

My Writing and Publishing Journey- From Grahamstown to U.S.A

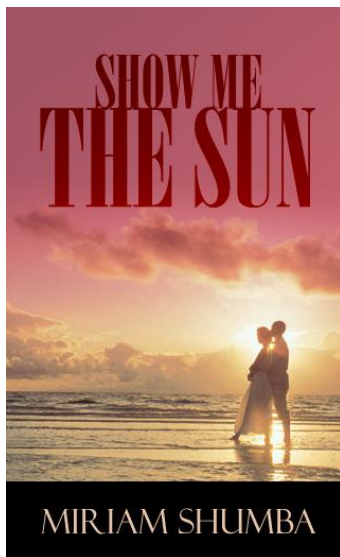


By Miriam Shumba

Rhodes University was a memorable experience in many ways. I spent four years there to get a Bachelor's Degree in Education with emphasis on Primary Education and those four years had repercussions that are still being felt today. My husband, who is also a Rhodes University Alumni, studied Accounting and Commercial Law and we decided we wanted to get married while there. We made friends from all over Africa who have remained in our lives. It was also while I was there that my first short story was published in Drum Magazine. After graduating, my husband, Gabriel, went on to join PricewaterhouseCoopers to pursue his chartered accountancy program as I began my career in teaching at a private primary school in Zimbabwe.

Early Writing Experiences

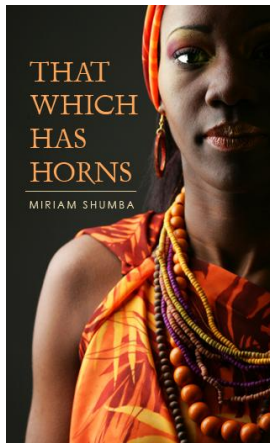
My earliest memory of enjoying story telling goes back to the time when my brother, cousins and I used to sit on a rukukwe (*Sitting Mat*) at my mother's home in Gweru to listen to my grand mother Theresa tell us stories that all began with the word, Paivepo (*Once Upon a Time*) and my siblings and I would respond Dzefunde; which is a response that meant that we were listening and paying attention, instead of falling asleep. The stories were mythical, sometimes scary but they always had a lesson in them. That warm feeling remained with me as I enjoyed creating fiction stories throughout my junior school education in comic book form. As I developed my creative art I wrote long hand in exercise books for my friends to read and enjoy during my high school days. I recall that when at 10 years of age, my mother sent one of my comics to publishers who replied me in a kind and informing letter, giving me advice and correcting the format the comic book was in. That letter surprised me and delighted me as this was my first experience with publishers.



First Novel published in the USA. "Show Me The Sun" by Miriam Shumba

Like many young adults, in high school I also kept a diary that I wrote in every day. Every seemingly significant event seemed to make its way in to the diary; such as failing a math test, or learning something new at Scripture Union meetings or was upset with a friend. The diary was always addressed to Ferry, a nickname I gave to my best friend who passed away when we were both 12. Writing that diary was a way of communicating with her but in many ways played a huge part in my love of writing and expressing what was going on around me on paper.

After being enrolled at Rhodes University I continued to write short stories in between classes and one day decided to send my short story to the publishers of Drum Magazine. I bought several copies of the magazine and sent them home for my family members to read. Upon my return to Zimbabwe I continued to write short stories for the most popular magazine at the time, Parade Magazine. I also began writing a novel that I titled, “Heart of Gold” but which was later published as “That Which Has Horns”.



Relocating

In 2001, my husband who was in the financial services industry was offered a job in the USA and the company relocated us to America. In my first few years of living in the USA, I finished writing my first novel but just kept it in boxes and didn't send it anywhere. In 2005 I began writing a new book that later became my first novel to be published, "Show Me The Sun". My inspiration for this book came from the way the media tends to dictate to people what the definition of beauty is and how young women's self-esteem is affected by the standards set by magazines, T.V and movies. I wanted to write a story about a woman who struggles with the way she looks and how that can affect her relationships with those close to her. This novel was released in January 2010. My second novel "That Which Has Horns" was also released the same year in October of 2010 even though it was the first book completed. "That Which Has Horns" is a fiction story about a family torn apart by secrets and it explores many different themes that make it a great book for book clubs. People of different cultures from mine can see the dynamics that we deal with as the people of Zimbabwe and how the economics they hear about in the media affects families and day-to-day lives of regular people.

That Which Has Horns is the novel you could say I spent all my 20s and part of my 30s with. I was never satisfied and continued to change events, characters and even the ending. As a lesson from this book, I hope people will realize that there are so many things that happen to people besides what's in the media. Yes, we have corruption, yes we have Civil Wars, yes, we problems that many developing young countries face but we also have people who fall in love, people who want to escape from reality and families

that tear each other apart for no good reason. We have many wonderful and inspiring stories to tell.

Due to my deep love of writing I know that it's something I would have continued to do even if I had not received the opportunity to get published. Each day there are fresh ways to create and explore ideas. My third novel "Chasing the Wind" is almost complete and but there are some areas that need development and explanations. Writing is one of my passions, despite it being hard work and it's exciting to create a world of people whose lives I try and control. At times, some characters seem to have a mind of their own, so I find myself taking them in a different direction than originally planned.

Writing Tips

I also enjoy encouraging other writers and in my website www.miriamshumba.com I give tips to writing and getting published as well as insight in to my writing journey. I'm still learning about the publishing business and after finding a publisher it's another world to learn how to market my work and build a platform around the work. I still consider myself a new author because I have so much to learn. However, there are several points that can be useful.

1. Be yourself, don't try and be like anybody else and this is something I had to remind myself often because after reading extensively it's easy to compare myself

to the authors I'm reading. I'm learning that I enjoy all those different styles so I should be happy with my own style.

2. Don't be afraid of critics, there will be plenty who may discourage you but you just have to believe in yourself and the gift that God has given you. The fear of criticism probably kept me from sending my books out sooner. The fear of what people would say about me and the contents of the books but now I realize that everybody will have their own opinion.
3. Find a writing critique group that's nurturing. I give credit to my critique group for completing my books. We used to meet once a month and required that I work on my writing more often.
4. Write because you love it not just for money because there's no guarantee that the months or years you put into the book will make you rich or even famous. I've always written even before I knew what a publisher was.
5. It's so much easier to write what I know very well, for example it's easier to write about a character's career if you are more familiar with it. I've chosen careers before that really stunted my writing because I wasn't sure what their day-to-day business is like. I then had to spend more time on research which is unavoidable but I feel it really slows me down when it's fiction writing.
6. If it's your passion, your dream to get published, don't give up, read about the art, go to seminars and talk to other writers who want to encourage you. I've had some rejections but I didn't give up and writing workshops have always sent me home with renewed determination to work consistently.

7. Keep a journal close by because you never know when ideas will come pouring in. I keep journals everywhere I go. So I have boxes of journals that are full of ideas, quotes and short paragraphs.
8. Above all have fun. Yes it is hard work but it should be enjoyable too.

Signing and launch of “That which Has Horns” at Barnes and Nobles, USA November 13, 2010.

