Hybristophilia and Heaven: The Ballad of Gert and Joey

Authors: Robert M. Kaplan
Submitted: 20. March 2023
Published: 15. May 2023
Volume: 10
Issue: 3
Affiliation: University of Wollongong, Sydney, Australia
Languages: English
Keywords: Gert van Rooyen, Joey Haarhoff, Child sexual abuse, Abduction, Satanic Ritual Abuse, South Africa, Apartheid, Evangelism, Dutch Reformed Church
Categories: Humanities, Social Sciences and Law
DOI: 10.17160/josha.10.3.881

Abstract:

In 1989, Gert van Rooyen and Joey Haarhoff abducted and murdered six young girls, with no trace of their bodies ever found. The crimes occurred during a period of social breakdown in South Africa, marked by disillusionment with the Dutch Reform Church and the emergence of vast conspiracy theories. Gert was a known paedophile, and the involvement of his partner Joey can only be explained as a form of active hybristophilia. The couple’s religious involvement is also notable, with Gert exhibiting characteristics of a cult leader. The crimes remain horrifying in a country with high rates of violence, rape, and murder.
Hybристофилія and Heaven: The Ballad of Gert and Joey

Robert M Kaplan MBChB FRANZCP MA MPhil
Associate Professor, School of Medicine, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Research Fellow, History Department, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Email: rob@rkaplan.com.au

Abstract

In 1989 Gert van Rooyen and Joey Haarhoff (Gert and Joey) abducted six young girls who were sexually abused and murdered; to this day, no trace of their bodies have ever been found, leading to a host of unproven conspiracy theories that they were sex-trafficked overseas for a paedophile network.

These appalling crimes can only be understood in the context of the last decade of Apartheid when lower-middle class Afrikaners struggled to deal with the breakdown of a system of racial exclusivity that had protected their jobs for life.

Disillusionment with the sternly Calvinist Dutch Reform Church led to many joining the host of evangelical churches. Social breakdown escalated with alcohol and drug abuse, marital breakdown, use of pornography, family murder-suicides and vast conspiracy theories about satanic ritual abuse, for which there was no evidence.
In this environment the couple’s predations still resonate as horrifying crimes in a country with among the world’s highest rates of violence, rape and murder.

Gert was a known paedophile, but the collusion of his partner Joey, can only be explained as a form of active hybistophilia, a form of behaviour that is only now beginning to be studied in detail. The religious involvement of the couple is also notable, with Gert showing the characteristics of a cult leader.
Gert van Rooyen and his mistress Joey Haarhoff (hereafter Gert & Joey) may well qualify as South Africa’s most infamous criminal duo – no mean feat in a country with one of the highest rates of violent crimes in the world. The couple committed a series of crimes that after three decades still entrance South Africa, not least because no trace of the victims was ever found.

The couple, who lived in Pretoria, got together in 1987 and immediately sought access to young girls. They made applications to foster children, but were turned down. Joey frequently called children’s homes requesting to bring girls home for the holidays and weekends. At the end of 1989, a 14-year-old girl from an orphanage in the Orange Free State spent the Christmas holidays with the couple.

These events were only a prelude to what followed. Between 1 August 1988 and 11 January 1990, Gert and Joey are believed to have abducted and murdered no less than six young girls — Tracy-Lee Scott-Crossley (14), Fiona Harvey[1] (12), Joan Horn (12), Odette Boucher (11), Anne-Marie Wapenaar (12), and Yolanda Wessels (13) – who was Haarhoff’s niece. The abductions occurred in Pretoria, Kempton Park and Johannesburg, with one further afield in Pietermaritzburg, Natal.[2]

The modus operandi was for the couple to spot a suitable victim in public, usually at a shopping centre – aged 11-12 years and always blonde – then for Joey, disguised with a wig, to meet the victim, pretend a connection with them in some way and persuade them to come with her to Gert’s van. And they were never to be seen again.

The intention behind the abductions was to provide victims for Gert’s sexual purposes. Joey’s participation in the abuse they were subjected to remains a matter for speculation.[3]

It was with the seventh victim that the system failed. Joan Booysen (16) was older than the others, but looked younger. Taken back to their house, she was handcuffed, drugged, sexually assaulted and locked in a cupboard. There is no reason to believe that the other abductees were treated any differently.

After Gert left the house she managed to break out. Pursued by a frantic Joey, Booysen ran into the street where she was nearly knocked over by a passing car. Seeing her distressed state, the driver took her in and drove off. Soon she was telling her story to the police.

For Gert and Joey the game was up. Joey told her daughter Amor that they had kidnapped a policeman’s child to extort money from him.[4] Amor, horrified, did not know what to make of the story, but begged her mother to go to the police, which she refused.
The couple drove down to the Natal coast, then returned to Pretoria. By then Joan had identified Gert's white Bantam truck.

The police staked out the house. When the couple returned to the home that night, they were waiting. The car turned round and set off with the police in chase. The tires were shot out and the car came to a halt on a bridge over the Apies river. As the officers drew closer occurred the climactic event that forever prevented closure. Gert pulled Joey's head down, shot her and then killed himself.[5]

On this note ended the morbid trail of Gert and Joey. The couple's murder suicides were inevitable with the awareness that the death penalty was still carried out in South African capital cases. Their death ended any chance in discovering what happened to the victims. Despite the most extensive searching, to this day no trace of them has ever been found.

**Forensic Analysis**

These offences occurred in a lower-middle-class setting involving the racially-protected lower-middle class Afrikaner society in the last decade of Apartheid when they struggled to deal with the breakdown of a system of racial exclusivity. A society of rigid beliefs reinforced by the Calvinist Dutch Reform Churches lost its bearings, with drug, alcohol and pornography use, family breakdown and murder-suicides, becoming prone to conspiracy theories like the prevalence of satanic ritual abuse and joining evangelical churches in large numbers.

Who were this couple who set off on such an horrendous trail of abduction and murder? Cornelius Gerhardus (Gert) van Rooyen, the oldest of four children, was born 11 April 1938 and always known by his nickname of "Bokkie". He lived with his family on the mordantly named Bloed (Blood) Street in Pretoria.

In 1954 Gert, then 16, was sentenced to "corrective training" (reform school) after he stole a car. He was back there a year later for stealing cars and a rifle. In 1960 he was again imprisoned for stealing motor spares and clothing.

So far, a few minor level crimes that either signalled a turning point to go straight and lead a respectable life, or a further descent into worse crime, possibly of a kleptomaniac nature. What was not yet evident was how Gert's predilections were to determine his future crimes.

Gert earned a living running a building construction business with his brothers, repairing roofs among other activities. How successful the business was is debatable, but he never seemed to be short of money. He travelled between the Rand and Durban for work. It was believed that these trips gave him access to
obscure locations where he could dispose of bodies and also fed conspiracy theories of his participation in a paedophile network with the victims being shipped away from Durban.[6]

Whatever he was up to, his house was described as a semi-fortress and visitors had to be let in through the security gate to enter. It was observed that he never parked outside, but always drove into the enclosed car park.[7]

Described as “flamboyant and a sexual braggart” by some people, Gert was also known as a "God-fearing man" who claimed to be a preacher.[8] Both descriptions came close, although the extent that Gert feared God’s mercy remains questionable.

Gert’s relationships were polyamorous to say the least. In 1957 he married Bettie Smit and had four children whom his mother was left to raise once they parted.[9] There has been no other mention of the relationship or the children.

At 26, Gert married his second wife Aletta, 19. He fathered six children: Anne Marie, Judith, Hannes, Phillip (Flippie), Gerhard and Adriaan. His skirchasing was a constant problem from the start and he became violent when Aletta confronted him.

In 1987 Gert was married for the third time to a Hester Smit. She left him in haste after a week and they divorced two months later.

Gert stalked the contact ads of the womens’ magazines and constantly advertised for secretaries who would never last more than a few days with him. Amidst other relationships, he had a son with Bonita (alias) whom he saw for four months. Warned that Gert was a certified psychopath who had been jailed, Bonita remained under his spell, remembering him as a charming gentleman who probably had unacknowledged children to other women.

Whatever he had fantasised about or done with young girls up to that point is not known, but it exploded in no uncertain terms in 1979. Gert abducted two girls, aged 10 and 13 years, at a Christmas party, took them to the Hartbeespoort Dam near Pretoria and molested them.[10] He released the girls the next day but was soon caught.[11] As was routine for such cases, he was assessed by a psychiatrist at Weskoppies Psychiatric Hospital and diagnosed as a pathological liar and psychopathic personality.

Sentenced to four years imprisonment for abduction, sexual assault and common assault of the little girls, Gert served three years before being released, obtaining in the process, like so many, the dubious prison title of model prisoner.

By any standards the blatant abduction of the two girls was an appalling crime and more notice should have been taken of the propensity to repeat it. This was much more than a sneaky attempt to feel up a victim, rather an indication of the extent to
which Gert was prepared to go to meet his needs, regardless of the consequences. He must have known that his capture was inevitable and considered the option of killing. There is no indication that anyone had picked up on this. Today he would be considered a high-risk offender, go on a sexual offender register and be closely monitored.

The two girls who could testify against him but demurred.

The next victims were not to be so lucky.

If it looked like Gert had gone on the straight and narrow path, this proved an illusion. His predilections became harder to conceal or he made less effort to be evasive. Gert made no secret of his attraction to young girls with blonde hair and blue eyes, telling his son that the qualifier was that their legs should not touch the ground when they sat in a chair. A domestic worker said Gert threatened to withhold her pay unless she brought him young girls from the township. Girls were later to comment how he would hang over the gate, leer, whistle and tell them they were sexy. He told some people about his sexual exploits with younger women, even girls of 5 years. Once again it can be asked whether people thought he was joking or exaggerating; no one, however, seemed to see it as having ominous implications or something to be reported.

Aletta was prepared to take him back after prison, but his sexual obsessions and incessant preaching were intolerable.[12] She divorced him in August 1983. The marriage could contain some clues to understanding him, but this was never followed up.

In 1987 Gert and Joey became a couple. The woman who was to be Gert’s myrmidon was Francina Johanna Hermina Haarhoff (always known as Joey), an attractive, popular woman in her fifties living in the city of Pretoria, the nerve centre of the Afrikaner domain. She had a brief first marriage and is believed to have lost a pregnancy due to abuse.[13] This was followed by the marriage to Japie Haarhoff, producing three boys and a daughter. After her husband died in the mid-80s, she worked as an accounts and debtor’s clerk.

A typical lower-middle class Afrikaans woman who attended the highly Calvinist Dutch Reform Church, Joey was not exempt from currents of moral uncertainty swirling around her and decided to join the Apostoliese Geloofsendring church (Apostolic Faith Mission), a Pentecostal church. By this stage such a move was no longer considered scandalous in the Afrikaans community.[14]
Here she met lay preacher Gert, hardly a catch for an attractive woman who had a number of promising suitors. He was less than good looking, more like plump and balding (which he would cover at times with a poorly-fitting wig).[15] She would soon have learned that he had been married several times and scattered children around. His grobhe appearance notwithstanding, Gert, using the glib patter of the confirmed psychopath, had no difficulty attracting women. Joey, entranced, if not besotted, overcame any reservations she had before they became an item.

Understanding Gert, a paedophile psychopath, takes little effort. He was utterly remorseless, highly manipulative and totally driven by his urges to molest young girls. He had a high sex drive. Joey was to complain how often he wanted to have sex (but this did not change her attraction to him). As with his children, he was also violent, which maintained his control over her.

Typical of serial paedophiles, the drive to obtain young girls consumed all his thoughts and activities. There is a similar pattern in serial killers and rapists of starting off with fantasies followed by small-scale attempts which steadily escalate in severity. His initial abduction of the two girls had mixed results. Prison was not desirable, so there had to be no future witnesses to indict him. On the other hand, it was an incentive for more molestations with the interval between episodes reducing incrementally.

Crime was not restricted to the father. Already facing charges of life imprisonment for the murder of a 15-year-old Zimbabwean girl, Flippie van Rooyen was found guilty of perjury in February 2001 after he gave the police conflicting statements under oath.[16] In addition, his brother Gerhard was sentenced to 15 years in prison for theft and fraud. This pattern of intra-familial crime tests the nature-versus-nurture theory of psychopathy to its limit.

Adding a fanciful radomontade to the story, Flippie claimed that the girls were killed as part of satanic rituals, their bodies burned with acid, or that they had been taken to the Middle East. He also alleged that three National Party ministers were involved in a child-smuggling network with his father that involved selling girls for cash.[17] His claim was highlighted in a book (later withdrawn after a defamation case) alleging that military and cabinet figures were involved in serial child abuse.[18] The wide consensus is that there is no basis for these allegations.

Even more puzzling is Gert’s daughter Anne-Marie who claimed to have been stabbed over fifty times by two teenage satanists at Scottburgh, KwaZulu-Natal, in 1995.[19] The police discounted the allegations and believed that she had stabbed herself. The following year, Anne-Marie was charged with fraud and perverting the course of justice.

Joey, on the other hand, is not just enigmatic but deeply puzzling. The contrast between a woman from a God-fearing Calvinist upbringing leading a quiet suburban
life to being the active procurer of a recurrent paedophile murderer is almost impossible to reconcile.

What kind of knight’s-move thinking led to the transition? Gert undoubtedly dominated Joey but he was hardly a charismatic figure. Folie a deux and (the scientifically dubious) Stockholm Syndrome can be excluded. Gert was a psychopath, not psychotic. For that matter, there is no indication that Joey was psychotic; her personality, however, was another matter.

Joey saw herself as Gert’s willing accomplice and there must have been some thrill in her capturing the children. Did the abductions result in sexual excitement? Even worse, did she participate in the sexual abuse? As the prison gates – if not the hangman’s noose – loom, Joey writes two letters, the last chance to get some insight, however limited, into her thinking. A week before her death, a letter to her mother Nelia van Staden holds the only known expression of remorse.[20] While taking her life was unforgivable, she wrote that she had loved Gerhard (Gert) so deeply because he gave her love no one else did. Joey begs forgiveness for the hurt she has brought her mother, hoping that God will save her soul. His ex-wife Alet would see that they were buried in one grave so she would be with God then.[21]

The night before her death, when arrest was just a question of time, Joey sends her will to her sister Alet.[22] She cannot even allude to the abductions, except to repeat that “Joan (Booyzen), the girl I got to know through another person, I kidnapped with the intention that Gerhard (Gert) persuaded her father to pay a ransom for her before I would release her” – which she underlined twice to emphasise. All utterly untrue. It was, in short, denial to the end.

Her possessions were left to her beloved son Abraham (Braam), the only one who had supported her relationship with Gert. For someone intending to shortly be in heaven with her beloved, Joey did not forget to settle scores. Her son Johan had rejected the man she loved the most and this was unforgivable. Her daughter Amor van der Westhuizen (vidé infra) – Joey blasted, who did not use the chances she had in life – was not to receive anything in the will; instead she was prepared to forgive her for the hurt she had caused. This was hardly an excusationem pro vita mea.

Her move to evangelism notwithstanding, predestination, that ineluctable Calvinist standard, did not leave Joey. Her letter has references to the will of god and the chance of forgiveness in the after-life. At 2.30pm on 18th December 1988 at Kerkstraat Helde Akker, she wrote, Gert had let her to the Lord. Now life no longer had any meaning; in heaven she would united with Gert, forever free from earthly
depredations. Herein lay the clue to Gert’s hold on her as a proto-cult leader, as well as the lasting influence of the church in which she was raised.

On this bathetic note, Joey went to face her fate.

The only significant insight into Joey’s motives comes from her daughter Amor, who wrote a book on their difficult relationship.[23] From an early age Amor was sexually abused by her father who would come home from his work at Voortrekkerhoogte military base. When her grandmother told Joey, she said she knew what was happening – but made no effort to intervene. In short Joey colluded passively with the abuse. To add to this Amor believes that her mother had been molested in childhood. This provides the most important factor in an otherwise bare field in understanding Joey: people who have been abused are more likely to become abusers themselves. [24]

Amor’s book reads well and has great credibility. There is something in the relationship between mother and daughter, from an early age until the last will, that seems to extend beyond the collusion with her sexual abuse. Joey’s near-sadistic rejection of her daughter can be attributed to the denial of her role in the abuse.

There is no indication of any psychiatric disorder in Joey. The only family history is with her youngest son who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. While Joey’s sons said her personality changed after she met Gert, Amor disagreed. ‘Van Rooyen did not change my mother. She started drinking for the first time and he may have got her addicted to some drug’. Maintaining the trans-generational chain, her brother Braam Haarhoff (52) – his mother’s favourite – was found guilty of molesting a young girl in New Zealand where he had settled.[25]
Hybistophilia

Female child sexual offenders (FCSO) are a lately studied but growing field.[26] As a rule, they are in the age group 20-30 years, but can span across the decades.[27] Psychiatric illness (notably personality disorder and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder), drug and alcohol abuse, as well as dysfunctional relationships, are common. An estimate of 90% of cases occur in association with a dominating male. A significant number of FCSO were victims of childhood sexual abuse themselves and most victims of FCSO are young females. [28]

What makes someone – invariably female – form a relationship with a criminal committing serious crimes, even serial murder which could include sadistic sexual acts? Hybistophilia, first described by sexologist John Money in 1986, is defined as a paraphilia (sexual deviation) in which sexual arousal, facilitation, and attainment of orgasm are responsive to and contingent upon being with a partner known to have committed an outrage, cheating, lying, known infidelities, or crime—such as rape, murder, or armed robbery.[29] The popular term for this is the Bonnie and Clyde syndrome.[30]

The term hybistophilia (of Greek origin: love that commits an outrage against others) has replaced the term enclitophilia (love that is blameworthy). [31] Aggrawal describes hybistophilia as sexual arousal due to the knowledge of one’s partner having committed an act of violence.[32] Vitello’s view is that hybistophilia is predatory in nature whereby sexual arousal and attainment of orgasm are dependent upon being a partner to someone who has committed violent offences such as rape and murder.[33]

Passive hybistophilia is very common, typically found in women who write fan mail to serial killers and men on death row with the intent of having a romantic relationship, otherwise known as ‘murder groupies’. [34] There are many such cases, a notorious example being Lynette Fromme (follower of Charles Manson) who took a shot at President Gerald Ford.

Some of these women are driven by rescue fantasies; in too many cases there is a pathological need for notoriety (reverse celebrity) in women with seriously inadequate or disturbed personalities. Those who write to convicted felons, to men on death row, must fantasise of sexual contact rather than experience it. It is arousal by the combination of the offender and the nature of their criminal acts, not necessarily sexual contact, that is the defining feature: ‘The more gruesome and heinous the crime is, the greater the sexual attraction’. [35] Could this explain why Patty Hearst became a gun-carrying bank robber when abducted by the Symbionese Liberation Front?
The rarer form, aggressive hybistophilia, is found in people, invariably women, who will help their partners perpetrate their crimes – or even participate – either willingly or unable to accept that they are being manipulated. Notorious cases are Myra Hindley and Ian Brady; Rosemary and Fred West; and Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo. Hindley was obsessed with Brady and saw no life without him until he rejected her in prison. While she always denied it, later evidence confirmed that she had been a participant in the sadistic sexual abuse of the abducted children, rather than a passive onlooker.[36] The relationship of Rosemary and Fred West was complicated by a number of factors, but she had been repeatedly raped as a child and then prostituted by her father. Homolka, who served a relatively short prison term, never denied her involvement with Bernardo. [37] Joey and Gert thus join these ominous dyads.

One explanation being investigated comes from cognitive evolution: the role of the Dark Triad consisting of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. [38] Such individuals, according to the theory, are more likely to cause social distress, create problems within organizations, tend to be less compassionate, agreeable, empathetic, satisfied with their lives, and less likely to believe they and others are good. Dark Triad individuals, by virtue of these traits, have an evolutionary appeal to the women they attract, regardless of their malevolent personalities. [39] The vagueness of these terms is notable and more convincing proof is required.

It must be said that there is much more research to be done on hybistophilia before we can have any reasonable insight into the phenomenon.

**Cults and Coercion**

A feature of Gert’s behaviour that may explain his control and manipulation of Joey is the similarity with abusive cult leaders. As his wife Aletta trenchantly observed, in addition to sex, Gert’s religiosity was a ubiquitous and intrusive feature of his behaviour.[40] A lay minister in a Pentecostal church was how he met Joey. Such churches, despite their growing popularity among Afrikaners, were still not mainstream in their community and it was not too many steps from there to a cult.[41]

While Gert did not have a group following, he reiterated the behaviour and abuses seen in so many cult leaders. Cult leaders notoriously sexually exploit children while dominating their adult followers into supine acquiescence. Captive Hearts, Captive Minds points out that all a cult requires to exist is a leader and at least one follower. [42] The “cultic relationship” or “one-on-one cult” is a deliberately manipulative and exploitative intimate relationship between two persons, often involving a significant power imbalance between the two participants. The stronger one uses his influence to control, manipulate, abuse, and exploit the weaker other. Such cultic relationships are one-on-one versions of the larger groups. They may be even more
intense than participation in a group cult with all the attention and abuse focused on one person, often more dangerous. This sums up Gert and Joey’s relationship.

At some level, Gert convinced himself, like other leaders, that his exulted spiritual role gave him the right to take what he wanted without restraint or regret.[43] And, like so many infatuated cult followers, Joey lost all sensibility except to place herself at the will of Gert above everything else.

The best illustration of Joey’s utter submission to Gert’s control was her frequent urging of Amor to marry Gert to bear children for him. This is remarkably similar to behaviour in cults where women followers of the leader are encouraged to breed children for him to abuse.

**Conclusion**

Joey, a willing pawn in the hands of Gert, was an extreme case of aggressive hybristophilia. The couple’s path of sexual deprestation and murder did not occur in a vacuum. As the protective shell of Apartheid crumbled, those who had benefitted solely because of their race were left alienated, insecure and defenceless, turning instead to evangelical religions while the nuclear family structure broke down and individual pathologies of the worst type allowed to surface.

The mystery of Gert and Joey and the fate of their victims will ever remain. In the end her daughter Amor summed it up and that is as close any anyone will get to the secret: “Gert van Rooyen did not change my mother, she embodied what she did.”[44]

What we are left with is the grim reminder that child sexual abuse is an appalling and ongoing part of the human experience and logic is turned upside down when some abusers go on to be abusers themselves.

[2] Several other unsolved abductions, of which South Africa has no shortage, have been attributed to the couple, but there is not sufficient evidence to connect them to the couple.


[6] An alternate explanation, in view of the family crimes, that the money could have been obtained by the more mundane ways of theft or tax evasion.

[7] This was a retrospective observation and a more mundane explanation could be that he was concerned about home security, a problem that beset all South Africans.


[13] Listed variously as Robbie Doubell or Japie Strydom; Amor wrote that she never learned the name.

[14] With the breakdown of Apartheid in the eighties, the iron hold of the Dutch Reformed Churches on the Afrikaner people weakened and many, seeking other solutions, joined evangelical churches. See: Falkof N. ‘Satan has come to


[21] They were buried separately. The involvement of ex-wife Alet is puzzling but there is no information to clarify this.

[22] Written in Afrikaans; references are made to the English translation. Thanks to Estelle du Toit for providing copies.


[37] For example, Fred West was brain-damaged from a head injury.


[40] Carla van der Spuy. Battered, Abused, Shamed. ibid.

[41] See: J.L. Hall. The United Pentecostal Church and the Evangelical Movement Selected chapters. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d7aa64720f74311abd0d8fb/t/5d8bbaa07597be3780c84c9e7/1569434120202/The+United+Pentecostal+Church+and+the+Evangelical+Movement+by+JL+Hall.pdf; and:


About the Author:

Biography of Robert M Kaplan
Clinical Associate Professor Robert M Kaplan is a forensic psychiatrist, historian and writer based at the University of NSW, Western Sydney University and Wollongong University. He writes on history of psychiatry, medical history, crime, genocide and biography. He gives regular talks on these topics. His two latest books are The King who Strangled his Psychiatrist and Other Dark Tales and Mary Barkas: A Life Unfulfilled (both in press). He is currently writing about the life of the psychiatrist Helen Flanders Dunbar.