



Hiding tears of grief



During South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, an ANC veteran's tale was so harrowing that Archbishop Desmond Tutu broke down. **Keith Wilson** hears how Jillian Edelstein captured the moment

The time November, 2000

The place Cape Town

The event Since December 1995, Archbishop Desmond Tutu has been chairing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, a series of public hearings investigating 30 years of human rights violations under apartheid. As the commission's work draws to a close, London-based photographer Jillian Edelstein, who has been documenting the hearings for four years, meets Tutu for one last photo session.

WHEN JILLIAN Edelstein travelled to Cape Town to photograph Desmond Tutu, she had one particular TRC hearing on her mind. In 1997 an ANC veteran, Singqokwana Malgas, had described how he was tortured by the security police: a mask was pulled over his face to suffocate him, and then a stick placed behind his knees from which he was hung upside down. During his testimony Malgas broke down and tried to hide his tears with his hands. Unexpectedly Tutu, who was presiding over the hearing, also began to weep and buried his face in his arms.

Jillian remembers: 'On my way to Cape Town I was thinking about the dominant imagery of the commission, which were the exhumations of people murdered by the security police, and Tutu himself being overcome with

grief during the Malgas testimony.'

This was to be her second photo session with Tutu. The previous sitting took place nearly four years previously, producing a number of portraits showing the Archbishop in the ebullient spirit that has so characterised his public image across the world. This time both photographer and subject were in a more reflective mood.

Using a Wista 5x4in camera, Jillian's preferred emulsion for her project was Polaroid Type 55, but the film's sensitivity meant she would always back up with either Kodak Tri-X or Plus-X. In this 20 minute session, her first few frames showed

Tutu face on, cropped tightly around his shoulders. Then he bowed his head and brought his hands up to his head. Jillian seized the moment.

'I was thinking about Malgas, but I didn't know how to broach it,' she recalls. 'So I said to him: "For me, the most telling moment in the Truth Commission was when you broke down in the court room during the Singqokwana Malgas testimony and you put your head down on the table with your hands."

'And he said: "You mean like this?" and he just did it.'

In 2001, Jillian's book about the TRC hearings, *Truth & Lies*, was published by Granta. ○

