



Mama

Lethokwa George Mpedi (Editor)





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Mama

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all mothers, whether biological or chosen.



TRANSFORMATION UNIT

*The book was produced in proud partnership with the
UJ Transformation Unit*

Word from the Chairperson of Council

Mother's Day is an annual occasion that allows us to recognise and celebrate the incredible women who have shaped our lives through their love, support, and guidance. In honour of Mother's Day 2024, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) published *Mama*. This unique anthology pays tribute to the strong mother figures who have left an indelible mark on our hearts and minds by showcasing their unwavering strength, resilience, and love.

As NK Jemisin eloquently writes in her novel *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, 'In a child's eyes, a mother is a goddess. She can be glorious or terrible, benevolent or filled with wrath, but she commands love either way. I am convinced that this is the greatest power in the universe.'

The book is divided into three parts, covering the themes of motherhood, tributes, and letters and poems. By sharing these stories, letters and poems, we hope to celebrate the strength, resilience, and love embodied by mothers and mother figures everywhere.

Through this anthology, we aim to foster a deeper appreciation for the women who have shaped our lives and provide a platform for the UJ community to reflect on the profound impact of maternal figures.

We wish all mothers a very happy Mother's Day!

Ms Xoliswa Kakana
Chairperson of Council
University of Johannesburg
April 2024

Preface

Mama is a heartwarming tribute to the eternal spirit of motherhood and the transformational power of education. The book highlights the diverse stories of strong women who overcame all obstacles to ensure a better future for their families, communities, and the nation. Such positive narratives have emerged as impactful foundations and benefits to multiple institutions, organisations, and structures, including the great University of Johannesburg (UJ).

Since UJ's inception, the institution has prioritised human rights and championed equity and social justice as strategically important. This commitment is not merely rhetorical; it extends to fulfilling our statutory responsibility regarding Human Rights and Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution (the Bill of Rights). We are steadfast in ensuring that unfair discrimination, exclusion, and violation have no place within our institution. UJ is unwavering in its commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, ensuring that societal impact remains positive today and for many generations to come.

Through our transformational work, we need to acknowledge where we come from; thus, we find it significant to 'pay tribute to the strong mothers and women figures' who walked remarkable journeys with many of us until we were self-sufficient. Such stories will not only be captured in the books as history but will continue to inspire many generations as we change the gender agenda status quo to ensure that current and future mothers are supported, empowered, well-resourced, and destined for greatness.

Mama expressively reminds us of mothers and the perseverance, resilience, and sacrifices that women had to endure to ensure a greater future, one that was once an imagination and a dream. Many extraordinary leaders, professionals, and inventors will remain grateful to their mothers; it has been possible because of 'mama'. As an

Mama

institution of higher learning, we will continue to celebrate women and all diverse mothers of the world, 'those who have lost children and those yearning to be mothers.'

Mama, we salute you!

Transformation Unit,
University of Johannesburg
April 2024

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Part 1

Motherhood

Celebrating Mothers and the Changing Meaning of Motherhood

Maria Frahm-Arp

We tend to think of motherhood as a static concept that unusually entails women who stay at home to care for their biological children. Nevertheless, this concept of motherhood only gained dominance in the Western world in the mid-nineteenth century (Yeo 2005: 4). Chodorow (1978) and Ruddick (1980) have challenged this universalist concept of motherhood, arguing that what is understood by motherhood and how societies raise children is socially constructed. Generally, motherhood refers to a relationship of care, protection and nurturing by one person to another (Glenn 1994: 1). When we think about ideals of mothering, we usually think of white, heterosexual, middle-class women as the ideal of ‘the perfect mother’ (Garwood 2014: 19).

This chapter explores some concepts of motherhood and how motherhood has changed over time. The chapter encourages readers to explore the often unacknowledged cultural norms of motherhood that they hold, and allow themselves to feel freer to develop and embrace their own understanding of motherhood suited to their unique family.

The literature on mothering is dominated by research conducted on mothering in the Global North and dominated by Christian ideals. However, mothering in Christianity has a complex history, partly because of Christianity’s problematic relationship to the family and marriage. Jesus called on his

disciples to leave their families, and Paul held celibacy rather than marriage as the ideal Christian state (Atkinson: 2019). As the monastic movement gained popularity through the Medieval period in Europe, a particular religious form of mothering emerged. The head of a female religious order was called 'Mother' because these women were meant to nurture, protect and guide the nuns under their care (Atkinson 2019: 67).

In the secular world, the female ideal was the productive housewife rather than the caring mother (Yeo 2005). Amongst the European nobility, it was believed that a child's intellectual abilities and moral values were transmitted to it through the milk of its wet nurse (Atkinson 2019: 24). Large cities like London had extremely high infant mortality rates. It was common for working, middle and upper-class women to send their children to the country to be cared for and raised by a wet nurse and some extended member of the family (Payne 2008). This meant that biological mothers often had little contact with their infants and young children. Amongst the nobility, children remained in the rural manor houses and castles of their families, cared for by wet nurses, nannies, and servants rather than by the biological mothers. Mothers were further removed from their children, as they were sent to the homes of neighbouring clans or tribes to be educated, usually from the age of about eight or nine (Orme 2017: xi).

Mothering amongst the working class and poor was also limited, as children began to work at six, helping their parents on farms and later in the industrial age in factories and mines (Payne 2008). Only after the Reformation did the family, particularly the nuclear family, begin to be regarded as the ideal Christian institution. It was mainly in the nineteenth century, with the emergence of the urban middle class, that the role of the good Christian woman moved from being an excellent housekeeper to being a good mother (Yeo 2005).

With the emergence of the white middle-class nuclear family in the mid-nineteenth century, motherhood in Europe, North America and their colonies began to be understood as

the female ideal. In this process, women became attached and confined to the private sphere. In the domestic setting, they were expected to offer their biological children intense care, devotion, and attention. Nevertheless, in colonial Africa and India, the reality of this mothering for white middle-class women meant that the daily physical care of children was left to the nanny or Aya. She was the person who changed nappies, fed, bathed, and protected the children, ensuring that their day-to-day needs were met. The biological mothers of these colonial children were often removed from their children and interacted with them only at prescribed times of the day. In a similar way in North America, from the nineteenth century until the 1970s, middle-class white women were able to outsource the more physically intense aspects of mothering to African-American and Latin-American women from low-income families, and were what Glenn (1994:7) refers to as 'mother-managers'.

The children of low-income women in North America, Africa, and Asia, who cared for middle-class children, were taken care of by other members of the extended families. The mothers of these children provided economically for their children and families, and the day-to-day nurturing, caring and protection of the children was done by aunts, grandmothers, and older siblings (Glenn 1994: 6; Walker 1995). While mothering in the white middle classes took place within the nuclear family context, mothering in the households of low-income women took place in multi-generational extended family households (Glenn 1994: 6). Very often, the biological mothers of these children only saw them on the rare occasions when they could travel from the places where they worked, back to their homes (Walker 1995).

Kuzwayo (1985) points out that in Africa, mother and motherhood is and was understood as a term of social naming and social recognition, not always limited to the bearing of children, but one that also validates and ennobles the woman. In twentieth-century South Africa, many mothers were not necessarily wives, as motherhood and marriage were not synonymous (Walker 1995). In urban South Africa, many

mothers working far away from their children found women's prayer movements such as the Mother's Union and Manyano groups important spaces in which to share their burdens and responsibilities of motherhood with other women in similar positions (Tucker 2018).

By the end of the twentieth century, three dominant ideologies of motherhood were being played out in South Africa. In African nationalism, the notion of motherhood as a dynamic and active liberatory force fighting for change emerged (Walker 1995); within Afrikaner nationalism, the ideal of motherhood as home-centred, politically passive and domestically caring dominated (Gaitskell and Unterhalter 1989:75); and the North American-inspired, nearly impossible ideal of the superwoman who was simultaneously a driven businesswoman, supermom and devoted wife (Douglas & Michaels, 2004: 5) gained popularity amongst the urban middle class.

With all the work that has been done in helping us to understand that motherhood, the values we give it, and how we understand it, is a social construct, we currently live in an era where a particular construct of 'idealised motherhood' dominates traditional and social media (Douglas and Michael 2004). This often shapes how motherhood is understood within religious contexts such as popular forms of Christianity (Frahm-Arp 2016). Most women who are caring for, nurturing, and raising children are left feeling that they are not good enough and that they are getting it wrong when their children are not perfect or when they don't feel delighted to hear their two-year-old cry at 5 am (Douglas and Michael 2004: 1).

In celebrating motherhood, we need to celebrate different shapes and forms of mothering more. In South Africa, women of different races have begun to reshape the ideal of 'good mothering' to what they call 'extensive mothering' where employed working mothers delegate much of the day-to-day care of their children to others as they try to free themselves from the dominant and oppressive ideal of 'intensive mothering', where the child's biological mother

is also the primary caregiver (Roberts 2008). The invitation then is to let go of oppressive constructs of motherhood and embrace forms and meanings of motherhood that are life-affirming for both the people doing the mothering and the people being mothered.

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2

Celebrating Teachers as Very Special Mother Figures

Sarah Gravett & Nadine Petersen

In the education system, one often hears female teachers being referred to affectionately by children, and sometimes by their parents as well, as ‘mother’. We think this is a fitting description. As former teachers ourselves and now as teacher educators, we regularly hear stories about teachers who provide a safe emotional haven for children in need of comfort, care, and stability. These stories show us how teachers offer essential guidance, share wisdom, and provide a nurturing presence, becoming reliable sources of strength during challenging times.

Many of these actions performed by teachers closely resemble the qualities associated with maternal care. Therefore, when we celebrate and honour mothers on Mother’s Day, we find it fitting to extend that recognition to teachers who frequently take on a motherly role in the lives of their pupils. Recognising and appreciating these teachers on Mother’s Day acknowledges the profound impact they have in shaping the lives of the young individuals entrusted to their care. Though these teachers are more often women, male teachers also take on the role associated with maternal care.

Here, we share two stories about such teachers. We use the first person to help capture the tone of these stories and allocate pseudonyms to protect the identities of the people whose experiences informed these.

Grace

My childhood was not unhappy when I was very young. My parents cared for me. However, when I was in Grade 5, life became very difficult at home, with my parents constantly fighting. I felt invisible at home; my parents were so focused on their issues that they seemed to forget about me. This tension at home followed me to school, and I also wanted to become invisible at school. I felt depressed and withdrew. During this tumultuous time, Ms D was more than a teacher to me; she became a lifeline.

One day, before break, Ms D pulled me aside and asked me to stay behind when the others left. She asked ‘Everything okay?’ and that simple question allowed me to spill out the darkness, fear, and chaos that I felt my life had become. Ms D didn’t offer empty platitudes. Instead, she just listened. Days turned into weeks, and Ms D continued to be a stable presence. She didn’t pry, but she made sure I had a safe space in her classroom, and she provided a listening ear, whether I wanted to rant or cry or seek solace and comfort.

One day, as I felt particularly miserable and struggled to focus on the work she assigned, she slid a note onto my desk. It read ‘Hang on. You’re stronger than you think.’ I held onto this note during my toughest moments. As the school year unfolded, the situation at home calmed down somewhat. I could breathe again. During my time of need, Ms D helped me weather the storm and keep afloat. She wasn’t just a teacher; she was a secure presence that reminded me that I wasn’t navigating my difficulties on my own.

In the grand scheme of things, Ms D might not remember me and her impact on my life. She saw a child struggling and offered a lifeline without expecting anything in return. Sometimes, a steady, simple, caring presence can make all the difference.

Thabang

I attended the funeral of a former teacher last week, Mrs H, and I listened to at least ten people talk about how she impacted their lives by being a pillar of support, extending a listening ear, providing encouragement, and embodying a comforting presence in addition to being an excellent mathematics teacher.

I am a 38-year-old paediatric specialist. I wasn't always a top academic achiever, though. Most of my school years, up to the age of 14, are filled with memories of struggling. I struggled to concentrate and focus on my schoolwork, to sit still in class, and to stop fidgeting and wait for my turn to be called on to answer the teachers. As a result, I would get into fights with my peers; I irritated my teachers, and I was constantly being sent to the principal's office. I must have irritated my mother as well. I remember her tired eyes looking at me, realising that she would have to clean up after me or sit with me for hours to finish my homework or that she would get another note from school complaining about my behaviour.

I struggled particularly with my schoolwork. I understood most of the work, but I was failing all my tests. It hurt me deeply when I overheard the teachers talking about me. They would call me 'a troublemaker', a 'loud disruptive boy', and a 'headache to have in class'. I even overheard my mother on the phone talking to her sister several times, asking if she was a bad mother. I was devastated!

Then, my class got a new, young teacher, Mrs H. I could see her watching me carefully for the first few weeks of class. She would often put a gentle hand on my shoulder when I was being particularly disruptive in class or move me from argumentative situations before they escalated. My heart sank when she gave me a note to take to my mother; I expected the worst! Imagine my surprise when Mrs H told my mother that she was recommending testing for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), as the underlying cause of my disruptive behaviour.

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It turns out I did have ADHD, and fast forward six months I was on medication, Mrs H taught me several tricks for new behavioural patterns, and I was a different child. My behaviour improved, and I was passing all my subjects so well that I became one of the top 10 learners in Grade 12 and was accepted into medical school. I realise that without her intervention, I may in fact have ended up a dropout! She changed my life; her interest in me as an individual, her care for a child (and mother) who were struggling, her insights into the underlying cause for my behaviour, and the time she took to help me remediate myself are what led to my success. I am sorry that I didn't tell her while she was alive how much she changed my life; she was as important to me as my biological mother!

Perhaps one of the most telling stories in South Africa of the role of a teacher in changing a life is that of motivational speaker, Ivor Swartz (<https://youththefuture.org/index.php/about>). Ivor was a self-confessed gangster serving a six-year sentence, who says teachers have a 'special kind of intuition' or a 'prophetic gift' for knowing which children need their help. While in solitary confinement for an infraction, he tells of a Damascus moment with a teacher, who, with a few caring, gentle words, put him on the pathway to finishing his schooling and reforming his life. He is now a motivational speaker and emerging leader, working with the country's youth.

These stories tell us that a teacher's job is not only to teach the school curriculum. Teachers carry the hope of generations of children. Teachers whose attitudes and actions are akin to motherly care have the potential to shape a new kind of society.

Join us in this tribute to celebrating caring teachers on Mother's Day.

3

No Matter What My Child

Ylva Rodny-Gumede

You

It is 8.50 in the morning. You, my child, have just arrived in this world. Your Dad and I are overjoyed, a bit exhausted, yes, after a long night's journey towards day, and hours in labour, but overjoyed and in love with you. I am lucky; I am giving birth at a modern, well-equipped hospital with fantastic staff who dote upon me and Dad, and on you, of course. A joy that we will experience again, twice over, as your two younger brothers are born. I have waited for and anticipated this meeting for nine long months, but nothing has prepared me for our first meeting, our first date, as it were. It is sheer unadulterated joy, and I know there and then that nothing can ever change the love I have for you.

Mormor

At 9.00, there is a commotion outside the hospital room where you arrived just 10 minutes earlier. A familiar voice, anxious, excited, and full of anticipation – your grandmother, my mother, enters the room. She has tried her utmost to contain herself and suppress the urge to storm into the delivery room. Of course, she has been there waiting all along. You would not think it possible, but here is another person who has waited just as long as Dad and me for your arrival, and who has loved you just as much as us from the very start, when you were just two blue lines on a pregnancy test. To you, she is 'mormor', your Swedish grandmother.

Mama

Her own journey to motherhood, quite different.

While Dad and I have dreamt about you and starting a family since the day we met, your grandmother, for reasons that might seem unfathomable, was forced to give up a pregnancy and a baby. A violation and trauma that women all over the world have had to endure for centuries and will yet have to endure. Her age, and the fact that she was unmarried, did not conform to what her family deemed acceptable. She was forced to give her baby up. When, later in life, she fell pregnant again, the trauma of the earlier pregnancy returned, and she struggled to relate and connect with her newborn baby. No one offered help. It is estimated that 1 in 10 women will experience postpartum depression, with many cases going undiagnosed. Younger women, and women without proper support from partners, families and their own communities, are at higher risk. There is help to be had, and overall, our society has gained a better insight into postpartum depression and a better understanding of how to support mothers suffering from it. However, depression and mental ill-health still carry an enormous stigma.

Ouma

Fast forward a few weeks. From the icy slopes of Sweden, yes, you were born mid-winter in Sweden, we are back home in South Africa where 'Ouma' is waiting with equal anticipation and unconditional love. A love that stretches far and wide and that encompasses so many people.

Her own journey to motherhood was fraught with hardship.

Ouma, who is now raising the third generation of children, and who has already seen her own five children, and sadly a daughter lost, pass through her house together with grandchildren and now great-grandchildren, loves and cares endlessly, no matter the hardships under which her own children have been born and raised.

Ouma almost ended up giving birth to your Dad on the steps outside the hospital as the staff initially refused to admit an unmarried black woman. Within a day of giving birth, she had to leave to go back to her job as a domestic worker in a town far away. Her employer would not allow her to have her children with her, and she had to leave your Dad in the care of an older 'relative'. Ouma's mother died in childbirth, and Ouma never got to know her own mother. Even though much has changed since Ouma was born in the 1940s, maternal deaths are still high in South Africa and national statistics from 2020 show that out of 100 000 live births, 88 maternal deaths occur. There are still considerable risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Socioeconomic status is still a determinant of health, and malnutrition and inadequate health care remain the main culprits.

In addition, and with poverty levels ever-increasing, motherhood and child-rearing are tough. Your Ouma has worked hard her whole life to give her children and grandchildren a better life than she herself had. I know there must have been times when the task must have seemed impossible, but never has she given up, and never has she faltered in her love and care.

A journey to and through motherhood shared by so many.

Aunty Sinandwe

When Ouma leaves to return to work, she leaves your Dad with Aunty Sinandwe. Aunty Sinandwe, who is not a blood relative and who is already caring for many grandchildren of her own, takes Dad in and loves him as her own. Aunty Sinandwe has a one-bedroom home bequeathed to her by the Nationalist government, as their policy of apartheid saw them appropriate her house that, for generations, was her family home. Like Ouma, Aunty Sinandwe has raised several generations of children of her own, and those of relatives and friends, all in her tiny house. And Ouma and Aunty Sinandwe are not alone.

Mama

All over the world, and in our own country, women are raising children amidst unimaginable hardships.

No matter what the circumstances, mothers, aunties, and caregivers love, care for, and provide for the children in their care.

Like Mormor, Ouma and Aunty Sinandwe, these are the women who give the most precious of gifts, unconditional love.

Part 2

Tributes

4

Echoes of Silence: Reflecting on the Struggles of Motherhood and Marriage

Shanee Giani

It was the peak of winter, a cold July. I gave birth to my daughter on my 30th birthday via elective caesarean. She was a healthy, beautiful baby who weighed 2.5 kilograms. This was my second child.

I was about two weeks post-partum when my bouts of crying began. I cried for many reasons I could not understand.

I cried because my baby wanted constant breastfeeding and closeness. Yet, I thought I would have mastered 'motherhood' by now. But my baby cried constantly and would not drink milk from her bottle. My womb burned each time she cried.

My body was all touched out by the end of the day, and I was often on sensory overload. I could not do this. I was dying inside.

'Please be quiet,' I uttered to myself as I tugged on my ears. 'Sshh,' I screamed.

I wanted to flee. I wanted to run away because it drained me there. Was my post-partum depression seeping back in? I didn't want to go through it all over again.

Tears streamed down my cheeks because I had to shed my old life as a mother of one, and now, I am a mother again. How lonely is this journey?

Mama

My experience of loneliness unfolded like a loosely hanging thread of silence and emotional neglect.

Although I experienced loneliness in my mothering and marriage, I could barely understand. Until one day, a vivid memory from my childhood came creeping in. In a flash, I watched my mother sit on a pink stool next to an old black stereo with a book and a pen in her hand. As the song 'More and More' by Joe Dolan played, I watched my mother from the doorway. Each time she paused the music, she rewound the cassette to write down the song's words.

The context behind this memory was that my father worked until late at night. My brother and I would spend lots of time cared for by my mother, eagerly waiting for our father to come home. My father was my home's provider and sole breadwinner, but my mother was our emotional and spiritual support. Her unconditional love, care, and support raised my brother and me into the adults we are today.

However, backtracking to my moments growing up, my mother was lonely. I watched her lonely 'being' find solace in music, and little did I know that that was loneliness right there until I became a mother myself.

As I grappled with my bouts of crying, I realised that this was expected; after all, I was a mother all over again. This journey of mothering and motherhood is not supposed to play out the same with every child, as every child is different.

For days, I could not think or speak. The silence was all I caressed. The vivid scene after I birthed my son three years ago played like a record. As I put my child down into the cot, he looked at me and cried. I cried, too. I looked deep into his eyes, gently whispered 'I am so tired,' and buried my head in my arms. Right there, I felt like a helpless human.

Please hold me! Hold the mother, not the baby! Then maybe I can 'hold' my baby. Perhaps I could be a 'better' mother to my children.

For days, I struggled—not just as a mother but as a human being.

Echoes of Silence

It's tough 'juggling' motherhood and work. 'Can't you balance?' they said. 'Sleep when the baby sleeps,' they said.

It simply did not work. I had so much to do. Wash the bottles, cook supper, do the laundry, attend to emails, and prepare for lectures. This was all too much.

I was tired. I was bleeding. The pain would not go away.

The village that once raised us has been redefined, leaving a void in my life—a symbol of broader societal change.

The balancing act—I will never get it right. So, I negotiated and traded off my responsibilities.

However, as a mother who worked from home, I was constantly reminded that my job or career must be separated from my role as a mother—which has been my greatest challenge under one roof.

And so, the injustice still lingers in small spaces like our homes.

Aren't our homes meant to be liberating spaces? But my home was never that.

The walls echoed with threats of divorce, navigating alcohol dependency, emotional neglect, insults and the constant devaluation of the self.

Moreover, the amalgamation of indoctrinations weaved into the so-called institution of marriage and motherhood. Marriage and motherhood are suffocating institutions. Oppressive institutions. Institutions that today still put us into places like the kitchen.

Whenever I felt suffocated and oppressed in my marriage, I turned to my role as a mother.

I wanted mothering to liberate me, so I mothered with great pride and honour. Mothering my children, for me, is a 'labour' of love.

But motherhood and marriage are complex.

Mama

Mothering is sacrificial, and is encompassed by economic, social and political challenges that encapsulate a kind of narrative of 'care' that is undeniably painful.

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Legacy of Love: The Resilient Matriarch

Sandra Champion

Mother's Love

A mother's love for her children is love that cannot be compared to any love. A day is celebrated yearly on the second Sunday in May in honour of mothers. Mothers get spoiled, and it is such a good celebration. Unfortunately, some children do not celebrate their mothers due to disagreements and experiences that have happened in their lives. Other children have lost their mothers while they were very young, and they do not have good memories of their mothers.

I'm happy to write about my loving and beautiful relationship with my mother until she fell asleep a few years ago. We had our healthy disagreements, which were normal, and not at all harmful or distasteful.

My mother had five children and thirteen grandchildren (all still alive), and she loved us unconditionally. She had her favourites, but she raised us well, being a 'single' mother as a widow in the early stages of her marriage. She adored her grandchildren and spoilt them to bits.

She taught us how to love, care for and be kind to others, significantly extending good hospitality to people who meet in any environment/space. She taught us to respect and to be humble but stand our ground. She was a giving person with her time and words of encouragement; she was a good listener, always emphasised that we generally do good, especially at

Mama

work, and exuded an excellent work ethic. She had advice or solutions for all our problems that we would share with her, and with her stern voice, she would advise and support us. She never spoilt us with material things. She did not believe in ‘freebies’ or handouts. She was a hard worker herself. I learnt from her that when there is help in the house, e.g., with furniture deliveries, she would offer the delivery person and his assistants something to drink after they had delivered the furniture. I still do that today.

Mother’s Strength

My mother was a ‘matriarch’ for her family of children and her grandchildren. She was strong emotionally, physically, spiritually, and psychologically. I don’t remember her receiving help or assistance in raising us. She was tough and had an end goal; she would support us and give us the childhood she could afford so that we could be good adults. She was not easily intimidated and would fight for what she believed was right for herself and her children. The lesson I learnt from her strength is the courage to speak up and not to allow myself to be bullied in one way or another.

Mother’s Resilience: House executive and project manager

My mother was strong physically, emotionally, and psychologically, as I mentioned before. She kept it together under stressful circumstances and unpleasant life experiences. She never had an easy life but had strong faith, which kept her going under the circumstances. Having said this, she was fortunate as she did not have to bury one of her children or grandchildren in her lifetime.

She was the house executive, a term used for ‘housewife’ in today’s language. She managed and handled home affairs alone, as her husband (my stepfather) worked in Johannesburg, like all other husbands. Most homes were

'run' by mothers. My stepfather was working in Johannesburg and would send the money to my mother in KwaZulu-Natal so she could manage the affairs at home. When I look back, they worked well as a team. There was trust and good communication as my stepfather was earning the salary to provide for the family, and my mother's role was to manage the budget and expenses, etc. She saw that changes were happening, and a good education was becoming more critical. Today, she can be very proud as her three grandchildren are university graduates, which is an honour for her. We were fed and enjoyed her scrumptious Sunday lunches comprising three-course meals, three-colour salads, and especially her homemade custard and jelly. I still cannot prepare these desserts, which is a letdown for my daughters. We were well dressed and well looked after, attending school and church. My cousins stayed with us then, and she treated them like her own children.

My mother and her husband bought vacant land where they built a family home. She had the plan drawn up for the house and was so excited when she showed us the plan. I remember it did not make sense as we were young. My mother was involved in buying the building materials, and she made sure that the supplies were enough and the items were correct and of good quality. Building the house was very stressful as the township was experiencing 'water shedding' in today's terminology. There was no water supply during the day until 22:00. This was the biggest challenge as the builder (bricklayer) would need enough water for him to build, and we used to fill up two big water drums at night, and the bricklayer would find water in the morning, and continue with his work. The walls would go up very slowly as we used the 'red brick' from coronation—called '*umagenqe*' in our vernacular language. My mother liked this type of brick because it was durable, which is true as the house is still standing today with the crazy/bad weather in KwaZulu-Natal. It has not been destroyed, and the foundation was rock solid too. It is a big house.

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My mother showed resilience, and I do not remember her complaining or feeling demotivated and asking for help. She was running her show with the resources she had. The building project was completed, and we were so happy to occupy a bigger home with indoor flushing toilets. This was exciting as pit latrines were the only toilets we used then. The indoor toilet was a relief for us, especially when we needed to use the toilet at night, and it was dark outside, and the structure of the pit latrines was not good; one was concerned that we might slip and fall into the pit, as we hear nowadays of the schoolchildren in impoverished communities falling into these toilets.

It was a pleasure to see my mother enjoying her home, as she would furnish it, clean it, and keep it neat and tidy herself, because she was not fond of housekeepers. She would hire groundkeepers. She spent many good years in her home until she fell asleep a few years later. As she would say: I quote from the Bible, 'The time has come for my departure, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith'. She will repeatedly quote this verse to us, preparing us for the inevitable.

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Echoes Of Love – For Mom¹

Tamara Francis

The Foundation of Love and Guidance

As you grow up, your parents are the first relationships you experience of love and emotions. Our mothers are our life-givers, instructors, caregivers, cheerleaders, and the foundation of who we are! She stands behind her children in whatever situation, guiding and supporting them on their life's path!

Unravelling the Tapestry of Motherhood

We often overlook the fact that our mothers have had their own positive and negative life experiences. Within the intricate tapestry of their lives, our mothers have navigated a complex array of challenges, triumphs, heartaches, and victories that have shaped the very essence of who they are. It's easy to perceive them solely through the lens of motherhood, sometimes forgetting that they were once young women with dreams, aspirations, and personal struggles.

Beyond the selfless roles of nurturers and caregivers lies a rich narrative of moments that have left indelible marks on their souls. The joy of their achievements, the resilience in the face of adversity, the thrill of youthful escapades, and the profound lessons learned from inevitable setbacks are all woven into the fabric of their existence. These experiences,

¹ Some sections of the chapter are drawn from the author's personal blog.

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whether celebrated or endured, have sculpted the contours of their character, imbuing them with a unique blend of wisdom and compassion, and a profound understanding of life's intricacies.

While we, as their children, may be fortunate to share in some chapters of their life stories, there are undoubtedly pages that remain unread, untold, and perhaps even deliberately concealed out of modesty or a desire to shield us from certain realities. It is a testament to their strength that they carry these experiences with grace, allowing us to stand on their shoulders while often remaining the silent architects of their own growth.

Acknowledging the individuality of our mothers fosters a more profound connection, unveiling a shared humanity between generations. As we recognise the highs and lows of their journey, we gain insight into the depths of their character, cultivating a profound respect for the resilience that defines their spirit. This understanding reminds us that, just like us, they, too, have weathered storms, danced in the sunshine, and embarked on the unpredictable voyage of life.

For my mom

As you age, your group of friends reduces, and without realising it, your mom becomes your best friend. The day my mother became my best friend was when I saw the child in her. I saw the woman in her, whose life traumas and experiences made her into who she is today.

The crazy love from my mom is something indescribable. It's a love that transcends time and circumstances. It's the kind of love that stays with you through thick and thin, through joy and sorrow. Mom is the only person who can give me objective and pragmatic advice. Her wisdom, gained through a life well-lived, is a beacon of light in my journey.

Mom will do things for me without expecting anything in return. Where can one find such a selfless, genuinely kind person? Home at mom's house! It's in her warm embrace,

the comforting aroma of her cooking, and how she looks at you with unwavering love. She epitomises selflessness and kindness, which are becoming increasingly rare today.

Mom's power to use her words in my defence has never failed me. Her old-school attitude is what keeps me grounded and motivated. Her values, passed down through generations, serve as my moral compass. I owe much of my strength and resilience to the lessons she imparted, often through stern but loving words.

We talk on the phone for hours so she can hear about the minute details of my day. It's in those conversations that the depth of her love becomes apparent. She's genuinely interested in the intricacies of my life, the highs and the lows. Her familiar, melodic voice is a source of comfort in a fast-paced, ever-changing world.

Mom naturally enjoys my birthday even more than she does her own; the day I was born was the best day of her life. It's a testament to her unconditional love and the joy she finds in my existence. Her eyes light up with pride, and her smile radiates an infectious happiness.

Mom has been with me whenever I do something stupid. She is always the first person that I call. Her laughter, a comforting melody, eases the weight of my mistakes. She never judges but guides with a gentle hand, turning even the clumsiest missteps into valuable life lessons.

She has immense patience for everything I do, including my trivial dramas. Don't get me wrong; her therapy sessions don't come without tough love, but then again, that's why I go to her. Mom is a pillar of strength, providing unwavering support and understanding even when I test the limits of her patience.

Mom is like a detective; no matter how often you tell her 'it's nothing,' she'll figure out what's wrong. Even if you impulsively take it out on her, she'll hear you out. Her intuition is unparalleled, a testament to her deep connection with her children.

A Grateful Acknowledgment

Mom, you have the innate power to make everything okay. Your kind embrace and wise words have helped me through some of my darkest days! I am who I am today because of your unwavering devotion, courage, inspiration, love, and support. I consider myself incredibly blessed to have you as my mother.

I love you dearly and am grateful for the countless moments of warmth and care. Here's to years of shared laughter, cherished moments, and an enduring bond. May our journey together be filled with love, understanding, and the strength of being a family. I salute you MOM!

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Generations of Resilience: The Legacy of the Women in My Family

Warren Johannes

The story of resilience and strength in the women of my family spans three generations and is rich in history. My great-grandmother was forced into the role of sole caregiver while her husband was fighting in World War II. She had to raise seven children by herself, despite the hardships. However, she kept her family together and provided them with the necessary care. The strain of the war and raising seven children took a toll on my great-grandmother, and she had to make the ultimate sacrifice of placing her three younger children in an orphanage. This experience impacted her deeply. When asked whether she regretted her decision, she said tearfully 'I would do it again because it was in the best interest of my children.'

Looking back on my childhood, I feel grateful for being raised by two remarkable women—my grandmother and mother. They both had unique parenting styles that left a lasting impact on my life. My mother was a tough and no-nonsense woman who instilled in me a sense of resilience and determination to face any challenge that life may bring. On the other hand, my grandmother was gentler and more empathetic. She taught me the importance of understanding and being in tune with my emotions. She always told me it was okay to cry and that it was a sign of strength, not weakness.

My grandmother was a strong and independent woman who firmly believed in women's capabilities. Once, a teacher

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told her she was stubborn and that no man would ever want to marry her. But my grandmother responded 'A stubborn woman like me don't want a weak man.' She was not easily intimidated, and once, when the magistrate accused her of being a bad mother because her oldest son was caught shoplifting, she confidently responded 'Your honour, that is your opinion. I am a good mother, and I raised these kids by myself. If he decided to steal, it is his decision, not mine.' My grandmother became a single mother of five children by the time she was only 35 years old, after her husband left her. The strong willpower that my grandmother possessed was formed during her childhood. She, along with her younger brothers, were placed in an orphanage at the ages of six, four, and two because their father went to war and their mother was deemed incapable of caring for seven children. These crucial years were instrumental in forging my grandmother's character. It wasn't until she turned 18 that she was finally reunited with her mother and older siblings.

My mother was a brilliant and promising student, destined to become our family's first lawyer. She was very argumentative and perhaps the first feminist in our family. However, she got pregnant at the age of 18 and had to give up all her dreams and aspirations. Being the oldest girl, she cared for her younger siblings and her new infant while my grandmother worked hard to provide for the family. These were tough times that moulded her for better or worse. My mother wasn't perfect, but I loved her. She had to give up her dreams to raise me when she got pregnant at a young age. Growing up, she always seemed angry, and I thought she blamed me for her unfulfilled dreams. My mother wasn't a talkative person, but she believed in actions more than words. She often said 'Don't tell me what you plan to do; tell me what you have done.' As a child, I wished she would talk to me more, but I understand her personality better as an adult. My grandmother always reminded me that regardless of everything, my mother would always be my mother, and I should always respect her.

Generations of Resilience

Growing up, my community valued family life, which was the centre of our social structure. Everything we did revolved around the church and family life. The typical family structure consisted of a mother, a father, and children. There was an unspoken expectation that women would marry before having children, and divorce was frowned upon in our religious society. Despite this, my family was different. We had three generations of women who were either divorced or single mothers. As a result, their social status was affected, and they faced judgement and criticism from others in the community. However, my grandmother understood the importance of instilling in us a sense of pride that went beyond societal expectations. Despite facing various challenges, our family remained close-knit, and we continued to support and care for each other through all the ups and downs. One of the most important traditions in our family, established by my grandmother, was that everyone had to be present for supper. Otherwise, they would not be allowed to eat. The other rule was that we had to finish our food. 'I want to see empty plates,' my grandmother would say. This rule ensured that we all shared a meal and provided us with a valuable opportunity to bond and spend quality time as a family. It also reminded us that there were families without food and that we needed to be thankful for what we had. Even today, I eat every grain of rice on my plate.

When I was seven, I attended a Christmas party at my church. The usher asked all the kids who were poor to stand in line. It was the first time I heard that word, and I was curious about what it meant. On the way home, I asked my grandmother about it. She smiled lovingly and explained that having less than others does not make you poor. What truly matters is your determination and hard work. At that time, I didn't fully understand what she meant. But as I grew older, her words became more apparent to me.

Spirituality was an essential aspect of my childhood. Attending Sunday church was mandatory, regardless of whether you wanted to go. My grandmother used to say 'It doesn't matter what you did on Saturday. Sunday is God's

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Day.’ Her unwavering faith was shaped by the difficult times she experienced in the orphanage and the hardships she faced later in life. My mother, on the other hand, lost her faith when my younger brother passed away tragically, but she rediscovered her faith two years before her death. Although I have lost my faith in recent years, I am constantly reminded of the many instances when God came through.

Growing up without a father figure to emulate unintentionally impacted me. I had to learn from the strong and determined women who raised me. They taught me to be an independent and respectful man. Throughout my life, I realised that I inherited my grandmother’s attitude of never giving up, and my mother’s toughness. I learnt that sometimes one needs a no-nonsense attitude to navigate the many challenges life will throw at you. These women were not perfect, but they were mine, and I loved them. They gave me the tools to become who I am today, and I am grateful for their guidance and support. Without them, I might have never learnt the importance of empathy, resilience, and self-reliance.

Double Blessing: A Tribute to the Mothers Who Shaped Us

Sehaam Khan

My parents divorced when my twin sister and I were about four and my older brother was seven. At thirty, my mother was the sole custodian of three children. My maternal grandmother had always stayed with us.

When my mother was a teenager, high school learners could leave school after standard eight (grade 10) and study at a teaching college. My mother pursued this path and subsequently completed her teaching certificate at Zonnebloem Teaching Training College in 1967. From her first employment in 1968 until her retirement in 2009, she taught at the primary school level.

My mother's salary and my grandmother's state pension were our sources of income, and while we couldn't afford much, my grandmother always said that my mother '*het 'n kop om met geld te werk.*' Simply put, my mother could make a rand stretch to cover everything we needed.

I remember my mother waking up at five every morning to take a bus to Bonteheuwel (she was then teaching at Protea Primary School). She would travel home the same way in the afternoons. Once she left in the morning, our grandmother would be there to get us ready and walk us to school, and she would be at home in the afternoon when we returned.

Mama

I remember that my mother was always tired at night. Much to my shame and in hindsight, we did not appreciate all her sacrifices at the time, but rather, we complained about trivial things ... Why can't we have new toys? Why was it such a big deal when I innocently raised my hand and ordered a bubble bath from my teacher in primary school? Why must I share a bed with my twin sister? Why must we finish our homework (when friends were playing outside) and go to bed at eight at night?

The answers were obvious. We didn't have money for luxuries. We had money for essentials. The toys and the bubble bath were luxuries we couldn't afford. My mother had to be up at five in the morning ... so the house had to be quiet by eight o'clock at night.

As an adult, you realise how difficult it must have been for a woman in her thirties to financially support five people. As an adult, I am grateful that my grandmother was always at home because I had a working mother. I am also thankful that we always had enough, even with the little money my mother earned.

I think my mother is a miracle worker.

She taught us to always thank the Lord every 'pay day'. She taught us to be grateful for our blessings. She ingrained in us that education is the key to opening many doors. She taught us that we will reap the rewards of hard work. She exemplified a woman with a strong work ethic. She is a believer with an unwavering moral compass. How do you relay how genuinely grateful you are?

There are times in your life when a simple thank you is inadequate. This is one of those times.

My grandmother had a standard two (maybe three), and I don't know who taught her to read well, but she loved reading! Every two weeks, we would have to walk to two public libraries in the area, borrow three books from each library, and be 'made' to read six books over two weeks. Honestly, I didn't enjoy those trips. Walking that distance just so that I could

Double Blessing

fetch books that would occupy my time and ‘eat’ into my TV or playtime. Ironically, as an adult, I now read about two books a week and over 100 books per year. The TV is rarely switched on, and I would rather immerse myself in a book than in mindless viewing. I love reading. My love of reading is thanks to my ‘Amma’.

Amma was a creature of habit:

- Change your clothes when you return home and put them in the wash so that the ‘dirt of the street’ can be washed away. Trust me, we were not allowed to sit on any furniture until we changed our clothes.
- Sunday afternoons were not complete without something sweet for ‘tea time’.
- She would not enter a church without a mantilla covering her head.
- There is prim, and there is proper ... then there was Amma. I think she was born in the wrong era (and on the wrong continent) as her demeanour was that of an English Lady.

Yes, she had ‘quirks’, but I can’t think of a single time she raised her voice at us. She was always there when our mother couldn’t be there. She was a constant presence who created a safe place for us. She co-parented and helped raise us.

Mummy and Amma, shamefully, it is only when writing this that I realise how truly grateful I am. Waleed, Wesaal and I are thankful for everything you’ve done, and Mummy, for everything you continue to do for us. Your love, support and sacrifices have shaped us into who we are today. Thank you for supporting us during challenging times and cheering us on during moments of happiness. Words cannot fully capture how genuinely grateful we are. Our gratitude and appreciation for you is immeasurable.

We were blessed to be raised by not one but two mothers.

Emma Khunjulwa Kwatsha: A Beacon of Strength, Love, and Resilience

Lwethu Kwatsha

I grew up as an only child with my mother, Emma Khunjulwa Kwatsha, who is from Butterworth in the Eastern Cape Province. My mother has been a remarkable influence in my life, providing unconditional love and guidance. Her name, 'Khunjuzwa', which means 'she is the reminder', carries significant meaning in our family's lineage. It honours the memory of her late twin sisters, making my mother a symbol of strength and resilience. Interestingly, my mother is also a Gemini, embodying strength and gentleness. Her caring and loving nature extends beyond her family to the community, making her a mother figure to many.

My mother's journey is a testament to her achievements and a beacon of inspiration for me and countless others.

Emma, a professional nurse, began her career in Umzimkhulu as a midwife nurse, bringing new lives into the world with compassion and care. Despite the daunting challenges she faced as a black woman in a predominantly white industry, she remained steadfast in her determination to make a difference.

The pivotal moment in her career came when she decided to pursue further studies at the University of Stellenbosch, a courageous step that would make her the first black woman in her community to practice neonatal care. However, financial constraints threatened to derail her dreams. Undeterred,

Mama

she made the difficult choice to put her ambitions on hold temporarily and work at the Pelonomi Hospital's neonatal unit to support her family, even as she bravely left me, her newborn and her only child, in the care of trusted family members.

Her dedication and perseverance eventually paid off as she completed her studies and returned to her passion for neonatal care. For 38 years, she worked tirelessly, saving countless lives and providing hope to families in their darkest moments. Her expertise, coupled with her innate compassion, made her a pillar of strength in her profession.

Even after so many years, the doctors she worked with still remember her impact to this date.

However, beyond her professional achievements, Emma's character truly sets her apart. At the age of 70, she continues to embody the values of intelligence, empathy, and kindness. She is a living testament to the power of love and resilience, facing life's challenges with grace and determination.

Emma's strength was put to the ultimate test when she contracted COVID-19 while tirelessly helping others in the Life Healthcare Rosepark Hospital in Bloemfontein. With multiple organs failing, her life hung in the balance. Yet, through sheer willpower and the grace of God, she emerged victorious, a living testimony to her unwavering strength and resilience. With her having to stay in the ICU for twelve days, I had also lost hope as she was not responding. The last days she woke up, the first person they called was me, her only daughter. Doctors told me she needed a full-time person to take care of her, but with her strength, and after a few days in rehabilitation, she became stronger than the person I used to know. Yet again, at 70 years of age, she started a business that transports children to schools. This is where I see that this woman will die if I take away the love she has for kids and her community.

As I reflect on her journey, I am filled with gratitude for the countless sacrifices she has made for me. From instilling in me the importance of education to nurturing my dreams with

Emma Khunjulwa Kwatsha

unwavering support, she has been my guiding light through every twist and turn of life.

I see the personification of strength and grace in her, a woman who defies the odds and inspires those around her to reach for the stars. She is not just my mother; she is my hero, mentor, and my greatest source of inspiration.

As I share Emma's story, I hope to honour her legacy and the countless mothers and mother figures who shape our lives with their love and resilience. May we always cherish and celebrate the extraordinary women who bring light and love into our world. I love her with all my heart. She has taught me that everyone is equal in my eyes, and I learnt to appreciate all the strong women raising their children and grandchildren.

I am glad to share the story of this remarkable woman.

From Humble Beginnings to Triumph: The Inspiring Story of My Mother, Ms Nozibele Ntuli

Tokoza Kwinana

During my first year at university, a friend of mine from Pretoria used to remind me of the Sotho proverb ‘*Mosadi o tshwara thipa ka bogaleng,*’ which means ‘a woman holds the knife at the sharp or cutting end.’ In IsiXhosa, a similar proverb says ‘*Ubamba intlwa ngeempondo isavela.*’ My friend would bring up this adage whenever we faced challenges, whether they were financial or academic. Whenever she mentioned these words, I was reminded of my mother, Ms Nozibele Ntuli, who embodied the essence of the proverb throughout her life.

My mother’s life resembles a dramatic story, quite literally. She comes from humble beginnings in the laid-back, rural setting of Dutywa, a town near Gcuwa (Butterworth), situated in a village called Gwadana in the Eastern Cape. The town presents yet another example of the contradictions of South African society: wealthy pockets in a sea of poverty, to paraphrase Martin Luther King’s words. We never had the fortune of living in an affluent area. Our surroundings were marked by poverty.

My mother is part of the generation that grew up during the migrant labour system, where men were forced to travel to far-off mines to earn a living for themselves and their families. Women were mostly confined to the home, responsible

for child-rearing and domestic chores. Their only other meaningful activity was subsistence farming. For girls, this system led to dropping out of school or limited opportunities in the mainstream economy.

Despite the limitations, my mother was determined not to let patriarchy and an oppressive political system hold her back. She completed her nursing studies and worked at hospitals and nurses' homes 200 kilometres away, while my father was also working in a faraway town. This meant that I was left in the care of my grandmother, who kept things running at home while my parents were far apart from each other and home.

When I was five years old, my father passed away, and our lives took an unexpected turn. This event had a profound impact on our lives, and my mother suddenly found herself as a widow and the sole breadwinner. She had to fight for our survival, and I can only imagine how much harder it would have been if I had siblings to take care of. Luckily, my maternal grandmother, Nokwakha 'Nguni' Mgoqi, was there to help raise me while my mother worked hard to make ends meet.

Despite all the challenges, my mother remained resilient and determined to provide for us. She would visit us whenever she had a free weekend, but this was no easy feat as she also had to visit her maternal grandmother, who had raised her. However, she balanced it all and proved herself to be a strong and capable woman. I often wondered how she managed to weather all these storms.

I am reminded of a testing episode in my mother's life history, where she was born before her mother could get married. This exposed my mother and grandmother to some of the grand pettiness of patriarchy. Having a child before marriage was seen as taboo, so my grandmother became the subject of salacious gossip and stigma in the community. Custom dictated that associating oneself with such a woman was a risk that could bring a curse. Suddenly, my grandmother found herself as an outcast, shunned and ostracised by even those she thought were her friends and close confidantes.

From Humble Beginnings to Triumph

But there was more to come, this time after ‘Cupid’s arrow’ had struck her. When my mother was about seven years old, my grandmother got married. According to her, she had hoped that marrying would appease the community and save her from ‘sin’, if that was what her detractors believed. But even with that, there was no reprieve from the cauldron of chauvinism. My grandmother could not move in with her daughter (my mom) into her matrimonial home. That meant my mother had to remain behind with her grandmother (my great-grandmother).

My mother was restricted to occasional visits, but even that came with its fair share of problems. She incurred the wrath of her step-siblings, who seemed pleased to call her names and hurl insults at her. It appeared that they were determined to make her feel that she was not their father’s biological child. The elders tried to contain this and make my mother feel welcome. However, things worsened when they passed away.

My mother grew up in a society where men were considered superior, and women were expected to be submissive. Despite facing numerous challenges, she worked hard to achieve success in her life. However, she believes she could have done even better if the circumstances had been more favourable. She always encouraged me to do better than she did and even suggested that I attend boarding school for a better education. Although I wasn’t admitted to boarding school, she remained supportive and urged me to excel in my studies to get into university. To her, my success was a way of overcoming the disappointments she faced in her own life.

My mother’s life was like my grandmother’s. Granny was a strict disciplinarian who set high standards for her family and was uncompromising in enforcing them. For instance, long before the term ‘curfew’ became common in the 1980s, my grandmother would reprimand me every time I came home after six o’clock in the evening. I lost count of the number of times she scolded me for ‘flirting’ with boys. My protests

Mama

against what I believed to be false accusations only aggravated her anger.

I am immensely grateful to my mother and grandmother for the disciplined and beautiful life that I have lived. Both were uncompromising in setting the highest standards of discipline, excellence, punctuality, and boldness. They both embodied the virtues of humility and empathy and the principle of 'lifting others as you rise'. The existence of both my mother and grandmother was underpinned by the importance of prayer, a belief system that God is the ultimate source of our existence.

My belief system gives me a competitive edge and drives me to be the best version of myself. I am grateful to both my family and extended family for shaping me into the woman I am today, despite my father's absence from my life at a young age. Their support has instilled in me the values of *Ubuntu*. I also owe gratitude to the local community, led by disciplined elders who foster unity and social cohesion.

Ndiyabulela ko Nozala!

Threads of Strength, Love,
and Resilience:
A Tribute to
Mrs Sbongile Oriana Mamabolo

Thabo Mamabolo

Life can be complex, with many ups and downs, twists and turns. And amidst all this, there are people whose qualities stand out, shining brighter and stronger than the rest. My mother, Mrs Sbongile Oriana Mamabolo, was one such person—an extraordinary individual whose presence was felt deeply by all those who knew her. She possessed a unique combination of traits that set her apart from others—an unwavering strength that helped her overcome any obstacle, boundless love that she showered on those around her, and a relentless resilience that inspired many. Her impact on my life and on the lives of my siblings was profound. In this tribute to my mom, I want to honour her memory by exploring these qualities—strength, love, and resilience—and how they manifested in her life.

Unwavering strength

My mother was an incredibly strong woman who worked full-time at a hospital and had several side hustles selling Tupperware, AMC, and Golden Products to support our family. She taught my siblings and me the importance of hard work and determination, greatly inspiring us. When we were growing up, my mother single-handedly renovated our

family's home in Durban, then sold it to build a new home in Polokwane. At 55, she retired and moved to Polokwane to start a student accommodation business. Despite the language barrier, as she spoke Zulu while the spoken language in Polokwane is Sepedi, she settled in well, made new friends, and even learnt some Sepedi. My mother successfully managed the family business, which became her major source of income. She could maintain the lifestyle she and my father had when he was still alive. She had seven grandchildren and raised two of my sister's children while she worked in Johannesburg. The grandchildren cherish their memories of her as she helped them with their homework, cooked delicious meals, and taught them humility. My mother became a widow at the age of 46 but did not remarry, as her priority was to raise us well. As always, she put us first in everything she did.

Boundless love

Mom's life was about love, self-love, and love for her children, husband, extended family and society. This was shown and shared in many ways, but I'll just reflect on a few. When I talk about self-love, I'm referring to her attention to fashion, beauty and a healthy lifestyle. As an example of my mother's love for her family, she always prepared delicious and nutritious meals for us. She taught us the value of a balanced diet and encouraged us to participate in sports at school. Another example of her love was how she always dressed beautifully and presented herself well, as she believed that it showed self-love and respect for oneself. She also dressed us well. We had special clothes that we only wore when we went to church on Sundays. It seems she subscribed to Tom Ford's belief that 'dressing well is a form of good manners.'

Her adoration for her husband, our Dad, radiated through every gesture, a testament to their partnership built on mutual respect and unwavering support. I recall, as a kid, when it was my dad's birthday, how mom made sure that she bought him a gift and how we would surprise him on the morning of his birthday. Mom had the utmost respect for our

dad. I can't recall ever hearing her raising her voice at my Dad or hearing them arguing. If they did, they must have done it quietly behind closed doors.

Mom loved us, her children, equally. Thus, she did not have any favourites. Most importantly, she brought us up well and cared for us, ensuring we were always well groomed, nurtured, and protected. Mom never left us alone when she travelled or when she was at work. We had a housekeeper who looked after us.

Quality of education was one of Mom's top priorities. She ensured that we attended one of the best private schools in the country, Inanda Seminary, a girls' private boarding school. Inanda Seminary is a secondary school for girls located in Inanda, near Durban. It has been known for its remarkable contribution to educating black South African women since 1869. The school takes great pride in its motto, 'Shine Where You Are', which is exemplified by its alumnae who have made their mark in various fields. My mother and her mother (our grandmother) also went to Inanda Seminary. My mother took us to this school because she wanted us to have the best education.

Throughout our childhood, we always had relatives living with us at home. Her love extended beyond her immediate family, embracing the extended family with warmth and kindness. We lived with two cousins from my father's side in the late 1970s as there were riots in the Transvaal during that time, emanating from the June 16, 1976 unrest. Mom also took in her brother's last-born son when his wife, her sister-in-law, passed away and took care of his schooling. She always ensured that our grandmothers, her mother and Dad's mother, were well cared for. We visited our paternal grandmother in Polokwane, then Pietersburg, at least twice a year. Mom would cook sumptuous meals for her, massage her feet, and even bathe her as she was pretty old and frail.

Her compassion knew no bounds, touching the lives of those in her community and society and spreading love through her acts of generosity and empathy. I remember how

Mama

she always assisted a blind neighbour with transport for her hospital check-ups. Mom would fetch her from her house, drive her to the hospital, and return with her in the afternoons. She did this every time the lady had to go to the hospital without asking for anything in return.

She also created work for neighbours, such as gardening work. Our gardener, for instance, was our next-door neighbour. Mom encouraged us to give away what we did not need anymore and not to be hoarders. We got into the habit of giving our old clothes to the needy. We would pack our clothes in a big bag and sell them to one of the neighbours selling second-hand clothing, and she would resell them at a profit. We also sent some clothes to our church to be sold in a jumble sale for fundraising. She fully embraced the African philosophy that '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', which means a person is a person through others.

Relentless resilience

During my father's illness and his eventual passing, my mother displayed remarkable strength and perseverance by taking care of him, ensuring that he was comfortable and clean, and visiting him every day while he was in the hospital. She demonstrated unwavering resilience, even after losing her mother and younger brother in a short time. Despite being a single parent, she supported my younger sisters in their education, taking my youngest sister to school and helping my second youngest sister through university.

In conclusion, Mrs Sbongile Oriana Mamabolo was an exceptional woman whose life was characterised by strength, love and resilience. She was a role model not only for her children but also for everyone who knew her. Her legacy lives on through her teachings, and how she navigated life's challenges continues to inspire us today. May her soul rest in peace, and may we continue to cherish her memory and strive to emulate her remarkable qualities.

One Hot October Afternoon

Ntandoyenkosi Maphosa

I recall vividly, one sweltering afternoon in October, this recently widowed mother, many moons ago, came home huffing and puffing, thoroughly drenched in sweat yet visibly excited as she handed me a few dollars. She exclaimed 'I was finally able to source the funds you need to go to your medical examination to apply for that Presidential Scholarship. Bath quickly and go to town.' The time was almost 2:30 pm, and the application deadline was 4 pm. I didn't even bathe as she had suggested. The thought of freshness perished with the urgency of rushing to town. I relied on public transport. The taxi driver who drove me did not share my earnestness and drove at a snail's pace, unaware he was holding my dreams at ransom. Somehow, I made it to town and sprinted like a madman to the Medical Practitioner. I did not have to look back to know that people laughed at me as I ran. I was unfazed by their laughter and crude remarks about this tall lady sprinting in the busy and crowded streets of the CBD. All that I cared about was getting my medicals done and submitting my application at Mhlahlandlela by 4 pm.

Dear reader, you see, it wasn't because I wasn't good at meeting deadlines, a poor planner or disorganised. On the contrary, my documents were ready for the critical medical report. Things were tough. There were no extra funds to spare at home to feed the dreams of one child when there were five more to take care of. People around me had discouraged my mother and me, telling us that the Presidential Scholarship was only for the politically connected, the affluent, and those known in high places. I had doubts about being an unknown,

but I kept pestering my mother and whoever cared to listen for the money. I needed to submit that application. My mother had been trying to source the funds for me for weeks. As far as we knew, she didn't believe in debt at all and had never taken loans in her life. However, on that hot afternoon in October, she put her convictions aside as a mother and finally decided to 'borrow' for me. I firmly believe it was because she could see how much I wanted the opportunity that was about to elude me, so she opted for a loan for her daughter despite the odds. That, to me, is a testament of love. As a mother, she had to be a tower of strength, a beacon of hope for me, and my biggest cheerleader when no one else believed in me.

During that struggle, what kept ringing in my head was that 'I had no father', unlike other children in my neighbourhood. Single parenthood wasn't quite prevalent in my community at that time. Seeing that my home was a one-income household, finances were tough. Consequently, there was no extra money for luxuries such as medicals for a scholarship I was unlikely to get. The reality of not having a father hit me hard. My mother did her best to fill the gap so we wouldn't feel the absence of a father. I also wasn't the easiest of children to raise now without a father (a strict disciplinarian). There were those who envisaged me pregnant, unmarried, with no tertiary education, jobless, and with no bright future, unlike my siblings who were bright sparks. I felt I had a point to prove and worked hard to disprove that narrative around my life. I was not Binga quality as some had wanted to believe. I, too, was university quality like my older siblings.

You see, I come from a family of six, and being the fourth-born, I wasn't exactly an A student like my older siblings. I did well in school, but I had to work extremely hard for the Bs and Cs I would get. My older siblings got straight As and earned enough points for university admission. I had passed, but undoubtedly not well enough to be accepted at our highly competitive public universities. I, therefore, earned the nickname 'Binga quality' while my older siblings were known as 'University quality'. My older siblings had tried to get me to a college to do a diploma, opportunities that I

consistently resisted, citing that I had Cambridge A Levels and was thus qualified to do a university degree. A diploma wasn't an option for me; the only person who seemed to understand my reluctance was my darling mother, and everyone else might have deemed it foolish. She fanned my dreams despite knowing that we had no resources for private universities or regional ones, which I kept applying for.

This extraordinary, introverted matriarch supported me, while I toiled doing non-paying temporary teaching jobs, in the hope that I would also eventually get accepted at one of my local universities or, better yet, a university outside my country. It's acceptable to dream big, right? And that's precisely what I did; my mother allowed me that, dreamt big with me, and said silent prayers for me. Just like my father, this woman strongly believed in education, having studied for a teaching qualification herself when she was older, juggling marriage and motherhood. The odds were stacked high against her and against me as a 'difficult' girl child, but somehow, we were resilient and triumphed. These principles are what I live by even today and instil in my children: as tough as things might be, we soldier on.

That one hot, unforgettable October afternoon, none of us knew then that the motherly love, commitment and sacrifice she had made for me on that day would be a momentous beginning of my life. This vivid, yet now beautiful, memory of that afternoon shall forever be deeply entrenched in my head, the core of my heart, and the deep end of my soul. A young widow, at that time with six children, believed in my dreams, aspirations and myself when I didn't believe in myself and no one else. The gods she prayed to heard her prayers. I got the scholarship, studied at a South African university, and obtained a doctorate in social work. Given how my life changed significantly since that time, the impact of the actions of this constant maternal figure in my life shall be felt by generations to come. This life-changing experience taught me one thing: 'All it takes is for one person to believe in you; as a black child, your dreams are valid.' I don't know where I would be without my mother's firm belief in me; her love for me is unmatched.

Mama

To say I am grateful is an understatement. This woman, who I call my mother, single-handedly shaped my life as it is today.

I am forever indebted to you for the phenomenal woman you are, Thokozile; thank you, MaDube!!! I am who I am today because of you.

Legacy of Love: The Unyielding Spirit of Savithree Berchu

Pranitha (nee Berchu) Mapimele

‘As a mother, I can tell you that you can do anything you find yourself fit to do to raise your children. Because only God can judge you, Savithree Berchu.’ Contrary to the usual way I write, I decided to quote my dearly departed Maa.

I chose to write down my reflections on an incredibly courageous and bold mother as my way of paying tribute to the foundation that supports me. By way of an introduction, what prompted Whistler’s mother to sit still for an entire painting? Mothers are sanctuaries. They believe in us even before we believe in us.

My mother’s acceptance or rejection was always the fuel I needed to keep pushing or to slam on the brakes. Savithree attained a sterling grade for her school leaving certificate, but unfortunately, due to societal conditioning, my mother was not allowed to further her education. With no other choice and her obliging nature, she then immersed herself in learning to sew and other homemaker chores in preparation for marriage.

My Maa, like countless mothers before and many mothers after her, was an astounding human. She advocated for women’s liberation even before this was a global concept. Born in 1949, she was in every respect ‘born before her time’. She achieved two double promotions as an outstanding learner in early primary school. I understand that this accolade gave her that zest for teaching and learning.

Mama

By the time my younger aunt was made to leave school, as per the society at the time, my Maa was instrumental in negotiating with my grandfather and uncles. She was an eloquent speaker and could hold a healthy argument. After a year of my aunt being homebound, my mum put in the time and toil to get my aunt enrolled in school again. She went on to complete matric and graduated at Springfield Teachers Training College. My aunt retired in 2022 as a principal after 45 years of teaching.

Savithree Berchu personified the word 'tenacious'. She would leave no stone unturned once she decided on a goal. She completed an Early Child Development course under the auspices of The Chatsworth Early Learning Centre. She would sew clothing for the community to earn an income to fund her driving lessons. In 1984, my Maa was a licenced driver with a car. An adventurer at heart, she would ferry us and our neighbours to the beach, park, and funerals. Imagine an Indian female homemaker driving her car in Apartheid South Africa during the 80's!

Considering that the person described above mothered me, I was going to be all that and more. This apple did not fall far from the apple tree. My Maa was extremely present and supportive. She became the navigation system for me as I took on my wifely role, and my cheerleader as I embarked on my journey to motherhood.

I often say that I am a sucker for assessments, and the results of an assessment have become my destination of happiness. My Maa was uncomfortably forward-thinking. The web spins more viciously. I fondly remember returning home after a term examination with my question paper from school. Feeling happy to be over with the torture associated with an assessment, my mother would go through the examination paper with my sister and me, to ascertain my final mark. I want to say that that was the most deflating feeling at that moment in time. It was not until my mother made me repeat the assessments during the holidays that I achieved 100% or close to it.

Legacy of Love

Situated only a walking distance from RK Khan Hospital, my Maa instilled in us the habit of always visiting the sick. We would make a sandwich and walk to the hospital. We sometimes visited relatives and distant relatives or sometimes even strangers.

Since learning that I would be a grandmother this year, I often ponder the emotions that my parents were feeling when they were experiencing these kinds of feelings. More significantly, my mother's thoughts and feelings make me wish she was still here so I could quiz her personally.

They say a mother is born the day she gives birth to her baby, and she stays 'mother' until she breathes her last breath. They say a lot. They also say that being a grandparent is a deeper level of unconditional love, plus value-added tax. Life becomes the full circle. The product, your child, is now a fully-fledged human and a parent in the making. I try to be the teacher my mother was to me as I manoeuvre through the empty nest and adult children phase. As humans, we are constantly growing and developing.

Mothers are referred to as the first educator a child has. The teaching and learning carry on even into adulthood. In the age of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, mothers are the foundation educators of sex education for young adults, which is so needed because of the instant gratification age we find ourselves in. Believe firmly that if your mother revealed to you how to use a spoon, then she is qualified to educate you on contraceptives as well. My Maa was open and broad-minded on the issues of sex. She was a confidante to many young ladies in our community. My mother supported orphaned young ladies needing support during their matrimonial procedures.

Passing on the baton is the cornerstone of the next generation's success. As much as I evolve, I believe the basics hold a place. I am still hanging on to those wholesome lessons, and hopefully, I have passed them on to the next generation just as my Maa left them in me.

A Tribute to the Selfless and Loving Leadership of Mrs. Beauty Ntombeziningi Mantshiu, My Mother

Phaladi Magongoa

Reflecting on the memories of my beloved mother, Mrs Beauty Ntombeziningi Mantshiu, I am filled with profound gratitude for the lessons she imparted to me and my siblings. Her kindness, compassion, and selflessness continue to inspire me today. Despite facing numerous challenges, my mother dedicated her life to serving others in her community. I am honoured to share some of her remarkable qualities and good deeds with you in this chapter.

Self-taught leader and community champion

My mother was an incredible woman who led by example. She was selfless and always put others before herself. Despite not having any meaningful formal education, she was a natural-born leader who believed in making a difference through small acts of kindness and charity. She lived by the words of Matthew 6:3, which states that when you do charitable deeds to others, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. This means she never sought recognition for the good things she did for others. Instead, she believed that helping people should come from a place of pure altruism and not from a desire for recognition.

Mama

Despite her humble nature, the community saw her for the fantastic person she was. Her kind heart and selfless spirit inspired others to follow in her footsteps and make a difference. She was a true role model, and her legacy lives on through the countless people whose lives she touched.

In the week of her funeral, the community came together to pay tribute to her life. As people shared their stories and memories of her, it became clear that she was a beloved community member who had touched many lives. Her dedication to managing the financial affairs of community projects earned her the nickname ABSA, one of the biggest banks in South Africa, from the elderly grannies who relied on her expertise. They spoke of the unforgettable trip to Durban that she had organised, which had brought joy and happiness to all who participated. Her legacy of kindness and generosity will continue to inspire and uplift the community for years.

Boundless generosity

The memory of my mother's kindness and compassion towards others always brings warmth to my heart. She had a remarkable way of noticing the struggles of those around her, especially the schoolchildren who walked by our house daily. Some of them didn't even have shoes on their feet. Without hesitation, my mother would invite them into our yard and ask for their shoe size. As soon as she had the means, she would buy them a new pair of shoes without seeking recognition or telling their parents. Her selfless actions truly reflected her character, and she never wanted to see anyone suffer if she could help it.

Charity work was indeed highly fulfilling to her. She was dedicated and genuinely committed to bettering the livelihoods of the community. Our home was a one-stop shop for those in need. She ran a free aftercare for neighbours' kids, taught a lot of ladies how to tailor clothes, and assisted school kids with Northern Sotho homework, free of charge. Community members consulted with her on personal issues,

e.g., sicknesses, relationships, and work, and she would give them good advice. She opened her home doors to everyone.

Maternal influence

My mother's discipline was exceptional. She allowed us to make decisions, but ensured that whatever decision we made, we were responsible and bore the consequences. In other words, she taught us to rise or fall by our choices. Accordingly, she instilled a sense of responsibility in us, which my siblings and I carry with us today. Her unwavering, firm, but patient guidance helped us become the people we are today, productive members of society.

Learning from mom

The lessons my siblings and I learnt from our mother are invaluable. She taught us to always pray, trust in God, and share with those in need, even if we don't have much. We also learnt to be responsible, make informed decisions, and take ownership of whatever responsibility comes with them. My mother instilled in us the belief that learning is a choice, and with passion, we can learn and master anything.

In conclusion, this tribute to Mrs Beauty Ntombezingi Mantshiu highlights the role of motherhood in society and the remarkable impact a mother can have on her children, family, and community. The qualities of selflessness, generosity, and leadership that my mother exhibited are admirable and essential for a healthy and thriving society. Mothers significantly influence the development and wellbeing of their children, and their actions can inspire and uplift their communities. Mrs Mantshiu's legacy is a reminder of the immense value that mothers bring to society and how their dedication, kindness, and compassion can impact those around them. I am forever grateful for my mother and her impact on my life, that of my siblings, and the lives of those around her. She was indeed a remarkable woman who left a lasting legacy of kindness and generosity.

Nurturing Dreams: A Journey of Academic Triumph, Maternal Support, and Professional Impact in the Indian Community

Yaasirah Choonara

Embarking on my academic journey, the unwavering support of two extraordinary women, my mother, Zubeda Choonara, and my mother-in-law, Fathima Ayesha Essa, has been the cornerstone of my success. Reflecting on this journey invites contemplation on my personal achievements and broader societal and cultural aspects, especially within the Indian community.

In the cultural tapestry of the Indian community, where familial ties are sacred and education holds paramount importance, the influence of mothers is profound. My mother, Zubeda Choonara, epitomises this ethos. From the tender age of 7, when I expressed my fervent desire to excel in everything, she became my guiding force. Her commitment to nurturing my academic aspirations aligns seamlessly with the cultural reverence for education as a means of empowerment.

As I journeyed through my school years, it became evident that my mother was not just a caregiver but a catalyst for my academic success. The moments leading up to winning the Dux award and assuming the role of Head Girl were marked by her unwavering support and encouragement. Her

role transcended traditional motherly duties; she actively participated in my academic pursuits, celebrating each triumph and providing solace during moments of challenge. These personal victories and milestones underscored her commitment to fostering a love for learning and a drive for excellence.

The narrative extends to my mother-in-law, Fathima Ayesha Essa, whose active involvement in raising my two children during my professional commitments has been invaluable. Her role goes beyond the conventional expectations of a mother-in-law; she assumed the mantle of a second mother, offering unwavering support in the intricate dance of balancing career and family.

These remarkable women have formed a supportive village, transcended immediate family boundaries, and embodied the communal spirit ingrained in many Indian households. The concept of a collective effort in nurturing and supporting the younger generation resonates deeply within our cultural context. It echoes the proverbial saying 'It takes a village to raise a child.' In my case, supporting an individual pursuing academic excellence took a village.

Within the rich tapestry of Indian culture, a delicate balance exists between cultural expectations and the pursuit of personal and professional aspirations. As a woman, navigating the dual responsibilities of academic pursuits and traditional family roles presents unique challenges. The concept of 'striving ten times harder' in the academic realm, often attributed to women, is not merely a metaphorical expression but a lived reality. It involves navigating societal expectations that may not always align with pursuing individual ambitions.

My journey, therefore, becomes a testament to personal resilience and the collective strength of women navigating these multifaceted roles. It raises questions about societal norms and the evolving dynamics of gender roles within the Indian community. The dichotomy of being both a dedicated professional and a committed mother is not unique to me. It is a shared experience among countless women striving to

Nurturing Dreams

break barriers and forge their paths in a world that can be both demanding and rewarding.

In the context of broader societal expectations, the collaboration between my mother and mother-in-law reflects the harmonious coexistence of tradition and progress. Their contributions underline the transformative power of supportive motherhood, not just for me but as a cultural force shaping the trajectory of future generations.

Beyond my narrative, my professional journey has also been integral to this evolving tapestry. Currently lecturing in applied pharmacology, pathology, and medicine at the only podiatric medicine institute on the African continent, I find myself at the nexus of academia and practical healthcare. This unique position allows me to contribute to the development of a field that is not only specialised but also essential for the health and wellbeing of individuals.

Furthermore, my academic pursuits have taken me through the rigorous journey of obtaining a Masters in Health Science. This academic milestone solidified my expertise in the field and provided me with a broader perspective on the intersection of theory and practice. Now, as a PhD candidate, I am poised to contribute to the expanding body of knowledge in health sciences, adding my voice to the chorus of researchers dedicated to advancements in the field.

In conclusion, my academic and professional achievements are inseparable from the profound influence of these two extraordinary women. Through their unwavering support, they have shaped my individual success and contributed to a broader narrative about the transformative impact of mothers within the intricate fabric of Indian cultural values. As I continue on my academic journey, their influence remains an enduring source of inspiration and strength. Their legacy extends beyond the confines of familial bonds, becoming an integral part of the evolving narrative of women in the Indian community striving for academic excellence, professional impact, and societal progress.

Resilience and Wisdom: Lessons From A Guiding Light

Letebele Mphahlele

Suddenly widowed at 39 years old, with three girls, the youngest of whom was just over a year old, life for my mother changed overnight. She had to navigate all these changes and care for her toddler. I was only six years old. I do not have many memories of my father, who worked in Johannesburg while we lived in Limpopo. However, I remember very well the memories of him being at home. He would always leave his shoes outside their door, and now that I am older, I understand that they were probably a 'Do Not Disturb' or 'Do Not Enter' sign. At that time, my sister and I were indifferent to this sign as we knew the shoes meant lots of treats and new clothes awaited us in the kitchen. We would spend most of these mornings in the kitchen until my parents emerged just before noon. Now, suddenly, that was gone for my mother.

I am an ISFP personality type, according to the Meyers-Briggs test. I had always been the feeling type among my siblings. My older sister was in boarding school, so my youngest sister and I were at home. I would hear my mom cry herself to sleep, although she tried hiding this from me. Oh, how it pained me. But, the following day, this woman would get up on time, get dressed, and go to work as if she had not cried herself to sleep the previous night. With the pain of losing my father, I did not want to go to school most days. I simply wanted to stay home and cry. I always wondered how my mother got up and went to work every day when I did not even want to go to school. At that moment, I realised I could not use my heartache as an excuse, because I saw my mother

go to sleep in pain, only to wake up and show up the next day. Here was my guiding light, teaching me that there is no excuse for failing to show up. I am allowed to feel pain, and I am allowed to cry, but that is not an excuse not to show up.

Over the years, I saw my mother read a lot. I remember she loved the author Danielle Steel. There were so many of her books in our house. My mother always had a book on her bedside table. It was also from Danielle Steele that she gave me a quote to hold on to as I was about to embark on my boarding school journey at the age of 9. 'Never settle for less than your dreams. Somewhere, sometime, someday, somehow, you'll find them.' (Steel 2009: 1). Also, I believe reading helped my mother escape the pain of losing her husband. Immersed in someone's thoughts could briefly make one forget about their lives. If she were not reading a book, she would spend most of her evenings with books all over her bed. She said she was busy with assignments or studying for her exams. She would often travel to Johannesburg to write these exams. All I know is that I did not understand how she did it. After a day at school, I only wanted to play, watch television and sleep. But here she was, night after night, after a day of work, busy with assignments. Little did I know I was observing discipline, consistency, and hard work. And when I started working, I found myself doing the same thing. I completed my postgraduate studies, including my thesis, while working. Seeing my guiding light do this consistently for years made me realise I had no excuse. She had three children, and she still did it. Who am I with just a dog? We are what we are exposed to. Even now, I usually have a book on my side table that I am reading, because reading broadens our perspective and knowledge.

Serving others

As I grew older, my mother would make my siblings and me help at family functions. I was not too fond of this. Why do I have to clean up after other people while they sit down, and their parents do not make them do anything? This upset me, particularly when the relatives were the same age as me. But

my complaints to my mother fell on deaf ears. I would sit in the corner and refuse to get up. She would give me 'the stare', prompting me to immediately get up and go about the business of the day. One family event after another, my siblings and I would dish out food, collect dishes, wash them, and do any other chores needed. Why do we have to do it? Is it because we are less well-off than they are? Why would my mother serve them? Does she feel inferior to them? She seemed so nonchalant about this. To my guiding light, what a way to instil humility in your children.

I also did not understand how the very same people who were 'better' than my mother in my eyes and whom my mother served would constantly call her and ask for her advice. Not only did they call, but they often took her input into account and acted on it. She cleaned up after them, but they valued her opinion. The very same people asked my mother for her input. This did not make sense in my mind. However, as I've gotten older, although I am not a leadership expert, I have realised that leading can also mean serving others. Serving others may also result in people listening to you, hearing you and seeking your opinion on matters. Serving others isn't for the weak, but is for those who understand themselves and are content with who they are. It is a virtue.

Prayer

That was the solution to all the problems my mom encountered. To this day, despite my feeling like everything is falling apart, the first thing my mom would say to me when I call her is to pray. I often wonder if she realises that these are real-world problems that require real-world solutions right now. But that does not matter to her. My mother prayed about everything, even the people who called her often. And it appeared she believed the situation would change once she prayed about it. Honestly, I saw many things that my mother prayed for come true. What also surprised me was her not worrying about something once she prayed over it. I have seen that while prayer might not change the situation immediately,

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it changed my mother's outlook on life. My guiding light is showing me to stop worrying about things I cannot control and pray about them instead.

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My Mother, My Teacher Under the Jackalberry Tree

Andrew Munyai

The scorching Limpopo sun provided an ideal environment for my mother to set up a one-person classroom under the jackalberry tree (*Ntoma*). These are the memories I cherish of our bond since I was three years old. As I ran around kicking a homemade plastic soccer ball with my friends on the dusty streets of Mbhokota Village, the gentle melody of my mother's voice would reach my ears as the day drew to a close. Like a school bell, I became accustomed to her voice reaching my ears from afar, signalling the end of my playtime and the beginning of my jackalberry tree class. Any hesitation I had to ignore this bell was met with reminders from my friends that 'Hey, your mother's calling you.' This further reminded me that the teacher was waiting for me, and I had to rush home. This was the first life discipline principle I learned from my mother: that in life, you have to sacrifice something nice to get something better. It laid the foundation for many of the life lessons I learned in the last four decades of my existence. This has taught me to see life through the lessons and knowledge my mom shared with me.

At that age, I pondered why my playtime each day was cut short, unlike my friends, who would play until the sun disappeared behind the mountain. Many times, I expressed my unhappiness. However, this did not discourage my mother; it invigorated her determination to teach me the principles of discipline and sacrifice. To encourage me, like a typical village mother, she would ask me 'Do you want to be like so and so?', pointing out a sizeable number of men and women whom the

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community believed had failed in life and had low standards of living as they didn't have any formal qualifications. These words instilled the fear of not wanting to be like 'so and so' my mother was referring to. This was her way of saying that my daily decisions would determine who and what I would become in the future.

The jackalberry tree class lesson made me better prepared, as by the time I started school, I could count from 1 to 100 and recite the alphabet from A to Z before even setting foot in any formal classroom. This was a crucial milestone in a village without a daycare or preschool. This gave me a good start compared to my classmates. As a result, my teachers adored me, and I was occasionally selected to lead the class in counting and reciting the alphabet.

The lessons of the jackalberry tree have been with me from my earliest years all the way into adulthood. During the December holidays, we reminisce about our childhood, when I am together with my siblings. One thing that stands out is how eagerly 'vhoDorah', as we affectionately called our mother, would insist on teaching us, even when we were in tertiary education. We find it funny that, despite her only having a high school education, she was so determined to check our marks every time we went home during the university holidays. We all agree that our mother expressed her love for us differently. Rather than just telling us how much she loved us, she expressed her love for us through her wishes and the sacrifices she made for us. As a parent now, I cannot convey enough how much I value her way of expressing her love to us. It is intriguing that even my nephew and niece, who stayed with her, share the same memories and lessons we experienced.

As a family, we were drawn closer by her love, which was like a magnet. It made me miss home a lot. Like many rural people, I looked forward to my journey back to my village from Johannesburg. Going home would fill me with happiness and anticipation. The excitement of seeing the family made the four-hour journey seem like a breeze. In her unique way of expressing her love for us, she would not miss

My Mother, My Teacher Under the Jackalberry Tree

a single moment of our stay in Limpopo, instead improvising her business of selling cow tripe (*mogodu*) and chicken pieces to the community. She would maintain that she was doing this to spend as much time as possible with her city grandchildren. With a smile, she would joke that she even practised English so that she could talk to them in English.

Her poor health as she aged worried us as a family, especially considering that all of us, her children, were away in Gauteng. As her firstborn, this weighed heavily on me. Her humility in expressing love for us, her children, was detrimental to her health. When she was not feeling well, she kept it to herself because she did not want to get us worried. In the past five years, we have had to rush to Limpopo at least once a year, as she would have been rushed to a hospital. In her dry humour, she would insist that we do not need to rush back to Limpopo whenever she coughed.

Our fear became a reality in March 2023 when she was rushed to the hospital. As usual, we rushed back to Limpopo, but this time, the excitement of returning home turned to fear and anxiety. We were hurrying to get home, but we weren't looking forward to getting there. The car was silent; you could hear a pin drop. This was the start of our miserable three-month regular journey from Johannesburg to Limpopo to visit her in the hospital. It was heartbreaking to see her in a hospital bed, sedated. We were told that to save her, her leg needed to be amputated above the knee. She was not pleased with this; she remained hopeful that her situation would improve. She was in the hospital for three months.

We celebrated her last Mother's Day in the hospital while she was fighting for her life. Ten days after Mother's Day, on the morning of 24 May 2023, contrary to Psalms 30:5, that joy comes in the morning, I received news that she had lost the fight. At that moment, I knew that nothing would ever be the same again. I would never be able to celebrate any little achievement with her. I would never again have the 'Mommy, I made it' moment. This marked the end of the special bond formed under the jackalberry tree. I'll have to rely on lessons

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learned from birth until now, to feel her love again. The memories will be with me forever. She showed us love through life lessons and sacrifices.

Her life is like a tapestry of memories. It makes me smile as I reminisce about the moments we spent together. Each moment is a precious thread woven in the fabric of time, which I will forever cherish. In her own way, she showed us love; a gentle touch, like a soft dove. Her actions spoke louder than words; a love that flew like graceful birds. A love for education resided in her heart, and with persistence, she never let it subside. Her children's success was her aim.

The Legacy of Strength and Compassion: Remembering My Mum

Sarojini Naidoo

My mum passed away recently on 24 January 2024. Although she was old (at 84), I never expected to say goodbye to her so soon. You see, she was such a strong person that we (my siblings and I) thought she was immortal. We often joked that she would outlive us all, and we called her the ultimate survivor. So, I did not expect to lose her after a straightforward op, after she survived both septicaemia and COVID-19 at the same time in 2022. That was nothing short of a miracle. Her doctor even told us that she was his longest-surviving dialysis patient. I thought that nothing could break her. But here I am, mourning the biggest loss I have faced in my life.

When I think about my mum, I am reminded of a woman who sacrificed everything to ensure that her children had a good education and went on to achieve in their lives. I still remember how we lived in her brother's house in Chatsworth when we could not afford our own accommodation. Her brother took us in and let all 9 of us live in one room in his house. On some evenings, she would gather us children and talk to us about how if we wanted more, we had to study hard at school and get good jobs. I also remember how everyone in her family would praise us when we did well at school, but she didn't because she thought it would 'spoil' us. But we often heard her tell others how proud she was of us, and she would push us to excel at school. In doing so, she instilled in us a deep curiosity for learning.

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My mum was the original Masterchef. She could make a meal from very few ingredients and stretch it so that each meal fed us all. She was also very innovative in her cooking, as she had to make do with what was in the cupboard. As a child, I ate every version of a sugar bean meal that she could conjure up, from sugar bean biryani to sugar beans and *phuthu* (crumbly or grainy type of pap or porridge) to beans and samp. Because my mum was an excellent cook, everything she cooked tasted good to me. She ate only after we were all fed, and it never occurred to me then that maybe there was nothing left for her after she fed all seven of her children. However, she never once complained.

My mum had much empathy for the poor, and she would always help whomever she could. I was always puzzled by this as we had so little ourselves, but she would tell us that other people were worse off than us. When I was younger and joined a community youth club in the area, we would arrange holiday programmes in the Phoenix area during school holidays to keep the kids off the street. My mum (and dad) would provide meals to the kids, cooking large meals over an open fire in her backyard, often subsidising the meals as the club did not have much funds.

I was amazed when, at her funeral, one of the elders at the church told us that she regularly paid her tithes as this money would benefit those the church was supporting. This is because tithes are meant to be a percentage of one's income, and she had no income except an old age pension. Yet she still contributed in the small way she could as she believed that everyone should contribute to and share in the church's funds. She would also take money from us children and give it to people she considered less fortunate, believing wealth should be evenly distributed. We called her a modern-day Robin Hood.

When I reflect on it, I realise that my mum was a socialist in her small way, without even knowing what the term meant. Her legacy is one of compassion and empathy for the suffering of others, and I feel truly grateful to have been blessed with this legacy. My mum came from very humble beginnings

The Legacy of Strength and Compassion

and was formally educated only up to Grade 3. But she had a razor-sharp mind and an excellent memory (a bit too good for my liking sometimes, as she never forgot a misdeed!). She read the newspaper voraciously and watched the news and weather forecast at 7 pm every night. She often gave us her opinions about the state of the country and crime in our society. She would also analyse news reports about murders and sometimes prematurely pronounce who the guilty person was before they were even charged with the crime. I would sometimes caution her about doing this, but it often turned out that she was correct!

My mum was the glue that held my family together. She did not tolerate any in-fighting between us children, even as adults, and would instruct us to be the bigger person in any dispute. It was sometimes frustrating if you felt you were in the right, but my mum stayed focused on the bigger picture only; that is, that the dispute would pass and that irreparable damage may be done if she allowed any free speech that would fuel it. If there was a function, she would not be happy unless all her children were there, so you just had to dress up and show up on her orders. While this doesn't sound very democratic, we were never brave enough to stand up to her! And in retrospect, it is what kept us all close to each other. I hope that we can pull together in this way even though she is no longer here.

My mum was the epitome of Superwoman, and her presence in my life left an indelible mark on me. I have had to bid farewell to the strongest, most resilient and compassionate woman I have known. I hope to keep her legacy of compassion and empathy alive in my own actions.

She has run her race and fought her fight.

Rest in peace, my beloved mum.

To My Mother, the Pillar of Our Lives!

Bongani Ngqulunga

My mother lived a long and eventful life. When she died in June 2020, we estimated that she was in her late 80's because, like many of her generation who did not go to school, she dated her birthday to significant events when she was born. For all the joy and satisfaction, she frequently confessed towards the end of her life that she and her two younger sisters had a difficult childhood. They lost their beloved mother while they were little girls. When that happened, she was about eight years old, and the youngest of her two siblings was probably three. Faced with the tragedy of losing his young wife, their father dispatched the three little girls to his mother-in-law, their maternal grandmother, to look after them. Their newly found sanctuary at their grandmother's house did not last long. Like her deceased daughter, their grandmother died too, plunging my mother and her two younger sisters into another crisis. In a short period, they had lost both their mother and their grandmother and were homeless.

Their father must have been very desperate because he asked a distant relative to look after his daughters while he was in Johannesburg working as a migrant labourer. Later in her life, my mother would regale us with stories of ill-treatment that she and her sisters suffered at the hands of their minder. Often with a little chuckle, she told us tales of countless whippings to which they were frequently subjected, which ultimately led their father to decide that it was better to have them live alone rather than under the tyranny of a distant relative.

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So, it then came about that my mother, the eldest of the three girls and barely ten years old, assumed the responsibilities of motherhood to her younger siblings. Often with a chuckle, she told us of her desperate struggles trying to prepare food for her siblings. While trying to cook, she had to tend to her youngest sister—literally a toddler—who believed that her eldest sister was her real mother. Although the stories of their difficult childhood were amusing when my mother told them, I often tried to imagine how difficult life must have been for the three little girls who lived alone in a traditional and conservative Zulu community in the Umsinga district of the early 1940s!

One positive outcome of growing up alone was the close friendship that developed between the three sisters. That closeness sometimes developed in strange ways. For instance, when my mother married my father, her youngest sister followed her, and they lived together. As fate would have it, she ended up getting married to the Ngqulunga family herself. As their children, we were cousins on both the maternal and paternal sides!

In marriage, my mother was blessed with daughters and, later on, a son. It was as if fate was rewarding her for having been a surrogate mother to her siblings. Ironically, giving birth to girls also brought her enormous difficulties in a culture that prized sons over daughters. Her in-laws expected—nay, demanded—that she gave their son an heir, which made her married life rather difficult for a long time. A beacon of hope was her husband, our father, who took a progressive view on having girl children and insisted in the face of fierce opposition from his family and the community at large that they be given the best education he could afford at the time. So it came about then that our family earned a distinction in rural Mahlabathini for educating girls, although neither my father nor my mother had formal schooling.

Together with their mother, these educated girls would become the anchor of the family when our father unexpectedly died in a car accident in Johannesburg when my twin sister and

To My Mother, the Pillar of Our Lives!

I were teenagers. At the time of our father's death, our mother was, we believe, in her fifties. For three full decades, she was the only parent we knew. Our children and her grandchildren were born into the family led by her, their Gogo. Although sickly in the autumn of her life, she lived on as if waiting for all of us, her children, to stand up on our two feet and raise our families.

Since her death four years ago, I have often thought about her significance in my life and the life of the family she has left behind. Like everybody who has lost a loved one, my sisters, my children, and I reminisce about her little quirks and often laugh about them. We see her life imprinted in the scores of female grandchildren, our children, who, having heard stories of the difficulties their grandmother and her siblings faced growing up as motherless girls (and a 'child-mother') in a conservative society, insist and demand equal treatment of boys and girls.

Although perhaps unique in its detail, my mother's story is quite common. Her struggles as a girl growing up in Umsinga and as a young woman in Mahlabathini are struggles that all women in conservative societies go through. The irony regarding the pressure exerted on my mother to give birth to a son—something that is quite common—is that most communities in Mahlabathini and beyond are largely dependent on women for almost everything. This is as true when a child is born as it is true when somebody has died. In my immediate and extended family's case, women, including my sisters, female cousins, aunts, and sisters-in-law, are anchors of the family, without whom everything would fall apart.

Just two months after my mother's death, my wife and I were blessed with another daughter—a third! We named her Ntsika. We did so in honour of our mother, who was the pillar (*intsika*) of her siblings' lives while she was a child, as well as of our lives and her grandchildren's lives in her adulthood. We also gave her a second name—Malibongwe—in honour of the Ngqulunga and other women who continue to be anchors

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in our lives despite a culture that insists on the primacy of men. My mother's memory and legacy live on in our daughter Ntsika, her siblings, and cousins! In the old tradition through which we communicate with and connect ourselves to ancestors, we say '*Sompisi! Mphemba! Godide!*'

Malibongwe igama lamakhosikazi!

Mologadi Salome Maphuthuma: An Influential Societal Mother, a Determined Biological Mother of Three, and a Firm Grandmother!

Charlotte Mokoatle

Hilt (2016) highlighted that motherhood combines raw emotions, experiences and the mother's hopes and dreams for her children. My mother, Mologadi Salome Maphuthuma, aged 64 years, is the true definition of a strong mother figure, having dedicated her whole life to nurturing and raising the strong, intelligent and resilient woman I am today (42 years of age) in addition to my two brothers, aged 37 and 29. She has four grandchildren, whom she also emotionally but firmly mothers, often with reference to her experience of mothering me and my siblings. Her influence and persuasive ability to help me be the best in anything I do have yielded remarkable results in my personal, academic, and professional journey. I have grown up knowing that I am a strong, intelligent and capable girl because of her daily motivation, encouragement and reminders. These reminders are applied not only to me as her daughter, but also to my siblings, my teenage son, cousins, our family, and relatives and neighbours. Mologadi is very outspoken, courageous, and supportive, and observing these characteristics throughout my life has brought out my confidence and bravery. It has instilled a sense of kindness and of being available to extend a helping hand towards others.

Her strength is that she mothered us while pursuing a demanding auxiliary nursing career, where she offered

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healthcare services day and night with dedication and empathy. She truly worked in love and harmony with fellow nurses and administrators in the various health facilities she served in her career, as many of them filled our home with regular visits and showered us with more love as we grew up. This was reflective of her interpersonal skills and natural love for people, which were reciprocated. She continued to improve herself academically, while passionately mothering us and holding full-time employment, and graduating in nursing in 2016 at the age of 56. This remarkable achievement illustrated to me and others close to her that no matter what circumstances present, you can reach for your dreams and achieve them with distinction. She often used this achievement and many others in her life as examples to motivate me in pursuing a doctoral degree, especially when I felt overwhelmed by the combination of job functions and my motherhood experiences.

As the eldest daughter of seven siblings, and senior daughter-in-law, since my late father was a firstborn, she wears the motherhood cap, profoundly holding both my maternal and paternal families firmly on her broad cultural and ethical shoulders. Today, she cares for her 95-year-old mother-in-law, who has shared that my mother is the person who can offer her comfort when she takes her last breath. This is a special accolade in the African culture as it signifies a peaceful, loving relationship between a bride and her mother-in-law, which is often deemed a challenging one to achieve. However, many would not be surprised, as this is her true character. Even as a retired nurse, she is still very much preferred as a reference point in our family and immediate community (young and old) for health-related advice, as that guidance comes with a level of authentic love and genuine care for humanity. This is the kind of love and care I have experienced my entire life and learned to pass on to others who crossed my path, especially students, as they journeyed through my academic hands in the past decade.

Her motherhood beliefs are embedded in the idea that one shall mother not only one's biological children, but also

those of their siblings and the community at large. Hence, she has led by example, as we have always welcomed and lived with extended family in our home, and currently, she is mothering her late sister's teenage son. She is also known to be someone one can rely on and contact at any time for advice on cultural, social, educational and, to a certain extent, financial matters.

Brock (2024) indicates that the role of motherhood to adult children may be to just listen, pray for them, or help point them down a road that moves them forward, walking alongside if need be. This is precisely what Mologadi has been doing for my siblings and me, since we have grown to be independent and employed adults whom she is truly proud of. Equally, I am a proud daughter to have been brought up, nurtured and cared for by such a determined role model; a force to be reckoned with.

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Mothers of *Insāniyat* and Ubuntu – The Shoulders on Whom I Can Stand Tall and Proud as a Feminist Scholar-Activist

Shahana Rasool

There are so many women whom I called mum, mother, grandma, and aunty who have raised me, loved me and inspired me through living *insāniyat* (humanity) or their spirit of *ubuntu* (humanity towards others—“*I am because you are*”). I recall these women and their imprint on my being human and my quest to make a difference in the world and build a better society through social work and education.

My father’s mum, my ma, could not speak much English, but her love and care came through in her beautiful smile and laughter. She was larger than life and transmitted her care through her total being, her food, and beautiful hot cups of tea—inspiring *insāniyat* through her food. All in the community knew her and came to her home to buy her achaar and dried mangoes. My grandfather died before my birth, so she supported her family by selling homemade goods. A truly warm and spiritual being, who was a pillar holding us up through many rough times, despite being a single mother who spoke almost no English.

My grandmummy, my mother’s mum, was the person I was most attached to growing up—I spent hours and hours in her loving arms. She was soft yet strong, warm and comforting, with an all-encompassing open heart. Her home was warm

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and welcoming. People from all over knew they could walk into her little one-bedroom flat (which housed five children) at any time and receive a warm plate of food. She prioritised love and education over everything else—the epitome of an *insāniyat* and *ubuntu* spirit. Her love was beautiful and enveloping—what a blessing to all that bathed in it—I was truly fortunate. My grandmother believed strongly in education and made sure that all her children were educated, even during Apartheid, despite limited funds. This commitment to education was passed on to my mum, who became a teacher.

My mother was that teacher who loved her ‘children’ completely and saw them as holistic beings, not just ‘learners’. She was not only concerned about their education from a knowledge transmission perspective, but she ensured that their capacity to learn was optimised by ensuring that those without food were fed. She would raise money from everyone to ensure that all the kids in her class had all the school necessities, such as books, shoes, uniforms, and stationery. She put her heart and soul into teaching and loving her children so that they could be successful. She embodied the African philosophy of *ubuntu*, knowing that it takes a village to raise a child. This is comparable to the word *insāniyat* in Persian, Urdu, Arabic, Hindi and perhaps some other languages, which is akin to the notion of all-encompassing humanity that recognises the essential beingness of the other. Her commitment to all her children in the classroom and ensuring they were educated and received sustenance and gifts was remarkable. Madame Rasool, as she was called, was much loved by her children and fellow colleagues for her smile, warmth, and generous spirit. It wasn’t just about the basic necessities but also making sure the kids had an end-of-year school party to celebrate life and their achievements. Defying this notion that poor people should only receive the essentials. She believed all children had a right to the basic necessities but also to love, joy and celebration to embrace their full humanity—the embodiment of *insāniyat* or *ubuntu*.

My mum passed away at the young age of 58 in a car accident with my dad and sister. She pursued her education

until her death, and just before she passed, she finished various courses and aced them. She was so proud of her achievements and my achievements. She was so excited when I got the scholarship to go to Oxford and would tell anyone who would listen.

The passion of my mum and grandmother for education was instilled in me, even though I was not conscious of it. I had no intention of becoming a teacher. Quite the contrary; I said I would never be a teacher. Somehow, the importance of transforming lives through education was gifted to me and passed on through my ancestry. I first fell in love with the transformative power of education through training and facilitation. A core component of social work is group work and education for liberation and transformation. I was passionate about group and community work as a student social worker. This love was crystallised in the training and development work I did for various NGOs at the beginning of my career. Watching people have an ‘aha’ moment in the process of facilitation or education is incredibly precious. This was later evident in training student social workers to learn the knowledge and skills for social work practice. Observing how young people absorb new theories and skills and develop into young professional social workers is so rewarding. As a child, I could never understand my mum’s dedication to her children, but as an educator, I can see the critical role we play in the lives of young people and the power we have as educators to make a difference in their world and communities through a decolonial and transformative education. I am not sure that I embody *ubuntu* or *insāniyat* in the ways my mum and grandmother did, but I know that the professions of social work and education are both callings, and engender the spirit of *insāniyat* and *ubuntu*.

Since I lost my grandmummy, ma, and mum, I have been blessed with so many mothers (too many to name—I hope you know who you are). The spirit of *insāniyat* and *ubuntu* lives in many South African communities, and besides the African community, is evident in the Indian and Muslim communities. My aunts have fed and loved me, my friends’ mothers have

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always welcomed me into their homes as mothers, and I have met many older, warm *insāniyat* women who have embraced me and made me a part of their lives. The lessons I have learnt about life, being *insāniyat*, and how to continue to spread *ubuntu* in every moment are priceless.

I thank every one of these beautiful, special, warm, loving women for all they have brought to enrich my life, which fills my cup and allows me to share with my students. It is essential that the spirit of *ubuntu* and *insāniyat* is passed on across generations and not lost in the midst of neo-liberalism and capitalism. Our duty is to ensure that the indomitable *insāniyat* and *ubuntu* spirit lives in our communities, families and souls, passed on from generation to generation, embedded in the pursuit of love, knowledge and transformation.

A Mother's Love Through the Eyes of a Daughter

Lisa Vermeulen

*Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.
Breathe in...*

On a mid-summer evening, a cool breeze gently hugs the outskirts of the Gold City. The sun is on her way to find a nestling home for the night in the West, navigating through a rainstorm rising from the horizon. A kaleidoscope of orange and yellow dances to the beat of the thunder as it paints the sky with infinite dreams. Dreams of hope, dreams of opportunity, and, most importantly, dreams of being loved. As the final stroke of light waves her magic wand, a phenological love is born in the form of seven bright and beautiful colours. A love so pure, a love so calm, and the only love that can bring peace to even the darkest storms: a mother's love through the eyes of a daughter.

Thinking back to when I was a little girl, growing up in a small, rural town in the Western Cape, I recall how my mother always had this saying when I was about to leave the house to go to school during the winter months: 'Where is your jacket?' 'I do not need a jacket mother; it is not cold outside.' Only to realise that she was right. She is always right. I needed a jacket because it was cold outside. Sometimes, I was too stubborn to admit I was cold and sometimes too proud to admit that I was wrong. Yes, I was also a teenager once who thought that a silly jacket might ruin my sense of fashion, instead of believing that a jacket might be the seven bright and beautiful colours we often see during a storm.

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You see, it is not about the jacket itself. No, it is about what it resembles: a mother's love, sheltering us from the elements and inking our body with seven magical colours as we wander through life.

I am obsessed with rainbows as they always remind me that light can prevail with only a gentle touch, even in the darkest times and most difficult moments in life. The first colour in the rainbow runs through my veins. I bleed when I get hurt, but blood also heals my wounds. Wounds of knife cuts on my back and wounds of love cuts in my heart. As red turns to orange, it becomes the colour of fire. The ever-burning fire that guides me over obstacles and across boundaries to reach for my dreams.

Then, yellow: my grandmother's favourite colour, the halo of an angel. I have also fallen in love with this colour. Strange, but it reminds me of sunflowers dancing in the fields of the North-West. And I know it will someday remind me of my grandmother as well.

Blue and green are the calming colours; my favourites. Always there to bring peace to my raging soul and to water any new opportunities that cross my path. New beginnings and new adventures simply cannot thrive without blue or green. Lastly, indigo and violet tie the final piece of my jacket, showing a rare beauty always disguised at the end of the spectrum.

It is undeniable that mother's love heals me. It guides me. It dances with me. It calms me. It makes me beautiful.

So now, on every mid-summer evening, I will look up to the sky. When the sun is on its way to find a nestling home for the night in the West, navigating through a rainstorm rising from the horizon, I search for rainbows. Hiding behind shades of grey, just waiting for enough tears to crack through the clouds: there they are, the seven bright and beautiful colours. A love so pure, a love so calm, and the only love that can bring peace to even the darkest storms. In the following brief poem, I say this is my mother's love through the eyes of her daughter:

A Mother's Love Through the Eyes of a Daughter

My eyes will follow the sun as it sets
A moment in time that my soul never forgets
Twinkle, twinkle, little ray of light
Together with storms you create colours so bright
Tears run down from the heavens above
To shower me with grace whenever life gets tough
A colour on the spectrum for each and every day, With
handprints in my heart, forever you will stay
I will wear you around my body when I am cold
Or carry you with me, because so I am told
Until the day we have to say goodbye, when you'll become
the prettiest rainbow in the sky.

Part 3

Letters and Poems

Letter to My Mom

Afezekile Moko

Writing a letter to a mother would easily begin with 'Dear mom', but to my mothers, it's 'Dear diary'. It is difficult to utter the word without tears streaming down my cheeks. 'Dear diary' is the easiest for me to communicate with you, so here we go.

Dear Diary,

Talking about her has always been difficult, and talking to her has been impossible for the past 21 years. Life is short, yet my time with her was practically non-existent. In the few years I knew her, she lived to protect and cherish me in the strictest but most loving way imaginable. Her affection was not limited to me as her daughter; it was extensive.

She made a grand entrance into a beautiful home, bringing light and a sweet aroma. Unfortunately, 40 years later was her grand finale, and we bid her farewell. To her siblings, she was love personified. To her nieces and nephews, she was a safe haven; to me, she was life.

Her love for family and friends has protected, supported, and celebrated me, and today, I am because you were.

Her love for God was unparalleled. Devoted to the Lord's ministry, she lived Matthew 28:19, which says 'Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.' She travelled far and wide proclaiming the gospel. To this day, I interact with her old colleagues from when she served on the national

Mama

executive committee for our church's most prominent student association, SDASA. They remember her for her love and tenacity.

She was fearless, steadfast, and resolute, a few characteristics I have been fortunate to have. She dared enter paths less travelled. Women in construction were not only rare but were unconventional, but she dared to be different. Twenty years later, she still roars and rumbles as her 'Woman in the Built Environment' banner continues to fly high. I aspire to be half the woman you were.

Spread your wings and continue to soar, *ntinga ntaka ndini!*

I was fortunate that she left me in the capable hands of another *mbokodo*. Her youngest sister; yet her age and stature proved that 'dynamites come in small packages.'

Losing your parents is challenging, and both your sisters shortly after is unimaginably devastating. In it all, she gained two more kids in less than 10 years; she single-handedly took it all on her shoulders for 17 years, a single parent to four kids, two girls and two boys, without complaint. She loved all of us equally and never made us feel inferior. Her strength, power and resilience were unmatched.

She would travel to the ends of the earth for her family, and face a raging dragon for her kids. She always loved and protected us, especially her girl kids. Her primary goal was for us to live a 'better life'; she worked tirelessly to offer us this life up until her last days.

I can never talk of my aunt without mentioning her love for education. Before joining the construction industry, she was a teacher and never let go of that aspect of her life. She was passionate about education; everything was a teachable moment, and her teachings are engraved in our minds and hearts.

She was passionate about educational development, so much so that she graduated with her third honours degree the year of her passing. A year after I started working, she strongly

Letter to My Mom

encouraged me to further my studies, which is how I earned my master's degree and am now pursuing a doctorate; her words were 'You never stop learning in this school of life.' And she lived up to those words.

She immersed herself in all that she did. She departed the construction space, recognised as an industry expert even by current construction moguls. She gave her all to her work and, in her senior years, was devoted to social upliftment and empowering rural development. She engrossed herself in improving other people's lives, no matter how much it took away from her.

She raised us to love and know God. She continuously instilled church values in the way we live and lead our lives. She accepted nothing less when it came to knowing God, and practised what she preached.

Heroes wear red capes, but this time around, my heroes are my mothers. May they continue to rest as we fly their banner high. Always on our minds, forever in our hearts.

A Love Letter to Mom

Smangele Zwane

Dear Mama,

From the moment you held me in your arms, I imagine you felt a mix of emotions—awe, exhaustion, and perhaps even a touch of betrayal. After all, I didn't look like you; my features mirrored someone else's. But little did you know that this bundle of joy would grow up to be both a defiant thorn and a delicate rose.

You were but a child when you had me, yet you shouldered the responsibilities of motherhood and the weight of societal judgments. How many would have persevered, knowing they still had a great distance to cover? You faced heartbreaks and changes, yet your strength was evident from the very beginning. It was as if you heard the starting gun and sprinted toward the finish line.

When I was a toddler, you took me to your haven in the Free State—a home you didn't get to enjoy. Raised by your aunt in Heidelberg from a young age, you bridged the gap between us. Despite the distance separating us, you provided continual support and unwavering love. Our bond, though thin, was unbreakable.

Cared for by your parents and a dozen siblings, this home became my fertile ground. I felt secure, even though I couldn't fully comprehend the depth of your sacrifices. Your cries, your pain, your prayers—they all centred around me. *uBaba*, my grandfather, witnessed your strength and determination. His eyes filled with pride whenever you visited us. You ran the race, extended yourself beyond mere responsibilities, "providing

Mama

not only for me, but for the whole family. You left an indelible mark on our lives.

I called you 'Sisi', like everyone else, but deep down, I knew you were more than that. Eight years apart—a vast expanse for a fragile bond to withstand. Yet, it held. Whenever you visited, I was drawn to you, seeking the scent uniquely yours—the fragrance of that Lace perfume. You taught me and your youngest sister how to tell time, and those moments remain etched in my memory as the happiest times—a little girl yearning for more moments with her mom, yearning for that motherly love.

Defiant

That's how I'd describe our teenage years. When I was around nine, you introduced me to a father. Unlike many parents, motherhood called you to settle down. And oh, how my sense of belonging blossomed when he said 'Call me Dad!' I felt patched and fixed in ways I didn't know I was open. The attention and love from my parents filled the gaps. But then came the inevitable storm of adolescence. That thin rope of connection we'd held snapped into pieces. I realised I wasn't like you—I didn't look, speak, or walk like you. I rejected your efforts to mother me, unknowingly pushing you away.

When I was 10 years old, your journey into complete motherhood and wifehood began. Looking back, I marvel at your strength, wisdom, and commitment. Like a mother hen, you orchestrated everything—from private schools to extracurricular activities. You encouraged my interest in tennis, celebrated every birthday, and provided me with a little girl's bedding—things that were mine alone. It was a lifestyle fit for Goldilocks in 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. When I lived in the Free State, the night-time stories spun by Sis Thoko (our ninth sibling) were my only glimpse of the families I dreamed of. Your plan was flawless—a daring feat even when others doubted you.

You pushed forward with the tenacity of a lioness guarding her cubs—a self-made businesswoman who defied the odds. You rewrote your life’s script from teenage pregnancy to running a household. I didn’t fully grasp your driving force, but the world praised you. They marvelled at my fortune to have a young mom. Yet I remained oblivious, acting out, keeping secrets, and delaying the revelation of my coming of age until you eventually found out. Our solace came when Dad returned home, and he, too, breathed a sigh of relief. I recall him thanking God that he didn’t own a pistol because who knows what would have happened in heated moments—I am forever thankful for the father you chose for me.

Still defiant, I rebelled. An argumentative know-it-all who poured her secrets into a diary—a diary where you unwittingly played a starring role. People often say young mothers grow alongside their children, forming a beautiful team. But not us; our friendship remained elusive. I wondered if babies held grudges, yet I never blamed you for taking me to your parents. If not me, then who? Perhaps Sigmund Freud’s abandoned theory of repressed memories holds the answer—a subtle influence on our conscious minds and circumstances.

Astrology, both Western and Chinese, warned that we were opposites who should never cross paths. It was eerily accurate. I began viewing the world through that lens—either a fitting pair or nature’s disaster. I stopped asking questions, and that’s when your hunger for a mother–daughter bond intensified. You kept telling me ‘So-and-so and her mother went out for Mother’s Day,’ or ‘So-and-so did this and that for her mother.’ But I remained unmoved, clinging to my explanation. I was determined not to challenge fate.

Ma, I apologise for the fracture in our bond. When you asked me to stop calling you ‘Sisi’, my lips couldn’t form the word ‘Mama’—that tender, cherished sound from one’s child. Instead, I settled for ‘Mawe’ and ‘Ma’. What an unconventional pair we became.

Hurt

Those feelings surged when I left your home as a young adult, driven by the pain of betrayal. I worked, studied, prayed, and grappled with loneliness. Another six-year gap separated our infrequent visits. As if adolescence wasn't challenging enough, we drifted even further apart.

Unathi

At 30, I became a mother and you named my son Unathi—for reasons known to you and one obvious to us both. He was an answer to both our prayers and journey. Amid life's trials, I returned to church, reconnecting with the rich upbringing instilled when I was sibling number 13. Following Jesus filled the emptiness; not the version used as a tool of oppression, but the Jesus who is my Lord and Saviour—a relationship we share. You know Him; He walks with us.

1 Corinthians 13:11 encapsulates the redemption and growth that unfolded when I became a mother: 'When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.'

As I listened, stumbled, and grew, I found my way back home. Your support, intelligence, strength, and quiet energy stitched together the tattered remnants of our bond. You are more than a sister, friend, or business partner—you are my mother. Mama, I now understand that God deliberately chose you to raise me despite the shock of teenage pregnancy. Our timing clashed by design, not default. You stood strong from the moment I was born—a pillar of resilience enduring 40 weeks (10 months) of pregnancy. You are to be praised.

Your love and labour extend beyond the garden you tend. They bloom in every season of my heart, like roses unfurling their petals. You care for my son when my schedule doesn't allow it, and your inability to be diplomatic and comments

about my bargaining skills at every turn make me smile. But Ma, sometimes you must let me be—we are different.

At dawn, you rise to refresh our home. Unathi's stationery collection grows, even though he doesn't need it. You cook, attend to neighbourly duties, and manage multiple projects. Yours is a life of purpose—a symphony of tasks, a canvas painted with love. Many claim to epitomise the biblical woman in Proverbs 31, the one a young prince should seek as a wife. But I know—you embody those virtues. Dad got it right.

Your whole and encompassing life reminds me to live, especially when depression tugs me in conflicting directions. The years we lost are now reclaimed. I don't question why I'm still cocooned under your roof; it's a chance and an opportunity we both needed. Many run their race at life's end, but I have witnessed your sprinting—you're right on time, Mama.

A bond of steel—unbreakable, unyielding. I believe that s/he who finds God is ministered in love and righteousness and promised a solid foundation. I no longer waver in our disagreements or fear the constellations that once predicted a doomed outcome. I met someone whose craftsmanship is unmatched—Jesus. He pulls unseen strings, weaving us together. Our bond defies the stars; it is carved in love.

In the sacred verses of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon imparts wisdom about the strength of close relationships. Not merely for marriage but for life's journey. I have tested this truth, woven it into my existence, and found it unyielding—like a cord of three strands.

'Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.' (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Mama, your chosen name for me resonates with love, resilience, and the now strong bond we share. You wanted to name me Bella (Isabella - devoted to God), inspired by a character from Danielle Steel's books. But elders hesitated, and so I became Smangele. Yet, in your eyes, I am both—a fusion of names, a testament to our journey.

Mama

Mama, you are my third strand—the one that intertwines with mine and with Jesus. Together, we stand firm against life's storms. Our bond defies constellations, transcends time, and echoes through generations.

With unwavering love,

Bella

Legacy of Resilience: Poems of Strength and Survival²

Lichelle (Shelley) Barry

womandla

we rise from the blood of warrior women
whose labour pains mark our history
women fearlessly imprinting the earth
with feet that stand firm in courage

we rise from African Queens
who balanced the sky on their heads
who roamed the lands
gathering sweet fruit to their breasts

we rise from dancers
whose bodies have translated music,
women who have called rain into being

we rise from nameless women
whose stories were never documented
by the writers of records

2 The poems contained in this chapter were first published in Barry, S. (2011). *The Travelling Poet*. London: The British Council and are republished with the necessary permission.

Mama

women who dared to pour their voices upon the
wind
and who were struck
for saying too much

we rise from women
who in '56 travelled with petitions
declaring their demands for emancipation,
women who have buried their families in '76, '85
and too many other years to count

we rise from women
who have scrubbed floors
eaten leftovers from the privileged
but who could ululate, whisper flowers into bloom

we rise from women
who raised us
with hearts stitched with faith
women who have been thrown down
in their homes
in the streets
in prisons
only to rise again – holding their fists to the sun

we rise from women
who taught a nation
that sent history in a different direction

you sister
you brother
you rise from women

invincible
powerful
African women

workday

she's cleaning bins & mopping floors
like every other morning
sticking her face in & out
of important looking offices

some ask
how are you?
bins are picked up
wiped with a fine-thank-you

perhaps
if they looked up
they could tell
from her eyes
that her mama died
this morning

her supervisor said
nothing can be done
schedule can't be changed
someone's got to
clean the bins
mop the floor
scrub the toilets

Mama

this morning
this morning
like every other morning

but today
she'll sweep dust
and think of Mama

ordinary

give me ordinary days
of sticky fingers
saying "no more sweets"
enough.

give me ordinary mornings/
tugging you from your dreams
rushing to school/
packing lunch boxes for two-
your sister. you.

give me ordinary scratches on the knee
tall tales of bad dragons

give me ordinary
tears/ needing me to nurse
the flu/some bug temporarily
resting in you

give me ordinary pleas
for a bedtime story
of little boys who grow into warriors

Legacy of Resilience

give me a snotty nose, a tantrum.

give me anything ordinary.

but we rise
to the black sun
of your slow departure

mothers don't know
how to say goodbye to children

mothers can't smile ordinary smiles
when her baby's eyes
are pools of mud-

where
her
heart
is
sunk
and
lost
in

for my mother

she made the world
her womb for me
love allows you that close

Reference

Barry, S. (2011). *The Travelling Poet*. London: The British Council.

Mothers Love

ChatGPT³

In the quiet whispers of the night,
In the gentle glow of morning light,
There lies a love, pure and true,
A love that's steadfast, through and through.

It's the love that cradles us from birth,
A gentle touch upon the earth,
Guiding hands that shape and mold,
A mother's love, forever bold.

In moments small, and moments grand,
Her love, a beacon, hand in hand,
Through laughter shared and tears we weep,
Her love, a treasure, ever deep.

In every smile, in every sigh,
Her love, a song that will not die,
In every hurdle that we face,
Her love, a fortress, in its embrace.

She sacrifices without a word,
Her voice, a song that must be heard,

3 Citation: OpenAI. (2024). *ChatGPT (3.5)* [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com>

Mama

In every whisper, every prayer,
Her love, a flame that's always there.

Oh, Mother's love, a boundless sea,
A gift that's given endlessly,
In every heartbeat, every breath,
Her love, a legacy till death.

So let us cherish, let's adore,
The love that's worth so much more,
For in her arms, we'll always find,
A love that's timeless, ever kind.

Verses of Valor: Celebrating the Matriarchs in Verse

Curwyn Mapaling

In this collection of poems, I traverse the landscape of love and dedication that defines my relationships with the most influential women: my wife, mother, and mother-in-law. Each poem is a tribute, a unique testament to their strength, sacrifice, and unwavering support. Beginning with my wife, whose resilience and love anchor our family; moving to my mother, whose teachings and sacrifices have shaped me; and concluding with my mother-in-law, whose entrepreneurial spirit and wisdom continue to inspire me. Together, these poems form a mosaic of gratitude, respect, and admiration, celebrating the essence of their being and the indelible marks they've left on my life.

Willow's Grace

In the quiet glow of dawn, I see your strength,
A fortress in your heart, breadth, and length.
With every sacrifice, your essence weaves,
A tapestry of love, in which our family believes.
You've weathered storms with grace, your spirit never
bends,
Your love, a beacon, on which our world depends.
The sacrifices made, in health, scars, and career,
Are etched in our hearts, in memories we hold dear.

Mama

Your mental fortitude, a guiding light so bright,
Through sleepless nights and days, you're our sight.
For studies paused, and dreams on hold,
Your story of love and resilience, eternally told.
Amidst the chaos, your love remains pure,
A testament to a bond so strong and sure.
Tired eyes may close, but your heart's wide open,
In every word of love and care, unspoken.
A prayer warrior, standing in faith's might,
With God at the centre, our guiding light.
Discerning and wise, in all you do,
Your guidance, a compass, so faithful and true.
To immortalise my words, my love, my ode to you,
For all you've done, and all you continue to do.
A mother's love, tireless, vast, and deep,
In our hearts, your love, we'll forever keep.
So here's my promise, on this Mother's Day,
To honour, to cherish, to love, and to always say,
You're our world, our rock, our guiding star,
In this life's journey, no matter how far.

The Essence of You

In the dawn's early light, breakfast in bed,
For twelve years straight, your love was spread.
Homework, Afrikaans mondelinge, by night,
Your lessons in diligence, our lighthouse of wisdom.
"Only the truly sick may rest", you'd say,
Teaching responsibility, come what may.
Running our household with a steady hand,
While father was working, you took a stand.
Working full time, yet always there,
Baking for church, showing how to care.
"Whatever you do, do it with might",
In your wisdom, I found my flight.
I bear your features, your quiet grace,
In my heart, you have a special place.

Verses of Valor

Teaching me to work hard, to stand tall,
Echoing father's ethos, through it all.
Now as a grandmother, your love anew,
To my son, showing the same care I grew into.
Mother, in me, your essence blends,
Your strength, your love, it never ends.
Through your sacrifice and steady hand,
I've learned to love, to grow, to stand.
A good mother to me, a grand to my son,
Your love's legacy, brightly spun.

To the Matriarch: A Tribute to a Pillar

In the tapestry of life, woven with resilience and grace,
Stands a matriarch, her strength encasing our space.
A single parent, with resolve so creatively vast,
Hustling, unwavering, her spirit unsurpassed.
Entrepreneurial spirit, wisdom deep and true,
In her daughter, these virtues grew, a reflection anew.
For raising her with love, through challenges untold,
A testament to her courage, fiercely bold.
A grandmother so dear, her warmth like the sun's embrace,
Accepting me as her own, with elegance and grace.
Thankful am I, for the roots from which love has flown,
In her, the seeds of greatness, lovingly sown.
So here's to you, for all that you have done,
Your legacy, a beacon, outshining the sun.
For in your footsteps, we find our way,
A beacon of hope, leading us every day.

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Letlhokwa George Mpedi
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