

John Liebenberg

Our good friend and colleague died last night in the hospital. He fell in his yard on Monday as he was on his way out to let us in through the gate.

We have known John from October 1989 let us rent his little outhouse on Palm St. here in Windhoek, Namibia. The city where we got the phone call this morning about his sudden death from his eldest son Joseph.

John was one of the wildest people we have met and had in our circle of friends. Restless with an energy in the body that resulted in constant movement. Here in Namibia, he is known as one of the few whites who fought for Namibia's independence. His weapons were his Nikon cameras, and his images helped to show the outside world how the machine of the apartheid regime destroyed human life in the border area between Angola and Namibia.

John, like all white South African men at the time, had been part of this machine as a drafted private during the war against the 'Communists' in Namibia. This insight made him change his rifle with Kodak films and meant that, up to the independence elections, he was number three on the white racist death list. Number one, Anton Lubowski, had been executed on September 12, 1989 by a group of men from the State Civil Cooperation Bureau. A hail of bullets from several AK47s determined his fate in front of his house here in Windhoek

Shortly after someone tried to execute John from a car driving up the side of his red Golf. Several shots hit the car, but he managed to drive from the assailants. For years he kept the VW with the bullet holes in it, not to forget.

Living with John, working with John, was a constant challenge. He demanded so much from his surroundings, and even more from his colleagues. We passed the litmus test, but not everyone got through his filter.

Since the UN would not reveal the miserable conditions in the underground prison cells the freedom heroes of SWAPO had in Angola, where dissidents were set to rot or die during torture, John Liebenberg was the man who dug up that story. And documented it. He got more enemies from it, now from the other side, but his integrity and his search for justice for all, nobody could stop. Not that the new rulers did not try.

John had to leave Namibia after a few years, the government made his life a hell. He chose to move back to his native South Africa, where until Monday he continued his work as a freelance photographer.

We are deeply shaken by his way to early departure. Even he had not the most healthy life style, we still can't understand that he has left his four kids, us, his many friends.

We thank you, who has donated to the hospital expenses, it still has to be paid.

Reference:

[Jørn Stjerneklar](#), Facebook Article, 16 February 2020