



# Why we did it

Our purpose in developing the 'My Best Teacher' booklet series was, like Jansen's, to counter negative descriptions of schools and teachers by identifying and paying tribute to good teachers. We wanted to continue his message of hope.

But, more importantly, we wanted to focus our gaze on the Foundation Phase as a critical stage of schooling which, until recently, has received little attention. We therefore felt it important to draw on the voices of our Foundation Phase group of student teachers and invite them to tell their stories. Although we did not restrict students to writing about Foundation Phase teachers, we were heartened to see that a number of students chose a Foundation Phase teacher as their best teacher, and we dedicated a section of the booklet to these stories.

Jansen acknowledges that a limitation of his book was that the advertising campaign used to seek out the stories privileged those of English speakers and people living in urban areas of South Africa. He explains how his team "could not penetrate all the small villages and towns of South Africa outside the reach of the English newspapers" (2011, p. 14). We, on the other hand, are delighted that a number of our stories originate from the distant rural areas to which Jansen refers.

Jansen indicates that another limitation of his book was that the stories chosen were written in English only. The first booklet in our 'My Best Teacher' booklet series is similarly limited. However, like Jansen, we recognise that "powerful, emotional stories of great teachers who changed young lives are often best expressed in the native language" (2011, p. 14). From 2016 onwards, we therefore invited the first-year students registered for the Education and Professional Studies course to write their best teacher stories in a language of their choice. While this made the marking and editing processes slightly more complex, we are proud of this **multi-lingual booklet** of best teacher stories.

Finally, we believe that by paying attention to the voices of our students and valuing their contributions, we are modelling good teaching practice. We hope that when our students become qualified Foundation Phase teachers, they, in turn, will value the voices of their learners and encourage them to write about and reflect on their experiences.

Enjoy reading the stories of our students' best teachers!



# Believing in all children



## We hated her at first

**A TRIBUTE TO MS MATOMELA, NATHANIEL PAMLA HIGH SCHOOL, PEDDIE, EASTERN CAPE, FROM ANELISIWE MARAMBANA**

I was raised by a single parent and have lived in Peddie for almost my whole life. Most people in my community live in poverty and battle to survive and to stay in school.

My favourite teacher at Nathaniel Pamla High School was Ms Matomela, my History and Life Orientation teacher in Grades 11 and 12. She was a loving person, but did not want people to see the big heart she had. She was very confident and liked to look presentable. Everything had to be in place when she attended a meeting and went for file moderation; she did not want to be seen as a disorganised teacher.

At first, almost all in our class hated her. We thought she was rude and that she pushed too hard. What we hated was that she compared us with the bright learners. We learnt with time, however, that she wanted us to believe that we could be like them, if only we worked a little bit harder. We made sure that we passed her subjects, just to get her off our backs. She eventually made us realise that we were not doing this just for her or our parents (though we did want to make them proud), but mainly for our future.

I came to love Ms Matomela, because she believed in us. She did not ignore her learners if she noticed that we were not interested in the subject or if there was something we did not understand. She tried by all means to believe in everyone and did not leave any learner behind. She taught us in a variety of ways, using different materials, such as books, videos and speeches to help bring the subject to life for us. Before exams, she would invite people to the school who had marked Grade 12 papers before. They would explain to us what was expected from us in the exam, the important things we needed to note and how the papers were marked.

She was prepared to explain something several times. She saw that if someone did not understand, it might mean that the learner had a different way of thinking. She would make us repeat things over and over again, because she knew how difficult it would be for us to learn without mastering the basics. She also introduced extra afternoon and morning classes. During the exams, she would call us at 4 am to make sure that we were studying. We always felt free to contact her if we had any problems.

Ms Matomela understood that learners have problems and often suffer from stress or even depression. She would not give up on learners who were not doing well or were unmotivated. She might shout at us and criticise our work, but she acted like a parent to us, supported us, asked what was going on and pushed us to do better. She would sometimes ask to meet with a learner after classes or call their parents to find out what was troubling them. One time, when we were failing Geography, she called my friend and I and asked what the problem was, even though she did not teach the subject. We explained and she listened, encouraged us to work harder and gave us tips on how to pass Geography.

After the Matric results had been released, learners posted how thankful they were to Ms Matomela for pushing them to work hard. It was only then that we realised all that she had done to make sure that we passed. I learned dedication and love of the job from her and am forever grateful for the opportunity I have been given to become a teacher and emulate her dedication.



**A TRIBUTE TO THE LATE MS TYUMBU, MURRAY HIGH SCHOOL, PLETTENBERG BAY, WESTERN CAPE, FROM SIYABULELA MAKONZA**

**T**wo years back, Murray High School welcomed a young, elegant, optimistic and curious teacher onto their staff. She was to become a young sister to our teachers and a very big sister to the learners. Ms Tyumbu was our Grade 11 Accounting teacher and our class teacher. She was a straight talker, a teacher who would never mislead any learner. She was disorganised at times, but always overcame that. Indeed, she was a candle that consumed itself to give light and wisdom to others.

Promoting confidence in a learner is an important role of a teacher, but learners also need to know when they are wrong. Ms Tyumbu taught me the great advantage of being confident, together with the bad results of being over-confident – confident even if you are wrong. True confidence, for her, was the reward of education; some days, she would say, “My child, you can never be confident if you are uneducated.” That has kept me going until now.

Ms Tyumbu was a persistent and patient teacher, who didn’t give up on us easily or look for excuses when things were not going according to her plan. In class she would just say, “Do what is required, not what you think you know.” She understood that learners’ minds do not all function the same; since she was thoughtfully persistent, it became easy for her to relate to all levels in our class. This motivated me to become a teacher and take full responsibility for the success of my future learners.

She taught us to be friendly, not only when it suited us, but at all times. Friendship is a way of creating unity among learners as well as teachers. Ms Tyumbu taught us that sometimes we needed to put our differences aside and form one united group of learners, who work together, not only for personal gain, but also to uplift the reputation of the school at large. In this, she was a shining example to us.

An educator teaches theory, but a great teacher also gives life lessons which may be useful to learners at a later stage. I was inspired by the way in which Ms Tyumbu brought the outside world to us whilst teaching. Since she was not too old, it was easy for her to relate to us and to show us how to conduct ourselves in the outside world. She always said to us, “A great teacher always reflects on life’s lived experiences; by doing this you might save someone else from making the same mistakes.”

Her greatness inspired me to become a teacher who always aims to be better, a teacher who wants change, improvements and better results; a teacher who makes no promises before acting on promises made previously. Ms Tyumbu inspired me to become a candle that consumes itself just to light the way for others, a nurturer of the world’s greatest resource: children. Ms Tyumbu taught me that a teacher does not just transfer information, but teaches from the heart. A great teacher inspires, encourages, instructs, influences and is also a mentor to many.

We were still getting used to her when God decided that her time on earth had to end. He was quick to take her, but we will always be grateful for what she gave to us. The Lord says in John 10:28, “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*” I hope that wherever she is, her eyes are on us. I would like to thank her for being a God-sent angel in our academic lives. Thanks for the role you chose to take in our lives, for being that wisdom candle that consumes itself to give light.



# The wisdom candle





**A TRIBUTE TO MR DANIELS, GELVAN PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL, PORT ELIZABETH, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SESAKHE NTSHANGASE**

**M**r Daniels was short in height and had a big belly that complemented his big presence. He would take very rapid strides while teaching, walking up and down to all corners of the classroom. We followed his every move, together with all his gestures. He spoke fast with his Coloured accent; it was easy to get lost in the words if you did not pay careful attention.

Gelvan Park School was situated in a Coloured area and had much of what made any primary school appealing: a great painting on the wall with roofs and trimmings painted brown, which was the school's colour and also dominated our uniforms. There were different playing fields for sports such as netball, cricket and soccer, and the school was inclusive in terms of race, religion and ethnicity. On my first day of school, I felt anxious. Living in Port Elizabeth for the first time seemed like mission impossible. How could I even begin to interact and form a love connection with this new environment when I had been born and bred deep in the Transkei where there were few resources and our command of the English language seemed inferior? The struggle ahead of me lay in overcoming my lack of competence in understanding and speaking English. I could only make out the meaning, to some extent, when I read the language. Starting in a new school in Grade 6 where I was taught by an English mother-tongue speaker for the first time proved difficult. I did not comprehend what was being taught, and Mr Daniels' style was abrupt, making no allowances for my shortcomings.

A girl who sat next to me in class occasionally translated what was being said into my own language for me. Every other learner saw me as a stupid girl from the village. I had to learn the ways of the new environment in order to fit in. One day, nervous as I was, I decided to raise my hand and respond to a particular question. I mumbled an answer, which happened to be correct! Laughter broke out; I still felt like the village girl with bad grammar and pronunciation. After this incident, however, Mr Daniels took a greater interest in my academic progress. He had noticed that I could think. He used to tell me how well I was improving and what a hard worker I was, something which was evident in my marks. I spent a month in the under-performing class, until Mr Daniels broke the news that he had to send one learner to Grade 6B, the higher-performing class. When he announced that that learner was to be me, I tried to resist, for I had already made good friends who understood my position. My resistance was in vain, and in time I adapted to my new space and worked to the best of my ability.

Mr Daniels saw something which even I did not recognise and he nurtured it to grow. He taught me the important virtue of courage. He taught me to be courageous in all I do and to never stop believing in my abilities.

This teacher played a huge role in how I saw and carried myself as a person. He boosted my confidence at a time when it was essential. He taught me that I had the world in my hands and I could do anything with it, even when people believed otherwise of me. He was the rainbow in my clouds. How then to pay him back for his efforts other than to work towards being a rainbow in someone else's cloud?

# He spotted competence I never knew existed



**A TRIBUTE TO MISS PHUMLA QUNTU, NOMBULELO  
SECONDARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM THANDIWE STUURMAN**

I started schooling at Nombulelo Secondary School in 2012, when I was in Grade 8. Nombulelo is one of the largest schools in Grahamstown and offers tuition from Grade 8 to Grade 12.

Historically, the school had a reputation for producing some of the best overall Matric results in the eastern part of Grahamstown and, after a period of deterioration and a few glitches, the Matric results were once again improving when I studied there. Indeed, that school had a number of good teachers, but until I was in Miss Quntu's Matric class of 2016, I had never encountered such a dedicated, passionate and accommodating teacher.

Miss Quntu taught me isiXhosa Home Language. She was middle-aged, short and medium-sized in stature, and wore her hair in a natural style. She was a Christian and a respected teacher. The first day in her class, she told us what she expected from us and how we were going to work together. She said we were going to work hard, whether we liked it or not, and if there were people who did not know why they were at school, they must not waste their time sitting in her classroom.

Miss Quntu was a strict teacher, wanting to push her learners so that we could succeed. She told us each and every day that there would be no one who would fail her subject; we would know all the things that she taught us by heart. What I liked most about her was that she wanted every one of us to pass and she ensured that there was no learner who would be left behind.

Unlike the teachers who focused only on learners who were doing well and at the top of the class, Miss Quntu invested extra time in struggling learners and gave them extra support. I remember a boy in my class who came from a private school where he had never learned isiXhosa. Miss Quntu held extra classes for him and other struggling learners.

Miss Quntu had good teaching strategies. She gave us homework each and every day, often giving us past exam papers to answer. She ensured that everyone engaged in the lessons. When we were analysing novels and poems, for instance, everyone got a chance to say something.

She was a professional teacher and became angry when we did not know something that we should have been taught in previous grades. During the holidays, she gave us extra classes because she wanted us to be well prepared for the examinations. She even agreed that her classroom be used for group study.

Miss Quntu was always aiming for the best. If you did not do well in her test or assignment, she would give you a chance to rewrite it. As a result of her hard work, Nombulelo Secondary School Matric learners were known for getting distinctions in isiXhosa. I never thought that I would get a distinction in my Matric final results, but Miss Quntu made that possible.

When we had a prize giving at school, the learners voted that she receive the best teacher award; she deserved it. She inspired me to become a teacher like her. Teachers, like Miss Quntu, who outshine others are rare. The distinction that I obtained because of her was an advantage when I was applying for the BEd degree in Foundation Phase teaching, as isiXhosa is the Language of Learning and Teaching in Foundation Phase. It was also an advantage when I was applying for the Funza Lushaka bursary because isiXhosa is their priority if you are in the Eastern Cape.

Thank you, Miss Quntu, for bringing out the best in me. You are an inspiration, a special teacher who sees a tomorrow in every child's eye.



# No learner will be left behind





**A TRIBUTE TO MR MSIPHA, EBENEZER SECONDARY SCHOOL, PORT ALFRED, EASTERN CAPE, FROM LUXOLO BINDA**

**M**r Msipha taught me during my years at Ebenezer Secondary School in Port Alfred. He was my best teacher and was also a priest. Everyone respected him, though some saw him as a fool because when people treated him badly, he always forgave them. Mr Msipha always listened and tried to help. He would go the extra mile, not for one specific learner, but for every learner.

Mr Msipha never judged. An important lesson he taught me was not to judge people or try to fix them, as if something is wrong with them. He used to say, "If you are a friend, help others grow. People often advise you not to associate yourself with [the]wrong people, but fail to remind you to be the one who shows them the light. Showing humanity means helping someone else unconditionally and regularly, whether it be emotionally, financially or mentally. It means putting someone else before yourself."

In my school, there was a girl who had been cursed. She had demons, known in isiXhosa as *amafufunyane*. Normally, a person who is cursed is excluded from society and avoided or seen as bad luck. If you are ever seen around such a person you are also considered evil. This girl was always alone and was always bullied. Some learners used to throw things at her and call her names. As a result, she missed school a lot or sometimes broke down while she was at school. Everyone was against her; she had no friends and no one to talk to. On her school bag she wrote, "Do not try to find me, I am a lost soul." It was quite clear that she needed help, but the world gave no sympathy and no place of refuge.

Only a brave and willing person could help the young girl. Mr Msipha took this responsibility, taking the risk of being called names and seen as an outsider. When he started, everyone lost respect for him. They said he would fail. Some even said, "There is only one God and his name is not Msipha." Even though such insults were thrown at him, Mr Msipha did not stop, and after about two weeks people started seeing changes. The demons used to talk and the girl would wreck things and every time this happened, Mr Msipha would pray. One morning, during assembly, the girl started breaking things in Mr Msipha's presence. He started praying and begged the school as a whole to take part and pray as well. They did this until she calmed down and no longer seemed to be suffering or showing any demonic symptoms.

Time passed, and when we were about to write our final exams, the girl was appointed as our motivational speaker. Everyone was shocked, as she started talking about religion and education working together to build a person.

Through this experience of Mr Msipha's work with the girl who was cursed, I have learnt a lot of things about humanity, religion and teaching. Many people today have lost sight of humanity and good will. Education is more than the theories we learn; it is alive and always renewing itself. As we live, we learn new things every day.

I hope this story will be fruitful and help others as much as it helped me and others who were part of the story. We need to understand that one hand must wash the other before they can both wash the face. In order for one to be able to move, one needs the support of another.

He went where everyone  
**feared** to go and  
**found treasure**



# Foundation Phase

## stories and classrooms

Choosing one specific teacher as the best was difficult for me, as I have had many wonderful teachers. As I thought back over all my teachers, however, there was one who definitely stood out above the others. Aunty Andrea was my Grade R teacher. Although I was in Grade R a very long time ago, I still remember the impact she had on my life and on the lives of all in the Giraffe Class.

Aunty Andrea was a blonde, beautiful and religious young lady who always wore skirts. She was passionate about teaching and full of love to give. I enjoyed her energetic presence; she would put her heart and soul into every activity. The Giraffe Class always had fun with Aunty Andrea. We had a beautiful, print-rich environment. The walls were colourful and inviting, filled with information and picture posters. The classroom was filled with toys and educational areas. The gardens were colourful with flowers and green grass and filled with exciting jungle gyms and equipment. Rocking horses, fireman poles and barrels were some of my favourites.

Every morning, during ring time, we started off with a fun and enjoyable activity and sang religious songs such as The whole world in his hands and Jesus loves all the little children. These two were my favourites. At the end of every day, we listened to classical music, an enjoyable and calming end to the day.

Aunty Andrea made all her learners believe that she had a pet owl that kept an eye on us all the time. This owl would come and visit us at home through the week and see if we were being naughty or good. Every Sunday night, this owl would go to Aunty Andrea and report back on what he had seen that week. In ring time on Monday morning, Aunty Andrea would tell us everything that the owl had seen. I remember one day, she told me that the owl saw me clean up all my toys very neatly, without my mom even telling me to do so! The next Monday I was rewarded and I was so proud of myself. Even though I loved this owl and got excited to hear my name being called out on a Monday, I was a little afraid of him. I was nervous that he was watching me all day! But I believe that this special owl encouraged me to clean up and be a good and kind child.

Little did my classmates and I know that our parents would write down something that we had done well or something that we could be rewarded for and drop it into a box when they took us to school in the morning. Aunty Andrea would then read off the little pieces of paper to us every Monday morning. My classmates and I were so excited about this amazing and mysterious owl that we didn't even realise it. To this day, I love owls and I always will. Aunty Andrea started my passion for owls in the Giraffe Class. From the day I decided to become a Foundation Phase teacher, I wanted to have an imaginary pet owl just like Aunty Andrea.

There was never a moment when Aunty Andrea was too busy for her learners. She was truly a mother figure at school, the first person to go to when you grazed your knee or even if you needed a hug. She was an amazing and loving teacher and I am blessed to have had the opportunity to be in her classroom and to learn from her. I hope that one day my classroom is filled with love, just as hers was.



**A TRIBUTE TO AUNTY ANDREA, TRINITY HOUSE  
PRIMARY SCHOOL, JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG,  
FROM KAYLEY ALLMAN**

# 'Owl' you need is love





***A TRIBUTE TO MISS SC HOBONGWANA, GRAHAMSTOWN  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN,  
EASTERN CAPE, FROM NOSIPHO BELWANA***

**M**iss Hobongwana was principal of the Seventh-Day Adventist School I attended in my primary school years. She was old-fashioned and very religious, an elderly person with a young mind. Everybody was afraid of her because she was strict and unapproachable, but there was something about her that made her my favourite teacher.

Miss Hobongwana was a go-getter and a hard worker. She had a lot of confidence in herself. She did not teach a specific subject, although we did have a Religious Education period with her on Fridays. She would teach us about self-discipline, morality, the love of God and how to walk a righteous life as a Christian. She was intelligent and taught us a great deal in spite of having no specific subject. She was also a netball coach and taught us environmental studies. There is a lot that Miss Hobongwana knew and was involved in. I enjoyed being taught by her and my behaviour and mentality changed radically through her influence.

In Grade 3 I learnt about the parts of the tongue and their functions. So that the information would be memorable, she made up a song for us which I knew by heart and which was automatically stored in our long-term memories: "Hyoid bone, epiglottis, fungiform, filiform, vallate papillae". She also helped us remember things we had been taught by other teachers by making songs out of particular sections. For instance, the seasons of the year: "SUMMER! Summer is very hot. WINTER! Winter is cold. SPRING! Spring and Autumn. Ah! Ah! In the middle".

Miss Hobongwana was generous, one who cared not only for the well-being of her learners but also for her community. She had a soup kitchen at her house on Thursdays, and she used to sell snacks at school and then donate her takings to the needy. She also bought uniforms for learners who came from disadvantaged homes.

She taught me the importance of humanity and walking in love, of helping a person in need. In primary school, when someone lost a parent or a family member, we would donate money. There was also the time when a girl burnt her home down by mistake, while she was cooking. Each person donated R2 and the teachers contributed to help the learner and her family with clothes and furniture. Although it was not enough, the thought counted a lot. Miss Hobongwana also asked the church to help the girl.

Miss Hobongwana showed me that being a teacher does not simply mean standing in front of a class packed with learners; it means being a parent to those learners. She showed me that it is important that, as a teacher, you treat your learners like your own children, build a warm environment and nurture them.

I want to be a teacher because I want to be like my role model. She made me believe in myself when I had no confidence and whenever I made mistakes, she would tell me, "Failing does not mean you are dumb; we learn by making mistakes. The more you fail and recover and improve, the better you are as a person". I also want to change the fixed mindsets of the learners who think that if you fail, you are dumb. I want to make my learners better than they were before, by having a positive effect on their lives and making sure that they all pursue their dreams. I want to touch the hearts of the learners and transform their lives.

**Opening  
the mind and  
touching the  
heart of a  
young  
learner**



**A TRIBUTE TO MISS DLAMINI, NTLAVINI PRIMARY SCHOOL, MOUNT AYLIFF, EASTERN CAPE, FROM ATHENKOSI JIBA**

I wish I could see her and tell her how grateful I am. Miss Dlamini was my second mother and the best teacher I ever met. When I was at school, I felt as if I was at home.

She was my Grade 1 teacher at Ntlavini Primary School, a rural school in Mount Ayliff. When I arrived in Grade 1, everyone in my class could write his or her name, except me. I could not read vowels and I could not write anything, and I felt so stupid because my classmates were able to do all these things. What made me love and admire Miss Dlamini was that she taught me to write my name. I remember how difficult it was, as my name was very long. She had to give me special attention. She even made a tag for me with my name written on it and told me to stick on my chest.

Miss Dlamini was patient with me, although I was very slow. She told me that I must believe in myself, and by the end of the first term I was one of the top learners in her classroom. My mother and I were very thankful to Miss Dlamini, because if she had not dedicated her time to me, I would not have been able to achieve all the things that I had achieved by the end of that term.

Miss Dlamini made me love school because she gave me positive messages. She taught me how to behave, as a girl. She taught me how to take care of myself and showed me my responsibilities, as a learner and as a child at home. Every day, when I got home, I would put on my mother's clothes and imitate everything that Miss Dlamini had done in the classroom. I was inspired by her work and that is why I want to be a teacher. I also want to spread the love that I got from her, and make children believe that school is a good place to be and a home away from home.

I want to inspire learners, as Miss Dlamini inspired me. I want to change children's lives as she changed mine. I believe that if a child is discouraged at an early stage, that child will grow up having a negative view of himself and the world. If a child is told that she or he is a failure, that child will not want to do anything, because of that negative attitude that has been instilled into her or him.

I am grateful that I met Miss Dlamini because of all the things that she said to me, which I still remember, even today. The words that she said to me are the ones that keep me going, even here at Rhodes University. I remember at the beginning of this year, I was struggling with Linguistics. It was difficult for me to hear and understand what the lecturer was saying. I got only 4 out of 10 for the mini test that we wrote and other people got higher marks than I did. At first I felt so bad, but then I remembered the time when I was struggling to write my name in Grade 1. Miss Dlamini said that there would be no light if there was no darkness. Those words made me realise that failing is part of the journey. If I do not fail, I will not learn anything. What I need to do is to examine what went wrong and fix my mistake. I have passed all my mini tests and term tests since that day. And even today, I believe everything is possible if you have patience and dedicate yourself to what you want to achieve.



# School, a home away from home





***A TRIBUTE TO MS MAMBINJA, NTABA MARIA PRIMARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SIPHESIHLE MANANA***

**T**hroughout my schooling career I have crossed paths with teachers who carry out their jobs with love and a huge sense of appreciation for their profession as well as others who tend to show less passion and commitment to their jobs, but ultimately do their jobs and carry out their educational responsibilities.

My favourite teacher was my Grade 1 teacher at Ntaba Maria Primary School: Ms Mambinja. Ms Mambinja was an exceptional teacher who never came to school unprepared for lessons. She exposed us not only to educational content but also to insights on how to become good and productive learners. She showed us that school was not all about progressing to the next grade, but about learning all the fundamentals of education in your current grade.

Ms Mambinja always constructed her lessons in a direct and concise manner that was easy to follow. Thinking back, I realise that this showed high levels of planning and good organisational skills. Her lessons never lacked humour and were filled with joy, exhilaration and excitement. Ms Mambinja never looked down upon us and respected us despite the huge discrepancy in age between us. She taught me that respect is a two-way street and that no matter how age sets two people apart, respect should always be present.

Ms Mambinja instilled a passion for excellence in me and taught me that two heads are better than one, giving rise in me to a liking for collaboration. Teamwork is one of the underrated tools of success, especially in a world where people are so individualistic and tend to fend for themselves. Ms Mambinja taught me that teamwork was an important educational tool, essential for the holistic development of a learner.

Having insight into their personal lives is important in understanding learners and Ms Mambinja went the extra mile in ensuring that she knew all the important details of our lives. She had substantial information about our family backgrounds because of close ties with most of our parents.

Ms Mambinja was a dynamic teacher who always strove for greatness. She knew that no matter how intricate or arduous a task, applying yourself will always ensure success, which does not come overnight, but through sheer determination.

# Teamwork

is one of the  
underrated  
tools of  
success



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS SHEILA MTHOMBENI, SOZIZWE  
PRIMARY SCHOOL, QUEENSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM ABONGILE MVANA**

I was at my new school, Sozizwe Primary, and it was the first time I had been in a location. The school building was in good condition, the classrooms had windows, good furniture and a proper floor. The school also had a feeding scheme. There were playgrounds and play equipment. I came from a village called Kamastone in the Eastern Cape, where I lived with my grandfather. My mother had just passed away, so my aunt had taken me to stay with her. This is how I came to study at Sozizwe Primary School.

I remember my first day as if it were yesterday. I did not have a uniform, so I was wearing my black skirt and a white shirt. I came into a tidy, beautiful classroom and met this beautiful teacher. She was pale in complexion and knew how to dress. Her name was Sheila Mthombeni and she was my Grade 3 teacher. The very first day she saw me, she fell in love with me, and would always ask me to help her with packing books or tidying her table. I enjoyed the attention that I got. As a result, I wanted to be the best that I could be so that I would not disappoint her.

I had had a very bad past, because in the place I came from, there was no-one who believed in me. Nobody in the village wanted to be my friend and teachers from my former school would tell other kids not to associate themselves with me, because I was bad influence. All this had happened to me because I stole R10 from a friend of mine. I also do not know what came over me, because I was not in need of any money; in fact, I was just greedy. From that time on, I had been stigmatised in my home village.

When I received such love and attention from Mrs Mthombeni I was blown away. I did not want to mess that up. This teacher treated every child as if the child were her own. After meeting her, I settled into my new school, made friends and had a positive life.

We had an event at my school and, surprisingly, Mrs Mthombeni chose me to make a speech. I was nervous because I had never stood and addressed a group of people in my life. Mrs Mthombeni took me through everything; she told me what to say, how to say it and how to behave while I presented my speech. The day came and, as I delivered my speech, I tried to remember all that she had said to me. After my presentation, she hugged me with pride – and even cried a little. All the teachers were surprised. That day alone changed the way I viewed myself; I realised that I was just as important as anyone else.

Mrs Mthombeni knew her work and how to handle her classroom. When we were reading a book about animals she made costumes for all of us in class so that we looked like the animals in the book and helped us to dramatise the book. Everyone had their own lines and acted like the animal they portrayed. She gave us her undivided attention and called other teachers to watch us as we presented the play.

Today I want to become a teacher because she taught me that great teachers produce great learners. Through her I saw that being a teacher requires more than just going into a classroom and saying that you are a teacher and that children should fear you. I saw that a teacher must be humble, creative and filled with great enthusiasm, as you are dealing with a very valuable treasure: someone else's future.



She turned a  
**thief** into a  
soon-to-be  
**graduate**



# Going beyond the call of duty



**A TRIBUTE TO MR HEM, AMAZIZI SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL, MPEKWENI LOCATION, PEDDIE, EASTERN CAPE, FROM VUYOKAZI JACK**

## Follow your calling

The idea of being in High School was scary and exciting for me, particularly because I was to attend Amazizi Senior Secondary School. The school was famous for being strict, full of bullies, having some scary teachers and some scary boys too. It was also recognised for its high pass rates in the villages of the Peddie district. There was one particular teacher, Mr Hem, who was famous for being strict, who did not like a chaotic environment and was committed to his job..

In 2010, I was admitted to Grade 8 at the school. Finally, I was to meet the famous Mr Hem. He was of average height and always had his *chiskop* shaped to perfection. When you first saw his serious face, you would swear he hardly ever smiled. He did not teach me in Grade 8 through Grade 11, but because he was the deputy principal, he always walked around the school, from class to class, making sure learners behaved, studied, and did not make too much noise. He was also a story-teller. If there was no teacher in a class, he would be our motivational speaker. That was when I noticed how much he loved his job.

Mr Hem trusted us, he was always hopeful and he saw capability in us. He never gave up on his learners, even if not all cared to take notice of what he said. He would say it anyway, hoping that we would listen and find it meaningful.

One day he told us about his own school days. He told us he had not cared about what he had and did not have at school; he and his classmates were all there on the same mission, and that made them the same. At school he was a dedicated learner and a hard worker. During break time, he and his friends used to buy a Drink O'Pop and dry, brown bread and eat that for lunch. They did not care what they ate; the goal was to get full and get back to their books. As I grow up, each day more of his stories make more sense.

When I lost my dad in 2012, when I was doing Grade 10, Mr Hem became like a father to me. I respected him and always wanted to make him proud; it used to hurt when I disappointed him.

In Grade 12, Mr Hem taught me. Being a great believer in God, he liked to quote one of Wesley's hymns in class when something wrong happened or when he was about to announce results: *Nkosi yam ubundithanda, ekulahlekeni kwam!* (My Lord you loved me, when I was lost). We found it amusing. If he saw that your grades were low all of a sudden, he would not let it pass; he would try to talk to you and ask if there was anything he could do to help.

I never saw a more optimistic teacher than Mr Hem. He invested time in his learners and worked on weekends to help learners out. The love he had for his job made him, to me, the best teacher. He told us that you always need to find your calling, and teaching was his. He always said that if you choose a career, you are choosing money, and that might be the biggest mistake of your life, because you won't enjoy it or do it well.

Thank you, Mr Hem, for being my best teacher. I was blessed to have a teacher like you. Thanks for not giving up on us. Now I am proud to say that teaching is my calling too. You are the reason I chose this career. I cannot wait to be a best teacher to someone else.  
*Enkosi Gcwanini!!!*



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS EREN EUJEN, MARY WATERS HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM GCOBISA MAKALO**

I come from an area where, once you have completed Grade 12, it is expected of you to get a job and make a living for yourself.

One particular teacher played an important role in my life by making me want more than that for myself. As a result, I am now at Rhodes University, studying towards a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase teaching.

We had lots of problems at my high school: there were no computer labs, no fences, unclean toilets and, most of the time, a shortage of teachers.

My Grade 12 English teacher fell ill at the beginning of the year and was sent for an operation. We were falling behind on the syllabus. Mrs Eujen had already retired; she was old, but her heart was full of love and passion for teaching. When she heard the sad story of Grade 12 learners not having an English teacher, she felt that she could not just sit back and do nothing about it, so she came back to teach us. She was not paid for teaching us; she did it out of the goodness of her heart.

Mrs Eujen was a confident teacher. When she walked into the classroom, and even when she was in the school yard, I could literally feel her energy. This energy spread to most of the learners in our class, including me. Mrs Eujen was also confident in her knowledge of her subject, English. I could see that she had a lot of teaching experience from the way that she interacted with the learners.

She was also interested in drama and that assisted her in her teaching. When we studied Othello, she understood it dramatically, and was therefore able to explain it very well. She was also loud, cheerful and positive. Unfortunately, because of age, she had chest problems and would cough a lot. However, she did not allow that to get her down and would quickly get on with her work. Mrs Eujen knew exactly what to say and when to say it; she also gave good advice and shared her tricks for tackling a question and studying effectively.

I remember how shy I used to be when I had to do presentations. In Grade 12, I gained confidence, as Mrs Eujen made it comfortable for me. She would say something positive before I started with my presentation, such as "Relax, take your time, you can do this!" During the presentation she would sit on one of the learner's desks, smiling and listening. There was no judgement in her eyes, only love and care.

Mrs Eujen's faith in me changed me for the better; I did not want to disappoint her. From having a habit of sitting at the back with my friends, I began to sit in front, to arrive early in class and to focus throughout the lesson. I studied hard because of her words, "I know that you can do it!" Unlike most other teachers, who did not visit the examinations hall when we were writing, Mrs Eujen would come and check up on us an hour before the exam started, to wish us good luck.

Before the year ended, our actual English teacher got better and came back. I was glad that she was feeling well, but I was sad and unwilling to let go of Mrs Eujen. However, Mrs Eujen's parting words were, "Make yourselves, your families and your teachers proud, and make me proud". I carried those words with me throughout the final exams.

Mrs Eujen inspired me to become a teacher who is able to inspire young minds, boost their self-esteem and make them enjoy learning. I will forever be thankful to her. She was like a guardian angel who saw us in trouble and gave a helping hand.



# Angels do exist





**A TRIBUTE TO MR GEORGE LAMANI, NATHANIEL NYALUZA  
HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM TEMBALETHU MBEMA**

**T**eachers spend a great deal of time with us, sharing stories and teaching. Some of the stories are just fun stories, but there are those which change people's lives, just like the one which influenced and changed my path through life. This story is about Mr Lamani and why he was a wonderful teacher to me.

George Lamani taught isiXhosa and was also the rugby coach at Nathaniel Nyaluza High School. He was good at making his subject easy to understand and learn. If you saw him, you would think that nobody at school liked him. You wouldn't see the other side of him until you talked to him and found out for yourself. The only thing Mr Lamani cared for was education. He wanted to see us happy at all times and worked hard to make us learn and love school. He was a teacher who liked to spend break times in his classroom, to be available to learners who needed help with school work or with any other difficulties. He believed that if he spent his time in the staff room at lunch time, he would never know what was happening in learners' lives. He believed it was his duty to share everything with us that would influence us to love school and become better people in life one day.

As an adolescent learner, I visited Mr Lamani in his classroom and we spent about half an hour talking about the importance of educating learners. When he asked me why I was there to visit him, I told him that I wanted to ask, "Why are you always alone in the classroom?" He took my question very seriously, saying, "It's a long story, which could take time to tell you". I said I wanted to know the story. He told me that there were a number of things which kept him in the classroom. People thought he had no friends, but these people were wrong; he had many friends, even outside school; he mentioned other rugby coaches as examples. He said that the most important thing that kept him inside his classroom was his wish to be available for learners to come and talk about the situations that made them feel sad or happy, or things that were happening at home which made it difficult for them to learn. He believed that at school there was '*NO my space and time*' for teachers. He said staying in the staff room would prevent him from helping learners. He believed that a learner could only approach a teacher if that teacher was alone in his classroom. Mr Lamani was not just a teacher but a life coach; he was interested not only in teaching, but in looking to help every learner feel happy at school and to know that they belonged.

In conclusion, I believe that a teacher should be like Mr Lamani and do exactly as Mr Lamani was doing. As a teacher, I need to bear in mind that a teacher is also a parent and counsellor, available at any time, because learners at school have issues and need the help of teachers.

# There is 'NO my space and time' for teachers



**UMBULELO ONGAZENZISIYO KUTITSHALA WAM  
OWAYEFUNDISA KWISIKOLO SAMABANGA APHEZULU,  
UMNUMZANA GABRIEL ALGUHUS OWAYEFUNDISA  
IZIFUNDO ZENZULULWAZI PHAYA KUMHLABA WASE  
NTSHONA KOLONI.FROM PHATHISANANI NGQONO**

**A**pha kulombhala ndizokuthetha ngoyena titshala wam owandincedayo kakhulu ngexesha ndisesikolweni. Ndimbona njenge qhawwe kum! Esikolweni ndandingumntwana othule kakhulu, eyona nto yayibangela ukuba ndibe ngumntwana othuleyo yayikuba ndandifika kwesisikolo saseKapa ndivela kwilali zaseMpumakoloni. Ukufika kwam kwesisikolo ndafumana uxinzelelo kakulu. Eyonanto yayibangela ukuba kubenzima kum yayiyindlela otitshala besisikolo babefundisa ngayo, yayingaqhelekanga kum konke konke. Imizekelo yayisenziwa ngotitshala bethu egumbini lokufundela yayiyimizekelo elungiselwelwe abo bakhulele eKapa okanye ezidolophini. Izinto ezininzi zazisithi xa zicaciswa ndifumane ukubhideka ngakumbi xa kufundiswa izifundo ze Geography Science. Kwakusithiwa xa kucaciswa into ethile kusetyenziswe umzekelo wendawo ezithile zalapho eKapa lonto yayindifaka engxakini kuba ndandiye ndilahlekelwe kakhulu ngumxholo lowo ngenxa yokuba ndingalazi iKapa.

Ndithe ngelixa ndisenza ibanga leshumi emva kokuba ndandisele ndincamile ukuba izifundo ze-Science andinakuze ndiphinde ndiziphumelele kwafika utishala ogama lingu Alguhus. Nangona wayengathethi ulwimi lwesiXhosa kwaye engenguye owebala lam indlela awayefundisa ngayo yayindenza ndizonwabele kakhulu izifundo zakhe. Umnumzana Alguhus wayezama ngandlela zonke ukuba wonke umfundi axhamle okanye acacelwe koko akufundisayo nokuba usuka kwindawo enjani na imizekelo yakhe yayingenamkhethe kwaye yayingacaluli abanye abantu. Okunye okwandenza ndizonwabele izifundo zika titshala Alguhas yayikukuba yayingumntu owayenomdla kakulu kwinkcubeko yethu, sasiyazi ukuba ngexesha lakhe lokufundisa nathi sizomfundisa nto ngenkcubeko yethu okanye amagama athile kulwimi lwethu angathi awasebenzise xa echaza okanye ecacisa okuthile kwisifundo sakhe.

Okunye utishala awandinceda ngako kukuba wayenenkathalo eninzi, abo babesokola ngezifundo ezo wayezinika ithuba nabo ukuba abafundise ecaleni emva kokuphuma kwesisikolo. Ndaye ndaxhamla ke nam apho wayencama ixesha lakhe ahlale nathi ukuphuma kwesisikola ecacisa kwakhona oko ebekufundisile emini kwakhona ngendlela ezahlukeneyo. Maxa wambi wayede asibize nangemigqibelo ukuba sizoshwankathela konke oko bekusenziwa phakathi evekini, kulapho besifumana ithuba lokubuza imibuzo singenaxhala lokubizwa ngamagama athile ngabanye abafundi abakhawulezayo ukuqonda.

Umnumzana Alguhus ebekrelekrele kakhulu, ebesithi nangona besifundela iScience kwigumbi elingafanelekanga kuba esikolweni ibingekho iScience laboratory; utitshala ebekwazi ukusifundisa ngendlela ezoba umfanekiso ezingqondweni zethu ukuze sicacelwe ngakumbi. Utitshala wethu ebeyenza iScience ibeyinto ebonakalayo ibengathi zizinto esizenza mihla le qha thina sibe singaqapheli ukuba senza iScience. Umnumzana Alguhus ebethatha kanye imizekelo wezi zinto sizenza imihla nezolo ukucacisa oko asifundisa kona. Kungako ndisithi utitshala wam ogama lingu Gabriel Alguhus ndimbona njengeqhawe kuba ukuba ibingeyomisebenzi yakhe ngendingekho apha namhlanje eRhodes Dyunivesiti.



# Utishala owayekholelwa kubo bonke abafundi bakhe!





**A TRIBUTE TO MR ZENGENI, ST MATTHEWS SECONDARY SCHOOL, ROCKVILLE, SOWETO, GAUTENG, FROM NTOKOZO NXUMALO**

**A**s a secondary school learner, I found that I disliked a lot of things, not because I really did, but because I told myself that I was not good at them. Mathematics was one of them. In my early years, it had been my favourite subject, because I was the learner who always got the highest marks. As the years progressed and I journeyed into high school, mathematics was not the same; I disliked it because it was 'so hard'.

At St Matthews, there was no such thing as 'hard'. The teachers there were the best. Each of them had a sense of discipline, urgency, passion and motivation. They created an environment where we could express our views, find our identity and develop our leadership skills. Mr Zengeni went the extra mile by allowing us to conduct the class ourselves. This enabled him to understand which teaching approach we were comfortable with and taught us that we should be considerate of other people's likes and dispositions. He ensured equal treatment for everyone and made it clear that no one was superior to anyone else.

In Grade 10, because I had difficulties understanding Mathematics, I focused on other subjects. It was then that Mr Zengeni approached me, having seen something in me that I had not yet discovered. According to him, I was smart, outgoing, goal-driven and passionate and, on top of this, great with numbers! I just had to put my mind and heart to it. As a result of this talk, I was motivated to work harder than usual, but when the results came back, they were not pleasing. By the end of the year, I had given up on myself. However, Mr Zengeni kept pushing me to aim for the impossible. I wrote my final examination with the mindset of just passing. The results came back, and they were better than they had ever been, which meant I would proceed to Grade 11.

I began Grade 11 with a positive mindset towards everything, including my 'weak' subjects. With encouragement, I started realising that challenges are not meant to break you down, but to show you your strengths and weaknesses. On the first day of school, Mr Zengeni made it clear that he was not just a teacher, but a friend and assistant, which meant that we could use his knowledge and skills to our advantage. His kind, calm and understanding nature, and the classroom rules of discipline and respect, ensured that individuals worked together to solve mathematical problems. His strategy built our communication skills and our ability to understand different perspectives. It also ensured that we found practical ways to do and to apply problems, and guided him on ways to improve his teaching skills. In preparation for tests or assignments, he provided us with past examination papers. He dedicated his time to all of us, and made it a point that individuals who had the most difficulties in understanding led the lesson most of the time. He never gave up on us. This act built confidence in every individual and created a sense of trust in the classroom.

It is rare to find teachers who are as persistent as he was. Watching him made me want to become an educator, so that I would have the opportunity of making children believe in themselves. His enthusiasm and faith in me has enabled me to be thoughtful and open-minded in everything I do. I am grateful to have met a man who is as inspiring, skilful, dedicated and passionate as he is.

Thank you, Mr Zengeni, for pushing me to work harder, showing me that all challenges are an opportunity to be great, and that every impossible is possible if you believe. You are the best.

# Giving up was never an option



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS IRMA MOLLER, MARY WATERS HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM CRESCENTA PAULSE**

I grew up in a small place called Grahamstown, and attended high school at Mary Waters High School. This is the only high school in Grahamstown for Afrikaans-speaking learners who cannot afford to pay school fees. Mary Waters is an English- and Afrikaans-medium school, and learners and teachers belonged to a number of different racial groups. It was not the most popular school in town.

Mrs Moller joined our high school as a teacher when I was in Grade 10. At that time, I did not know her, but something about her caught my eye and my interest. She was short, friendly and professional and always had a smile on her face. She was also a lot different from all the other teachers. Whenever I passed her class during school hours, she was busy writing on the board or explaining something to the learners. She was a good Mathematical Literacy teacher, but my impression of her was that she was interested in the learners themselves, rather than simply being interested in teaching her subject.

Although at that time I was doing pure Mathematics, I so wished that she could have been our Mathematics teacher. Just listening to her as I passed by her classroom made me understand quite a lot of what she taught her class. I sometimes felt that our Maths teacher was speaking a totally unknown language. I therefore approached Mrs Moller for help. I knew that she did not teach pure Mathematics, but I thought she might have some background knowledge, given that she taught Mathematical Literacy. What really surprised me was that she knew a lot and she explained it to me in a very helpful, understanding and friendly manner.

In Grade 11 I changed my subject from pure Mathematics to Mathematical Literacy. Because of this, I had to do History and Geography as well. My curriculum changes meant that I had far more dealings with Mrs Moller, because she taught us Mathematical Literacy. Now it felt that my dreams had really come true; I began to have a clearer understanding of what I was being taught.

During my Grade 11 year, there was a shortage of teachers at our school and we did not have a History teacher. This was where Mrs Moller showed her ability to multitask! She took us for History as well as Maths Literacy during her periods. Although she had another class that needed her just as badly as we did, she tried her best to accommodate both subjects during one period. Never did I think that any teacher would dedicate herself in this way, not for the sake of being a good teacher or for any reward, but simply for the sake of the learners and for the love of teaching. The little time she gave us for our History subject was just as much as what we got for all our other subjects. Because of this, we, the Grade 11 history learners of that year, were able to write well in the June exams, and achieve good results.

In time, the school managed to get a new History teacher and our results improved further. But Mrs Moller was still available for questions and assistance. She was the most dedicated, hardworking, and selfless teacher I had ever met, and because of all her support and care, I will never regret the choices I made. For me, Mrs Moller was a mother, a friend, and the best teacher ever.

With all my heart, I hereby thank Mrs Moller. Because of her encouragement and child-friendly teaching, I realised that there was goodness within teachers and decided that I would like to become that kind of teacher.



## A dedicated multi-tasker





**A TRIBUTE TO MS MAKAPELA, MPILISWENI SECONDARY SCHOOL, NGEMA, KATLEHONG, GAUTENG, FROM NIKILITHA QELEWA**

I look back on memories of waking up early in the morning and exiting the school yard in the evening without any fear but hope and faith of making it in the end. My heart is filled with joy – but I did not always feel this way. Ms Makapela was the teacher who brought hope and faith back into my life.

The community had lost hope in Mpilisweni Secondary School because it had such a low pass rate, compared to other schools in the region. Children would stay for a year and then move to other schools. My parents had taken me to Mpilisweni because it was one of the few schools in the area which taught isiXhosa.

I was really nervous when I reached Grade 12. Then there she was, a woman in her late 50s, delivering a speech of introduction to the class. It was as if she was talking specifically to me. I still remember the exact words of the quote she ended with: “Giving up is only an option for those who are not willing to finish what they have already started”. She introduced herself as child of God and told us that everything she did included God. She continued by saying, “This school has been seen to have failed the community, but from now on things will change. I am putting my job on the line for that.” Right then, I knew that she was going to change my life.

Ms Makapela introduced afternoon classes, with help from other teachers, for Grades 10 to 12. She calmly handled difficulties of time, transport and children going home late, and introduced morning classes too. She said if parents were concerned about their children’s education and willing to bring back the good reputation of the school, they would work together with the teachers. As Grade 12 learners, we had to put in more effort and work harder.

Not only did Ms Makapela introduce new ways of improving our performance; she made class an exciting place to be. She accommodated everyone equally, with ease and warmth. She worked together with the school to keep our parents constantly informed about our academics, something that had never been done before. On mornings before exams, we would have morning prayers, which were somehow also a therapy for us. People started opening up to her and that is where she encouraged us with scriptures which made everything seem possible. As nervous as I was about passing Grade 12, I started believing in myself. Ms Makapela also got Grade 12s involved in tutoring Grade 10 and 11s, saying that we would not only pass on knowledge, but gain more insight as we taught. She motivated us to participate in sport, not only to win, but to take a break from academics.

Pass rates at Mpilisweni started improving. Grade 12 learners started passing and obtaining distinctions, not only in isiXhosa but in subjects like Maths and Physics. Eventually, our school was included in the top 10 schools in the region. There were even thoughts of making Ms Makapela principal, but apparently she said, “At my age, I am happy to make a difference not only in your eyes, but also in God’s eyes. I am satisfied with what I have; making a difference in the position that I am in shows that I still have strength to do it”. With those words, she held her position as a respected language teacher.

Not only did Ms Makapela show dedication to her work, but she was willing to make sacrifices for the learners of Mpilisweni Secondary School. Ms Bulelwa Makapela is an inspiration to me. She might have not realised it, but her work and dedication made me want to become just like her; a role model to my learners.

# Hard **work** and **faith** made it all **possible**



**“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”**

Henry Adams

One person that I will forever put on a pedestal because of the way he affected and still affects my eternity has to be my Grade 11 teacher. The influence Mr Douglas had on my life extends even to this moment. He taught me Mathematical Literacy at Curro Academy. It was a private school, but seemed to have less of everything compared to other Curro schools. Extra-mural activities, especially sports, were minimal: we only had a netball court and a soccer field. There were very few learners at the school, only one Matric class and two Grade 11 classes, one of which only had six learners. I am not sure why there weren't more learners there, but I enjoyed it because I got the time and attention I needed to do well. Although there were few teachers, they were very good teachers.

Mr Douglas was a tall, dark, well-built, middle-aged man from Zimbabwe. As a young student, he had been very hardworking, and had made it in life at a time when circumstances in his village and his country were very difficult. Coming to South Africa had been a huge challenge, requiring him to start over and rebuild his profile. I saw a huge amount of strength and resilience in his inspiring story.

I met Mr D in my Grade 11 year, a time when I had just accepted defeat from Mathematics and therefore felt very inferior. I had to sign up for Mathematical Literacy, a subject perceived as an option for the 'not so bright' learners; I was ashamed.

I quickly found out what type of person Mr D was; his values, aspirations, the qualities he possessed and the knowledge and passion he had for teaching. He seemed a bit harsh in the beginning, because some learners thought that Mathematical Literacy was a walk-over; he taught us that no-one can succeed without effort. Mr Douglas was an excellent teacher and revived my love for Maths. He would try everything he possibly could to make us understand what he taught. I loved how he would not move on until we all understood. He would use practical examples to make us understand, bringing different shapes to class, especially the irregular ones, because they were difficult to figure out. He would even go out of his way to actually make the objects himself; he became a craftsman, just for us. He gave everyone his attention and treated everyone as his favourite. He made every person in class believe in themselves and in our capability of doing very well. That made us push even harder.

Mr D was very disappointed when I left the school during the year. I remember him saying, “There goes my Matric distinction”, and nothing felt as good as hearing him say that. It showed me how much faith he had in me and that made me go to my new school with a positive mind-set. My marks had changed drastically and this made me proud.

I think “blessed” is the word that best describes the way I feel about the encounter I was privileged to have had with Mr D. He has inspired me to be a great teacher, just like him. A huge thank you to Mr Douglas. Sir, you have not only taught me mathematical principles; you have instilled in me values and life lessons that can never be erased from my heart. You have made a huge mark on my life and that will always influence how I treat my learners. I am grateful to have had a great teacher such as you. You are the best!



# He became a craftsman to teach Mathematical Literacy





**A TRIBUTE TO MRS HANLIE PODD, GRENVILLE HIGH SCHOOL, RUSTENBURG, NORTH WEST PROVINCE, FROM REMOFILWE TLADI**

**M**y favourite teacher and human being, Mrs Hanlie Podd, showed me that I am, and will always be, capable of anything I set my mind to. Her life motto was “Hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard”, and that changed my view of what matters when it comes to success.

It all began for me when I was in Grade 10 and had chosen to take Consumer Studies as a subject. Mrs Podd was the only Consumer Studies teacher at my high school, as only a small group of learners took the subject. She taught classes from Grade 10 to 12, so she was my teacher for three years. Her classes were always an adventure, not only because of the subject she taught, but because she made her classroom an environment where you could be yourself. Her lessons were always informative and she made sure that each and every one of her learners performed to the best of their abilities.

Mrs Podd was not just my hero in the classroom, but also on the hockey field. She was an amazing player and did an excellent job as the first team hockey boys’ coach. On the hockey field, she always strove for excellence. She taught us that you should play to make yourself proud. Even if you don’t win, you should come off the field knowing that you played well. Mrs Podd made me fall in love with the game because she coached with passion and with love for the sport. Her teams were always grounded in discipline, because that was the key quality that she believed a hockey player should possess.

Mrs Podd was considerate and loved her learners. I was a forever happy teenager and always in a good mood, but if I was ever down, she would notice and ask me if I was okay. When it came to her learners, she went the extra mile but also expected the same input and effort from us. When we felt tired or unmotivated, she would send us outside to do a few exercises, so that we gained more stamina and enthusiasm for work.

She instilled in me a love for cooking through her fun lessons, in which everyone was fully engaged. During cooking practicals, she would walk around and make sure that the dish we were making turned out perfectly. She made me feel as if I was doing something that I was not only good at, but also passionate about. At the end of my Matric year, I received a book prize for best practical cookery in my grade and in the book, she wrote a message for me: “Dear Remo, I am so proud of you! Thank you for being awesome! – Poddie”. Those few words spurred me on to greater achievement.

Poddie was an excellent teacher. As a teacher, she gave me knowledge and treated me with respect and dignity that came from the heart. As a person, she inspired me and showed me love. She had a huge impact on my life and that, among other reasons, made me want to be a teacher myself. I looked up to her and strive one day to have a heart of pure gold as she had. As a teacher, I would find joy in having the same influence on others as that which she had on me.

My gratitude goes out to Mrs Podd for her extraordinary efforts as a teacher. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have experienced the love and inspiration that a teacher can offer. Thank you, Poddie, for inspiring me and showing me the world.

**“Hard work  
beats talent  
when talent  
fails to work  
hard”**



**A TRIBUTE TO MR ALFONZO BERNARD MICHAELS, MARY WATERS HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SEBASTIAN WILLIAMS**

**A** 'life science dictionary' is the name I gave to Mr Michaels, who taught Life Sciences from Grade 10 to 12 at Mary Waters. He had passion for what he was doing, and that is why I chose him as my best teacher.

He was a big person, with big hands, fairly tall in stature, a 'coloured' man with a white skin colour. In my opinion, the car which he drove was the most beautiful in the whole school. One could hear his loud voice from three classes away. His voice frightened me before I starting engaging with it. It was the loudest when he was teaching; however, I understood his lessons twice as fast as I did with most teachers. I have never seen a teacher giving his all to a challenging subject like Life Sciences the way he did. He made it easy for us through his powerful teaching skills. He applied the work to our lives and played around with key words. Learners respected him because he had an arrogant expression, but he was not really an arrogant man.

His personality made me want to clone him. He was precise and neat, and washed his hands many times a day. His desk was always in order; he knew where to find any documents he needed. He liked to tell us that since he started teaching at our school, a period of 28 years, he had been absent for fewer than 14 days. He stood up for learners in many ways; he wanted the best especially for those in Grade 12. He organised classes after school and was always willing to go the extra mile for the school. The pass rate for his subject was important to him; he could be very disappointed if we got less than 70%.

His life achievements were outstanding. He matriculated when he was 16 years old. By the time he was 21, he was a qualified educator and had his first job. That part of his biography made me realise that we all can do it. As our class teacher, he always opened up to us and told us about his mother who had had a stroke. This was his way of bridging the gap between us and him; he wanted us to be more open with him. Something that I always laugh about is that he could not go a lesson without a cup of coffee.

I had the time of my life with him as my teacher. I wish that his impact could be carried down to the next generation. "Colour of skin is nothing when it comes to mentality," he would tell us. He often pointed out to us that so many black children, despite severe disadvantages, are incredibly determined. He would also draw attention, often with a laugh, to the numbers of coloured children who dropped out of school, despite having a privileged life compared to many black children who do not have anything. He made clear examples of top learners at the school to substantiate what he was claiming.

Thank you, Mr Michaels. I want to be your clone and to teach my learners in the way you taught me!



His personality  
made me  
want to  
clone him





***A TRIBUTE TO MRS MBELE, GEORGE KHOSA SECONDARY SCHOOL, DOBSONVILLE, SOWETO, GAUTENG, FROM PHUMZILE WILLIE***

**M**y best teacher was Mrs Mbele. She was my Economics teacher from Grade 10 to 12. She was in her late 40s, a beautiful, intelligent woman, known for her unique personality. She was supportive, caring and disciplined, a woman who always smiled when she entered the school premises and the classroom. She was polite, kind and somewhat strict. She knew how to handle learners inside and outside the classroom. Mrs Mbele was always early for school and never missed a class. I used to enjoy her class a lot as she made all of us feel happy and welcome. I never wanted to miss her class unless I was feeling unwell.

After teaching us a topic in the Economics class, Mrs Mbele would ask many questions and make sure we could give clear answers. After teaching two to four topics, we would take a test. This thorough approach, based on questioning, has really helped me in my academic studies. It has meant I am not afraid to talk and to ask questions if I don't understand something, or wish to suggest something. The fact that she gave us a platform to stand up and talk and express our views has helped me gain self-confidence. It has also modelled to me a strategy that I will use one day when I am a teacher.

In time, Mrs Mbele became a mother and a role model to me. She taught me to follow the right path in life, even if it involved facing difficulties. She always had a positive mindset and was a friendly and easy-going teacher, with a good sense of humour. We never feared her; we respected her.

Her personality, the love that she had for learners, her enthusiasm and passion for the teaching profession and her good teaching skills combined to make her a good teacher. The values that she contributed to my life and my desire to be a great teacher one day, were her unique style of teaching and the support she gave us, not only in our studies, but also in our personal lives. She never judged us, regardless of our different backgrounds; I believe that, in order to be a successful teacher, you have to give all the support and patience that you have for all the children in your care.

Mrs Mbele has taught me that teaching is not something that you do for fun, or in order to become famous; it is something that you need to be passionate and enthusiastic about. Mrs Mbele was always at school and in class early and this has taught me that as a teacher, you need to be disciplined and punctual; you are a role model to your learners and you should respect everyone around you. A teacher sets goals for learners and uses teaching strategies to accommodate every learner in the classroom.

Thank you, Mrs Mbele, for your kindness, love and support and for the parenting role that you have played in my life. Today I am a first year Bachelor of Education student because of you and I promise to follow in your shoes. I am very grateful to have had an awesome teacher like you. You have helped me, with inspirational words, to develop my potential and embrace my strengths. I deeply appreciate the chance that God gave me to meet you.

An  
inspiring  
teacher with  
a unique  
teaching  
style



**A TRIBUTE TO MR MANDILAKHE KLAAS, ARCHIE MBOLEKWA PRIMARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SANDISELE NKWINTI**

**T**his is a tribute to Mandilakhe Klaas, a temporary teacher, at Archie Mbolekwa Primary School. My primary school was a public school situated in the dusty streets of Tanyi location. It was one of the best public primary schools you could get; it was famous for producing the best athletes, choral music and academic excellence. Personally, for me what made the school so special and what made it achieve many of its goals, were the teachers who taught there. I believe if it was not for the teachers, the school wouldn't have produced the best athletes, good choristers and academic results.

Out of all the wonderful teachers we had, the one that stood out for me was Mr Klaas. He was the best for his sense of humour, which was something that came naturally and effortlessly to him. He taught me English first additional language; everything he taught he brought to life and made it practical for everyone. No learner wanted to miss his class because he made teaching and learning more of a mutual benefit. He was so special to me because he was someone that was understanding and easy to approach and I believe that all teachers should be like that so that learners can open up to them.

Mr Klaas was very serious when it was time to study and very cheerful when it was time to play. Most expressively, that man taught me how to speak well and I'm quite sure he didn't know he did that because I would notice how he simply made an unprepared speech in the assembly and talk like he had practised for years. From that I used the exact same gestures to see if it would help me think out of the box. If my father, as a well-spoken person, laid a foundation for learning how to speak well, Mr. Klaas constructed the building. He was really dedicated to teaching and went beyond the curriculum; he went the extra mile.

So, it happened that we became close and built a friendship, in and out of the school premises. I used this to my advantage because whenever I had homework that I found challenging, I would approach Mr Klaas to help me out. He taught me everything I needed to know about soccer as he was also the coach of the school's football team. All of this was overwhelming for me, I literally had no better person who I could refer to as my role model. He is one person who inspired me to become a teacher; I imitated everything he did and it worked out well. It wouldn't be a lie to say that he made me who I am today.

Mr Klaas educated and entertained. His classroom was a free and inclusive space and a safe environment. Everyone was comfortable because he protected everything that happened in his classroom and he often enjoyed saying "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" to reassure us of the safety and security of his classroom. From this experience I learnt that, as a teacher, you don't have to be strict in order to get the attention and respect from your learners. Instead, you need to be easy with them so that everyone is comfortable and eager to learn something from you as a teacher.

Often, we do not know the impact we have in people's lives and even when its recognized we don't get the glory we deserve. Mr Klaas, you were only a temporary teacher yet you had the greatest impact on me. As I am taking a journey of becoming a teacher, I promise to follow in your footsteps and touch lives like you touched mine. Thank you!



# What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas



# The inspirational teacher



*A TRIBUTE TO MRS MJEKULA, ENQILENI PRIMARY SCHOOL, PORT ELIZABETH, EASTERN CAPE, FROM ANELE BLOUW*

she **motivated**  
me through a **poem**  
by **SEK Mqhayi**

I was born in Port Elizabeth and attended a number of different primary schools before my parents settled on Enqileni Primary School where I met my best teacher.

Enqileni Primary School is situated in the location of Motherwell and renowned for excellence in sports and academics. Most children in my community attended this school, which had good, helpful teachers. One teacher who deserves special mention is Mrs Mjekula.

Mrs Mjekula was my Grade 7 teacher and taught me Geography and isiXhosa. She was very short and had a very soft voice. You could easily take her for granted because of her physical stature and the fact that she hated corporal punishment and shouting at learners. She had a beautiful singing voice and was responsible for the senior choir, into which she recruited me at the beginning of my Grade 7 year. This was to be my first opportunity to get to know her outside the classroom.

One day, Mrs Mjekula gave us a poem written by SEK Mqhayi to read and learn by heart. The following week, Mrs Mjekula asked us if there was someone who could recite the poem for her. To her surprise nobody raised a hand to do that. I knew the poem very well but I was too afraid to speak. Mrs Mjekula was disappointed and was about to punish the entire class when my classmate, Thando Ntsangana, spoke up and told Mrs Mjekula that I could recite the poem.

Mrs Mjekula called me outside and asked me to recite the poem. I did it so well that she asked me to perform it to all the Grade 7 classes. Throughout the year she kept on motivating me, telling me that I should aim to pass all my subjects well. At the end of that year, I received awards for Mathematics and isiXhosa. She even made me perform the poem at the school prize-giving ceremony. All this goes to show how much she believed in me, at a time when my confidence was low.

Her classroom was an open and relaxed space compared to that of other teachers. She allowed learners to talk in class, which was in complete contrast to other teachers I was used to. Mrs Mjekula had her own way of dealing with naughty learners. She would call them aside and speak to them, as if she were talking to adults. She would speak about the importance of taking education seriously and how it would benefit you in future. This kind of talk was very powerful and helpful and led most learners to respect her.

For this and other reasons, she was my best teacher. She was knowledgeable about the subjects she taught. She was passionate about her work and demonstrated enthusiasm and energy in class. She was full of wisdom and knew how to motivate her learners. She played a mother figure to me at a time when I had a lot of personal issues, teaching me the importance of self-belief and actually making me believe in my cognitive ability.

Mrs Mjekula has contributed greatly towards my decision to become a teacher. Ever since our relationship began in Grade 7, we have been in contact. I admire the way she influences people in a positive way, using the platform of being a teacher. There are a lot of people I know who have been changed by their contact with Mrs Mjekula and who are educated today because of that. Her motivational words, the way she conducts her classes and the wisdom that she shares with her learners are the things that made me want to emulate her. I am what I am because of this teacher.



**A TRIBUTE TO MR GREG BAXTER, KINGSWOOD COLLEGE,  
GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM JUSTINE BOWKER**

**N**ew buildings. New uniforms. New faces. I walked into my Grade 6 class in a new school. My heart was racing and I felt sick with nerves. 'Good morning, class,' said Mr Baxter. I relaxed instantly when I saw the smile on my teacher's face; I knew he was going to be an inspirational teacher.

The class sat down while Mr Baxter introduced himself; he was also new to the Kingswood family. There was an air about him that created a relaxed classroom environment, conducive to learning. Mr Baxter always encouraged us to be ourselves, to answer questions in the class and to ask questions when we did not understand the work. This led to many debates within the class. We were never afraid of being wrong, because no matter what we said, it would be taken into consideration and discussed. We would be encouraged to see other points of view and broaden our perspective on various issues. This helped my confidence to grow, because I saw that no one else was afraid of trying to answer questions or to put their point of view out there. I began to do the same and realised that my understanding grew as my point of view was discussed and the pros were praised and the cons were criticised. I took this feedback and used it to my advantage.

Mr Baxter was a keen sportsman and he brought his love of sport into the classroom environment. He would, for example, use a tennis ball, called The Silent Seeker, to keep us focused during class. If we got distracted and stopped contributing to the class, or were being disruptive, he would throw the ball at us. This was not to hurt us, but to recapture our attention. The Silent Seeker created an element of excitement and anticipation in the class, because you didn't really want the ball to be thrown at you, so you would try your hardest to participate at all times.

Mr Baxter was not only a teacher to me, but also someone I could confide in, about friendship and family issues as well as schoolwork. He was always concerned about how each one of us was coping with the pressures of school, hostel and work. In the second week of Grade 6, my Dad was struck by lightning. I found it really difficult to cope with this on my own, but Mr Baxter stepped in and helped me through that difficult time. He reassured me that everything would be okay and in the end my Dad was okay and is still living a happy life.

I aspire to be like Mr Baxter one day. He has shown me that a teacher must make the learning environment fun, interactive and productive, because this makes learners eager to learn and not afraid of making mistakes. I also want to play an active role in my learners' personal lives so that I can be a pillar of strength to them, when they need one.

I would like to say a big thank you to Mr Baxter for being there for me through the rough times and the good times and for helping me grow into the confident woman I am today. I hope that in future I can have the same kind of impact on my learners as Mr Baxter had on me. I also owe it to him that I got through my Dad's accident; without Mr Baxter, I would have been so concerned about my Dad's recovery that I would not have been able to focus on my work. I went from being a shy introverted young learner to a more confident self-assured learner in a very short time, because of Mr Baxter's input and encouragement.



## Recapturing our attention: "The Silent Seeker"





***A TRIBUTE TO MRS KOSANI, ULWAZI HIGH SCHOOL,  
MDANTSANE, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM NONKULULEKO CHITYA***

I was lucky to be a learner at Ulwazi High School, because we were taught how to dedicate ourselves to hard work. We never had weekend rests or holidays like other schools; we simply studied and studied well.

Great teachers motivate, inspire and lead; they interact with the community to effect positive change through themselves and their learners. My best teacher was Mrs L Kosani, my English and Mathematical Literacy teacher from Grade 10 to 12. She was also the principal of Ulwazi High School. Mrs Kosani was a loving and caring person, who treated her learners as if they were her own children. She was inspiring and there were many things that I learnt from her which have driven me to become a foundation phase teacher.

Mrs Kosani was my best teacher because, although there were times when I did not attend her classes, she never expelled me. The most valuable thing that she did as principal, was to call parents when she faced challenges concerning learners. I remember a day when the whole class was given letters for the parents concerning their non-attendance at school. When I went home, my grandmother had been informed that there was something wrong, but she didn't say anything. The next day, my grandmother went to the school. Strangely enough, there were only two parents who had responded to the letters; the rest had not come. The two of us whose parents had responded were amazed that we were not in trouble. The principal simply told us to keep on attending school regularly.

When I was in Grade 11, it seemed to us that the only people in the school who were taken care of were the Grade 12s. One day, I went to Mrs Kosani to speak to her about this. When I entered her office, she was smiling. I sat down and started to ask her why we didn't get extra time for study, as the Grade 12s did. She replied with a smile on her face, "You do have extra time. Weekends and holidays, you do not rest – or do you also want to camp for two months?". I told her how the Grade 11 learners felt. From this time, Mrs Kosani started to give recognition to every learner from Grades 10 to 12.

Mrs Kosani was always a positive teacher and a problem-solver. As Ulwazi High School, learners we were fortunate enough to be sent to winter and spring school, held near Mdantsane. There we had a chance to explore new things and learn other teachers' strategies. Unfortunately there came a time when Mrs Kosani withdrew permission for her learners to attend these schools. She had noticed that some learners attending those programmes were disrespectful, smoking or bringing alcohol to classes. Some wore make-up and fancy hairstyles and most brought their cellphones to class. She wanted to protect her learners from adopting those styles of behaviour, so we stopped attending the programmes.

Learners at our school were never allowed to wear long colourful hairpieces or bring cellphones to school. The worst part of her strict regime was that we didn't have a matric farewell. Instead, we had our own unique matric farewell, to which we wore our full uniforms. Various pastors from different churches attended and spoke to us with the purpose of influencing us to be believers and to recognise that not everyone will be equal in life.

Our school was very different from others – all because of Mrs Kosani. She did her best to make us succeed. I want to become a teacher because of the inspirational, motivational work she did in my life.

**Role models  
inspire us to  
build a  
brighter  
future**



**A TRIBUTE TO MISS MAVUSO, VICTORIA GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM NOZIBELE DYONGMAN**

**M**iss Mavuso was a young, energetic, loving and caring teacher. She was a chubby and bubbly person who liked making jokes in class and had the best smile in the school. She taught me English at Victoria Girls High School, an ex-model C school in Grahamstown. The school environment was a warm one, having all the resources that their learners needed in order for them to progress and pass. The school had enough teachers and each class had fewer than 30 learners. This enabled the teachers to know their learners, their weaknesses and strengths, and help them where they need help with their work. It is worth noting, however, that if love and care are not present in the classroom, learners will not make progress, in spite of the presence of every learning resource.

Miss Mavuso was one of the best teachers at Victoria Girls High School. She was energetic and encouraged us to work when we didn't feel like working. She was kind and sweet and her smiling face made it easy for us to approach her. Whenever we did well in our work, she would reward us with sweets. She is my best teacher because she loved and cared about her learners and treated them equally. She did not have any favourites.

From Grade 10 to 12, I struggled with English and got marks in the 50s. Miss Mavuso always encouraged me and believed that I could do better. I never took her seriously; I thought she was just saying that because it was her job as a teacher to encourage her learners. In Grade 12, I went and spoke to her. I told her that I would like to get 60% for English and asked if she could give me some extra lessons after school and activities to help me improve my mark and fix my mistakes. Without any hesitation she agreed to help me.

During the extra lessons we had together she showed me that she believed in me and that has helped me to believe in myself. I ended up loving and enjoying English. She told me that it is okay to make mistakes, because that is how we learn. The love and care she gave me made me a better person in life. She taught me that anything is possible if you work hard for it and do your best. If you felt down, she was glad to give you a hug and a sweet to try and make you feel better. She was like a mother to us, because she would listen to all our problems and help us to sort them out. She respected our confidences and never told any other teacher about them.

The love and care that she showed to me has inspired me to become a teacher so that I can share the same kind of love and care with my learners, to make a difference in their lives and help them feel comfortable in class. Some learners do not get love from home and if, as a teacher, you can provide them with love, they will enjoy being at school. I want to encourage the learners in my class to believe in themselves and trust me as their teacher.

I would like to thank Miss Mavuso for all the patience and hard work that she put into developing us into the people we are today, and for the love and care she gave us.



# The Mavuso magic





**A TRIBUTE TO MRS GWENDOLINE (WENDY) WILLIAMS,  
DURBAN GIRLS COLLEGE, DURBAN, KWAZULU-NATAL,  
FROM KATYA WILLIAMS**

**M**y favourite teacher is not the one who stood in front of me in a classroom, nor one who had my back on the sports field; she was my very own grandmother. What she taught me was not in the school curriculum, but she taught the power teachers have to create change and inspire people. She was my teacher, my hero and my ultimate role model.

My grandmother and I have always been very close and I have spent a lot of time with her. Through her, I have seen the respect, love and admiration she inspired in others by reflecting on her life and behaviour and becoming the best teacher she could possibly be. I have lost count of the number of times parents and learners alike have come up to her and thanked her for the impact she made on their lives. Gogo Gwen became unforgettable in the lives of the people around her, because she strove for excellence. This taught me that you should always make an effort to improve yourself in whatever you do. She started out as a maths teacher in a small school in rural Zimbabwe and ended up being one of the most respected headmistresses of one of the most prestigious schools in Durban. This inspired me always to go the extra mile in whatever I do, because I want to have the best possible impact on the people around me. It also inspired me to keep pushing myself, so that one day I can reach the same level of renown as she did – perhaps, even, exceed her.

Not only was my grandmother a respected teacher and headmistress, but she served on the boards of many schools and, after she retired, began community work with an educational programme run by ISASA (The Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa). ISASA's aim, in this programme, was to take gifted, underprivileged learners and put them in good schools where they could excel, and ultimately to find bursaries and scholarships for them so they could get into university. In order to make sure that the children have the skills and support needed to succeed in schools with high academic achievement, the ISASA program organises maths and science camps throughout the year. I have accompanied my grandmother to a few of these camps and the stories I've heard and the love I see in the eyes of the learners for "Gogo Gwen" taught me the importance of good education in South Africa, the need for excellent teachers and, most importantly, the impact a caring and supportive teacher can have on the lives of learners.

Having watched my grandmother in action throughout my life, I could not become anything other than a teacher. And I did not just want to be any teacher, but a teacher of whom she could be proud; a teacher who impacts the lives of her learners; a teacher who makes learners want to come to school and leaves them with fond memories; a teacher who encourages them to grow.

Thank you not only for being a wonderful grandmother, but also an outstanding role model. Thank you for showing me the kind of teacher I should aim to become and for guiding me into becoming the person I wish to be. You will always be the person I look up to. Thank you for your continuous support and unconditional love.

# Gogo Gwen



**A TRIBUTE TO MR PHUMZILE MBANGATHA, DALINDYEBO  
SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL, QUNU, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM NOLITHA MBUNXE**

**D**espite being one of the most disadvantaged schools in Qunu, my school was known for its excellent results; education was valued, even though conditions were not conducive for productive teaching and learning. You may wonder how this was achieved.

Mr Mbangatha was our Deputy Principal. He made me understand that success and reaching the top of the class involved a lot of discipline, good character, focus and direction. He was a strict disciplinarian. You break the rules, you get punished. Simple. His rod was something you would not forget in a hurry, especially when you received it on a cold morning. It was like hot tea that burnt your hands or body all through the day.

He inspired his learners to succeed and encouraged them to do well. One of the biggest things I admired about him was the support he gave his learners in everything they did. He offered free extra lessons because the school could not afford tutors to assist us when we were struggling. He donated study guides, and those study guides were useful and helpful to us, especially because some teachers looked very severe to learners, so they were afraid to approach them with questions. If he realised that the class was looking sleepy, especially after lunch, he would tell little jokes to keep us awake. He was supportive and sincere and a great influence and role model to the learners of Dalindyebo High School.

Mr Mbangatha was such a great person, one of the few people who are truly devoted to teaching. He made a difference in my life and in a lot of ways still does. I have learnt from him that teaching is an art, a skill and a gift that needs to be developed and refined. That is why I have chosen the life-long career of being a teacher. That is also why I believe that as young adults we must try to improve the status of teachers, because teachers can have a lasting impact on the lives of their learners. They play a vital role in learners' lives and in their continued growth and development. We need truly humble teachers who impact lives in a positive, constructive way, quality teachers who can provide quality education.

I would like to honour Mr Mbangatha, my teacher, friend, guide, counsellor and mentor, for all that he has done for us. He was there for us when we needed him most and he has never failed us. He has accepted our failings with good humour. He has always forgiven our many wrongs. I know there are not enough words to describe my gratitude and thankfulness to Mr Mbangatha. I thank him nevertheless for inspiring me to be the person I am now. He has shown us, by example, the way to lead our lives as we continue along our lives' roads. He has given us love, and we could not ask for more.

Mr Mbangatha, you played a huge role in guiding and encouraging me as a learner. You shaped me to be the best person I can ever become. Your kindness touched my heart and changed my life forever. May you continue to be that best teacher to others in the future.



**This devoted  
teacher  
was a great  
inspiration**





**A TRIBUTE TO MRS MARHEPULA, SHILOH PRIMARY SCHOOL, WHITTLESEA, EASTERN CAPE, FROM ANDISILE MFUNISELWA**

**M**y story of becoming a teacher comes a long way, via a passion for accountancy. In my years at Shiloh Primary School, Mrs Marhepula taught me Economics and Management Science (EMS) in Grade 5. She was dedicated and well organised, and had a gift for mothering. She was one of the best teachers I had during my early schooling years.

I was a bit lazy and unenthusiastic about school until I met Miss Q, as we called her. My voice always shook when I had to present my work or answer questions, but I was getting 80s and 90s on every test. This is what made her notice me. One day she picked me to answer a question. I knew the answer but I could not talk because I was shaking! So I whispered it to her as she looked at my face. She said it out loud and instructed the class to clap. After the lesson, she called me to her office, wanting me to explain why I had not spoken the answer out loud. I responded, telling her about my 'stage fright'. She said, "Andisile, our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure". Back in those days I could not understand what Miss Q was trying to tell me.

I developed a passion for EMS because Miss Q made us believe that it was the only learning area that mattered. I enjoyed her periods, the subject was doable and we were all managing to pass. She would bring sweets every now and again and share random stories with us, just to make us feel good. I evolved a love for Accounting and decided that I wanted to do B. Com Accounting and became a well-known chartered accountant like Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu.

During my high school years, I chose Commerce and Mathematics as my subjects. Unfortunately for me, I failed Math during my Matric year. I believe I could have done better, if only we had had a better teacher and enough resources in our school.

When I received my Matric results, which indicated that I had obtained a diploma pass, I was disappointed; I wouldn't make it for B.Com Accounting. I then saw my EMS award of excellence from Grade 5. Miss Q came to mind, together with her quote. I decided to analyse and interpret what she had meant by it. I took it that Miss Q was saying that I had potential and I must embrace it. Let me not feel as if I am not good enough, I said to myself. I will always be good for myself and I have a lot to give to the world. From there, I decided to redo my Matric. At Lesseyton, in Queenstown, where I re-did my Matric, I met Mrs Nokhela, our Accounting teacher and school principal. She noticed that I understood better than everyone else. Of course, I was doing Accounting, my favourite subject, for the second time. I should have been ahead! She asked me if I could help her by tutoring my fellow learners. I told her that my voice shook when I had to speak in public, but she encouraged me and I ended up doing it. From those tutorials, I abandoned my dream of becoming a chartered accountant and started dreaming about being a teacher who would have an impact on the children I came across, as Miss Q had on me.

I believe that by recalling and analysing Miss Q's quote, I realised that failing Math was not the end of the world. I will forever be grateful for that. I have made it this far because of the power of that quote. Thank you, Miss Q.

# The power of a quote



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS MAGER, GOOD SHEPHERD PRIMARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,  
BY YANDIPHA MTWALO**

**G**ood Shepherd Primary public school is housed in an old church building in the rural town of Grahamstown. It had no playgrounds or grass; just old trees to play on. Each grade had one classroom. As I look back on my years at this school, with its dusty, old, wooden floors, I realise that I was blessed to be taught by a remarkable, passionate and loving teacher. Mrs Mager had an impact on my life that contributed to my decision to become a teacher. Some of her influential actions were the way she helped me with Afrikaans, the way she helped me to socialise with other children and her accessibility.

Mrs Mager was our Afrikaans teacher; it was an English-medium school with Afrikaans being the second additional language. Afrikaans was quite difficult for me, because there was no one at home who spoke the language. So, I went to Mrs Mager, telling her how I was struggling with Afrikaans and she went the extra mile to help me to understand. When I was in primary school, I was shy and I had no friends. She asked me what seemed to be the problem. I told I was afraid to talk to other children, so she introduced me to Kayla, an Afrikaans-speaking girl, who became my friend. That really boosted my self-esteem. It's the little things that a teacher notices that change learners' lives.

Mrs Mager was a good listener and took time out of her busy schedule for anyone who needed her. She created a welcoming learning environment for all learners and knew all our strengths and weaknesses. Mrs Mager was never angry, even though there was one boy in my class, Bulelani, who was always out of control. She would just say, "Bulelani, sitting like a donkey in the moonlight"; that was when we knew that she was angry. After that, she would laugh. A friendly, gentle, warm and passionate teacher, she had a smile as big as her heart.

Mrs Mager taught me how important it is to carry love in your heart because that shows who you are as a person. She taught us the importance of being kind to one another in the classroom and of sharing outside of the classroom. She encouraged me to believe in myself and my abilities. If she went out, she always left me to look after the class, to boost my confidence. She was organised and well-prepared for each day and she made use of constructive criticism and advice.

Mrs Mager has inspired me to become a passionate teacher and to work with children; to be excited about influencing learners' lives and to understand the impact that I can make on them. She has shown me that I need to establish a strong and trusting relationship with my learners and that sometimes I will need to be flexible and change the way I teach, in order for my learners to understand clearly. She modelled to me a love for each and every child in the class. I think those are the things that have led me to becoming a teacher.

To Mrs Mager, thank you for being an amazing and inspiring teacher. You have taught me self-belief: that I must never look down on myself. I have overcome my fears of making friends, thanks to you. You have helped me with Afrikaans and you have taught me to be kind. And you have taught me to love everyone, no matter what their backgrounds are. Thank you for your advice and for always being honest.



# Inspiring warmth, love and confidence



# Love of the subject



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS MCITEKA, MARY WATERS HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM YONELANI CHASO**

## She made history come alive

A short, strong, black woman with a pleasant aroma and a smile so lovely that it seemed as if the sun had shone into that small, loving heart. A warm-hearted, accepting person who always wore neat, coordinated clothes that had that extra spark. Yes, that was my best teacher, Mrs Mciteka, a woman who taught me never to give up in life.

Mrs Mciteka was my Geography and History teacher in Grade 10 at Mary Waters High School. A school was built on a hill, on a street called Lavender Road. Mary Waters was still developing and always had problems with teacher shortages. The school accepted every race and nationality, but because its dominant language was Afrikaans, people often labelled it 'a coloured school'.

Mrs Mciteka was good with History and taught me many ways of remembering historical events. For example, she advised me to make my own little summaries of the events, so that I could easily recall, for instance, the events that happened during Hitler's time or around Shaka's wars. She made history come alive in my brain, because she was so patient with her learners. She always had time for us, because she enjoyed what she was teaching. She would even go the extra mile of making summaries for those who were struggling to make their own. It was when she was teaching us that I realised that I loved and enjoyed History. Although she had a sweet, soft voice that put most of my classmates to sleep, it was music to my ears and gave me pleasure, because it brought into my mind pictures of what happened in the 1800s.

She was not trained as a Geography teacher but, because of the shortage of teachers, decided to take on the challenge of teaching Geography as well. The first week did not work well because it was the first time she had taught Geography and she had not had much time to prepare, but come the second week, it was as if she had been teaching Geography for years. That to me was a huge achievement.

Mrs Mciteka's achievement was encouraging to me. It helped me to see that there are some gifts that we are born with. Mrs Mciteka was definitely a born teacher, because it took her only a week to master geography teaching. On top of her in-born talent though, she was a dedicated, hard-working person who never gave up, no matter how hard the situation. She encouraged me to do the same thing in my life.

Mrs Mciteka was not only a teacher to me; she was also my mother, my friend, a person to whom I could pour out my pain, a shoulder to cry on during happy as well as difficult times. At break time, we would sit together and talk about our personal lives. She would then advise me to work hard and never to give up, not to do things to please others but things which would bring me satisfaction. I learned that barriers would always be there, because life without barriers would be pointless. I needed to find effective ways to break the barriers down. These words stayed with me and as I grew up, I saw what she meant and came to agree with her more and more.

I want to become a great teacher like Mrs Mciteka; she gave me hope that there is more to life than just living. Don't give up because one barrier defeats you; there are still trillions of barriers needing to be broken! Be brave and strong and be the person you want to be in life!



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS RICHARDS, VICTORIA GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM KEZIAH ALISON DANIELS**

**V**ictoria Girls' High School was a girls' only school when I attended it, but strangely enough, it had a male principal. Rules and regulations were obeyed and had to be followed at all times, otherwise you would find yourself in detention on a Friday afternoon.

During my final year, 2014, my favourite subject was Mathematical Literacy and that was where I found my comfort zone. Mrs Richards was my Maths teacher and ended up being my favourite of all the teachers on the staff. The reason for this was that she was always there when I needed her the most. She encouraged me never to hesitate when I had a question, but to stand bravely and ask it, without doubting my judgement. She made me realise my potential with regard to Maths and always told me never to give up hope, but always to be willing to try again.

Mrs Richards had no children of her own; that's why she became a teacher. She resided in one of our school's hostels, Eleanor Brown Hostel, where she became the matron of the house. Mrs Richards was not only my teacher but someone I could talk to; in class, we would talk about everything, and I mean everything: boyfriends, house issues, friends fighting amongst each other. I used to call her 'Mam Ree' and the rest of the teachers would look at me strangely when I greeted her in public or in the corridors. She was passionate and full of energy. She loved what she was doing. When it came to teaching our class, she was dedicated, and could be very motivating when learners needed that extra support and guidance.

During our Maths lessons, we were allowed to make ourselves coffee and Mrs Richards would spoil us with biscuits. That was never allowed in other classes. Mam Ree believed in team work and encouraged interaction and mutual engagement at all times; that is why whenever we had class work, we would do it in a group and help those who did not understand.

Mrs Richards has made me the person I am today. She is also the one who encouraged me to follow my dream of becoming a teacher. She was not only my teacher, but was a real inspiration: I looked up to her and wanted to be just like her. My life has changed because I developed dreams and ambitions. I wanted to become a teacher, because I believed I owed her and the only way of paying her back was to become just like her, and share what I have with children.

I would like to thank Mam Ree for everything she has done for me; without her, I would not be where I am today. She gave me hope and always told me, "No matter what life throws at you, pick up the missing pieces and carry on".



No matter what  
life throws at you  
**pick up** the  
**missing**  
**pieces**  
and carry on





**A TRIBUTE TO MR DAVID CLORAN, CLARENDON HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, EAST LONDON, EASTERN CAPE, FROM EMILY FRAUENSTEIN**

Clarendon High School is a well-established, all girls' school in East London. Mr Cloran was my favourite teacher at the school. He had brown eyes and hair, and he always had a smile on his face. He had an enormous impact on my life because of his many good qualities. He was passionate about history and current affairs; he was entertaining and he was creative. We had about seven male teachers, and most of them would wear a tie every day, Mr Cloran hated ties and would only wear one on a very special occasion. Regardless of this, he always looked neat, which is more than could be said about his desk, on which papers were piled, higher than Mount Everest. The second you walked into his classroom, you could see that he was a History teacher: the walls were decorated with posters of Egypt, Greece and various wars, as well as a few world maps.

Mr Cloran taught me History in Grades 8 and 11, he taught me Accounting as part of EMS in Grade 9 and he was my Matric home-room teacher. He nurtured my love for History throughout the years that he taught me. Unfortunately, he never managed to instil in me a love for Accounting, which was always my worst subject. His History classes were my favourite, because he managed to turn a simple part of history into something fun and memorable. When we were learning about King Henry VIII and his wives in Grade 8, we could never remember how each marriage ended. Mr Cloran made up a little rhyme that has stuck with me throughout the years. It went like this: "Divorced, beheaded, died. Divorced, beheaded, survived."

Mr Cloran had a way of making everything entertaining. When he had to go somewhere, he would never simply walk, he would always skip. Mr Cloran was a golf fanatic. Between lessons, he would look at golf clubs on Bid-or-Buy and pretend that he was buying them. He would tell us about each golf club and when each should be used. When he was invigilating our tests and he got bored, he would go to the back of the classroom and practice his swings.

In Grade 11, Mr Cloran decided that if we all did well in our November exams, we could have a History class party. Then we could give him a cake. He was very specific about the cake he wanted. It had to be a "four-layered chocolate cake, covered in caramel, with a cherry or three on top". He went on for the entire year about this cake, and the briefing on the kind of cake he wanted never changed. At the end of Matric, my best friend and I decided to put him out of his misery and finally make him his cake as a "thank you" for everything that he had done for us over the past five years of high school.

It was his creative ways of doing simple tasks that inspired me to become a teacher. I want all learners to know what it feels like to be actively involved in their learning. I would like to have an impact on my future learners as Mr Cloran has had an impact on me. I have remembered so much of what was taught to me by Mr Cloran, simply through the fun way in which he taught. Not once were his classes boring; even the boring bits of history were made to be fun. I look back on my high school career fondly because of Mr Cloran.

# Taking a swing at History



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS KEITER, HOËRSKOOL PJ OLIVIER,  
GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM MIKIALI FEBRUARY**

**A**lthough Hoërskool PJ Olivier was not my first choice of high schools, I found when I attended it that it was an inspiring school, dedicated to achieving the best for its learners. The school felt like a family and its environment was warm and friendly. I became proud of being part of a school that fought for the right for children to be taught in Afrikaans. The attributes of my school have made me into the person I am today, a person who is inspired to be a teacher.

Writing this tribute story is difficult, yet it brings back warm and wonderful memories of my teacher who inspired me to become someone great in life. Mrs Keiter, my Grade 6 teacher, was a wonderful teacher. I will never forget her soft voice, her warm heart and her passion, dedication and love for what she did. Also memorable is the smile she always carried with her during our Maths lessons.

Mrs Keiter would always lend a helping hand when one of us had difficulties understanding work. Apart from being my Maths teacher, she was also a mother figure to me and my classmates; we could go and speak to her about anything. One day, when I struggled to understand a lesson, I approached her after class and we spent the whole lunch period going over the problem. She persisted in helping me to understand and it paid off, because from that day I started understanding my Maths better. Mrs Keiter made us feel appreciated, especially after tests in which we had not done well. When we all felt down, she would give us a day off to relax. She would always say, "Life is too precious to feel sad, so let's be happy and carry on". Her wisdom was one of the most memorable treasures that I carry with me today.

Mrs Keiter inspired me to do my best and strive for excellence in my work. Whenever I struggled, she was there to lift me up; whenever I felt sad, she was there to cheer me up. I still think of my days back in Grade 6 and of how Mrs Keiter shaped my world, not only by teaching Maths but also by teaching me life lessons. Her kindness and loving heart inspired me to become a teacher so that I could carry on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that I experienced from her.

One day, we had a braai at the end of the school term to bid farewell to Mrs Keiter, who was leaving the school. On that day I felt sad, because I was saying goodbye to my role model, my teacher who helped me to become a better learner. She came and sat next to me and she whispered in my ear, "Everything will be fine. Just remember, I might not be here anymore, but I will always be in your heart". I cried when she left, but I will always carry her words with me.

I will never forget my Grade 6 teacher. During my high school years, when I was struggling with Maths, I would think back to those days when Mrs Keiter made me feel better when I felt down and transformed my understanding of what a Maths teacher is. Thank you, Mrs Keiter, for inspiring me to become the woman I am today. It was a privilege to be your learner and it is an honour to follow in your footsteps.



# A phenomenal woman





***A TRIBUTE TO MR MICHAELS, MARY WATERS SECONDARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SINESIPHO MATIWANE***

**M**r Michaels, a married man and a father figure, was my class teacher and my Life Sciences teacher in my Grade 12 year. He was a physically active, funny and teasing person, caring, passionate and knowledgeable. The way he worked and expected his work to be done showed him to be organised, punctual, dedicated and supportive. He even had a particular order in which his notes should be pasted.

His class was a living space for Biology, where skeletons, plants and past learners' projects were displayed. He prided himself on his learners' work. For him, Biology was not just about teaching us the theory; it was also practical. He lived Biology.

Mr Michaels was open with us; his energy and his funny teaching and teasing was meant to entertain us, so that we would remember what we had learnt. He would draw a picture for us, using the things in the classroom, such as the desks (eg he would use the desks as the DNA strands). His classes were so exciting that lunch time became less important. I started loving Biology and wished he had been my teacher for Biology throughout my FET band.

He was his own person and spent most of his time doing school work. He made sure we got homework and at the end of every term he would take in our books, examine them and sign them. That was his way of making sure that everyone took part in his lessons. Neatness was the way for him. He wanted neatly covered books, with terminology at the back. He was always on time and did not entertain late coming. He never shouted. Another way of making sure people participated was to send people to go and do work on the green board. This worked, because it meant that you had to make sure you knew the work, so that you did not embarrass yourself.

Mr Michaels built our confidence and trust in ourselves. He was never just absent, nor did he come to teach us and then leave early. If a certain teacher was absent, he would take that period and teach us Life Sciences or have discussions with us about life and advise us on how to do well in Matric. He made sure we attended our extra Biology classes and he always got the best pass rate in the school.

I would like to thank Mr Michaels very much for his hard work and dedication. Not only was he my teacher, but also my father, guardian and mentor. He has proven to me that there are still good teachers in the world. I wish every teacher could be like him, in terms of characteristics and actions. He has contributed to my wanting to become a great teacher.

# He lived Biology



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS MARTIN, GWABA COMBINED SCHOOL,  
EAST LONDON, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM AYABONGA MACWILI**

**W**hen I went to repeat my Grade 10 at Gwaba Combined School, I was apprehensive about how I would cope, having failed at my previous school. Gwaba is situated in Kwelekra village near East London. It had a shortage of teachers, and even some of those who were there were not dedicated to their work. On my arrival, I was introduced to Mrs Martin, our class teacher, who also taught Mathematical Literacy and Life Sciences from Grade 10 to Grade 12. She was an open, loud, talkative teacher and was always present at school. Of all the teachers who taught me at that school, she was, for me, the best. We called her 'Masibiya'.

Mrs Martin was a teacher who would always look out for us; she treated us as if we were her own children. She didn't use any punishment, rather talking to the offenders, as if she was talking to her own children, showing them the right thing to do. She was always encouraging and inspired us to do the right thing in life. There was a strong relationship between her and her learners because she knew the needs and talents of every learner in her classroom. She made me realise the importance of believing in yourself, no matter the situation.

One of the best things about her was that she didn't give homework; it was our duty to ask for homework every day, especially in Maths. This was her strategy of making sure we were engaged with our school work. Mrs Martin believed that homework was the only thing that could make an impact on learners' results. Although learners did not like getting homework, she made them understand that the importance of doing homework was that it gave practice.

She made me feel comfortable and confident in her class. She knew a good deal about the subjects she was teaching and would give advice on how to go about solving a problem so that you would not make the same mistake twice. In her Maths class, every learner would go to the board and calculate his or her own sum. She was patient with us and gave us time to think and relax. Additionally, she would give us extra help in any way possible. For example, when we had an assignment, we would do the first question with her in class. This boosted our confidence in doing the assignment. She also sold chocolates and ginger drinks, and would make competitions out of them, so as to motivate her learners to work hard in class.

Thinking about my relationship with Mrs Martin and the impact she has had on my life has shown me how I might change the lives of others. My decision to become a teacher was triggered by the way I was treated in my last three years of high school. I had not imagined myself going to university, but Mrs Martin reminded us why we were in school and of the significance of the exams that we were to write. This motivated me to aim for a university pass.

It is through the support, guidance and inspiration of Mrs Martin that today I'm happily studying at university, something I didn't even dream of. Of all the teachers that I have had, she's the best, because when I thought I couldn't recover, she made me believe in myself again and finish school. By becoming a teacher, I believe that I will be showing her my gratitude. I hope to change children's lives as she changed mine.



We had to ask  
for **Maths**  
**homework**





*A TRIBUTE TO MR NDZIMANE, GADRA MATRIC SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM ASEKHONA MINI*

When I arrived at Gadra Matric School in 2016, I felt so isolated, not knowing anyone. I also felt inferior to the other learners. Gadra Matric School was a second chance for me – I had one year to pass Grade 12 – but I did not believe in myself and my abilities. This was until I met my Economics teacher, Mr Ndzimane.

Mr Ndzimane was the ‘greatest cool’ Economics teacher. He was not originally from Grahamstown; he was from a rural town called Peddie, also in the Eastern Cape. My year of learning with him as my teacher was the best year of my life. Mr Ndzimane was a special teacher; his classes were the best of all those that I attended at Gadra. They were always vibrant; he would make jokes so that we didn’t get bored, and when it was hot, you would hear him saying “Woo, it’s so hot in here! Open up the windows, because you know that your teacher is hot (in a slang way)”. We would always laugh, because we knew he was far from ‘hot’.

Mr Ndzimane always came to class prepared for his lessons. On the few occasions when he was not present, we knew that he would leave work for us to do. Mr Ndzimane loved his job; for him, it was not simply a job; it was a profession. Mr Ndzimane made me fall in love with his subject, because he always made examples that were connected to reality; Economics, after all, is about what happens around us. He made sure we understood in class, asking for examples and also giving examples. I remember the time we were doing the business cycle. He said to us, “The business cycle is like our daily lives; it fluctuates from day to day and for you to make it stable you have to work on it. And keep in mind that you will not always hit the prosperity phase, but you might also hit the recession phase because of the problems surrounding you”.

Mr Ndzimane was not just a teacher but also a man of God, who regularly conducted Sunday services at the ‘River of Life’ church. During those services he often said, “The way I love my learners...”, and he always made examples of when he was in class. This showed how much he loved his job. Once, when I was in one of his services, he was talking about the importance of prayer. He said, “Often while I am teaching, there is something that says, ‘Pray’, and my learners will hear me say, ‘Amen’”. I knew that to be true.

Mr Ndzimane was not just a teacher; he was an inspiration, a motivator, a man of God, a father, and a friend. He is the one who inspired me to be the teacher that I want to be today: a teacher who will be dedicated to the profession; a teacher who will be a role model to many children who will come through these hands of mine, to come back one day saying they are where they are because of the values and morals that I have taught them.

# The ‘Greatest Cool’ Economics teacher



**A TRIBUTE TO MR MANGALISO JULIUS NKWINTI,  
NATHANIEL NYALUZA SECONDARY SCHOOL,  
GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SINAYO MDEKAZI**

**M**r Nkwinti was an English teacher at Nathaniel Nyaluza, one of the oldest high schools in Grahamstown, and he was also a former learner of the school. He was my English teacher in my Grade 11 and Grade 12 years. He was a humble, noble and extraordinary teacher.

Mr Nkwinti's English lessons were more interesting and fun than those of other subjects because he was funny and enthusiastic. I always looked forward to his fascinating lessons. He would change the pitch of his voice to emphasise important things we should note. Also, he used to make hand gestures and repeatedly used one particular quote: "Niyathanda ukwenza izinto ezisnaks" (You like doing funny things). He used this quote when we did something wrong; and also when we did something good, the same quote became a compliment. He treated colleagues and learners alike with respect, and they, in turn, respected him. This respect made his classroom a friendly and productive atmosphere for teaching and learning, a place where learners had no reason to fear.

There were novels and other books in his classroom, which he would allow us to borrow. These books helped me to improve in syntax and increased my lexicon. He also had educational games such as scrabble, which he used to teach us spelling in a playful and fun way. He had other helpful resources in his classroom, such as posters of English concepts. Additionally, he had a notice board which reminded us of school work, such as assignments, that needed to be done. English became my favourite learning area.

Mr Nkwinti was a reliable teacher and always present at school. He valued time management and set a good example by always arriving at school early. He also honoured his commitments by arriving for his teaching periods on time. If he was going to be absent, he would let us know and set work for us to do during his period. This classwork would be written on the board. He believed in work consciousness and in hard work. He also valued our opinions. He did not believe in corporal punishment, but would give a verbal warning to a learner who broke a classroom rule. Sometimes, as an alternative, he would send the learner out of the classroom.

Mr Nkwinti would make us copies of his year plan so that we could hold him accountable if he did not cover a certain topic with us. He would finish the syllabus early in the second term so that we could use the remaining two terms for revision. Thus, the national examinations held no surprises for us, because we had covered everything in class. In all the years he has been teaching not one of his learners has failed English First Additional Language (FAL) in their final examinations.

He was a dedicated and passionate teacher, always happy and full of energy. His teaching techniques inspired me, most especially the respect with which he conducted his classes. He was more than a teacher to us; he was also a mentor and father figure. He taught me to believe in myself and to work hard to achieve my goals. This resulted in my receiving the award for best learner in English FAL. He inspired me to pursue a teaching career and went the extra mile by helping me with my application essay for university. He left a mark on me which I would wish to leave on my learners one day, in the future.

Mr Nkwinti, you have played a significant role in my life. Your encouragement and support assisted in building my confidence and inspired me to pursue a career in education. Thank you for being an inspiration in my life. For me, you are a legend.



# Mr MJ the legend





***A TRIBUTE TO MRS K, UPLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL,  
WHITE RIVER, MPUMALANGA, FROM LAUREN WEIR***

**T**he senior phase of primary school is often not an easy time for learners. It is a time driven by hormones, a time of ending and starting friendships, finding your feet, as well as dealing with an increased amount of school work. Luckily for me, my senior phase period in primary school was made a whole lot easier by my favourite teacher, Mrs K.

I first met Mrs K in Grade 5 when she was assigned to be my new art teacher. The first thing I noticed about her was her beautiful long blonde hair. Mrs K introduced many new and different activities into our school, such as tie-dying t-shirts, painting self-portraits, starting our own gardens and so much more. At this age, I lacked confidence in all aspects of life: I felt stupid, ugly and inferior to my peers.

Towards the end of my Grade 5 year, my best friend at the time managed to persuade me to take ballroom dancing classes with him under the supervision of Mrs K as the teacher. This was an extra-curricular activity at our school. Mrs K, the teacher who enlightened my entire school career, took Matt and I under her wing and taught us Latin American dances, so that we could participate in the annual school talent show.

I was absolutely terrified to be on stage and dance in front of other people, as this was something that I had never done before. Luckily, with excellent advice from Mrs K, help from Matt and hours of practice, I outgrew this fear of being on stage and I gave the performance my all. This paid off and we won the talent show. Not only did Mrs K teach me to be more confident in my abilities, but she also gave me the opportunity to learn a new hobby, one which I still enjoy today.

Mrs K was like a bright light in my dark days, a light which made the years to come more bearable. I remember Mrs K as having an incredible, charismatic persona, and a contagious laugh and sense of humour. Mrs K was a strong woman, whom I later learnt dealt with many different personal problems in her life, but still managed to win through and give off the energy that she wanted to see in this world. I think the quality that I admire and appreciate most about Mrs K is her genuine love and concern for all who had the privilege of crossing her path. I remember clearly how Mrs K ensured that all the learners (no matter how bad they were at art or dancing) enjoyed the activities and that each learner attained their full potential and capabilities.

I strive to be a teacher like Mrs K, and will hopefully introduce similar hobbies to my learners in order to change even just one learner's life, like Mrs K changed mine. To this day we still speak regularly. She checks up on me relatively often to see if I am doing well and following my dreams. It is safe to say that Mrs K is the reason that I want to become a teacher. I would like to use this platform to thank Mrs K for all the hard work that she put into her job, and all the time that she spent making sure that I was okay. I do not know where I would be without your influence, and I do not want to know either. You are a true motivation!

# Dancing her way into my heart



**'N HULDEBLYK AAN MNR JURIE TALJAARD,  
HOËRSKOOL PJ OLIVIER, GRAHAMSTAD, OOS-KAAP,  
DEUR LEY-LANI SLABBERT**

'n Mens het skaars by die klas ingeloop toe het Meneer Taljaard jou gegroet en gevra, "Hoe gaan dit met jou?" Hy het altyd belang gestel in al sy leerders en was altyd bereid om die ekstra myl vir ons as sy Matrikulante te loop. In my Matriek jaar, het hy vir my Afrikaans en Geskiedenis gegee. Hy het elke les opwindend gemaak en het vir ons stories vertel en liedjies gespeel van mense soos Bob Dylan. Volgens meneer, het jy "'n groot gat in jou opvoeding gehad as jy nie geweet het wie Bob Dylan is nie". Sy ongelooflike persoonlikheid en sin vir humor het talle harte gesteel, insluitend myne.

Meneer Taljaard het baie jare van ondervinding in die onderwys agter die rug gehad. As jy my vra, was hy 'n wyse man. Die stories wat hy vir ons in Geskiedenis vertel het, het my 'n groot passie teenoor ons land se geskiedenis laat ontwikkel. Hy het baie keer voor die klas gestaan en vir ons die werk verduidelik en vertel van die geskiedkundige gebeure van ons land. Dit het my keer op keer gefasineer dat hy die datums en mense se name kon noem en gebeure kon vertel sonder om ooit die geskiedenis handboek voor hom oop te maak.

Hy het my in talle opsigte gemotiveer en geïnspireer. Alhoewel die meeste van ons in die eerste kwartaal sleg gedoen het, het hy vir ons goed gesê wat ons opgebou het en nie afgebreek het nie. Ek onthou dit nog soos gister toe hy vir ons gesê het "Dit maak nie saak of ek vir julle ekstra klasse gee of meer notas tik nie; julle het almal die vermoë om meer as 80% te kry en ek sal julle help om dit te bereik." Hy het altyd moeite gedoen en vir ons ekstra notas getik oor al die belangrike lang vrae, wat dinge baie makliker vir 'n mens gemaak het. Deur die res van die jaar het my persentasie in Geskiedenis geleidelik beter geword. Ek is trots om te kan sê dat ek in die laaste twee kwartale meer as 80% vir geskiedenis gekry het. Al het ek in myself getwyfel, was Meneer altyd daar om my te motiveer. Hy wou net die beste vir my gehad het.

Te danke aan Meneer Taljaard het ek ook in my Matriek eksamen meer as 80% vir Geskiedenis gekry. Dit was vir my 'n groot prestasie, want Geskiedenis was die vak waarvan ek die meeste gehou het. Hy het my geleer hoe om passievol te voel oor die werk. Meer belangrik, het hy my geleer dat mens nooit moet opgee nie. Hy het gereeld Carpe Diem gesê, wat beteken 'seize the day'. Dit het beteken dat jy die beste moet maak van elke geleentheid en elke dag, want niemand weet wat môre inhou nie.

Aan die einde van my Matriek jaar is ek na ons skool se prysuitdeling genooi. Ek het netjies in my skooluniform opgedaag, min wetend dat ek 'n prys sou kry. Die beste gevoel was toe hulle my naam noem en afkondig dat ek in Geskiedenis vir Graad 12 die beste presteer het.

Ek wil graag eendag soos die onderwyser wees, want hy het geweet waartoe ek in staat was en hy het nooit op my opgegee nie. In my oë, was hy die beste onderwyser wat ek nog ooit kon gehad het. Die manier waarop hy klas gegee het, het my net laat besef dat ek ook graag eendag so voor 'n klas wil staan om iemand anders se rolmodel te wees, want hy was beslis nie net my beste onderwyser nie, maar ook my rolmodel.



# Deur die oë van 'n leerder





**A TRIBUTE TO MISS PHUMLA QUNTU, NOMBULELO  
SECONDARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM BONISWA ZABO**

**N**ombulelo Secondary School is a huge, neatly kept, government school in Joza location, Grahamstown. In my high school years, I had the privilege of being in a fairly small class, which meant that our teacher was able to notice everyone. When I moved into Grade 12, I was taught isiXhosa Home Language by Miss Phumla Quntu. She had a passion for isiXhosa and could often be found in her classroom, busy with her work. She was my best teacher.

The second shortest teacher in the school, Phumla was a South African, residing in Grahamstown. She liked to wear dresses, high heels and black-framed spectacles; her hair was natural Afro, and she always had a smile on her face. Moreover, she was a religious woman and would tell us that if we prayed earnestly, with faith, the Lord would indeed answer our prayers. She would say it in Xhosa, 'Xa ucela ngenene nangenyaniso, imithandazo yakho izakuphendulwa'.

Even though she was short, her dedication to us as learners and the inspiration she was to us was enduring. She never questioned or had doubts about our learning abilities. In addition, she encouraged us to persevere. There were learners who had never taken isiXhosa as a subject before, so she was patient with everyone. Whenever it was time to read a novel, she would let us read it first and then act it out, so that we could demonstrate our understanding and exercise our reading skills. Every lesson she gave us was reinforced through a test.

I considered Miss Quntu my best teacher, because she was a believer and a 'parent', who never gave up on her learners. She told me, "Never give up on your studies; you can always improve on your previous results". She made her teaching of isiXhosa interesting, because she gave us topics to research. We would then make oral presentations, an exercise which prepared us to be public speakers and teachers. In that way, she helped to build our confidence. She would remind us always to keep eye contact with our audience, even when we forgot what we were going to say.

In addition, she boosted my confidence in Mathematical Literacy, a subject in which I had experienced many challenges. As I was doing well on theory subjects, she had no doubts about me in those. She would regularly ask about my well-being and how I was finding other subjects. She was a good listener and was the first person to come into my mind when I had a problem. She would tell me that I could never be defeated by something which had no power; I should simply practice and put more effort into it.

She made a miraculous contribution to my studies, because she believed in my ability to pass and this boosted my confidence. The way she taught me isiXhosa made me eager to learn. In the final exams, I got 73 percent for isiXhosa. I had not expected this, because the exams were tough and I felt the pressure of her expectations; she was the one who kept reminding us to take our education seriously and work harder to build our independence.

I may not remember everything you said, Miss Quntu, but I will always remember how special you made me feel and the equality you had in your classroom. Thank you so much for your big heart filled with love, patience and care. The influence you had on me will never be erased; it will forever keep me going. I will remember your teachings, for they have played a huge role in always keeping my eyes on the goal, and helping me never to doubt the abilities and skills that I have.

Your **height**  
does not  
determine your  
**intelligence**



# Mother & father figures

**A TRIBUTE TO MR NEVILLE GOSS, BUFFALO FLATS  
PRIMARY SCHOOL, EAST LONDON, EASTERN CAPE,  
FROM ZIARRAH-LEE GOSS**

**D**uring my schooling career, I did not encounter many teachers who inspired me to do well, but those who did found a special place in my heart. To this day, I remember all the lessons they taught me regarding education and life. This especially applies to lessons derived from my own father.

Neville 'Mr G' Goss is the perfect example of a good role model. He decided to use his difficult past experiences to better the lives of others. During the 31 years my father spent teaching and being the principal of a rural primary school, he had an immense impact on the lives of his learners. When I was younger, he would often be approached by a person whom I saw as a stranger. He would later tell me that the person was one of his past learners. All his learners came from difficult backgrounds, but, with the help of my dad, they did not let that determine their future. They always made a point of greeting him and thanking him for inspiring them. When I was a child, this made me see my dad as a superhero.

My father and I have always had a special relationship. In some ways I am an exact replica of him, apart from my being female, of course. The one trait we unashamedly share is our love of literature. As a child, he would often surprise me with a book he thought I would enjoy or recommend a poem he believed to be extraordinary. This is a tradition he has upheld to this day. He was proud of this trait in me and would often show me off to his co-workers, asking me to recite poems or prologues for them.

I attended Buffalo Flats Primary School for five years before I had the opportunity to be taught by my father. Years before I started Grade 5 (the grade he taught), my father would teach me everything to do with English, which is one of the reasons I fell in love with the subject. We would sit at the table and he would explain terms such as "personification" and provide me with examples. My favourite is, "The Tabasco sauce smiled". After giving this example he would ask, with a funny face, "Can Tabasco sauce smile? No. Tabasco sauce can't smile, it isn't alive." I have carried such lessons with me throughout my life.

When I finally reached Grade 5, I had the honour of being taught by my father. It was then that I realised why all those strangers made a point of thanking him. I observed occasions when specific learners got caught up in drugs or had learning disabilities that their parents refused to acknowledge. Mr G would always find a way to help them. Not once did he ever embarrass a learner, make them feel inferior or make them experience negativity.

Mr G is the greatest contributor towards my decision to become a teacher. He is a kind, humble, compassionate and loving man; the world we live in could use more people like him. In today's society, we need more teachers to love their learners and their jobs. We need more teachers who will go out of their way to make a child feel special when they're feeling down. Most of all, we need more teachers to go the extra mile to ensure the success of their learners' academic careers. Neville Goss is, and always will be, my role model. I am grateful to have a father as inspiring as he. I aspire to be as great a teacher as he is and to have a similar positive impact on the lives of the children I teach.



## "Can Tabasco Sauce smile?"





**A TRIBUTE TO MR JARAM, WOOLHOPE SECONDARY SCHOOL, MALABAR, PORT ELIZABETH, EASTERN CAPE, FROM MBALI CAWA**

**W**oolhope Secondary School was an interesting school with many different layers to it. Even though it was well run, there were still a large number of learners who would bunk, drink and smoke weed inside the premises of the school. With only a few positive influences at play, the environment forced you to make a choice about who you would associate with and the habits you would gain from that. To survive the school, you had to be emotionally strong and determined. You had to know yourself fully, so that you could not be easily swayed and lose yourself in the long haul.

Mr Jaram was the deputy principal of the school and he also taught History to Grade 11 and Matric classes. When we were first told that he would be our history teacher for the next two years, I was intimidated by the mere thought. His role as deputy principal made him seem strict and unapproachable. I guess I just feared that my voice would not be heard.

To my surprise, none of my worst fears were realised. Mr J made History fun, interesting, enjoyable and easy to understand. He had a magical way about him that made you go to class, listen, understand and pass. For two years, we were always late for the class that came after his!

For me, his class was the one place where my opinions mattered; he even made us believe that we could somehow change the world. He encouraged debates, in which he would give as good as he got. Even if we said something he did not agree with, he would refrain from insisting that his view, as teacher, was right. He allowed us to be ourselves and his class became a sanctuary for us; it was the one place where the walls did not have ears.

In spending time with Mr J there were number of things we got to know:

- His love for his wife, two daughters and son: he spoke regularly about how proud he was of them;
- His love and respect for his Islamic religion and his dream to one day visit the holy city of Mecca;
- His love and passion for teaching history;
- And last but not least, his love and loyalty to the ANC. At some point during election season of 2014 I said to him that I didn't find the ANC relevant and received a 35-minute lecture on where the party came from, how he had been a loyal member since his youth and that the president was not the party, its history or what it had done for the people.

Looking at my relationship with this man, I realised that it was true when they say, "If you respect the privilege of being a learner, you become a privileged person who is trusted beyond the confines of a classroom". One day, when I ran into his wife, she held my hand and asked that I work hard and pass my Matric well, not to disappoint her husband, who always spoke so highly of me. That day I became emotional, because I realised that, just as important as he was to me, I was also important to him.

Mr J was a father to so many of us: if you were in trouble, his door was always open. He was a friend and a voice of reason to many, including me. His ears were always ready to listen and his arms willing to comfort. Through him I learnt that every learner is different and should be pushed, loved and motivated to excel.

If I can just be half the person and teacher he was, I will have achieved my goal in life.

The one place  
where the  
walls  
did not  
have ears



**A TRIBUTE TO MISS JACOBS, MARY WATERS HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM NWABISA BONDE**

**M**ary Waters High School had no fence, because some people and learners who lived nearby had stolen and sold the metal fence to a recycling centre. We never felt safe at school because, according to the community, we were their targets: they could make money by taking our cellphones and watches. Many learners spent most of their school days behind the classrooms, smoking until home time. It was a school where a focused and determined learner could be influenced into believing that it is not education which is a key to success, but that bunking classes in order to hustle, steal or bully other learners for their pocket money made a person successful. Disobeying a teacher seemed to be a good thing to do.

I had never liked school and the things I have described gave me more reason not to enjoy it. I was among those learners who came to school for the sake of coming. I sometimes came without my homework and would be bored in class whilst the teacher was teaching. I could easily have been influenced and ended up bunking classes, but Miss Jacobs turned me, and many other learners, in a positive direction.

Miss Jacobs, an IsiXhosa speaking woman, taught history from grade 10 to 11. She was a pastor and the leader of the School's Christian Organisation (SCO).

After the June holidays in 2012, the year I was in grade 9, I stood in assembly, uninterested as usual. It was announced that one of the learners had died due to a car accident and Miss Jacobs came forward to speak and pray. I cannot remember the verse, but I remember that she asked for donations and that she explained how we, as learners, came from different backgrounds. She prayed for those who, at that moment, had heavy hearts. She prayed for the school and learners to change in a positive way. She also prayed that parents could change and care. Her final message was, "Life is too short to be doing nothing productive. Be the change that you want at home. Some of you might be asking how, when you do not have money and are not clever enough to get good marks. Do not worry about that. Pray to God; He will never forsake you".

After she had said this, I thought of how my parents loved me and wanted the best for me. I even thought about how I did not even know what I wanted to be; I had, as yet, no dreams about the future. All that I imagined was being behind the wheel of a fancy car. I decided that I would go to the SCO prayer meeting. From the time that I did that, I felt a sense of belonging and regained some strength to work hard at my studies. Miss Jacobs was not just the SCO Leader but was also a mother to the learners and encouraged us with bible verses.

Things changed for me: I loved going to school and I worked hard and got good marks. I even studied history in Grade 10 and fell in love with it because Miss Jacobs was passionate about teaching history. I then had dreams of being like her. I wanted to be a teacher and change learners' lives. I wanted to bring out the best in them, just as Miss Jacobs had done for me.

Thank you, Miss Jacobs, for showing me that hard work pays off. Thank you for making me realise that whatever a person believes in, will happen. Thanks for making me see that I can also be passionate about something.



Life is too short to  
**be doing,  
nothing  
productive**





***A TRIBUTE TO MR NHLEKO, BIRDSWOOD SECONDARY SCHOOL, RICHARDS BAY, KWAZULU-NATAL, FROM KHULISIWE HADEBE***

I have chosen to write about a teacher who showed me that we need to live life to the fullest. He taught me Mathematical Literacy at Birdswood Secondary School, from Grade 10 to 12. Birdswood is a multi-racial school, located in Richards Bay. The school was established in 2012, so everything was well-built and it had enough resources to accommodate every learner.

Mr Nhleko was a tall, dark gentleman who shared jokes in his lessons, which kept us from being bored. He inspired his learners to succeed and kept them pushing hard to achieve the best results. What I liked about him was that he showed support to learners in everything they did, not only in their schoolwork. Even if you had family problems, he was willing to help and assist as much as he could. When my own father was admitted to hospital, I used to cry every day. I had even lost interest in school, but there Mr Nhleko was beside me, supporting me through it all. A teacher who shows favour to no-one and treats all his learners equally is someone to be admired and appreciated. He was kind, funny, humble, passionate, a role model and a father to all. He taught me to stand firm and make my voice heard and to do everything with a good and warm heart. Because of him, I developed a passion for standing my ground and having no fear when it came to oral presentation.

This teacher was my best teacher; I feel that Mr Nhleko had all the qualities that children look for in a teacher. I have not forgotten him till today and I am sure I never will. I am now at university, but Mr Nhleko and I keep in touch through phone calls. Whenever I need advice or am having a problem, I talk to him, because I know he brings out the best in me.

After I had completed high school, I changed the way I saw life and the way I did things. I decided that I wanted to give back to other children; to groom them from their youngest age. This is why I chose to do foundation phase teaching. I want to have good teaching methods, make the lessons interesting and ensure that all my learners leave my classroom with a clear understanding of what has been taught. I want to have a pleasing appearance and voice. I wish to be a good leader to my learners.

However, I still have a portrait of Mr Nhleko, my high school teacher, engraved on my mind and heart. There are not enough words to describe my gratitude to Mr Nhleko. I thank him for inspiring me to be the person I am now. He is the reason that I want to show my learners that equality does exist in the classroom and that a learner can find love and comfort rather than hatred from a teacher. Thank you, Mr Nhleko, for being my eagle and teaching me how to fly!

# My eagle: every learner needs his or her own champion



**A TRIBUTE TO MR DEN JELA, NOMBULELO SECONDARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM LUMKA MDLUNGU**

I was born in Johannesburg, but raised in Transkei, in a small town called Ngqamakwe. I moved to Grahamstown when I was in Grade 3. When I proceeded from primary school to Nombulelo Secondary School in Grade 10, I experienced a serious crisis of confidence. Nombulelo is situated in Joza Street in Grahamstown, a double-storey brick building with a big hall. At this school, I faced many challenges and felt uncomfortable because I met many different people who behaved in unfamiliar ways. I felt that I did not belong.

This only changed when I met Mr Jela, our Business Studies teacher, who welcomed me with an open heart. Mr Jela, a tall, good-looking man in his 30s, was approachable, smart and professional and took care of his appearance. He played a big role in my life by being a father to me. This really meant a lot to a young person like me, who grew up with no father around. I really needed a father figure in my life, and even called him 'daddy'. He used to fight for me when I faced injustices and, when my peers judged me, he defended me. When my peers teased and provoked me, and said that I thought I was better than everyone, he stood up for me.

Although my school was not the best school, he made me believe that I could make a difference in that school and that I could achieve anything I wanted to. He served as a motivator, not just telling me to work hard and be dedicated, but doing that himself. He was very dedicated in everything he did and he loved and valued his job. Unlike other teachers, he was a good example to me and to others.

On top of this, Mr Jela always brought a smile to my face because he was encouraging and energetic. I could see that he did not teach out of necessity, but because it was his calling. Because he was so passionate about his work, I used to enjoy his lessons and did well in my studies. I actually became one of the best learners in the school. I am pleased to say that he was my role model. One might wonder why I chose a male teacher as an inspiration. I chose him because he did what the other teachers could not do; he made jokes in class so that we could feel comfortable. In most classes, when it was time for presentations, we used to shake, because there was tension in the class. However, in his class, we felt free, because he did not like any form of discrimination.

Mr Jela was very different from other teachers. He did not keep bad company, he did his work on time, and was never lazy. He was well organised and even used to work during holidays. I remember, as learners, we used to go to school during holidays as well, because we liked what he did. The other thing about Mr Jela was that he was a humble person; he sacrificed his time to help us, in order to make sure that we passed Matric. He made me believe in myself as a learner and he was patient. He taught me discipline through his lived example. One day, I forgot the time for my English exam. He called me to remind me that I was writing. When the teachers wanted to prevent me from writing, he pleaded with them, because he saw potential in me. I passed that exam with flying colours. I will forever be thankful to Mr Den Jela.



Don't allow  
**anyone** to  
**put you**  
**down**





**A TRIBUTE TO THE HOME-SCHOOLING OF  
MRS NDIBONGO, FROM HER DAUGHTER  
LINNEA NDIBONGO**

# My mother, my teacher

**D**uring my school life, I have come across both great teachers and teachers who only remind me of the things I hated about school. Miss Stacy, for instance, had the patience to teach me multiplication, plus she had a tube of itchy-bite cream that she let us use when we came to school with mosquito bites. Mrs. Lines, another of my teachers, was the reason my parents knew I needed glasses. You need not guess the reason why I was called 'four eyes' at school. Unfortunately, because our family was constantly moving between schools and across countries, I was not able to bond with my conventional teachers; that is when I met the best teacher I have ever crossed paths with: Mrs. Ndibongo (her other name is Mom).

During my school life, I have come across both great teachers and teachers who only remind me of the things I hated about school. Miss Stacy, for instance, had the patience to teach me multiplication, plus she had a tube of itchy-bite cream that she let us use when we came to school with mosquito bites. Mrs. Lines, another of my teachers, was the reason my parents knew I needed glasses. You need not guess the reason why I was called 'four eyes' at school. Unfortunately, because our family was constantly moving between schools and across countries, I was not able to bond with my conventional teachers; that is when I met the best teacher I have ever crossed paths with: Mrs. Ndibongo (her other name is Mom).

From 8:30 until 14:00, she was Mrs. Ndibongo; after that she was mom. Being taught by her was hard; before she resigned to teach my siblings and myself at home, my mom had been a high school mathematics teacher. She was a no-nonsense teacher, who pushed her learners and did not take 'I don't know' as an answer. The strictness was not visible in her when she stepped out of her classroom; it could not be found in her five-foot frame or in her colourful attire, but it was there all the same.

As a little child, I remember hearing her Grade 9 learners say that she was mean and they could not wait to be rid of her. The next year those same learners were so thankful that she had pushed them as hard as she did and even wanted her as a teacher again. When I got to Grade 9, I was in the exact same place as those learners had been. Mrs. Ndibongo was mean and all she did was shove maths down my throat.

With my mom being a maths teacher, I had no choice but to take pure maths. By the time I was in Grade 10, I cried almost every day during maths. I did not believe in myself or my mathematical abilities. This was mostly due to the fact that both of my parents are really smart, and my brother proved he was just as smart, doing a first-year university calculus course when he was in Grade 11. It was hard to see my young brother do better than I did at school; I would spend hours looking at a set of questions trying to figure out the answer, while my brother tried to figure out how I could be so dumb. Even my tears did not persuade Mrs. Ndibongo to let me off the hook. She would simply explain the methods again - one, two, three...ten times. She was patient and never compared me to my brother, her previous learners, or herself.

Mrs. Ndibongo pushed me far beyond what I ever thought I could achieve. She never gave up on me and never let me give up on myself. She reminded me that I was not made to be the same as my brother; yes, he was good at maths, but I was good at art. As a mom, she took the time to encourage me and love me. As a teacher, she supported me patiently as I pursued my academic goals, no matter how long it took.

I do not think I would have done so well academically, were it not for Mrs. Ndibongo. Because of her, I was able to persevere and come out on the other side. It is because of her teaching that I decided to become a teacher. It has become my dream to make a difference in the lives of children, just as she does. I can only hope to follow in her footsteps, not only becoming a great teacher, but also a great mom.



**A TRIBUTE TO MR NIKELO, SIDBURY FARM SCHOOL,  
SIDBURY, EASTERN CAPE, FROM NOMBEKO NOMOYI**

**M**y best teacher was Mr Nikelo. I met him when I was doing Standard 3 (Grade 5 nowadays) at Sidbury Farm School. He was a godsend – a strict teacher to whom failure was not an option; he took his job seriously. We loved him like a father because, despite being strict, he was kind and very patient with his learners.

He taught us English and was very good at it. We wrote a test every month and if you failed, punishment awaited you. That punishment was repeated until you passed. We all did well in his class. “Ask if you don’t understand,” he would say, “because I will not be there when you are writing your test”.

Mr Nikelo did many things for our school out of the goodness of his heart, ensuring that our school gained recognition in spite of being a farm school. He left us with good memories. On my first day at school, our Grade 1 teacher was sick, so they placed us in Mr Nikelo’s classroom. He noticed that I was chewing bubble-gum and called me to his table. When I reached his table, he took hold of me by my throat, saying, “Spit the chewing gum out!” Once it was out, he took his hand off me and told me to sit down. I was embarrassed; other learners were laughing at me. In spite of all this, Mr Nikelo was my best teacher.

Music was his legacy: he taught us hymns after school. One of the hymns he taught us was Imikhosi yemithika; it was always a great pleasure to listen to that hymn. We would hear it on the radio and sing along, proud to hear our hymn on the radio. The best hymn he ever taught us was uSangoma. He won trophies because of the hymn and some called him Sangoma because of it. We enjoyed singing it very much, and at choir competitions our parents would say, “Please sing uSangoma”.

Mr Nikelo made sure we were involved in sports. I used to come first in running events at athletics meetings. I was selected to run the five kilometres at Alicedale and ran at full speed, leaving everyone behind. I won a medal and was very happy and proud of our success. Both Mr Nikelo and my parents were excited and very proud of me.

In many ways, Mr Nikelo groomed me to become who I am today. He led me to want to be a teacher. He instilled values in me by living them out in front of our eyes. We had a good relationship with him, and would share with him our home problems, confident that he would respect our confidence. He would help us solve our difficulties. I would like to be a teacher so that I can do the same for others; I would like to be like Mr Nikelo: easy to talk to, a good listener and a patient person.

Mr Nikelo was my family, my hero and my role model. He was everything I needed in a teacher and I thank him for everything he did for us. Wherever he is now, I have no doubt that he is still giving time to his learners. If time could stand still or go backwards, I would choose to go back to those years when I was in his classroom. I am what I am because of this teacher. May he shine wherever he is.



Despite being  
**strict**, he was  
also **kind**





***A TRIBUTE TO MS NOMBONISO NCETANI, UMTATA COLLEGE OF MATHS, SCIENCE AND COMMERCE, UMTATA, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SINALO NONGAUZA***

**N**omboniso Ncetani is a god-fearing woman, born and bred in Umtata in the Eastern Cape. A single parent who had lost her husband a few years before, when I knew her she had made peace with it, and was living happily on her own, her two children having grown up and left home. At school, she was not only a teacher, but also the HOD for Life Orientation, a preacher, and the organiser of the Student Christian Organisation (SCO). She always urged learners to join the SCO group or to go to church.

Umtata College is an independent multiracial school, dominated by black learners, which offers tuition to learners in Grades 8 to 12. It opens earlier than other schools in January, and all learners are expected to report to school with all their stationery and in full school uniform.

When I first set my foot in that school in late January to join Grade 10, learners had already settled down and got to know one another. It was the second period of the morning, the Life Orientation class, and the teacher was busy teaching. I appeared at her door, accompanied by one of the school administrators. I was not scared of the other learners, but of what the teacher would say about my late arrival. As I walked into the classroom, Ms Ncetani stopped teaching and gave me a smile. She welcomed me and asked me to introduce myself to the class. It seemed as if this was normal procedure with new learners and since it was a Life Orientation class, she wanted everyone to feel comfortable.

Time passed, and Ms Ncetani's class became my favourite, I liked the way she conducted her lessons and the way she related to each and every learner. On one specific day, she came to class without a formal lesson to present; it seemed she just wanted to speak life into us. At first, we were confused, because, the way we knew teachers, they would normally just teach and leave, regardless of the problems we might be facing. She started by sharing the life problems she had faced when growing up, as well as those she was currently facing. We felt sorry for her, because she had been through a lot of pain and trauma. Nevertheless, she seemed happy. Her agenda was to make us feel comfortable to talk to her about our problems so that she could help where she could. Some learners ignored her efforts, but she became a parent, a friend and also an advisor to me. Every time I was battling, I would go to her. Sometimes she would also share with me what had been bothering her on that day. Maybe she wanted me to know that every person has bad days.

Her life lessons made me realise that life would not always be easy; there are times of hardship where you might even think of taking your own life. She left me knowing that whatever your situation, the pain it causes can never be compared to the worth of your life. That is what I always tell my peers.

Every moment with her made me appreciate her efforts in trying to shape and guide me through my high school life. Nomboniso Ncetani, my teenage years were not easy, but you made me realise that adolescence is just a phase that every child has to pass through. You taught me that it is okay to make mistakes; that later I can reflect on and learn from them. I am a different person from the one who first met you; you became my second mother and I appreciate what you have done for me. Thank you very much.

**She was not  
only  
a teacher  
but also  
a parent**



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS SARAH HENDERSON, EPWORTH  
HIGH SCHOOL, PIETERMARITZBURG, KWAZULU-NATAL,  
FROM MICAELA VAN DYK**

**H**enry Brooks Adams once said, “A teacher affects eternity; no one can tell where the influence stops.” As I remember my Grade 10 form teacher, I realise that I was blessed to be influenced so strongly by this magical English teacher with deep Irish roots. Mrs Henderson was not merely a teacher, but also a mentor and mother-like figure to each and every girl she taught.

In-between the lush green and immaculately kept gardens, lay the buildings of Epworth High School in Pietermaritzburg. One of the pristine white buildings had two floors, the second of which included Mrs Henderson’s classroom. Mrs Henderson had an incredible fashion sense and always arrived at school in excessively high heels. Her classroom was on the top floor of our school, so she had numerous stairs to climb in those heels. When we entered the classroom for the first time, her bubbly, sincere and motherly nature struck us immediately. Her thick Irish accent made her that much more intriguing.

The petite Irish teacher’s love for the English language inspired us all. Her classroom was colourfully decorated with encouraging quotes, pictures and posters. Every girl wished to emulate this young, vibrant, fashionable teacher with a friendly nature and a heart of gold.

Mrs Henderson would start the day off by enquiring of each of us how we were. Her ambition was to make each learner feel her classroom was home from home. When situations were stressful, or tensions were high, she became our supporter. She always included us in her decisions on schoolwork as well as her personal life, thus making us feel we were really part of her family.

Mrs Henderson encouraged us by telling us how special we were and how we deserved to be treated. Moreover, if anyone told us differently, she would make it her mission to show that person that he or she was wrong. An instance of this occurred before our Grade 10 Vogue Ball. A month before the dance, we had dance lessons every week, with the boys who would accompany us. On one occasion, one of the boys spoke very rudely of his date. Mrs Henderson responded fiercely and excluded the boy from the dance. She later told us that no man in our lives, present or future, should ever be allowed to treat a woman in that manner. She was so protective of her ‘girls’, that she could not bear any one of them to be hurt.

Although she was never my English teacher, she would always offer her help and advice on English during form time. If any learners struggled, she would go the extra mile to help us pass well. Mrs Henderson was always in her classroom, waiting for any learner who might need her assistance.

Furthermore, her teaching methods showed me that teachers don’t have to teach at a desk and lecture to the class. For example, when reading one of William Shakespeare’s plays, she allowed her class to dress up as characters in the play and act the scenes outside, making it fun for each of her learners. The rest of us envied her class, as they were clearly having fun outside, re-enacting the scenes.

Her life lessons, encouragements, motivations and passion have contributed to my decision to become a teacher. Her kindness, generosity, love for and of the world, as well as her friendly nature made me feel safe and welcome in her classroom. For this reason, she has inspired me to become a teacher. I wish to be like her and influence many other lives the way she influenced mine. Thank you, Mrs Henderson, for being my “pot of gold” and inspiring me to become the best teacher that I can be.



# The Pot of Gold in her teaching