

Blindness and the Power of Inner Vision

This is the inspiring story of a truly remarkable South African, Advocate RW (Mike) Bowen, and his transformation from a disabled war veteran into a powerful campaigner for human rights. Mike was tragically blinded in late 1917 by exploding shell shrapnel in Flanders during a battle of the First World War. He overcame this severe disability through his great strength of character and with the help of a capable and determined woman, Eleanor (Lil) Gillies, who married Mike. She encouraged and supported him throughout their married life.



Mike graduated from Cambridge University with a law degree and then qualified as a barrister in London. On returning to South Africa he had a distinguished career as an advocate and as a Member of Parliament. Mike forcefully opposed racial discrimination and promoted the interests of disabled people. He achieved much in public service, working with compassionate individuals on projects for the disabled, many of which were initiated and nurtured by women.

The important role played by women in shaping men and society is often overlooked. This biography highlights their pioneering work and proves that “behind every successful man there is a powerful woman”.

“In my experience there are far too few books which celebrate the life of people with disabilities and even fewer that actually deal with the issue of turning the discrimination which they experience into a wider campaign to overcome prejudice and exclusion more broadly. Not least of his achievement was his establishment of a multiracial school for blind children. He turned rhetoric into action. I sincerely hope that this book gets wide exposure and people learn a little more about a man who deserves to be remembered and whose life should be celebrated.”

(Lord David Blunkett, former UK Home Secretary and himself blind since birth)

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Hilary Marlow



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The inspiring story of Mike Bowen and Lil Gillies
who met in the aftermath of the Great War



A biography of Advocate RW Bowen, MP

by Hilary Marlow