



Why we did it

Our purpose in developing the 'My Best Teacher' booklet 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. We made a conscious decision to include all 40 stories in our booklet. Although we did not restrict students to writing about Foundation Phase teachers, we were heartened to see that seven 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. The majority of our stories come from local schools in the Eastern Cape; we have stories from the cities such as Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, East London, Plettenberg Bay, Queenstown and Somerset East. But there are also stories from Peddie, Dutywa, Mount Fletcher, Uitenhage, Matatiele, Mount Frere and Barkley East. In addition, there are a few stories from KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape, Gauteng, Mpumalanga as well as one from Zimbabwe.

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 will in turn value the voices of their learners and encourage them to write about and reflect on their experiences.

Where to from here?

We are continuing with the 'My Best Teacher' project with each new intake of 1st year students and we plan to compile further booklets dedicated to their stories. Jansen indicates that a constraint of his book was that the stories chosen were written in English only. Our booklet 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). Thus, our plan is to invite new groups of 1st year students to write their best teacher stories in a language of their choice. While this might make the marking process slightly more complex, a benefit will be an authentic multi-lingual booklet of best teacher stories. We look forward to this next phase of our 'My Best Teacher' project.

Believing in all children, no matter their differences



Mrs Jack the Ripper

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS KATHY JACK OF ALEXANDRIA HIGH
SCHOOL, ALEXANDRIA, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM ALEXANDER DESMOND REPAPIS**

I thank you, Mrs Jack, for inspiring me to always imagine the impossible in this world and start making it possible. You are the one who taught me to dream; your classroom was my momentary escape from reality. You made stories such fun to listen to; we all felt we were really a part of them and I became a character in every novel you read. I enjoyed how you always provided me the space to lose myself in thought. I enjoyed the way we would engage in deep conversation about the novels we read: how we spoke about the world as if it were a disfigured face yet possessing beauty; how we laughed and debated and argued like friends and what a unique bond I developed with you - which for me was truly special! I miss the relationship I had with you, my prison guard. I miss the other prisoners I befriended, and still today I reminisce about all the good old days. Oh, how much fun we had behind those prison walls! I thank you, Mrs Jack; you helped me come out of hiding and you taught me to challenge my world.

I remember how I used to be the learner in the far back corner of the class, always with my head down in my books, scribbling and drawing robotic teachers and learners that looked like starved zombies, and other silly cartoon illustrations of an imprisoned world; I drew an enslaved humanity marching out of the schooling system robbed of twelve years of their lives. You always challenged me, trying to break down the wall I had put up around myself, to break me out of my isolation. You would force me to sit in the front of the class and challenge me to give answers, as if I were your only student. You pushed me to write on the green board where I ended each sentence with a full stop made of a skull or a nuclear explosion. You made me interact with the other learner sponges, forcing me to do public speaking and join the debate club. We always argued and debated, but you managed to convince me to get more involved in the system, convincing me to conform to the ideologies you tried so hard to indoctrinate. Today I am very grateful that we did argue as much as we did, because you managed to help me break down walls that I had created to keep the world outside. Thank you for being that hammer. I want to thank you, Jack the Ripper, for ripping me out of my comfort zone of isolation. You helped me trust the world enough to explore it and not despise it so much. I am as crazy a person now as I have ever been, but all thanks to you, I have been able to free myself.

I truly miss you, Jack the Ripper, for you made an impact on my life. I now look at the teaching profession not as a job but as a passion which can be very rewarding and fulfilling because of the relationships that one can build with the various unique characters in a class: because of the way they influence your life as a teacher and you influence them as learners. A classroom is truly a place of learning because both learners and teachers learn every day from one another in very special and unique ways. I now aspire to become a teacher because teaching trains one to be humble and open-minded in dealing with the diversity of people you encounter in this rewarding career. I hope my teaching will inspire and influence the learners of my classroom to reach for their passions and full potentials, and to aim for success; that they will follow their aspirations in life as my teacher Mrs Jack encouraged me to do in her very unique manner. This will mean that I am pursuing my passions in life.

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS KAISER OF VICTORIA PRIMARY SCHOOL,
GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM NTOMBESIZWE BOOI**

I started schooling believing that I was stupid. I am not sure whether it was merely something I had told myself or whether it was a conclusion I had reached in the classroom, by judging from my academic performance and comparing myself to those around me. Whichever it was, I really doubted that I would even pass Grade 3. To my surprise I passed all my Foundation Phase classes and proceeded to Grade 4.

Grade 4 for me meant going to a new school, with a new teacher, new faces and a completely different environment. I had gotten used to being in an environment where I could be myself, speaking only my mother tongue and only having to change the language that I used when I had to write some answers on paper. Moving from Ntaba Maria Pre-primary School to Victoria Primary School was a huge transition for me and it changed my life: English was the medium of instruction and learners were strongly encouraged to speak English even outside the classroom, so as to develop good English competence.

When I moved to this school In 2006, I was welcomed into the classroom and the arms of an amazing teacher; her name was Mrs Kaiser. She understood that I was not at ease speaking English and that I was enormously uncomfortable, because every person around me was just speaking English. On Orientation day, tears were streaming down my face, the uncomfortable flow of salty water telling the story of someone who felt she was at the wrong place at the wrong time. I cursed the decision that had brought me to such a school. Then Mrs Kaiser came up to me and gave me a hug and promised me that she would be nice, and that I did not have to be scared of her or of anybody else.

In the classroom, she was magic. She had her own way of making me feel relaxed and comfortable, even though I did not feel calm inside. At first I failed at everything except spelling tests. I always obtained 100% for these tests, not because I studied but because I was just naturally good at ordering the letters, even in words I had never seen in my head.

In spite of this, Mrs Kaiser saw beyond the Ntombi who was lazy, the Ntombi who thought of herself as a failure and who believed that she was at the wrong school. She was very patient with me and treated me with care even when I was undeserving. She always told me that she knew that I was smart, but just lazy. She happened to be multilingual and so she would always say in my home language “sebenza ntombi” meaning “work, my girl”, and this would be so heart-warming that I would actually be motivated to work.

She had her own way of reaching out to every single soul in the class, and did not show any obvious signs of favouritism to particular learners. When I progressed to other grades, and even to high school, she was always in the back of my mind because of her loving and caring nature and the passion that she had for teaching. She never got tired of my million excuses for not doing my homework, but kept reminding me of why it is important for my future that I do my work.

I would like to adopt her way of doing things when I am a teacher one day, trying to understand my learners and be a role model to them. As I was writing this story I was reminded of the words of a man called Horace Mann. He said, “A teacher who is attempting to teach without inspiring the pupil with a desire to learn is hammering on cold iron.”



Looking beyond and deeper than the surface



*She believed that
teaching was the
mother of all
professions*

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS DE BRUIN OF BIGGARSBERG PRIMARY
SCHOOL, GLENCOE, NORTHERN KWAZULU-NATAL,
FROM LINDELWA NOTHANDO NGCOBO**

As a young girl who grew up in a village, went to a rural pre-school and could barely understand English, I was attending my first day of school in a multi-racial school. My class teacher was a loving white lady who was dressed up like a lawyer in a formal black two-piece suit. She secured her long blonde afro hair with a ribbon on the left side of her face, her red lipstick and red cheeks completing the gorgeous look. She closely resembled the white women I had always seen on television.

I could not even understand when she greeted me, and just nodded to everything that was said to me, despite it being an instruction. I somehow felt that I did not belong or fit in to this environment, where everyone seemed to know one another. As I sat by myself at the back and Mrs de Bruin made her way towards me, I started having butterflies in my stomach. 'What am I going to say now?' I asked myself. She greeted me and once again I gave my usual response of nodding my head. It was then that Mrs de Bruin realised that I could not even understand what is termed 'basic English'.

From that day onwards, my life changed. Though I was treated like every child, I was given more attention than any other child and was required to attend extra classes where basic concepts were taught. Months went by, and I found I could start engaging in class conversations and could answer questions like every other child in class. I just did not have that American accent that everyone else in class had!

Mrs de Bruin is one of the many reasons why I am so keen to get this degree. She believed in me when I was a blank page. She filled me with prints of motivation and told me I was the best. I reached greater heights and as result, I believed in my strength. She made me look forward to each day of school and made me cherish my primary school years. She performed magic in my life, turning a village girl whom everyone looked down upon into a bright star. She filled my life with colour. I recall the day I received my final report with the comment, 'PROMOTED TO THE NEXT GRADE. MOOI WERK!' As from that day onwards, I told myself that one day I would be like Mrs de Bruin.

She really inspired me as a child and a future educator. She made me realise that everyone is unique and special. She believed that teaching was the mother of all professions. She made me realise that children may forget what you say to them but they will never forget how you make them feel. And she maintained her sense of humour against all the odds.

Thank you, Mrs de Bruin, for believing in me and for making me a shining star. I realise that it is not that teachers like you have fancy degrees or qualifications, but that they have big hearts and a desire to change the world. I see myself being more than a teacher, just as you were.

**She
believed
in me when I was
a blank page**

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS MAJIBA OF J.A CALATA HIGH SCHOOL,
CRADOCK, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM LUANNE MINERS**

I have learned that in order to make someone part of your life you must trust and be honest with that person and let that person have a positive influence on your life. Therefore I can say that Mrs Majiba, my Grade 11-12 Agricultural Science teacher, was my best teacher; this is because she was there whenever I needed someone to talk to for personal or academic reasons. Mrs Majiba was a very strict person, but loving and caring and always positive in everything that she did.

Her constant message to us was that anything that you as a person want to do is possible, and therefore she would encourage all her learners to do their best. Mrs Majiba would tell us, 'No matter what you are going through, you must always be positive about yourself and believe in yourself; when you are negative about yourself you will never get positive results'. She would also say that there would always be people with negative things to say about me, but I must stay strong and never give up. People will always talk, whether you do wrong or right.

Another of her strong messages was that if you understand something you must always help other learners in the class, building bonds of trust. That is one of the reasons why she is my best teacher; she taught me to have respect for myself in order to have respect for the next person. And she taught me never do something to someone that I do not want done to me. She was passionate about her work and she always put school work first no matter what else was happening. She told us that whenever we did not understand something we must always ask for help.

The school I attended used isiXhosa as a medium; I was the only coloured in the school. For me to go to that school was very challenging because of the behaviour of the children, and even some teachers, towards me. They would always say negative things to me because I was a coloured attending an 'African' school. That made me suffer academically, but all of that changed when I met Mrs Majiba; she always had the right words to make me feel better about a situation and to encourage me. Those experiences taught me never to discriminate against a learner that I teach; I know that I must love every learner, show them the right way and be an example to them.

I learned a lot by watching the way Mrs Majiba treated other people. She saw that the children in her classroom came from different backgrounds, so she tried her best to make everyone feel loved and cared for. Some of the children in the class did not have parents; she as the teacher had to be the parent for them. There were learners in the class that did not have proper uniforms to wear or came to school without eating and she would help them. She would tell us that no one asked to be in that position so we need to support one another. She never separated her class into children from rich families and those from poor families. She reminded us that we must never look down on any person, because that person might help you one day.

I once wanted to be a dental therapist or a paramedic but I have changed my mind; Mrs Majiba has inspired me to make a difference in other people's lives, and in my community and country. I have learned that as a teacher I can have a positive influence in a child's life and am studying education in order to be a good teacher, to enable children to have a bright future and in that way to change the world. I thank Mrs Majiba for everything that she taught me and for making me a better person.



The love that she showed us made us one

*She saw that the children in her
classroom came from
different backgrounds, so she
tried her best to make
everyone feel loved and cared for*



**A TRIBUTE TO MR ROBERT STEVENSON OF
GRAEME COLLEGE, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM ANDA SINGATA**

Teachers play a vital role in the future of their learners; without knowing it, they make a big difference in their lives. It is a teacher's compassionate eye that can see the success or failure in a learner; when teachers adopt a positive attitude towards their learners, they set them a standard for success. Today I want to pay tribute to a teacher who inspired me, a man I will never forget. He believed I could pass even when all hope was gone. I plan on sharing how this man changed my life and through his approach became a role model to me. This man was Mr Stevenson, a deputy Headmaster of Graeme College.

Mr Stevenson was a hardworking, motivational history teacher, working at an all-boys school. He taught me in Grade 11 and 12. His motto was: "Everyone can succeed as long as they put their minds to the challenge." His methods of teaching were always interesting; even the bunkers made time for his classes.

He had studied English and taught it in his previous school and, because of this, he would always share riveting new words with us. Mr Stevenson was punctual and professional, a teacher who engaged with the whole class. He never had favourites, treated us all equally and taught us to treat each other as equals as well.

In the year 2012, when I was in Grade 11, I had become a man according to Xhosa culture. Many learners were uncomfortable being in the same class with me. Some even looked down on me, doubtful that a man should learn with boys. I was introverted, stressed, very emotional, and battling in school. I did not see myself finishing the year, let alone passing the Grade. One day, when the final bell rang and everyone was making their way out of history class, a voice shouted, "Anda, could you stay behind for just a minute." I was certain I was in trouble, just not sure what I had done. Mr Stevenson started by asking me how I was finding my way in Grade 11. No teacher had ever asked me this kind of question before. I was puzzled and had no idea how to respond.

Mr Stevenson told me that he was worried about my performance; something seemed to be troubling me and it was reflecting in my academic performance. He assured me that there was a way forward, if only I would allow him to assist me. He was confident that together we could get my grades up, even saying, "I know it is possible for you to be in the top three in this class". Mr Stevenson did not even give me a chance to respond, but simply took a blank piece of paper and marked it with a black dot. 'Is this paper useable still?' he asked, and I answered, 'Yes'. As I was looking at the paper he commented that only a small portion of the paper was ruined by the dot: the dot did not determine the quality of the paper; it was just a mark. He told me not to let something as small as my insecurities ruin my whole life.

The thought of someone besides my family caring for me was overwhelming; I honestly did not expect it. Mr Stevenson began to work with me, and I became comfortable with him in a way that I never was with any other teacher. Slowly and surely, as our extra classes progressed, the way I viewed life changed. In 2013 I matriculated and I was in the top three in the history class, as Mr Stevenson had predicted.

Thank you, Mr Stevenson, for seeing something in me which I did not know existed. You were the eye which never gave up on me, and you showed me how to motivate success in any student. You have inspired me to become like you and change someone else's life for the good, as you changed mine.

The eye that never gave up

*Thank you,
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Education and Faith

**A TRIBUTE TO MR SINEKE OF CARL MALCOMESS HIGH,
KOKSTAD, KWAZULU-NATAL,
FROM NOMONDE RONGO**

I have decided to write about a teacher who taught me for only a limited time, a man who was my principal, as well as a mentor and leader to everyone in our school and even to the society of Sisonke Region of KwaZulu-Natal. He was at that time the well-renowned principal of Carl Malcomess High School, Mr Ma-Athi Sineke. I came across this wonderful mentor in the busy year of 2010, the year I arrived at that school, when I was still a child, dependent on the assistance and guidance of my elders to build my future. Mr Sineke was well known in Kokstad for his strong leadership of one of the best public schools in KZN, a school known for good behaviour, top performance and 100% pass-rate in the Matriculation Examination. Mr Sineke, who was originally from Umtata, was also well-known for his famous brother, Mr Siyavuya Sineke, a news anchor on SABC TV.

The wonderful teacher I am portraying to you was my Economics tutor. That man never believed in quitters; he taught us that in life you must have one plan, because if you attempt a second plan, your first plan might result in failure. Having a second plan is like expecting the first plan to fail. The only plan B that you must have are the results of plan A. He used to push us so hard, especially when it came to writing exams. To him it didn't matter that you had passed a test with flying colours, he still wanted more, and would let us know that we were capable of achieving more. He wasn't a man of words only; his actions spoke louder than words. For instance, when it came to exam preparation, explaining something to a learner wasn't a problem; even if you were the only one in the entire class who didn't understand, he would make sure that he made time for you and went through it over and over until you understood. If you didn't do a homework task, and your excuse was that you 'didn't know how to do it', Meneer would nominate you to do the work in front of everybody else. For him, that was the best punishment and the best way to remove any negativity which you might have when you were working on your own. He taught us that trying something, even though you didn't know how, mattered more than sitting back and pointing fingers.

The school motto on our badge said, 'Lord, direct us', and Mr Sineke put that motto into practice. At the beginning of each and every year, a famous gospel artist and well-known pastors from our community were invited to open the school activities with prayer. Every student in our school was important to Mr Sineke; he was never a teacher who discriminated against learners for any reason. Our principal was amazing: a living proof of the value of hard work and dedication, a believer and inspiration. He was not just a good class teacher or a good mentor; he was also a leader, a sportsman and a Christian.



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Foundation Phase

stories and classrooms



I aspire to be the kind of teacher that she was: a teacher who cared about every one of her learners and could inspire them to be the person they wanted to be

Mrs Escarnarsi, my nursery school teacher, was the most wonderful human being I ever encountered. Although she was never my teacher beyond the nursery schooling stage, she also taught at the school I attended for FET studies. She had a bigger impact on my schooling career than any other teacher, and is the reason I have decided to become a teacher. She dedicated her life to her students, encouraging us and producing independent learners and leaders.

From my first day of school, this woman had the ability to make me feel comfortable and allowed me to express myself in the only way I knew how: through art. As a child, I was very active with my imagination and creativity and my greatest longing was to draw. At home, growing up with only brothers, I had not discovered this need and was not aware that art was something anyone could participate in. Not only did Mrs Escarnarsi manage to unlock my creative side practically, but I now realise that she is one of my greatest sources of inspiration to be a teacher. Not only do I aspire to be a teacher; I aspire to be the kind of teacher that she was: a teacher who cared about every one of her learners and could inspire them to be the person they wanted to be.

I felt as though Mrs Escarnarsi knew me, through and through, and I am sure all her learners had similar feelings. Every learner in her Grade was assigned a day every week where they could come to her classroom and enjoy an iced tea, a cupcake and, if you wanted, half an hour to talk to her. Needless to say, everyone wanted to stay and chat, as she was someone they all admired and were inspired by. Even at such a tender age, we knew that the time she gave was a more precious treat than the cupcake we received.

This woman, whom I had the pleasure of encountering throughout my schooling career, became my second mom. After being in her class in nursery school I did not get to see her as often as my other teachers, but she was always in the classroom next door or down the hall. Even after our preparatory schooling, Mrs Escarnarsi found her way into our lives through her daughter, who also attended our school. She always gave the most welcoming bright smile and was extremely excited to know about her long-lost learners. For me, my most heart-warming experience with her occurred when she responded to my announcement that I wished to become a teacher - a teacher just like her. She inspired me my entire life, but it was only then that I realised that she was the source of my urge to educate.

Dedicated to Learners

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS ESCARNARSI, ST STITHIANS COLLEGE,
JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG,
FROM KATE HILL**

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS STEMMER, BERGVIEW PRIMARY
SCHOOL, MATATIELE, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM ASANDA NKOTHE**

The best teachers teach from the heart and not from the book.

My favourite teacher was Mrs Stemmer, my Grade 3 teacher at Bergview primary school. She never told us her first name. I was one of the few kids in my neighbourhood who went to school in town; we had to travel to and from school every day which meant waking up earlier than the kids that went to nearby schools. Ours was an ex-Model C school which offered schooling up to Grade 7. It had good infrastructure, electricity, enough stationery and highly trained teachers who reported on time to the staff room every morning. The way in which my teacher presented herself in class was amazing; she always wore a carefully chosen outfit with matching high heels. Her nice long black hair was always neatly tied in a ponytail. She placed great value on neatness and always reminded us that it was essential to be responsible if we wanted to make it in life.

Mrs Stemmer had an open-door policy; she gave us a set of rules and their consequences at the beginning of the year and by August we were still abiding by those rules, such as the consistency of her discipline. She always reminded us that we should not leave her classroom dirty because she valued neatness and responsibility. We all have bad days, but my teacher was always happy and made life seem like a walk in the park. I will always admire her for not bringing her problems to school.

We always made sure that for her, our workbooks were neat. Our books could not have flaps at the corners, known as elephant ears; if she found that your book had those flaps, she would refuse to mark your work. Every child wants their work to be marked and to see whether they have been given a gold star or not, so getting your book marked was a big issue. Mrs Stemmer taught me that taking responsibility starts with the small things; once one can take responsibility for small things, one can move on to bigger things. Spelling words was a struggle for me, especially because English was my second language. She dedicated time to me and helped me with my struggle until I got the hang of English spelling. I am grateful that she did not give up on me, because I cannot say I was the easiest learner to teach.

Being a teacher is not the easiest job; standing in front of more than ten children every day and hoping that they go home having learnt something from you is the toughest job in the world, considering the pressure from your management at school and the parents as well. Mrs Stemmer treated each one of us like presents: she took time to unwrap our potential every day. And this was a lesson that she taught me: there are many children with talents and potential that just need the right teacher. Now I need to unwrap the potential of the children in my classes.

Mrs Stemmer was not a teacher who was always shouting at us, and when we were punished we always knew why. She had rules on the classroom walls together with the consequences for breaking them, so we knew which behaviours would result in punishment. In other words, she treated us like adults and we knew what was expected of us in her class.

In conclusion, the best foundation is built in the early years and it takes the best teacher to build that foundation. The Foundation Phase needs teachers that strive to find each child's potential and show every child that they have the capability of being whatever they want to be if they are responsible and dedicated in their school work.



The best teachers teach from the heart and not from the book



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS ARNOLD, VICTORIA PRIMARY SCHOOL,
GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM NATALIE WILLIAMS**

I was more fortunate than many other children to have started my primary schooling at Victoria Primary School, an all-girls school well known in the Eastern Cape and in South Africa.

I can still remember walking into my Grade 2 classroom in 2003. It was one of the brightest and warmest classrooms I have ever seen. I was a bit scared and anxious, not knowing what to expect. At the door, ready to start off the year, stood Mrs Arnold, with red lipstick and the curliest, fuzziest hair I had ever seen.

She instantly captured my attention and from that moment I knew that I was going to enjoy being in her class. The way she smiled and greeted us made us feel she had known us all our lives. She always had a smile on her face and never revealed that she had had a bad day. She would always notice when something was wrong and try to help you see the bright light at the end of the tunnel. She knew how to handle emergencies, never panicking and always helping us to remain calm.

Mrs Arnold had a way of keeping peace among peers. When my classmates had arguments or claimed that they 'hated' one of their peers, Mrs Arnold would call upon all the children who were involved and find a better manner to deal with their issues. What I valued most about her was that she would never leave things unresolved. I realised that many children appreciated her when my friend whispered in my ear, asking me if Mrs Arnold was an angel.

Not only did Mrs Arnold play a peacekeeper and a mother at school but she was also an excellent teacher. Her excellence lay in the teaching methods which she used in the classroom. There were many children who struggled to maintain their focus and attention but somehow Mrs Arnold found the way to teach that would be most beneficial to all. After each new thing she taught us she would make a song about it and would even get up on the table and make us all dance and move around. This meant that there was no possibility that anyone would remain uninvolved. For my part, I could not wait to get to school each day.

Not only was Mrs Arnold my teacher but she was also my hockey, netball and tennis coach, so I spent most of my days and weekends with her, gradually getting to know her better and being able to have many open discussions with her. When we were travelling she would also take us to her farm.

It was her effort and her caring that made me value her the most. When I felt that I could not do something, she would push and encourage me. Her encouragement awakened in me a realization that I wanted to pursue a career in teaching; she had made me see how helping another could be beneficial to the person and to me. After I had completed my schooling career I thought that she would have forgotten about me and was surprised when she recognised me. When I asked how she still remembered me after many years, she claimed that it was the special footprints I had left, not only in the classroom, but also in her heart. Up until this day I am grateful that I had the opportunity to meet this phenomenal woman; she played a big role in my decision to pursue a career in Foundation Phase teaching.

The 'Angel' who inspired me in more than one way

*I realised that many
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**A TRIBUTE TO MRS BARTLE, LITTLE FLOWER ROMAN
CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, UITENHAGE, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM NOKUTHULA KLAAS**

As I was going through my old primary workbooks, I happened to see a Grade 3 classwork book. I immediately had a flash-back to our Grade 3 class teacher Mrs Bartle, a beautiful teacher who always came to class smelling good and wearing attractive clothes that suited her perfectly. I closed my eyes and saw her smiling face and felt her warm and loving hugs. She was my favourite primary teacher. Her classroom was colourful with all the work we did in our art lessons. One reason why I will never forget her is that she helped me explore my artistic side.

I loved my school. On entering its gates one was greeted by tall trees and colourful, fresh flowers. As one entered the wood-floored, neat and colourful Grade 3 classroom, one could feel the care and love flowing from teacher to learners. Mrs Bartle always paid attention to her learners and insisted that learners tell her whenever they felt unsettled. She was a permissive teacher and believed that children should be left to do what they wanted to do at some point during the day because she knew that children could not sit still for a long period of time. Mrs Bartle was not only a teacher, she was a mediator and partly a psychologist, fully understanding the development of a child. This made me want to follow in her footsteps and be someone's favourite teacher one day.

Flipping through my books, I happened to find an old report card from her. It was colourful, with beautiful stickers alongside her wonderful comments that encouraged good manners and behaviour. One of the comments was: 'Keep up the good work'. At the end of the term I was always eager to receive my report card because my good behaviour and my eagerness to learn new things always impressed her. Mrs Bartle used the 'compliment' technique to promote good manners and respect. This helped us understand one another and help one another to behave in an appropriate manner in the classroom. When she disciplined us, she did not use corporal punishment; instead, she talked to us like adults. We used to listen to her and behave in the required manner, another reason why she was one of my favourite teachers.

In our classroom we had a play corner and a reading corner that we used to visit every day, as long as we had behaved well. In each and every class there is that misbehaving learner who gets everyone into trouble, and we had such a learner in our class. Sometimes when that child misbehaved Mrs Bartle used to make him stand facing the wall for a few minutes. If the child repeated that behaviour the time he spent facing the wall became longer and longer. As the time went by, the child learnt to behave like all the other learners in his class.

Mrs Bartle has inspired me to pursue a teaching career and to show children the fun way of learning, where one need not be afraid of the teacher. She has inspired me to become a teacher so that I can give the children I come across in my career the same experience I had with her in my Foundation Phase years. I would like to take this chance to thank my lovely Foundation Phase teacher, Mrs Bartle, for being my best teacher. As William Arthur said: "the great teacher inspires."



**Your
classroom
was so colourful,
so was your
heart . . .**



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS STEP OF CLARENDON PREPARATORY SCHOOL, EAST LONDON, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM HANNAH PUTZIER**

My best teacher was Mrs Step, my Grade 1 teacher. She was tall, had dark, short hair in a bob and she was pale. My school was an all-girls model C school which took pride in being 'the only school for girls,' expecting good discipline, neatness and politeness. As a young child I was very energetic and talkative - I had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD.) Even though I would disrupt the class and other learners, Mrs Step would always be understanding and patient with me. She never labelled me as the 'naughty' child. She knew that I wanted to listen to her, but she also knew that I found that a very difficult task.

While I had other wonderful teachers, I have chosen Mrs Step because she taught me before I went onto Ritalin. I was a much more difficult child in those days, but she treated me just as kindly as other teachers who dealt with me when my behaviour was moderated by the drug. Mrs Step chose to find out the reasons for my behaviour and she accepted me for who I was. She loved Dr Seuss quotes and would encourage us with quotes such as: 'Don't give up. I believe in you all. A person is a person no matter how small.'

Mrs Step never shouted at our class. She did not even get angry with us when we would disobey her but instead would give us her disappointed look. Even from the young age of 7, I learnt what this expression looked like and I hated it. I never wanted Mrs Step to be disappointed with me so I tried my best to behave well.

From Grade 1 days, I have always hated Maths. Every day in Grade 1, we would have a short Maths exercise that we had to complete in a certain period of time. These exercises made me panic and they made me feel stupid, because I struggled to complete them. One day I felt that I had done worse than usual in the Maths exercise. I was so frustrated and angry that I took my pencil and wrote my name extremely darkly on the booklet. I think my pencil went right through the page as I took my rage out on it. I wanted Mrs Step to see it and to understand that I had messed up my page on purpose, because I was frustrated with Maths. When I handed it in to her I had a feeling of triumph, because I was trying to make a point; I was also fearful that she would be disappointed with me for what I had done. When it was time for the Maths exercises to be handed back I waited for mine in anticipation. Mrs Step came to my desk, put my book down and walked away. This angered me even more. How could she not notice what I had done to my page and the point that I was trying to make? At the end of the day when the rest of the class had left, I called her to my desk. I told her 'I messed up my booklet, because I did badly in that exercise and I hate Maths.'

I will never forget Mrs Step's response. All she said was, 'I know'. She didn't reprimand me for messing up my page. She didn't shout at me for hating the subject. She didn't even give me the disappointed look. She just kept quiet and gave me time to figure it out; getting angry and ruining my page didn't help anything.

Through her actions Mrs Step taught me that a gentle spirit can be strong, that getting angry never solves a problem and that silence can speak louder than words. For this, I thank you Mrs Step.

She **always** **knew**

*'Don't give up.
I believe in you all.
A person is a person,
no matter how small'*

Going beyond the call of duty

A TRIBUTE TO MRS DEKKER OF VICTORIA GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SHANIQUE HILPERT

In primary school, I resented school as a whole and was not fond of any teacher. But near the end of my high school days, my teachers started showing me affection and giving me attention. The one teacher who helped me to become the person I am today - a person who believes in herself - was my Grade 12 Mathematics teacher, Mrs Dekker, a holistically good person. She helped me get through a tough time and she taught me as much as about life as she taught me about Mathematics.

In school my parents pressured me to do pure Mathematics, but Mathematics has never been my strong point and I have never enjoyed it. I squeezed through Grade 10 and 11 in spite of poor Mathematics results, but when I reached Grade 12, I knew I had to pass the subject otherwise my name would not appear in the newspaper. In Matric, I was blessed with Mrs Dekker. She was a kind-hearted person and treated all the children in her class with the respect and affection that she expected from them. Mrs Dekker went out of her way to help us by offering extra Mathematics classes on Sunday afternoons. She was an understanding person, allowing us to make mistakes in class without being judgemental about them. This inspired me and the rest of the class to complete our work and to try to understand, even if our understanding was not quite complete. She was young at heart even though she had two children and had been married for a long time. She gave the class her WhatsApp number and asked us to contact her on Facebook if ever we were struggling or needed a shoulder to cry on. This gesture not only made us feel closer to her but also closer to one another, and it made us feel comfortable to ask one another for help.

Having almost completed school, we were on our way to becoming adults. It was important for us to establish morals and values for ourselves because most of us were about to leave home and experience a great deal more freedom and responsibility than we had had before. Having Mrs Dekker teach us at this point of our lives was a blessing. She had good morals and values that have rubbed off on us, and was able to demonstrate to us skills for learning and for self-control. She believed that the way you treat others will be the way you are treated. She also believed that one needs to work hard for what one wants to achieve. Mrs Dekker taught us to stand up for what we believed in and to stay true to people who trusted us, but also to be respectful of other people's feelings. She inspired us to become better people than we had been before. All of these little things that she did and said reminded me of my mother, and that made the bond between us stronger.

During the exam period, Mrs Dekker encouraged me to go to her house to go over my Mathematics, so that I could reassure myself that I understood the work. Not only did she help me to prepare myself in the best way possible for the exams; she also helped me through the darkest time in my life. I knew her for only one year, but in that year she was my mother, my friend and the best teacher in the world. I will always remember what she did for me and I will strive to make as much, if not more, of an effort to help my learners grow into the learners and people they were meant to be.



She taught me about Mathematics, and about life



She challenged and supported me

A TRIBUTE TO MISS MEYI SINGATA-BOYA, NOMZAMO SECONDARY SCHOOL, PORT ALFRED, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SIPHOKAZI ADAMS

Miss Meyi Singata-Boya was my Accounting teacher at Nomzamo Secondary School in Port Alfred. She gave us extra classes in Accounting, her kindness and dedication going beyond the call of duty.

Mis Meyi inspired me and became my best teacher because of certain characteristics we shared. Throughout my high school career she found a way to mentor me, either directly or indirectly. She used to fix people with a very special look when they misbehaved in her class. To me, that did not build fear of judgement as it seemed to do in other learners; I respected my teacher and through respect won her heart so that she was more patient to give me help.

Miss Meyi was a capable teacher, always giving hands-on practical classwork and homework exercises in order to check our understanding. Some exercises were very difficult, but she believed this work would help us break school records with our Accounting results. Back home, my brothers who were already done with school were amazed to see my EMS books, because they saw we were being taught pure Accounting, appropriate for FET grades.

Accounting was one of my major subjects, because I had chosen the commercial stream. It was one of the most complex subjects I ever took, challenging me every day. I never went to bed without doing some practice exercises, because Miss Meyi was always on my back. At times, she would shout and even kick me out of her class, just to make a point to me and to the class. Surprisingly, some teachers who passed me standing in the corridor would think I was a bad learner, as I would stand and wait till she called me back. Sometimes I did not understand the new things she taught us, but I would always read ahead and practice more than others, because my teacher was easily pleased by learners who responded to a challenge. So although there were bad days, there were also good days: Miss Meyi would make sure that we understood the content, but also that we enjoyed the lesson. While she really challenged us, she was also there to support us.

In our Matric year she broke her leg severely and was unable to teach from June till December because our school was not built to accommodate people with disabilities. As learners who were under a lot of pressure to pass Matric, we decided to go to her house for guidance on exam preparation. She did not mind helping us and in turn, we were happy to help her out with household chores. It was a way of showing our appreciation to someone who had been a really good teacher to us.

Miss Meyi went the extra mile in the many things she did for us as a class, giving equal encouragement to us all in academic performance and bringing together different personalities from different households in love and peace. In times of sorrow, when learners had lost loved ones, she would extend a helping hand. One year she covered the costs of dresses, make-up and transport for learners who could not afford to go to the Matric dance, a culminating event for every learner at our school. Many teachers followed her example and now almost everyone in Matric has his or her own Matric jacket, supplied by the caring staff of Nomzamo Secondary School and the community of Ndlambe at large. Her humanity made me a better person, and now that I am pursuing a career in teaching, I am proud to follow her example and count her as one of my role models. I love my Accounting teacher.

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS Z TOKHWE OF KHANYA SENIOR
SECONDARY SCHOOL, MOUNT FLETCHER, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM ZIMKHITHA MDLADLAMBA**

For many people, teaching is a profession, but for this unique teacher teaching was a calling, something she was born for. She was my home language teacher from Grade 10 to Grade 12, but carried herself as if she was the principal of the school. She was quiet, presentable at all times, tall, and had a light complexion. For me, she was the first talented teacher I had ever met. I was impressed and amazed by her leadership qualities and saw someone who could be a model for me.

Though she was quiet, when she spoke, it was with confidence. Her way of being was contagious, always a motivation to everyone who wanted to be a leader and a hero one day. Everyone gave her more respect than any other teacher in the school, and everyone liked her because she was open-minded and acted with love, care and passion.

Mrs Tokhwe was not only a teacher, she was also a parent to whom we could talk. She knew everyone in the class and could tell if something was bothering you, even if you were putting on a brave face. Able to handle herself, she could also enable others to handle their difficult situations. Until I met her, talking to a teacher or asking a teacher for advice was not 'my thing'. But with her I felt safe; she was easy to talk to because she was an excellent counsellor and a good listener. You could talk to her privately about personal issues. If you went into her office crying, you would often come out looking as if you had never been miserable.

Our school allowed corporal punishment. In spite of national policy, an agreement had been reached between the SGB and the teachers. But Mrs Tokhwe never believed in beating learners; we never saw her holding a stick. In any class there will be children who do not behave and who press your wrong buttons. What I loved about Mrs Tokhwe was that you would never see her angry, no matter what; she believed in talking, not punishing. I learnt from her that it is important, as a teacher, not to lose your temper with your learners, even if they make you angry. You need to remain professional, because the minute they see you emotional, they will exploit your weak points in order to see you unhappy again.

I Matriculated in 2013, but for personal reasons did not apply to a university. So 2014 was a gap year for me. One day, while I was at home I received a call from Mrs Tokhwe, and she asked me if I was interested in education. I said yes, I was, and she told me about Rhodes University. I had never heard of Rhodes; not even the name was familiar to me. Because she is from Grahamstown, she came to the university, picked up an application form and a bursary form and sent them to me. This motivated me so much that I filled them in immediately and sent them back to the university. Fortunately I was accepted and she was the first person that I told. After I had enrolled at Rhodes, she never stopped calling me to ask how I was doing. This made me realise that being a good teacher doesn't end in class or at school. Teaching is like planting crops that you hope will grow and bear good fruits one day, and it is your work to lovingly take care of them so that they will never die, but will produce even more, to respond to the urgent needs of our society.



The real deal

*Teaching is like
planting crops that you
hope will grow and bear
good fruits one day, and
it is your work to lovingly
take care of them so that
they will never die*



A TRIBUTE TO MR JJEERO RICHARD OF MDENI SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL, DUTYWA, EASTERN CAPE, FROM AWETHU PUTUMANI

It was Winter, and some learners were not prepared to attend classes because it was so cold. The school, Mdeni S.S.S., Eastern Cape, was in the rural areas, falling at that time under the Cofimvaba District. One block had six classrooms and one dilapidated big shack divided into two rooms. The whole school, catering for Grade 10 to Grade 12, numbered approximately four hundred learners. Nothing was enough in the school: we had only thirteen teachers with six being temporary; we sat on frame chairs and had no desks.

The best teacher was found: Mr Jjeero Richard (we used to call him Sir Ree), an African man from Uganda. He taught Mathematics, but he spoke a very good English because before he came to South Africa in 2010, he had taught English in European countries.

Mr J. Richard taught us tirelessly. As we all know, Mathematics is challenging, but he was master of it. There was no question he would not answer, giving detailed explanations. When he was teaching, he would also teach us some English, especially proverbs and idioms. He had a 'Nigerian type' of accent, so he would write words on the board in order to help us to understand him. He valued nothing more than studying, more especially Mathematics. He encouraged us, 'Rome was not built in a day'.

I was one of those learners who always wanted to try, and he always gave us extra work to complete. One of his strategies was to teach the whole class and then give extra classes only to those who were interested. Those individuals then had the responsibility to teach their classmates, because some were slow to understand.

We all dream, but what is the use of just dreaming, if the dream can never be achieved? Having a teacher like Sir Ree was a blessing. Before we got to know each other, I had limited opportunities to be successful in life. I experienced the pain of life in rural areas where people were ignorant. I never knew that life had a positive side; I never knew that life could be cheerful. I saw things happening around me, but never thought that they affected me, until he opened up the world to me.

Thank you, Sir, you will always be my great hero and my best friend. You taught me far more than Mathematics, and far more than was required. You taught me to respect people, and I appreciate and am very grateful for all you have done for me. When things do not go as planned in my life, I just think about the way you gave your energy to save my life. You taught me how to be a good African man, how to deal with people, how to be proud. Now I see no reason to live my life in fear. Now I know that I can travel the world and can bring change to my country, my community and to my people.

The effort you have put into me and other rural learners, knowing how difficult our circumstances are, has inspired me to be a Foundation Phase teacher. I know you would have preferred that I become a senior Mathematics teacher, but I have learned how vital the Foundation Phase is and been given an opportunity to study for this phase. And yes, I believe that with love, we can save the world and change it into a better place. This quote makes me feel great: 'We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love' (Dr. A. Chikona). I salute you, Sir.

An outsider who cared about the inside

Thank you, Sir, you will always be my great hero and my best friend

The inspirational teacher

TRIBUTE TO MRS NOMAZWI BALURA, KUYASA COMBINED SCHOOL, NEMATO TOWNSHIP, PORT ALFRED, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SPHAMANDLA VITI

Teachers are high on the list of people beyond the family who inspire children. We spend most of our childhood years in school with these strangers and often they become our parents, our support system and our role models.

Mrs Balura was my Grade 11 and 12 isiXhosa and Life Orientation teacher. Most children claim to love their LO teachers as they deal with 'real life issues' – which it is, of course, their job to do. From the moment I entered high school, everyone was talking about Mrs Balura, saying that she was the 'coolest' teacher. Certainly, she was for me 'my best teacher'. Before I knew anything about her, when my knowledge of her was based only on rumours, I prayed to be in her class and for her to be my Matric teacher.

She was dark, of middle height, with a very beautiful figure – and she wore the most beautiful clothes. The first time she came into my class in Grade 11, she greeted us with a big smile on her welcoming face and shook hands with everyone in the class. She introduced herself as our teacher of home language and Life Orientation for the next two years. We spent the whole of our first period listening to her stories of high school and University, but at the end of the period we left with homework. We hadn't realised that she was teaching us LO; in our minds, we were just listening to the story of her life.

One of the stories she used to tell us whenever we were about to write exams, was her story of failing Matric because of pride. In her arrogance she had not been able to accept that her preoccupation with sport and social life would cause her to fail; the following year when she repeated Matric she passed with two distinctions. She would remind us that her first mistake had not made her 'a failure'. Her motto was: If you do not believe in yourself, no one else will ever believe in you. If the task is not anti-human, I have the power and courage to do it. We must never be discouraged by the obstacles we come across in the road to success; we need to be strong, because challenges do not destroy us, they empower us.

I passed my Matric at a diploma entry level; when she heard this she invited me for a coffee in town. She reminded me that this was not the end of the road; there are so many things to achieve in life and one mistake could never determine my future. She told me that I was not competing with anyone and that success comes to those who wait patiently and work hard for it.

Her family, education, learns and school were the things Mrs Balura valued and appreciated most in life. She became a teacher because she wanted to make a difference and she wanted to change the lives of those who are looked down upon. She wanted to raise the standard of education so that we would know that education can take you to places you never thought you would reach in life. Her best weapons were punctuality and dedication; she would say to us that if we were ready to work and were always punctual, nothing would ever go wrong.

In November 2012, the year I left the school, Mrs Balura was awarded her master's degree. She is still teaching at Kuyasa Combined School and at the moment is enrolled with the University of Cape Town for her PhD. She will always be my best teacher and my inspiration in life.



She contributed to my personality



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS JUDY LIEBENBERG,
PENRYN COLLEGE, NELSPRUIT, MPUMALANGA,
FROM ALIZA LIEBENBERG**

My mum taught me in Grade 8 and 9 and I cannot think of a single moment where the classes were not full of laughter and free life lessons, given during Geography and History classes. She can only be described as 'the jack of all trades' (the female version of course).

Established in 1992, Penryn College, also known as the Bush School, is still relatively young compared to surrounding schools. There was a time when cows actually roamed across the sports fields; part of a teacher's job description was to chase them off the fields so that sport practices could start. Even now it is not uncommon to have Penryn College's teachers filling a variety of roles, though most are less comical. Referring to my mum specifically, she is still involved in the high school choir and has been for many years; she is head of Harrier house and she is a hockey coach - even though her knowledge of the sport is very limited. What makes her special though is that, year after year, she does everything that she is involved in with enthusiasm, a smile on her face and without complaining. I am inspired by the amount of energy and enthusiasm she shows every day.

My mum is an incredibly strong individual and it is this strength that enables her to take on the parents of problematic children, who, according to them, have done nothing wrong. Never once has she ever shown anger or spite towards a family. Some parents forget that you are doing your job and fail to see the situation from your angle, but my mum nevertheless tackled the issue with a clear mind. When my mum is asked to do something, she will do it to the best of her ability without complaining, unlike some teachers who refuse to do extra activities they are not getting paid for. She taught me that, as a teacher, it is your duty to give the children you are educating every opportunity that is available; I will do my utmost to follow her example.

One of my mum's most famous speeches to Grade 9 classes and to anyone who is listening concerns Mathematics versus Mathematical Literacy. When Grade 9s are busy choosing their subjects for Grade 10, some learners cannot decide which to choose, usually because their parents are forcing them to take Mathematics, whereas they actually want to take Mathematical Literacy. She starts by saying, 'On the scientific calculator, it says "log", "sin" and "tan". To me a log is a piece of wood; sin is when you do something wrong in God's eyes and tan is what you do in the sun. If you believe the same way I do, then just take Maths Lit.' I am certain that Mathematical Literacy classes have been larger because of those speeches.

My mum never judged other subjects and never said her subject was better than others. She saw the importance of all subjects, but left learners to choose on the basis of what they thought was important for them and their chosen path. This convinced me to become a teacher because I want to inspire my Foundation Phase learners to dream big, no matter what people say, because it is solely their choice. As a teacher I also think it is important to recognise the importance of all subjects, because it shows solidarity towards your fellow colleagues; it is in my mum's character to be always supportive of others. I have always wanted to be someone who can be depended on and I am quite sure that I got that quality from my mum.

To put it plainly, I find my mum to be the most fantastic teacher and I hope that I can be just as much of an inspiration to my learners as she was to me.

The teacher who always **smiled**

*I am inspired by the
amount of energy and
enthusiasm she shows
every day*

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS MATHANGANA, THOLANG SENIOR
SECONDARY SCHOOL, MATATIELE, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM NEO EMMANUEL TSOKUDU**

The life of a learner can be difficult when you have no one to guide you. But when I arrived at high school, I was lucky to meet a teacher who loved people and who had a passion to teach and help learners. She was Mrs Mathangana, my class teacher from Grade 10 until I finished my Grade 12 at Tholang Senior Secondary School, a rural school with a great reputation in our area.

When I met Mrs Mathangana, I found that the whole school was afraid of her. They used to say she was a very rude and unfriendly teacher and I was also scared of her. She taught me Travel and Tourism in Grade 10. I never wanted to be seen by her as a bad person and fortunately most of the class also wanted to impress her. After we had written the mid-year exam, she was astonished to find that most of the class had passed her subject with a grade of level five or more. This indicated to her that we could even do better. There were still a few learners who were struggling and she did not cast them aside. Instead, she ensured that we all passed Grade 10. I found that she was not the bad person she had been labelled by other learners in school. She ensured that she was there for her class, not only in her subject, but for all subjects. She really supported us and at the end of the year, almost 90% of her learners passed very well. I passed her subject with 93%. This was a great achievement for me; I had never got such a mark before in my life.

Mrs Mathangana was one of the silent warriors who make the world a better place: a great teacher who did not only teach from the book but from her heart. She took us, as a class, through to Grade 11, supporting us all the way, paying attention to each and every one in our class. She did not mind going the extra mile for her class and would sometimes come to class just to talk, inspiring us to get through this difficult stage in our education. She would often leave most of us crying, because of the different sad and inspiring stories she had told us. Whatever we were doing, bad or good, her words would ring in our minds, and make us think critically before we did anything.

Because of her strictness and her encouragement, we all passed Grade 11, and in Grade 12 she was still our class teacher. Unfortunately we did not finish that year with her; God did not give her the chance to see the seeds germinate which she had sowed. She passed away on the day that awards were given to the best learners in every subject, when I received the award for top achiever in Travel and Tourism. In spite of the award, that was the saddest day of my life: our school had lost a great teacher, a mother, a pillar and a heroine to her learners. Yes, she was the strictest teacher in the school corridor, but the most adored teacher in the minds of her past learners. She always encouraged me to further my studies in teaching and is indeed the person who inspired me to become not just a teacher but a great one. I think that by choosing teaching I am honouring and paying respect to her memory. She made me the person I am today and I wholeheartedly appreciate what she has done for me.



She was indeed a heroine

*Mrs Mathangana was one of
the silent warriors who make
the world a better place: a
great teacher who did not
only teach from the book but
from her heart*



She turned education into an experience

A TRIBUTE TO MRS TESSA KIRKALDY OF GADRA MATRIC SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM EZILE ANESIMO TITI

I respect Mrs Tessa Kirkcaldy (Mrs K) from Gadra Matric School: she was my best teacher and is my role model. She led the staff of Gadra, one of the best upgrading schools in Grahamstown. She dressed stylishly, but did not see appearance and image as a priority. She never used makeup or wore heels; instead, she liked flat comfortable shoes.

Mrs K was unique in that she was responsible for more than just our academic enrichment: she built us up to become better leaders. She showed me that one can make a difference in a person's life, not by giving them money, but by giving them your time. She interacted with all her learners, knowing that each and every one was different, and she did all she could to accommodate all the learners in her classroom. She was committed to the learner's well-being, inside and outside the classroom. Most important of all, she was always prepared.

The solid relationships that she built with us as learners positively affected nearly every aspect of my life and my career choice. She would help us construct a Maths problem by putting it into the form of a play, which helped us succeed beyond term papers and standardized tests. Furthermore, she encouraged us to 'wear our academic self' (to work hard) from the first day of school, believing that the year had ended already, although it was the first day of school.

I do not know the characteristics of a good teacher, but I would not disagree if she was said to demonstrate a number of them. She made Mathematics Literacy fun, offering stimulating, energetic lessons essential for our success. Her strategy for dealing with learners who were likely to misbehave and play truant was to make her classroom an exciting environment for learning. It is not easy to change a learner's mind because every child comes to school with a different ideology. This meant that Mrs K had to go the extra mile for certain learners, which required extra work, but she did it without punishment - corporal or of any other kind. The development of such learners requires excellent teachers such as Mrs K.

There was just something about her that was so special; she inspired us to work harder and to pursue a specific goal. This inspiration was integral to ensuring learner success and encouraging us to achieve our purposes. I would even study in her classroom after school, as I realized that I worked better there, continuously feeling motivated to work harder. The enthusiasm generated by an inspiring teacher can stay with a person throughout their lives. Today I am because she is. It is rare to have such caring educators.

My name is Ezile Anesimo Titi, I am an upcoming teacher and I have been inspired. It is only now, reflecting on my high school years, that I realise how blessed I was to have had an amazing educator like Mrs K. I want to express my eternal gratitude to her, a role model who inspires and a great teacher to many. It was not difficult for me to decide on a career because I wanted to be like her, a teacher that one cannot forget about.

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS T GOVINDSAMY, EFFINGHAM
SECONDARY SCHOOL, DURBAN, KWAZULU-NATAL,
FROM PHOKUHLE MTHEMBU**

The teacher who left a significant mark on my life is Mrs T Govindsamy, my Biology teacher, a woman in her late 50s. She had cancer and was also diabetic but was always full of energy, willing to do whatever it took to beat these diseases. She never let her health come between her and work. We would walk into class looking half dead and she would tell us that she jogs before she comes to school.

When it came to doing her work, she was very efficient, very determined and organised, but very impatient. She used to scream at us when she taught, which I felt was unnecessary, because she already had a loud voice. Her dress code ranged from what is comfortable to what actually fits. She only dressed formally when there was a special ceremony at school.

Biology was my favourite subject but I always got the lowest mark for it on my report. The reason for this was that I treated Biology like all my other subjects; I devoted no daily study to it. When I should have been studying, I complained that it was a difficult subject. My teacher intervened, because she saw that I had the potential to do very well in this subject if only I could change my attitude towards it. I took all her tips very seriously and when I started applying them, they actually worked. I had never in my wildest dreams thought that I could get a distinction in Biology, but I did and was proud of myself.

My Biology teacher was not an easy woman to impress, but if you did well she would acknowledge it, telling you how proud she was of you. Her encouraging words, her guidance and her behaviour towards her learners made me look forward to the next day's challenges. It made me realise that I could accomplish anything that I set my mind to. She was a very optimistic person and her optimism rubbed off on me.

Great teachers like Mrs Govindsamy are not always those who have fancy degrees and qualifications. They are the ones who have a big heart and a burning desire to make the world a better place, one kid at a time. I am grateful that I was one of her learners and that she was able to have such a great impact on my life. The most important lesson that I learnt from Mrs Govindsamy was that if you want to go far and inspire your learners, you need to be efficient and have a burning passion for what you do. You should never give up on a struggling child because that child might turn out to be your shining star. I can recall how people never wanted to be part of her class but would leave with a big smile on their faces once they had been there. I hope that one day I will not be just a teacher in a child's life but be a hero and make an impact. I want to be able to mould children and prepare them for the challenges that they might come across in future.

To Mrs T Govindsamy I would like to take this opportunity of thanking you very much for being such a great inspiration in my life. I am truly humbled and blessed to have had the great opportunity of being in your class. I pray that you beat your cancer and diabetes and that God will bless you with a long and a healthy life.



The teacher with
a **big heart**
and a burning
desire to make
the **world** a
better place



**A TRIBUTE TO MRS PAM VAN RENSBURG, SAINT TERESA
PRIMARY SCHOOL, SOMERSET EAST, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM MARILESE HORNE**

When I was in Grade 4, I was in the class of Mrs Pam van Rensburg. She made me enjoy school much more than I had before. We could not wait for her lessons to start, because they were always filled with love and excitement. She would let us play with puppets and clay when we were done with our work. Mrs Pam always complimented us when we did well in our tests and that motivated us to try even harder. She was one of those teachers who knitted scarves and gloves for the children who were not fortunate enough to have them. She also hugged and kissed us all when we passed at the end of each term. She always had this wonderful smile on her face when she saw us and she never seemed to get upset. We loved her lessons so much that she never had to use a cane or shout at us. She taught us many things which we did not realise we were learning at the time, such as morals and values.

I still remember one Friday when she took our class to the museum. After we had finished our tour through the museum, we went to look at the ducks. Mrs Pam even let us feed the ducks and not long after that, most of us were in the water. I can still remember the way she laughed when she noticed that her whole class was in the water, feeding the ducks.

I realise that Mrs Pam was born to be a teacher and enjoyed every moment of it. She made me fall in love with teaching and children. She made me see that a teacher has to teach from the heart, someone who has enough love for each and every child in her class. Mrs Pam loved each one of us as if we were her own and when one of us was not feeling well, she always made it her duty to check up on that learner. I remember so clearly the point at which I took a chair and went to sit right next to her. She gave me a warm smile and the place next to her became my favourite place in class. She has not only made me want to be a teacher; she has made me want to be the best teacher I can be.

Mrs Pam is now in a wheelchair and I still go and visit her. We always talk about the wonderful memories we share and she is the one person who keeps me going when things get tough. Even though her health is not good, she always asks about the children who were in her class and what they are doing with their lives.

Up to this day, Mrs Pam is still my inspiration and my role model, because she has always been there for me through good and bad times. She is like a second mother to me. When I need anything, I know I can count on her because I know she will always understand. She has shown me that it is not only through blood that people are related, but through loving one another and being there for one another. On my 21st birthday she gave me the prettiest ring, which she said represented love, hope and faith. I carry those words with me each and every day.

How can I ever say thank you to a wonderful teacher who has given me wings to fly so high today? I have no silver or gold to give her, but I want to say, 'Thank you for inspiring me and for showing me what a real teacher should be like. My love and admiration for you has only grown stronger over the years.'

Teaching **from**
the heart
and going the
extra mile

Love of the subject

A TRIBUTE TO MRS VAN DER MERWE, VICTORIA GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SHANICE HILPERT

It was quite difficult for me to choose my best teacher, as I was blessed to have had many good teachers in my life. As I had to pick one rose from the bunch, I decided on one phenomenal woman who was not part of the regular school staff. She was a woman who was always smiling and always willing to help where she could, a woman who wanted to see the best in us and strove to enable us to work as one.

Never before had I experienced a hockey coach who under no circumstances ever raised her voice, who drilled us on the field until we threw up, and who would never bite our heads off when we missed a brilliant goal. Instead, she would motivate us and make us realize and learn from our mistakes. This lady not only had a heart for sport but she had a heart for each and every one of us in our hockey team. This phenomenal woman was Mrs van der Merwe, the mother of Nicola van der Merwe and also the mother of each and every one of us in her hockey group. She was such an inspiration to me! Every week we would proudly walk to the field for practice with a smile on our faces. We would no longer have excuses or fake a sickness to get out of attending hockey practice, as we had the best coach anybody could ever have asked for.

Mrs Van der Merwe made us feel a passion for hockey, and this included fitness, which we all hated. After a hockey match against DSG, Mrs Van der Merwe said that if we won, she would treat us. After fighting our hearts out, we managed to lose, but Mrs Van der Merwe still gave a special supper for us as it was our final game of the year. She paid for everything out of her own pocket and even accommodated us at her home.

She taught us how to play fair - not to play sly by disobeying the rules, or by hurting the other player so that we could be in the spotlight and shoot a goal. She also taught us how to be a good team and how to communicate in a respectful manner with one another. She ensured that we knew that it was okay to lose, and that a person who is injured and cannot play further should raise a stick or hand for time to gain some strength again. She encouraged us to fight our hearts out and keep playing.

The love and pride that our coach had, made us stronger as a team and also made us fight to win the game for her. Winning was not really Mrs Van der Merwe's main concern; she was more concerned that we had fun. I want to thank Mrs Van der Merwe for being my strong pillar, and influencing my life, I look up to her and I truly hope that I can be such an inspiration to my own children, as well as other people's children, one day.

'The best teachers are those who show you where to look, but do not tell you what to see.' We have learned how to dance in the rain and turn lemons into lemonade! I believe that there is a lesson to be learned through everything we do, and I have learnt a lot from Mrs Van der Merwe, and not just about how to improve my hockey skills. Through her I have realised that every learning experience can be fun, and that we should cherish each and every moment of our lives.



Playing **hard**,
playing
fair and
having **fun**



Reliving History with Mr Ndabeni

A TRIBUTE TO MR NDABENI OF NOMBULELO SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM AKHONA MAZALENI

The teacher whom I looked up to at school was Mr Ndabeni, the Deputy Principal of Nombulelo Senior Secondary School. A fine teacher, respected by the whole school, he was my history teacher from Grade 10 until Grade 12. He was a job-orientated teacher, a humble man who had a high work ethic. He was dark in complexion, chubby and not that tall and he always looked very respectable. The school had a large number of learners and most of the learners at the school were older than the average. In spite of the huge numbers of learners, Mr Ndabeni built a relationship with each one of them.

Mr Ndabeni would always encourage us to do well in all our subjects at school. He would motivate us and tell all the learners that they had the potential of being anything that they wanted to be. There were older learners in the classroom who had been at the school for years, but he never looked down on them. He always saw potential in them, even though some teachers saw no hope for them at all. He would make time for us on weekends, when we would revise all the work that we had done during the course of the week. He knew every learner's strengths and weaknesses and had good relationships with all of us. His office was open for every learner at the school who had a problem.

Mr Ndabeni was also a Reverend at his church. He had our best interests at heart, teaching us how to become better men and women. I still remember the day when he told us that being a man is not just wearing pants and having been to initiation school; it is all about the way that one carries oneself. It is the decisions that you make that lead you to wisdom, which many men in our generation lack.

The way in which he carried himself at school taught me a lot about how a professional teacher should behave. Whenever there were conflicts at the school he would step in and resolve them. He had good relationships with our parents and made sure that they knew how we were all doing at school. He always made history classes fun, as he would open up debates in the class where learners would discuss what happened in the past and the impact it has had on the world today. He encouraged us to read books and newspapers and also to watch the news so that we knew what was going on in the world.

Mr Ndabeni treated all his learners equally and he did not want us to look down on one another. He always wanted us to work together and help one another in areas where we had difficulties. I still recall that when I passed my test with 100% he came to me and said that he would change it to 99% because he did not want me to be over-confident; I needed to work extra hard for that 1%. He then paired me up with learners who were struggling with history in Grade 10 and Grade 11. By the end of the third term, those learners I worked with had improved and had passed history. At the end of the year, all the history learners passed; Mr Ndabeni had 100% pass rate in Grade 12 that year.

Mr Ndabeni was a great teacher and very passionate about history. The great work that he did with his history learners motivated me to become a teacher. Even today I still communicate with him and he keeps on motivating me to do well. I have learned a lot from him and I want to influence the learners that I will teach in the same way that he influenced us.

I remember the first day I walked into my Grade 2 classroom. It felt so strange. I felt like I was not ready to be there and I was trespassing in this territory. I felt like a cyclist in a 4x4 race. But a specific teacher, who liked throwing class parties on Fridays and creating connections with every living species in her classroom, managed to convince me that I wasn't a cyclist - I too was behind the same four-wheel drive as everyone else. The Grade 2 teacher, who was called Mrs Jacobs, had the ability to make children dig, uncover and discover their potential; it made us feel wonderful seeing our efforts and our potential to achieve. Mrs Jacobs introduced many of us to ourselves. She knew it ...

There was sometimes a feeling of agitation around the classroom when we were doing our classwork - such as filling in incomplete sentences and working out equation sums. Defeated, we used to go and ask Mrs Jacobs for help, but she was never prepared to look at unattempted work. The words 'I can't do it' used to echo around the class room, but she would say, 'Show me that you can't do it,' and ironically sometimes we use to show her that we could do it. Afterwards she would ask with a confused expression, 'Was it honestly you who said I can't do it?' We would just smile in response.

Mrs Jacobs use to push us to see our potential and this led to us developing confidence and not being afraid to learn, but at the beginning of Grade 2 my self-esteem was a drop in the ocean. I believed I couldn't do anything academic. I believed I was not capable of reading nor speaking English. Therefore, my strategy was to appear like a ghost - be there inside the classroom but again don't be there because those who belonged could read the story books, talk to each other and do many things that I believed I couldn't do. But there was something I didn't know. Though I use to see Mrs Jacobs in class every day and sat with her to go through work, I didn't know that she was approaching me. Basically, her intention was to approach every learner in her classroom. I believe it ...

In the last hours of Friday afternoons Mrs Jacobs used to hold class parties which functioned as a communication channel. Chatting voices filled the room. On Fridays you were allowed to express yourself and were encouraged to reflect on the week and say any troubling thoughts you had. Therefore, people were different on Fridays. They complained, talked, laughed and played and Mrs Jacobs stayed interactive in order to get to know her learners better. The compassion and interest she had for her learners and teaching was evident in the way she behaved. Therefore it was not a big surprise when she heard my confession even though I didn't say anything. When she approached me, she said, "You want to be a red apple," but I thought, 'How can I be red apple when I'm a green apple.' Red, yellow and green were the colours Mrs Jacobs used to categorise the reading groups in the classroom. The top readers were the red apples, followed by yellow and then green apples.

My great interest in reading had filled me with desire to be a red apple. They were the independent readers. Their story books looked appealing. I gravitated to them like a magnet to a metal. I believed their books contained great stories - my curiosity to discover the stories was agitating. Mrs Jacobs made time every day in class to help me develop my reading skills; eventually my curiosity was satisfied as I ended up sitting confidently among the red apples.

I look forward to being like her ...

Only years later when I remembered my Grade 2 days, I realised what kind of a teacher Mrs Jacobs was. She was a teacher who believed understanding your learners is a prior step to teaching. Unlike some teachers she did not ask or expect the learners to change to meet her requirements; instead she was flexible and willing to compromise in order to understand them and to work together. It was her motivation and encouragement that enabled me to experience the world of literacy.



Shades of Apple

A TRIBUTE TO MRS JACOBS OF GOEIE HOOP PRIMARY SCHOOL, CAPE TOWN, WESTERN CAPE, FROM YASMIN DAHIR

Mrs Jacobs believed in us, which increased our confidence to believe in ourselves and our capabilities. When I become a Foundation Phase teacher, I look forward to being like my favourite teacher, Mrs Jacobs. I'll have the patience, passion, kindness and interest that has helped her learners to discover and grow in learning. Now, whenever I see a red apple I remember my second grade reading group and Mrs Jacobs.



**A TRIBUTE TO MR RENARD, ST ANDREWS COLLEGE,
GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM ANNA NELSON**

The relationship which I built up with my English teacher over the period of my last two years at school was undeniably special. Each of his lessons was an experience on its own, each one unique in its own way. Through the many lessons I had with him, I was given the privilege to get to know him on what I could describe as a rather intimate level. He had a warm personality which reflected interest, immense enthusiasm and sometimes shining excitement, almost like that of a little child. His distinctive character drew a person in, and I certainly couldn't help myself from engaging with this extraordinary man. It was easy to smile when in Mr Renard's class, and the more lessons I had with him, the deeper our relationship grew.

The bond I developed with Mr Renard is remembered and treasured through the many memories I have of classes with him. Mr Renard's classroom was no dull place, and it was through getting to know him as a teacher, that I came to love and respect him deeply. Mr Renard's warm, 'young at heart' personality as well as his quirky sense of humour and enthusiasm were some of the special qualities which contributed to his rare teaching style. He created a classroom where what we were being taught became entertaining and where the text we were analysing became significant.

When I am reminded of setworks, poems, movies and reviews that we studied, I am taken back to my English classes with Mr R. I feel a range of widely differing emotions when I recall the different texts we were exposed to, studied and analysed in class. We acquired our understandings in his happy classroom space, filled with pictures, quotations and poetry books. Not one English lesson was ever dull!

With Mr Renard, my experience of learning was an entrancing, insightful and beautiful journey. Most of all I loved his spicy (sometimes even a bit naughty) sense of humour, his kindness and his enthusiasm. These and his genuine, young-hearted and warm personality added to the 'essence' of his teaching style. They spoke to me and warmed my soul.

The beauty of this relationship lies in the fact that memories of his classes can be retrieved through the many stories he told and shared with us. One of these was Mr Renard's story of how he got the subject prize for Accounting in Matric, seeming to suggest that that what he should do with his life was to become an Accountant. I can say without a doubt that he was definitely not meant to do that with his life!!

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am very blessed to have spent time with Mr Renard and encountered him on a personal level through my growth and development as a learner. The impact he had on my development as a learner, and also as a person, was immensely positive.

He was not meant
to be an
accountant

A TRIBUTE TO MRS WATSON, QUEENSTOWN GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL, QUEENSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM BABALWA SIRALILE

POETRY, DRAMA and NOVELS. She is the reason why I love literature so much. Back in the day, before I met my Grade 8 teacher, I did not like reading at all. Studying for a test or an exam from a textbook was the only encounter with the written word that I could tolerate. And I had to tolerate that because it was the only way I could pass my grades and get through school.

It was during my time at Queenstown Girls' High School that I met Mrs Watson. Her room was always full of learners when she taught me. Her table was situated in front, between my neighbour's desk and mine. This meant that she would notice when I was not paying attention. This didn't happen often, as all her classes, whether study-related or not, were always interesting.

Whenever Mrs Watson would read something to us, she would make the reading come alive. The first book I ever read with Mrs Watson was our famous Grade 8 set book: *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I enjoyed listening to her read the book more than I enjoyed watching the movie itself. As I mentioned earlier, literature was not for me, yet Mrs Watson made it 'my thing'. I tried writing a few stories of my own and had a diary in which I recorded my experiences and ideas.

Mrs Watson opened up to me the completely new world of literature and taught me how to appreciate it. She taught me about William Shakespeare, something very important to me as Shakespeare was prescribed every year from Grade 8 to Grade 12.

She also taught me to love reading. To this day I cannot bring myself to finish a whole novel on my own, but I do enjoy reading poetry, short stories and occasionally some articles from magazines and newspapers.

Mrs Watson was not just my English teacher at school; she had a flat just outside the hostel and was kind enough to help me whenever I needed help after school hours. She would also organise extra classes for those who needed help with their work just before a big test or the final exams.

She was not just the usual professional teacher; she would let us go out onto the field and the lawns to act out some parts from Shakespeare's drama and poetry. The Shakespeare festival that was held every year at our school became the biggest event for our English department and Mrs Watson played a huge role in getting the class prepared for it. She would help us understand the complex English and help us to memorise our lines. She judge us before the day of the festival arrived, so that we were able to polish our lines.

With only four English teachers in the whole school, having to teach five different grades and sometimes having to double up on grades per day, there was a lot of work for her. Yet we left the classroom each day having learnt much more than we had expected to learn. She is a wife, a mother, a teacher, but on top of it all, she was my English Literature mommy.

To Mrs Watson, thank you very much, ma'am. You English lessons have not just taught me to love literature, but have taught me that it is okay to step out of my comfort zone, to try new things and listen to other people - and to love my career choice of being a teacher as well. I want to major in the English language as a home language, just like you did. Although I do not have the words that can describe my appreciation for you, I know that literature always has the right words.



**"I met a
traveller
from an ancient
land"** (Percey Bysshe Shelley)



**A TRIBUTE TO MISS BULELWA NGXATHA, TYHILUWAZI
SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL, PORT ELIZABETH, EASTERN
CAPE, FROM NOBATHANDWA NOQAYI**

My praises for Bulelwa Ngxatha defy all limits; she cannot be adequately described in English. *“Ndosuke ndithi Qhawekazindini onjengawe akakabelekwa linina”*. You are surely one of a kind.

Tyhilulwazi is a high school set in one of the roughest places in Port Elizabeth, a place full of contradicting lifestyles, where you find good and bad people getting along. My school was the kind of school where no parent would aim to enrol their child and I don't understand why my mother took me there. Learners did not care about attending class and would get into trouble for truancy. Our principal used to chase them all around the school yard and that sometimes would cause destruction. The broken window of my Grade 12 classroom is still in my mind even to this date.

When people talk about “passion,” the first person who comes to mind is Miss Ngxatha. She made me love languages more than any other subject, specifically isiXhosa home language. I remember the day that she hit me on the back of my hand with a stick. Yes, at that moment I hated her, she hit me because I got a mark of 34 out of 40 for a district test. Nonetheless as days passed by, I did not even know why I had hated her in the first place. Miss Ngxatha made her isiXhosa classroom fun and interactive. We would recite wonderful isiXhosa poems from the book called *“Vukani Madoda Kusile”*. We would do isiXhosa presentations with huge enthusiasm, because we knew that our teacher was the best. Through her style of teaching I fell in love with isiXhosa. I remember how I used to bother her by borrowing isiXhosa novels and short stories books. At times I would bother her with things that did not make sense, like asking for R1. Since I was so inspired by her, I would look for anything that would cause us to interact, but as a teacher who had no favourite learners, I do not think she noticed what I was trying to do.

I remember how we used to laugh in her class when she would pose a question whose answer we had no idea about. In the end, Miss Ngxatha did not only teach us school knowledge; she taught us about life in general. I remember how she would share stories of amaXhosa life in the olden days. Those stories were the best; they made me into a young person who is aware of her culture. They made me feel proud of being umXhosa. I remember that I would tell her that I wanted to write isiXhosa books as well, whether they be novels or short stories. I also wanted to contribute. She would tell me to follow my dream. The saying that she used when she was encouraging us was, *‘ntinga ntakandini’*, which conveys the idea of the sky being the limit.

As a student who is following a career in education, I wish for the kind of strength that she had for us. Miss Ngxatha made me realise that I could be something in life with isiXhosa. She made me fall in love with the idea that my language is also important and it does contribute in my life. Through Miss Ngxatha's guidance, there are so many graduates of my school and others yet to graduate this year. The passion that she showed for education made me to choose education as my life's career. And for that I want to say, 'Thank you, Sis' Buli, for the role that you played in my life. Thank you for making me fall in love with isiXhosa. *Gxatsho ke mntwan' omgquba. Nangomso ntonkazi!*

She made me
fall in love
with
isiXhosa

A TRIBUTE TO MISS JONES, NOMBULELO SECONDARY SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM HLAKANIPHA GXEKWA

Nombulelo Secondary School is in Joza, part of the Grahamstown location. It is said to be the best school in the location, a school where teachers, doctors, even soldiers enrol their children for a better education. The school consists of Grades 8 to 12. Only African children attend the school, but it is very diverse when it comes to teachers: during my time there were Coloured, Indian, and White teachers, as well as teachers from the more northern parts of Africa. Never before in my school years had I seen so many male teachers.

I still remember it as is clearly as if it were yesterday. It was the year 2009 and I was doing Grade 10 for the second time; I had not done well enough in languages in the previous year and this landed me in Miss Jones' English class. She was one of the three white teachers in my school and was the first white teacher to teach me. She was very passionate about English and enjoyed teaching it; one could tell from the way she came early to class and even stayed behind to give classes in the afternoon. I used to hate languages and gave them little attention, but she changed all that.

Every day, for the first 10 minutes after coming into the English class, Miss Jones would read a poem to us. That encouraged us to read the poems by ourselves, before we heard it from her. We had a book called *To all my countrymen* that contained more than 100 poems. The school system required us to do only ten poems and be tested on any three at the end of the year. I read more than fifty poems, because Miss Jones instilled in me that love of poems. Not only did we learn to read them, but we learnt to analyse the hidden truth in the poem.

When I got to Grade 11, I became so fascinated with language, I didn't even concern myself with passing the Grade, but was only interested in understanding the subject. I was fortunate that Miss Jones was once again my English teacher. Although her hands were full, she managed to give her full attention to each and every learner. She was a native English speaker but she never laughed at me when I made mistakes when speaking to her and I was never embarrassed when I was around her. She was not the type of a person who would put you in an awkward position.

Miss Jones had had a problem with her legs from a very young age, and this meant that she could not carry her bags full of books and notes. Everyone in class was excited to help her because we loved and respected her so much. We created a roster for taking turns in assisting her with her bags from her car to the class. This forced us to come early to school; even the principal was surprised to see how dedicated we were to being on time and assisting our lovely teacher.

When I was in my Matric year, we were told that Miss Jones was leaving the school. I was so sad, but we never lost contact. I used to see her in town and we would talk; in fact she would encourage me. She was the best teacher in all my schooling years and it is the memory of her that stands out every time I think about school. I never thought I would make it to university, but she was the one who told me that the sky is the limit. I didn't understand then what it would mean, but now I do.

Thank you, Miss Jones; you never saw my poverty but my potential. Inspired by Miss Jones, I quote, "I will teach till I die".



The poem lover

*Thank you, Miss Jones;
you never saw my
poverty but my
potential*



**A TRIBUTE TO MR BARRY OF PENRYN COLLEGE, NELSPRUIT,
MPUMALANGA,
FROM MEGAN WILSON**

Not only was he the funniest teacher I have ever met; he was also one of the smartest people I know. Mr Thomas Barry was my Grade 11 English teacher. I had always hated English and found it a struggle, because of being dyslexic, but the minute I walked into his class on the first day of Grade 11, I knew that because of this man I would grow to love this subject I had dreaded for many years.

Mr Barry transported us to a different century and a different world when he read to us; he made every story come alive within his classroom. From re-enacting the fighting scenes from Othello with his plastic swords that would break continually but be fixed the next day with duct tape, to riding his imaginary horse around the class when studying the rather strange Equus. He made us appreciate the likes of Shakespeare simply because he was amazing at explaining the unknown; he made you want to learn the language because he made it so interesting.

Every day was a new day in his class; he never brought yesterday's issues into today's class. No matter what had happened yesterday, he always forgave and forgot. We started the new day with a clean slate. This was a breath of fresh air because many teachers held grudges and made you pay again and again for what you had done wrong. Not with Mr Barry; he always said, 'New day, new issues'. From this we gained respect for him and never wanted to disappoint him. He valued honesty and always gave you a chance to explain yourself. In this way he showed us that no matter what, there is always a way to solve a problem.

I remember that one day I was having a really bad day and my next lesson was double English, the thought of which just made me feel even worse. But the English lesson had the opposite effect on me; I walked out of that class feeling like a new person. I remember we were reading one of the many poems we had to study for exams. I'm not too sure what poem it was but the way in which Mr Barry read and analysed it just made so much sense to me. It showed me that no matter how bad your day is, there will always be that one person who can turn it around. That day it just happened to be my crazy energetic English teacher.

Mr Barry was truly an amazing teacher and because of him I want to be a teacher. He showed me that even if you do not enjoy a subject, you can grow to love it if you have the right inspiration and a teacher who can show you that not everything about the subject is boring. He demonstrated that, by using the right methods, you can get any learner to put effort into understanding something that they once had no interest in. I want to change the way in which children view the world, in the same way that he changed mine. I want to teach with the passion and enthusiasm which he has, even after 20 years of teaching the same old thing year after year.

Transported to
a different
era during
English class

*She played a role in my life
as the teacher who was
always truthful and real to
me*

**A TRIBUTE TO MRS R, THE WYKEHAM COLLEGIATE,
PIETERMARITZBURG, KWAZULU-NATAL,
FROM SINENTLAHLA GUBULA**

My Biology teacher became my favourite teacher, even though it did not start that way. When I had her as my Grade 8 and 9 Biology/ Life Sciences teacher, she was very scary and very intimidating. I did not want to ask questions because I felt that she might think my question was stupid, so I was very quiet in class. She retired at the end of my Grade 9 year. I would not say that I was happy to see her go, but her departure did not affect me as much as it did the other learners, who all loved her.

As months and years went by, my grades started to get worse. So the school that I was attending decided to get me outside help: a tutor. I agreed to it because I was stressed about my marks, especially those for Biology. I wondered who my tutor was going to be, but I was not expecting Mrs R. When I saw her, all those feelings I had had towards her many months before came back. I was not the only one who was to be tutored by her; there were many other girls. The other girls were so excited to see her again. We set our times with her, my time being during lunch hour on a Friday. During this time of being tutored by her for Matric, all my previous feelings about her disappeared and I started to like her. I found her very interesting and passionate about what she was teaching me. She valued punctuality and self-esteem; she told me not to under-estimate myself. She would tell me stories about living in places like Zimbabwe, where I could only dream of living at the time. She would also help me with my other subjects, mainly history. She would tell me things that were not even mentioned in the history books. She showed the same amount of passion for history that she showed for Biology.

I do not really think she impacted my decision to become a teacher; becoming a teacher was my decision alone. But she played a role in my life as the teacher who was always truthful and real to me.



The **tutor** who
didn't take any
nonsense

Mother & father figures



I felt so special

A TRIBUTE TO MISS MAFU, AMAZIZI SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL, PEDDIE, EASTERN CAPE, FROM NOMPHELO DYANI

Miss Mafu was my best teacher, the kind of teacher I never expected to meet. Although she stayed in East London, her home was near Peddie. She was a married woman with three kids, but different from other teachers at my school: she was not just a teacher; she was my mentor, my role model and a mother to me.

I grew up in Peddie, in a rural area called Mgababa. I completed my primary schooling there and then moved on to attend Amazizi Senior Secondary School. I was so nervous on my first day at high school. One thing I noticed was that, at this school, learners seemed to have close relationships with their teachers. I had never noticed that at primary school. The teachers of Amazizi were so friendly to us; they had smiles on their faces and were interested to know our names. The next day they came to us to introduce themselves and their subjects. Among those teachers who came to us, there was a short lady who looked as if she was in her late thirties. She was light-skinned, with long black hair and beautiful small dots on her cheeks. Her lips were dark and she had a loud and bold voice. I fell in love with her. She asked us to introduce ourselves. I was surprised to find that by the end of the week she knew our names.

Miss Mafu was a Natural Science teacher. She taught differently from other teachers. She would make sure that we understood what she was saying by repeating it until she saw us we understood. There were times when she would ask us whether we understood or not and when we said, 'Yes,' she would say, 'No, you don't get me.' In one day she taught us about the cell and how to label it, and I still remember the cell, even today, although we studied it in Grade 8. Like other teachers, Miss Mafu used corporal punishment, but she was not like other teachers when she punished us. She used to say she was punishing us because she loved us. I continued with her to Grade 9 and she never changed. What I noticed about her was that she loved and treated all the learners in school equally, unlike some teachers who have favourites. In particular, I noticed that she was different from those many teachers who only favour bright learners.

She did not teach me in Grade 10 because I was doing Commerce and she was teaching Life Science. In Grade 12 we met again, but now she was teaching me my home language, isiXhosa. In Grade 11 I did badly in Accounting and decided that I would change to another subject in Grade 12. My Accounting teacher was so disappointed, because I was a hard worker and I had passed her subject, unlike other learners, who had failed it. My Accounting teacher told Miss Mafu about her unhappiness with my decision to quit Accounting. Miss Mafu was good at talking to learners and she spoke to me, begging me not to quit Accounting, saying that it could possibly help me in future. After talking to her, I changed my mind and continued with Accounting. The fact that a teacher had tried to convince me about my future made me feel so important; it changed my image of myself.

Miss Mafu will always be my best teacher. Even though she had her mistakes like everyone else, she opened the world to me. I want to become a teacher like her and add to the number of teachers who inspire learners' lives. She showed me that the work of being a teacher does not end in the classroom. I give a big thanks to Miss Mafu for everything she did for me.

**A TRIBUTE TO MS KLOSS, CORNERSTONE COLLEGE,
PRETORIA, GAUTENG,
FROM THAPELO MOREKWENA**

My best teacher was my high school Setswana teacher Ms Kloss, from Cornerstone College in Pretoria. Ms Kloss taught me from Grade 10 through to Grade 12. I have chosen her not only because of the love and commitment she put into her work, but because she was the rock of my Setswana class. Never in my life have I met a teacher that was so loving and so full of respect for everyone.

I came to Pretoria in 2010, having lived all my early life in a small village called Taung in the North West. When I arrived in the city with my two cousins, Ms Kloss helped me to build a home there. In the college, there were 26 new learners who came from poor backgrounds. She welcomed us all into the school's hostel and treated us like her own children, making sure that we felt comfortable in our new city environment. A mother to all, she showed compassion to everyone, encouraging us to be active and to take part in the different extra-curricular activities of the school.

I remember walking into her class for the first time and receiving a warm welcome from her; she knew our names before we had even met. She made it her business to know as much as she could about her learners before she started teaching them. She is the only teacher I knew who actually listened to a learner's problem and was always willing to help out in any way she could. Ms Kloss became my second mother and that is why she will forever be my best teacher.

Ms Kloss was the sort of woman who would punish a child as a child and would not let differences between learners get in the way of her doing her work. She treated everyone with the utmost respect and admitted when she was wrong; she was a mother to all of us and was never afraid to tell a person the truth. She enjoyed connecting with everyone in the classroom and I never saw her showing any signs of favouritism to learners, unlike other teachers. She would encourage us to aim high and would also be a comforter when things were not going well for us.

Ms Kloss valued her work and would make sure, if there was a day that she was not going to be in class, that we had work for that lesson. This rarely happened because she never took sick leave like many of the other teachers. She took pride in her work and would also be interested in our development. If I struggled with any of my subjects, she would encourage me to get help, just as a mother would do for her children. When learners who came to class with sad faces or involved in a conflict, she would call the sad or conflicting parties aside and listen to all sides of the story, instead of jumping to conclusions. All this prepared me for life after high school.

It was through my time in the Setswana class and having witnessed Ms Kloss in action that I became inspired to become a teacher. I never saw nor heard her complain about life; she kept on going and made sure that people around her were well taken care of. I too would like to change many lives, like Ms Kloss has over the years, and also help to groom our future leaders. I will forever be thankful to Ms Kloss for those most memorable years of my life and I shall carry with me all that she taught me during those years. Thank you to the woman who made me fall in love with teaching.



**The woman
who made me
fall in love
with teaching**



***A TRIBUTE TO MR MAGEBA ZULU OF COLANE SENIOR
SECONDARY SCHOOL, MOUNT FRERE, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM THOZAMA FAYILANE***

When learners go to high school, they expect to encounter a generally nurturing learning environment filled with friendly teachers. The last thing they expect is to enter a classroom and find a teacher who slams a door loudly as his introduction to the class, then points at one of them at random and asks what the South African National Anthem is and who was the author of it. Of course, I was the unlucky learner. I remember frantically looking around the classroom, hoping one of my fellow learners might know the answer. Unsurprisingly, they all looked out of the window and down at their desks, avoiding eye contact with me at all costs.

In spite of this scary beginning, Mr Zulu, my Economics teacher, was my best teacher. He was an eccentric, theatrical, unique and eloquent teacher. I knew that with his unconventional teaching style I would experience incredible success. My school was notorious and other schools teased us a lot, but Mr Zulu was my best teacher, in spite of the school he was teaching at.

Mr Zulu was like a parent to me. We as learners used to call him by his clan name, Mageba, and he played the role of a father figure because of his kindness, enthusiasm and passion. He respected his learners, irrespective of our age.

One day, our Mathematics teacher gave us a sequence and series of mathematics problems to solve; we tried many times but could not get the answer. The teacher became angry and wanted to hit us, but we refused to be beaten with a cane. Our Mathematics teacher declared that he would not teach us for a month, and most of the teachers sided with his decision. At that, we took the matter to Mageba. He listened to both sides of the story, intervened and acted as mediator. He believed in putting education first, even if it meant a dispute with the principal.

As I have already mentioned, Mageba was my economics teacher. Learners liked this subject because of him, despite perceptions that it was difficult. I remember Mageba talking about South African poverty; he used the Gini co-efficient to demonstrate what he was talking about. He often used gestures, acting and sometimes playing in order to convey concepts.

In 2013, my Matric year, Mageba gave us many activities to do and, because we knew he would not collect the work for marking, we did not bother to do them. Unfortunately, one day he asked for them. Because we had not done the activities, he instructed us to kneel down in the assembly so that learners who were in lower grades and other people present could laugh at us. We laughed while we were kneeling, because he had promised to give sweets to anyone who completed the punishment successfully by showing remorse.

In conclusion, Mageba is a teacher who had a great impact on my life. He showed us that, even though none of his own children were studying in our school, he would treat his learners as his own children. I can proudly say that Mr Mageba contributed towards my being at Rhodes University because he provided me with application forms. When I think of my future teaching career, I say to Mr Mageba, 'It is because of you that I will, one day, be able to go on and become an amazing teacher. I thank you for that.'

Education first whatever the consequences

**A TRIBUTE TO MISS ADAMS, AYLIFF PRIMARY SCHOOL,
PEDDIE, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM SINALO MARAMBANA**

When I started Grade 1, there was a Grade 5 teacher who really inspired me to be a teacher by her beauty and the way she dressed. I wished I could skip all the grades at school so that I could be taught by her.

However, I had to soldier on through Grades 1 to 4 in order for her to be my teacher in Grade 5. As I grew up, this memory remained with me. It made me think that many teachers inspire learners with their outfits and that plays a very big role in inspiring many to become teachers. Yet it was not only the way this teacher dressed, but also her personality, which contributed to what I am today.

My best teacher's name was Miss Adams. She was a beautiful young lady, light in complexion, with a lovely smile. As time went by, I passed Grades 1, 2 and 3. After passing Grade 4 I was so excited that I would finally have the chance to be taught by Miss Adams.

Miss Adams was very nice to all of us. One day, we were told that the learners from Grade 5, 6 and 7 were going on a trip to East London. I told my mom that we were going on a trip and that there was an amount of money that needed to be paid; my mom said she would pay for me. When there were only a few days left before the tour, I reminded my mom about the money. Sadly, she said she could not afford to pay it. I was very disappointed that I would be the only one who could not go, but decided to put a brave face on it. The day before the trip, Miss Adams called me and asked why I had not paid the money for the tour. I told her that my mom could not afford the money. After school, Miss Adams called me again and told me to prepare for the tour; she had paid for me. I was so excited that I could go, I could not thank her enough. I enjoyed the trip; it was another bright memory for me. What Miss Adams did for me really inspired me to be the person that I am today, not only because of her beauty and her outfits. She was not just a teacher, but a parent to many learners like me. She did not want to see one of her learners feel disadvantaged; she wanted us to be treated equally. Miss Adams had her own kids at home but that did not stand in her way; she did what she could and paid for me. Miss Adams was kind to all students; I am sure if it had been up to her, she would have paid for all the learners who could not afford the money.

Miss Adams was the best teacher ever. She was an example to me and made me what I am today. Teachers like Miss Adams will make a difference in our country, as more children will want to be like them. She motivated us to be what we want to be in future and she always reminded us to be neat and clean. I guess she wanted us to grow up just like her, as she liked people who take responsibility for themselves at a young age. Though we sometimes made her angry, that did not stop her from calling us her children.



A mother to all



A TRIBUTE TO MRS MNGCAMBE, MARY WATERS HIGH SCHOOL, GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE, FROM SIYASAMKELA MATYA

Because of her enthusiasm for the language and for teaching in general, Mrs Mngcambe became one of the reasons that I fell in love with the English language.

She is a woman in her middle forties who grew up in Grahamstown and went to school at one of the township schools in Joza location. She comes from a humble background like mine. I am not certain why she chose to be a teacher, but the interest she showed in her work indicates that she loves her job and has a passion for what she is doing. She was my English teacher during Grades 11 and 12 and in class she used to share with us stories about her home situation, how she grew up and her struggle to get into university.

Mrs Mngcambe is my role model because her background is somewhat like mine. Although I attended a 'coloured' school, I did not have much contact with English at home and this affected my self-esteem because the medium of communication and learning throughout my school life was English. This affected my school performance in all my grades, but especially in high school where we had to do presentations in English in front of the class. Once I had heard Mrs Mngcambe's story, however, and knew where she had started from and how far she had come in life, I was greatly motivated. She would always encourage us to believe in ourselves and not let our circumstances define who we are. The main thing she emphasised was the need for hard work; she used a term '*inqanawa iyazika*', which means the ship is sinking, to warn us to pull up our socks and work even harder.

She is my favourite teacher because she developed in me a love for English, despite the fact that she was a Xhosa speaker. This motivates me and makes me want to work hard so that I can have a positive impact on the Foundation Phase learners I will be teaching in a few years' time.

Despite the fact that she was my English teacher, I would go to her if I needed clarification in any of my other school subjects. She would read a concept and explain it in a way that I could understand and make sense of it. She loved her work and was like a mother to all her learners as well. She always encouraged hard work and a balanced life style. She was and still is a very approachable woman who loves people very much.

Indirectly, she has had an impact on my decision to become a teacher. While she was just being herself and loving her job, she was laying a foundation in me and helping to develop the love for standing in front of young children and teaching them. She made me realise that being a teacher is more than just waking up every morning and going to work in a school; it is part of who you are, and forms part of your identity as an individual. She was also human and had her down moments and times when she did not tolerate learners' behaviours. However, she tried to make sure that she dealt with her feelings with professionalism. I would like to have a similar influence on the Foundation Phase children I will be teaching as she had on me.

Don't let your
circumstances
define **you**

The unconventional teacher

A TRIBUTE TO MR DUMANI SOGONI, VEZUBUHLE PRIMARY SCHOOL, PORT ELIZABETH, EASTERN CAPE, FROM UNATHI NTOLOSI

The sight of young children playing a game of marbles in my area set me thinking about my primary school teacher and how he made me stop playing that game during school hours.

Mr Dumani Sogoni is and always will be my best teacher ever. He was a tall, well built, active and funny person, known as 'Meneer' (Menyeri as we used to say, giving it its isiXhosa pronunciation) by every learner in primary school. He was my first and last male teacher and taught me through Grades 6 and 7. He was my best teacher because he was the first one who noticed that I really love reading and he even brought me some of his books to read.

At first we did not see eye to eye, simply because he liked to make me wipe the blackboard and he used to send me to different teachers around the school as his messenger boy. Little did I know that he saw me as the most respectful learner and he trusted me because he knew that I was approachable. That made me realize that no matter how young a person is, he or she can mean a lot to an adult.

I remember a day when we went on a school outing to a place called 'Bay world'; it is a zoo-like kind of a place displaying many different creatures, from skeletons of old dinosaurs to live dolphins. Meneer was with us on that outing and he gave us a lesson on sea creatures. I vividly recall that he behaved like someone who had once worked there, because he told us about all the characteristics of those different sea animals. The Bay World employees were fascinated by this guy who had taken over their job. The manager even asked him to leave his contact number, so that they could call him if they needed information.

Mr Sogoni was known at school as the teacher who administered the most harmful lashes (remember that we grew up in the era of corporal punishment and that most parents supported it). Many of his former learners who have achieved great things around the world have come through those beatings. Among them is South African fast bowler, Lonwabo Tsotsobe; Mr Sogoni was his cricket coach back in the day.

There were two classes of Grade 7s in 2009. He was my class teacher and I was so happy because in his class you felt at home. He was open to us and spoke to us as if we were adults. I remember writing a history test for which I got 95 out of 100. He was livid; his face turned red even though his skin complexion was black and he did not talk to me that day. I was too scared to ask him what was wrong, but later found out the reason for his anger: 'You became lazy and lost the last five marks and that is not like you,' he said. Those words still echo in my head. From that day I told myself that I wouldn't be lazy again.

It was exciting when I left primary school, but painful because I felt I still needed my teacher's guidance. A year after we graduated from primary school, he also left the school to focus on his taxi business. When I was browsing around the internet I found out that Mr Sogoni, who was my primary school teacher, is now a board member and HR manager at Ubunye Ngamandla Transport Services (Pty) Ltd. That has really motivated me to become a better person. I have realized that the story of 'Menyeri's' life should be recorded in a well-written book, because of his important achievements and his generosity.



**Ey Ey
Uyaboonwa!!
Watsh'uMenyeri**



We've got an
uncle in our
English
Class, Mr
Levey!

**A TRIBUTE TO MR HAMILTON LEVEY, EDUCOLLEGE,
PORT ELIZABETH, EASTERN CAPE,
FROM AKHONA SAME**

My favourite teacher is Mr Hamilton Levey. He is an Afrikaans-speaking teacher although you would never know it from his English accent.

In 2001, when I started my Grade 8 studies, I met Mr Levey for the first time. I was very short and tiny back then and looked as if I should still be in primary school. Mr Levey was a giant, balding, and with a big belly. The learners in higher grades always teased him and called him Mr Joshua Doore, because he looked like the furniture king.

My first impression of Mr Levey was of a harsh and scary teacher. This impression was created by his physical stature. As we lined up waiting to be placed into classes, I made mini-prayers that I would be placed in another class and not in his. God must have been laughing at me and shaking His head saying, 'No, my child!' I was placed in Mr Levey's class and he was not only my English teacher but my register teacher too.

On that very same day, I learnt that Mr Levey was very sweet, with a great sense of humour. He made us do an ice-breaker exercise. We had to say three statements about ourselves, two of which were true and one which was a lie. The rest of the class had to guess which one was a lie. Mr Levey was the first to start, telling us he was a model, he was a murderer and he was pregnant. It was difficult for us to guess which statement was a lie as they all sounded like lies. My imagination went wild, speculating that he may have been a policeman or soldier in his youth, when apartheid was in force. That would explain his being a murderer.

It turned out that Mr Levey was a murderer indeed. He told us how he killed insects while he was a young playful boy. The second truthful statement was that he was a model. We all laughed at this; it would have made more sense to say he was pregnant, because that's the way he looked. He told us that to his wife, he was a model. We then turned the joke on him by saying that to us he looked as if he was pregnant.

Mr Levey was one of my favourite teachers because he always had a response to all the nonsense that the learners would give him. The school was full of learners who had been expelled from other schools because of misconduct. Mr Levey was one of the few teachers who would stay in class rather than walking out on us when a few learners misbehaved. Instead of punishing the whole class, he would deal with individuals.

Regarding academics, we would struggle a lot with English Home Language. Even though we barely passed, Mr Levey would pat us and say, 'Well done, and better luck next time.' I may not have done very well in my final exam in 2005, but I am grateful for the knowledge that Mr Levey gave me.

To pay tribute to Mr Levey, I will adopt his teaching approach of making the classroom an environment for fun and education. He managed that against the odds of having to teach in a small old office building and despite having many disruptive learners who needed special attention and sought it in the wrong way. He was a good man, treating us equally in all aspects, and never punishing the innocent when enforcing discipline. He was easy to approach: a friend and parent to all, who always made time to assist those needing help. He was a real uncle!

A TRIBUTE TO MISS FEZI NTAKA, VUSISIZWE SECONDARY SCHOOL, WORCESTER, WESTERN CAPE, FROM PAMELLA QUSHWANA

She was an educated black teacher with a beautiful smile and a good-looking figure. Her voice was not loud, but even a deaf person could hear her because of the wise words she uttered. That was Miss Fezi Ntaka, my Business Studies teacher from a small dusty township near Worcester. Her classroom was on the second floor of the Grade 12 block; it was very neat and organized, unlike that of the other teachers, whose classrooms had broken windows.

The first time I saw her, I was in Grade 10. She entered the classroom carrying two books on her left arm and a blackboard duster in her right hand. She stood in front of the class and introduced herself, smiling and friendly. But after the introduction she said she wanted to introduce 'her colleague'. I remember her exact words: 'Me and my colleague we've been working together for quite some time now, and she helps me to heal people who need to be healed'. She said these words pointing at the duster. At first I thought she was crazy. But she continued, saying, 'I know some of you might think I am losing my mind, but I am not; through this duster I have produced entrepreneurs, accountants, H.R managers, etcetera, and I am planning to do the same with you!'

I did not understand her, because I knew that the duster was for cleaning the blackboard. I thought to myself, 'This teacher is evil; how can she produce people in high professions with a duster?' After some time, she started using 'her colleague', the duster. She used to beat every person in the class with the duster: for not doing homework, for making a noise in class, for not attending classes, for not submitting an assignment on time, etc. Every time she beat us, she would ask us individually, 'What do you want to be?' I started hating her. I and my peers would gossip about her and say that she was evil, cruel and abusive. We would say negative things about her, behind her back. But ironically, we grew to respect her, we did everything she told us to do, because we were afraid of being healed by her colleague 'duster'.

It took me the whole year to realise the meaning of 'healing'. At the end of the year, we got our results and the whole class passed Business Studies with flying colours, but that was not all. Our class got the award for being the best disciplined class in the school. Those were the first achievements of the 'healing duster'. During my Grade 11 year, Miss Fezi Ntaka and her 'colleague' were still around. She was still teaching us Business Studies. Apparently she was also going to teach us in Grade 12. I had no choice but to accept both of them, and follow their rules.

Miss Ntaka continued using her duster 'colleague', throughout my Grade 11 and 12 years. From the duster I learnt discipline and respect, I learnt to be on time, to be focused at all times, I learnt to differentiate between what is wrong and right and most importantly, I learnt never to act on the basis of my emotions but always to use logic and to think critically about everything. Then I grew to realise that Miss Ntaka did not hate us. Instead, she was preparing us to become the best in everything we did, because she loved us.

She inspired me to become a teacher, because she cared about her learners. She had a passion for teaching and she healed us in a positive way. I thank her because she shaped me into the kind of person I am today. I also want to be that kind of a teacher, one who makes a difference in children's lives.



The duster that heals



‘Makhapetshu’ the unconventional teacher

A TRIBUTE TO MR VAN DEN BERG, BARKLY EAST HIGH SCHOOL, BARKLY EAST, EASTERN CAPE, FROM ASIPHE GALADA

Mr van den Berg was a very tall man, probably the tallest man I had ever seen. He was the Accounting teacher at Barkly East High School and later became the Principal of the school. The school accommodated more than three hundred learners and learners felt at home there because of the staff.

Mr van den Berg was a very popular teacher because of his teaching style. If the first term ended and you did not know him, you were considered to be anti-social. He would always surprise the new learners with his ability to speak isiXhosa fluently. His methods of punishment were also unusual. He would put a learner on garden service or on Saturday detention. One of his punishments was called ‘shock therapy’: one would sit on a brick for the whole break period under the scorching sun. Everybody tried to avoid his punishments, but there was no escaping it if you were given one. Apart from being an educator, he owned a vegetable farm where he employed many people from the township. That is how he got the name ‘Makhapetshu,’ because he was mainly a vegetable farmer.

He taught all classes, from Grade 8 to Grade 12. In Grades 8 and 9, he taught the basics of Accounting; after that he would say, ‘Vat hom fluffy,’ meaning that the ball was in your court. You were allowed to leave his class whenever you felt like it but he would plead that you should not make a noise while roaming around the school. In Grade 10 a person could choose between Accounting and Life Sciences. Most people went to Life Sciences because they had failed Accounting in the lower grades. If you stayed with Accounting you were regarded as very brave.

Makhapetshu’s ways of making the learners learn his subject were different from those of other teachers in the school. You would never find him with chalk in his hand, but he would give you learning resources such as textbooks, study guides and previous question papers. During his class, an activity would be written on the board. He never checked whether we did it or not; all he would do is threaten that what was on the board would be in the test or exam. His classes usually contained only ten to twelve learners because the other learners did not like this method of teaching. His motto at the beginning of the year for every Accounting learner was, ‘Get on the aeroplane at the airport because you cannot catch it in the sky’. In other words, if you get the basics right, you will find Accounting easy.

Tests were written every Friday and if you failed, you would join him at school on Saturday. He would recommend that you bring lunch for yourself because he could not guarantee that you would be out early. This would then encourage you as a learner to study and pass at school rather than spending the whole of Saturday in extra lessons. Grade 12 learners who obtained eighty per cent or more in their final exams would receive four hundred rand each. He loved losing money to bets about test and assignment scores.

A motto of his that made me develop into an independent thinker in life was: ‘Only babies are spoon fed.’ When you are able to feed yourself, then you are old enough to do things by yourself. He used to say being an educator requires a person to be passionate about it. He had an open door policy which gave us all freedom to go to him and ask questions. He would explain concepts in a way that would be easy to understand. That is why he was the greatest teacher I ever had. His unconventional teaching made me want to be a teacher too, and to make a difference.