

# Fanus Rautenbach

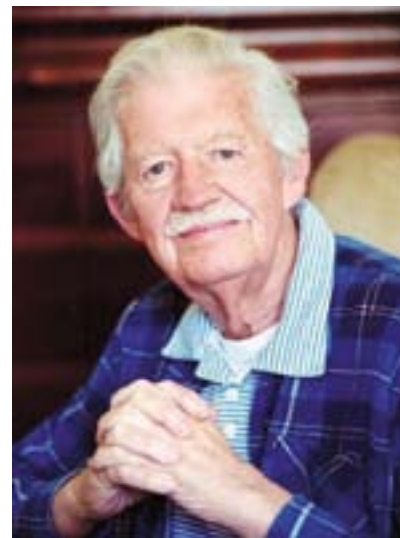
DR FRANCOIS VERSTER

Correspondent

*May he be remembered, also by those who did not know him*

Afrikaans-speaking South Africans need no introduction to the man known as Fanus. The witty wordsmith who held thousands spell-bound with his humorous anecdotes and often risqué jokes died on 29 January at 82 years young. Stephanus Petrus Rautenbach (1928-2011) was a legend in his own lifetime. But we as a nation seem to adhere to one principle of the rainbow phenomenon - we fail to really merge: yellow stays yellow and pink will be pink. Therefore: to (many of) our non-Afrikaans compatriots, this is who Fanus was the man who knew poverty during the Great Depression - he tells the tragic-comical tale of his childhood in **Tiesj** (Hemel en See Publishers, 2002), the master radioman (creator of among other characters, the infamous Staal Burger - probably related to Schalk), the pioneer television journalist (he wrote *Nuustak*, et cetera), the innovative designer of neologisms like 'kitskoffie' (instant coffee) and so forth, but most of all a humorist. Fanus maintained that humour is more than just cracking jokes. It is really about observing, about knowing your subject material, namely people. The rest is basically adding some colour to the story you spin.

Fanus wrote many short stories, initially under the pseudonym Fanus Bach, but later he chose to be called Fanus instead of Fanie or Rautie, and this is where I first almost met him. Almost, because he became 'part of the furniture' - we scarcely notice senior citizens once they step over the threshold of what Fanus called the 'kieriekasteel' (a word one cannot really translate, but which means



a castle where walking sticks are common), even those who once were famous.

It happened like this: I was asked to review **Tien uit tien: stories en sêgoeters van Fanus Rautenbach** (Tafelberg, 2010), a collection of stories by Fanus, edited by Danie Botha - which I did. I thought nothing of it, except that he wrote some really good, original stories and implemented unusual techniques.

Then Botha asked me to visit the old man, who was pining for attention. This was just before Christmas 2010. I was busy; could not

*Fanus maintained that humour is more than just cracking jokes. It is really about observing, about knowing your subject material, namely people. The rest is basically adding some colour to the story you spin*

even go out to Vredenburg to visit my own mother. An acquaintance called. She would set up a meeting. A coffee shop near the 'kieriekasteel' in Claremont. Two weeks flew by. Then the lady called again. Fanus fell ill, we have to postpone. And I just knew. When the next call came, I nodded to my wife; she did not have to tell me.

Fanus often joked that his epitaph should read: 'Nou is hy dood-ernstig' (Now he is dead serious). Like all brilliant humourists, he seemed to have a need to be taken seriously, even if only once in a while - for instance, Peter Sellers revealed that he wanted to be a serious actor. Imagine that! And most humourists suffered from depression - humour is a 'laugh with a tear'. But there was never any evidence that Fanus Rautenbach was depressed, ever. Hopefully not too lonely either.

**Tiesj** is one of two autobiographical works by Rautenbach, the other being **Fanus onthou en Sebastian lieg in die mou** (met Piet Coetzer; Lapa, 2009).

With acknowledgement to *Bolander*.

