Sisterhood is POWA’s 7th anthology of poems, short stories and personal essays. The anthology embodies the meaning of sisterhood, of relationships in which girls and women give and receive friendship, love and support. This safe, secure environment, increased by their bond, is neither threatening nor imposing; a “sister” is there to give encouragement and unconditional love.

The theme of Sisterhood grew from a personal essay published in last year’s anthology, Love and Revolution. “Am I my sister’s keeper?” by Joy Lange tells how her family started St Anne’s Homes, a shelter for abused women and children, which Joy and her sisters continue to manage today. Her parents left their children a legacy of love and concern for each other, which has reached into the lives of homeless families and the community, a revolutionary act of love.

All the contributions warmly embrace this theme. The writers defined what sisterhood meant for them, and incorporated it into their stories and poems. Their understanding of sisterhood deepened through reflection. In this way, writing also becomes an act of liberation.

POWA’s vision is to create a safe society that does not tolerate violence against women, where women are powerful, self-reliant, equal and respected. POWA’s mission is to be a specialised and multi-skilled service provider which contributes to the complete eradication of violence against women in society. POWA provides counselling, legal advice, court support and shelter to women survivors of domestic violence.
Breaking the Silence

Sisterhood
Breaking the Silence

Sisterhood

Funded by:
The artwork reproduced in this edition is the result of the on-going collaboration that POWA has with the CDP Trust. This partnership is now in its sixth year, and it draws on the CDP’s approach to creating visual narratives, enabling healing and making advocacy media through the arts and their cultural forms.

In July 2011, the CDP facilitated a narrative body mapping process through a module within the POWA Women’s Writing Project workshop. The process drew on the powerful symbolism of women’s bodies as engaging in creative activity, with or without prior art-making experience, and opened up safe spaces for sharing personal stories, for sharing hopes and fears and releasing anger and hurt. Through these processes, the individual narratives became a collective narrative – empathic shared experiences of women dealing with violence and demanding their rights to justice and protection in a gendered society.

*Art-making workshop facilitated by Charlotte Schaer (CDP Trust); Photography: Charlotte Schaer*
Dedication

This piece is dedicated to the late Charlotte Schaer, former Director of CDP (www.cdpt) and great friend of POWA. We will always love you.

A celebration of Charlotte’s sisterhood
For a number of years, POWA has witnessed and engaged in the powerful and life-changing creative work of the CDP. And the strongest and most persistent voice in this work has been Charlotte Schaer. She was a source of inspiration and a constant reminder of the profound power of creative expression. She strongly believed that every woman needs to find her own voice and to let it be heard, and Charlotte helped so many women in this search. She taught us the value of the personal, qualitative and profound changes that happen within the individual person – changes that are not always easy to capture within the boundaries of the reporting structures in many organisations.

Charlotte’s enthusiasm and complete dedication to working for change within the lives of women, children and youth made an imprint on every person that she engaged with. Her true belief in the power of the individual and personal voice, and ability to create change on all levels of society, was a driving force that inspired all. She taught
us to see the creative self as a catalyst for this change. Charlotte lived the change she wanted to see. She was tough but gentle, critical but receptive and always aimed for the highest quality of work.

Charlotte not only developed and ran a strong organisation but she never ceased to care for every single person she met. She had a special way of connecting with people.

Charlotte has left an imprint in the lives of the women she encountered that will continue to grow and expand even in her absence.

*Deyana Thomas*
*Director CDP Trust*
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This anthology contains the selected entries submitted to People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) during 2011. This is POWA’s seventh year of producing Breaking the Silence – an anthology of women’s writing – and a mark of its continued success and achievement. The aim of this project is to open the debate around abuse and women’s issues by giving women the opportunity to express their emotions and write creatively. The creative act of writing becomes a creative act of healing and a way of breaking the silence.

The theme for 2011/12 was Sisterhood, the relationships and connections built by women to express love, support and solidarity to one another: mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, friends, neighbours, counsellors, partners, colleagues and strangers. These connections are as a result of shared, similar experiences or a collective understanding of “victimhood” or survival, and what it means to be a strong, courageous and powerful woman.
We thank all the writers who contributed poems, stories and personal accounts to POWA. Writing your own story is courageous and difficult. We appreciate and value every entry. Each story contains its own power and merit. As always the panel of judges found it difficult to select the entries for the anthology.

The following women made up the panel of judges:

Liz Trew, who chaired the panel, a former POWA volunteer; Jeanette Sera from POWA; Sixolile Ngcobo from Oxfam GB; Caroline Zoh Akiy Mbi-njifor from Engender Health; and Pastor Princisca Tananyiwa from Prevailing Word Ministries International. Collectively, the judges have a background in gender issues and creative writing, and could judge entries in all the languages in which POWA received submissions. We thank them for their time and commitment.

The artwork was produced by participants of the POWA ‘Raising Her Voice’ project and is again supplied to us by the Curriculum Development Project (CDP). We thank them for the colourful work, which enhances and adds meaning to the creative writing. We also wish, through this publication, to honour and pay tribute to the late Charlotte Schaer (former Director, CDP) for her selfless giving to this project and her relentless work in the women’s rights sector as a whole. Her memory lives on.

This anthology would not have been possible without the financial support of the National Lottery Distribution Fund. Their support has greatly contributed to the expansion and continued success of the project.
Foreword

As always, we look forward to receiving submissions for next year’s anthology, details of which will be posted on the programme’s website, www.womenswriting.org.za, and advertised in the media.

Nonhlanhla Sibanda
Project Manager

Nehwoh Belinda
Project Assistant

Liz Trew
Chair of the Editorial Board
The theme of Sisterhood grew from a personal essay published in last year’s anthology, *Love and Revolution*. ‘Am I My Sister’s Keeper?’ by Joy Lange tells how her family started St Anne’s Homes, a shelter for abused women and children, which Joy and her sisters continue to manage today. Her parents had left their children a legacy of love and concern for each other, which has reached into the lives of homeless families and the community, a revolutionary act of love.

That story embodies the meaning of sisterhood, of relationships in which girls and women give and receive friendship, love and support. The safe, secure environment, increased by their bond, is neither threatening nor imposing; a ‘sister’ is there to give encouragement and friendship.

All the contributions we received warmly embraced this theme. The writers had defined what sisterhood meant for them, and incorporated it into their stories and poems. Their understanding of sisterhood had deepened towards reflection. Writing also becomes an act of liberation.
The short stories in this collection play out their unfolding dramas to reach some change or discovery. In ‘Mended Pieces’, Julia, who has overcome an abusive past, is rewarded by caring for women in a homeless shelter. She pictures these women as broken pieces of glass that were mended to form a beautiful vase. She reaches out to Nothemba, who isolates herself, locked in her traumatic past. In ‘Bread’, a woman stops at the traffic lights and sees a girl begging. She hands her some change and the girl calls her ‘sister’, a simple act that connects the woman and the girl. A white girl in ‘White Without But Black Within’ is driven to follow her calling of becoming a sangoma. Her close friend Thandeka supports and helps her achieve this. ‘Girl Power’ is a rite-of-passage story of girls growing up. They learn, ironically, through lies and deception, the true meaning of friendship. In ‘Strength from My Sister’ a young schoolgirl is raped by a neighbour in a rural village. Patience, her biological sister and Zandile, her cyber friend, give her constant support and love. In ‘Witch and Bitch’, an old woman and a girl, who are at first hostile to each other, are shunned and cast out by villagers who call them witch and bitch. The old woman and girl eventually connect with each other.

The personal essays illustrate the notion of sisterhood well. In ‘A Starved Sisterhood’, an anorexic sister locks herself away in her sickness, rejecting all help from her healthy, gym-loving sister. With a touch of irony it takes a traumatic incident for the sick sister to reach out to her traumatised sister, and so begin her healing. In ‘Companionship’, two girls form a strong friendship from their childhood. They go their separate ways and
misfortunes as adults, but are able to renew their strong bond again. A rural girl in ‘Love Her Madly’ discovers she is HIV positive, and is demoted at work. She overcomes her stress through the support of her loving sister and by joining a TAC group. In ‘My Circle of Angels’, the writer, as ‘a single, unemployed, HIV-positive mum’, expresses her gratitude for the sisters around her. Sisterhood is also the ability to reach out to others; it could be someone in the street. We have lost the core values of ubuntu, she says. ‘Inspired by Women’, itself an inspiring account, gives generous sentiments of sisterhood. Through the loss of her mother, the writer finds two supportive mothers and a loving, deeper friendship with a sister. In ‘Suster’ two women from very different backgrounds support each other by each admiring and respecting the other ‘for we live through other people all the time’. In ‘Forgive Me My Sister’ the writer’s best friend pushes her away in anger and grief when the friend’s son is killed. The writer finds the notion of sisterhood ‘through the nature of God’ and the best friends are eventually reunited.

The poems bring out the meaning of Sisterhood in various styles and rhythms. ‘A Chant to My Sisters’ and ‘Slaughtered Sisters’ are challenging calls for sisters to be strong, to wake up, change their values and become themselves and not what society has prescribed. ‘My Sister Could’ glories in the notion of a sister as a wise magician who will always be in ‘my freedom’. ‘Sisterhood’ defines and explores what it means to be a sister. ‘The Ladies Take Tea’ delightfully brings friends together, who forget their misfortunes and meet as ‘empress, queen and other lofty titles’. ‘Liewe vriendin’ calls on a friend to lift her out of the pain of adulthood, affirming the value of friendship.
These stories, essays and poems are interesting and inspiring. They tell how women who have lost themselves through trauma, abuse and negative images of themselves have been strengthened, empowered and valued by sisterly support. In so doing, these writers point towards the possibility of a better world.

Liz Trew
Chair of the Editorial Board
POETRY
Sisterhood is love
Love so sisterly and selfless
Selfless so sisterly and kind
Kindness so sincere and warm
Warmth so soothing and sisterly

Sisterhood is a way of life
Life so full of compassion
Compassion so sisterly so strong
Pillar of strength so gallant and sisterly
Sisterly so brave and gallant

Sisterhood is lion-hearted
Lion-hearted so sisterly not lily-liveried
Sisterly shoulder so huge and mighty
So mighty to comfort and appease
Sisterly soothe so tender and relevant

by Patience Nozithelo Mkosana
Breaking the Silence

Sisterhood is giving
Sisterly hand so timeous and helpful
So helpful so courageous and so empowering
So sisterly so sincere
Sisterhood so life-saving and true

Sisterhood is forgiving
So forgiving to see the future in a new light
Together we overcome, we victorious, we thrive
Forgiveness so sisterly it emancipates
from the chains of sadness
Sisterhood that gives birth to enfranchisement

Sisterhood is a way of life
Life so full of compassion
Compassion so sisterly so strong
I was born alone yet you lifted me to the pedestal you keep locked in your throne, your heart. Never have I needed anything that you did not provide, my everything. You have kept me cupped in the palms of your heart; your manicured care always cured me, my very own care bear. Not only are you my sister but a magician too, turning drought into flourishing, NO DOUBT. Older and bolder you carried me on your shoulder the world you taught me, an oyster. We have walked down almost every avenue of our Sisterhood, carving the pavements with memories, miniature monuments. I have travelled the world through your wisdom, for those reasons you will forever reign in my queendom, my freedom.
A Chant to My Sisters

by Mbali Langa

Those who don’t buy into media prescribed roles of self being,
Sold by unreal images housed in boxes
Tied by pretty red ribbons,
Carrying capitalistic notions of informed beauty
Branded by impersonators
Just second-hand imitators of megalomaniacal beings
With self-perceived supremacy,
Blood hounds
economically feeding on ebony’s insecurity
a fevered symptom in the lineage of my mahogany

This is a chant for my sisters

So I come to expose their get-rich roads
Built on the infrastructure of our suffering cultural codes
With their adverts they bulldoze our homes
Demolish our kids’ values and leave our morals
in shambles
A Chant to My Sisters

A cry for help dimly calls

So I chant to my sisters

Those who bounce to their beats
And buy into the hype of their illusionary types
To take a minute and realise that consumerism is a trap so tight
Locking many of our sisters’ minds
So I call to those divas caught up in hussle fever
To realise that true grace is not achieved by enriching a shopkeeper
Or pouncing around half naked proclaiming you’re single either

So to all the single ladies, all the single ladies
Young, old and about to be married
Look within to achieve self-gratification
Materialism only promotes a constructed satisfaction;
A reality essentialised by useless commodification

This is a chant to all the sisters

Grounded or caught up
It’s time we act now

So I call to those divas caught up in hussle fever
To realise that true grace is not achieved by enriching a shopkeeper
The Ladies Take Tea

by Jayne Bauling

It’s a once-a-year thing, the five of us
drinking fragrant tea from fine
flowered cups with matching saucers,
eating tiny iced cakes, crooking
our fingers and naming ourselves
Empress, Queen and other lofty titles,
wearing our best dresses that
we gigglingly call frocks,
not forgetting, never forgetting
bruise-raising blame
unpaid maintenance
confiscated salary
imposed pregnancies
custody hearings –
not for a minute forgetting,
only taking tea and titles for this
one afternoon, once a year.
With hands tied firmly behind backs
Our hearts bleed drops of sorrow,
Dripping, soaking into the ground
The screaming sounds so loud in our heads
But there is no sound
We are the voiceless masses
The silent faces
The blank ballot papers
Anger surges from our pores
Immersed in feelings of helplessness
Meat falling off the bones
The decaying carcass of hope
Lies lifeless
We are the voiceless masses
The silent faces
The blank ballot papers.
We are the ones who must change
Change to fit into your paradigm
Your narrowed, skewed, hurtful view.
Breaking the Silence

We must wear flowering dresses with bows
in our hair and pink lips,
We fail to exist if not for the gaping hole you
so brutally rip apart
Bricks smashed bodies, hate perforates our souls
Protection eludes us
We are the voiceless masses
The silent faces
The blank ballot papers
But we are not victims
We do not crawl into your boxes and hide
We do not lie down and play dead because you are
threatened by our might
We are powerful,
strong,
dynamic,
vocal,
in your face,
fists in the air,
angry,
humble,
caring,
compassionate,
emotional,
survivors
And you cannot break us
Because our voices will be heard across
our beautiful land
Our faces will be imprinted into your consciousness
And our ballot papers will be marked with the blood
of our slaughtered sisters
Liewe Vriendin

by Juliet Rose

Raak aan my met jou sagte woorde
Dalk ontdooi my koue hart...
Lag saam met my oor die dinge van gister
Dalk kraak die masker van my gesig af

Min mense kan my laat lewe, lag, juig
Jy kon
Maar nou is jy ver
Weggeneem deur grootwoord

Kom ons bak modderkoekies en sit 16 kersies op
Kom ons ry fiets met pienk lintes wat agter ons aan wapper

Dan hoef ek nie te dink aan die seer nie
Dan hoef ek nie ’n langmou hemp aan te trek
op Lente dag nie
Dan hoef ek nie ant-deprisante te drink en slaappille
onwettig kry nie
Dans saam met my op tafels
Drink saam met my Jack Daniels tot ons geld op
Sing saam met my liedjies uit ons kinderdae
En huil saam met my oor ’n fliek oor aborsie

Ek wil nie dink aan more nie.
Ek wil weet dat jy vandag hier sal wees.
Asseblief? Asseblief!

Hoekom is ek so moeg?
Moeg vir perfek probeer wees
Moeg om goed te probeer wees
Moeg om soos jy te wees?

Liewe vriendin… hoekom word ons groot?

Lag saam met my oor die dinge van gister
Dalk kraak die masker van my gesig af
‘What’s love got to do with it… what’s love but a second-hand emotion,’ a song sung with so much gusto by Tina Turner, was playing on the car radio and I soon found myself singing along, much to the amusement of my colleague, Caroline, who was driving. Almost before the song ended, I asked her whether she had seen the movie portraying the life of Tina Turner and soon we were engrossed in a discussion of the abusive life that such a strong woman with a great music career had endured for years from her husband, the legendary Ike Turner.

I suddenly felt my mind reeling back to my experiences surrounded by abusive relationships for many years, having grown up in an abusive home.

Caroline and I were travelling on a wide-open road surrounded by beautiful countryside, located within the mountainous area of the Cape Winelands. We had quite a long way to go before we reached our destination and I found myself quickly brought back to the present by
Caroline asking me if I knew that she grew up in the area we were now approaching, Worcester.

She very excitedly pointed out the exact house where her family lived, as she strained her neck to look back at what was still kept intact of their family home.

She then went on to tell me about her mother and how brave she was when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in her early fifties, the mastectomies, the treatments, the pain and the morphine. Caroline reminisced about her mom’s terminal illness, the hospice home-care and, months later, the passing away of her mom. Throughout her mom’s suffering, she meticulously planned and arranged all her business, making sure all her personal affairs were in order.

I easily related to her pain and admired her mother’s courage, especially when she shared how her mother said her good-byes to close family and friends, carefully planning even her own funeral. I then understood and even joked with Caroline that now I knew where her perfectionism and organisational skills came from.

I soon found myself reminiscing about my own mom, growing up with a dad who drank, who worked away from home and physically abused his wife for many years. I was relating how he used to kick her with his iron-tipped concrete boots, when he rushed her to hospital with her eye almost hanging out, and how one time he put our dog after her. My sister, Pearl, jumped in to help my mom and the dog turned on her, tossing her around like a rag doll; taking chunks out of the back of her leg.
Sisters by Blood

Strangely, we never really spoke about this incident again. I suppose there were just too many incidents; it all seems so exaggerated and unreal now.

As Caroline and I continued on our journey we remained quiet in the car for quite a while, both caught up in our own thoughts. I found myself thinking back to the constant struggle it was for my mom to get money from my dad as he was always spending it at drinking houses (shebeens), having good times with his friends.

My mom used to make great efforts to put food on the table and keep our home clean. However, she would get a beating for the simplest reason. He would pick an argument if a particular shirt was not ironed or he couldn’t find the other sock. We would often be sitting at the table eating and the next minute he would simply overturn the table, sending all our plates flying or he would throw his plate of food against the wall if not to his satisfaction. We always expected the peace to be broken at any time. After a major, violent outburst, he would go out and come back intoxicated and all we would long for was that he would just go and sleep when he returned.

As siblings, we used to sit on the corner waiting for my dad to come home from work, take one look at him from a distance and run home and warn my mom about his mood so that she could be prepared.

She then went on to tell me about her mother and how brave she was when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in her early fifties
One Friday night, as usual my dad didn’t come home with the week’s wages and my mom took me along to go and look for him. All that my mom wanted was money to buy food and pay the weekly debts. We eventually found him. I remember walking in on a scene that changed my perception of him forever. As we arrived at my uncle’s place, where he normally went on his drinking sprees, we saw my dad sitting between two women in a makeshift double bed, covered with a blanket and drinking. The fact that he was in ‘bed’ with these women was not what really shocked us, but more the fact that my dad, who had such a high opinion of himself and was so fussy back home, was sitting in absolutely appalling surroundings. We turned so fast on our heels, and needless to say this was another ‘secret’ that I had to keep.

Thinking back now, I realise that my mom was completely disempowered in the home yet thrived when out in the community. She was involved in feeding schemes for those less fortunate than us; she often cooked large pots of soup in winter, came to the school fence to hand out mugs of soup. She also always baked for our schoolteachers, much to our embarrassment at the time as she was almost always the only parent who gave so much, going the extra mile. The teachers obviously loved having us in their classes and my mom was well known and respected in the community. If we went somewhere and there was a child who did not have shoes or something warm to wear when it was cold and rainy, we already knew when my mom gave us one look that we had to take off our own shoes or jacket and give it to the child. When it was hot and my mom bought us ice-cream and another child looked longingly at us, we had to give the ice-cream to the child. This instilled in us a deep sense
of caring and sharing and it soon became natural for us to give. Back home it was evident that my mom was ridiculed and trampled upon yet she suffered in silence over the years.

I remember endless discussions with my mom, encouraging her to go to the police station to report my dad, even urging her to leave him. I pleaded with her for us to take our clothes and just leave. Years later I concluded that many women stay within the situation due to economic reasons; they just don’t have the means to sustain their families and simply stay for the ‘children’s sake’.

Caroline interrupted my thoughts by asking me about my family, whether I have any sisters and brothers. I cleared my throat before responding, ‘We are four sisters, two older than me and one younger, but my dad had a son a few years after my mom’s death from someone he had a relationship with while he was working in Durban.’

I hardly finished my sentence when Caroline said, ‘My goodness Amy! In all this time that we have been working closely together, this is the first time I hear that you have a brother.’ I heard myself respond the way I usually do when people hear of our brother, ‘We don’t really have a close relationship. We didn’t really get along with his mother in earlier years and they live in KwaZulu-Natal.’

My mother instilled in us a deep sense of caring and sharing and it soon became natural for us to give.
As sisters we were very close, although we had our usual squabbles and fights. There was a huge age-gap of eight years between my eldest sisters, Jacky and Pearl; the rest of us were only one year apart. Jacky worked for a number of years while we were still at school. She broke my mother’s heart when she fell pregnant and married as soon as she turned twenty one when she no longer needed my parents’ consent even though my mom did not approve of her choice. Looking back now, Jacky probably couldn’t wait to get out of the house as she was always treated differently from all of us. We all received beatings, but she always got it the worst, especially the verbal abuse. Only years later did we understand what the actual reasons were.

My mom was often ill with an angina heart condition, high blood pressure and the inevitable migraine headaches. She would always have a vinegar cloth tied tightly around her head and that is how we often pictured her.

Once again, Caroline interrupted my thoughts by asking, ‘How did your mom die Amy? You never told me.’

Once again I cleared my throat and continued. ‘My mom was very excited when the time drew closer for me to go to university; she supported me with my enrollment and even accompanied me to the Student Orientation Week before the official start of my classes, much to my embarrassment and protests,’ I giggled at the memory. ‘I tried in vain to talk her out of it by saying the other students wouldn’t be bringing their moms. Anyway, it was no use arguing with her. She cut and coloured her hair, bought herself a new outfit; she really blossomed. At the orientation she made sure she introduced
herself to most of my lecturers and wanted to know exactly what the course I enrolled for entailed. I even showed her where my classes would be.’ I vaguely heard Caroline’s response, ‘Wow! Your mom was quite a woman! She really showed an interest in your future.’

I very proudly said, ‘She was, but little did any of us know that that was going to be the last week of my mom’s life. During the early hours of the Saturday morning she woke me up saying that I must get her to hospital as she had a headache. Those were her last words as by the time we got her to the hospital the doctor said she was already in a coma. She suffered a massive brain haemorrhage and after three days in a coma, on my first day of university, on the eighth of February 1982, our mom died after being declared brain-dead.’

Caroline went totally silent as we were fast approaching our destination. I turned to the back of the car for my jacket and neatened the pile of notes on my lap to pack into my bag. Soon we would be doing our presentation at a meeting and I hurriedly lowered the car visor to check my make-up in the mirror, put on some lipstick and ran a comb through my hair while shuffling in my handbag for hand lotion. I came across some peppermints and handed one to Caroline as she scanned the area for a parking closest to the entrance to our venue.

Before we got out of the car, I touched Caroline’s arm and said, ‘Thanks for listening, my friend. I have not spoken about all these things in years. It’s done me the world of good.’
‘It was good for me too,’ she replied. ‘Normally when I drive through Worcester I don’t even look in the direction of our family home, it’s way too painful. It was good having someone to listen to me for a change. Everyone is so caught up in their own affairs and we are always in some kind of rush with so many deadlines. It just seems that no one really listens anymore. The sharing’s done us both good.’

A couple of hours later, after responding to questions from the floor and the programme director thanked us, the crowd dispersed. We quickly gathered up all our information brochures, switched off the overhead projector and shut down the laptop. On our way out Caroline handed me the car keys and said, ‘It’s your turn to drive, Amy. I’m going to recline my seat and catch up on some sleep on our way back. I’m so tired,’ She gave a big yawn. ‘What’s new?’ I replied, chuckling, ‘I’m used to it by now. One minute we’re still chatting and the next you’re snoring next to me.’

To be quite honest, I still wanted to continue with the line of thoughts mulling in my head since allowing all these memories to resurface. I quickly wormed my way through the traffic and turned to Caroline and said, ‘Right girl, you can relax now, we’re on the open road.’ I smiled to myself as she made herself more comfortable in the seat, pulled her jacket over her shoulders and snored softly.

*Everyone is so caught up in their own affairs and we are always in some kind of rush with so many deadlines. It just seems that no one really listens anymore*
I moved around a bit in my seat, reached with my one hand under my sweater to loosen my bra, an old habit of mine when it got to the end of the day. I maneuvered my arm and quickly pulling the straps free and removing my bra, placed it in my handbag and then secured both my hands on the steering wheel.

My thoughts very quickly went to Jacky, who was about twenty-six when our mom died. Pearl, eighteen, then me, seventeen and Monique a mere sixteen. Unfortunately, there were no good-byes. My dad had to be telephoned to come home from Durban. It was very hard for him as he never had the opportunity to communicate with his wife one last time. He vowed never to marry again and he kept to that promise until the day he died aged seventy eight, 30 years after our mom died. I suppose he loved her in his own peculiar way.

It’s amazing how the years flew by and I came to the realisation that life simply happened.

Over the years our dad continued to work hard, and he provided for us until we all started working and had our own families. He was fortunate to receive a second chance in building relations with his grandchildren, but it became evident that he would never accept Jacky’s children; he remained cold and aloof towards them. Jacky was married and divorced twice, having survived two abusive marriages.

In retrospect, it seems as if the vicious cycle of violence came full circle across all three generations over the past five decades within our family; my sisters each having their own stories to share.
As a family we often come together, although it felt in the last few years that we did it mostly to please our dad as he started to treasure spending happy family times together, especially during the last few weeks of his life. Strangely enough, we are all very elated as Jacky and our dad seem to have found one another. He was most happy that she was the one that cared for him when he suddenly became frail and had to be hospitalised before his death. As sisters we surrounded him at his bedside, made sure he was comfortable. The bond between us was amazing. We even accepted the fact that we have a brother, Patrick.

Through our pain we were able to talk about many family issues, especially the fact that our dad was not Jacky’s biological father. We concluded that this was the reason for the strain and animosity in our family over the years, and explained why she was always treated differently and why our mother was constantly ridiculed and ostracised. Jacky was apparently born illegitimately, which was taboo at the time.

It explained the age-gap amongst us, why Jacky was treated differently from us and why my dad’s family never really acknowledged or accepted us. Slowly we were starting to put all of the pieces of the puzzle of our very broken past together, in this way bringing closure and inevitably healing. We spent hours chatting about our own interpretations of particular incidents, particularly the fact that Jacky was never told by our parents who her biological father is, and at her age of fifty six, it seems unlikely, although she hasn’t given up looking for him.
As I neared the area where Caroline lived I leaned over towards her at the traffic light, gently nudging her arm, ‘Caroline, wake up! You’re home.’ She stretched and yawned. ‘I wasn’t sleeping, I heard you humming to the music.’ ‘I know,’ I replied, and giggled to myself as Caroline wiped at her eyes and asked me what the time was. ‘It’s time to kick off your shoes and relax once you’re home,’ I said, ‘Have a good evening and don’t be late in the morning,’ I chuckled, as she gathered her bag, made sure she had her cellular phone and half stumbled out of the car saying her good-byes.

As soon as I get home, I plan to run a bubble-bath, but before I relax for the evening and watch the seven o’clock news on television, I am going to send messages to all my sisters to invite them for lunch on Sunday. We still have so much catching up to do, and besides, I just want to enjoy the sisterhood that we rekindled amongst ourselves after our dad’s funeral. Irrespective of what happens, whether Jacky ever finds out who her biological father is, we remain sisters, sisters by blood.

We still have so much catching up to do, and besides, I just want to enjoy the sisterhood that we rekindled amongst ourselves.
She sat under a tree at the homeless shelter where she worked, holding her notebook and pen, wishing she could go somewhere quiet where she could write and think peacefully. With flashbacks from her painful past, she felt as if she had escaped to a much better place, the place she had always imagined. She remembered when she was a child, the innocence and joy written on her face. She longed to go back to that time of her life. She opened her notebook and started writing. She was a poet but called it ‘meditation’, maybe that’s why she never allowed anyone to go through her work. She had a lot of stories to tell but she thought only her notebook could carry the load.

She was an inspiration to all the women who lived at the shelter. She loved her work mainly because she could relate to all the situations these women experienced. She was a victim of all sorts of abuse early in her life, and because she couldn’t handle the shame, she resorted to prostitution and drug use until she met Mary-Anne, a volunteer at the same shelter, who changed her life and made her discover a
passion for life. Helping other women was a tribute to Mary-Anne, who passed away a few years ago. She was a mother, sister and daughter to these women. Although she grew up without a mother, she was now a much better woman than she imagined her mother to be. She lived for these women and as each day passed she knew and was proud that she had changed at least one life.

One of the women who lived at the shelter saw her sitting under a pine tree. She could see that Julia was busy with something but she still went to her. Her name was Nothema. She was in her late fifties and had a painful past, which she didn’t want to tell anyone about except Julia, and didn’t want to see anything or anyone that reminded her of it, which is why she ended up at the shelter. ‘Beautiful day, isn’t it, dear?’ Nothema politely asked. ‘Oh it is indeed a beautiful day,’ Julia answered quickly, closing her notepad so Nothema could not see what she was doing. They continued chatting about the weather, the colour of Julia’s dress, and about how happy Nothema was to be part of a great family of women who shared a similar past and vision. Nothema unexpectedly stood up to join a group of women, who were sitting under a tree a few metres away.

She remembered when she was a child, the innocence and joy written on her face and she longed to go back to that time of her life.
Julia couldn’t stop thinking about Nothema. She remembered how Nothema was when she first came to the shelter and how much she had changed since then. Julia opened her notebook again and continued writing, trying to concentrate after being disturbed. As she continued writing she pictured these women as broken pieces of glass that were mended to form a beautiful vase. She pictured the vase put on display in a room full of people, many of them fighting over it. As she carried on writing she realised how special her relationship with these women was and how fortunate she was to have them. Julia continued to imagine the mother she never had, she pictured her mother’s face, her body, and wished she could meet her for a day. Julia’s father made sure that she never saw her mother, not even a photo of her. ‘If you see her you’ll become the slut that she is,’ he had always said, refusing to give her information about her mother until he died, leaving Julia all alone. That was part of the reason why Julia appreciated her relationship with the women at the shelter. She needed motherly love and these women gave her just that.

Some of these women only needed a person who would smile at them each day without wanting anything in return. Some needed someone to tell them they were beautiful but all they needed was to be loved, and Julia strived to give them all the love to make them realise the beauty of life. She helped them find jobs, and some found their families. Each day was an adventure for her. Although there were other people working at the shelter, they didn’t seem to have as much passion and drive for their work. Maybe it was because they had never been in the same position as these women.
She looked at how happy and playful these women were and remembered how she was when she first came to the shelter. She was sixteen when she came, when life was tough in the streets. People treated her like dirt because of the person she had become, but deep inside she was a scared little girl. With all her scars she allowed herself to heal and each day drew her closer to her healing. Before she knew it she had gone back to school and with help from Mary-Anne she did a counselling course after her matric. All these thoughts invaded her mind while writing but she couldn’t stop. It was just the inspiration she needed.

Julia seemed to have forgotten that it was lunchtime. Caught up in her thoughts she seemed to flow with her pen. Thoughts about her past were rushing through her mind. She didn’t stop to look at the time and had forgotten that she hadn’t had anything to eat since morning. Suddenly her alarm rang, reminding her that lunch was over. She stopped writing, stood up and went back to work and, with a smile on her face, knew she was doing the right thing for these women.

Julia appreciated her relationship with the women at the shelter. She needed motherly love and these women gave her just that.
Witch and Bitch

by Jayne Bauling

The old woman sees that the girl is back in the village.

Girl. They all seem like girls to her, even women in their sixties. She remembers them all as babies.

Or she seems to remember. Thinks she remembers. Some days the old times feel like the day before, yet she can’t recall what happened in the real yesterday, what the weather did, if she ate anything or drank some tea, which people she saw.

She has lived too long, she sometimes thinks. It is a bad thing to outlive your children. She doesn’t know where her grandchildren and their children are.

The girl. Fiks, they call her. Something like that. She doesn’t hear well any more, and what she does hear comes to her through distorting distance. That’s because people have started to shun her.

She prefers it that way. They frighten her now, these young people of sixty, fifty, forty. Long ago she had authority over
them, power to reprimand or instruct, an adult when they were youths or children.

Now she often feels like a child. Feels she knows nothing. She doesn’t understand the way people have changed. Once confidently lived in, her world – a small rural community and surrounding farms – has become a place in which she feels a need to walk carefully.

Even the children frighten her. Those who shout at her and throw stones, or those others who run screaming when they see her, it makes no difference.

The girl Fiks isn’t much older than a child. A very young adult would be the proper thing to call her. One of the clever ones who finished school and went away. To Polokwane or somewhere else, to a job or for further learning, the woman doesn’t know because there’s no longer anyone to impart the small details of other people’s lives.

She misses gossip.

Polokwane. She went there once when she was a young woman and the farmer gave her husband something extra at Christmas. It was still called by the other name then, what was it?

*Girl. They all seem like girls to her, even women in their sixties. She remembers them all as babies*
‘Pietersburg,’ she mumbles to herself, but it sounds wrong; everything coming out of her mouth sounds wrong since it collapsed and caved in around too few teeth. Now it is many years since she has even been as far as Makhado.

She was bent over, leaning on her stick, when she first saw the girl, but now she must sit down on the sun-whitened plastic chair outside her shack. It takes long to lower herself, and she mutters at the pain in her joints.

The girl stands at the end of the beaten earth path, her voice raised in an exchange with someone out of sight beyond a tangled clump of thorn trees and euphorbia.

She is always loud, this Fiks girl, always laughing, sharp and clever with her mouth.

The woman is afraid of her, but she is also afraid for her. She sees how the men look at her, their eyes following her when she passes in her bright small clothes that show so much of her taut, glowing brown flesh, shoulders and arms and the upper swell of her breasts, sometimes even her navel and the skin above and below it, and all of her legs.

The woman wants to warn her – tell her to cover herself and speak more softly and not to stare so boldly into men’s eyes and laugh that scornful laugh when one of the younger, over-confident ones attempts to flirt with her in his clumsy, country way.

She has become a town girl, and the men and boys don’t like it.
Witch and Bitch

The woman’s mind drifts from her memories and fears to a point where she wonders what it must feel like, how much cooler it might be, to go about in so few clothes.

It is one of those days when she feels crushed by Limpopo’s summer heat. She is almost sure she heard distant thunder earlier, and it is a full, moist heat, pushing down on her, but she thinks it will be a day or more before rain comes. First clouds must gather and then disappear again, and come back once more, building and darkening.

She dreads rain, dreads a storm even more. The last storm tore off part of her roof, and there is no one to help her cover the hole. No one wanted to hear her when she went asking for assistance. They didn’t want to see her either, avoiding her eyes and edging away, or else swearing at her, shouting at her to stay away from them.

Sometimes it is as if they are afraid of her here in the village, but how can that be? The idea must be just the trick of a mind turned traitor on her with its confusion of memories and uneasy fancies.

In the same way her body betrays her. Once she could have found the materials to mend her roof and climbed up there to do the work herself.

They didn’t want to see her, avoiding her eyes and edging away, or else swearing at her, shouting at her to stay away from them.
The storm that took her roof seems nothing if she remembers that other one, when the two children and some goats were killed by lightning streaking out of a roiling purple sky.

That was when the woman became the oldest person in the village, because something happened to Mama Makondo. No one wanted to talk about it, though, given up to grief for the children.

Two years on, the woman still misses Mama. There is no one left to share her memories and tell her if she is remembering truly or not, with her husband dead when she was in her forties, half her life still to be lived.

That girl, Fiks. She is walking along the path, singing as she comes. She shouldn’t walk like that, the woman thinks in fright, muttering angrily. If men see what she’s doing with her hips...

What does she want, coming this way? This battered half-roofed shack is the last one. Beyond is bush sloping up to the Soutpansberg foothills, and the danger of bush-pigs and snakes.

She mutters some more about the foolishness of the girl.

‘Hey, old woman!’

They’ll see you muttering under your breath and think you’re a witch, speaking curses
It’s more than cheeky for Fiks to address her like that, the woman thinks. *Old woman* in that cheerfully challenging tone is disrespectful of her years. She has sometimes heard the girl talking in English and Afrikaans, showing off; even *granny* or *ouma* in those languages would be more respectful than *Hey, old woman!*

Yes, a town girl. The woman scowls.

‘I heard you talking away to yourself just now.’ Fiks has paused on the path, hands on her hips, so that the woman can see that her nails are long and painted a fierce orange that stings the eyes. ‘You should be careful about that. I’m telling you. It gives people the wrong idea.’

The woman’s scowl deepens. ‘What talk is this?’

‘They’ll see you muttering under your breath and think you’re a witch, speaking curses.’

‘Who must I talk to, then?’ The woman is surprised by a burst of anger that gives her rare fluency and wit. ‘There is no one else here.’

Even the chicken has gone. The chicken she kept promising herself she would slaughter for eating soon, while she still had a few teeth left for chewing. She had put it off. The brainless creature – once regarded solely as a source of food, for its eggs, its flesh – it had become a presence, the recipient of her mumbled ramblings.

She holds to the thought of the chicken so as not to think of the thing she knows but doesn’t want to know.
Fiks has said the word, though. And the chicken’s disappearance, its probable demise, ties into that terrible word.

A word from which she has fled and ducked and hidden in the fear-filled darkness of her thoughts – a word unacknowledged but lurking like nightmare’s remnant shreds in the morning – ever since the thing that happened to Mama Makondo.

‘Listen, old woman!’ Fiks is aggressive. ‘They’re talking about you here in the community. You did something to a child. Hurt him.’

‘They had my chicken, those boys.’

The woman thinks she remembers grabbing one of them by his arm. Her grip had been feeble and he was a big boy, twelve or thirteen. He knocked her down. She knows that part really happened. She still feels the bruises, especially the one on her right hip.

They had run off with her chicken.

‘They say you cursed him. Cursed his family.’ Fiks is full of contempt, maybe for what people are saying, maybe for her, the woman doesn’t know. ‘That’s why he’s feeling sick. And his father lost his farm job.’

‘Why have you come back?’ the woman asks because there doesn’t seem to be anything to say in response to what Fiks is telling her, some of it leaking from her mind already, something to do with some children.

‘I’m just visiting. Family, you know?’ Fiks laughs her loud
laugh. ‘I’ll never live here again, trust me... Listen, you need to take me seriously. These people could hurt you. Kill you. Watch yourself. Don’t act strange.’

She’s spinning in high heels with open toes, walking away down the path.

A frightening girl, a terrible girl, the woman thinks. A girl so full of scorn, and yet – alive, crackling and snapping with the force of life in her. The woman feels enlivened by their brief exchange, as if some of the girl’s energy leapt across the space between them and entered her.

And the brightness of her clothes, colours her old eyes don’t have to strain to see.

The girl’s warning comes back to her in tattered scraps. Talk of hurting and killing.

The woman doesn’t think she is afraid of dying, at least not as afraid as she was as a young woman when the life force was nearly as strong in her as she feels it in Fiks.

She is ready to die, but she wants it to be peaceful. She wants it not to hurt. She has enough pain living. She fears more.

Then she forgets the warning and only remembers Fiks.

The woman feels enlivened by their brief exchange, as if some of the girl’s energy leapt across the space between them and entered her.
Breaking the Silence

There is no area of meeting between them, she thinks, and the thought is wistful. What do they share? Fiks is a born-free, while she has lived most of her life oppressed. Such different experiences shape them, set them apart from each other.

The storm comes a day, maybe two days, after Fiks walks up the path to deliver her rough warning. The woman loses count of such things as days.

She has felt the storm’s approach all day, a tight band of pain encircling her head, with her skin alternately molten and clammy in the humidity. Earlier in the day an increase in the numbers of tormenting flies also warned of the storm’s advent. Now they are gone, and everything is silent and still in these minutes the woman has lived through many times in a life as long as hers.

Those things she can manage to lift or drag she moves over to the side of the shack that still has its roofing.

A wind rises and the clouds grow heavier, navy and troubled.

She blocks every opening she can, using mats and anything else that looks substantial enough. Then she sits on a chair in the most sheltered corner of the shack, and waits.

She waits for it to start, and then she waits for it to be over.

The loose edge of the remaining roof flaps and bangs in gusts of wind hurling themselves at the shack. The afternoon grows dark as night.

The wind gains in strength, howling and screaming so
that it is all the woman can hear, even her own muttering obliterated.

Then blinding white light tears the world apart and the skies crack open with a long booming roar. The first drops fall. The drops become a downpour and then a cascading sheet of water.

The woman doesn’t know how long it lasts, half an hour or an hour. The storm’s shrieking violence fills her ears, her head, her whole being. Everything is wet. She sits with her feet in water that has flowed into the shack, flinching and cowering with every jagged flash of lightning, some of it so close she feels the shock of it.

She wonders if she will die, struck or drowned.

Then it ceases, a gradual lessening to start with, then an abrupt stop, like a tap turned off.

Quiet but un-silent. From all around comes the gurgling trickle, the plink and drip of water.

Into the quiet comes another sound, a human sound; muffled by distance and her deafness, it is the rumble of many voices.

What has happened?

*The wind gains in strength, howling and screaming so that it is all the woman can hear, even her own muttering obliterated*
She shuffles outside, the squelch and suck of liquid mud weighting her feet.

It is early evening, washed tranquil and pearly grey by the storm. Trees are bent low and dripping, giving her a clearer-than-usual view of the village. At its heart and also off to one side is the angry red of fire.

Lightning has struck, she understands, and is afraid.

There is anger in that rumble of voices, swelling to a roar.

It is drawing closer.

Bewilderment – incomprehension – but at their heart an instinctive terror.

Then someone comes flying out of the already darkening evening. The girl, Fiks, barefoot and wearing a scandalously short pink dress.

‘They’re coming to kill you!’ She is gasping but clear-voiced in her anger. ‘The uncle of that boy they say you hurt – lightning struck his house and killed someone there, I don’t know who. Another house too. All their chickens and the goat died... They believe you did it.’

The woman quails before her rage. ‘No, please. I...’

‘Come with me.’ Fiks is decisive, imperious. ‘I will take you into the bush and we can make a circle round behind the mob and hide you in my family’s house. They’re not part of this madness. Then we’ll decide what to do to keep you safe.’
Witch and Bitch

The woman is trembling and confused, tears of terror leaking from her eyes.

‘I am too slow. They will catch me.’

‘No! I’ll carry you if I have to.’ The girl’s voice is a blazing thing to match her fiery eyes. ‘Come now, at once, before they get close enough to see us. Don’t worry, I won’t let them hurt you.’

And she is half-hauling, half-carrying the woman away from her shack, into the drenched but sheltering bush.

‘What makes you do this dangerous thing?’ the woman croaks when Fiks thinks they’re safe enough to slow their pace and she finds breath to speak. ‘For me?’

The girl’s smile slashes like a knife, but the woman is no long afraid of her.

‘They call you witch, they call me bitch.’ Fiks pause, flinging back her head and staring up at heaven with fierce, fighting eyes. ‘Me, I call us women, you and me both.’

They call you witch, they call me bitch. Me, I call us women, you and me both
Sophie saw the girl approach the car in front. She hated seeing children beg.

She kept her hands at ten-to-two on the wheel and her eyes on the mountains ahead. The slopes were shadowy and under a dense thicket of trees, but the tops were bright where the sun fell. The sky was blue and a single cloud travelled slowly along the ridge from left to right.

No, sorry. That was always her response. She thinned her lips when she said it and shook her head to the side. She was sorry, but what difference could a rand or two make to anyone’s life?

A big smile showing white teeth. Funny Money?

No, sorry.

A brisk walk past her car – a show of goods at her window like it was a shop front. Township pictures?
Bread

No, sorry.

A string bag held overhead. Avocados?

No, sorry.

An open plastic bag she was sure would end up in a ditch later today, filled with newspapers, empty Vida cups, chocolate wrappers. Any rubbish?

No, sorry.

And then the girl. Hands held out. Large brown eyes. Unusually intense. She bounced up and down as she looked into the car. As if she needed the toilet.

Any change? The voice was dulled through the glass of the window. Sophie never opened the window. It was grotesque the way it slid down to reveal a pair of hands poised in prayer, asking, begging.

Any change?

No. Sorry.

Sophie looked to the mountains. The cloud had passed by but she could feel the girl, still there.

Pleasehelpme! Ineedmoneyforbread!

Sophie turned and saw the girl’s fingers almost touching the glass, the palms of her hands white and dry, her body moving up and down.

Please! Thereisnothingtoeatinthehouse. Ihavenothing!
Nobreadnothing. Anythingyoucangiveme. Please! The girl bounced more and she looked with large eyes into the car.

It was the tone, no, the words, no, the image. The girl moving up and down, the child with no food in her home, the empty cupboards – it was all those things, all at once. Sophie never broke her rules. Break them once and things got too confusing, too overwhelming.

Please! The girl said. Had she seen Sophie waiver? The lights changed but the girl remained.

Ihavenothing! Ineedtoeat! One rand. Anything! Her voice high and urgent.

Sophie took the purse from her bag on the passenger seat and quickly opened it. The car in front was already moving. There was a twenty-rand note and some coins. She spilled the change onto her hand, slid the window down and rolled the change onto the girl’s hands without touching the dry palms. She accelerated and heard the voice clearer without the glass between them.

Bless you, Sister.

She’d called her sister. No one called her sister. It was too intimate, but when she heard the girl say it, Sophie felt there was something like a thread between the two of them. Sister
Sophie was shaking. The girl’s urgency had affected her. Was she really going to buy bread or was it a well-honed act? Perhaps she wanted money for fast food, Mr Price clothes, electronics, the cinema. Did that small child really go home to empty cupboards? She’d called her sister. No one called her sister. It was too intimate, but when she heard the girl say it, Sophie felt there was something like a thread between the two of them. Sister. Could such a small act create a bond between two people? She was shaking. The girl’s urgency had affected her and she could not stop thinking about it all the way to town.

As Sophie drove home later, she looked for the girl at the junction. She slowed, almost expecting to see her collecting money from every car – an act that couldn’t be refused – but the girl was not there.

Funny Money, township pictures, late-edition *Argus*, flowers bigger than the man selling them. The girl was not there.

Sophie drove along the highway. It had affected her. She would tell her husband later. But when he got back, he had some news of his own and Sophie forgot all about it.

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Sisi looked in her hand at the money. There were three five-rand coins amongst the coppers but she did not count it all now. She put it in her pocket and slid it into the piece of cloth she kept there. Three fives meant she could finish for today. She looked up at the mountains. The light had moved far right and she knew it would soon be dark.
She walked back along the main road, passing beggars and bead sellers, and she turned down past the garage. It was still very hot. Better hot than cold but it was a long walk and she was thirsty. She would have to wait.

She stopped one block before she got to the bus and turned the corner by the Chinese clothing shop. It was quiet at the back of the shop and she stood in the doorway – amongst the packing crates, the rubbish and the things nobody wanted to buy – and she counted seven rand from five, ten- and twenty-cent pieces and she held the money in one hand whilst she folded the rest of the money back into the cloth and put it in her pocket. She would not look at the bus driver when she gave it to him. If she gave him a chance, he would throw her off, with her small change, and tell her to get silvers or not come at all. When she gave it to him, she would make sure she dropped it quickly in his hand and then walk straight to the back of the bus.

Music played in the bus and nobody spoke over the driver’s singing as they waited at the lights. There were no beggars at the lights, no spare change here.

They took the highway out of town and Sisi was glad she had a seat today even though she was tight up against the window and beside her was a big woman with a basket on her lap and a felt hat covering her head.

It was quiet at the back of the shop and she stood in the doorway – amongst the packing crates, the rubbish and the things nobody wanted.
When the bus stopped it was getting dark. There was no more tarmac road and when she got to the shop, there was no welcome for Sisi.

Out! The woman said.

Sisi showed the woman a five-rand coin, silver in her palm.

What do you want?

Any stale bread?

No. Only full price. Half a loaf with that.

Sisi held the money out as the woman halved the bread and put it into an old Blue Ribbon packet. She could see behind the woman as she moved. Bar One, Tex, Aero, Dairy Milk, Time Out, KitKat, Jungle Bar, Coke, Fanta, Lays chips, peanuts, bananas, oranges, mangoes, tomatoes, meat pies.

She paid for the bread and walked home along the track.

When she got there she pushed open the door. She stood inside, opened the bag and took two slices from the top. She ate the bread and as she ate, she smelt the coins on her hands. She ate quickly then put her cup into the bucket and drank. The water and the bread bloated her stomach.

She sat on her blanket and counted the slices. Eight left. She took three more out and put them under her pillow. The rest she left in the bag on the crate by the door. When her father got home, it would be better if there was something for him to eat.
She lay down and felt the bread under her pillow and thought about the sister who had given her the fives. Tonight was a good night, there would be no trouble. There was bread, there was bus fare for the morning and there were some silvers left in the cloth she kept in her pocket.

She felt the bread in her hand. Yes, she thought, tonight was a good night.

_Tonight was a good night, there would be no trouble_
One cool night, Amanda was fast asleep and deep in her nightmare where she was haunted by this strange shadow that she could not clearly see. Screaming with terror, her roommate and best friend, Thandeka, woke her up. Her eyes were full of fear and confusion. ‘Here, have a glass of water. It was just a nightmare,’ whispered Thandeka.

Amanda Smith, 22 years of age, studies Quantity Surveying at the University of the Witwatersrand. She lives with her best friend Thandeka Mkhize, 22 as well, who is studying Film at the same university. They have been friends since primary school where Thandeka was schooling through a bursary. Amanda is from a rich family that is racist, that does not like Amanda having a black best friend.

The same dream keeps haunting Amanda. Every night she tries to get a clear view of this shadow but the moment she is about to get a clear view, she wakes up.

‘Who do you think could be this shadow in your dreams?’
‘I don’t know but it seems like a guy.’

‘This dream of yours is beginning to scare me and I think I know someone who can help you,’ said Thandeka.

‘Who is that?’

‘A family sangoma who I know, she resides in Soweto, hope you’re willing to go.’

‘I just want to stop having this dream,’ said Amanda, feeling a rush of blood flowing through her body giving her goosebumps.

That afternoon, the two ladies drove to Soweto. Thandeka stopped her car in front of an old house that had white paint falling off. They knocked and a voice replied, ‘Thokoza’ from inside. They walked in and were told to sit on the floor. Thandeka spoke to the sangoma, MaZulu, while Amanda was busy looking around with an uneasy feeling running through her heard. MaZulu asked Amanda to follow her to some small room along the corridor.

The room was dark and had the smell of impepha. ‘Take off your shoes,’ ordered MaZulu. Amanda sat on the floor mat. ‘So tell me about your dream my daughter.’

‘I’ve been having it for quite a while now. I’m in this bush alone and scared, then I see a shadow of someone, the shadow keeps coming closer and when I’m about to see who it is, I wake up,’ explained Amanda with fear in her eyes.
MaZulu took a bag made of animal skin, ‘Blow inside this bag,’ said MaZulu politely. Amanda took a deep breath and blew inside the bag. MaZulu threw the bones and began to talk to the ancestors. Amanda sat there, quiet and curious. When MaZulu was through, she looked at Amanda straight in her eyes for a few minutes before asking some questions. It was like she was reading her mind.

‘Do you know anything about your grandmother?’ asked MaZulu.

Amanda was a bit confused wondering why she was being asked about her grandmother who died when she was only three. ‘No I don’t, she died when I was very young.’

‘I will call you when I have something but for now I am as confused as you,’ said MaZulu as she walked Amanda out the room. Both ladies said ‘Thokoza,’ to MaZulu and drove away.

On the same evening when Amanda was asleep she felt someone was standing in her room. She opened her eyes and saw that it was the shadow that she had been seeing in her dreams. She couldn’t see because of the darkness, the moonlight was the only source of light in her room. ‘Who are you and what do you want from me,’ whispered Amanda. The shadow vanished into thin air leaving behind mist in the room.

MaZulu threw the bones and began to talk to the ancestors. Amanda sat there, quiet and curious.
In the morning Amanda seemed distracted and quiet over breakfast. ‘What’s wrong, you seem unusual today, is it something that MaZulu said?’ asked Thandeka with concern.

‘No, no, I just feel a bit tired, I think I’ll visit my parents,’ replied Amanda. All her life she was able to tell Thandeka anything but now how was she going to tell her that the mysterious shadow was in her room last night?

Later that afternoon Amanda showed up at the doorstep of 129 Samuel Street, Sandton where her whole life made sense. It was in this white three-storey house where she felt safe.

‘Daniel, Amanda is home,’ shouted Jessica as she approached Amanda to give her a warm hug. ‘Hi my angel, we have missed you and your dad was even thinking of coming to kidnap you,’ joked Jessica.

‘I’ve missed you too, Mum,’ whispered Amanda. In her mother’s arms she felt like everything was back to normal and that this shadow had disappeared forever.

‘Welcome home my angel,’ said Daniel descending from the stairs. Dad gave his little girl a hug that made her feel safer and that everything was going to be ok.

‘Let us all catch up over a cup of tea,’ insisted Jessica.

‘I’m sorry honey I’m off for a game of golf,’ replied Daniel politely.
‘It’s ok, Dad. We’ll catch up some other time,’ said Amanda. Daniel gave both his angels kisses and off he went.

They sat down and already Jessica started to dig what was wrong with her daughter. ‘You are not yourself Mandy, is everything ok?’ Jessica disturbed the peace.

‘I’m fine Mum, just a bit tired.’

‘Are you sure that’s all there is to it?’ insisted Jessica.

‘I said I’m fine, Mum,’ snapped Amanda.

‘You know you can tell me anything.’

‘I don’t know what’s going on with me. I’m having this strange nightmare every night,’ a tear rolled down her cheek. Jessica handed her a tissue. ‘I went to a sangoma who couldn’t tell me what was wrong but just asked me if there is anything I know about Grandma.’

‘And what did you say?’ Jessica asked curiously. Before Amanda could even answer, Jessica threw another question. ‘What were you even thinking by going to a sangoma?’

‘I wanted answers and I told her I know nothing about Grandma, after all there really is nothing I know about Gran unless you have something to tell me Mum?’ replied Amanda looking straight into her mother’s eyes.

‘What is there to know about your Gran other than that she raised me well?’ said Jessica as if there was something she was hiding.
Later, Amanda gave both her parents goodnight kisses and she went upstairs to her bedroom. She felt like here the shadow would not find her and the dream would never come for her as long as she was in this house. Unfortunately it was here where the shadow wanted her most. She tucked herself into her warm blankets and dozed off.

Deep in her sleep she again feels that there is someone in her room and this time the feeling is stronger. She opens her eyes and sees her haunted shadow. She waits for the shadow to say something but the shadow stands still and quiet. ‘Do you want to tell me something about my Grandma?’ whispered Amanda. The shadow stood there for a few minutes before vanishing into thin air. It was like Amanda felt a connection with the shadow. She sat up till dawn thinking what it was that her mother was not telling her about her granny.

Early in the morning Amanda heard her mother downstairs preparing breakfast and thought it was time to interrogate her.

‘Morning dear, why are you up so early? And you look tired,’ noticed Jessica.

‘I couldn’t sleep Mum and I think you have something to tell me about Gran.’

‘There is nothing to tell about your granny.’

‘Mum! For heaven sake can’t you just put yourself in my shoes? shouted Amanda.

‘I’m sorry dear but I don’t believe anything these creepy
sangomas say and how can your dream be connected to your granny if you hardly knew her?’

‘I should be asking you that, Mum.’

‘Did you sleep well angel,’ asked Daniel, enjoying his breakfast.

‘Good sleep, Dad, thank you,’ pretended Amanda.

‘I thought I heard you and your mother arguing this morning.’

‘It was nothing Dad; you know how Mum doesn’t want me to come downstairs in pyjamas.’

‘Oh ok, I thought it was something big,’ said Daniel, relieved.

‘I’m going back to res today Dad.’

‘So soon?’

‘I’m sorry, Dad,’ said Amanda, feeling guilty. It was unfair to Daniel that his daughter had to leave just because Jessica didn’t want to tell Amanda about Granny’s life.

Amanda is leaving. She starts her car and as she is looking in the rear mirror, she sees a glimpse of the shadow. Goosebumps strike her all over.

She ignores the feeling and drives away. Thandeka is reading some horror novel when she hears Amanda unlocking the front door.
‘Hey girl why are you back so soon?’ asked Thandeka suspiciously.

‘I had an argument with my mum and I think she is hiding something,’ replied Amanda, annoyed.

‘Wait a sec, I’m lost,’ said Thandeka, confused.

‘I think this dream I’m having has got something to do with my grandma, I need to go see MaZulu.’

‘Your grandmother?’

‘So can we go see her? Please Thandy,’ begged Amanda.

‘Ok let me just change.’ Amanda sighed with relief.

‘Thokoza,’ shouted the ladies at MaZulu’s front door. ‘Thokoza,’ replied MaZulu. They came in and MaZulu was worried.

‘We are sorry to come unannounced but I needed to see you,’ said Amanda desperately.

‘It is fine dear, come let’s go inside.’ They sat down and MaZulu was ready to hear why Amanda wanted to see her.

In her mother’s arms she felt like everything was back to normal and that this shadow had disappeared forever
‘I now see this shadow in real life. I see it in my room when I’m sleeping at night. Yesterday I felt like I was connected to this shadow. I sensed fear and pain but I still can’t see who it is. I feel my mother is hiding something about my granny so please help me find out what it is,’ pleaded Amanda.

MaZulu took her bag and asked Amanda to blow inside. Amanda did it more easily this time. MaZulu threw her bones and began talking to the ancestors. This time it took longer than before. MaZulu was deep in the ancestral world. When MaZulu was done she seemed confused.

‘Did you find anything?’ asked Amanda.

‘I could see your grandmother, she is in pain and she is walking with this shadow but this shadow wants you to walk with them,’ said MaZulu. ‘Your problem with this shadow is deeper and I know the right person who can help you but you need to be willing in every aspect of your body.’

‘Yes I’m willing, I will do anything to find out,’ Amanda sounded more desperate.

‘I am afraid the person is in KZN. When do you think we can be able to drive there?’ asked MaZulu.

‘Tomorrow morning is fine with me.’

‘Tomorrow it is then.’

Amanda was quiet all the way from Soweto to Braamfontein. When they got home Thandeka wanted to know how it went with MaZulu. ‘Did she tell you anything?’ asked Thandeka.
‘Yes she did and I need to ask you the biggest favour ever.’

‘Shoot,’ replied Thandeka. ‘Can you please go to KZN with me? There is someone who can help me find out what is really going on,’ begged Amanda.

‘Girl you are asking me a very big favour,’ said Thandeka in amazement.

‘I know but I am scared to walk this journey of discovery alone. You are the only person who has helped get through anything.’

‘It’s fine Mandy, I’ll go with you.’

Amanda picked up the phone and immediately called her mother.

‘Hello,’ Jessica said on the end of the phone.

‘Hi Mum it’s me, I am leaving tomorrow for KZN to see some special sangoma who will tell me what is going on.’

‘What?! What am I going to tell your father?’

‘I don’t know but I know you can keep it a secret since you are pretty good with them.’ Amanda hung up the phone before her mother could even reply.

I am scared to walk this journey of discovery alone. You are the only person who has helped get through anything
Morning came and the two ladies went to pick up MaZulu for KZN. It took them eight hours to drive there and finally they came to a huge yard that had many huts and sangomas. ‘This is my sister’s house – Zondi – she is one of the greatest sangomas in KZN,’ MaZulu told them. Thandeka parked the car and they were welcomed into the main house. People outside were amazed, wondering what a white woman wanted in such a place. MaZulu explained Amanda’s story to Zondi. ‘I think you all need to rest, and you Amanda, you will wake up at 5am and go with me to the river,’ said Zondi. At 5am on the dot Zondi knocked at the door where Amanda had slept. Amanda and Zondi walked to the river that was about 5km from the house.

‘Take off your clothes and wash yourself in the river,’ requested Zondi. As Amanda was bathing, Zondi was busy with her ancestral dance. Zondi gave her a white liquid to moisturise her body.

‘My dear, MaZulu and I were up all night trying to get through the ancestors and they told me that you need to be a part of us.’

‘A part of you?’ asked Amanda, desperate.

‘Yes you need to become a sangoma.’

‘How come? I am white and we do not have the roots of sangomas in my family,’ snapped Amanda.

‘I know and that is your journey that you have to travel in finding your roots as a sangoma,’ said Zondi. ‘Tomorrow you will have to go to the Bayede cave. It will take you two
days to get there. You will go with MaZulu and you can take your friend along but it is only you who will go through the cave.’

The next morning the ladies were told to go. They were given a lunch box of meat. In the bush Amanda could see the shadow was following them. It was like it had been protecting them. The ladies were now tired but MaZulu insisted they continue. Two days later they finally made it to the cave. Amanda went in. It was dark and misty. Amanda began dancing and singing the songs Zondi had taught her. She saw the shadow and finally she saw this young man who was with an old lady.

‘Amanda it is me, your granny. This is Thabo who brought you here. Thabo was my first love but because he was black, your uncle killed him. He was a sangoma so he wants you to carry on.’

Thabo ‘the shadow’ handed her a bag that was full of bones. She started singing again. As she was dancing, she could see ancestors calling her to come. She was welcomed into the clan as the first white woman. She managed to finish her initiation through Thandeka and MaZulu’s help who were also singing and dancing outside – otherwise she was going to die in the cave.

As she was dancing, she could see ancestors calling her to come. She was welcomed into the clan as the first white woman
Each and every day I kneel down thanking God for blessing me with them for they have given me the light and direction. As a young girl I grew up in an ignorant community where a woman has to take everything as it comes and threaten to keep it.

I was raised to believe that being hurt is normal and just part of life, where men have the right to do as they please with our bodies.

It all started 11 years ago when my mother gave me a few cents and I decided to spoil myself with a packet of chips and some sweets. I went to the tuck shop. It was empty – just me and the guy who worked there. As I approached him he told me he didn’t have change so I had to ask ‘aus wako rumung’. Only to find that there was no one.

As I walked in, he followed me and closed the door, told me to take my clothes off. I refused as I had my favourite dress on. He held it, pulled it up and took off his pants. I didn’t
know what was happening but I knew it wasn’t supposed to be happening and it hurt like hell.

When he was done he told me to keep quiet and gave me money and the chips. I took it because I knew I was going to need it for ‘kheri ko skolong’ but I didn’t want the chips anymore and gave them away on my way back home.

When I got home I told mom I wanted to bath as I felt dirty. She laughed and plucked the kettle and helped me bath. I was hoping it would wash away the pain and memories, but it never did.

She noticed blood on my panties and asked me what had happened; I told her ‘ke abutti wako next door’ she washed it all away.

As my sister walked in she told her I had been raped. We both went to see the neighbours. I had never seen my sister that angry. On our way there I remember my sister saying ‘hake battle le bo mobona, he doesn’t belong here and nobody does that to my princess and gets away with it’. She called for our cousin Dimakatso to accompany her to the police station.

Big Sis was always there for me. She did her best providing for me and she loved me unconditionally.
I went to the neighbours with mom just after telling them what abuti did. They offered us groceries as they knew we were poor. It felt good knowing we were not going to sleep on empty stomachs but when big sis walked in I had to choose between that or sending abuti away.

It felt I was taking food out of their mouths, but big sis said I should always put me first. You know why? Because I am special. At that moment I chose to send abuti away where they keep all the bad guys. I did it because I didn’t want him to do it to me again and other little girls.

The policeman said I am smart. It made me feel good. Big Sis was always there for me. She did her best providing for me and she loved me unconditionally. Everybody knew that you would swear that I am her daughter. Even now her love shines through her eyes.

Growing up wasn’t easy. I went through many more challenges but kept them to myself as I felt my sister had been through a lot and I didn’t want to stress her even more.

I finally got a chance to talk to a certain lady by the name Zandile Ntuli. She had the warmest smile ever. I liked her but couldn’t explain the connection. She also couldn’t explain it. She always said she believes we are friends for a reason.

She would guide me. She gave me advice and said I should never give up and told me she would always be there when I need her and she is. She believed in me, a total stranger even when I had given up on myself.
Breaking the Silence

Zandile showed me that you don’t have to know someone or have their blood running through your veins to be their sister or lend a helping hand.

Abuti might have stolen my innocence but three things will remain in me; faith, hope and love and it’s all thanks to Patience Molapisi (my sister) and Zandile Ntuli (my cyber friend). They pulled me through.

I might not have a little sister or be Zandile, but I plan to be the best big sister to many other girls.

Zandile showed me that you don’t have to know someone or have their blood running through your veins to be their sister or lend a helping hand.
‘Slam your body down and wind it all around. Slam your body down zigazig ha. If you wannabe my lover’, we would sing and then retain a dramatic out-of-breath pose. In that moment we were the Spice Girls. We emulated their dance moves and believed that our harmonies were just as gripping as the vocals of the actual girl group. There were five of us, six if you included Melissa, and each one latched onto and named themselves after a member of the singing group who exhibited similar characteristics. I was Ginger Spice, although in actuality I bore no resemblance to Geri Halliwell besides the fact that the puberty gods had blessed me first and I was therefore the esteemed carrier of a visible sign of femininity – breasts.

We were drawn to each other, but this could easily have been the result of the social milieu in which we found ourselves at the time. We were brown girls, all different shades and tones, attending a primary school in the northern suburbs of Cape Town where a ratio of three Afrikaans classes to one English class existed and less
than half of the English occupants were people of colour. I remember an incident in the first week of Sub A, where a fair little girl called Andrea innocently raised her hand while the class was congregated on the reading mat and told the teacher ‘Miss, my daddy said I can’t sit next to people that stink’. Miss Nelson’s face turned a deep plum colour as she said ‘Nobody here stinks and you’ll sit right where you are young lady’. Andrea’s father proceeded to take her out of the school and I remained self-conscious of my hygiene for quite some time.

Before the regular rehearsals of songs based on the notions of girl power, our bonding rituals were far less complex. We played hand-clapping games that included sayings such as ‘girls are sexy made out of Pepsi, boys are rotten made out of cotton’ and more competitive games where we would tie together ripped pairs of our mothers’ stockings and assign two girls to man opposite sides of our creation by positioning the stockings around the ankles, whilst various jumpers would proceed to different levels of knees and under-bums as we recited ‘England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, inside, outside, inside, on’.

By the time we reached twelve, we lay on the field in a star formation with our heads touching and conversed while looking up at the blue sky. During these times, at break, we would occasionally have to contest with the nuisance of a rugby ball infiltrating our star sanctuary. Once, I got really cross and threw an unapologetic Johan Potigieter’s shoe onto the N1 highway, adjacent to our school’s field, in an attempt to give him a lesson in courtesy. I was brave back then, but then a boy happened and so began my compulsive lying phase.
His name was Afzal Davids and to my mind he was utterly irresistible with dark skin, a crooked nose and a slightly more athletic build than the rest of the brown boys, which could have been attributed to his love for cricket. I was convinced that he would not ‘ask me out’ because I was Christian and right there and then I changed my religion in the hopes that Afzal would hear about our likeness. I assumed that I could get away with it too, since my name had a Malay ring to it and my dark brown skin, long black hair and sharp nose revealed traces of that heritage. I would eventually come to regret this lie, as the karma I am currently faced with requires me to convince strangers that I am not Muslim, Indian and more so that I’m not from Durban – a threefold curse indeed.

This new identity did not go without questioning from my friends though. ‘But Fara, why didn’t you tell us before?’ asked Kelly, who was dubbed Baby Spice on account of her being a tad chubby and very giggly. ‘I only found out over the weekend when we visited my mother’s family in Paarl. Her side is the Muslim side and my Muslim name is actually Isaiah,’ I said. To me this ‘Isaiah’ sounded like the Arabic name Ayesha, and Reyhana, an actual Muslim, also known as Posh because of her conservative manner and long glossy hair, found my spelling rather peculiar and questioned me. I insisted that that was just the way it was spelt.

I was brave back then, but then a boy happened and so began my compulsive lying phase.
I was nearly caught out by my lie one day when Crystal, accepted as Scary Spice as a result of her short curly brown afro, passed a packet of biscuits around while we sat crossed legged in our sacred circle on the field. When it was my turn I unknowingly popped the biscuit into my mouth and Reyhana reprimanded me by saying, ‘those biscuits are bacon-flavoured Fara, you’re not allowed to eat them.’ In a panic I got up and started pacing. Reyhana then approached me and instructed me to calm down and stated that mistakes do happen. I however felt compelled to cover my guilt and proceeded to say ‘It’s not just that, guys, I’m also allergic to bacon and I break out in a rash whenever I eat it, I’m just a bit worried.’ I then proceeded to scratch various parts of my body. Not only had I changed my religion, but now I had a mysterious allergy too!

Jaime-Leigh, my best friend, and nicknamed Sporty Spice, because of her love for netball and tennis, narrowed her eyes and folded her arms across her chest as she doubtfully said, ‘You never told me about this.’ We made a point as best friends to know each other’s eating preferences, so in the same way I knew that Jaime blushed uncontrollably when she ate oranges and that her pet peeves were ice-cream and cake stemming from bad experiences with those foods. She knew I couldn’t stand cauliflower and found the concept of sweet potatoes gross. ‘I only found out recently,’ I lied, ‘and that is why I’m so worried.’ Jaime then offered to take me to the sick room and insisted that we call my mother to let her know since I was so anxious about getting sick, but I managed to convince her and the other girls, after much dispute, that I would be okay since it was only one biscuit. What followed was
Girl Power

a long inquiry of my made-up allergy and a beautifully fabricated explanation by me.

The next day at school Reyhana pulled me aside and took a brown book from her school bag. Inscribed in gold letters on the front cover was the word Qur’an. My eyes widened as I thought that she would read a verse that mirrored the Christian dogma of eternal damnation in reaction to my bacon mistake, but she reassured me by wrapping her arm around me and saying, ‘I asked my parents about what happened yesterday and they said I should read this to you.’ She then opened the Qur’an and read ‘He hath only forbidden you dead meat, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that on which any other name hath been invoked besides that of Allah. But if one is forced by necessity, without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits, then is he guiltless. For Allah is Oft-forgiving Most Merciful.’ I was relieved to say the least but I had never hoped more than in that moment that Jesus would be just as forgiving as Allah.

My eyes widened as I thought that she would read a verse that mirrored the Christian dogma of eternal damnation in reaction to my bacon mistake.
Afzal never did ask me out and one would think that after nearly being found out I would stop lying, but it was as if some force had taken hold of me and I continued to falsify my life's events. I went to work with my mother one Saturday and she allowed me to fiddle with a computer to occupy myself while she worked. I don’t know what compelled me to do what I did next, but it seemed really clever at the time. I found a template of an email on the desktop of the computer and in the recipient tab I typed ‘Geri Halliwell’ and the sender tab was filled with ‘Fara Isaiah Adriaans’. I then printed out the template and wrote a note to myself stating that ‘Geri’ was so glad that I was such a big fan and that the Spice Girls continued to make music because of fans like me. I asked my mother to show me how to use the photocopy machine and then proceeded to copy the fake email so that the handwriting would not be imprinted into the paper. The following Monday at school, I showed the girls the email and only Crystal raised suspicions about the handwriting being similar to mine, but the other girls voiced no accusations and my lie was condoned.

My array of lies, however, did not compare to the intended harm I inflicted on Melissa. The lies were self-inflicted hurt; I had to deal with my ailment of being discontented with my authentic-self, but what I put Mel through was malicious. Melissa and I were best friends in Sub A, but somehow I found her too clingy. She would follow me around during aftercare and demand my attention all the time. It was no fault of hers, that IS what best friends do, but even at the age of six, I needed some space. Jaime and Reyhana transferred to my school in Sub B and immediately I attached myself to them and ended my best
friend relationship with Melissa. She was still a friend, but Jaime took her place as she was not as demanding of my time.

When we were ten years old, an advertising agency came to our school to do castings for a commercial, and Crystal, Melissa, Jaime and I were chosen. For the last shoot of the ad only Jaime and Melissa were called back and I simmered inside about the manner in which they had bonded that day and felt excluded when they complimented each other on their terrific outfits and relished in the fact that only they were called again for the commercial. I was terrified of losing my current best friend to my ex-best friend. That is where the grudge for Melissa developed.

I had convinced myself that Melissa was trying to steal Jaime from me and as a result an internal fury toward her manifested externally. I can’t remember if it was under my influence that Melissa was excluded from our Spice Girl clique, but that is a possibility. I suppose I had gossiped about her and slandered her name and as a result Melissa had been ostracised by our group. I can’t quite remember how everyone turned against her so rapidly. All I do know is that by the time we infiltrated the bad girl scheme, she already had few friends.

I remember us sitting at Crystal’s house one day and we were most likely dragging Melissa’s name through the mud when the idea arose that we should create a club.
I remember us sitting at Crystal’s house one day and we were most likely dragging Melissa’s name through the mud when the idea arose that we should create a club. We would make all the girls in our class fill out application forms and naturally everyone would be in the club, except Melissa. I still cringe to this day when thinking about how we wrote ‘approved’ on each of those application forms, with the exception of Melissa’s, which received a big red ‘rejected’. Her heart must have broken and I could probably still not understand the personal implications which that horrific act caused her.

We all enrolled in an English-medium high school where we were no longer the only brown girls around. There were myriads of them and each of my friends was dispersed into different classes. It seemed as if the girls had all found new friendship groups within their respective classes, which left me no choice but to call a meeting. With respect to our prior sanctity of the field I summoned the girls to our new school field. As I spoke about us all disintegrating and falling apart, I could not stop the tears. They flowed and flowed and all the remembrance of acceptance and tolerance and love came streaming in when I described to them the way in which I viewed our friendship. These were my sisters, my solace through everything and the idea that I could lose that petrified me. They all held me closely, comforted me by saying that we would always be friends and would make a point to spend time with each other. However, this was wishful thinking as we all followed our own paths and made new friends.

I eventually did apologise to Melissa, and let her know just how very sorry I was for the ill manner in which we
treated her. The apology was not a means to rid myself of guilt; it was a true testament as to how remorseful I felt. Something just clicked with me that day when I met those girls. I realised the importance of female support and understanding. I could have been the one that had been isolated with validation for my contrived discourse, but they had forgiven me for my deep-rooted insecurity and eventually filled that space with love. In turn I deliberately hurt a fellow sister and deprived her of what I now believe to be the basis of all the sisterhoods I have entered since then, the principle of unconditional love. My apology may have meant nothing years after the fact, but my comfort comes from watching how Melissa formed her own authentic sisterly bonds after we had gone our separate ways. My former friends never once spoke of my lies, not even Jaime, who at 24 still remains my best friend. I can only attribute this to knowing that few things compare to the love women have to give.

I hear from the girls via the internet now and then. Reyhana is engaged, Crystal now straightens her hair and Kelly has put on just a little more weight. Jaime and I remain close and she still plays netball, and Melissa became a physiotherapist. I have learnt to forgive myself for my past behaviour and heal my internal wounds. The irony is that I now have the smallest boobs.

I can only attribute this to knowing that few things compare to the love women have to give
PERSONAL ESSAYS
If I were to explain the true meaning of sisterhood in my own words I would speak about two or more women or girl children who love, protect and understand each other. I am reminded of two girls who grew up together in a village years ago and are still friends today. Their journey started as a result of their parents living in the same village and moreover on the same street.

One of the girls, Sandra, is wise, kind and loving. The other, Grace, is calmer, rather quiet and also wise. They are both from poor families and live in an undeveloped rural area which is, nevertheless, beautiful because of its mountains and bushes.

The more she tries to help her get out of her marriage, the more it puts strain on their friendship because abused women often think people are jealous when they try to help
They walk to and from school together every day and play together, living their lives more like sisters than friends. As life goes on they become teenagers and move to a new phase in their lives but are still friends. They start dating and unfortunately both fall pregnant at the tender ages of 16 and 17. Sandra gives birth to a baby girl just a month before Grace is blessed with a baby boy. They struggle to raise their kids as they are young and vulnerable. Their babies’ fathers are also young and unemployed. Sandra and her daughter’s father break up and her parents are left with the responsibility to help raise her little girl.

At a later stage Grace also breaks up with her baby’s father. They still share the same experience and are close friends in their late teenage years. Grace falls in love again, which helps grow her friendship with Sandra because her new boyfriend is related to her friend.

They are much closer now and are both matured. Unfortunately, they can’t further their studies after matric as they both have kids to take care of. Sandra gets married in her early twenties and this hits hard on their friendship as she marries into a family that lives far away, which forces her to move and leave her best friend behind. Nevertheless, Grace is very happy that her friend has found love even though she won’t be seeing her anymore.

In the meantime the new guy in Grace’s life happens to be a bad man. He starts cheating and when Grace tries to talk to him he beats her up. Yes, he is abusive, but like most victims of abuse she believes it’s her fault that her boyfriend is beating her up and she always hopes and prays that he
companionship

won’t do it again. Sadly it never stops and her friend is not there to support her.

Tragically, Sandra’s husband gets killed a while later; she stays there for a few months of mourning but eventually moves back home as her in-laws believe she is still too young to stay alone for the rest of her life. She goes back to her family for comfort and to move on with her life. Yet again fate brings Sandra and Grace back together. They already have two children each and their friendship grows stronger as they grow older.

Sandra tries to warn her friend about abusive men and convince her to leave her boyfriend but it’s not easy because Grace loves him and the fact that he is related to Sandra makes it even more difficult for her to interfere or take sides. As life moves on Grace gets married to her boyfriend, who is still abusing her. She lives in fear but is hoping that things will get better now that they are married, only to discover that they are getting worse. Her husband believes that he owns her now that he has paid lobola for her. This in his eyes gives him the right to do whatever he wants with her. Grace falls pregnant with her third child and two years later with her fourth. She still carries the hope that they can be one big happy family but it is still an impossible dream because her husband doesn’t want to acknowledge that he has a problem.

Even though two women can’t solve each other’s problems they still stick together through darkness and light, giving advice without judging
Breaking the Silence

Sandra works away from home but every time she comes home they discuss Grace’s marriage. The more she tries to help her get out of her marriage, the more it puts strain on their friendship because abused women often think people are jealous when they try to help.

They don’t talk much about it, although everyone else tries to convince Grace to leave her husband because he is vicious, which makes him hit her even more, believing she is discussing their marriage with people on the streets.

Fortunately for Sandra she has a new man in her life that is treating her well and is a good father to the children. Grace is still stuck in an unhappy marriage and is not willing to sacrifice and divorce her husband.

She lives in the belief that she is doing it for her children; of course they are the reason why she keeps going every day, the reason she is strong, not realising that they should be the reason for her to leave her husband, in order to protect them.

Sandra would love more than anything in the world to help Grace but because she is not a professional there isn’t much she can do to convince her. The fact that they are both uneducated also does not help.

These two friends have been together their whole lives, and even though one can’t help the other to get out of abuse, she keeps on supporting the other. Sandra keeps hoping and praying that one day soon Grace will see the light and gather the courage to walk out of her marriage and start a new life with her children.
Companionship

I think the true meaning of sisterhood must be encouraged from both sides of a relationship. Even though two women can’t solve each other’s problems they still stick together through darkness and light, giving advice without judging or misleading each other..

Sandra keeps hoping and praying that one day soon Grace will see the light and gather the courage to walk out of her marriage and start a new life with her children.
Most people define sisterhood as a circle of females who help each other out and are there for each other through the thickest of times, regardless of being related by blood. They define it as a spiritual bond between ‘sisters’ who subscribe to more or less the same beliefs and objectives. I say sisterhood goes beyond the people we talk to every day, it goes beyond our friends, relatives and those we hold dear to our hearts. I say sisterhood is the ability to reach out and touch somebody; the person could be someone on the street whom I’m meeting for the very first time and is bleeding to death and just needs a glass of water whilst waiting for help. I say sisterhood is that willingness to help that ‘sister’ at the bus rank who is carrying a child on her back, luggage on her head and can barely see where she is walking.

The modernised ways of living – tall fences, SUV cars and shades – have blinded us from our core values of ubuntu, and now when we see a little child crying we don’t even bother to stop and ask what might be the problem. Gone are those days when amatshitshi were organised and grouped
and were taught the values of sisterhood, because trust me the word might be modern and English but it has been there for as long as we can remember.

I have ladies in my life I may as well call my sisters because we have been there for each other and supported each other as if we were from the same womb. These ladies I’ve told and shared my deepest secrets with, stuff that even my blood sister doesn’t and will never know. The life experiences I’ve gone through with my friends no one can compare to anything. I wake up every day and thank God for giving me these friends whom I love like they were my own flesh and blood.

The support I’ve enjoyed from my girls ranges from the days I didn’t have money for student residence in varsity and my best friend was right by me going through the student financial counselling process. It goes to sharing a blanket to just one snowball for supper after finally getting a residence room. My girls were there for me when I had my son, and when my son was admitted to hospital with pneumonia. My girls were there for me when I had prenatal depression, and also when I built up the courage against a cheating baby daddy.

*I say sisterhood goes beyond the people we talk to every day, it goes beyond our friends, relatives and those we hold dear to our hearts. I say sisterhood is the ability to reach out and touch somebody*
Being the youngest in the group has meant at times I get to be the little child (good and bad) and telling from the fact that our circle of sisterhood is born-again and God-fearing I expected them to judge and rebuke me when I told them that as young and unmarried as I was, I was pregnant, but the true Christians they are, they were there for me, from the first doctor’s appointment to the day of delivery of my precious and handsome son. And once again I thought my sisters would shout and rebuke me when I told them that not only did I bring a son into this cruel, wicked world but along with him I brought HIV and he (as young and innocent as he is) shall live his life with the help of ARVs thanks to his naïve and careless mum. Instead of my girls judging me, disowning me or rebuking me, the rebuking I got was for my negativity. The only thing I’ve been getting from them is love, support and comfort.

My son is now four years old and he has these very caring aunts and godmums, I know that even if I was to pass away he would not end up on the streets, but there will be an aunt waiting to open her home to him.

As of now I am going through a phase of unemployment and my sisters are still there for me, and they remind me that each battle comes to an end and there’s bounty to enjoy afterwards. I enjoy so much warmth from these women and I can’t help it but thank the Lord for hearing my cries and giving me sisters who understand me and see me as an equal as opposed to being seen as a last-born who will always be a child in the eyes of her siblings.
I have recently shared with one of my friends (my oldest friendship in the crew) my incestuous rape when I was six years old, and she gave me the biggest virtual hug. In as much as I knew she would be there for me but this is something that I have not even told my family and I feel much safer with her than my family especially since a family member was involved. The safety net that my friend has set for me is much more than what my blood sister has ever done and I don’t see her doing it anytime soon.

My circle of sisters will not be complete without my mother. It sounds strange to actually group my mum as one of my sisters but truth be told her versatility makes her fit to be my mum and also my sister. In my times of being down and out, my mum takes her time to worry about my needs and those of my son. I am very blessed to have had this particular woman as my mum. The strong personality that she exudes rubs off on me on so many levels. This woman has taught me the phrase ‘grabbing the bull by its horns’ and how to apply it. I am proud to have been born to and by her. Her fighting spirit and her protection of her children and family has made me the woman I am today. I might not be in any traditional grouping but with my mum around I sure feel safe and sound under her leadership.

I enjoy so much warmth from these women and I can’t help it but thank the Lord for hearing my cries and giving me sisters who understand me.
It is through my hardships, abuse, broken relationships that I have grown to appreciate the friends I have, who I regard as sisters that life has chosen for me. These are the sisters I plan to start an organisation with to groom other young sisters and give abused sisters the love that we have given each other throughout these years.

Yes, I might be a single, unemployed and HIV-positive mum, but my sisters make my life worth living.

*My mother’s fighting spirit and her protection of her children and family has made me the woman I am today*
Inspired by Women

by Nomalanga Nkosi

The notion of sisterhood has always been elusive to me. Growing up as a teenage model, there were infinite examples to support this. As a model you were always greeted by envious looks at every turn. It was normal for other models to wish the worst on you. Women found themselves secretly hoping that their counterparts would trip on the ramp and fall flat on their faces. I remember one girl in particular who refused to go out onto the runway because my outfit looked far better than hers. Even though this was not my own doing, I found myself part of the ridiculous circle that had formed around her to pretentiously comfort and reassure her! The sisterhood here was wrought with acts of backstabbing, false affectation and betrayal. This was the modelling world and models had to either learn the trade or be eaten alive! It was survival of the fittest.

I developed a strong sense of distrust for women in general. This made me very suspicious of any woman who tried to be kind to me.
These are the examples of sisterhood that contributed to my formative years as a young woman. It was due to this experience that I developed a strong sense of distrust for women in general. This made me very suspicious of any woman who tried to be kind to me for any reason whatsoever.

My mother’s life as witnessed by myself supported my beliefs. She was so beautiful – not because she was my mother but because of the response she inspired wherever she went. When she walked past, it was as if she was followed by a trail of exquisite peacock feathers, leaving the onlooker gawking in disbelief. Incidentally this also put her at the heart of many men’s attention and infatuation. Inevitably, this made her so unpopular with women that she did not enjoy many female friendships. So, together we did not have positive feelings about female relationships.

My mother’s beauty, however, did not inspire admiration from all men. Men would be so besotted with her that they had to have her. Once they did, one issue would always rear its ugly head. The men she became involved with tended to become insanely jealous of her. This is one reason her marriage to my father did not last and the reason she ultimately lost her life.

Early one New Year’s Eve morning, some years ago, I received a phone call from my younger sister. She was spitting words I could not quite make out in my sleepy state; something about having to rush home because something terrible had happened. As I listened to her my heart felt a plunge so deep that it forced my body into cold consciousness. It is that moment when your body knows that which your mind...
cannot or will not concede. I was suddenly in a strange place. Something inside me was already going into hysteria and I had no knowledge of what it was or the cause of it.

So like lambs to the slaughter, we made our way home.

The mornings in the Vaal were always very fresh and crisp. And you could almost see beyond the sky it was so clear. The chickens that belonged to Puleng’s mother were always too eager to get us urbaners out of bed and it did not matter how deep under the covers I would try to sink, the chickens always won. The air was thick with a sense of liberation as the local girls swept the land outside their homes. There was something innocent and nostalgic about the way the trees whispered in the mornings.

This morning, however, there was only loneliness lingering in the air. This was mirrored by the faces of the women who were waiting for us in the house. There were aunts, grandmothers and neighbours milling around the house preparing tea as we entered the kitchen. All activity ceased and every eye fixed on us as we made our way in. It was as if a strong potent force was pulling everyone into my sister and me.

This morning there was only loneliness lingering in the air. This was mirrored by the faces of the women who were waiting for us in the house.
I watched the relatives sit my sister down. There she was sandwiched between two thick arms with a hand rubbing her back. Her eyes were roving vigilantly in an attempt to suck the news from their faces. She reminded me of one of those new-born antelopes – confused and pathetic as it tries to make sense of its new surroundings. I watched her closely. It was strange to see her this way.

She looked delicate with her groomed nails and full lips. Like our grandmother’s clay dolls she could withstand any kiln but only to emerge a more fragile vessel than before.

I hated relatives. I was not used to having them in our house with their false fret and gossip. There they were; sending silent messages to each other above my sister’s unravelling head. Even as they relayed the events of the night before, they could not mask their affectation.

My sister’s full cheeks would always give a slight shake whenever she heard something she did not like. They were shaking now. Suddenly she flung herself to her feet and made for the window where she held on to the bars, tugging at them in a strange attempt to escape the ominous feeling that was fast engulfing her. She started to howl as her feet took turns to drum against the ground.

Her cry was bitter and hollow as she called for her.

Mother.

Mother was dead.
Our beautiful mother had died. No words were enough. No tears satisfactory.

Her lover had stabbed her to death. In a fit of jealous rage, he had thrust the shaft of his weapon into her head, over and over again. A crime of passion, they called it.

Like incense smoke she lingered sweetly and pungently for a while and then faded away, never to return again.

For many years after that day, I would yearn and look for her. In every beautiful moment I would seek her out. When the world would become too much I would cry for her.

It has now been 11 years and still I cry for her. The burden, although still heavy and agonising, has been lessened. I have found many more mothers along the journey that have held my hand through the pain. Unlike the unhealthy models of sisterhood I had growing up; I have been honoured with new sisterhoods and female fellowships.

I have two mothers now whose companionship is enigmatically enriching. There’s Ma Erna, my colourful Afrikaner artist mother whose guidance inspires my own creativity and boldness. And then Mama Djan who has the most generous spirit I know of. With four children of her own, she still finds space to lavish love (sometimes in the form of her delicious Ghanaian sponge cake) and many light moments on me. She managed to raise three doctors single-handedly too! It is her strength and example that keeps me focused on life’s positive qualities as I wade through it.
Breaking the Silence

Through this all another particularly special friendship was born. The one that I treasure most in the entire world – the friendship I share with my younger sister. Through the experience of losing our mother, our connection has grown deeper and more beautiful.

Our beautiful mother had died.
No words were enough. No tears satisfactory
Sy is nie my suster nie. Ons het nie dieselfde ma nie, nie eers dieselfde pa nie. Sy het in ’n ander huis grootgeword. Dieselfde woonbuurt, dieselfde skool, dieselfde kerk, en tog is ons lewens so verskillend. As ons net kyk na ons ouers: sy het haar ouers nog nooit hoor baklei nie, hulle praat rustig met mekaar, saggies. Ek kon my verstom daaraan, selfs vandag nog, dis baie mooi. My ouers, wel my pa is ’n alkoholis, my ma lei aan depressie (niemand neem haar kwalik daarvoor nie).

Dit was altyd koud in ons huis, ekstra koud as my pa daar was! Hy was maar min daar want hy het altyd ‘weg gewerk’. Die ‘weg werkery’ was ’n dekmantel vir ander verhoudings, dit het ons eers later uitgevind.

*Fast Forward* na my eie grootmens lewe. Ek kies hulle net soos wat my pa is: womanisers, verslaafdes, abusers; en my ‘suster’? Sy trou met haar hoërskool liefde… en leef die sprokies lewe wat almal begeer.
En toe, eendag, het ek genoeg gehad… (eintlik het my verloofde genoeg gehad van MY) en ek is WEER alleen. Ek begin bou… myself leer, versterk… kry hulp, huil… probeer vrede maak met my verlede… met my toekoms.

Ek maak weer kontak met my skool vriendinne en my ‘suster’ is geskei! En sy lyk stunning, asof die wereld vir bestaan, jonk, blozend, gelukkig!

Hoe kry sy dit reg? Ek het donker kringe onder my oë, my naels is in ’n toestand, my lyf wys die mishandeling waardeur ek is. My vel is in ’n toestand! Hoe kry sy dit reg? Ek vra haar en dit lyk asof sy praat van iemand anders se lewe. Haar man het haar verneuk met haar beste vriendin toe vang sy hulle uit, pot hom een hou met die vuis en dit was die einde van die sprokie. Niemand het uitmekaar geval nie. Niemand het in stukkies gebreuk nie. En sy het alleen daardeur gegaan. Haar beste vriendin (wat toe al die tyd haar man se skelmpie was) kon haar nie daardeur help nie. Haar ouers se perfekte wereld het nie plek gehad vir ’n ‘stukkende’ geskeide dogter nie.

Al my harde werk was verniet… My hele wereld stort in duie. Hoe pateties van my! Ek huil van voor af, ek lê vir dae aaneen in my bed en wens dat ek net kan dood. Ek loop in my pajamas rond, kam nie my hare, borsel nie my tande, tot ek eendag in die spieël kyk en my ma sien. Dis nogal ’n wrede gesig!

Toe begin alles maar weer van voor af, ek gaan ‘book’ myself in by ’n sigiatriese kliniek. Verwerping is die grootste issue waarmee ek daagliks moet deel, dan is daar die miskrame, die emotional abuse, verwerping, physical abuse,
“Suster”

verwerp, victim triangle... ek lees, deel, praat, huil, gil, kom in opstand... ek kan nie meer nie... maar opgee is ook nie ’n opsie nie...

En ek doen dit alleen, want vertroue is ook ’n issue in my lewe.

My bloedsuster bly in ’n kasteel langs die see, my moeder lewe in haar eie wereld waarin alles ‘perfek’ uitgebeeld word... voorstedelike huis, met honde en mooi tuin en binne is daar lyke wat bestaan.

Ek was so so alleen... en toe ontmoed ek hom... Hy het my laat lag! My laat goed voel oor myself, hy wou my beskerm van die lewe, hy het my soos ’n prinses behandel... eintlik het hy my soos Prinses Raponsie behandel... Toegesluit in ’n hoë toring vir sy eie vermaak. Nie WEER nie...! Hoe kon ek myself weer in so situasie kry?

En as ek my ‘suster’ bel om te hoor hoe dit met haar nuwe koning en klein prinsies en prinsessies gaan dan lag sy net en vertel hoe gelukkig sy is om my as vriendin te hê wat haar aan so ’n goeie man voorgestel het en wat haar altyd laat lag met pittige sê-goed!

En in my mooi huis met sy lieflike tuin en honde wat op die grasperk rondloop is alles perfek... En binne leef daar lyke! En as ek te koud raak dan bel ek my suster om my daaraan te herinner dat ander mense my bewonder!

**En ek doen dit alleen, want vertroue is ook ’n issue in my lewe**

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It was on 10 February 1995. I was thinking how beautiful life is; thinking about me as a happy, rural girl who wakes up in the morning, goes to the bushes to gather wood, talks with other girls about boys, and creates jokes, thinking what fun it is to be a rural girl.

On that day I was not feeling well so I decided to go to the doctor. I felt scared, sitting in the consulting room, shivering because I didn’t know what was wrong with me while the doctor was busy assessing me. I was scared because I thought he was going to inject me.

When he had finished examining me he said, ‘Sisi, can you go and do the test?’ With a shivering voice I agreed. I kept quiet for a long time, asking myself many questions without answers. The first question which came to my mind was: who's going to take care of the kids?

He counselled me first, then did the test. Wow! The test result was positive. The first thing I thought about was, oh
my God, it’s over for me; I’m going to die. Going home I felt down and sad. Someone could see at a distance that I was carrying a heavy load on my shoulders. When I got home I didn’t want to talk to anyone, just locked my bedroom door and cried.

My elder sister noticed that there was something wrong. She came into my room to comfort me, saying that I was going to be fine even before I could tell her what happened.

After I told her I had to go back to work because my days for sick leave were over. When I arrived I decided to tell my employers about my status because I had another appointment with the doctor the following week.

Sadly, they didn’t have information about HIV and demoted me from top chef to housekeeper. They said I was going to infect everyone. It was painful. I was so stressed. Within a month my CD4 count dropped from 381 to 72, so I went back to the doctor and was in and out of hospital because of stress. The doctor advised me to quit that job. I did but instead of going home I went to my sister’s house because we decided to keep my status a secret from my parents.

When he had finished examining me he said, ‘Sisi, can you go and do the test?’ The first question which came to my mind was: who’s going to take care of the kids?
I stayed there for a long time and my sister was very supportive; she supported me financially as well as emotionally because when I quit I was just left empty-handed.

After a while we thought we must go and tell our parents, although we were scared. We talked to them and surprisingly they were more supportive than we expected. I joined TAC through a support group. That’s when I realised that, Wow! Life still goes on even if you are HIV positive.

Because of my sister, here I am – beautiful and strong. To those who used to think HIV is a death penalty, they now look up to me as their weapon to fight it. I’m sister, counsellor and a role model to them. It is because of one person who is extraordinarily special in my life – my sister. That is why I say; ‘I love her madly’. I love her more than anything.

‘It doesn’t matter how many times one falls, what matters the most is how many times one rises again’

My sister was very supportive; she supported me financially as well as emotionally because when I quit I was just left empty-handed
As I walk into my family kitchen, the air is heavy with the aroma of chocolate brownies. I find them cooling next to the oven, next to a batch of freshly iced cupcakes – a magnificent spread, a veritable high tea. One could be mistaken that my family of five has an insatiable sweet tooth, or that we are entertaining this evening. However, neither is the case. My sister has merely spent another day baking. Yet again, I will take the spoils to work tomorrow to share with my colleagues on the pretence that once again I had friends over, or that I bake faster than I eat. How could I explain the truth? Where would I begin?

She sneaks up on me, ghoulish and gaunt, dressed in once-skinny jeans that sag at the back and one of my dad’s old sweatshirts.

‘Eat one,’ she urges.

‘Not hungry.’

‘Just have a bite?’
I force myself to take a bite for her sake. It tastes amazing, full-bodied, fragrant, rich and perfect. It probably tastes like ‘more’ for many, but personally it makes me nauseous. I push the brownie away and she skulks down the passage. These are the only words we will exchange this evening.

My little sister, who not long ago could not go one day without emailing me, my confidante, my style advisor, my best friend, my likeness – was now a stranger. It is easy to blame it on sickness, to say that this is not her, that this is just a person who is very sick, but somehow something between the saying and the actual living of it is lost.

Perhaps this is because, to the untrained eye, anorexia seems solely focused on weight loss. In coverage of anorexia you hear a lot about Body Mass Index and bones, laxatives and hours spent exercising. Being health-conscious and a regular gym-goer myself, it just seemed like a case of my own healthy habits pushed to the extreme.

Seeing my sister’s bones strain through her arms as she cut a pod of mange tout into tiny pieces over dinner or noticing the stained black rings under her eyes surprisingly did not sting the most. When you are in such close contact with someone, you begin to become accustomed to the way they look, no matter how much they warp and fold into themselves.

It is easy to blame it on sickness, to say that this is not her, that this is just a person who is very sick.
What was worse was her constant paranoia manifested in wasted minutes spent checking that every door and window is closed several times each time before we went out. More uncontrollable was her uncharacteristic rage and venom at any of our attempts to speak to or help her. Most surprising, her newfound skill of manipulating my parents, who were overcome with guilt at creating such a tortured individual.

Whenever I visited home, my beautiful sister, who previously looked up to me, regarded me with hate – for eating, for having friends, for not depriving myself and for letting life in. She scowled at me through the agonising atmosphere of the dinner table and rolled her eyes as I accounted any joy or trial in my life. I was distasteful and unwelcome to her. So I stopped visiting.

Humans are adaptable, I began to forget. I filled my life with work, with friends, with food. I lived my life passionately, aggressively. I was fine, really. A fine refuge drinking from stagnant waters, seeking comfort in the beds of hollow acquaintances who could not touch me where it hurt. People asked me how she was and it was like speaking about a distant acquaintance. ‘She’s fine, I think. As fine as she can be.’ What progress could I speak of when nothing was being done, when the kitchen still heaved with fresh baking, and the medicine cabinet with an array of laxatives? This shell that silently walked the passage of my family house was not the strong girl I once knew, the girl old before her time who I once so heavily relied on.

One winter’s morning a brick with a vicious man attached to it smashed through my window. I innocently thought it was
a bird that had flown into the side of my car. The shock made me stall my car, giving him enough time to crawl through the window and press a knife to my throat. A scuffle and a surrendered cellphone later, I drove home shaking from cold and shock, picking glass from my arms and swallowing back tears.

My family home was the only place I could think of going. My mom would be home from work soon and she could help me. Until then, I would have to face the ghost of my sister. She stood in the doorway, taking in my broken car and appearance. As I curled up on the sofa, she walked to the kitchen.

Seconds later she returned, silent as ever, with a cup of Milo and marmite toast cut into soldiers (we had always agreed that this makes toast taste better). She put her arm around me and for the first time I began to shake and cry. She was still there. Behind the bones, the sickness and the mood swings she was still my sister. She still loved me. She was still mine.

My little sister, who not long ago could not go one day without emailing me, my confidante, my style advisor, my best friend, my likeness – was now a stranger
Forgive Me My Sister

by Karen Denise Lanie

We had been out partying until quite late one night. I was dead tired when I arrived home and fell into bed. It was 3 o’clock in the morning when the shrill tone of the telephone rudely awakened me from my deep slumber.

Through my sleepy unconscioness, the voice on the line said that Roxy’s son had been shot and was in intensive care fighting for his life. I did not feel any grief or urgency at that moment, and quietly said ‘thank you for letting me know’, and went back to sleep. Whilst trying to fall off to sleep, I could not help thinking that a short few hours ago, we were in high spirits and having the time of our lives. Now this dark blanket of doom was hanging over our heads.

When sunrise came, the horrifying news of the death of Roxy’s son fell upon me. I felt as though somebody had hit me with a blunt weapon across my face. I could not reach Roxy on the telephone. I felt panicked by the shock and horror that she must have been experiencing at that particular moment, and all I wanted to say to her was, I
love you. I wanted to shield her from the horror of what had happened. I felt so helpless. Roxy had raised her three sons and a daughter on her own. She was and still is a dedicated mother. Her children are her world. Her world had crumbled with the death of her son.

Roxy, being Muslim by faith, buried her son the same day. At the time, I could not help thinking that this is all too quick. It was all happening too quick. Roxy is not one to show any emotion. She was calm whilst my blood was raging. She was taking all of this too easy. Little did I know that the outward calm was an illusion. In the weeks that followed, it was like living in a nightmare. Roxy lost her job because she could not concentrate. She was depressed and angry all the time.

At the time I did not understand anger and how, like a raging fire, it could so rapidly consume a human life if fuelled. Roxy and I had always been very close. We used to party together, laugh together, cry together. In fact, we pretty much lived in each other’s hair most of the time. We were inseparable. My last partner had recently left me for somebody else. The until-then unknown anger of betrayal was very fresh. Through it all, Roxy was by my side. I knew that it was my time to be by her side, but I seemed to anger her more than help her.

I felt panicked by the shock and horror that she must have been experiencing at that particular moment, and all I wanted to say to her was, I love you.
I tried to console her, but she pushed me away. I tried to attack her, but she pushed me away. I tried to tell her that I love her, but she pushed me away. I tried to tell her to find help, but she pushed me away. I felt helpless, and that feeling of helplessness made me desperate to save Roxy. The Roxy I knew had died inside. The new Roxy was grief stricken and the angry monster reared its head. Instead of dousing the flames, I was unknowingly fuelling the raging fire that was consuming her.

The more I tried to help Roxy, the more she pushed me away. Eventually, the angry monster within flared up and bit me in the butt. We had a nasty exchange of words and went our separate ways. I felt an intense sense of loss to see my sister and friend close the door on our relationship. Since I never did have a biological sister, she had become my sister through the special bond of friendship we shared. Although I say that Roxy closed the door on our relationship, I had to have had some chunk of responsibility in allowing the closing of the door. At the time, I could not see my responsibility in all of this. I was too blinded by ignorance, pride and my own selfishness to see it.
Whilst I was unknowingly battling my pain and anger, Roxy was battling hers. We were so blinded by our own pain and anger that we could not see each other’s pain and anger. Our pain and anger was personal to us, and we could not see beyond that. We lashed out at each other instead of trying to allow each other the much-needed space to work through the pain and anger. Instead of helping each other, we beat each other to an emotional pulp.

After the fallout, I was angry at Roxy. However, whilst being angry at her, another force grabbed a hold of my life. Through my own pain and suffering, David, my other gay sister, or is it brother? What the hell. David was brother, sister, mother, father, friend, all rolled into one. He grabbed my hand and, with his wonderful nature, was able to help me get myself off the beaten track. He took me to church and introduced me to God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Not long thereafter, David also died of a stroke. Amazingly enough, by what I can only explain as the ‘strength of the Lord’, I did not feel alone. Although I was very sad to see him go, I somehow knew that he had gone to a better place. He is constantly in my heart and in my thoughts. His amazing gift of sisterhood or brotherhood will always be cherished. He taught me what it was like to be a sister or a brother. He changed my perspective on how to raise my daughter. My daughter and I have the most blessed sister/sister and mother/daughter relationship, which we did not have when she was growing up.

At the time of David’s death, I learnt that you are never alone. When you think you are, is when God sends you somebody
new or somebody old. There is always somebody popping in to fill that empty space in your heart. Although I experienced a sense of loss when David died, the circumstances and situation was very different. Roxy was still around. David was gone forever. David and I parted on good terms. Roxy and I did not. I longed to make peace with her, but I did not know how to do it. I think that in all honesty, I did not want to make an idiot of myself when she rejected my apology. Fear can and does paralyse you. I felt paralysed when I thought about the idea of contacting her.

I went to church every Sunday, and I had the opportunity to learn the nature of God. I also had the opportunity to learn to know myself and appreciate myself during that alone time. Although I was alone during that time, I learnt how important it is to have a relationship with oneself. Unless you know yourself, you cannot and will not understand others.

I missed Roxy, and tried very subtly to keep an eye on her through other mutual friends. I thought that she had written me off, and I was not going to set myself up for another dose of her anger; definitely not whilst I myself was still too weak. In the meantime, I was further weakened, through the loss of my job and my home. My financial situation deteriorated rapidly, but somehow my spiritually and faith grew stronger.

We were so blinded by our own pain and anger that we could not see each other’s pain and anger
When Roxy’s birthday arrived at the end of September, I thought that my chance had come to break the ice. I sent her a birthday wish by email, not really expecting a response. Almost immediately, I received a thank you by return email. It was polite, but not very warm and inviting. I was convinced that we were not yet ready to put the past behind us and rekindle our friendship. I was elated that I received a response at all, but I did not want to rush the process. It was a start. I had to be patient.

More than a year had passed since I had spoken to Roxy when I received an invite to a Girl’s Get Together. I was a bit apprehensive at meeting up with Roxy again, but I quelled my fear and decided to go. On the day, nothing seemed to go right, and this feeling of doom was growing stronger by the second. Eventually, the moment arrived. It was now or never. Shereen had arrived, and the time was now.

The get together was at the home of a mutual acquaintance. I did not know what to expect, but I was pleasantly surprised. I was still very reserved and held back. I did not want to annoy Roxy all over again. I am not well known for tact, and I did not want to open my mouth at all in trepidation of messing the whole get together up. Instead, I held back, and only answered when asked a direct question. I limited myself to short answers.

The get together was a huge success and it brought Roxy and me closer together than what we were before. We both needed the space to work through our individual pain. The pain will probably never totally disappear for either of us. However, we have learnt to support each other through our
Forgive Me My Sister

pain, whilst acknowledging each other’s individual strengths and weaknesses.

The ice that I perceived between us melted away without a single word about the past being spoken. There was no need for apologies or forgiveness. It was an unspoken given. It was as though the fallout never happened. We do not agree on everything. We love each other enough to know when to let go and when to pursue a topic. We talk to each other at least four times a week on the telephone, and we visit each other at least once a week.

We are both very different in the way we think, the way we dress, the way we walk, the way we talk, but we are still sisters. To have a sister, you first have to learn how to be a sister. I think that was a valuable lesson for both Roxy and me to learn. We are sisters. We don’t have to be like each other, but we do love each other for the individuality within us both.

We live very separate lives, but when it comes to having somebody to talk to, we know where to find each other. There is an unseen, unbreakable bond that exists between us and always will. We are sisters.

We are both very different in the way we think, the way we dress, the way we walk, the way we talk, but we are still sisters.
We cannot know everything. We do not experience everything everybody else experiences. We are unique and we have to accept that others are uniquely beautiful in their own right. We do not always have to agree with them, but we do have to love them for who they are.

To have a sister is to be a sister. As with any relationship, it comes at a price; that price is, amongst other things, acceptance, commitment, humility, tolerance, patience, support, forgiveness, encouragement and love. The greatest of these, is love. You do not always have to agree with your sister or your brother, but through love, all things are possible.

You may not always have your brother or your sister by your side, but you know that they are forever in your heart and thoughts, and you in theirs.

To have a sister, you first have to learn to be a sister. You do not have to share a womb to share each other’s lives. You just have to love each other unconditionally. Do not tell them that you love them. Show them that you love them through your attitude of love, forgiveness and acceptance.

*To have a sister, you first have to learn to be a sister*
Impilo Iyaqhubeka

by Maria Shongwe


Kwakungasizi ukulandula, ngamuva konke eyayikusho kimi maqondana nothando kwafika usuku lokuthibahambe kwakungathi ngabe abasahambi ukuphindela emuva.

Akuphelanga isikhathi esingakanani wathumela abakhongi. kwakungathi ngilele ngiyaphupha uma bememeza esangweni abakhongi. Kwakungathi umshado kanti cha, babezolobola njengendlela okwakumandi ngakhona.

Ngabalandela ngokushesha nami ngijabulela ukuya emzini ngangibona yonke into eyayeniwa ekhaya ingibambezela besalungisa ezinye izinto engifanele ukuhamba nazo.

Sengifikile emzini akuyanga ngokucabanga kwami. Izinto ezazikhulunywa ngami zazibaba njengenhlaba, uma


Kwathi ngo 1998-09-24 kwamenela ukufa, usuku engingeke ngalulibala empilweni yami, kwakungathi umhlaba uphenduka uba bomvu.

Yaqala inkathazo ngangena ngaphuma enkantolo umndeni ungifuna zonke izinto eziqondene naye. Ngangihlala ngigadiwe okwesiboshwa seque ejele, kungafunwa ngithi
Impilo Iyaqhubeka

nyaka ngoba babecabanga ukuthi ngizontshontsha zinto zomfowabo ngiye e Swazini.


Kusentwasahlolo izigange ziyaqala ukuba luhlaza kodwa kimi kwakungathi kusebusika, kungekho injabulo yokuthi ngiyohlala emzini omusha.

Ngafika ngathola ugwadule lwendawo laphe ngangiyaphumelela ngona, ngangingaziwa muntu. Izindlu zazakhiwe zihlangene ngamakhona wawungafunga ukuthi ngumuzi owodwa kanti cha, yimizi emibili. Ngaphuma ngakhusela emthunzini, libalele ngisho ebukhweni bezinja.


Wasondela wacela ukungena eze eduze kwami laphe ngangihleli khona wakhulumu nami wamathemela kwakhe. Ngavuma ukuthi ngizokuza kungafika izingane. Ngazibuzo esehambile ukuthi kodwa lomakoti ungumuntu onjani
abantu bengasanakani nje kakhulu emalokishini.

Engakuphawula kuye yindlela angamukelwa ngayo emzini wakhe ngabona ukuthi hhayi, wuhlomega olunye lomuntu lolu engihlangene nalo. Siqala ukubonana wangazisa nemvelaphi yakhe nokuthi kungani elapha nezinkinga ezamenza waza kulendawo.


Akubanga malanga amangaki wafuna ukungisiza noma ngangingakasho lutho kuye. Kodwa ngangibonakala ukuthi inhlupheko ingiphethe ngoba wawungasaboni noma ngingumakoti noma ngiyisalukazi naso esizihluphekelayo.
Impilo Iyaqhubeke

Kungakho namuhla uma ngithola lelithuba lokuthi ngibhale indaba yami ngikhetha ukubhala ngaye, isizathu waba yiqhawe lami. Nami ngaqala ukusebenzisana nabantu kuze kube namuhla umuntu ubongwa esaphila.
Ndikhulele Phi?

by Nokubonga Dikani


Ndifunde amabanga aphantsi eMzonkeshe Primary School, amabanga aphezulu ndiwafunde eNgwenyathi Public School. Kulapho ndiphumelele khona ibanga leshumi.


Ndikhulele Phi?

Kwakubuhlungu kakhulu ke ukukhulela kwimeko elo loholo.


Kunyaka ka2008, ndiye ndamshiya uMadam ndayokufunda eYunivesithi yaseFort Hare kwalapha
eMonti. Waye wandikhuthaza uMadam futhi wathi ngemini emdamshiya ngayo ‘Uhambe kakahle Lucy, futhi izandla zam zivulekile ukukunceda wakuxakwa’.


Wandinika umsesane ngenxa yobuhlobo bethu kwaye abantu abanini bafuna ukuwuthenga kodwa ngeke ngoba ndiwayazi uthetha ntoni kum. Lo msesane ndawufaka kucikicane. Kwinyanga kaJune, uMadam ebevela uDurban kuba uMaster ebebaleka iComrades Marathon. UMadad ebendiphathele izipho ezintle.

Ndayiphala zaka lemeko kuMadam kuba wayengumntu ondinika amacebiso aphilileyo, athi ukuba akanalo icebo andomeleze

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Ndikhulele Phi?


Ndimthembile noYesu ngoba yena usondela ngo-kukunika umntu wokusula iinyembezi. Ndiyazidla ngoMadam kwaye ndinqwenela ukuba ndimkhathalele ndakuphangela, mhlawumbi yena uyobe ehlala kwikhaya labantu abadala.
NOTES FROM THE WRITERS
Jayne Bauling
I have had work published in two previous POWA anthologies. I write fiction and poetry. My Young Adult novels have been awarded the Macmillan Writer’s Prize for Africa and the Maskew Miller Longman Literature Award, while my latest YA novel *Dreaming of Light* is currently shortlisted for the Sanlam Prize for Youth Literature, the gold and silver winners to be announced in October. My short story ‘Flight’ was shortlisted for the 2012 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. I won the inaugural African Writing Prize for Flash Fiction with my story ‘Settling’. My adult and youth short stories have been published in a number of South African anthologies. My poetry has been broadcast on the SABC’s SAfm and published in a number of international literary journals. I live in Mpumalanga.

Mawint Nokubonga Chauke
I am 20 years old, originally from Mpumalanga and currently a third-year law student at the University of Venda. I am passionate about writing and I have been writing from a very young age. Getting my story published is an honour and I am very grateful to POWA.

Sally Cranswick
I graduated with a distinction from the University of Cape Town’s Creative Writing MA in 2010. My novella, *Horse*, has just been released as an eBook with The Novella Project (www.thenovellaproject.com). My story, *Trouble For Her Mother*, was included in the POWA 2010 Anthology, *Breaking The Silence* and I have just written and published an illustrated eBook for children, *The Folk of Rijk’s*. 
Recent shortlists include The Global Short Story Prize, the Voice of Africa Writing Competition, and The Fish Literary Prize. I was longlisted for The Paris Literary Prize.

I received a first-class degree with honours in Creative and Media Writing from Middlesex University in 2005 where I was awarded The Mike Brown Prize for Fiction and an Arts Council England bursary. I have had various short stories published in magazines.

Nokubonga Dikani
I was born in Newlands, East London. I am a domestic worker and am currently studying towards a Social Sciences degree at the University of Fort Hare. I have two daughters.

Carlette Egypt
Born and raised on the Cape flats in the Western Cape, I completed my studies in Social Work at the University of the Western Cape in the late 1980s after which I pursued my career in community development and women’s empowerment programmes. I have always had a strong awareness of the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ and the ever-increasing gap between the rich and poor. After an eighteen-year career within the non-government sector and encouraging women to become more entrepreneurial to address the high unemployment rate and empower themselves to become financially more independent and self-sufficient, I was fortunate to find employment within the enterprise development sector.

For the past seven years I have been employed in economic development and am fortunate to live out my passion of
capacitating and advising entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs to contribute towards growing the economy, becoming self-employed and creating jobs for others.

In my personal capacity, I have always had a passion for writing and see myself as a ‘closet-writer’. I love writing short stories and articles on a host of relevant topics. A few years ago I enrolled for a writers course via correspondence with The Writer’s Bureau in the UK and am taking it in my stride to complete my writing assignments and finding my niche.

Amy Heydenrych
I am a writer from Johannesburg, passionate about socio-economic development and female empowerment. This passion has extended to my current job, where I am the Communications and Marketing Officer for GroFin, a multinational development financier that invests in and supports SMEs to boost job creation, particularly for women. I have been published on a wide range of topics including business, tourism, architecture, education, economics and entrepreneurship in South, West and East Africa.

In my spare time, I write short fiction stories and do volunteer trauma counselling. In fact, I took up counselling as a result of the trauma written about in my personal essay. I love music and, as a newly converted vegetarian, also love to experiment with vegetarian cooking. In the future I would like to further my counselling qualifications and one day publish my own novel.
Roché Kester
I was born in 1987. I am a poet and writer based in Cape Town. I obtained my Bachelor’s Degree (Literature) from the University of the Western Cape. My poetry has been published in the UWC Create anthology titled *This is my land* (2012). My writing has also been featured in the feminist play *Reclaiming the P... word*, which has been staged at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival.

Mbali Langa
I am an entrepreneur, a director, an editor, a writer and a videographer. I hold an honours degree in Dramatic Arts and recently completed my master’s degree in Film Studies. I am an eclectic individual and have been involved in different aspects of the arts where I am a respected filmmaker, disc jockey, graffiti artist and hip-hop activist. Raised in Nelspruit, my love for words and art were born in the rural landscape of the lush-green mountains of Mpumalanga during my high-school years. In 2004 I moved to Johannesburg where I started my Arts degree majoring in literature, linguistics, media studies, film and performing arts at the University of the Witwatersrand. I worked as a Scriptwriting and Television Studies tutor for undergraduate students at Wits TV from 2009 to 2010. I have also been a volunteer teacher at the Inner-City Shifts Workshops at Drillhall, downtown Johannesburg and now work with a casting director for adverts and feature films. I am an ‘underground’ filmmaker which means most of my work has not been for commercial recognition or financial gain. Since joining Brain Matter Media during its inception in 2007, I have been concerned with research and coming up with innovative and ‘out of the box’ concepts.
Karen Denise Lanie
Born and raised in Bosmont, Johannesburg, I started my life on 20 July 1965. I was the youngest and only girl of three children. Both my parents and one of my brothers died a few years ago.

I attended primary school and secondary school in Bosmont and matriculated from Chris Jan Botha Senior Secondary School in 1982. After matriculating, I went to work, firstly as a clerk in a bank and, after holding various junior positions within an insurance company, became executive personal assistant, and have attained a good reputation with established South African companies.

I am a woman, mother and grandmother who has faced adversity and continues to face adversity on a daily basis. My spirituality gets me through the rough times.

Inspired by my writing, which started out as therapy for anger, my goal in life is to teach others how to cope with and ultimately overcome adversity.

I am a true believer of the living God and aspire to improve my relationship with God, whilst sharing my experiences, knowledge and the wisdom bestowed upon me by God to everybody I come into contact with. I actively serve on a Kairos Ministry Team that ministers the love of God to incarcerated women in prisons.

Patience Nozithelo Mkosana
I was born on 22 September 1983 in Zvishavane, Zimbabwe. I have a BSSc honours in Communications from the University of Fort Hare. I am the daughter of a wonderful woman and resilient man, a wife to an amazing husband and a mother to an adorable son, Shaun Mpumelelo Phiri. I am a creative and enthusiastic individual with a good sense
of humour. I love travelling and the sounds of nature add substance to my hope in life. I take joy in unleashing potential from people – I believe everyone has a strong point and the fact that one is weak in a particular area doesn’t mean he/she is totally hopeless. It might take numerous attempts in various areas and sometimes the faith of Job to realise your potential. But when you do, that feeling of tranquility grows your confidence and you know without a shadow of doubt that you are good at it.

Dipuo Edna Molapisi
I was born on 7 September 1990 in Soweto, moved to North West and then came back when my guardian passed away. My eldest sister took over raising me until now. Life has never been easy but the challenges are all worth it as they teach me valuable lessons. I guess it is a way of refining me.

I am currently unemployed but trying to sharpen my knowledge and skills by going to school. I am working on doing a Social Auxiliary course as I love working with people and lending a helping hand.

Nomalanga Nkosi
I am a versatile upcoming artist, shaping myself as an actress, presenter and writer. My thespian roots stem from the Market Theatre Laboratory where I trained as an actor. I also come from a visual arts background and hold a Bachelor of Fine Art qualification from Rhodes University.

My acting debut came in 2009 when I performed a one-woman play, *Skinny Genes*, at the National Arts Festival as part of the fringe programme. Written by me, the play is an
Notes from the Writers

exploration of the female image and its positioning in society and culture. My acting experience also includes a cameo on the popular TV soapie, *Generations* in 2010.

I also host a radio show titled *The Daydream with Ms Sunshine* on VoWFM which explores all things inspirational. Some of my former guests include Lebo Mashile, Penny Lebyana and Elvis Blue.

An avid arts activist, I founded the Hook it Up Foundation whose main purpose is the advancement of young people in South Africa through education in arts, culture and heritage. I have also worked as an arts manager for seven years, delivering various arts programmes and projects in Kenya, Nigeria and the UK.

**Juliet Rose**

I was born in the early 1970s in a small Northern Cape town. Even though I consider that ‘home’ I did not grow up there because of the gypsy life we lead. We never stayed in one school for more than 2 years and got use to being called ‘the new girl’. Because of our lifestyle I never made any friends, it was just easier that way, I did not hurt anybody by moving away after the contract was over and I did not get hurt; or so I thought.

Early adult hood was not easy. Having an alcoholic for a father and a mother that suffered from severe depression did not help with my self-confidence and I did ‘stuff’ that I am not proud of.

I married the wrong man, living the perfect life and dying each day... little by little. But despite all this I was able to make friends with an amazing woman and after more than 20 years she is still in my life; cheering when I get something right, crying with me when I don’t...
Nicole Rudlin
I (33) was born and bred on the Cape Flats. I discovered my voice as a black, lesbian, feminist poet while living and loving in the concrete jungle of Jozi. I am passionate about women and gender issues and a dedicated youth development worker. I am a proud mother of 3-year-old Malia. I started the ‘She Speaks’ spoken word movement which is a collective of lesbian women writers. I live back in Cape Town, learning to *thetha* isiXhosa and paying homage to the mountain once again.

Fortunate Sethoga
I was born and raised in a village called Ditlotswane, Bakenberg at Mokopane in the Limpopo province. I passed matric in 2009 and moved to Jo’burg in 2010. I was raised by a single mother of 3, whom I am staying with at the moment. I am 20 years old and currently in my second year, studying Mining Engineering at Johannesburg City College in Braamfontein.

I stay in Observatory, east of Jo’burg. My writing is inspired by the people who live around me; I love writing that is inspired by true stories. I started with poetry and then short stories but none of my work has been published before.

Maria Shongwe
I currently work with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) as a treatment counsellor at Amsterdam clinic in Mpumalanga.
Coleth Sithole
I am a mother of two children. I am currently a pre-school teacher and live in Bushbuckridge.

Namhla Stemela
I was born Namhla Tandile Stemela 22 years ago, and am now known by many aliases due to my crazy, colourful personality. I am a pure Jozi girl, born and bred under the city lights. My culture and heritage, however, remain very important to me; being Xhosa has molded me into a person with a better understanding of my roots and how I choose to implement them into my very urban daily life. The city is my playground and by far my favourite teacher in the class of life. I am moved by art, be it the art of word, music, drawing, performing or just living. Through writing I hope to dazzle the world and inspire others to tap into their own minds and find greatness. My greatness lies in my ability to take people on journeys through the capsule of the mind. It is one thing to have a great imagination but doing something with it is another. Through language I build cities of creativity; I speak Xhosa, Zulu, English, Afrikaans and German; through these languages I merge cultures and ideas and at times even give birth to my own language. Namhla means Today and for today I shall live, hoping for better tomorrows.

Nkosinomusa Truth
I was born in Soweto in 1991 and stay in Turfontein, south of Johannesburg. I am a Media and Journalism student and I love to read and write. My love for writing stems from my love of reading, the more I read the more I want to write. My support structure is my friends as my mother passed away at a very young age.
Sisterhood is POWA’s 7th anthology of poems, short stories and personal essays. The anthology embodies the meaning of sisterhood, of relationships in which girls and women give and receive friendship, love and support. This safe, secure environment, increased by their bond, is neither threatening nor imposing; a “sister” is there to give encouragement and unconditional love.

The theme of Sisterhood grew from a personal essay published in last year’s anthology, Love and Revolution. “Am I my sister’s keeper?” by Joy Lange tells how her family started St Anne’s Homes, a shelter for abused women and children, which Joy and her sisters continue to manage today. Her parents left their children a legacy of love and concern for each other, which has reached into the lives of homeless families and the community, a revolutionary act of love.

All the contributions warmly embrace this theme. The writers defined what sisterhood meant for them, and incorporated it into their stories and poems. Their understanding of sisterhood deepened through reflection. In this way, writing also becomes an act of liberation.

POWA’s vision is to create a safe society that does not tolerate violence against women, where women are powerful, self-reliant, equal and respected. POWA’s mission is to be a specialised and multi-skilled service provider which contributes to the complete eradication of violence against women in society. POWA provides counselling, legal advice, court support and shelter to women survivors of domestic violence.