

HONORARY GRADUATE

Irene Menell

Irene Menell (born Manderstam) had her primary and secondary schooling in the United Kingdom, Switzerland and South Africa. In 1949, after matriculating at Kingsmead College in Johannesburg, she proceeded to the University of Cape Town to read for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, which she obtained in 1952, following this with the degree of Bachelor of Laws in 1954. While at university she served for two years on the Students' Representative Council and on a number of committees both on and off campus, acting as chairperson of many of them. Already she was displaying her ability and her efficiency in all she undertook.

In 1954 Irene Manderstam married Clive Menell. Of this union five children were born. Throughout the children's early years, while not pursuing her professional career, she remained actively involved in the issues that faced society, both politically and in a variety of community projects.

She was a founder member of the Liberal Party and was active during her university years in its Western Cape formations. When the Liberal Party closed down she joined the then Progressive Party and held many elected positions at national, regional and constituency levels within that party and its successors. In 1977 she was returned unopposed as the member of the Transvaal Provincial Council for Houghton. She was elected to serve a second term in 1981 and continued to represent the constituency and the Progressive Federal Party in that capacity until the abolition of the provincial councils in 1988. From 1981 to 1986 she was Deputy Chairman of the PFP caucus and chief spokesperson for the party on hospital services and administrative matters in the province.

From 1962 until Dr Helen Suzman's retirement from Parliament in 1989, Irene Menell was largely responsible for the efficient administration of the Houghton constituency party offices and acted as campaign manager for many of the constituency elections. To mark Dr Suzman's extraordinary contribution to the politics of South Africa, Irene Menell initiated the publication of the collection of essays in her honour entitled *Values Alive*, which was presented to Dr Suzman in 1990.

Together with her husband Clive, between 1957 and 1958 she played an important role in the creation and production of the musical *King Kong*, widely recognised as a key event in the history of African jazz. For many years they were together responsible for the American Field Service Student Exchange Programme in South Africa. Some years later, during 1976-7 they were jointly involved in initiating the events that led to the formation of the Urban Foundation.

Irene Menell has had a lifelong interest in the performing and fine arts. She was a founder trustee and is patron of the Federated Union of Black Arts (FUBA), a music, art and drama educational institute. She participated in the establishment of the Johannesburg Art Foundation, a community art centre, of which she is a trustee and past Chairman. She is also a trustee of the Market Theatre and the Afrika Cultural Trust, which, like the Market Theatre, occupies part of the Newtown precinct and offers a broad range of educational, cultural and recreational activities to children and adults.

As a founder member, and since 1983, Chairman of the national committee of the READ Organisation, Irene Menell has been a leading participant in shaping an institution dedicated to the enhancement of communication skills in South Africa. Through the establishment of over two thousand libraries in schools, colleges and community resource centres, the development of educational cross-curricular materials; teacher and learner training and incentive programmes which have been offered to over seventy thousand teachers and to millions of learners, young and old, READ has made a significant contribution to fundamental educational needs in our country.

In 1993 she was requested by Mr Justice Richard Goldstone to direct the establishment of a human rights documentation and training centre to be funded by a grant from the Norwegian Government and to serve the needs of the Goldstone Commission as well as the community at large. The Institute for the Study of Public Violence, which became the Human Rights Institute of South Africa after the termination of the Goldstone Commission in 1994, is concerned with a number of human-rights issues.

In addition to her other commitments, Irene Menell is a trustee and the Treasurer of Medical Education for South African Blacks (MESAB) and a member of the Board of Governors of the University of Cape Town Foundation. She is also a member of the Broadcasting Monitoring and Complaints Committee of the Independent Broadcasting Authority and a director of the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism.

Irene Menell together with her husband, Clive, has given much to the wellbeing of this country in so many fields - in the promotion of education, in the emergence of a democratic government, in the arts, in the advancement of the underprivileged and in economic development. It is truly fitting that the University signify its appreciation of their life's work by conferring on her the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.