenth-century books with a hair dryer. Older books were made with good quality paper which can be saved in this way. Modern books just turn to pulp. As each page dries out, the words printed on it gradually reappear. It's not much in the scale of what has to be done, but it feels as if some of our heritage is literally rising out of the waters.







A photograph of a demolition site. The ground is covered in dark, charred debris and rubble. Several large, cylindrical concrete pillars are visible on the left side. In the center and right, there are several metal boxes and containers, some of which appear to be salvaged. Two green wheelbarrows are parked in the foreground. The overall scene is one of active demolition and salvage operations.

KEN MULWA

“ In May I stayed at upper campus for much longer than I had in my previous year and a half at UCT. I somehow found myself volunteering day after day, unable to rest until the Jagger salvage operations were complete. Every day I went home feeling very tired - but it was a satisfied kind of tired, knowing I had spared no effort. I remain proud of the work fellow volunteers and I did within such a short time.” ”

“

What motivated me to volunteer for the Jagger fire salvage project was that I felt sorry for the future students and I did not want them to suffer the consequences of the fire. My intentions were to set a good example that a bit of help can make a huge difference.

I loved the fact that everyone was dedicated to what they were doing. I enjoyed sweeping, mopping, lifting up crates and picking up wet cardboard boxes from the floor. I also enjoyed working with my mother, who works at the ICH Library.

I will hold onto memories such as the friendliness and kindness of the UCT Library staff: Uncle Blythe Edwins, who bought my sister, Lathitha, and I chocolates, chips and hot chocolate. We really enjoyed the treats. To me it meant to have a good heart and not to focus on how much work needs to be done.

Ayakha Mashiya  
BELLVILLE PRIMARY SCHOOL,  
Grade 7

”

## LATHITHA MASHIYA \*

I got my love for libraries and books from my mother Nombeko Mashiya who worked in a bookshop and then in libraries. She works in the ICH Library at the Red Cross Children's Hospital.

I was happy to give up my Saturday to volunteer as I knew it was for a good cause.

What motivated me into helping out at the UCT Salvage and Recovery Project was that I wanted to contribute in a very small way towards recovering and restoring the historic collections which were at risk of being lost forever. I wanted to make a difference in a very small way and be part of history. Also I thought to myself that one day I may need these resources myself.

I enjoyed helping out where I could with my little hands. I got to see for the first time the historic buildings that UCT is famous for. I met a few lecturers who advised me regarding the career field that I'd want to pursue one day.

The experience has left an indelible mark on my memory. It was really emotional seeing volunteers from all walks of life helping out where they could in whichever ways they could. They showed the true spirit of Ubuntu.

It was special sharing this experience with my mom. I now understand why she loves working in libraries and at UCT.

Lathitha Mashiya  
The Settlers High School,  
Grade 9BE

”

## SUZANNE LEIGHTON

“ A series of abstracted oil paintings of the slopes behind the University of Cape Town, where the April fire raged in the wind, leaving stark landscapes of bare earth and scorched trees. It was with a heavy heart that I walked around the familiar campus and on the mountain slopes behind UCT. Through these works I attempt to show the hidden beauty in devastation - focusing on the colours, shapes and silhouettes to create a sense of hope in the aftermath. ”



PETER G UNDERWOOD

“ What did the salvage mean to me?

It was in the blood: as a professional librarian, my focus was on keeping up standards of service to the library users. As Professor of Librarianship at UCT, I tried to instil the importance of quality of service in breadth and depth. A burnt library is an obstacle to both objectives - and, yet, service is still possible if one thinks in terms of rescue, restoration and eventual extension.

Working with the team in the Triage Tent reminded me of those objectives and of the contribution that so many were making, not out of a sense of obligation but, rather, as a means of expressing a sense of community: together we can make some sense of this devastation.

It was hard work and satisfying to the extent that we had participated in the start of a process of recovery and discovery. Now, I want to be part of building the future!

”



OWEN KILIMENI

“ During the salvation [salvage] process I was pretty much involved in everything during the extraction of the material. I was packing and sorting the crates, damp crates crates with mold, damp crates and crates that had dry material in them. I took three days of extraction traveling from Grabouw to CPT. This was all worth it. I worked at different stations with different people it was nice to hear other people to here their motivation to help with the extraction with with people coming from far at their own expense without worrying about the return. I was also involved in all media of extraction from tapes with records, book and art work and to see the amount of work that we managed to savage in a short space of time. ”

CARLA LEVER



## THE INFERNO

In 2000 I made some of my dearest undergrad friends in a first year classics course: The World of Odysseus. Among them was Matthew Shelton. Homer was magical enough that I minored in Classics during some of the most formative years of my young adulthood in the English Department.

In April, in the gutted and damp depths of the rare books collection, I found myself reunited with Matthew again. Randomly and fittingly, we were assigned to triage the Classics and Literature special collection. Homer, Plato—even, ironically, an unscathed copy of Dante’s Inferno!—all passed between us, from shelf to hand to hand. We salvaged the very same books that defined our university journeys, and informed our careers. The most bittersweet\* of full circles.

\*Thanks to UCT classics, I know this oxymoron comes to us courtesy of Sappho, a woman whose legacy is profound despite her writing being saved only in carefully retrieved fragments. Perhaps, too, having been passed parchment to hand, to hand, to heart.







JACQUI DIXON

“ To salvage the basement library the most efficient way was to create a human chain and pass the crate of books from one person to the next. The camaraderie was infectious! Many personal stories were shared between the volunteers whilst standing in that chain. It was wonderful to connect to old students and new and to hear about the career paths of various alumni. ”

## CAMERON WORTHINGTON

“ I was a volunteer for about 5 days worth of full day shifts. I started out packing crates and hauling them out of the basement of the library. Eventually I moved up to the learning lounge where I joined the team of library staff and volunteers (lead by Bev Angus). Up in the learning lounge, the primary task was to organise the materials into their correct categories. I learnt a lot about the indexing system in a very short time. The fixed team; consisting of Bev, Susan, Zuki, Vernon and more were very energetic and friendly! I learnt a lot from all of them and enjoyed working alongside them, despite the difficult circumstances.

In the learning lounge, there were periods of nonstop work and then breaks. This was due to the need to wait for “shipments” of materials. While waiting we would plan the most efficient way to deal with

the coming load and put plans in place to deal with the type of materials we expected to arrive. The media type was, predominantly journals, pamphlets, newspapers and microfiche. When a truck full of materials arrived, it was unpacked into the open space near the door. There would be a couple people sorting the books based on the categories (BAJ, BA, etc). The sorted books/materials would be packed into crates with other materials of the same kind and then transported to the correct zone to be stored. While I was there, I tried to give Bev a bit of relief by instructing the new volunteers on what needed to be done and by overseeing that the sorted crates would go to the correct zones. Near the end of my time volunteering, we were told that the Pick n Pay crates weren't good for storing long term. This meant that we also had to transfer all the books/materials from the grocery crate style into these grey archival storage crates. The grey crates did save space, since more material could fit into one crate than previously. However, this transferral was a big undertaking. I dedicated most of my last two days to transferring all the pamphlets, which were the biggest collection of materials stored in the learning lounge, into the grey crates. This was done with the help of some new volunteers who, I later found out, lived in George and came down from the weekend to help because they were a descendant of J.W Jagger.

”



## CONCHETA VAN DEVENTER

### CONCHETA'S JAGGER SALVAGE DIARIES

18 APRIL 2021

I saw the smoke, but since I was studying it didn't directly occur to me that it could be at UCT. I started reading group messages on WhatsApp and I was really concerned about everyone's safety. Up until the next day I worried, but luckily everyone was out safe.

24 APRIL 2021

The SMS came through, calling on Volunteers. I felt the need to help, because it is something that really saddened me finding out about all the damage. But nothing could've prepared me for what I saw when I got on to campus. I felt like crying. Years of heritage, years of history, gone or damaged.

I attended multiple of the salvage sessions. And each time tore my heart more. But it also amazed me. The amazing things that are in the archives, the drawings, the books, everything. It is sad that there are so many things that were lost in the fire, but thankful for the things that could be saved.


During the time spent with the salvage, I got to know so many people from the community, librarians, students, community members, etc., made new friends. And it has taught me to appreciate the things around me, while it is still good.



“ On 17th April 2021 we were on our way back to Cape Town after completing a magnificent 5 day hike in the Baviaanskloof Mountains. As we drove over Sir Lowry's Pass we saw plumes of smoke rising from the lower slopes of Table Mountain. Being keen hikers and lovers of nature we kept the radio on for updates of the fire. By the time we reached home it was quite clear this fire was far larger than we imagined.

On Sunday 18th when the news broke of the extent of the fire, the destruction of Rhodes Restaurant, the roof and later the building of Special Collections on fire. I watched in absolute horror as the images unfolded before me on TV and social media. The emotions of disbelief welled up within me and I shed many tears of sorrow. The same tears I shed when I lost a loved one. My heart went out to all the staff who worked in Special Collections especially the present staff, the hours and years of tough research and labour that had gone into making Special Collections a branch of UCT Libraries a renowned repository in Africa.

I spent 32 years of my career as a Senior Library Assistant at UCT Health Sciences Library where I gained an enormous insight into managing and taking care of medical literature, mainly print journals which eventually became my responsibility. I retired in 2017. In 2018 I spent 6 months as a contract worker at UCT Law Library, the last 1.5 months were spent in Special Collections. When the call came for



volunteers it was only natural to respond. The day I arrived on campus as a volunteer I was taken aback at what confronted me. It looked like a war zone. I chose to work in the section wrapping and preparing archival material for the freezer. Most of the material I handled was soaked, dripping with water. Others already showed signs of mould which, to my knowledge, was not a good sign for recovery. I looked at some of the titles, notes taken in Parliament pre 1994, someone's doctoral thesis.....the rest of the titles were blurred by my tears. I prayed they would survive for posterity.

The volunteers consisted of a mix bunch of people including UCT PASS staff, library staff, students and outsiders. We were all there with a common goal to assist in raising Special Collections from the ash to its former glory.

Pat Callaghan  
30th Jan 2022

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SOPHIE COPE

## The loss of the future

I approach this as the loss of something that I did not know. This is significant because it turns the space into something — an echo chamber for all the other things that might have been lost before they were experienced properly. It is almost the loss of the opportunity to experience the loss.

When you lose something you didn't really know, there is also the feeling of losing the future — the idea that this or this space could, at some point, become known. And so you don't think about it much because there is no sense of urgency while it's there. And then it's gone.

Of course 'the past' is lost when a library burns, but also, it seems, the future in which one can go and visit these things from the past.

Sophie Cope

2021





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