

BREAKING THE SILENCE: EXTRACTS

1 –on the concerns of eligible young women

The very first submission to this challenge was *The Call*. About how women in their late twenties or thirties wait for the call - *that* call - from that one man they have their eyes on; the one they almost dare not pin their hopes on. Hopes around whether he will be a stand-up guy; not threatened by her job; not throw his wallet and his connections to politicians around on a first date. About how girlfriends support each other and reflect together around which men can and can't be trusted. The essay ends abruptly where the phone rings... and the caller ID shows it is the man she's hoping would call...

2 – about our elders

On the memory of a loving and disciplinarian Gogo who made all the difference to a young man's moral compass; his values - a how he still gives his seat over to the elderly on a train ride. Yet his thoughts and emotions are so conflicting. He pays tribute to his sister; his mother; his grandmother, but makes a vital confession that the love of his life will never really know how much he cares - because he was taught to hide his innermost emotions as a man and that is what he does.

3 – on women living with HIV

A moving personal story by an uncle about his niece, the daughter of his sister, who was born with the Human Immuno Virus and struggled with her health all of her life. I was unsure what solace to offer this writer. It was well-written and factual – his experience with a particular hospital; the SASSA system; taking care of her; w the additional trauma of her pregnancy at 15; the battle to give birth. This uncle/brother/son's greatest concern is that if the birth was not handled with sufficient care which is what he suspects; how his mother cope for the third time around having had to take care of her daughter; grand-daughter and now the possibility of a great grand- daughter who might be HIV positive?

4 - on gender roles

A couple of essays seemed to want woman to have a role - or a place. It seemed men are asking for encouragement, admitting they cannot be the kind of men they might want to be – the men who adore women, acknowledge that there is nothing more precious than woman. Yet, they are unable to be this man if the woman does not allow them to lead.
“We need to hear that you believe in us.”

5 – on odes and poems

A handful of women sent in poems and short pieces by men in their lives; odes to Mothers and women; confessions on how at our most primal we cannot help being and playing out the demons we are born with? Men hurting women and women hurting men – badly – as a part of the package deal we make as humans – and the need to make peace with this.

6 – on the paradox of being ‘born free’

A father wrote of his hopes for this ‘born free’ daughter. Her surprise watching the police brutality and violence citizens were subject to during apartheid in Sarafina. How different her expectations of life. The feeling of contained pride was palpable. It read like he was hoping that she would amount to more than the women of struggle – the women who were part of the 20 000 strong who marched on the Union Buildings - whose contributions are commemorated on Women’s Day. Yet the underlying question that lingered was whether one achieve great things without great struggles? Will we ever amount to as much as our freedom fighters did?

7 – On men’s struggles with woman.

A submission spoke candidly of women being tough as bosses, not quite the multi taskers imagined, playing the same power games as men do. Women are full of tolerance and more understanding when it comes to men, but also need more care. It is easy for them to celebrate, and can sometimes be frustrating if you don’t pay them attention. The author speaks of his first encounter with his wife “she was full of understanding even when I went out with friends the whole night. She developed more trust in me. I would arrive early in the morning drunk, more especially on the weekends. One night I realised that I was investing more time in friends rather than family. A real man knows that family is important and that it always comes first.”

My biggest regret was not realising the gift of a woman my wife was to me. When I lost my job, I could not be able to make her happy, we didn’t do things like we used, I was not able to support my family, it’s true that money makes the M in a man.. I would sit at home with nothing to do, I felt so helpless. My financial instability determined my fate. “

8 – On regrets, advice, warnings, admissions

There were essays with apologies; regrets; deep pain being carried by men for both words left unspoken and deeds left undone. Missing birthdays; anniversaries; cooked meals and not being able to commit - sometimes because of fathers who left. The caveman, the hunter the provider, the head of the family....the central position of men in society is certainly under threat. According to some, the male ego is taking a knock as a result, with damaging effects. There is deep concern that young flowers are not striving for the same high ideals of the struggle generation.