



Beulah with Thulani Dube First Runner-up and Noel Daniels CEO of Cornerstone Institute

MEN'S WRITING CHALLENGE

By: Beulah Thumbadoo, Initiative Founder

THE WHY

“I launched a men’s writing challenge on the 5th February 2016 via my website and Facebook, to test the power of social media combined with active citizenry in the sphere of writing. Having attended a meeting in January at WomenZone in Artscape to plan activities in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the August 9th 1956 women’s march, I left wondering whether there might be a way to include the voices of men somehow, to bring about a more balanced perspective.”

THE WHAT

“I was first inspired to get men to write – because that’s what I know best. I ran a short story competition for 18 years and had published 100 essays by women in 2006 so this was the perfect segue for contributing to the 60th anniversary celebrations heeding a constitutional call to be inclusive and build social cohesion. Getting men to write about the women in their lives was extolled as an interesting way of linking a deeper exploration by men with what the South African women’s march meant to them.”

THE HOW

“All self-funded, I realized this would have to go beyond social media if I were to reach men from every generation, religion and other descriptions. I reached out to Write On!, the SA Writers’ Guild, multi-faith entities, SANGONET, The National Arts Council, head representative of Women at the Department of Arts and Culture and Sonke Gender Justice. Some yielded immediate responses, others were slow in yielding results and others did not join the party. I leaned heavily on good friends to help get the challenge out to writing groups; literary festivals; bookshops where budding writers gather as well as radio shows and print media.”

THE WHEN

On 17th February the Men's Writing Challenge was posted on Sunday Times BooksLive: <http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2016/02/17/a-writing-challenge-for-south-african-men/>. By March I approached Cornerstone Institute in Salt River which took a keen interest in this project. They incorporated an additional launch event into their popular monthly dialogue series which 20 people attended on April 5th. Co facilitated by RedZebra, it was a truly significant and intimate space for sharing which many expressed hope and interest in seeing repeated to draw in more men.



By 1st May 2016 I had only received a total of 8 entries. It was time to re-think the effort: were men not writing because there was no monetary incentive? Was the topic too intrusive and too difficult for them to tackle? Deadline too soon? Was writing a difficult endeavor to embark on?

Extending the scope

“The sister of a writer from Kenya asked me to extend the competition to the African continent. My own sister in Canada wanted men in her part of the world to be able to enter this competition. When a request from an Ashoka (www.ashoka.org) Fellow in Brazil to extend the competition through its network of social entrepreneurs surfaced: a more uncomfortable and insistent question close to home arose: Was the competition was for South African men or men in South Africa?

I raised R6000 in prize money and extended both the competition and the deadline to 1st July.”

I made as many A3 sized posters as I could afford and put them up wherever I could: Clarks Bookstore in town, the Central library, The Labia theatre. A few more stories started trickling in, however with the support of players like National Arts Council, DAC and Sangonet, the call would have been more widespread.

What men wrote about:

- the concerns of eligible young women
- our elders
- women living with HIV
- gender roles
- odes and poems
- the paradox of being 'born free'
- trust, respect and family priorities
- regrets, advice, warnings, admissions



Kingsley Khobotlo (Winner)



From left to right: Nancy Richards, Beulah Thumbadoo, Dr Sharon Johnson, Laurie Gaum, Riaan Visman, Roeshdien Jaz

BREAKING THE SILENCE - The Panel discussion and Prize-giving event at Cornerstone Institute

THE “WHAT” NOW?

“Having been inspired to launch this space and platform to bridge the growing gender divide; feeling the response and holding this space, it’s now time to extend a call-to-action to my fellow-activists, passionate about dialogue, writing, healing and bridging the divide. Let’s take this to the next level!

To read the summary or Breaking the Silence or download the full Men’s Writing Master Book, click on the links provided.