

Why so much hate and hurt in the world, when loving and caring people exist?

Paidamoyo Gerald Manomano (joint 2nd runner up)

Now I admit. Yes.
It's too late though.
Too late for me,
but not for our son.
Yes, please. Show him.
Let him read and understand.
These words.
For these are his father's unsaid words.
Unsaid words to his mother.

That day I wanted to say I'm sorry but I didn't. Why would I say sorry to a woman I bought? You buy something; it becomes your property, right? You buy it to do any way you deem necessary. So I was told and grew up with that doctrine hammered into my tender head, the doctrine sank its roots into the person who became me. I was told that women are not humans but objects that can be sold, traded, bought and that they are a source of wealth. Women are there to increase a man's lineage. Women do not have feelings, if they have, they don't matter for they are women's feelings. It really doesn't matter that I leave you unsatisfied anyway and everywhere. It really doesn't matter and why should I make it matter?

Saying I'm sorry to you was a sign of weakness, it would've taken away the man in me. I was setting man standards for our son, the standards that were set since time immemorial. Selfish man standards.

You were right.

That day I really wanted to apologize; for forgetting that it was your birthday. Our 12th anniversary came and went without me even noticing. You noticed, I saw the card but my mind did not register, I was tired from a long night out with friends. Time and again I wanted to apologise for all the missed and uneaten dinners. It didn't matter to me that you had taken your effort to prepare the meal. Please forgive me for all your calls that I did not answer and sms that I did not return.

For me it was work, friends, family and you. It was supposed to be YOU, family, work and friends. I hid behind scowl, you just smiled.

I apologize.

That day, I wanted to say thank you.

But why should I thank you for doing what I bought you for? Did your parents thank me for turning you into a woman? A homely woman, true traditional African woman. Should I say thank you; for being the mother of my children, for being my wife, for preparing a meal for me, were you not eating too?

A pompous self-centred being I was.

I took you for granted.

I admit.

That day I wanted to express the deepest feeling I had for you, a feeling that was so foreign to me, a feeling that scared me. How can a man have such feelings? A deep ache inside of me. I was so used to hate, anger and intimidation that it was so difficult to have a space in my heart for anything else. The feeling that I never expressed, the feeling I never understood. Love. So many times I saw hunger in your eyes, not for food, but for something fulfilling, something that would've made you feel content. You yearned for something that had made you leave your family, something I had promised you. I saw you wanting more than my disdain and contempt.

All I had to say more often was;

I love you.

I should've appreciated you more. But no, I saw nothing to appreciate in you, even the fact that you are a human being. I looked for wrongs and mistakes in you. I can't believe that I cursed the fact that you are a woman. So ashamed of myself I am. Time and again I made a fool out of you, making you believe even the stupidest thing. You never showed me that you had caught me in a lie, so humble you remained, so submissive like Abraham's sacrificial lamb, not a single bleat escaped its mouth even when the gleaming knife came down on its exposed neck.

I salute you!

I failed not only you but our children too. They only knew that they had a father when they heard me dictating and scolding you. I missed their school activities; you attended each one of them. I never lost sleep when they were not feeling well. Children are always sick, it's to be expected. I said in my selfish booming voice. How was I to know that I was contributing to the sickness of our children by not giving them my attention? Passively, I abused our children. I really do not deserve you and you do not deserve my scorn and contempt.

I am wallowing in regret.

You were right, friends do lead one astray.

Friends are there when all is going well; they are there to enjoy the ride only.

True you kept your vows, the vows you made since that big day those many years ago. The vows that I said too. Difference was that you meant every word while I just went through the motions.

I really am so ashamed of myself. Tell me, how do you manage it, smiling still while changing my diapers? You could have pursued a lucrative career, intelligent you are, I'm sorry that I made you believe otherwise. I was afraid to lose you, so insecure and petty and jealous I was. Your love for me is so painful.

Today I ask myself, was it that difficult just to say:

I'm sorry; for rewarding your love for me with pain, for making decisions and taking action without consulting you first, for all those sleepless nights you spent fearing the worst for me, "Where were you?" you would ask.

"ARE YOU MY KEEPER?" I would bellow.

"No. I'm not. It's just that we worry too much when it's past your home time." You whimpered.

"I come home any time I want to, you are not my boss and last time I checked I was the head of this house and still am!" Yeah, head of the house for sure.

“Plus the car broke down.” You knew I was lying.

“I’m sorry about the car, I guess you should change the mechanic.” You never missed a beat.

“However I want to let you know you will always be the head of this family. Our daughter wanted to show you something from school.” You said in your soothing voice. The softness of your voice tortured me.

“What something?” I asked the least concerned. I had paid school fees, done deal.

“She is representing her school at national level on a science quiz competition...” That shocked me, is my daughter that good? Really shows my negligence as a father.

“I don’t see how that concerns me?” I am a selfish person I tell you.

“She just wanted you to know. Will you take them to school and wish her luck? Please.” You pleaded with me to do my duty. I wanted to hug you but the foreign perfume on me stopped me.

“I will be late for work, I need a shower right now.” The second one for me that morning. I left you there sobbing. Believe me you, I hated myself.

You are the best; yes you are; look at our children, so humble and God fearing: Respectful, intelligent and hardworking too.

You are beautiful; yes you’re, in your doek and African attire, my Chimora girl, better still, my own Yvonne Chaka Chaka.

Forgive me; for all the wrong and pain I have caused you, for every salt tear that has and still flows on your cheeks. I have stabbed you time and again on the same spot.

I apologize; for taking you for granted, for throwing you to the wolves just to serve my purposes, for treating you like a feeling-less thing.

Thank you; for putting up with my childish behaviour, for being my wife. Yes, thank you for being you.

I love you; the magic phrase that you last heard from me when I was courting you.

Yes I know, I promised to love you till the end of my time, so many promises that I made to you, promises that I broke. I behaved as if you were a foe that needed to be conquered. Yes I am, the woman conqueror. I felt like David raising Goliath’s head, the difference? It’s your heart that I was raising pierced by my cruelty. Yes, I made shredded cabbage out of your heart. I’m the main man.

You are a strong person my love. I thank God for your strength and for creating you as you are.

You are so blessed!

It is us men who have made this world to be in this state; pain, anger, violence, wars and all the negativity. We created monsters out of our sons and made our daughters harlots. For our sons see and learn how we treat their mothers. Our daughters believe that pleasing a man makes their world go round. They do not have trust in man anymore; they want revenge for all the ill treatment their mothers suffered.

it. You have been building me up from day 1, carving out my future, always keeping my best interest at heart, even at the times where I thought that you were doing the exact opposite.

If being away from home along with crashing head-first into puberty wasn't bad enough, when I was in grade 9, 2006 I also saw the departure of my father, who was and always will be my hero, my idol and my best friend. I still remember the day when you told me that he was leaving the country to go back to Tanzania. I cried tears of pain and agony that day, a day that I'll never forget. I was angry, I was sad, I was mad, I was frustrated, I was pissed off at the world. This was easily one of the lowest points of my life, and to this day I am still left with so many unanswered questions. It was a very dark time for me and nothing seemed to make any sense whatsoever. As confused and lost as I was, you still stood strong whenever I looked in your direction, never did you show any signs of weakness despite the fact that at the time you were probably as confused, if not more, than I was.

I acted out on many occasions over the next few years, as I struggled with my own demons. Drinking, smoking, coming home late, not coming home at all, getting locked out the house, getting mugged (because I was high out of my mind) and even once going to jail (it was just a holding cell, for the record). Looking back at it all, it is quite clear that I just wanted to be away, away from the pain, away from the memories, away from my thoughts, away from my feelings, away from my reality. I honestly struggled with coming to terms with the fact that Dad wasn't around anymore, and I'm really sorry for taking out my frustrations on you. It was very inconsiderate and selfish of me, especially considering the fact that you were now left with a whole family to raise on your own and an entire life to rebuild from the ground up. I really don't know how you did it Mom, honestly I have no clue.

In hindsight it really seems like it was in plain view all along, but somehow your brilliance was hidden from me throughout my childhood, it is only recently with age, that I have come to realize that you managed to hold everything together while you were fighting your own battles, climbing your own mountains and waging your own personal wars. How one woman can raise a family of 5, go through a separation after over 25 years of marriage, start and run her own business in a foreign country, put her kids through the best schools and universities, find time to entertain 7 (at the time of writing) energetic grand kids, continuously support her entire surrounding community and still manage to stay sane, loving, caring and extremely humorous throughout, is truly beyond me. To you Mom, I pay homage.

You have shown me how to be strong, focused and level headed regardless of what the world thinks of me. You have taught me how to care for myself and those around me, you have taught me the importance of vision and constantly working towards one's dreams, you have instilled in me the desire and ambition to succeed in my own life while still prioritizing the upliftment of all those that are around me. Your life is the epitome of self-sacrifice, love, discipline, determination and all-round faith.

I don't know how you do it Mom.

Thank you, we love you Mom - we always have and always will.

Your (favourite) son.

Ben

Women

When the term 'women' - plural - comes to mind, I think of my past relationships. I think of love, lust, companionship, friendship, comfort and of course, the ever-present confusion. My track record is not all that amazing, with my longest and most recent official relationship only lasting about 10 months. My shortest relationship was about 3 weeks long, although that was back in primary school so I'm not sure if I can include that in the official list... (just for the record, *insert name here*, if you are reading this, that was an unforgettable 3 weeks of uhm, texting, chatting and stuff !?).

Relationships for me, have been one of the hardest aspects of life because as soon as I cross that intimacy boundary, I suddenly struggle to understand what exactly I am 'supposed' to do or who exactly I am 'supposed' to be. I feel like there is so much pressure on me, and this is one of the reasons why I easily concede to defeat. You see, growing up I always fell back on my academic brilliance to get me out of trouble, because I could understand things like mathematics, I.T, accounting, science etc. Numbers made sense to me, logic was logical, algorithms were rational but when it came to life outside of the books - I just didn't know what to do, I didn't know what to say and I had no idea how to act. No one taught me how to love, no one taught me how to be a good partner, how to be a good boyfriend or how to be a good man. There was no rule book for me to cram, no formula sheet for me to wrap my head around, no memo for me to compare my answers to, no calculator for me to rely on and this left me in a constant state of panic, anxiety and confusion.

Somehow though, my left-brained, introverted and anxious self still managed to get into a few intimate relationships with real human beings. The process of allowing someone else into your life is extremely daunting, especially because being truly open, honest, transparent and vulnerable was never one of my strong points. But regardless of this, I still did it, I jumped in head-first (sometimes needing to be nudged) and what I know now for a fact is that more often than not, my relationships were kept afloat by the love, understanding, patience and willpower of the woman that I was with at the time. Sadly though, on multiple occasions I have either:

A) Not tried hard enough while still in the relationship,

Or

B) Given up way too easily before even getting into a relationship.

It is only months and years later, in hindsight where I realize how good I actually had it and how easily I threw it all away.

My mother likes to say that I am 'afraid of girls'. When I first heard her say it, I had no idea what she meant because talking to (as well as just looking at) girls was evidently one of my favourite past times. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that she was actually onto something. Although, to be honest it is less about me being afraid of girls, than it is of me being afraid of the 'C' word: commitment. Now this is something that I will openly admit to being extremely afraid of. You see, I have a deeply entrenched fear of abandonment and this has led me to live a very detached life, purely as a coping mechanism. I have this constant fear that people will leave me, get over me, disregard me and just forget about me, so this coupled with my anxiety and confusion around intimacy is just a recipe for complete and utter disaster.

One of the major contributing factors to these intense abandonment fears of mine is the fact that when I was younger (14 years old), my father just up and left me, never to return again. The person I

looked up to, the person I loved, the person I idolized, just went out of my life, one day he was there - the next day he was gone. So if he can do that, then what is stopping anyone else from doing the same? My current theory around this is that I have subconsciously associated love and attachment with pain, anger, frustration and sadness, meaning that the best way to avoid these negative feelings all together, is just to stay clear of love, emotion and intimacy as a whole.

Look, I didn't choose to be like this. This is just how my life turned out and I am well aware that my somewhat biased outlook on life has and will come in the way of a lot of potential relationships.

So to all the women of my past, I hope this sheds some light into my strange, self-destructive, and counter-productive behaviour. To all my future partners at least now you have a heads-up of what is to come when we eventually cross paths. So Godspeed and don't say that I didn't warn you.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

Men like me

Raymond Howard

Table of contents

1. Taking up the challenge
2. Why men like me?
3. The self and responsibility
4. Leadership
5. Success and achievements
6. The things that hurt
7. Love and relationships
8. Something to think about
9. To the brave women in history

1. Taking up the challenge

With no disrespect to the theme of your writing challenge for men i.e.' the struggles of men with women' I have decided to provide my essay with its own unique title "men like me."

Wonderful thing They call Democracy... I grew up in an area where we were made to believe that certain groups of people are just simply superior to any other group,.. even in our thinking about who we are. Then came 1994 the dawn of democracy for South Africa and we became aware of our rights politically, but more so as human beings as entrenched in our constitutions' Bill of Rights. The right to freedom of expression and the right to disagree and to defend our individuality is what I embrace as an introduction to my essay, because it's these rights that make it possible for me to participate in your challenge to promote equality and hopefully close the gap between the thinking of men and women about each other.

At last a platform to share the thoughts the character the ideas and the truths about 'a specific group of men!' A big thank you to the Beulah Thumbadoo foundation for creating this challenge!

2. Why men like me

Why “Men like me”? Simply because there are men like me gracing this wonderful earth of ours! Men, who don’t say much, but have the kindest of hearts and intentions towards everyone they come in contact with in work and play or family. When their actions, words or intentions are wrongly interpreted or criticised, these men keep quiet in order not to hurt the feelings of their critics, when they should stand up and defend themselves.

This man’s spiritual belief in a Higher Power forms the basis of his approach to life and everything he does. As such he knows that there is purpose in everything that comes his way and that nothing happens without reason and that with time the latter becomes clear.

His reason for celebration, joyfulness and motivation, his frustrations and the things he’s holding back, are to be found in the characteristics of this special group of men, listed beneath.

3. The Self and Responsibility

He has a complete understanding of THE SELF and lives in complete honesty to THE SELF. Therefore he finds it easy to identify and associate with like-minded people and his reaction to their general behaviour is based on this great understanding. He has no enemies in the overall sense of the word, but is rather respected for his insight and ability to deal and work with people from all walks of life. Young people whom he had the privilege to educate, call him the ideal role model, and “father”. Some are amazed at his ability to address THE SELF in them and as a result bring out the best in them. When he finds himself at the right place at the right time to lend a helping hand to someone who everyone else ignored, they call him an angel from heaven and he has the honour of walking away with their blessings. He is principled and has an organised and goal orientated work approach. He prefers to be pro-active rather than reactive and yet is not rigid in his thinking, but shows great flexibility to adjust his methods if it becomes clear that the latter will secure the success of what it is he endeavours to do. He is not afraid to be regarded as an island in his thinking of, or dealing with a specific issue and can therefore be trusted as a trend-setter rather than a trend-follower when committed to a course or entrusted with a responsibility.

4. Leadership

As a leader he demands and earns respect for his calm, collected, subtle and persuasive way in which he gets his team to do what needs to be done. Never dominant though, he is admired for his logical thinking and ability to clarify why things are being done in a specific way. His ability to identify and utilise his various skills within a team creates an atmosphere of shared responsibility and ownership of the challenge and its outcome. His attention to detail, recordkeeping and feedback leading by example and from a base of knowledge, complements his need for progress and effective structures to benefit those for whom it is intended.

5. Success and Achievements

Success, compliments and appraisals is the driving force behind his quest to continue and to improve on his winning formula. He has no hesitation to share the latter with those who are interested in how he gets things done, as what is paramount to him is making a contribution towards the success of others, sometimes at his own expense. And even if he becomes a victim of his own generosity, this does not derail him from his desire for others to have or to be treated in the same way as he wants for himself. Therefore quiet moments and reflection over his achievements forms an integral part of his motivation to face another day.

6. The things that hurt

Nothing hurts or frustrates him more than the abuse, misuse or exploitation of one person by another and in particular by those in position of leadership or authority of any kind. People's lack of information or knowledge, or fear of a threat, is no reason for anyone to use as a catalyst to achieve selfish goals and hidden agendas or objectives. He lives for the ideal that politics would be more than just a game to gain peoples' votes but that it be utilised as the best platform to genuinely improve the EVERYDAY LIVES of people holistically so that people make choices from the heart, from THE SELF and not based on promises by various political parties only.

His understanding that the cycle of life is made up of different seasons and that in the process we experience hurt, failure and disappointments, enables him to even view life's setbacks as an integral part of personal growth without compromising what he believes in.

7. Love and relationships

He is not a crowd pleaser or a man for the crowd, but easily stands out in a crowd because of his fearless defence of his individuality and reasons for being part of that crowd. His conditions for participating in a crowd will either be for personal growth, a situation that demands it or for the acknowledgement or celebration of the success of achievers who form part of the world he lives in daily or that of himself.

His circle of friends is small and is restricted to close family, colleagues, a few old school friends and those who share a specific sports interest or music. He contributes his sporting success on the highest level (he has been a Provincial and South African marathon champion) to his general approach to life and as confirmation that he "MUST BE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT."

He lives by the philosophy that love, as God intended it to be, should be the driving force behind everything a man does. Love should bring out the woman or man in you. If love is not lived or experienced in accordance with what the Christian Bible says in I Corinthians 13 v1-13, you have not yet found love. He has been in a few relationships and sadly he is still awaiting the experience of love in which THE SELF, THE SOUL, THE REAL ME is being accepted for who and what it isThis is what he holds back most.....

8. Something to think about

I think it's every woman's dream to find the man who can speak to HER SOUL, who's not afraid to expose HIS SOUL... so much so that they can say "I AM YOU AND YOU ARE ME."

However, men like me are faced with the following dilemmas:

1. Most women regard men like me as being TOO PERFECT, perhaps without understanding that this is what it takes to win a soul.
2. Some women feel that their relationship with men like me is threatened by his commitment and generosity towards his work, social or community responsibilities (what if that commitment determines their standard of living? Shouldn't he rather be supported if that commitment stems from THE SELF?)
3. Some women exploit the GOOD SELF in men like me by way off subtle, psychological victimisation (use of words, knowledge of specific aspects of THE SELF etc) in order for him to deviate from an otherwise, uncompromising principle.
4. Some women who are not true to their SELF initially pretend to accept THE SELF of men like me for reasons of their own. When the relationship is being tested by life's normal challenges, they

show utter discontent for the things he thought they both held dear. This is extremely painful although on the other hand it shows that time catches up with those who thought they can deceive THE SELF.....

When THE SELF can take it no more and he parts ways in order to save THE SELF, he is being crucified as someone 'who doesn't know what he wants or someone who wants HIS WAY.... However he knows that THE SELF is still intact and therefore he can continue his search, though unnoticed, for the one person who is in search of THE SELF from THE SELF.

Makes you to wonder if we live in a world where second best is best?"

9. To the brave women in history

Women across the world have been at the forefront of many battles, but their involvement on any front, business or political, should never be at the expense of THE WOMAN THEY ARE MEANT TO BE.....

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

STRUGGLES MEN HAVE WITH WOMEN

Christian Mpho Mofokeng

Men also have it hard just like women do. Men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. I believe that if we want to choose true equality, we need to realize that men are just as important as women are. They face their own unique struggles; women fail to understand that. Life is not a walk in the park for men either.

STUFF ABOUT BEING A MAN THAT WOMEN DON'T GET AND THAT WE WOULD LIKE THEM TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND.

1. It's a penis, not a sniper rifle, we can't pee without our urine spilling all over the toilet seat but we try not to.
2. Having nothing in common with your girlfriend's best friend's boyfriends, stop forcing us to be best mates with your mates boyfriends.
3. We have no legitimate sexy time clothes.
4. There's not much we can do about nature's alarm clock.
5. Spacing out - some men intentionally abuse the term "I need my space" to ensure that they can have their cake and eat it too —fool around while not giving up what they already have. But not all men are like that. Most men simply just want some room to be (by) themselves. Men, just like women, need to feel that they aren't trapped or being held hostage in their own lives. From time to time, men want to get away and be alone or hang out with their friends.
6. But it's a strain on the relationship when women think that a man is being selfish.
7. The emasculating SHAME of not being good with tools (except our own); not every guy likes to work with tools and do hard labour (being hard is good enough).
8. Being distant while showing interest, sometimes we don't need to text a lot but we want women to text us often.
9. Not saying what she means. Men are not mind readers yet women expect us to read their minds like a psychic. Fact: men are not good mind readers; in fact, we often have difficulty just figuring

out what women mean. Women are far more sophisticated communicators than men; they seem to be more adept at the subtleties of gestures, facial expressions and body language. Therefore, men and women almost always suffer from communication breakdown in a relationship. So, ladies, please say what you mean.

10. Asking advice about men from other women - some women, without even knowing it, are driving the men who love them from their lives. For the most part, women are getting information from a secondary source. They are asking other women, listening to so-called relationship experts, and believing statistics. While those sources may be helpful and provide some useful information, nothing is as accurate as asking men first-hand what they think and feel.
11. The three B's of sex. I'm going to be straight and to the point here: sex IS important to men. Perhaps it would be nice if sex didn't play such a big role in relationships; but for most people, sex is a biggy. And big is better. For men, it's probably more important than it should be. The sexual aggravations of men boil down to the three B's; bad, boring and boudoir battle.
 - Bad sex
Sex is a learned skill. It's similar to driving a car. Basically, anyone can do it. Some are good at it. And others are experts. But everyone has an idea of what they consider good and bad sex. Common complaints among men are; lack of enthusiasm, lack of rhythm, and being sexually dis-functional. It's something that should be openly and honestly discussed. The reasons for being sexual dis-functional can be psychological, ethical and religious, or a host of other things. If the problems seem insurmountable, the advice of a pastor or therapist may be necessary.
 - Boring sex
Boring sex isn't necessarily the same thing as bad sex. It is simply boring sex. Boring sex is always doing it in the same place, at the same time, and in the same old position. It's when the sex gets to the point that it feels more of a duty than a desire. Boring sex is when you're going through all the motions but there's no spice or passion involved.
 - Boudoir battle
Using sex as a weapon doesn't do anything but make a man angry. It can be subtle things such as not being open to touching and cuddling. Or it can be more strategic. It can be refusal to certain things in bed. The most brutal bedroom battle is outright refusal.

Of course, a man can't expect a woman who is angry at him to make mad, passionate love. That's where communication comes into play. It's far better to talk and resolve the differences than play games. Men get very insulted by such behaviour. Bedroom battles can lead to deep resentment and some will use it as an excuse to cheat on their wives or girlfriends.

12. Constantly talking about other is a big point of frustration. Men don't like to hear women constantly talking about other men. It's not necessarily an ego thing. It's just that each man wants to feel special and important to the women in his life. Women don't have to cradle us like babies, nor do they need to be patronizing. But a woman would be wise to realize that the ego of man can be fragile.
13. Engaging in a power struggle.

It really irritates men when women they're involved with are constantly trying to upstage them. This is especially bothersome for these men who aren't trying to compete with their mates. This behaviour takes many forms. Some women who engage in power struggles with their mates do it through career competition? For some the competition is based upon education level: who has the most advanced degree from the most prestigious school? Another form of engaging in the power

struggle is trying to get the last word in. In addition to those power struggles, some women try to make sure they look smarter than a man by intentionally upstaging their man in public, disagreeing for the sake of disagreement, unnecessary rudeness and being condescending or cutting down what a man says when he states his personal thoughts and opinions.

14. Drama queens.

Drama queens are always whining, pestering, going on endlessly about something. With them, nothing is ever right. They pull all kinds of little tricks to get and control a man's attention. If he's watching television, she wants him to get up and put out the trash. When he has time off from work, she tries to plan each hour for him.

Another technique used by the drama queen is to play damsel in distress to get a man's attention. In this role the drama queen says "save me". Initially, it may make a man feel good to be the chivalrous knight in shining armour coming to the rescue. But too much distress can drive even the most loyal knight to ride off into the sunset.

15. Social issues men are often faced with.

- Not all women are assaulted by their men. Did you know that one in seven men have been or are being assaulted by their significant other? As of 2000, more women were more likely to initiate abuse in a relationship than men. This is not to play the blame game but rather to open people's eyes to realize that men, as well as women, can suffer from abuse in a relationship. Domestic assault on men occurs as often as every few seconds.
- Assault, whether physical or sexual, is a very serious issue plaguing our society and it should be taken seriously regardless of the gender. The reality of men having their own issues is prevalent and should not be ignored. Allowing assault to continue instead of fighting against it because it doesn't fit a political agenda does a great disservice to society as a whole. We need to stand and defend victims of both genders. Assault should not be a way for anybody to push their agenda.
- Men rarely come forward with rape and domestic claims because there is stigma surrounding them. Even when they do come out, are they ever really heard or just turned a blind eye to?
- Custody issues.

Statistics state that in 2007, there were approximately 13,743,00 custodial parents in the US, and of that number only 17.4 percent were fathers with custody of their children. Children need their mothers, without a doubt, but what about their fathers? Women fail, no actually the whole of society fails, to understand that men can take care of their children just as well as women do. We now have men who are primary caregivers, especially in the society we live in today, whereby a "stay at home" man/father is becoming a social norm, yet the courts and society still fail or don't want to believe that men can really take care of their children without bringing any harm to them.

Most of the time it is up to the court to decide whether the child should live with their mother or father and the best place for them to be, but shouldn't men also have a more equal shot at gaining custody of their own children?

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

The Struggles of Men with Women

Thayimoni Dyani

Most of the times we as men find it difficult to understand women in relation to how they think and do things; their feelings, as well as their thoughts. For one to truly understand and know someone you have to come closer, hence courtship leading to marriages. The struggles that follow after one has tied the knot are immense due to one being used to living a life of solitude and then being forced to adjust to a new lifestyle. Oh! Poor souls, I feel their pain as many in our communities end up giving up and throwing in the towel shortly after the "I do's" have been said. The reason being the fact that most men are still by then mommy's boys. It's not easy though when two people who are dear to your heart, fight bitterly for your attention and care. It is nice to be in courtship with our partners sharing and saying sweet words, but the reality strikes after taking her to the altar. What most of our dear darlings don't understand is patience and perseverance ultimately catching our hearts thereby releasing us gently from the rival war. Also our mommies must try and give their daughters in law an opportunity to show them that they also care about us. It is a trust issue in a sense that another women can love, care and make us happy in a different way. This rival competition around an individual can end up tearing down our families instead of building and giving them stability. With you my second half and darling of my heart I celebrate our understanding, love, comfort and joy when together. The manner we advise each other and knowing that you have my back covered most of the time, helps. Though at times it becomes a daunting task to advise you when things do not work out as expected for I know my advice is disregarded when you have formed an opinion about something. This frustrates me as the end results come the same way I predicted them. To see the next day motivates me and knowing that God loves me, and will not forsake us is a booster in my life. Although some plans and ideas I gave birth to in the past crumbled in front of me the joy of waking up the following day gives me the 'I can' feeling. When I am drawn into an interesting task and suddenly the sun goes down, this drains energy out of me.

My grandmother is my hero in showing and teaching me to care and to nurture other people as she has done to many individuals. Her house became the safe haven for most kids that were at times not related to us, but none of them experienced untoward treatment. She epitomizes the true socialist at heart, and in all the time I've known her, I have never heard her complain. For that alone you have installed in me from a young age a sense of nationhood. Although you were not educated nor wealthy with the little at your disposal, sharing became your motto in life. Your hands as well provided for our survival in times of need when you sewed clothing and sold it to raise some cash. You never boasted great education but managed to pull through and this left me wondering how you had achieved such an opportunity; a bomb you were going to be.

My mom what a lovely person you have been, your strict disciplinarian nature placed me on the straight path. You never failed in preparing me to face the world alone without shame or fear. Your continuous training, equipping and giving your all; making sure come what may I become the better man. Now I face the outside world with sheer confidence, thanks again and may your soul rest in peace.

Both my sisters you are everything to me that a brother should look for. A pillar of strength and a shield when life throws its missiles at me.

To my teachers who paved the way for me to be who I am today, a great thinker, and a creative. Please continue doing so as that is your God given talent so use it productively.

My wife take note of this: both of us differ from one another in terms of strengths, weaknesses, likes as well as dislikes that must be understood. My darling when I disagree with you, this does not mean hatred or rage against you. Please understand that when I don't support a vision you suggest that does not imply bad motives, or a plan to sabotage you. However, since I am given the duty to provide, protect and lead our household it is within my prerogative to analyse every outcome from afar. As every leader must make a decision and not all are acceptable but must be adhered to, some might not be understood at first but later clarity emerges. I love you and will always expect you to submit, hence shall never harm you intentionally. Be mindful of the fact that any sacrifices I make for our household are with good intention, and must be at least appreciated. At times a little bit of acknowledgement acts as a motivation or booster and gives me wings to do more. The most important aspect to be noted and understood by women in our lives is when both of us respect and honour each other in front of our kids that produces a healthy and productive nation. Every nation starts from individuals that makes up a family when joined in holy matrimony to form a village thus leading us straight to the nation. An individual not cared for adequately produces a disgruntled somebody who then becomes dead wood, that shall contaminate the entire forest. Our mothers and grandmothers have done a sterling job of raising us, imparting knowledge, supporting our fathers and grandfathers with humility without any quarrels. Most of them are still doing it excellently within their families; raising the banner even outside their boundaries of family life. These are educated and popular individuals who are leading quiet lives in submission to their husbands. Mothers of the nations like the late Miriam Makeba, Mama Letta Mbuli, Mama Yvonne Chaka Chaka are least of them who epitomize the heroines of our country. Hence Mama Lilian Ngoyi, the late had her name engraved within the walls of remembrance in our country when together with her comrades they challenged the unjust status quo of the past. All of the above women were educated and successful and never cease to be our role models.

What frustrates me the most is to see our young flowers not interested in making names for themselves but rather deciding to spend their precious time giving birth non-stop from an early age. These unwanted teen pregnancies put a strain on the country's economy as they produce so much dependency on the social grant system. Most of our sisters and younger daughters engage themselves in non-stop leisure without thinking about its repercussions. When these poor souls, our nieces arrive they are left without care in pursuit of a nice time; a mother not caring whether a kid has eaten or not. Can't somebody illustrate the idea that to educate a women is to educate the nation and make it his or her mission? To see our beautiful flowers in our localities abusing liquor is depressing as one wonders about tomorrow's motherhood. Also, there is a crop of educated and middle class women who treat us men as nothing especially if one earns a small salary. To them a sense of their acquisition gives them the power they have been looking for, leading to abusing it. Hence to you my sisters please tread carefully don't patronize and send everybody away due to materialism. Please try and be yourself no matter what social standing you are in: remember you worked hard and it does not matter whether you are on a corporate ladder, or academic ladder but humility makes someone attractive and loveable. I am not saying expose yourself to victimization but always remain cautious. You are the bedrock of the nation and therefore cannot be taken lightly or be non-existent. I do however love to be appreciated whatever small the effort or contribution I make and to be acknowledged as

such. I am not materialistic but would love to live life to the full enjoying my happiness responsibly. Today's crop of our country's women should know that for nation building to occur, listening, respect, and advising each other must occur. Also no men in us the previously disadvantaged has ever oppressed any women in the past in fact all of us were treated harshly. In the past we fought side by side against the unjust system and now let us enjoy together as one, when challenges occur lets tackle them together. Let us not compete against one another as there are no awards to be received but bear in our minds that this nation is ours. It is our responsibility to build it side by side. If we cannot - or fail in carrying out that important task nature will judge us as failures.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

David Kapp

The English of Domestic Violence, and The Domestic Violence of English

We split infinitives
We split the atom
We split a skull

What wonderful beings
we are (we men)
we who are superior
to all things

We crack a walnut
We crack a joke
We crack a (spare) rib

We blow out a candle
We blow into our hands for warmth
Those same hands that
strike a blow

We strike a match
We go on strike –
and come home to strike
a woman and (girl) child
(in the quiet and dark
of family life away
from the glare of the public)

We build confidence
We build houses (albeit matchbox ones)
We build relationships, which we
then break down like they are
our matchbox houses

We march, against apartheid
(of the statute book and the mind)
Sometimes we even march against
capitalism and woman and child abuse

We name our children
We name hurricanes
We call women names

We take up burning issues
and bride-burning continues

We arrange our furniture
and we arrange marriages

What wonderful beings
we are (we men)
we who are superior
to all things

(Saturday, October 08, 2005, engaging with words, engaging with domestic violence, engaging those
who perpetrate the crime.)

9 minutes a day

9 minutes a day
that is all it takes
men to be fathers

half the country's
children are without

(a fatherless nation
where 5 million mothers
are single parents)

compounded by apartheid's
migrant labour system
which underpins mining

where mineworkers
see their families
4 times a year

what values are instilled
in children if you do not
see them is the
rhetorical question

(who reads to children

the ancient wisdom thereof
now proved scientifically)

9 minutes a day
can the stereotype
cultural barriers
and perceptions
be broken

(not to mention
domestic violence
woman and child abuse
and HIV/AIDS)

9 minutes a day
that is all it takes

What will it take

“Half of the country’s kids are being raised without fathers, say researchers” (Cape Times, October 16 2015), “HSRC bid to salvage dads’ role” (Argus, October 16 2015), “Address apartheid mine legacy issues first” (Cape Times Business Report, October 16 2015) and “Proved: reading helps kids” (Weekend Argus Classifieds, May 3 2015).

Woman, mind your head (for South Africa’s National Women’s Day 2005)

Woman, mind your head,
there is a ceiling above it.

Is it hemming you in,
getting in your way,
restricting your
upward movement?

What do you have to do,
to get through that ceiling?

Must you raise your voice,
or your skirt?

Should the ceiling be lowered,
or your blouse?

(Might men complain,
about the lowering
of standards, so-called?)

Do you dress for power?
Or for success?
Or just for yourself?

What is this success?
Material wealth and status,
or the development of the mind?

Why do some women make it,
up there, and not others?

Are you happy for women up there,
or are you jealous and suspicious?
(Typical, say our men).

Do women change once there?
Behaving now like oppressors?
Does their worth change?

What support structures are in place, written the morning of 28 July 2005, on the theme of Women's Leadership, for South Africa's Agenda Feminist Journal, for National Women's Day, August 9. I thought thrice about writing this as I am not all woman. But I felt much better after getting Mitchells Plain poetess Fozia Davids to submit her "Miracle Women" poem to the Agenda Feminist Media Project, some Community Newspapers and the Afrikaans Metro Burger.

back home, too, in the kitchen,
for those who break through?

Is it still man-made, up there?
and back home, in the kitchen?

Do women make it,
in spite of the barriers?

Is women's leadership still
the exception and not the rule?

(we) men must be (strong)

(we) men must be strong
says a limping Grade 4 boy
after a boisterous interlude
in the school day's learning
(just up your well-lit street)

a boisterous interlude
that which is expected
of our boys and our men
after all boys wear blue
and girls (so they say) pink

(we) men must be strong
surely tongue-in-cheek
or has he been trained

(is it in our African DNA)

(he has learnt to play chess
and now wants to beat me
as it is with our scrabble games
much as I doth protest too much
about playing for the love)

(we) men must be strong
boys do blue and girls pink
as is the tradition you are
probably accustomed to
as the leader of the pack

(we) men must be strong
from an active young boy
earlier pummelling an older girl
(in the fashion as seen on TV)

(we) men must be strong
girls don't talk to strangers
or go walkabouts late at night
(wait for your Prince Charming
from the cradle onwards)

all this strongness stuff
the an-eye-for-an-eye mind-set
what strength will it give
the excuse for violence
in return

See "Proposed solutions to the rape crisis are simply wrong", and "Rising brutality of rape cases alarming, says academic" (Cape Times, February 11 2013).

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

Shared Truth of the Invaluable

Turston Louw

What are your hopes and fears? Share them with us. Your honesty will be met with open arms. As we share our hopes and fears we can proceed to rejoice within hope and be each other's comfort in the presence of fear. A man has the ability to cry. Strong one has to be to shed a tear and then have the courage to smile knowing that both will come again. Let's nurture the young one's as well as the old who have fallen by the wayside. Let's love them impartially so they grow in character as they exhibit the same nature.

Choices are made, albeit often the wrong ones. Out of the wrongs great lessons are to be learnt. So do not dwell in disappointment. Accept the mistakes and incorporate the lessons learnt within your

fabric of experience as to stay covered and protected from repeating them. Do not turn away all experiences but approach with caution. The theoretical aspect seems simple; in life keep what works and discard what doesn't. The practical implementation is the challenging part.

Woman should be protected without having to feel powerless. Women should be cared for without having to feel helpless. Women should be loved without having to feel used. Women who empower themselves, care for themselves and love themselves and so do not need someone else to do these things for them.

Sharing your life with another person leads to the realization that there are many compromises to be made, both by yourself and the other person. A man who respects a woman would not ask her to compromise her values. A woman who respects herself would not compromise her values.

There is a unified way to live, truth to be shared by all. One shared truth is that everyone and everything else is just as you are: invaluable.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

The Male Need Not March Into Obscurity

Barend van der Merwe

Increasingly today, gender discourses are characterised by the role of men in modern society. It is troublesome and tedious to have to have these disputes buzzing around you when you don't know yourself, what the definition of a man is. And you wonder sometimes, why should we venture into this gender discourse if we don't have a basic point of departure? Is there any merit in such a discourse? Don't you people have better things to do with your time? Ah, 'you people'. I can distance myself from society with my vocabulary. With words, there are no boundaries as there is in life. It remains therefore a question, whether I like it or not: what does it really mean to be a man today? Publications on the subject of male identity in the 21st century are flourishing. So much of life has changed over the past few decades. At 30 years of age, I can still be considered a relatively young person, but certainly no newcomer. I can only imagine however, how the world must have changed for my parents, who were born in the 1940's. But even for myself: We were children in the time before cell phones. It was still the time of beautiful Christmas cards, which in time became Christmas emails, and later, Christmas social media posts...

The way the world functioned for centuries past holds a romantic quality for many. Life was so simple back then, you might hear someone say. Men were men. Women were women. Children were children. But it could be argued that this manner of reasoning constitutes nothing else but romanticising the past. The truth, instead, is that change is painful. Change is almost always painful for humans. And the gravest challenges we face today have little to do with gender roles. They are rather issues that are facing humans. Not necessarily men or women, but people. All people are affected by office jobs, by sitting eight hours at a desk, by youth unemployment and rising inflation, by crime and substance abuse and a general feeling of despair and defeat. Yet despite all this, one finds a lot being written by scholars, by academics and in the media on the issue of 'being male'. There are always opportunities for those who want to theorise. And the issue of identity is like a fountain that never runs dry. Because things change. Change is, after all, the only consistency in this world.

And let us not try to deny this: never before in the history of humanity has the male identity been as distorted as it is today. It is no surprise therefore that the issue of male identity seems to have been neglected for long, only to suddenly see an explosion of articles and books on the subject, enough to literally (and literary) give you sleepless nights. If you have never been worried about being a male before, there is now a lot to contemplate and feel threatened about. We are experiencing a male identity crisis. The end of maleness. But words are dangerous things. The more that is said, the more that is being conceptualised, the more we are perhaps caging the male identity. Artificially stirring up? The synthetic man crisis? Language empowers us. But language also often unnaturally defines us. Indeed, language often fails us. We are the children of postmodernism are we not? Along with the deconstruction of the narrative, we should therefore, instead of defining maleness, rather ask, what does it mean to be human today?

More so when the question arises: Do we not perhaps hold a distorted view of gender? Should we perhaps take a step back and look into the past and ask what did being male, and being human, mean in days gone by? Will this assist us in exploring modern human gender issues? Does historical enquiry provide answers to such questions? And if we consider history, are we reasonably equipped, of sound judgement, and having access to the most reasonable of resources in order to assist us in such undertakings?

The easiest route to take upon reflecting on male identity is of course the one of playing victim. We can simply start and end by contemplating the notion that men do not feel like 'men' anymore. The demands of modern life are destroying the male spirit. For example, whereas universities were historically the exclusive playground of men statistics show that today, women constantly outperform men academically. The role that women are playing in the public life exploded, and it seems that women will play an ever greater role in the future of public life. The caveman, the hunter the provider, the head of the family....the central position of men in society is certainly under threat. And according to some, the male ego is taking a knock as a result, with damaging effects.

And then there is feminism. And in South Africa we celebrate a special day for women: Women's day. Should we not have a Men's day? All the world's a stage, but a stage with conflicting narratives and demands. In the time of Shakespeare, male actors played all the roles of women. This in itself tells us a story which we should never overlook. As there is no universal definition of what 'being a man' means, it naturally follows that there is also no definition of what is a woman. There are of course biological definitions, but there is no universal cultural definition for gender roles. Ask an anthropologist. It's simple. For some of the most complex aspects to life, such as parenting, friendships and gender roles, there is no fixed recipe. Of course there are many books and theories that try and give guidance, and provide answers. But there are no recipes.

There is what one could perhaps try and define as 'conventions'. But these are not really conventions. They are nothing else but stereotyping humans. We can perhaps try and further explore the subject of male identity by studying the matter of marriage. The role of marriage is certainly changing in society. Percentagewise, fewer people are getting married than before, while divorce rates remain high. It is not only hard to be a human, and to be a man today. It is hard to have strong ideas about anything in life. With the media, and in particular the spectacular rise of social media, human beings are constantly being challenged, and all ideas and concepts are contested spaces. Every day we partake in a global brainstorm on social media. We object and we are being objected to. We learn and we unlearn. And our identities are at the heart of all of this.

I remain convinced that the life of the average woman is extremely hard, much more than the life of the average man. Women are left stereotyped in much more gruesome ways than men. Still it

remains that I have had painful experiences as a result of being born male. Perhaps the most painful part of being a man were the times when one was left feeling that one was failing at being a man. It seems that the last thing that we seem to remember is that we are humans first, and only after that men and women. This is not only too often left forgotten by men, but by all humans, including women. I have been fortunate in my own opinion that, during the course of my own life, I have not had to play 'man' too often. I have not married, and deserted my cultural norms to a great extent. We don't fail as humans when we fail to be men and women in terms of our cultural conventions. And yet gender roles remain part of society, and part of life. While we should not be consumed by it, these tensions should not be left unexplored, in the same way that it needs not be countered into destruction. We can and should seek a balance - a balance which we should also continuously redefine.

As we reflect on the brave women who 60 years ago marched to the Union buildings in defiance of the oppressive pass law system, we must be reminded that the sacrificing of stereotypes is to our own and society's benefit. History is plagued by distortion. For example, research conducted into the South African War (1899 – 1902) indicated the central role that women played during the course of the conflict. The role of women is horribly neglected in both literature and historiography. The domination of male discourses clearly disrupts our ideas about reality, about the past, and about our own identities. Our society should be a vibrant one, and not plagued by unbearable stereotypes about what being a human constitutes. This is the true spirit of our Constitution and Bill of Rights, for which the women of 1956 made such great sacrifices.

To try and answer the question then of what does it mean to be a man in 2016 remains a discussion with no end. But being a man should, I would think, first and foremost mean being a human. Africa is the cradle of the human race. It is the home, not only of the first human civilizations, but also of the concept of 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'. Modern humans should learn to constantly socially evolve and ease into new definitions of our identity. The future is the playground for those who are able to adapt. For us, change should become something we experience as natural. There is a world of opportunities for those who are able to change and adapt, for those who are flexible in their approach to life. There are many roles that we can take to assist us in giving meaning to our existence as human beings. There is no single right or wrong way to live. The changing role of male identity should not be seen as a threat by men. In fact, it has only a very little to do with being men. Our social evolution from strong defined gender roles into flexible identities offers opportunities to understand ourselves and society more objectively. The success of men does not rest solely in the hands of men. This is one of the advantages of the changing nature of our societies.

When I think of all the women who I admire, I do not necessarily see them as women. The men and women who have had the greatest effect on me, I believe, were neither men nor women (and let us not forget that there are transgender people too). They were people. I can list them, but if I start, there will not be enough space. I want to single out one, my grandmother. She was a simple person. She didn't have much education. She completed grade eight, but her world was confined to raising a big family in a rural area. But the gift that she gave me changed my life. I can recall how my grandmother read me books. Endless hours of reading, day after day, sacrificing her time for me. I have no doubt that I would not have been the person I am today without my grandmother, in the same way that the women of 1956 also changed my life for the better.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

years behind bars that hurts me, it's the fact that I was so enraged that I refused to take any responsibility for my own part in the deterioration of our relationship."

Harold spoke next. His father worked every day of his life until he died at work, age 74. Harold, now 52, was retrenched a year ago. Growing up he had been taught that a man must always provide for his family. Now he was unemployed and his wife, Lynette, was paying the bills. For the first time in 20 years he was unable to take care of her financially. "To have to watch her waking up every morning to go to work so that we can eat... so that we can survive... Being a woman of faith, she tried to keep my spirits up and told me that we would be okay... but I just couldn't look myself in the mirror anymore knowing that I had failed where my father and his father had succeeded. New Age Man has given me hope and helped me realize that it's all a matter of perspective. Dr Masuku explained to me that I could still provide for Lynette, just in a different way. Now I wake up every morning with a new sense of purpose. I'm volunteering at a school down the road and have started offering my services as a handy man in our community. When Lynette comes home I have cleaned the house and cooked supper." Harold pauses for a moment with his finger on his lips, as if searching for the right words.

"You see, what retrenchment has taught me is that there is more than one way to support your significant other. It has taught me to have faith in my marriage and understand that I am not my father, and therefore my journey will not be the same as his. The trick is to not allow pride to breed bitterness. I'm happy to announce that I have just drafted a business plan and have been called in for a meeting next week to present it in more detail to a potential investor." This news was received with a warm round of applause from the dozen or so men that sat in the room as Harold made his way back to his seat.

Makgatho stood up from his usual spot in the corner and made his way to the front. He was a strange one, and to hear him speak was rare, but something had obviously compelled him to stand up tonight. In front of the group of men he looked a little unsure of himself. "Go on Makgatho" Dr Masuku encouraged with a broad smile. He was the son of a man that had never shown him support, drank like a fish and beat up his mother. One night when Makgatho was 12 his father took a swing at him, but was too drunk to maintain his balance, tripped over a cord, hit his head on the kitchen table and died. Makgatho had been angry ever since because he was never afforded the opportunity to confront his father and tell him what he really thought of him. He too had been attending private sessions with Dr Masuku and had finally made a breakthrough. He reached into his blazer pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper.

"The Doc asked me to write a letter addressed to my father and tell him, my father, everything I wish I had had the opportunity to tell him all those years ago. Tonight I would like to read that letter to you." The room was still.

Dear father,

For a long time I hated you and cursed the day I first laid my eyes on you. You have brought mom and I nothing but heartache and misery. To this day the smell of alcohol brings back painful memories of those many nights when you would kick down the door and wake up mom to fix you a plate of food. Loud noises leave my nerves shattered thanks to you, and to this day I can still see mom screaming when I close my eyes. The images of her trying to get away from you as you lunge across the table fill me with hatred that forces me to clench my fists until my finger nails dig deep into my own flesh.

Dr Masuku, my therapist, has rescued me from those painful memories that have imprisoned me for so many years. He has made me realize, bless him, that you actually did teach me something: I never...EVER want to put my children through what you put us through. You see we live in a violent society that is filled with men who are confused and hurting. The role of the man has changed and the relentless assault on the dignity and person of women and children must stop. It starts with us, men.

If we, the current generation, indeed live in patriarchal society then we need to acknowledge that the role of a man has evolved. Our woman and children require a different kind of love, a different kind of support from us. Being a man is not about going out drinking all night only to come home to terrorise your wife or girlfriend in front of your children, leaving them with lifelong emotional scars. What message are you sending to your son by hitting his mother? What is your little girl's self-worth going to be some day when she reaches dating age?

My son needs to learn from me how a lady should be treated. He needs to learn from me that it's okay to cry in public... to show emotion. He needs to grow up understanding that a woman is one of God's greatest masterpieces and deserves to be respected and cherished at all times.

During the dark days of apartheid it was the women who ran the household while their husbands took the train to go and work in a mine hundreds of kilometres away, often for months at a time. It was the women who had to raise the children when their husbands were arrested for not carrying a dcompass. It was the women who said we will march to the Union Building in 1956. It was the women who sacrificed so much for us, for this country.

Now is the time for us men to groom the boy-child to be part of a generation that will say "Not in our name! Not in our name will female students on university campuses continue to be raped. Not in our name will grandmothers, mothers and daughters fear to speak their mind or be successful because some of us have fragile egos. Not in our name will sons continue to grow up without fathers. Not in our name will a man's hand continue to be perceived as a source of pain. NOT IN OUR NAME!

That's what you have taught me, father. You have taught me that I don't want to be anything like you. I don't want the vicious cycle of abuse to be inherited and continued by my children. It stops here! I'm taking back what you robbed me of, and through the help of Dr Masuku and like-minded men, I am creating an environment in which our women can walk down the street without having to look over their shoulders. From now on a man who beats his wife must know that if I, as a neighbour, hear her scream, he might as well call the police himself.

Thank you dad for making me realize the kind of man I don't want to become.

Makgatho

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

WE LEAVE BEHIND FOOTPRINTS...

Harold Slabbert

When you were born, I was the happiest father in the world and wore with pride the shirt that still had a little bit of the blood from your birth. I did not know what it would feel like to love you as I do but I would not trade this in for all the gold in the universe. I don't know what I was hoping for your future because you are a "Born Free" and I still remember your mother and I driving around for a place to cast our votes on Freedom day. I still worry about this even though you are now an adult.

Far be it from me to tell you what to do with your life because as you know, I roll a bit differently (thanks to Leoni) and I have come to accept that this is your journey and that you will eventually find your place in this beautiful, mixed up crazy world. I do try and keep ego out of what it is that I am doing although it's important that I make a difference in the lives of the people that I meet. I know that in some small way I am able to connect and do this because it's all about how we make people feel, that is remembered and it was Maya Angelou who said this. She is no longer with us but her works have left an impression. One that, I believe, will have a lasting effect on those who read her work. Your one article is for me an example of the potential that you hold deep inside and I so wish would come out into the daylight because you have much to give.

I am not asking you to be like her or any of the amazing women in South Africa who have made a mark in the struggle for liberation and have left foot prints in the annals of history. I am also not asking you to be like the icons of South Africa, women (and men) who have made a mark and who make me proud to be a South African because of the things they have achieved before they were at the same tender age that you are now. Perhaps I am, but that seems to be an ego thing because of the fact that I am your dad and I want you to shine. I want you take on the inequalities that women are facing in this country and elsewhere in the world. I want you to fight the injustices of this world that are bringing it to its knees such as poverty, greed and the constant conflicts that are being fought in Africa and in the Arab world. I want you to fight the lack of compassion for the children who are the victims of war and who have lost their parents and family members because of a callous disregard for human life felt by those who fly missions into civilian held territories. I want you to take on all forms of patriarchy that put women in second place and often degrades them as less than human and makes it seem ok to abuse and rape them or kidnap them with impunity.

This all seems like a bit of a rant but these are the issues that concern me and I do believe many others in this country. But I want to narrow things down a bit and look at issues in this country and the healing that needs to happen. This healing is only possible if we all get together and talk about them in an open and frank manner. It is at times like these that I wish I had your mind and your experiences at high school where you had friends from all cultures-this to me was always the most beautiful thing about you - your willingness to embrace others who are not the same skin tone as yourself. What did you talk about? What were the issues that affected you? What were the plans you all had to shape your futures? I know that you did not always have it easy, what with the divorce and how this affected you and I believe still affects you. I wish I could get you to understand that this should not define who you are and that you should treat it as a lesson and be stronger for it. God knows that you have had to deal with rejection and this is perhaps your biggest fear but I believe that you can rise above this and escape the world of make believe that you are hiding in. I am hoping that how I raised you is enough.

I still remember your reactions when you were watching *Sarafina* and how the police were treating people. Believe it or not but that was the tip of the iceberg when you go back and look at the history

of apartheid and its atrocities against black people of this country. I was impressed by your sense of injustice and that you felt so strongly about this. You have a grasp of what is going on the country and we can have discussions about these and other international issues. I long for that although I do believe that my ego gets in the way at the worst possible times and we end up having arguments that are meaningless and futile. I know that you are not always surrounded by the most positive people and I wish I could have changed this negativity that your mother harbours. She is always so angry and her anger does get in your way but I believe this is because you allow it to. I am sometimes caught up in my own negativity but I think that I keep this to a minimum and that I am here in this lifetime to learn some important lessons. Damn, but some of them are hard to take!

So where to now? I don't know, but what I do know is that there are some pretty awesome people in this country who are making a difference to their communities in their own special way and this is what moves me. I want to be like these beautiful individuals and make a difference. As a child and youth care worker this is what we do when we work with children and youth who have been hurt and damaged by adults - we try and make a difference. We try and get them to see that there is still beauty in the world as Macy Grey says in her song of this name. I refuse to accept that what is happening politically is going to drag us down as a nation and its really up to you and the young people from #Fees must fall and any other hashtag that we have seen to date. Because it's really up to you to bring about the changes that we so badly need. The new revolution should be one that is based more on our humanness and that as human beings we are all entitled to dignity and respect. It should be a revolution that enables us all to live together despite our differences and that our search for identity which, as Kopano Matlwa Mabaso has indicated "is one of the things that keeps us in common". We need to move away from the rhetoric of fear and violence and the culture of degrading women and hurting children through poor service delivery and shockingly poor education. This situation does not allow for more of the amazing things that are being achieved by people who are not afraid to follow their dreams to manifest. No matter how much this scares, it scares them in a good way.

You are African by virtue of your birth on African soil. This may not mean much to you in the greater scheme of things right now but it is what it is. You are required to shine and do more than just exist so that you become a part of the revolution that makes this continent great again. An Africa that respects women, and does not mutilate their genitals one where child marriages are a thing of the past; one where men are held accountable for their actions and where the rhetoric denotes men's issues as men's issues and not as the issues of the victims of abuse at the hands of men. I have been exposed to people who have had to do extraordinary things to survive the violence and hatred and hurting that people inflict on each other out of greed and thirst for blood. I am humbled by this resilience and more especially when this is shown by children and people working with these children in communities where there is very little and people are struggling daily to make ends meet. You have had it easy for the most part and I do hope that you will be able to raise your children in a better place, one that you have helped to create.

I know this seems like a pipe dream but I like to think that, even though I was on the road a lot, that I was still able to instil in you a sense of compassion for those around you while also instilling a sense of adventure. I don't know what my footprints look like but as long as I showed compassion then I am happy. What will your footprints look like? How will you make a difference and will you show compassion to those around you, even if it seems that they do not deserve it? It's your turn to shine now, Champ, so go out there and do your thing.....

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

Nothing more precious than a woman

Hermann Steyn

'Sometimes the most ordinary things could be made extraordinary, simply by doing them with the right people' ~ Nicholas Sparks

In men's eyes there is nothing more precious than a woman. The best way to have a healthy relationship is to give a woman what you expect to get.

A woman should allow the man to lead, not to control her but to protect her. We want a woman to take pride in being a woman so that we can take pride in being a man. We will do anything for a woman, there is nothing more precious than a woman.

We want a woman to consider our feelings and our expectations and we want to be treated the same as we treat you. We love you and we need you. A woman's beauty is not in her looks but her beauty is in her heart and its ability to give and receive love. We love you and we need you.

What do we want in a woman? We want companionship. We want you to come to the rugby game with us...sometimes, not always. Or come along to the golf game on a Saturday, just once in a while to surprise us. Or come and sit on the couch when I watch a rugby game. We like having you around but we still want our men time to spend with our friends as well.

We want respect from you, maybe more than love. It means that you think that we are important and we love that. We like to be admired and we want you to appreciate us and to tell us that.

A man needs encouragement and we need to hear that you believe in us. If we know that, we will always be on your side. We also like recognition when we do something for others, like friends and family and we will appreciate it if you recognise that.

We want a woman to express her real feelings with us. Tell us when you're sad and tell us what we do wrong so that we can fix that without feeling awful and responsible. We will open up to you. We want to feel safe with you and want you to be in touch with your feelings.

We love our women!

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

The Life and Times of Xolelwa Ntolo - My Beautiful Niece

Some 19 years ago my sister Patience Ntolo gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. She was dark like umalume wakhe emhle kakhulu. At age 7 she started getting sick and there has never been a time when she has been completely well for a long period. Many years ago my niece she tested positive for the HI virus and the real battle started. The issues of stigmatisation and marginalisation were able to be managed well at home with the help of my mother who accepted the challenge of bringing up an HIV positive grandchild when my sister passed on. She started school when she came of age and when she became older we managed to get her into an HIV programme in Ixopo. But with time she became very sickly and was in and out of hospital, which affected her studies. We tried to

encourage her to go to school but it was very difficult. What broke the camel's back was when a teacher told her that she must choose between schooling or staying at home sick, because he could not continue to tolerate that yena. This was the last straw and the action that pushed her to stop schooling. She has never been to school since and her health has never improved in any significant way.

Her Journey into Adulthood

The biggest challenge of managing this type of a child is that she started being sick at a very tender age, she started on ARV treatment early and yet this was never of her doing. She was angry and disappointed. She had dreams that were shattered by the realisation that she cannot participate in society like a normal child, we tried our best to support her but she was always weak and would always fall sick. She always asked us when in pain, "Malume what did I do to deserve this. Why me Malume, I did nothing wrong". We did not have all the answers but we tried to support her.

When the time came as with any young man or woman to grow into adolescence, she rebelled. Her adolescent stage was characterised by a lot of things including identity versus the role she struggled to deal with rapid physical changes, but she also had to deal with the challenges of knowing that she was HIV positive. Despite the fact that she was not accountable for her HIV status she never lost her self-esteem as other people would have when faced with lifelong challenges. Adolescence is characterised by mood swings. It is because of these behavioural challenges that she sometimes even defaulted in taking her treatment. Sno went through all these stages without being properly managed by the healthcare system.

Fighting for her identity in a country with poor adolescent user friendly health services she became a victim, and fell pregnant. An HIV reactive 15 year old girl with compromised immune system had to stand the stresses and strains of pregnancy. During pregnancy her body had to provide for two with no proper self-help care, support and guidance by the health care providers, let alone knowing about PMTCT which would have been a bonus to her. Fortunately, she was a strong young woman and so she managed to share her gradually deteriorating CD4 cells with her unborn baby up to 9 months.

Giving birth to a baby was the most strenuous activity that she had to endure. She ran away from home a couple of times and my sisters' had to track and trace her every time. They did all they could to make sure that she was supported till she gave birth to her child. During the baby's delivery she needed to have lots of energy and emotional strength. She lost lots of blood but she held on. A young HIV reactive woman losing blood, decreased CD4, obviously became more vulnerable to other opportunistic infections like TB and others. Today Sno has confection TB and HIV. She held on and 4 years later she is still struggling and fighting the virus to live.

I am of the view that because of how the pregnancy was managed the delivery of the baby may not have been handled well to ensure that the child is not affected. This we have not checked, only because we are so scared that if it is true, then we will be here 10 years in future talking the same language. But most importantly our worry is whether my mother will be able to take the pain for the third time. She took care of Sno's mother, now she is taking care of Sno and if the young man is positive she may not cope with this truth.

The Experience at Rietvlei Hospital

2012 was the worst year for my mother, for this is the time when my niece became so ill that the doctors suspected that she was losing some faculties in her body including the functioning of the

kidneys. This was the time when my mother decided to move closer to my sisters, so she relocated from Mzimkulu to Mtata. So she started using the clinic at iSidwadwa in Mtata for her treatment. This was the worst decision ever... On more than one occasion she called me in tears because the nurses threatened her so bad, they were so rude and one day they chased her away like a dog, simply because she came for treatment without bringing the child (who could not walk - the nurses wanted her to bring her to the clinic regardless). My mother started the process to get her Disability Grant and this was the worst experience as she was told that she must go back to Mzimkhulu SASSA, to take the child to the Doctor that recommended her grant. Now remember that you are applying for the grant because umntana can no longer provide for herself. She can't do anything for herself, kodwa she had to travel almost 300km. She got there but two days later fell sick again, everything stopped for she had to be taken to hospital again in uMzimkhulu. An ambulance was called which got there around 9am and took her to Rietvlei (we have Clydesdale Hospital - HIV institution - 4km away by the way, but ambulance refused to take her there). She could not sit because she was complaining about a painful back. So she was asleep all the time. She sat on the chairs at Rietvlei but could only see the doctor at 3pm. The doctor wanted x-rays but told my brother that the x-ray department closed at 4:30pm, so must go home and come back the following day. The time was around 5pm. She was in no condition to go back as she had not been given any treatment. But the nurses told us that she had to go, as they could not accommodate her without a doctor's orders. My brother had to get her into a taxi and go back 45km at night, and got stuck estopini (at New Clydesdale) as they needed another car from the taxi stop to our home. They managed to get a colleague and a friend to drive them home.

During this period I tried to get hold of the matron at Rietvlei, just to understand why a referral hospital closed their x-ray department at night; why a person who was brought by an ambulance around 9:30am was not served by 4:30pm for a decision to be made either to admit her or send her back home, I was told that there was no night Super, and the lady at reception suggested that she put me through to the senior nurse at OPD. She did put me through but the phone kept ringing and nobody picked up and I suspected that the OPD must have been busy. I then decided to call the Presidential Hotline, Vanya (the gentleman who answered, Reference number – 4501101) advised me that the procedure was that I must call the hospital again, get their feedback plus reference number, call the provincial call centre, get their feedback and reference number, then call him with all these details. This will then give him enough information to log the call so I then called the hospital again, tried to get the night matron but could not as the OPD did not pick up. I then called the provincial hotline and Ms Gugu Tenza picked up the call and I told her my story. She suggested that we tele-conference the hospital and speak to the matron. I told her of my attempts and she told me that she will get the matron at the head office. As soon as she introduced herself at the head office, the reception routed the call to the night matron and we were connected. The night Matron (uMama uSogoni) was very helpful; she told us that she did not understand why people should tell us that X-ray closed at night because the hospital had a person who was always on standby to deal with such matters. This was very sad because the doctors and nurses advised patients that x-ray was closed and they were all sent back home to be served the following day. We had a long discussion and umama uSogoni apologised about sending away uSno because of lack of X-rays, for this was not correct as they had somebody who was supposed to be working on standby. Mama uSogoni called the ambulance to go back and fetch my niece again back to the hospital to be admitted. Now - this could have been done much earlier but nobody cared. The issue of the X-ray dept that closed at night yet it should not be, was never addressed, umama uSogoni promised that she was going to write this in her hand over report and she was going to request that the day matron uMama uNqophiso contact me and explain what had happened and how she was going to make sure that it

never happened again. Unfortunately umama uNqophiso never called. I called a few days later and could not get hold of her but up till today she never returned any of my calls.

My biggest worry was and still is that patients were sent away yet government was and is paying people to have these services rendered. Rietvlei is a referral hospital that should have better services and yet it still sent referred patients back home after 4pm if they need X-rays. My question is how many people get sent back and never come back again because they die on their way back or simply cannot afford to come back. Other patients would just give up and stop fighting the disease because it is just too much for them, the people tasked with the responsibility to help them stay alive just don't care enough. My niece survived this ordeal. She got better a few days later was released and I travelled to Mzimkhulu to take them back to Mtata.

The SASSA Experience

My mother and my niece had to go back to Mzimkhulu a week later in order to finish the Disability Grant application. They had to go to Sassa in Mzimkhulu to get a form that they had to take to Rietvlei and back to SASSA. Then they needed to go to the doctor that recommended that she get the initial support grant, but unfortunately the latest records were in a new clinic in Mthatha to which they also needed to bring to Mzimkhulu for the process to be completed. All this had to be done by the same person who is applying for the disability grant; that same person who is sick and cannot do much without support. The sad part is that she was expected to personally show herself at all these places for something to be done.

The processes followed to make these applications are so difficult and tedious that a person who does not have support will not be able to complete this process.

My simple question was why can't public sector institutions talk to each other as they have all the records for Sno. The clinic in Mthatha, Mthatha General Hospital, Rietvlei Hospital and Doctor Mlisana had all the records that could be shared in order to fast track the process and make sure that the patient did not travel as this was putting stress and strain on the same patient that we were trying to support. If my mother did not have the support of the family (my brother in Mzimkhulu and my sisters in Mtata) she would have stopped the application process.

Wrong ARV Regime for 2 Years

The family received the worst news ever during Sno's four day stay in Rietvlei. The doctor concluded "Sno was sitting on a wrong treatment for almost two years, hence the complications". We were told that the treatment regime she was in no longer worked for her and she should have been moved to another combination hence the drop in her CD4 count and the possible kidney failure. We were so disappointed because it was such a mission to get her to stay the course, but we felt that it was better late than never. We were not prepared for communication from the honourable doctor. The doctor in Rietvlei could not prescribe new drugs combination simply because the doctor did not have access to the files in Mthatha to do this. So were once more told that Sno must go back to Mthatha in order to receive the new prescription and drugs. Now Sno was expected to take treatment just for the sake of it knowing that it did nothing to better her situation. This took almost two months before she was able to get a prescription in Mthatha. We took her there a couple of times and were told that the treatment was not available. Eventually it was delivered and she got it.

The question that I cannot answer even today is why the doctor in Rietvlei could not prescribe and give Sno the right treatment given her state and condition? But most intriguing is why it took two

years for the doctors to realise that Sno was on the wrong treatment. What were the implications of these delays on the quality of her life?

She is Now Terminally Ill

My niece is now at the terminal stages of her sickness. Her CD4 count went down drastically and she became very weak but damn she still hung on to life. She still was able to put on a smile or even tried to stand up to show that the disease will not keep her down. Yes she fought for all these years a battle to live. She was and still is as strong in her heart and she has refused to give up. We are now convinced as a family that she has reached a period where that small body can no longer take it anymore. Her kidneys have now given up on her and she can no longer control her bowels so we have now put her in diapers. She held on to life even when it meant being humiliated and embarrassed. She held on when many would have given up. She is still holding on yet we all think it is all in vain to hold on through years of pain. She is still in so much pain yet she still tries to smile to show her appreciation for what her granny has been able to do for her: An old lady who stopped living her life and started living for her grandchild for the last 10 years. A grandmother who sacrificed everything for her sickly grandchild, who protected her, taught her the role of a prayer, loved her and did everything with her. This is the love that kept my niece alive for the last 19 years. In December she was so sick that on two occasions we thought that we had lost her but she came back, I know why. It's because she did not want to leave her granny Kodwa. The other day she started praying that she would rather die and rest than to continue taking this pain, she complained that she had taken the treatment diligently for years yet this has never made her feel better. This is a prayer of a 19 year old strong, young woman who has had to endure it all.

HIV vs. Poverty

I am of the view that this experience is a reflection that management of the disease is key to our success in managing this pandemic. We need systems that talk to each other. We need a SASSA that can access necessary data that will allow them to evaluate applications for support to the needy in an efficient and effective way. We need document and records management systems that allow patient records to be managed efficiently across hospitals without having to send sick patients across the country because our records cannot be shared. With unemployment sitting at 82% and more than 41.5% of our households living without income, this becomes the killer of our people. Sno has been sent back home to die so many times but she held on and refused to go. Yes, she had the love of all her aunts, cousin and uncles all supporting each other, but how many other poor families will have this support? Other people never receive this support and don't have money to even feed themselves, now the treatment requires that our people must eat good food and exercise enough to manage this disease, with such poverty this is not possible and we will continue to lose our poor people despite having all the tools to change their fate.

KwaZulu Natal invests seriously in the lives of its people, by even providing supplements to people that are poor. This helps supplement their food intake and it allows them to take their treatment. One province has identified this as a challenge and provided its vulnerable members with support, why is the Eastern Cape not doing the same thing? We must start budgeting for supplements in the Eastern Cape as our poor people are dying because of poverty and not HIV.

Sharing of Information

Disease and Risk Management Solutions are available in medical aid administration companies like Medscheme, Discovery, Old Mutual Healthcare, and Liberty, Metropolitan Health etc. that could allow SASSA, the Department of Health and Hospitals to effectively manage these systems. Their

systems are developed in South Africa by South Africans. One of the biggest systems developed and run by Old Mutual over the last 20 years is lying collecting dust at Lethimvula/Medscheme, as it was handed over to them during the purchase of Old Mutual Healthcare in 2009. This system if activated would allow hospitals to be effective and efficient. The people that designed it and maintained it are in the country and it's not a huge number - only 10 of them - led by the best systems development manager on healthcare systems Mr Richard Nongogo...

This situation can be turned around, if people are given space to make a difference. If men and women in positions of power allow us to collectively work together to change the plight of the poor.

Dignity for the Dying

The fact that we don't have a fully-fledged Hospice in every small and rural town is just criminal. When terminally ill people are discharged from hospitals what is our expectation here? That they will die a painful death without dignity because we cannot afford to provide them with a dignified death? Because we cannot invest in making sure that our poor people must get dignity till their last day on this earth?

It is my wish that my niece and her life experience maybe the example of how we must not manage HIV and AIDS. I hope that her life and death should not be in vain. I pray that her resilience and will power must give strength to those that have tested positive. But most importantly it must be a mirror that will show us what we have lacked and how we can fix it sooner rather than later.

Our request to your organisation is that you support the establishment of centres that will help terminally ill members of our society die with dignity managing pain during the last days of their lives. Our hospitals just discharge these members not caring what happens to them before they die. Those that have money have Hospice to go to but our poor people have nowhere to go, they lose sanity and consciousness because of pain and they die.

We therefore request assistance for the establishment of Hospice facilities and services in our rural communities that will help give dignity to our poor South Africans so that when the time comes they have a place to go if they no longer have the support from either families or hospitals.

NB: On Sunday the 20 January 2013, Sno was admitted at the TB section in Mthatha General Hospital. She is comfortable, for now, but the struggle to live continues. The biggest challenge is that uSno when she is out of the hospital she is always vomiting, having diarrhoea and nothing she eats stays in. This is creating more problems because she now defaults on her treatment regularly and we can't give her treatment on an empty stomach. So this is our dilemma.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

WORDS LEFT UNSPOKEN

Thulani Dube (First runner up)

It is always crowded nowadays on the trains. The morning commute to work has evolved into the horror nightmares are made of. I see her each morning now. I believe she looks for me, not out of love though. Part of me wishes I never offered her my seat. She wakes me up with that mellow "unjani mntanami" (how are you my child?). I tried to keep my eyes shut once just to keep my backside on a seat. That is the reason I buy a first class train ticket after all. Though my youth is ripe in me, a one-hour train ride as a standing passenger does bring pain to my heart.

I saw her a few weeks ago, sweet old lady I thought. I felt a shiver run up my spine right up to the strands of my hair. The resemblance was uncanny. I hardly smile but she just lit up my face and I could not control the action there after. I have to say not much brings joy to my heart these days, though that day she shone some light into that dark place I call dear heart. Sawubona Gogo, unjani I said. As she replied, her voice drew me back to reality. It wasn't her. I felt joy, I felt pain. Now that I think back, I really don't know what I felt. I guess even if I did I would not know how to describe it. How could I, real man show no feelings, let alone attempt to paint that picture.

I rose from my seat. I was raised this way. How the world has changed. I see school children nowadays will not offer the elderly a seat in buses or trains. This culture of selfishness has been creeping into me ever so stealthily. At times my actions would make her turn in her grave. Maybe not turn in her grave but rather slap me uncharitably across the cheek right back into yesterday. Oh, how I would love that.

Thoughts ran through my mind as if unleashed and in every direction they scattered. Though that day I was happy to see her, I hated her for the flood of emotions that she released. After all she taught me that. If you are to be a man, you must close yourself off to the world: this world is cold so you must be colder to survive. Till this day, the chill in me is alive. So many memories gone by in a second: the noise and the rocking and jerking of the train drowned by the beating of my heart. I have heard about this evil phenomenon, it's not a black thing I was told. I took deep breaths to drown out that panic attack. She raised me to always be in control and to lack no composure at all. I loved her for it. I hated her for leaving to soon. I can never hate her. I hate the world for taking her away from me. I had to keep my anger focused on something and the world always seems like the best scapegoat for many a sin.

I remembered those lazy Sunday afternoons that we used to sit on the stoep and she would drink her mahewu whilst knitting or sewing something. "Never let those hands grow idle", she would always say. I would sit obediently, patiently waiting. The joy it brought me when she would say "go and get your glass". Her voice still sweeter than any melody I can recall. I would rush into the kitchen, leap onto a chair and find my special glass from the cupboard. It was the only time I would drink from a glass at that age. The metal mug was the way of life every other day. She would pour me a drop of mahewu in my large brown glass. Yes I had claimed that glass as my own. It was never about the mahewu, not at all. I realise it now. The truth is it was all about the fact that I got to spend time with my grandmother. Granted she helped my mother raise me, I guess those moments when it was just about us were what dreams dream about in the still of the night. In my infancy they were magical. They thaw my heart every time I let such a thought creep in.

I realise that many share the experience of having such an active granny in their lives. For me it was a blessing, even more so a blessing that as she helped shape my life my mother was always active in this molding process.

As the beating of my heart returned to its steady pace I acknowledged the blessing of having three strong women in my life: My granny, my mother and my baby sister. I realized that by holding on to these values of the strength in me because I must be a man, I would fail to mention that the number is four rather than three. My better half would drive a stake through this stone heart if she ever knew that feelings were kept at bay here. Not today though. As she walked into the train I felt a swirl of emotion so strong that try as I may I would never hold it down. On this day the war was lost. I realized that I loved her to bits my Sihle, but surely had never told her this. I tried to let my actions speak out loud though as a soul searched in that very moment that I gave up my seat, I conceded that maybe it was my voice that needed to do the talking as opposed to my actions.

In that very moment, I realised how much I missed ugogo umaDhliwayo. The pain that I even missed her funeral was that of a sword splitting me in half. I cried in private, not even my love Sihle saw me shed a tear. I was raised to be strong. Days rise and fall and still I keep my tears at bay. This is what she said strength was. The world must never see you cry she said. I hold those teachings ever so dear to my heart, I live those teachings.

So many times she was there for me, ploughing the way to a future that I may call bearable. Her strength I will always admire though hard as I try can never duplicate or emulate it. She made sure I was fed and always clothed. In modern words she was a true hustler, always on the grind to ensure we lacked nothing. I remember the day she slept on the floor in my room when I was sick with chicken pox. Her words were "I can never ever let you out of my sight when you are sick". Though she will never know it, she was my hero. Once she asked me what kind of man I wanted to be when I grew up and my response was "ngifuna ukuba njengawe" - I want to be the man that you are when I grow up. She set such a high standard.

She taught me to be an impenetrable fortress: a stone heart. I love it but I hate it. To the women in my life they may never know my true feelings. To her she will never know my gratitude and love I had for her. God rest her soul. If she was music, she would be hip hop because I love it, it calms me, it understands.

That moment I gave up my seat on the train, in the storm of emotions I wished I could read her a poem I wrote for her. I could never let my feelings out of my heart so I scribbled them in my notebook and kept them hidden from those who need and needed to her them. Ironically I write many a poems in the train. Maybe the noise is an escape. I penned words to three strong women in my life:

This is a shout out to hip hop
Saluting the greats that are my hip hop
Not to be confused with imitations
Real hip hop cannot be held down
Truly no limitations
Loud and clear I hear the whispers
What is my hip hop you ask?
Confusion lies upon your faces like early morning dew
The time to know the truth knocks at your door
Long overdue is what it is
What is hip hop?
Hip hop is my mom waking me up every morning
Hip hop is her strength as she carries me through life
Hip hop is in her voice telling me I will overcome
Hip hop is in her voice, forever warm
She is the rock that is hip hop
Shout out to hip hop I say
Hip hop is my grandmother waking me up every morning on days past
Telling me that I am strong and the future is me
Hip hop is her loving hug
Shout out to hip hop
Salute to the greats, true pillars
As silence grips your bodies
And the realisation that is hip hop subdues you
I give this loud shout out to hip hop

Hip hop is in the smile of my sister
It is in her voice of encouragement
Telling me destiny is in my palms
That is that destiny I stand as king
This is my hip hop
So hear me clear
Hear me loud
This is a shout out to hip hop
Hip hop that shaped my life
My hip hop
Big shout out to these women in my life
True pillars, pure strength
This is my hip hop

And to you Sihle, sthandwa sami, love of my life. I know now that these words must never be left unspoken. Someday I will be man enough to let these feelings rain down on you. This strength I was raised to have as a man is truly a curse and no strength at all. Though I have mustered it well it has cost me the freedom of knowing that those who need to know are in the light of that knowledge. I poured my heart out for you a page.

I wrote you a love song-

Poured my heart into its lyrics-
Baked it in the warmth of my heart-
I need to shout out these feelings-
Serenade you with a drizzle of emotions-
I wrote this with love-
Penned it so clearly with my feelings-
Etched it so gently on my heart-
I wrote this song for you-
A song drenched with love-
I wrote you a love song-
A song you may never hear-
Whose words I dare not utter-
Feelings I may never share-
All sealed in this love song-
Hidden under the shadow of reality-
Cruelly holding me from singing my song
I wrote you sweet melodies of love-
Tunes you will never hear-
I feel joy, I feel pain-
Keeping this inside torments my soul-
Joys of sweet melodies seasoned with the pang of heartache-
Heart to heart shall never be-
As only my heart sees this song-
Only my soul hear its lyrics-
This is your song-
Though sealed in the confines of my heart-
Away from intended heart-
Miles away from you-

Distance shields you from this song-
I wrote you sweet melodies-
I wrote you a love song-
A story of feelings-
I keep it in the basement of my heart-

That split second on the train gave me an insight into what true strength is, what being a man is. Words left unspoken will rob you of this strength and with that realization I strive to be a new man with a new strength. Strength to speak and let those I love know that my love for them is true and real.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

The Call

Site Sikhosana

The gas heater is burning slowly providing much needed warmth for Khanyi to decide that today she'll stay at home and watch her favourite TV series, perhaps catch up on some reading. She's been reading the book *Think like a Man* by comedian turned author Steve Harvey which was now resting on the arm of the sofa where she is curled up wearing her favourite black gown that has her name embroidered on it. The brownish-red silk and cotton curtains are closed which gives the room a dark ambiance, almost like in the cinema when the movie is about to start, but lighter.

She has on her lap an iPad displaying all major social networks – Twitter, Facebook, Instagram. She is mildly active on social media but lately she has been only spending a reasonable time on them.

"You are still going through his profile page. It's been a month now. That's bordering on stalking." The voice said followed by a giggle.

Khanyi turns around to see where the voice was coming from. It was her best friend Nosipho. She remembered she had spent the night since it was too late to drive to her place.

"Last time I checked it wasn't illegal, unless they catch you." Snickered Khanyi.

"I heard he is trouble."

"But which man isn't"

"Doesn't it bother you that he is rumoured to have dated one of your acquaintances and his updates ayasho ukuthi he is an incurable flirt," commented Nosipho in a pensive tone.

"Ngike ngezwa but there's something about him though. He seems to have a good heart and when he smiles..."

"Not to mention that he is divorced and has a kid..." cuts in Nosipho as she turns on the silver Russell Hobbes kettle, sets up two white coffee mugs engraved with gray wording Love At Home.

"You make it sound like I'm going to marry the dude," laughs Khanyi.

“The way you’ve been going on about him I wouldn’t be surprised if you have married him already”

“Well, he’d have to ask me out first.”

Nosipho finishes making coffee, hands Khanyi the cup. She joins her on a two-seater couch.

“He has your numbers, angithi?”

“Yeah. I gave them to him a while back when we met at Sun City during the SAMAs.”

“Has he ever called?” asked Nosipho sarcastically.

“Well, no.”

“There’s your answer.”

The girls laugh at their conversation as their attention turns towards the TV that is playing a legal drama of some sort.

Khanyi’s mind flashes back to the last date she went to. She doesn’t even remember why she agreed to the date as it was in all respects clear it was not going to work. She hated blind dates but one of her friends had insisted she’d have fun. It seems being single after a certain period distorts the line to a point of indistinct and gives one involuntary hope that somehow things might work. The guy was almost an hour late and when he did arrive he offered no apology. He tossed on the table what looked like Range Rover keys and his fattened wallet, which could be full of laundry receipts instead of bank notes. Khanyi couldn’t really tell. ‘It’s hard being a businessman,’ he started talking, ‘I just came off a meeting with Cyril. He wants me to run some of his companies as his focus now is in the government. You do know he’s in government now, right? He asked as if he was talking to a child. Khanyi wanted to snap, ‘No twerp! I wouldn’t know considering I have a degree from Harvard Law School and have been a special legal adviser to Gauteng government for the past three years,’ but she didn’t. She was better than that.

“Do you think there’s hope for us over 30s in the dating world? Khanyi asked Nosipho in a half dejected voice. She in actual fact wanted to know.

“There’s always hope. It’s the dating dynamics that have changed. Standards have changed. These days the focus is more on superficiality and materialism. Things like love, joy, peace, forgiveness, kindness, companionship are taking a back seat.”

“It seems the older one gets, the smaller the dating circle becomes. And dear Lord, men of today refuse to commit!” exclaimed Khanyi.

“Even with that, I still believe there are good men out there. Finding them is a different story altogether,” Nosipho consoles.

Later in the day, Khanyi is sitting in her bedroom. She had just woken up from a nap that was meant to be short but felt like hours. She was feeling rather lethargic. She sits up straight, leaning against a vinyl-finished headboard. She folds her legs, pulling her knees towards her chest, wraps her arms around them as she rests her head on the knees and faces the dark curtained window. Tears start rolling down her cheeks. At first it doesn’t make sense why she is crying. She draws a loud breath, wipes tears using the back of her well-manicured tender hand.

She realizes she is lonely and it's not making sense to her why she's feeling this way – after all she has a great job that pays well. She owns her home and the latest German car she drives. She has friends and family. She is a Christian woman who regularly goes to church and most importantly she has the most beautiful daughter.

She can't remember the last time she was in love, romantic love that is. Perchance it could have been as far back as when she was with the father of her child. Even with that, the memory seems distant; she can't even recall how it felt like. She had had been on a few courting sessions subsequently but none of them gave her that exhilarating-make-someone's-spirit-soar-type of sensation.

Khanyi grabs her iPad from the side table of her bed. She unlocks the screen using a code. She lands on Thato Molefe's Facebook page. This is the page she's been on every day in the past month. She'd known Thato for a few years now, not lets-hang-out-everyday-kind-of-know-you but more I-know-you-exist-kind-of-know-you. They once worked on a gig together and from time to time would comment on each other's twitter posts. He would jokingly declare his love for her but who believes anything written on social networks if not followed up by a phone call or a text? It is only recently that she felt considerably drawn towards him. Although Khanyi's friends think he is philanderer, she knows in her heart that the face he puts on out there isn't really who he is. There's more to him other than his obvious good looks and playfulness. In there is a man with a potential often misunderstood. In her head she knows he is the one but how does she put what's in her mind in to reality. In her culture a woman never approaches a man – umuntu wesimame akasheli indoda. She decides she'd rather die inside than declare her love to him.

She goes back to her snooze.

The phone rings. She answers, 'Hello'

"Is this Khanyi Mkhize?" The voice on the other end of the line enquires.

"It is. Who is this?"

"Hi Khanyi, this is Thato Molefe. Would you like to grab coffee?"

oooooooooooooooo

The struggles of men with women

Gugu Ngema (Judges' commendation)

The 60th anniversary of the August 9th 1956 Women's March on the Union Buildings occurs shortly before my 60th Birthday. So, although I have known of the great event, it is still just part of my pre-history.

Following recent traumatic and violent events which left me in a coma, from which my recovery has been miraculous, I consider the year as an important milestone in my life, as well as that of the women's struggle for total emancipation. The day and year humbles me to embrace the four stations on the way to freedom; discipline, action, suffering and death. It also encourages me to

plead with our women to accept the inevitability of these four stations in their ongoing struggle for emancipation and freedom.

The study of biology afforded me the privilege to understand that if I was born at the beginning of November, therefore, I was conceived at the beginning of February of 1956, following the wedding of my parents over the holidays of December 1955 to January 1956. This would mean that I was six months old in my mother's womb on the historic women's march. Although my mother did not participate in the march, my grand aunt had participated in the preparations for the march in Natal as local secretary of an ANC branch. She is the one who first introduced me to what she called "Congress politics" as articulated by Chief Albert Luthuli, whom she greatly admired. I remember coming from college in 1975 after I had attended an Inkatha rally addressed by its President Gatsha Buthelezi as he was popularly known then, my grand aunt sat me down and lectured me on what she considered to be authentic Congress politics.

In her honour, I share some perspectives in this text which I consider relevant in advancing the cause of women, particularly within the conservative rural context of KwaZulu Natal.

My mother was soon to be confronted by the dreaded pass laws when she had to join my father immediately after giving birth to me. I had been left in the care of my grandmother to whom I came to owe my very being and my aspirations. Even though she was illiterate, my grandmother ensured that I not only passed but also excelled at school. She had even predicted my future achievements in giving me my beloved name, M'hambiwezwe, meaning the one who travels the world.

Having been born and bred within a patriarchal context, which was reinforced by Roman Catholic dogma and emphasised through brutal Apartheid repression, I was bound to stumble in my marriage. For instance, even while I was still at primary school, when a girl who has since become one my trusted friends, got position one in class, I nearly committed suicide simply because I had been dethroned by a female from what had become my accepted position.

I do not in any way blame my former wife for divorcing me, having succumbed to the wayward desires of body and mind. Instead, I have grown to appreciate the extent of her love and commit myself to the struggle of women and mankind for emancipation and freedom. In marrying my former wife, I had broken one of the destructive stereotypes within my culture: Xhosa women cannot genuinely love Zulu men. It was my own fear of disclosing and possibly infecting an innocent, loyal woman in life with a dreaded disease – death sentence at that stage - that led me to drift away from my former wife. The values instilled in me by my grandmother, simply refused to allow me to tarnish and destroy my former wife's life.

I have admired and will continue to admire my former wife's love and resilience, which I have sought to impart in my various interactions with women that I meet.

I have witnessed with shock, numerous incidents of women abuse and denial of their God-given rights in our community. I have also witnessed and admired our women's ability to endure some of the worst deprivations in their lives. I will continue to admire the resilience of women in bringing about a better life for all.

I have also witnessed women using their looks and bodies to secure material wellbeing to advance their careers and status in life. I have also painfully witnessed what I regard as destructive tendencies, particularly within the conservative rural environment, of women's assertion of their rights. Considering the gains that have been achieved since the historic march, the advice of my late grand aunt often comes to my mind when I see our women behaving like this. To her, self-discipline

also meant developing our own things and role models rather copying others. To me, this means womanhood as an equal but different notion to manhood, like the two sides of the same coin.

On the other hand, I cannot help reflecting on some of the shining examples in our community such as Mkabayi ka Senzangakhona, Shaka's aunt who was the only woman in his Council and commanded her own battalion. My recent interactions with women, including those of Limehill Community Development Association (LCDA) and those professional women who are and have been involved in my treatment and recuperation, fill me with hope that we will still have our own Mkabayis. As I ponder my life from now onwards, I cannot help wishing that one of these heroines might allow herself to be my companion and partner.

Since my sad divorce, I have painfully journeyed my life solo, only consoled by the commitment and resilience of LCDA women as they strive to survive abject poverty and subjugation within the corrupt and poverty-stricken context of Limehill Complex. I have striven to nurture a chaste life, to cultivate mastery over my sense and soul, lest I let my wayward desirings lead me astray. Unlike before, I pray for the partner who will accompany me as both a friend and an equal, as we both continue on the difficult but necessary journey to freedom. Having embraced an asset-based community development approach to development, I now recognize the importance of ensuring sound personal health in order to make a meaningful contribution to mankind's struggle for freedom. In the meantime, I will continue to support and respect the women's and therefore humankind's struggle for emancipation and freedom. *Unwele olude Mbokodo!*

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

Elsa

Kevin Hoole

You call her lioness. Why? She's not derivative.

She was strong, growing up. You think I mean in spirit, but I don't. Even now, when arthritis and the scolding of her sons hold her back, you can still see the fire inside her, to work. To lift. To build. To break every assumption of femininity and do her damn grouting, it can't be that hard to learn, and besides no one else can do it better. She got a workbench for her birthday. It was too flimsy, and there wasn't enough space for her tools. But she has a floral hammer in her purse, because she's still a lady.

Blame her on German engineering, if you want. Cool eyes, perfectionist to a fault. Silver-gold hair pulled back so as not to fall in the paint, the food, the tax returns. The warmest heart that told me not to worry, I'm alright, you sit down and relax, ok if you want you can slice the onions, but be careful.

She never taught me German, or how to sew. She told me I needed more life experience before I could start writing. The same plastered fingers that saved me from drowning saved me from everything else. Am I ungrateful to her, because I want to compare scars, rather than be protected from them?

I wish I could speak her language, so she can know me in words that aren't a problem to be solved. So that I can see in her the pride that most young men look for in their fathers.

So that I can show her that I'm a lion too. Or better yet, a lioness.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

She

Gary Montague-Fryer (Judges commendation)

Crone, mother, maid and whore. The four aspects of women as portrayed throughout literature, and which are drummed into us as young boys as the boxes into which we must place the women in our lives, there to stay quietly and mostly irritatingly, until we outgrow them and achieve manhood.

Glancing perfunctorily over the resumes of these women who have interwoven their lives with mine, they do indeed fit very neatly and obediently into the four boxes....ouma, mom, lovers, domestics, sisters, daughters.

But if you shift the lens from auto to manual, and fine tune the focus, those boxes start cracking, the cheap cardboard of their patriarchal construction collapsing beneath the sheer weight of life they contain, and the multiple roles that bear truth come pouring through the seams, ultimately exploding forth in all-engulfing splash of colour and poignant memory and rich teaching, the all-powerful African Mama blacksmiths on which the anvil of my life has been forged...

...If you keep your head when all about you are losing theirs....the Kipling poem resonates as powerfully today as it did twenty years ago, perhaps even more so given the tumultuous change our country is currently undergoing. At my all boy white high school, it was used as a written punishment for misdemeanours of the non-caning variety (breathing about the only one of the latter type, if memory serves).

Many a young lad stood next to the venerable oak staircase copying out the poem fifty, a hundred times, a foundation upon which manhood was supposedly constructed. Kipling wrote it as advice to his son, extolling the virtues of fortitude, responsibility and resolution as necessary attributes of achieving the mythical and much desired state of true manhood.

My journey to this nirvanic state of ultimate achievement took a somewhat different route, ironically mapped out through the wisdom and guidance of the amazing and disparate women in my life....

.... my mother had been complaining about stomach pains for a while. Doctors sent her off with a myriad of prescriptions for wind, bloatedness, gastro. Given that she tended a bit toward the hypochondriacal, my twenty-one year old god-like self was contemptuous of this latest supposed illness. Eventually a specialist diagnosed her with cancer, already spreading through her like fire in summer, fanned by a black south-easter, too far advanced even for the horrors of chemo.

She was given six months.

The only child of a Jewish doctor and an Afrikaans farmer's daughter, my mother was a fiercely proud woman; a high school English teacher by trade, she had fought hard to be where she considered her rightful station in life to be, a large house in the leafy southern suburbs. She had never smoked a day in her life, and had perhaps two glasses of wine a week.

She was angry. No. She was boiling with incandescent fury, perhaps attempting to burn away the corruption inside of her that was devouring her body from the inside, consuming her hopes and contentment. Her life.

She wasn't leaving her death row cell of morphine-coated pain resolved and at peace. She raged silently and furiously against the dimming of her light.

My father coped up to a point, and then he dealt with his anguish by being out of the house. The task of looking after my mother in the final month fell to me. The enviable task of watching your mother wither away, like a piece of fruit long forgotten in the bowl, nature denaturing until all semblance of life has gone, a state of empty husk.

The memories play like a student film on YouTube....

...the sickly sweet smell of morphine hung about her bedroom, a constant reminder of the cloaked figure waiting on the periphery. Lifting her out of bed to carry her to the bath, she was lighter than a soul, barely thirty kilograms. Only the eyes remained free of the disease, and they blazed with anger and fear.

I learnt a lot about myself in those last few weeks. Who I had been, who I thought I was, and who I knew I could possibly be. I crossed the threshold from carefree twenty-one year old into something else.

Older, wiser, haunted. But not manhood. Not yet.

Finally, at the Hospice, I left my sister in the sun of a balmy late January afternoon, and entered her room. Cool, peaceful, quiet. A place where people come to die. I take my mother's hand, and feel an uncharacteristic grip in return. I meet her eyes, clear and lucid for a change, her grey slack lips parting in a rictus smile.

A final wheeze, her eyes betraying the massive relief of a final release from pain and fear and horror. A rustle in the background, as of an ancient cloak on bone. Then her soul, leaving the body, hovering for a second or two as if unsure of where to go, then flowing out the window, into the sun, the light.

In the year following my mother's death, I became a man. All that she had instilled in me, striving always to be the best that I could, working hard and with focus to achieve my desires, and a passion for English which led me to leave my law career and teach high school English, found a spot inside me, foundations for the structure which will ultimately house the man.

That moment of my mother dying in my arms has defined who I am now, the man I've become, and the journey that I took to get here.

Other extraordinary women have interjected themselves into my life, creating crossroads and junctures and speed-bumps and stop signs and turning points.

My ouma was a formidable lady, still teaching Afrikaans at a prestigious girls' high school at age seventy-five. She went up against her own family to marry my grandfather, an English Jew. Her refusal to accept anything less than the best from someone, the correct way of doing something or treating someone, was hugely significant in moulding who the boy I was, and the man I became.

She died three months into my mother's illness, the pain of watching her only child being consumed by the cancer too much for her redoubtable, windswept Karoo koppie of a heart.

Other vignettes of memory rise seemingly unbidden....

...Lucille, my first love, who taught me about loving and desiring and needing and wanting and breaking and fumbling and hurting and loving, star-filled summer nights on the slopes of Devil's Peak, exploring what wonderful things bodies are, and the outlandishly fun things they can do, who ultimately taught me one of the great lessons in life, that having your heart ripped out hurts a hell of a lot more than bones breaking, that it seems life is over because you can never, never ever never let anyone this close again, because it hurts really so very very fucking much; but then of course the first and oldest of the healers, Time, shows that it is possible to give or lend out the real, true bits of yourself to others again, that after the pain, healing does come and that all wounds, literal and figurative, real or imagined, soul-wrought or flesh-ripped, all heal in time, and love comes calling again.....

...Flora, our family domestic, who cleaned our home and put up with my white boy arrogance and privilege, because you had to in a country where one group had all the economic, political and human rights, with dignity and quiet resilience, a lady who should have been home watching her grandchildren but instead was picking my underwear up off the floor, who taught me the power of self-respect and pride in yourself, no matter the circumstances, and to never let them see what they have done or are still doing to you.....ndiyabulela kakhulu Flora....

....and you, my love, you the jigsaws that fit perfectly into all of my irregular, broken pieces, poly-filling the numerous ravine-like cracks of my soul, making me whole, or at least giving the appearance thereof, the azure abyss of your eyes soul-sustenance nourishing and keeping me alive, your breasts a favourite resting place, accepting caressing and biting in turn, as I sssslip into you, ssslowly, as dreams on hot restless nights, alchemically melding the perfect fit of our souls into one, your hair tangled, sweat-mussed, spread out on the tiger-skin blanket like an intricately woven sunbeam...nestled in close-close you cannot see my soul through the twin eye-portals, soaring heavenward on a golden unicorn, creating ripples through the momentary cessation of time, as the world careens unheeded round and round and round, eventually spinning off its axis and bouncing away amongst the planet, an errant shot on the pool table of the gods.....

.....but of late I see something else in your eyes, you've been so far away and drifting further, our ships that were so true to course now seemingly being borne away on different currents, me just watching it happen, unable to summon the emotional reserves of courage needed to ask you why...

...Trace, how close am I to losing you...?

...you who taught me that passion is all and everything, the alpha to the omega and back again, passion, searing, lava white-hot life-engendering passion.....come back, I am not I without the you that makes us we, soul sister, wife, mother, lover.....

I find myself sitting on a wind-scoured dune here at the end of a day, mighty Atlantic ocean waves finishing their long journeys in a magnificent display of shock and awe, watching my daughters laugh and jump and spin on the beach before me, embracing and living a life that I have given them...

...and the realisation comes crashing home like one of the great waves before me smashing the froth-cream sand, that from them comes the simplest lesson of all, and perhaps the greatest lesson that I can learn, that despite the failing heart maybe it's not all so blackened and dead with self-pity inside and that maybe, my girls, my strong African women, the time has come to heal, to forgive myself and my deceitful body a little, just every now and again, say every time one of my girls laughs in pure unadulterated joy, or when I scream in the purest of six year old stoke at having made the

magical trip along the soul-artery of a Cape winter wave, or when the disappointment leaves her eyes for a few moments, and I see how desperate she is for me to become me again....

That's what they've taught me, these female colossi who have interwoven the path I travel...that by hurling little bits of light defiantly against the soul-rot, little bits, then maybe one day the darkness inside will become so weak and ineffectual that I can simply rip it off and out of me, let it go, and it will float away on the cold north-westerly pre-frontal wind, dissipating....

Not holding on anymore, tourniqueting the real Me to death, to nothingness of any value or worth. Just letting go for a change...

The sun sets behind an approaching storm at the end of a Cape winter's day, you can smell the power and beauty on the wind as it picks up, ushering in another tempest to cleanse the city of the Cape of Storms, the mother City, the place I call home, and I smile at her, and the girls and women that surround me and are me smile back, and I know that it will be okay.....

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

I Dance with Her

She is wearing a Purple Dress

An Impressionist Poem by Perry Bellos

We sway to melodies of hyacinth
we sway to harmonies of lilac
we sway to the rhythm of my lovers hips
immersed in songs of dancing candle flames
under the trembling fires of the dear cosmos
we taste the risk of immortality
we fall in endless downpour we fall
down deep down to drowning depths
we gasp for ecstasy of lavender
we grasp a purple universe
in contours of salt and sweat and dream
on the curvature of her erotic species
where rounded volumes of soothing song
sway to the fleeting eternity of purple
where words and candlelight fuse
with the rhyming secrets of my lovers hips
with the fragrant wax of the melting universe

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

The Aunty with the Scarf

Sedrico Husselman

The road is empty early in the morning here on the Cape Flats. Some of the council flats and Maisonette flats have lights on. Behind these doors with various colours and some doors with the panes worn off, are aunties who are preparing for their families for the day. Some have husbands who will go to work early to work for the Council on the building sites around Cape Town. Some aunties do not have husbands; they left years ago and are either on the soap "weg geseil" they slid away like on a bar of soap we were told or went to buy sugar and never returned. These aunties are looking into their bread bins to see if they can get a sandwich together for the kids for school and something to take with for them to work.

Behind one of the doors on this empty road this morning the aunty with the scarf wakes me and wakes up her children as well. They have to get up early with her as they have to take the train with her. She taught that here in Mannenberg they would not get such a good education so the sacrifice has to be made. Some mornings they just had black coffee and a slice of brown bread to start the day. Like a hen with her chicks she will leave before the first light of day. Her scarf on and the overall to go work in the factory; her three children follow her.

Down the road here in Rio Grande it is quiet. You can smell the fresh air and sometimes the mealie meal coming from behind the doors of some of the aunties kitchens. Down Renoster the line of people walking to the station to go to work file up one behind each other. Morning aunty Charmaine how are you? The aunty with the scarf would answer, "By the Grace of God we go on! "As God vir ons is wie kan dan teen ons wees? And so the chat will go until they would reach the station.

On her way back from the station in the evening it is down the roads again from Nyanga station which separates Mannenberg from Gugulethu. She would have a Shoprite bag with her each Monday evening. In the factory people sold bread, meat packets of R10 with chicken, lamb, beef pieces, penny polonies (kind of sausage made from all kinds of left over meats), potatoes, tomatoes ...all the kinds of things households would need to get through the week. Factory money lenders and food sellers knew that by Monday the ladies would be broke. They would also lend money for train tickets and so on. The aunty with the scarf would be stopped numerous times down the road by other aunties. Aunty Charmaine my husband didn't pay maintenance again! Don't you have a few slices of bread for my children. She would give her bread and just make sure she had at least 2 slices left for each of her family. The same would go for the potatoes, onions and actually everything in her packet. This is the church lady - she can't say no and she also will not say no. Because she knows when she is home she might need something from the other aunties to make her pot of food. Dankie sister Charmaine die Here sal u sien! Thank you sister Charmaine they would say the Lord will bless you.

The aunty with the scarf would reach home and realise she doesn't have an onion for her food. She would send her son to ask aunty Kaffer next door. This aunty always had because she was the money lender and chicken and eggs aunty in the road. Actually they ran the local tavern in the road and oh my dear this house was always filled with so much drama. When aunty Kaffer and her husband would fight she will run into the house of the aunty with the scarf as he would not come into that house. Aunty with the scarf was the church lady in the road and would comfort her and pray for her. A few minutes later aunty Kaffer would go back almost with a seal of the Holy Spirit to her house.

The concept of women empowerment is not a new one to me, as I grew up in this kind of environment. It's not surprising then, to say that I met my wife while studying my undergraduate degree at university. My wife completed her degree in marketing, media and communications before we settled down. She worked for a few years until our son was born nearly two years ago and now she is at home looking after him, but also running a business with me for the last year called iloveza.com where we aim to assist small businesses, and surprisingly most are owned by women.

It is not with the women who own these businesses that I struggle, but rather it is women that I worked with in previous jobs.

For most of my working career I had female managers, in fact I've only had two permanent jobs where my managers were male but both were short lived as circumstances changed causing me to change jobs.

I am all for women empowerment and love that women are taking on more roles with more responsibilities, but can they handle it?! I was always told that women can multi-task and was led to believe this to be true but working with them for almost 10 years has proven a lot different. I've noticed a few trends and it was especially prevalent in my last place of work where I was the only male amongst a team of 15 women.

Multi-tasking is definitely not a skill possessed by most women, well at least not in the work places that I have been. One task was too much for them. My last manager actually had her son sent to boarding school so that was one less thing to deal with, and either had her husband cook, or she would buy ready-made meals just before she went home like the other women who had families in my team. I'm not criticising them and I'm not saying that men shouldn't take on more household roles which some of us do, but all those husbands/boyfriends also worked, so where did they find time to still cook or look after their family when these women could not?

About 8 years ago I joined a graduate programme of a large auditing firm. Females headed the graduate programme, females also managed my work placement during the term and the HR people that I was fortunate enough to interact with, were also females. The entire experience in the year that I was there was traumatic to say the least. Badly organised and run is an understatement. None of us on the graduate programme were placed in a permanent position after the programme had ended. My role at my work placement was not only doing my work, my manager's work (who was female), but also doing my senior manager's work (who was female). The "opportunity" was given to me to do everyone's work not because it would help me gain experience; it was simply given to me because they could not handle the workload of those positions.

I personally think that the females who ran the graduate programme and my managers were incompetent at their given roles. Gender equality in the workplace is very good and should be practiced more, but I do have to draw the line when females or even males are awarded jobs that they are not qualified for just because someone is trying to make sure that the statistics of the company are not skewed.

The graduate programme didn't end well for me, as the company had me falsely arrested for a crime I did not commit. This incident left me unable to find another job for 2 years as I was blacklisted because I had exposed the programme, how it was run over the 7 years that it had been in existence with regards to the training, placement after the programme and exploitation of the students on the programme. That was my first encounter of how women operate in the business world: ruthless. You could probably say it was a really bad break-up, and now I know the meaning of the saying, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned".

In 2011, I was fortunate to be employed by an educational institution. My manager, once again was a female. I worked at the institute for a few months and was lucky enough to study my honours through them, which took me a year to complete. During the year of my studies (which I did part-time as I was working at the institute), I reached most of my sales targets (as I was in a sales position), and was one of the top salespeople in my team as well as most respected and the 'guy' our manager would send to deal with problems that arose as she was quite 'busy'. The following year as I had completed my honours in business management and had a proven sales record, I applied for other positions within the company including a sales manager position that became vacant. My sales manager was not happy with the situation, and once again I was stifled. Out of all the positions I applied for within the company and all the interviews I went for, none were successful. This was rather strange considering I met the requirements (some I was overqualified in education and in experience) of all the jobs, the interviewers all seemed to like me, but at the last minute something would always come up. I received "regret application unsuccessful" e-mails some with no reason and others with reasons like they still needed time to decide and they would need to interview more people or they just decided not to hire at that moment. This went on for months and I eventually started looking elsewhere and found a job outside of the company.

My last place of employment was at an HR outsourcing company. As mentioned before, there were only women in my team, including my manager. This is where everything that I experienced from the previous two jobs with females finally made sense to me.

I was hired to do sales for the company, but a few months in, my manager saw that I had potential to be a payroll consultant so she wanted me to learn the system, but took away my commission as she said I would receive an increase in salary once promoted. I learnt everything and a few months later I learnt how to do payroll implementations for large organisations, eventually it reached a stage where I knew everything there was to know about payroll. My manager then decided I should start shadowing her in the operations of the business. It wasn't long before I knew the entire business, and while everyone was on holiday in December I ran the business - after only being in the business for 10 months (the shortest period of any of the other employees). When it was time for me to be promoted, as I was now in a totally different role to that which I was employed to do, with a lot more responsibility, it was a very sensitive subject for my manager. There were a lot of excuses such as, the company can't afford it (even though they were hiring people in the sales position that I was in and offering them double my salary at the time) and there were bigger things to come I must just be patient. I was now doing everyone's job including my manager's as every time an employee left, I was always the one who had to carry the load.

That's when it struck me that this felt like the graduate programme all over again. My manager, like the other managers, was incompetent. She made me do all the work (like them) and was passing it off as her own (like them). When it came time for me to be rewarded (promoted/employed) it couldn't be done because I was never given credit for the work that I did.

My aim is not to criticise these women, or bad mouth them. This is just a personal account of my experiences and the unfortunate struggles that I faced working with them. Women in the 'working world' usually frown upon those who choose to stay at home to look after their families and/or run a business from home, when they should be celebrating and empowering every woman no matter what they choose to do. Their inability, in my opinion, to acknowledge the strength of other women (not in the same corporate position as them) is their downfall and this attitude as well as their attitude to us men, is what spurs on our misunderstandings. Their inability - the ones whom I've

encountered, to give credit where it's due for fear of their position, which equates to misuse of power and success, is my grievance.

Today my perspective has changed or maybe I'm just lucky. My wife and business partner has shown me once again, like my mother did, that there are women who can multi-task, are strong, are successful, and are very good mothers. My wife not only helps with the daily running of our businesses, but writes articles, and checks all the work that is done before it gets sent out. She also finds time to do catering for her home industry which she has been running for a few years. Recently, over the last few months, she has taken on the role of a reader/scribe for children with special needs at a private school that she used to work for. All of this added to probably the toughest job in the world, which is looking after a very active toddler, our son. She cooks and cleans without any help (we don't have a domestic worker or nanny), and makes sure that our son is well rounded in his educational development. This is a true strong, successful woman and mother.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

You are a woman, woman

Anthero Bowie (Judges' commendation)

You are incapable of hate, yet when you do, you do it passionately
You are incapable of anger, yet when you do, you do it ferociously
You are the stability of a nation
The very foundation of morals and values
You are the personification of purpose, your aim is to please
Sometimes you might ask yourself - Why me?
I will most gladly answer that question for you.

You are a woman, woman.
You are the very air that I breathe
You are the substance of my weary soul, you make me whole
Most importantly
You are a woman, woman

What is it about you that makes me so intoxicated
Is it because when you love, you love righteously?
Or has it got to do with the way you exude confidence in what you set your mind to
Maybe it's your extra-terrestrial beauty that is so captivating
You are breath taking.

To tell you the truth,
It can be a lot of things
but there's this one thing I'm very sure of

You are a woman, woman
And without you, there can be no me.
Without you how can I be?
Without you I will cease to exist.
Without you. Without you.

NO!

You are a woman, woman
And I salute you.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

My Mother was dead

TELFORD VICE **(Joint 2nd runner up)**

My mother lay on her back on her kitchen floor. Her eyes were closed. Her mouth was almost open, as if she had been about to say something. Through the window, the morning sunlight skipped off the sink and found her face. Her skin was a shade of grey I had not seen before. My mother was dead.

Her arms were at her sides, her legs straight, her feet more or less together. There was no sign of distress, no mess, no evidence of injury. No-one could have died more neatly if they tried. Heart failure, the coroner would say once the rituals began.

But in that moment there was neither reason nor room for ritual. There was only my mother and me. An exquisite peace kept out everything else. The world had stopped for us to say goodbye.

I knelt at her side and bent down and kissed her forehead, touching her hair as I did so. She felt, to my lips and my hand, as grey as she looked. Her lifelessness was undeniable.

I don't know how long I stayed with her, together and alone, but I know it was long enough. When I stood up, I had accepted that my mother was dead and I had satisfied myself that I had bid her farewell. Grief followed in the coming days and weeks, but my closure was complete even before I turned away from the body and felt the world start to move again.

The life of the woman I knew to be my mother had ended but her life was bigger than that. She was 41 when I was born and I was 32 when she died. I had been part of her reality for less than half her life. I knew her soul as well as my own, but there was so much I did not know about the years before I was born. What I did know only prompted bigger questions that had not been answered.

I knew one of her sisters was an alcoholic who stayed one step ahead of her husband's attempts to dry her out by hiding a bottle in every room of their house. Another sister married a Royal Air Force pilot after World War II and moved to England. Their first child was born at sea.

One of my mother's brothers, Reece, who had lost a leg in a car accident, insisted on eating his dessert before his dinner. Another, Fred, was taken prisoner at the battle of Tobruk and escaped by bribing a German soldier with a loaf of bread. He subsequently suffered from what is now called post-traumatic stress disorder. To my mother he was simply "bomb happy". Both Reece and Fred had relationships - and children - with women of colour, a truth not often spoken of in my family, and always awkwardly.

My mother herself was married with five children when my father came into her life. They never wed. That makes me a 60s love child, a bona fide bastard.

I have always worn that status like an expensive suit. It fits my personality and, for a long time, it was a defence against the disgust at my existence that seethed at me from most of my semi-siblings. How could they not despise me? I was the fracturing of their family made flesh, a walking, talking reflection of their hurt.

Or maybe I was an easy target for their guilt. My mother, a nurse, left her family because they shunned her after she contracted tuberculosis from a patient. She was quarantined in her own home, made to use separate cutlery and crockery and kept away from her children. According to her, they did not see what was wrong with that.

My parents, a man who had grown up in a reformatory after being abandoned by his family as a boy and a woman whose utterly normal life had dissolved in someone else's spit, might have made a magnificent love story. Instead their relationship was less about romance than it was about trying to be what could be called respectable.

My father was an intermittent presence in mine and my mother's lives, not least because he was jailed for drug dealing more than once. My mother earned money, and quite a reputation, as a fortune teller. I grew up between those nonconformist poles, unafraid of the weird, wary of what was deemed normal.

We lived in small towns in the Eastern Cape and spent more than one night sleeping on East London's pavements. For several years we stayed in a corrugated iron shed in the backyard of an old German woman's house. There was no garden, no electricity and no running water when we moved in. We brushed our teeth at an outside tap. But, thanks to my mother, all that changed after the first few months.

"Nobody is better than me," she would say whenever somebody gave her cause to think they thought they were. I never did. I couldn't imagine how anyone could.

When I was 20 someone smashed my father's skull and left him for dead. He survived, but as an unsteady, frail semblance of the surefooted man he had been. My mother and I were the only people he could turn to for help, and help we did. She gave him a place to stay in the small, tidy home she had finally bought. I bathed, shaved and dressed him, and cleaned him up when he suffered the seizures that were a legacy of the attack.

When he was well enough he wobbled out of our lives and towards his next drink, his next hit, his next dice with delirium. I saw him once after that, months later when my mother called to say he had turned up demanding more help. I went to her house and spent an hour or two telling him why he was no longer my father. A few years later I received news of his death. I felt nothing. I did not need closure to get over my father's death because I had nothing to get over. He was, in every way, not my mother.

She was a long way from perfect. She smoked 60 Lexingtons a day for most of the years I knew her. She added a tablespoon or three of butter to everything she cooked. She voted for the National Party because she believed that if she didn't "they will take my pension away".

Her politics were trapped in the white fear of the time. The thought of Nelson Mandela being released terrified her. She could not fathom how we would one day be ruled by a government that looked like our nation. But she was fluent in isiXhosa - which she learnt during her early years, which were spent on a farm in Komga - and eternally grateful to a woman called Ida Booi, who donated the blood that saved her life during her battle with TB. Some of her blood, my mother would enjoy saying, was black.

She taught me that nothing is without its contradictions, and that they should be celebrated. She also simplified complication with bracing directness. I was never in doubt about what my mother thought about anything. No-one was.

And yet, despite me knowing all that, the woman who lay dead on the floor in front of me remained a mystery, a story untold, a life lived richly and poorly and everything in between. Without more of the facts of that life, a photograph taken in my mother's twenties has become the focal point of my unknowing.

It is, to my mind, a picture of happiness, a snapshot of a woman in love either with someone or with life itself, or both. This was my mother before she married, before she had her first five children, before TB, before my father, before me.

She is standing in a garden wearing a sleeveless dress hemmed midway between knee and hip. Her left foot is thrust outward, toes kissing the ground. Her hands are firmly on her hips, elbows poking defiance at the world. Her head is tilted to her left. Her blonde bob dazzles like her smile. Just like it would do decades later, the sunlight has found her face.