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Nonzwakazi

One Woman's Story in South Africa



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Introduction

My senior thesis in political science is deeply influenced by the concentration that I hold in African Studies. Though political study in international relations and human rights took me to South Africa, I returned with a critical eye, questioning the power dynamics of the political science I had been taught at an American university.

In my work and thought throughout this biography, I am greatly influenced by my professors and peers in South Africa who taught me about perspective. Mahmood Mamdani, author of *Citizen and Subject* and head of the Centre for African Studies at UCT, taught me to understand history as a debate, rather than a complete truth. Each human being throughout history not only contributed to its development, but understood it differently from one another. Our classes were structured such that we would read opposing viewpoints of the same event and debate them until we reached the revelation that truth does not exist in history: only perspectives do. Mary Simons, professor of Third World Politics at UCT, taught me about the existence of the third world in politics, something I had struggled to find within theories of international relations in the United States. Importantly, the “third world” has recently been affected and changed by the “first world” through exploitation and colonization – their histories are one, though that one history can be viewed from many perspectives. Mary taught me to locate the “third world” and the citizens of the third world within theories of international relations created within the “first world.”

The University, as always, plays a minor part in the learning that occurs when a mind encounters a new world. Ultimately, my education in South Africa came from the people. Friends and strangers both challenged me to see the biases with which I understood their country. They taught me that no matter how poorly the South African economy behaves, no matter how sad or corrupt the political scene might be, that the Republic of South Africa, as a single entity, will not become obsolete. The country will continue to exist and even more importantly, the people will still live and work and love and thrive and suffer within that country. The dismantling of apartheid was one of the greatest and most difficult political achievements of the 20th century – second only to the defeat of Nazism in World War II or possibly the fall of the Berlin Wall. On an international and political level, the end of apartheid meant everything – capitalism spread into South Africa with the eradication of sanctions; tourism became more popular; much of white South Africa fled to Europe fearing retribution from the formerly oppressed citizens; laws changed; Nelson Mandela was elected the first black president and a new constitution was written. The political implications were enormous. Yet the lives of people in South Africa have changed little. The social and economic oppression, which the majority of the country suffered under Apartheid, have remained significant influences on people today in South Africa. A successful political state does not necessarily mean that the people reap the benefits which politicians sow. The social devastation of history can last lifetimes.

In preparing to write the story of a South African woman, I have learned much about the social effects of apartheid which, though triggered by politics, are a monster with a maniacal mind of its own. Every social interaction with South Africans taught me the power of race and nationality which exists in spite of whether one is aware of it or invokes it. I learned to be aware of the way I am perceived and subsequently treated by friends, stran-

gers and even the law. I developed a consciousness for the power dynamics that accompany my persona and began to understand my viewpoint as one that is born of a specifically American context, influenced by and understood from a position of privilege and safety. I take pains to recognize these details because Gertrude Sgwentu is a close friend of mine who trusts me to write her biography. That trust comes not only from our friendship, but also from an understanding of the care that I take in considering the political and ethnic complexities of South African society. Entrusting me with the task of writing her biography, she understands the cautiousness I exercise in trying to understand and relate the effect the history of South Africa has had on her life, while remaining conscious throughout, of my many biases.

The first most fierce bias is that I cannot possibly perceive the explicit effects that race has on the psyche of all South Africans, especially those who suffered most for the color of their skin. When it began in 1948, nobody thought that apartheid would last. It was a pipe dream of the National Party which neither the people of the Union of South Africa nor the international political community would tolerate. They were wrong. By the time Gertrude was born in the 1960s, apartheid had become further entrenched. The greatest leaders of the resistance to apartheid were either jailed for life or murdered and it seemed that this passing phase had become a way of life. Gertrude grew up in this organized and segregated world where apartheid controlled all life insidiously, creating racist institutions which take the personal agency out of bigotry and bluntly impose it on every facet of the whole society. The first few years of her life, Gertrude remained unaware of the impact on her future, not only of the previous twenty some years of apartheid, but also the two hundred years of colonialism before that. A black, parentless farm worker in rural South Africa, she became increasingly aware as she grew, of the implications of her birth and the limitations that her location and status imposed. Yet as she better understood the complexities of life in South Africa, she became sensitive to the meanings of race and class within a society that not only defines human beings according to race, but limits their freedoms, their movements and even defines their interactions accordingly. In writing her story, I hope to be as conscious of race and power as she was forced to become within a society where such things essentially determine the status and survival of a human being. As I recognize race, however, I must not allow its impact to control me the way apartheid has controlled so many people. Our friendship has begun to destroy some of the notions of racial segregation imposed under apartheid and has helped to further destroy the ideas of the world into which Gertrude was born. I wish to record the story of the defeat of apartheid – in one woman’s life, demonstrating that the personal is political, that Gertrude’s personal struggle in defeating apartheid is also South Africa’s struggle.

As I attempt to understand a context within which to place my whiteness and my Americanness, I refer to a white South African author who has spent her life creating stories, which help to more specifically describe evil as it existed under apartheid. Nadine Gordimer recreated the destruction of communities, families and lives with words that the international community – and literate South Africans – could understand, so that the beauty of South Africa was captured and the devastation of that beauty could be understood for the tragedy that it was. I identify with Gordimer, not as a white person, but as an outsider. She was a white person who did not suffer the worst of apartheid’s oppression

including deprivation of education and healthcare, inevitable poverty, social degradation, abuse and the certain familial devastation, which apartheid imposed on non-whites. Yet Nadine Gordimer chose to challenge the injustice which flooded her world. In fact, one might say that she fulfilled the responsibility that comes with the status of privilege and education. I hold her up at the beginning of this project, as an example and a role model. She attempted, and succeeded, in representing people whom many thought she could not represent, as an outsider. She fought a battle in which there were two sides: fierce opposition and apathy. She chose to fight rather than ignore the injustice in her world. I do not claim to be fighting a great battle by writing this thesis. I desire to expose a beautiful brilliance who chose to reveal herself to me in South Africa: a woman who fights for justice in South Africa daily, but gets little recognition. By writing Gertrude's story, I am helping her to fight. Though I am an outsider, I still believe I have a contribution to make to a struggle that continues.

In her speech, "Speak Out: the Necessity for Protest," Gordimer quotes Franz Fanon who said, "Every time a man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said 'no' to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act."¹ According to Gordimer, my right to write about Gertrude comes not from the fact of my whiteness or American-ness, nor is it annexed because of those. Rather, my right and responsibility to write about another human being comes from the fact of my humanity, regardless of race or nationality. My project requires that I be as conscious of my humanity as I am of my race with every idea, every sentence that I produce. The purpose of the biography is not to tell the story of a black South African as much as it is to honestly examine the systems and traditions which shaped one specific and incredible woman: Nonzwokazi Gertrude Sgwentu. I look to Nadine Gordimer's work as an example of poetic and accurate language which portrays both the miracle and the tragedy of life under apartheid in South Africa. I can only hope to so acutely and humbly capture one life in writing. Doing so will contribute not only to the ongoing racial struggle in South Africa, but to humanity's struggle against our worst vices – one which Gertrude appears to be winning.

Race is not the only quality with the potential to divide Gertrude and me; nationality stands out as another critical surface differentiation. Although, even as all of my thoughts and ideas have been shaped primarily by an American context, I must maintain the understanding that I am not quintessentially American. Gertrude, also, is not quintessentially South African and does not represent all South African women. Most importantly, the fact that South Africa is a "developing" country does not mean that Gertrude is a "developing" person. Likewise, America's "development" is in no way a reflection of my maturity as a human being. Though this seems an obvious fact, it strikes me as a consciousness which necessarily summarizes the debate of cross-cultural and trans-development writing.

Chandra Mohanty refers to such mistaken classification as the labeling of the "third world woman." The details of Mohanty's argument are crucial to the process of writing Gertrude's biography. She reminds the "western woman" that women in the "third world" are not some class of undeveloped people waiting to be developed and represented. The trap of development is that it lulls people of the West into a false sense of success or superior-

ity. Clearly the "third world woman" must be oppressed by her poverty, her lack of employment, her inability to feed her children, her religion, her husband, etc, or so we think. We reach these conclusions often by imagining ourselves in those contexts of other women. In addition to being a diverse group of people within many different contexts (not simply the "third world"), "third world women" have talents and abilities, which help them to survive, the value of which people in the West cannot understand. Westerners look at a poor woman in the "third world" and see a dispossessed, disempowered, colonized woman in need of support and help. One problem with that evaluation is that it discounts the context in which need exists – women do not need economic revival independent of their countries. A second problem is that women might not be the ones who need the help. All over the world, if children are being fed, fields are being plowed, people are being comforted or helped – women are doing that work. If we think the "undeveloped world" is a frightening prospect today, think what it would be *without* the women. Women need to be respected for the work they are doing and for the work they can do. The West, furthermore, must understand the prevalence of ideas and solutions that exist within the "third world" for problems of the "third world." If any help is to be given at the human level, let it rather be humble assistance which understands the depth of brilliance which comes with experience possessed by "third world women."

Gertrude, specifically, is a powerful person. That is why we are telling her story. She is not a victim, nor is she a child or an idiot. Though South African society is a complicated racially hierarchical patriarchy in which black women rank the lowest on the power scale, Gertrude has much more agency in her life than most people in South Africa, black or white. She refuses to adhere to accepted power differentials and actively challenges them whenever they appear. That defiance produces the requisite agency to mobilize change. Clearly, she could have more power than she presently possesses – she is far from positions of power in politics or business. She does not, however, lack the power needed to reach her goals. Her immediate power comes from her personal life: her family and her clients of SAFE. These are contexts in which she is needed, loved, admired and given free reign to direct them as she will.

Mohanty talks about shedding the Marxist truism, "They cannot represent themselves,

they must be represented."² Gertrude can represent herself, and she does. I must give that self-representation space to manifest itself in her biography with the understanding that this is not an autobiography, though she is not incapable of producing one. Anthropologist Ruth Behar recorded the stories of a friend from Mexico who approached her, much like I was approached, with the request to record the stories of a woman's life – Esperanza. The beauty of Esperanza's story is that Behar translates it from Spanish herself, with all of the color and eloquence of an experienced writer. In an attempt to make Gertrude's story accessible to readers, I tried translating Gertrude's words completely. When I translated Gertrude's innuendoes, connotations and grammar into creative and proper English, I lost the spirit of the biography which is Gertrude. It is not enough to tell her story in my words. Gertrude must tell her story herself. How else can her dynamic brilliance be portrayed in her biography? After all, if one is to demonstrate her brilliance at any given time in her life, should it not be in the telling of her story? Gertrude is an expert

in many fields, but her specialty is the struggle that she has endured for the past 35 years. I believe that to write the story without her voice would be an act too closely resembling a form of colonialism – perpetuating the idea that Western tradition is the superior tradition, that proper English learned in Western schools will tell a better story than she who created it in the first place.

Finally, though we do not share a race, culture or nationality, Gertrude and I do, in fact, have a common ground besides our humanity: we are both women. I find the awareness of gender, when working with Gertrude's story, to be a strangely necessary cognizance. Gertrude and I are both women who consider ourselves feminists. Not only are we feminists, but all of the work we do as mutual friends, colleagues, students and teachers converge on the point of our feminisms. To recognize our womanhood seems an unnecessary detail because it is such an obvious component of our relationship. Yet our gender is a crucial factor in that relationship. Our closeness is a result of our gender, as well as our concern and work for women. Gertrude has centered her life and that of her family around working to help women empower themselves. In doing so, she has empowered me, as well as herself, to see the value inherent in and specific to our womanhood. The creative energy and support that can emerge from the relationship between women is a powerful tool when accessed with mutual respect and solidarity.

The ideas that merge to create a framework for this story are born of many lessons. Most of those lessons exposed themselves to me during my time in South Africa. Whether I was merely ready to receive them at that time or those are ideas born of a South African, an African or a post-colonial context, I am not sure. Regardless, I am grateful to the people of that place who helped and quite sternly challenged me to recognize all that I had to learn.

CHAPTER 1

Gertrude Today

It was Antigone who symbolized our struggle; she was, in her own way, a freedom fighter, for she defied the law on the grounds that it was unjust.

- Nelson Mandela



Before any beautiful thing is born, there's always little little things that will always try to stand on your way not to come, to get that thing beautiful, to really work to see the fruit of this beautiful thing. Because if you, when you pregnant, you start to not want to eat, the child is not going to have the nice energy, the fruit or anything, you know. You're going to say, "I can't eat" and the child is not fed. It's a fight. Somehow, it's God teaching...you and the child that this is a long walk, baby. This is life. You are about to be born, you are about to give birth to life that you came, found here.

But you have to struggle to eat though you don't feel like eating. Or maybe if you overeat, you might spoil this child, so you have to say, "I'm not going to overeat." And you're going to feel the kicks. The child is kicking now, you can't turn over if you are lying. Because you protecting this thing. If you turn over, you might spoil this thing and you might also be hurt. So God, in all these things, is teaching us "You not alone." You were born, Ali, by your mother. Your mother was with you. All the time, your mother is with you. Till you die, your mother is with you. You started, you were conceived in her. And she struggle with you trying to protect you and at the same time, you protected her. Because if you die in her tummy, she is also in danger. So you are two, always in life, you are so two in life. Always in life, you not alone. And I got scared when people say, "It's my life," and it's like that. Somehow I don't want people to say that because you never, it's never really just your life. Somehow there are other people's lives. And it's a chain, it's a net. Life is a net. And I got worried when people forgetting about those little things, that nice feeling, mad feeling of an unborn child.

And they forgot about the changes in their bodies. Your breasts suddenly itch, you got fat, you look smart. The changes, the changes, you know, it's the seasons that you go through when you pregnant. And why did God chose all these seasons for a woman? Why did he chose that before a child is born, there must be blood? Why did he chose there must be a pain before a child is born? He could have chose that before you give birth you can just get in the feet and take out the baby, you know. He should have chose many things, but he gives us, though you love this child, you know you going to have a pain, but you can't wait for this child, you know. There must be blood, there must pain, there must be struggle, there must be prepare, you prepare! Even Jesus was born in a stable, but there was a preparation there. They look for something that can a child be born there and ...Why after this you feel like you're so tired? So many seasons in one's life from the conceived moment, you know. And a woman is part and parcel of that. You can't escape it.

This story is one about the biological process of life. It is about the birth of a woman, of the family she conceives and with it, the creation of a new nation. It is about the birthing of a new nation by women – from the perspective of one mother of nations. She is the care-

taker of old ideas about struggle and survival born by the history of many lives under oppression; and she is the birthmother of new concepts of forgiveness and love – critical to the aging present.

Gertrude Sgwentu (S-gwen-two) is a South African woman, mother and activist who has accepted the notion integral to any idea of social progress: that human beings care for one another, understanding one another's needs as our own. Much of her work consists of counseling other women through debilitating situations of rape and abuse. Ultimately, she works to empower women to use their capacity as women to support themselves and their families and thereby to rebuild some of the most fractured parts of South Africa, including the family and the community, by starting with the soul.

The first time Gertrude and I met to discuss her work with women, she told me about a small business venture she was helping to start. Some of the women she counsels asked her to buy chickens so that they could start a business of raising and selling. This project was one of the only options of employment for these women; living in a country with a national unemployment rate of 30% and having only completed school up to Standard 2 and Standard 6,² Gertrude and her husband spent 500 Rand, roughly US\$80, to buy chickens, a heater and feed so that Mama Xhyambie and Mama Kinkana could start a business.

Gertrude completed this undertaking before her daughter's 11th birthday. I joined the small party, which just included the Sgwentu family and me, with my contribution of cake and a book. I was surprised to find that the Sgwentus didn't have the money to give her more than a great meal complete with chicken and the privilege of not doing the dishes. Gertrude's generosity with the chicken project misled me to believe her to be much better off than she actually is. In my experience, it is rare to lend people money when savings are low and birthdays or holidays are approaching. I found myself piecing together the few things Gertrude had told me about the way her family chooses to live and I began to realize that there was more to learn from this woman than just the story of one black South African.

Gertrude and her family have a remarkable ability to share their lives, their home, their family and even their money with any human being in need. She did not think twice about spending the last of her family's savings on someone who needed it. I asked, "What about hospital bills and school fees? What about groceries, birthday presents?" When others are in need, you can respond to their need with what you have or you can wait until you have enough to share. But you will never have enough to share unless you are giving what you have all along. These are the secrets Gertrude slowly revealed to me. She lives her life in a way that has been preached to me in church, school and books, but never have I seen it manifested in a person who so accurately demonstrates it and so thoroughly believes it.

When I interviewed some of the women with whom Gertrude works, this concept of sharing became even clearer. They have a completely unique understanding of wealth, which did not include notions of accumulation or ownership. Through Gertrude's translation, they told me, "Wealth is sharing. Whatever you have, you can always give some away. You

don't worry about how much you have compared with others because you're not fighting, not climbing – there will always be enough when you share.” As I lived and worked with Gertrude and these women, I learned that sharing does not mean giving away old unwanted things. It means giving of yourself, your livelihood and your necessities, because you care about the needs of others as deeply as you care about your own. Gertrude put those women first financially on Thania's birthday because sharing is the only way to ensure that her family will be forever wealthy.

To compliment her unique understanding of wealth, Gertrude possesses a rare ability to place need in the perspective of a nation which reflects an economic demographic similar to that of the rest of the globe. In a world where the 225 richest people own as much wealth as the world's poorest 47% people and the three richest people own more than the 48 least developed countries,³ developing a healthy perspective on wealth can be extremely difficult. South Africa has a similarly extreme disparity between rich and poor, even after the end of apartheid. The following statistics are taken from an article written about South Africa in the Economist in 1995. “If the white 12% of the population were a separate country. . . its standard of living would rank a comfortable 24th in the world, only a little behind Spain, according to the United Nations' Human Development Index. Black South Africa, by contrast, would rank 123rd, just above...Congo. White South Africans are on average nine times richer than blacks.”⁴ Those statistics reflect not only individual income (measured by Gross Domestic Product per capita), but also quality of life. The Human Development Index (HDI) measures “life expectancy, educational attainment and income” in order to rate the “human capabilities in three fundamental dimensions – a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.”⁵ Black and white South Africa do not remain separated by wealth only. Their standards of living, agency, and quality of life also differ from each other greatly, in proportion to their wealth.

Ultimately, Gertrude does not simply seek economic opportunities for the women with whom she works. She seeks to economically empower women so that they can rediscover their dreams, which have been rendered moot by their economic situations. The economic injustice suffered under apartheid proved to be so destructive, poverty hearings were held for South Africans to voice their grief. The hearings revealed, in part, that three out of five children in South Africa “live in poor households and face abuse including sexual abuse,... fractured and unstable families,... and alcohol abuse leading to child abuse.”⁶ Material poverty itself does not cause the deprivation of hopes and dreams. Dreams disappear when an entire community is dispossessed of educational opportunities, economic potential, land and rights.

Understanding this process through which dreams are abandoned, Gertrude started the foundation for South African Female Empowerment (SAFE). Through SAFE, Gertrude counsels women who are recovering from rape or abuse and trains women to counsel others. She lends money, as she did with the chickens, to women with strong ideas for starting businesses. She also provides courses for the acquisition of multiple types of skills and connects people with jobs.

When we met in 1998, Gertrude and her husband Boy had been doing this work for 10 years. They started when their first child, Evelyn, was newly born. Gertrude had already begun her life long habit of counseling, casually discussing problems with acquaintances from church. Through this informal counseling, she met a woman named Lindiwe.

GERTRUDE: I think I'm around 23 years old...Lindiwe was so sweet girl and...she was staying with her mom and her sister's two daughters...I ask about the two girls, she told me her sister died because people thought she was a pimp of the police and they burned her. At the time of necklace...they burned her to death. And (Lindiwe) stayed with her children now and she was looking after them and her mom. And she did not have a job at that time...her mom just had a operation of removing her womb when I met her.

...Slowly I got used to her, and I told her she should finish her standard ten. And she told me, “No, I can't,” because of the problems that she don't have money. And I said to her, “Okay...I will see what I can do. I will talk to my husband about that.”

...I always see there's people that are selling second hand clothes in a box...and it's R100...And I told Boy about Lindiwe...I told him...I would love that we must buy these second hand clothes for Lindiwe. And we did.

Anyway, I'm pregnant and we don't have money. Really, we don't have money. And we'll buy these second hand clothes for Lindiwe. We said she must pay us back, not pay us back the money that she made, pay us back the money that we...used this to buy the things...And what I did then, I took the, actually Boy, it was Boy's idea...He said to me, “Take these things and put them in small boxes and give her one box and tell her you want how much. Don't give her any huge box and ask her to pay the whole huge amount. Then you can see if she's a person to work with.”

The following day, I went to her, to the flat where she lives. It was not far from our flat. I find, Ali, in this flat there was no water, they have to walk to go to the toilets, they have to go and ask other people for water and there were bunch of womens staying there. I think in Lindiwe's flat, there were like four or five sort of like families. Ooh, and I saw Lindiwe's mom. She was lying there after the operation...(exhale)

You know, when you struggle – like you don't have money – and you sort of like see you got enough to help other people. And I started to say, “I got enough to help these people. I have to help these people somehow.”...And she showed me more people. They were still young, man. They were really young, these guys.

Ali: Were they younger than you?

Gertrude: No. But I mean young to do things – you know, to prosper or to study or to do better things in life...I saw those that I think, “They can still do it,”...and I did not bother worry about them.

I worry about those that I can see they really – education was deprived from them. They really need empowerment or upliftment just up to a little corner that can start to dream, you know, to bring them their dreams.

And I share, I told them that I’m going to bring clothes to them or they must come to my flat and I’m going to show them what is inside that...box...In fact, I was honest to say to them, “I bought this with a big box and I’m sharing that amount amongst you guys and I want you guys to make maybe...fifty rand in this box or maybe sixty rand. Make that. And when you come, come pay my money and come show me that you did make the sixty rand. You know, some will do, some won’t do...Then that’s when you start to see who do you want to work with, who’s really taking responsibility from that.

So, from that, Lindiwe did go to school with the other group. I also went back to do standard ten with them. I think I just wanted to get, to give them confidence to be there. I spoken to the Technikon in Strand...and we got them there. I said, “These guys can’t afford all the books that you want...Can we try this...Can you try to get them books?...What can we do? They want to go to study.” So we did that with them.

Gertrude sat through the standard ten exam four times. One sitting was for her own matriculation, one was with Lindiwe, one with Boy and one with a group of women she sent back to school through SAFE. She does not stop at arranging classes for adults – to have teachers and fees paid for – but she goes through the process with people. Under apartheid, many people learned to subjugate their dreams rather than follow them at the risk of getting hurt. Gertrude refuses to accept that lesson. By going through the standard ten exam with people, she gave them the courage to complete it and get their high school diploma. She convinces people not to listen to the voices that tell them their entire lives that because they’re black, they will never reap the benefits of their work.

After working with Lindiwe and others selling used clothes, Gertrude worked with their community. Lindiwe’s squatter community had been forced to move twice when Gertrude and Lindiwe met. Called a shantytown or squatter camp, Lindiwe’s community was an illegally settled community, which developed as one of many squatter camps in South Africa. These camps were the result of resistance to the government’s goal of placing Blacks in townships, designated areas for non-whites, who went to the cities to work. They were seen as “a grassroots revolt against the migrant labour system.”⁷⁷ Because they did not own the land, people in these camps were labeled “squatters” by the government and the term became a common part of South African English. Apartheid has officially ended, but squatter communities remain. People lack the financial capability necessary to move into legal neighborhoods. Whole squatter communities are still dispossessed by the government as

well as owners of the land they illegally occupy – even six years after the beginning of a majority black government in 1994.

Lindiwe’s community was displaced in 1988, two years after the abolition of pass laws and enforced racialized living areas. The move was the third of three that the entire community of roughly 1,000 people made together. Finally, they were squeezed into an area between the beach and the mountains – just far enough from each so as to not derive any of the benefits either has to offer – about a mile from Gertrude’s house. They named it Nomzamo meaning, “One who strives or undergoes trials.”

Gertrude: So, then they started Nomzamo...And they were chased away from that to the other place also next to Sir Lowry’s Pass. And when they were there, they started to need building material. Again, we went looking for them, looking for Lindiwe. And when we got there,...Lindiwe’s mom was very sick. When we got there, oh, they were in a plastic house. There was few of zinc, but [the plastic on the outside of the house] was like making “Wha, Wha” noise.

Okay, we said, we will try to help them. And Boy just went around that day to check the farmers that he knows and ask about the building materials for these things and really farmers said, “Okay, we will do it for you. We will get the things.”...Some will say, “Oh, Boytjie⁸, is it you? We will get you some...Get a truck.”...And then we share amongst all these women that we know, but mostly went to Lindiwe. And what we also used to send – her mom still thank me for it – is to send lot of food to them...You get stuff that are cheap, then you buy a lot, though at the time we had only one child, Evelyn, and she was young. We buy a lot and then we go and drop it by her and say please, she must share with the other people. And we could help her because at the time Lindiwe was not working and they had nothing else.

And then that group started to tell others about what I’m doing and yeah, that’s how I started. It’s really a hard way to explain how I started. It’s really hard and it just expanded and expanded and I will counsel rape victims unaware of I’m counseling really, you know...You find yourself counseling domestic violence. You find counseling marriage affairs, unaware, totally unaware. And at the end, you start to say, “But I was counseling a marriage thing here,” or “I was counseling a domestic violence.” Then I started to go to do courses. More and more and I started to send people to courses. At the beginning...I did not trust myself...I thought I can talk to the group of people and give it to the social workers or to people that are in that field...And especial there was white people that were doing that.

And also...we tried to get people to get in jobs. We used the...advantage of people that knew Boy around, they did not know me...We used that by saying, “We got these two womens that we know. They are honest people. But we’re not saying they can’t do anything wrong. But as far as we can tell, they are honest people. Can you please give them a job?” And we get others in Van Riebeek Hotel, just not far from us and in, sometimes in

old age homes, jobs sometimes in cleaning houses or restaurants...You know, that's how we sort of like expanded, man.

This enterprise which Gertrude and her husband started at the beginning of their marriage slowly evolved into the fully-funded clinic that it is today. It is a place where ideas and lives are changed because one woman was brave enough to break out of the molds set for her by a racist society and follow her intuition to help others rediscover their own dreams.

I'm full of knowledge, I can teach many. I can teach many about surviving, I can teach many about starving, I can teach many about psychology, I can teach many about pride, I can teach many about compromising, I can teach many about love, I can teach many about forgiveness, I can teach many about faith. Maybe hope leading to faith or faith leading to hope. I can really teach many. Today, we struggling to have jobs. We are told we are not educated enough. What is education really? I think education is about experience. Really, you do things. Even if how educated you are, you might not be able to survive to do things right because you never experience them. I wonder if there's no... job that just need an experience of what we have survived before. I wonder if we can ever given this chance. I wonder if I will ever be given a chance to do this. Anyway, I'm making my way to that. I'm giving myself a chance. And it's hard. It's hard, it's hurting, and it needs me to just be strong and compromise, as many that are doing that.

Gertrude has had to struggle every day of her life. Living as a black South African, with no family, no money and the weight of history holding her back, she has made a life for herself. In this world where she was meant to be a servant, a slave to the white race of South Africa, Gertrude has resisted every pressure which attempted to degrade her potential. This is the story of her victory within a country that created some of the greatest human triumphs and some of the most devastating human tragedies.

CHAPTER 2

Childhood

To be an African in South Africa means that one is politicized from the moment of one's birth, whether one acknowledges it or not.

An African child is born in an African Only hospital, taken home in an Africans Only bus, lives in an Africans Only area, and attends Africans Only schools, if he attends school at all.

When he grows up, he can hold Africans Only jobs, rent a house in Africans Only townships, ride Africans Only trains, and be stopped at any time of the day or night and be ordered to produce a pass, failing which he will be arrested and thrown in jail.

His life is circumscribed by racist laws and regulations that cripple his growth, dim his potential, and stunt his life.

This was the reality, and one could deal with it in a myriad of ways.

- Nelson Mandela



GERTRUDE: ...Nonzwokazi Gertrude...these two names I love them very very much,...I draw strength from them, I draw love from them. They got a wonderful meaning. Nonzwokazi's meaning is the deepest beauty. And my, my granddad used to call me Nonzwany which is the...beauty of the water when...it's in the morning or late afternoon when you see the colors of the water and you look deep into it, you see...it's strong, it's not intimidated by anything and it's a beautiful thing. You know when you stand on top of the pool or anything, the natural one, and you look down there, you see maybe your reflection and you feel like, "I wonder what is happening at the deepest on it?" That name is like that, the beauty of the water, the dignity of the water. So that's when you look at the name Nonzwany. And Gertrude is the strongest woman who never falls. It's a...old German name...So I love my names, I want to be called by both.

Gertrude, named Nonzwokazi (Nun-zwo-ga-ze), was born in Molteno, South Africa as the illegitimate third child of eight to a young woman whose husband worked far away, on the railroads. When the pregnancy was discovered, her father stopped coming home. Soon after her birth, Nonzwokazi was sent to live with her grandparents where they worked on the Birch farm about seventy kilometers from Molteno, in Dodrecht. First, however, the elders of Molteno performed the Xhosa ritual of marking a new born child. The marking included cutting off the tip of her left hand pinky at the middle knuckle and making small one inch cuts on her face, the joints of her arms and legs, at the waist and on her hands. The markings signify a richly traditional Xhosa heritage into which Gertrude was born, but in which she did not grow up. They tried to mark her quickly – within ten days of birth – so as to send the bastard child away as soon as possible.

GERTRUDE: The tenth day, they believe they have to...my situation, it's like they did some special things, as I said to you, because I was born out of this thing. They tried to cover things within 10 days.

Like cutting of the finger, do some cuts and give it to the forefathers. You know, the child to the forefathers. Because they do the cuts when you still young...This finger [the left pinky], they cut it and they put it with the cow's mess...In a really tradition house...there are...four or six poles that are joining together like this. So you put that cow mess that has got a part of your finger there. Because they believe the forefathers will come and fetch it in there. And your blood, you bled into it. And also, there is something that they doing also with your cut. They cut your joints and I think they cut there as well, in the middle of your hand and here on your wrist. But mostly, your joints, at the back, right on your waist...

I think I remember of this by seeing what was happening to other children. And I will also pick it up when they say, "Oh, your finger! Nonzwokazi's finger was cut when she was ten days." Or maybe, "She was healed when she was ten days."...Because they sometimes doing that when your...umbilical cord healing and this also must healing. It's how

they count it...Sometimes I ask question, but I think there's always a fear of people ask too much questions, what will those questions lead to?...Why was this? Why did you decided to do this? Can you tell me about this one? I'm sure they can already hear when I ask any question, it's always leading to something, so that close it.

And what makes me to don't have access exactly about my life is that in a black tradition, I don't know about white,...to show a respect to a person, you don't ask questions. You're not allowed to ask questions. You're not allowed to ask questions to your mother, your father or the elder people,...so that culture cut you down and if you want to do it, you must know you have crossed the borders of that culture and you don't mind...And also I don't think I mind as much, but my mother is using that culture not to be able to talk to me. And my aunt.

The process of marking Gertrude is one of many traditions that she was exposed to throughout her childhood, only to understand or question them later. Even today, she cannot explain what the markings mean.¹ When she arrived at the farm where she would live with her grandparents, shortly after she was marked, she was given a birth date and a Christian name. Her official I.D. birth date is July 27, 1963. She believes, however, that she was actually born July 26, 1964. As a result, in the two years I have known her, she's been perpetually 35. Her Christian name did not come from her grandparents, it came from the owner of the farm, Mrs. Birch.

Nineteen sixty-three, sixty-four was a controversial time in more urban areas of South Africa. Nelson Mandela and ten other African National Congress (ANC) members had spent almost the entire year on trial for acts of treason and sabotage against the apartheid state. Educated men who had seen all the failings of the anti-apartheid movement, they had started a military wing of the ANC in order to wield more power in their struggle to form a non-racialized society. The ANC was a national anti-apartheid organization founded in 1912 for the coordination of resistance to oppressive policies by Whites. The military wing was called Umkhonto we Sizwe or "Spear of the Nation." They were banned from South Africa in 1958 and operated underground. By 1963, protest marches or gatherings had also been deemed illegal. The bannings not only meant that all leaders of these protest groups, called "terrorists," must go into hiding and undertake activities with caution. It also meant that large groups of black South Africans could not meet either in protest or discussion. It meant that uneducated black South Africans did not easily have access to the struggle. On June 11, 1964, the leading ANC activists were sentenced to life imprisonment. With the leadership in prison, the movement became less organized and more factionalized.²

Gertrude was born into a different world than that from which the ANC had been banned and the leaders locked away. In rural Dodrecht, people were already isolated from the movement geographically. Their struggle was against the farm owners, not the government. Enough generations had passed since the turn of the century, when land disputes began to be settled, with the land in the hands of the Whites, that most rural black farm

workers did not even think to question the disparity of land ownership. Even if they did, they were remote enough that no movement existed for them to access, nor could they have survived if they resisted the demands of their employers. Whites in South Africa possessed 87% of the land whereas non-whites possessed only 13%.³ Those percentages were established under the 1913 land act, which made only 13% of the land available for black ownership.

Racial oppression had reigned long enough that, in many areas, it did not have to be enforced. According to race and family, many people fell into the proper roles of power and subservience because there was no context within which to question it nor a liberal education with which to examine it. Among the feelings of helplessness, fatigue and hunger, the absence of dignity, pride and agency were not as starkly recognized by rural farm-working Blacks.

GERTRUDE: ...You know they're not educated, their parents are not educated and she knew everything. Each and every child that was born on that farm, she would record things for them. Nobody knew about date of birth. Nobody knew about birth certificate. A child must be written down the information - what time are you born. She's the one who knew. Because nobody was educated enough to know that. She could speak Xhosa purely.

ALI: This is a white woman?

GERTRUDE: White woman.

ALI: English? or Afrikaans?

GERTRUDE: She was English. That was Mrs. Birch. She was a German woman married to an English guy from UK, from England. So, they were Birch family...We called her Nontegana because she was a fat woman.

And, also Ali, what was nice is, she gave me the name Gertrude. And when she gave me the name Gertrude it was there with the father of the Roman Catholics that was a German guy. This guy used to come and have tea with them. It's so funny. When she told me about this, she said this father's surname was Buha. It's a German surname. And Father Buha was very respected by the Xhosa communities in the Eastern Cape. He was sort of

like one of the first ministries that came to that area. For people believed in him, you know. They somehow did good things because he was around them, you know. Everybody that, from the community, if you say, "I was at school at the time of Father Buha," They will say, "Oh, she must be good person," you know, because of him. And that marvelous guy, he decided I must be Gertrude, you know.

And what is nice also, Nontegana did the good things for these people, for the area. And she said when Father Buha said her name must be Gertrude, "I said how can you read my mind because I also thought of Gertrude?" So, in the same time, that happened in their minds, my name must be Gertrude. And when he was blessing me by this name, he didn't say life is gonna be easy. The meaning of the name is telling me life is not gonna be easy, you know. So, that gives me strength.

As a young child, Gertrude's life consisted mostly of school, church and work. Through school and attention from Mrs. Birch came her individual development as a reader, an English speaker, a superior student and responsible leader. In church, she learned the Bible and she went to trivia competitions where she learned her potential among peers. With farm work, however, came many of the physical problems which have lasted her entire life, and her intimate understanding of poverty and struggle. Even 30 years later, she has a crooked arm from a broken bone which never healed properly and cramped feet which developed as a result of years of walking barefoot on top of already existing foot problems. When she wasn't working, Gertrude spent time being a child - playing, making believe and dreaming of ways to escape the life which she defines today as a nightmare.

School

The farm school, Lion Hill, was built on the property of a neighboring farm and run by the farm owners in the area. It existed for the children of farm workers and therefore had an all black student population, and faculty of two. The school only went as high as standard four (grade six) and beyond that, farm workers had little opportunity for education. In fact, when Gertrude started school in the 1970s, the majority of blacks in schools were in the pre-primary and primary levels. Few blacks were in secondary and tertiary school levels – and almost no farm workers were. Gertrude's generation was one of the first to go through Bantu education which started in 1953 as an attempt to "subjugate Africans psycho-ideologically to the designs of apartheid."⁴ Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa until 1966, H.J. Verwoerd said of education for blacks, "If the native in South Africa today in any kind of school in existence is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake...There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labor."⁵ The farm schools, in accordance with "African" schools or "Bantu education" throughout South Africa were not created to better the lives of black children. Insofar as school is a process of inculcating students with their role in society, apartheid schools accomplished their goal to educate

black students at such a low standard that they would inevitably be the least qualified race group for any higher education or occupation.

GERTRUDE: Those children from these farms behind here – they all go to Lion Hill School...and you must check how far is Lion Hill. There's no other school...It was built by the neighbor of that farm and then the farmers will have a say on it...So, I mean, these guys are control...I come from this control. Besides the big apartheid, that small control of one human being. All these children go to that school

You walk...to that school, and I tell you, you got beaten if you late. You must be at school at 8 o'clock. You going to have a cane, you going to have punishment and everything. You just know you must be there. And this is...a rough road...and you just barefoot.

When I got to school, I could speak English through [Mrs. Birch]. She will teach me English, she will teach me. She will always laugh when I talk, you know. She will always say you have to speak. Sometimes I'm angry, I don't want to speak English because I'm not looking at the future, you know. I don't know anything - why is this language? And she said, "You have to speak," with a tough voice, "you have to speak English, Gertrude, because it's good for you. It's gonna be good for your future."

From the way she describes it, school was one of the most comfortable places for Gertrude in her childhood. It was there that she met teachers who wished to adopt her and people who could see and encouraged her potential. She spent her days as a prefect of students, leading prayer and caring for the mortar statuettes of saints which line the driveway leading up to the school. Her favorite recollection is that of being able to ring the bell and pray to the Virgin Mary – one statue only prefects could address.

When the children had holidays from school, they would gather wood for the winter and work at a neighboring farm. This work was some of the most strenuous and difficult for Gertrude who continued to amass physical problems which went unattended.

GERTRUDE: You know...in many times before, I did not enjoy the venture of climbing the mountain or going to the mountains. Because you see that mountain that you seeing there. I'll show you closer. We used to go up there. This time you already bringing wood down because you wake up about 6:00 and you go and collect woods there. And this time you already back. Or maybe before breakfast, before 8:00. You already back...You must collect these things till a high stack like this on your holiday, each holiday, that's for people to use when it's winter. In summer, you always collect wood for winter. And even in winter, you do. But, so a mountain or a na-

ture for us, it was not for, just for venture, for enjoying it, we hated it because it was part of our struggle, you know...I don't know, it was a miserable, it was a misery to look at it. You're looking at these things, you seeing the beauty. I don't see the beauty. Because it brings back all the, you know, all the things...Slowly I'm seeing it, but not like before. You know, because you need to heal that and then start to see things in another eye.

Here [passing a neighboring farm], in holidays, this guy plant mealies. I used to work here with this broken arm, I work here. You see those people [black workers tilling the soil], you see they doing something there? And over there, behind there, there's a lot of mealies behind that thing [barn]. He owns it. And we work here and carry heavy bags. And you must never think a child more or less, a little bit older than Siphon [seven years old], can't do something on this. We work here. I don't know how much we used to earn or what, but you just work here, I'm telling you.

And this bridge, we used to play here and stand, stay there and throw stones, but it was lot of water. And play and play. You forget maybe you have to go town or maybe you coming back from town or from school. You play and play. When you start to think it's late, you run up here [the direction of the Birch farm]...you run like anything.

The Birch family will walk with their horses around here. This was their favorite place... I used to really like this. This place [an open field adjacent to the Birch family house] I remember with horses. I used to say, "One day I'm going to own a horse and ride." I never rode a horse, even today, but I'm still working on it. And they play and they let them jump over. We will just stand as a group of children watching them. I think in each and every of us we wishing, we hope we can be them. Over here, they will play with their children and jump and they, you know, they just look at you. You know, it's like, if it were me, I would just call one of these children and say, "Come, I'll show you how to do it." No, they just look at you. And when you see them, all of you, you must greet, "Molo, Baasie" "morning baas" or "afternoon baas," anything. And if you see their children, you just want to be seen, you push each other that you must be on the other side, that you be seen.

This scene is a familiar one to anyone who has ever been to areas of South Africa where there are groups of small children discovering otherness. Outsiders, especially if on horseback or in a fancy car, coming to a farm or going into a township will see plenty of children – barefoot and dusty – standing, as Zoe Wicomb so accurately describes, "their fingers plugged into their nostrils with wonder and admiration."⁷ Like children who stare blankly at a camera after begging to have their picture taken, they know only that they want to look important, but don't understand how. They want to be seen by the boss children. When they see a Mercedes Benz, they want to see the car and even to be seen by it – but the self-importance they reveal in pushing to be seen does not develop into the image they imagine. They are just dusty kids, pushing to be seen by whatever it is they sense to be important.

The contrast between the amount of attention given to children with money and that given to poor children is overwhelming. It is one that exists in every country – and especially from country to country – all over the world. Yet in South Africa, the two economically disparate groups – the very rich and the very poor – live and interact so intimately that the shock of the contrast is unavoidable.

Competitions

As she got older, Gertrude was more involved with the church – entering competitions and beauty pageants in the Eastern Cape. She was instantly successful in competitions, charming judges with her smile and winning Bible competitions with her years of alone time spent reading a Bible. Because she did not know her parents, Gertrude long considered God her parent. She spent time with the Bible in lieu of being with a family or a mother. Ironically, Gertrude faced pressure from her extended family not to participate or succeed in these competitions as well as in school. She had been so much more successful in school and church than any of her relatives who, out of jealousy, tried to hold her back.

GERTRUDE: I remember one day when I was supposed to go for a competition about the New Testament and the Old Testament, as a Roman Catholic child. My grandmom didn't want me to go. Simply because her youngest daughter, that was little bit older than me, was not good on doing it. And so she didn't want me to go and compete with her daughter. Because she knew when I'm there, her daughter is not seen. You know, I always take in charge over things. You know, or maybe control, I will be known.

Anyway, they knew me, they knew me. Aliwal-North, East London, Queenstown, Dordrecht, they knew there is this child...They knew Nonzwokazi from Lion Hill is coming, you know, and I'm going to know the answers...For me, reading those testaments, those New Testaments and Old Testaments, was a parent. I had a time to do it because I was hiding behind it. It was where I was finding comfort, you know. And they didn't need that. They had their parents around them. So for me there was more meaning than just words. So that's why I was good in it. You know, I was seeking the angels, I was seeking God, I was seeking Jesus, I was seeking many things in it and they didn't need that; they had their Jesus and angels because they had families around them, you know. So but that ended up making them jealous and then their parents. And I think they couldn't understand. You know, people in the farm, they think very narrow. There's a lot of competition because it's just a tiny group of people making competition to each other. So how can I just become so excellent and I don't have my parents here, you know?...

So this time we were going to do this competition in Aliwal-North, which was far from Dordrecht...When the time came to go, suddenly my grandmom didn't want me to go. I was torn apart. I was very hurt. And, all the others left to go to Lion Hill which was our school and then the bus was going to pick them up there to go to Aliwal-North. Aliwal-

North was a town. And I stayed behind in the farm. All my age and the older age was gone. Sort of boys and girls. I was lonely and hurt.

[Later] And, when I got back, back to the house, my granddad's house, I found the guy that was working for the Roman Catholic there and the other woman from Aliwal-North there. And they were there to plead my grandparents to let me go. But it didn't help. They didn't let me go...This thing was going to take the whole week - it was starting on Friday. This day was on Thursday because the starting was on Friday. So...that Sunday...I went with my grandparents and my aunt, Ethel, to this place, hey, to this church, where the children were competing. It's a big huge place where youth comes together. And then these people kidnap me, for me to stay there. When my grandparents left, they left without me.

And now, at night, it was not nice. Because I didn't have blankets, I'm not prepared to be here. And no children wanted to share their blankets with me. They didn't even want me to come close to them. I think inside them, they were saying, "Here is this threat." And even my aunt, she didn't want me to come and share her blankets with her.

ALI: Your aunt?

GERTRUDE: Yeah, my aunt, my grandmom's youngest daughter. So, I was there and I was hurt and...but I was smiling. I was really smiling. I don't remember me really showing when I'm hurt. I will always smile. That was proven by my foster dad when he said, "Gertrude will be hurt and will be angry, but she will always smile." That was, for me, very nice.

But anyway, so I stayed there and the following day I was okay! It was me and Moses and the answers, you know? Going on and on. Though I did not have clothes to change. But this woman went to her house and she got clothes for me and blankets and all that. But when I came back to my grandparents house, I had a big hiding. Why did I allow them to kidnap me, you know? And which was one of the things I was facing when I was there. It was very hurtful.

The daughter with no mother, Gertrude lived with her grandparents who barely had time to care for her. She lived mostly under the control of her Aunt Ethel, but more as a servant than a child. She was not to be respected because of the conditions of her conception. Yet life on the farm was easy for no one, least of all the adults, whom Gertrude tries to remember without bitterness after they worked as hard as they could to keep her alive. Ultimately, her relatives saved her, though they despised her success and the extra attention

she received from Mrs. Birch. Meanwhile, she just tried to do what made sense and felt good within a set of rules that she did not understand.

GERTRUDE: I used to want to be her daughter like anything. I really wanted to be Ethel's daughter. I think what made me want to be her daughter is because she was the only mother who was there around. And I wanted to belong somewhere.

But it's funny my aunt would say, "It's funny that Nontegana want you to speak English with her." So, I continue to speak English with her. I did not learn English through school. [Ethel] was not really in favor of Mrs. Birch wanted to help me to buy uniform and to get in school. Because they thought she should have done it for Pumeza [Ethel's daughter].

...I think why they didn't want me to go there it's because...it's only one child of out of that family, I'm talking about my grandparent's children, that had standard seven...And the others were not clever, they were always failing. I remember my aunt, the youngest one, I got in standard three and I got her there and she was older than me. And I did standard four and she, the following year, she came to do standard four and I repeated standard four because the teachers...said I must keep on, I must do standard four, otherwise I was still young and I will rust, my mind is going to rust, till I can go to another school.

One of the dangers of recounting history and the figures who compose it, especially South African history, is that nobody knows who is accountable for all that occurred. As she remembers her story, Gertrude has much more contempt for the actions of her grandmother and aunt who were supposed to care for her than for Mrs. Birch who had no legal obligation to do a thing for her. Mrs. Birch had the luxury of speaking English with Gertrude and encouraging her at school because she had no other concerns, nor animosity towards her. Gertrude's aunt and grandmother not only had to worry that she be fed everyday, but they had many more children to look after. They also worked hard to keep Mrs. Birch's house clean and her children fed while they worried that there would be enough food for their own children. Their manner of treating Gertrude, furthermore, was dictated by a Xhosa tradition that Gertrude never fully accepted or understood and therefore still cannot fully relate to.

GERTRUDE: That woman used to beat me like anything, Ethel. Her children, I was like a nanny to her children. Like, you know, as she's working for Derek [Birch], I was working for her. Her children, their dad is in Cape Town, working in Cape Town. They must be taken photos in this school. Ali, in the morning, I take her daughter to come and bring her to [the teacher] to take a picture, a photo. And bring her back to the farm and come back to school. That woman, and she had two daughters. And she used to be the one

that would send me around on this farm. That woman has got a lot. And she does feel guilty. But I don't want her to feel guilty. Because she gave me umpokoqo.⁸ At least I had a place to sleep. And...I did not die. She kept me going. That's how I look at people. I look at the positive things that they have done for me, but that doesn't mean I forget about what they did.

The question, ultimately is: For how much can one person be accountable for when surrounded by injustice? When subject to the whims of a militaristic racist government? Did her grandmother do as much as she could? Probably. Did Mrs. Birch? Probably not. A rich farm owner with plenty of money and servants, not to mention education and experience, she could have done much more for the people who worked for her. But then again, she did more than some would have and she operated within the confines of a convention that has dictated employer-servant relations in South Africa for centuries. Gertrude chose not to hold any of her inaction against her. In a country where so many people have been hurt, does it even make sense to place blame? Gertrude resolved to move on.

Revisiting the past

Gertrude recorded most of these stories as we traveled to Dodrecht to face a past that haunted her for 20 years, after she left it behind. She chose to see our journey there as a way to move beyond it. Former Archbishop of South Africa Desmond Tutu, said of the past in the introduction of findings for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "The past, it has been said, is another country. The way its stories are told and the way they are heard change as the years go by...the future, too, is another country. And we can do no more than lay at its feet the small wisdoms we have been able to garner out of our present experience."⁹ The following are excerpts from the stories Gertrude told on our way to her past. She describes some of her few happy moments on the farm, her most difficult trials and that which helped her get through it: her angel.

GERTRUDE: When we get in that farm, I want to show you that house that still holds nightmares for me in my life. It hampers my strength or stops my progress. It's like a wind that takes me there in my dreams, like I'm flying there.

Ah, I got my nightmares of that house...Funny enough, it's very hard to recall anything that happened in that house that is nice. And I never dreamed of it. I can't recall what, maybe eating jam once a year on Christmas. That was nice...And screaming early in the morning, "Happy Christmas!"

And what else, there's a thing that I can remember...It makes me to love my granddad a lot...He used to come with a big mealie-meal bag...once a month...He was quite old at the

time, not very old, but old. And he was supporting about maybe twelve people in the house. And I tell you, Ali, that mealie meal is huge, it's big. And it's just going to be finished not very very long. Which means he has to buy. Because the farms will give them this mealie meal, sort of like free once a month. And if that finish, it finish. Then he has to buy. So, which means, he was always working, he was in debt in this guy, and this farm. When I think of that, you know, I was a part of a guy that was doing that, it makes me to love him very much and say, you know, he did his best. He really did his best and that huge mealie meal made me, made that person that is sitting next to you today. And I can never forget that. But I don't know if I can say it makes me happy or it just makes me sad. Or it makes me strong, it gives me more courage. But...it must never happen again...

When you go over that mountain...as a child...I will be sent to one of my uncle's houses to do something and I'm expected to come back and you'll see how far is the farm. And my angel was always with me. You see those mountains over there? That's where we're going to...what a nightmare...I never dream of coming here. Can you believe I used to walk here? [Referring to the 16 kilometer walk from the town of Dodrecht to the Birch farm.] At the time it was not a tar road...it's steep all the way when you go back. I tell you, I used to hate going back to that farm. I don't think there's ever a thing that I used to be happy going back to the farm, even from school. I used to hate it and the main thing was, I hated to go back to where my grandmother was.

ALI: Did she ever beat you?

GERTRUDE: Oh yes, a lot. And she used to stand on my way, like she did not like about me being so famous and being in this church and go to Aliwal North and go for beauty contests...I used to win beauty contests a lot. And she did not want this teacher to [adopt me]. She was a stumbling block a lot in my life. It's like she's got a hold on my life. She was the one that makes decisions in the family and, oh, I don't like her.

As the sun is like this when I'm at this teacher's house in Lion Hill. The sun will be like this and I'm standing at the back of the school...and I just say, "If I can just go over those mountains." That was always my dream, is to just see what happens over those mountains.

This farm that you're going here and the other one, I used to cross this...cross that and I'm sent to do something and come back quickly. I tell you I'm going to walk and run that hill and singing and singing about what I'm going to do when I come to this church and I memorizing everything so. When it was happening, I had a way of escaping the hurt. And mostly it was about my angel. My angel that I used to talk to so much. You know, that God was a good God that kept me going. Because I just knew my angel was with me, we singing together, we doing this, we practicing together, it reminds me of

things, you know, anything that I was doing, my angel was with me. And I did not like to go in groups. I did not like walking as groups. I like, I used to love to be alone.

...Remember there was a...guy that...wanted me to go for a competition. **His mom died. And I was in a choir, a church choir, so we were forced to go and sing in the funeral. And we sat there and, the choir, we stood there in, just in front of the coffin. Which was for me very scary to look at someone who's dead. Ooh, I was very very scared...And, on our way back I was very scared. I didn't want to walk in front. It's like she's going to appear in front of me. And I didn't want to be at the back, she's going to come at the back. I didn't want to be at the end of the sides, she's going to appear anywhere. I wanted to be in between people, it's like there must be someone who walks close close in front of me. And I started to trust my angel somehow, but I didn't trust my angel in the sense that he or she can look after me all over. I thought if my angel is at the back, she won't be able to protect the front.** (laughing) So, and I couldn't have a picture of my angel being big, it was my age. So I started to talk to my angel and I say, "We are the only ones here so you have to do something. (laughing) You must talk to God to add another angel to look at us."

I look at it and I think it did carry me through for many years, for many years. The thing of the angel was just a thing. And I said, "You have to talk to God. God has to send us another angel, not that I think you can't look after me, but I'm sure you also scared." You know, and I was talk! I was really talk. And others would sometimes hear me talking and say why, who did you talk to? People thought I had, uh, what, a wrong spirit because I was talking alone so much. And I knew inside me I was not talking to any wrong spirit. I was talking to my angel. And even if...I'm asked to do something like washing nappies. I didn't like that and looking after my auntie's children. I will tell my angel, "I don't like this, but I'm doing this because you're not going to go to God and be hurt and be ashamed of me." You know...it's like "I'm doing this because," it's like I was doing it for the reputation of my angel to God, you know. So, and I will say, "I don't like it." And I will say, "Okay," and I will come up with a song. And I think I believe that my angel was singing for me. I believe it was like the angel was giving me the song to console myself. Which did carry me through. And it made me to survive the Parkers' tempers, it made me to survive many many things. Because in many ways in my life, I did not show how I feel. Even if I'm angry, I'm hurt, I will always try to please these people in order for me to survive, to have tomorrow. Or for them to keep me till tomorrow. And, ja. I like the story of my angel. (laughing)

ALI: Ja. Can I ask you a question? I wonder what religion you practiced on the farm and whether you think the idea of the angel was a Christian idea that came from living

with people who are Christian or, or if there's an idea of angels and of God in the Xhosa tradition...

GERTRUDE: In the Xhosa tradition, there's not angels really, I don't think there is. But because I grew up in my grandparent's house, they were Roman Catholic. But their religion was mixed with a black tradition, maybe African tradition, because they believe on the forefathers and they believe that the forefathers were looking after them. So I also grew up believing my forefathers are looking after me. But I couldn't really be strong in that because I didn't know who was my really forefathers. At the end of the time, I didn't even know who was really my father. So I couldn't hold on in that tradition because it was confusing me. According my grandparents, they know their granddads were looking after them. They knew if anyone died, that person is alive, is watching over them, you know, guiding them. And, me, I couldn't really, but I believe somewhere somehow I should have a granddad, a grandmother or whatever so that it's looking after me. So, that was mixed Christian, but the angel thing was coming from a Christian point of view. And, ja, I believe on the angel because I read a lot the Bible, especially the Old Testament. And the New Testament, how the angel came to Maria. So, I read that a lot. But most what made me to believe on the angel is the dream of Esop...this guy that was walking to a place in the Bible the way he saw the ladders, the angels that were going up and down and they were reporting. So that one made me to believe on the angels. I think that's the main thing that made me to believe on the angels.

ALI: So who really encouraged you to read the Bible?

GERTRUDE: ...Reading the Bible was more my aunt Ethel, was more a person that was reading Bible...But I think the encouragement from the Bible, it was more from my aunt and praying...I could pray very young...But, as I was growing up, I started to pray, just, you know, just know that I must pray. And I can talk to my angel anytime. I knew that, in a black tradition or in a black religion, the forefathers are the ones that report all your needs to God. So, I took it as my angel is the one that reports my needs to God. So that's why I was talking so much to my angel. I didn't have that thing of like, I can say a thing and God hears it. For me it was my angel that can take the whole message to God, I'm complaining now, I'm happy, and then he comes back.

...And that's why I believe in somehow I chose my own somehow tradition. Not culture, but tradition. Somehow I chose my religion. I chose how to believe on things, what suits me, what's the best.

ALI: ...I want to know what it was like growing up in a really Xhosa tradition while you were going to school every day and where you had to pray to God, where you learned about the Christian God and then you also went to church. Did they conflict?

GERTRUDE: I think they don't conflict because people believe...God is a God that you can't just talk to him clean. It's a God that you must talk to other super spirits, they take the message to God. It's like, if you're a Christian, you can think, "I talk to God, my angel brings a message to God." And they believe the forefathers are the ones that talk to God. So it somehow comes together. So, that's why it does not contradict, it does not fight, you know?...And they don't see God as anything else rather than the God that you can talk to through your forefathers. And they believe if you do anything like slaughtering cows, cutting of a child, the forefathers are actually just like, "...The angel of God must protect the child." So, if there's a blindness in it...the blindness is there. And even if they take the child to the witch doctors, that doesn't mean they saying totally then witch doctors will help that child. They believe the forefathers that are communicating with God...And they are supernatural to anyone that is not a witch doctor. So, it's like I'm acting somehow in the level of forefathers because I can see physically see them or spiritually see them. And God works close to the forefathers as we believe maybe as Christians, God works close to the angels. So, it does not contradict at all.¹⁰

Ali: Were you ever baptized?

Gertrude: Ja, in the Roman Catholic. And again in this church where I got married with Boy.

Ali: Is that when you were a baby in the Roman Catholic?

Gertrude: In the Roman Catholic, I was a baby, that's where I was given the name Gertrude.

And then when you go deeper to religion and then they say Roman Catholic is wrong because it allows people to practice their tradition things.

I remember the priests, Father Buha and the others, used to come when my granddad does the traditional slaughtering, beer and they will also come and share that. Whereas the Christians believed if you do that, you, you, it's the myth that is given to the...dark

spirit. I refuse to believe that because if, Ali, the dark spirit was so bad, I shouldn't have been in this world. I should have been killed all...long back. And if the dark spirits...that Christians call dark... did not work, the white or the apartheid, should have destroyed the black nation completely...They believe the forefathers are carrying the message. They prayed that God and slowly that God is conquering that past of the apartheid. Slowly, because He is God. Who am I, who is this Christian that can say it's wrong?

...You know, I don't believe in forefathers. I don't know if I do. I'm stuck in the middle. I think what makes me so mad about forefathers, it's like always a spirit that I dream, I'm scared. If I believe totally the forefathers, I'm giving into the spirit. It's my own fight. But I don't undermine it, I respect it, in fact. Because I believe somehow on my forefathers, there are those guys that are watching me...and when it comes to forefathers stories, if my granddad, my mother's father is now a forefather, I know he loves me. I know he's watching over me. And I cannot deny that...and it can't be a dark side too. My granddad won't be a dark side that will do any wrong, any harm on me.

Gertrude's account of her synthesis of Xhosa religious tradition and Christianity reflects the extent to which colonialism and the process of apartheid had integrated itself into daily life so that it was no longer something one might question. It was similar to the phenomenon of low political awareness in Dodrecht, which nobody questioned because it became a part of life there. The cultural acculturation process is not necessarily bad. Different cultures inevitably influence one another and often their interaction leads to greater richness in both. The mission schools for example, were a great thing for the spreading of education in South Africa, though they were part and parcel of colonialism. In fact, South African anthropologist Absalom Vilakazi warns against framing all Western influence as corrosive or negative.

The implicit assumption (used to be) that the more rapid and complete the change, the more damage was done to the people and their ways of living...The anthropologists' reluctance to see or accept change was soon to come into sharp conflict with the expressed wishes of the peoples of the non-industrialized and the non-literate world who had come to know and to value what science and technology had to offer and were therefore clamouring for change at 'jet-propelled' speed, as Nkrumah phrased it.¹¹

At this point in her life, Gertrude had been influenced by two extremely different cultures in almost everything she does. She was given her Xhosa name by her mother and her Christian name by Mrs. Birch and Father Buha. She was taught to speak English in addition to her native Xhosa, though she did not know why. She lived with twelve people in a two room house with mud floors and worked hard to earn her keep with a family that wasn't hers. Meanwhile, the Birches were rich enough that when TV came to South Africa in 1975, Gertrude was able to see it – by peering through the windows of the living room at night. There is no definitive culture or even family, for that matter, with which Gertrude

primarily associates. Her personal tradition therefore developed into a synthesis of Xhosa and Western tradition.

The philosophies of Steve Biko, an African nationalist who was killed in 1977 while in police custody, would challenge Gertrude to find more conflict between these two cultures. He resists the word "acculturation" because it connotes "fusion" and does not recognize the imposition of Western cultures which eradicate African cultures rather than fuse with them.¹² Biko writes, "The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face."¹³

The conflict for Gertrude, in adulthood, has been recognizing the Western influences and yet reckoning herself as an African within those Western contexts: Christianity, English and feminism. She struggles to preserve the parts of African tradition which enrich her life while recognizing the parts of Western culture that she loves, that have enabled her to live a life in which she feels fulfilled. A new type of African is emerging in the end of the 20th century. She is an African who derives the benefits of Western influence while reasserting her Africanness as valid and essential to politics, family, religion and even science. The processes of colonialism and apartheid have degraded and illegitimized that Africanness. The struggle against that illegitimization, however, has contributed, in part, to the strength of the reclamation. "This is a culture that emanates from a situation of common experience and oppression."¹⁴

Steve Biko's political philosophy did not reach the Birch farm when Gertrude was there, however, and maybe it never will. Farm workers are isolated by geography as well as the more amorphous politics of white land owners. While Gertrude was still at the farm in 1976, Biko's work in promoting black consciousness incited urban township students in Soweto, outside Johannesburg. The students protested new laws requiring that they learn Afrikaans in school. Not only would the law change their language, it would cause most students to fail their standards because all of the tests would be changed to Afrikaans that year. In seven months, following the first Soweto uprising on June 16, 1976, 575 people were killed by police in Soweto, 134 of whom were under 18.¹⁵ Farm workers like Gertrude saw indirect effects of the uprising, though they remained disconnected from the source of the changes.

GERTRUDE: 1976, at the time,...I was in the farm...repeating my standard four. Our teachers taught us somehow, to let us know [about the Soweto uprising]. But I knew about it more when I was in Ilinge...So it was like knowing what happened yesterday or after a few days, especially in places like Dodrecht. So, I didn't have the effect of being faced with a thing direct. But I think I was faced by it by the action of those that knew. It was more, because those days it was more pressure to any black person...they knew maybe, in the clever places or in a bigger screen, black people are standing for all the Blacks. And as you saw in Dodrecht, we were totally in the hand of white people there,

which people still are. Totally controlled by the farmers there, what do you think then they did? They oppressed more.

But people did not know because they were working for farms, not educated and I just remember that they will say...“When people knock to come and ask for places to stay, you don’t open the door because there’s lots of terrorists.” And farm people did not know what is the terrorist, rather than a killer. And the example that they were given to them, it was about the, Nyerere.¹⁶ Nyerere and those big guys in Africa...those freedom fighters of Africa. And the only thing that we were given, it was the side of killing, killing, killing...“They can kill you.”...So we did not have any really round story of why are they killing, who are they fighting for, why are they fighting, who are they aiming, who is their enemies. And I remember, Ali, when we come back home from the farm, we were also told all the time – several, Mrs. Birch, everyone, the people that work for them, like my aunt, anyone, “You don’t just take a lift from anyone and when people stop next to you, run away, because they terrorists.” It was not like, “They can rape you,” or anything, it was like, “There’s terrorists around.” There’s a lot of terrorists and they say they are going around looking for places to stay...So, I was in an area where it totally was controlled by fully the hand of white people. And, Oh, God is so good. Because I jump over and I left that place.

Leaving Dodrecht

GERTRUDE: ...I remember I was hanging the washing - the nappies and the washing. And I was singing, you know. And, oh, I was so hurt. And I ran away, no, and I did not ran away. I finish hanging and I took the bucket to go and fetch water and I stayed in my suitable place, that was my dream place, under the windmill. And I look at the side where, okay, every time about 6:00, 6:00, half past 5:00, I think, you could hear the, the noise of the train. You hear the noise behind the mou, just behind the mountains, which is far, but you can hear the noise of the train, you know. So, I will always wish to go in that direction of the train. And, and while that is happening, the windmill is making that nice noise. So, I dreamt there. I dreamt to be a doctor under that windmill. I dreamt to do many things under that. And the sun will disappear. And I will always wish to go where the sun goes...

So, this day I was sitting there and I think I needed my mom more. But, when I needed my mom, I didn't have a picture of how it's gonna be. So, but I needed my mom. I needed my home, my parents.

But that’s where I used to sit. And dream all my dreams. I used to say, when [Ethel’s daughter] come with me to fetch water or to do anything later, I say to her, she must leave me. I want to sit there...I’d stay there till the sun goes down.

And I can never imagine, no they can’t, they can’t. I can’t imagine any white South African to say, “I understand what you went through” to each and every of us. I can never imagine that. Because even if you explain as I’m explaining to you, I don’t go into detail. Sometimes you feel, “Why must we tell people about this?” But though it’s still inside you and even if you tell, what is the difference it’s going to make? They can never imagine this life, they can never, though I can.

It’s true that the rich, the enfranchised, the free could not imagine such oppression and poverty suffered by South Africans. Otherwise, they might work as hard as Gertrude works to ensure that nobody else will ever have to suffer through it.

There came a day in her life at Dodrecht when Gertrude could no longer stand to stay where she was. She had longed too hard for parents, a school with higher levels and opportunities for progress. She set out to find the only thing she knew to look for outside of Dodrecht: her father, whom rumor placed living in a township of Queenstown, about 120 kilometers away.

GERTRUDE: When I ran away from the first time, with my sister Tembeke, my older sister, we went to seek for our father from the farm where Mrs. Birch was...We walk, I think it’s something like from here to Cape Town, I don’t know how many kilometers was it, but far [roughly 30 kilometers]. And as you know those big trucks, we call it lorries in SA, that they take sand, they work on the road. And, I was so tired and tired and this guy stopped.

We were going from the farm to Queenstown...And, so this guy stopped there with this big truck and he gave us lift. Ali, it was something. It’s a huge tall, tall truck and we have to climb and try to get there and I fell. I fell. (laughing) I went from there - oops - to the floor, from high up. (inhale) And I was bleeding and everything, but I climb. At the end, I climb again and I was on top...When we got in there, there was sand. So, all the way to Queenstown there’s full of sand in our hair, everything...

And then we get in Queenstown and from Queenstown we walked to Ilinge, which was tiring. And when we got about nine in the township Ilinge and we knew must we ask not for my dad. We knew we must ask his cousin.

...We were going for ourselves, no one sent us, we just heard that he was in there, after the divorce. We, we heard he was in Ilinge, after Queenstown when you go to Kingwilliamstown. So we went searching for him. The reason why we went searching for him: at the time I had finished my standard four and I repeated standard four three times. Not that I was failing, because there was no other school that I can go as a senior, the school ended on standard four. So I wanted to go further. So, why we ran away, it’s because...my grandparents didn’t want me to go away from them. They didn’t see the need

for a girl to be educated. And I was still pretty young. When I finished my standard four, I was about, I think eleven, ten years old...

So we got in Ilinge, finally we got to this auntie's house very late. But when we got there, the house was CLEAN, it's a two room. It was clean, everything is shining and the children are dressed nice, totally another situation from that farm. And the shoes are clean and all and we just sat in a little corner, in a corner, you know, we were so intimidated by this life. And she was okay, but her children didn't welcome us at all because we looked very funny, you know, we looked very poor, I can imagine. (laughing) And we sat there and I was very hungry and very tired. My feet were swelling and we didn't walk with shoes, we didn't have shoes. So we were walking barefoot. It was not a tar road. At that time there was no tar roads really there. So it was a rough road. And when we got there, Ali, okay and then they made a place for us to sleep. And then we slept there. School! The following day I didn't want to wake up, I was so tired...And at the time we didn't know that my sister was pregnant. She was two months pregnant or three.

ALI: How old was she?

GERTRUDE: I think at the time she was maybe 18?

ALI: How old were you?

GERTRUDE: I think I was ten, eleven, round about that. But we didn't know about "How old are you now?" You know, the date, the birth, (laughing) you know like now we celebrate the "Oh, it's my birthday!" We didn't know that. I just recently know about the birthday, I think '89.

So,...we slept there...And the following day, we supposed to wake up. And the children in the house, the polished the floors, you know, the tap it [hard floors], and we don't know that. We used to use the cow's mess to clean the floors. And we looked very funny compared to those children. And, can you imagine, those children are teenage. How are they going to explain to other children, the neighbors, where they pick up these children? You know, I'm just thinking what was going in their minds. Totally, we could see they didn't welcome us. But their aunt, I mean their mom did welcome us, which happened to be somewhere our aunt. But this woman was very concerned about me. She was pretty concerned. But at the time I didn't realize why she was concerned. And we ended up, we walked to look for my father. She knew where he was but she kept us for two days before

we went to look for him because she knew that he was working in East London for railways. The only person that was at home, it was our stepmother.

ALI: Oh, did you know her?

GERTRUDE: No, we didn't know her. We didn't know at the time that our dad is married to another person. Another woman. When we got there, Ali, she was confused. He was also confused. He was happy, but you know, confused. But I can't really recall how was his mood, but...

My aunt, my supposed-to-be-a-Dad's sister had a shop in Ilinge, so I just served clients and after that, I walk to the house where my so-called dad owned. I just remember when I was walking there, it's a long walk...to get to the house. I wandered around, I didn't want to go straight home. I was just in between, you know, I was just like, "Do I have a home really?" You know, "Do I have a parents really? Who is really my parents?" What if someone comes and says "The person that you think it's your mom, it's not your mom." You know?

But things started to be pretty tough. I got a school to go and do standard five. We stayed there and my sister was forced to go back because she was pregnant...I stayed a while. I think when we got there it was about March. Because it was still hot.

I apply for my own application (laughing) for school. They were amazed. I looked very bad, funny, poor, but I could apply in English, you know? So, which I think it was good. I had a school that was outside the location or the village, very far. Not very far in that sense, but it was about a hour walk to get there. And you go between rivers and mountains and then you get in school. I didn't have shoes. And, Ali, when it was about June, I started to panic that I walk without shoes because it was cold. Eastern Cape is very cold. Here you don't have ice. There you got ice, really. And I started to really get cold. That's when I started to hear about that my dad, the person who I thought it was my dad, it was not my dad. And this came on Saturday, it was on a Saturday that day. I was crying for the shoes and this woman said to me, my stepmother said, "Do you know that your parents are divorced?"

I said, "Yeah, I know."

And then she said to me, "Do you know why that they are divorced?"

I said, "No."

She said, "Because of you."

"Because of me." And I'm still crying.

She said, "Yeah, because you're not your dad's child. That's why your parents were fighting all the time." I didn't know this sort of fighting because I never stayed with my mom or my dad. I didn't know. And she said, "That's why you never stayed with them. Your mom just gave birth to you, she stayed with you for a while. And when she could see she couldn't hide you anymore, that you didn't look like other children or whatever, she started to take you to your grandparents in the farm." It started to make sense...I think the tears started to dry out.

And the man that is supposed to be my dad, he was there. He didn't say anything. He didn't say, "No she's lying." He was just listening. He just said, "I remember when you were a baby, you were a nice fat little girl that was looking so beautiful...And, so he said to me, "Your mom should tell you your dad." (exhale)

Ali, that was like, it's the end of the road, you know, it was like, this was the guy that I walk, I look for him, I never have a chance to stay with him, and I ran away to get hold of him, you know, to have a relationship with him. Today I'm hearing that he is not my dad. And he's not saying it's not true - he's sitting here. And I'm alone with himself and his wife and his wife's son. Okay. I just decided to, what did I do? I think I just ate. My sister was gone. I'm alone, alone, alone with him.

...Okay, I was like I'm walking but I don't feel what I'm doing. It was like, you know, you're floating as you're walking. I was totally shocked with this whole thing. But...things started to be very tough at my dad's house now and they said they were going to take me back to the farm and blah blah blah, but they never really have money. And I talk to the child that was my classmate, Lindy. Lindy was my friend. And Lindy didn't have a father as well. But she knew that...I think her mom get pregnant from another guy. And Lindy told me also she doesn't know who is her dad, but I knew her mom is not married. We actually decided that week, we'll never get married, we hate married, we hate men. We hugged fingers as a covenant against marriage.

Lindy was also angry at her mom, not knowing exactly her story because, believe it or not, it's sad to be an African child because you are not allowed to ask questions. Her mom was a strong woman and a teacher. And then I spoke to Lindy, we became friends in the class, we both students...And Lindy said to me, "You can come and stay with us. I'll talk to my mom. My mom is looking for someone to clean our house." She told her mother that they had to keep me. Lindy had asthma, I did too, but hers was worse. And she was thin and I was fatter. And she was really black, African child. It was Lindy and her aunt and her mom. And her mom said I can stay with them, but I have to work for them.

So I got to stay with Lindy to clean the house. And her mom will buy me shoes. So I stayed with them as a servant. And as a friend to Lindy. It was very nice because when Lindy study, get done for things tomorrow, I'm cleaning. I'm washing the dishes, I'm sweeping, I'm shining the floors and everything. And when I finish, I start studying for

my test or whatever for tomorrow, doing my homework...I must make sure they got bread in their lunch. So, and the following day we all go to school.

...But when we got back, I must not think like I must sit or do something, you know, I must make sure they got food. But, it was a normal thing for me to do it because I was doing it anyway with my grandparents in the farm. You know, I was looking after their grandchildren, my aunt's children.

...I think it's '77 or '78...That's when I started to know some more about politics. You know to be able to say "discrimination," to be able to say words like "politics," to know about how negative white people are, not in a full way, because it's a process. Because...I'm coming from the white farm, that is controlled by a white man and a white woman that gives you one fruit from the huge fruit. Or maybe that greets you and you say, "Ooh, she's nice." I mean, you heard me saying Mrs. Birch was nice. So, it was not easy for me to change my mindset as a child, especially, to think Mrs. Birch was wrong. Even if they say a white person is wrong, I would not believe that she can be wrong because how can she be? She's my boss. She's my great grandfather's bosses. I grew up as "She's the best." She's the one that gives milk to a black person. So somehow she's my god...

ALI: Was Lindy English as well?

GERTRUDE: No, Lindy was Xhosa. Yeah, in that area in Ilinge, it was only Xhosa.

Ilinge was a township of the city of Queenstown, a tiny industrial city in the Eastern Cape. Like most townships, Ilinge sat outside the city and accommodated the black labour population who worked for the Whites in town. Ilinge most likely had a variety of types of houses, but for the most part, it was a poor community. Lindy's house was just a shack house compared to the Birch family's house, but compared to the farm workers' space where Gertrude lived at the farm, it was classy and exciting.

Gertrude lived in Ilinge for two years. While she was there, she worked in a shop, as a cleaning lady for Lindy's mom, and she completed standards five and six [grades seven and eight].

GERTRUDE: So, I stay with Xhosas there and with Lindy. So, Lindy's mom was also like my foster parent because she was looking after me. She will make sure everything is fine. I had asthma, so she will take me...to the doctor. But I was working for them at the same time.

So that happened till the end of that year. And at the end of that year, she gave me money to go back to the farm. But I went back to the farm with shoes that time. I had shoes. And I did my standard six.

...This guy in Dodrecht...he gave me a lift, he was working for Roman Catholic, he knew me. And...he took me to the farm. I was shaking, I was disappointed. I think somehow I was thinking already about the ways of running away. And I think at this time I also wanted to know the truth from my mother. And my mother that I don't know, I didn't know, I couldn't picturize my mother.

Returning to the farm

GERTRUDE: So when we got, when I got back, or driving the bus, or not driving myself, but in the bus to Dodrecht, it was beautiful...it was really beautiful, Ali. But as I started to approach the farms of Dodrecht, I started to be really hurt. And at the same time I was scared because I ran away, you remember?...I was scared, what are they going to say and what will be, I knew what life will be, you know. And, I was, oh dear Lord, I was so worried.

...But they were fine, my granddad hugged me...But...the others, they were just fine, you know, they "you look nice" and I think I did look nice. "You look nice and so clean..."

I was so "I don't want to be here." Like, I mean, inside me, I did not want to be here. And I, I explained to them, how is the year, how was Ilinge, because Ilinge for them is like Cape Town, you know, it's a big town. And Queenstown is Joburg to them. And I explain these there. But, yet inside me, I think I will, I was already preparing for the next move, but I didn't know where...

...When I went to see [Mrs. Birch], she didn't seem like she was happy to see me. But, she was not angry to see me, she just instructed me to do things. I was thinking she was going to be angry and say, "I bought uniforms for this child and she ran away"...she did not. Why I thought she was going to be angry, Mrs. Birch is the first person that send me to school, the first time to sub-A...She's the one that she will make sure she will talk over my grandparents and my aunt that they must let me to go for beauty contests. I'm talking about sub-A now till standard four...my grandparents wouldn't want me to go.

...But, somehow, she asked me, "Why did you come back?" And...I told her why, but I didn't tell her the long story about not having a father, you know, and everything, but somehow she knew...Because apparently my grandparents were forced to explain why

they are keeping me in the farm. They were not supposed to keep me in the farm if my parents are not working in the farm. So my aunt that was working for Mrs. Birch explained to her that my mom got pregnant from another guy so that's why they were forced to keep that. So it was like a hiding point for me. So she knew that.

...Why she wasn't mad...I think the way that she was predicting my life, she knew it's not going to go anywhere if I stay in that farm. And she knew pretty soon I'm going to be forced to get married. And that guy will pay lobola.¹⁷ So, but she never said that to me. I think she was always hoping that I will leave that farm, not that she don't want me in the farm, for the sake of my future. She really did love me, that woman.

Meeting her mother

GERTRUDE: ...I came back December and my mom came that December. It was the first time to really see this woman that was my mom. This day when I see her, when I saw her, the first time when I saw my mom -

ALI: The first time ever?

GERTRUDE: The first time that I can recall her face, you know. I can say maybe as a person I'm seeing her now. Not the first time ever, but you know, like saying I know what is your features and whatever, your voice and things like that. I just came from the forest to pick up woods from the forest. She came and when we got there, she was there, it was myself and my sister. She didn't say come here and give me a hug or anything. She just say, "Look at her, she's so untidy! They want boys but they don't even look after themselves." When we get there, she was there for a while, so which means, she was told many things by her sisters and her mom about what we doing, my sister and I...I didn't expect that. I expected she was going to say, "You're tall, you've grown, you are a grown up girl, or something, you know, what standard are you? What you doing?" And I look at her..., "Okay." Then we are given apples, she brought apples. And a apple was a big thing to get, hey? A really big thing to get. And we get, I remember, it was red apple. And we get these apples and we sat on a chair there. My sister was used to my mom because she stayed with her all her life. So...I sat there looking at her, the movements and everything.

And, days after that, I remember I was cleaning the floors, using the cow mess...¹⁸

If, say for instance, in this house [clarifying why one might used dung, referring to her present day home], if we didn't have carpets and everything, we clean with it here and all over. You just refresh it when you see it's starting to color green, start to be out and then

you put another one. When you do that, you must put your left-hand arm and then use your right. So, as I was doing that, she noticed I was not using this arm, my left-hand arm. She notice and she was angry at me, why I'm not using it. She said, "How can you work if you're not using both your arms?" And then, I'd look at her. I think I'm still like that. I don't easily defend myself. I don't easily make decisions for other people because I thought she should see. She should ask, "Why are you not using?" Rather than saying, "How can you work if you're not using both your arms?" And I look at her and I continue. And then she took me here around the collar...

And she said, "Look at me!"

And they say, "Can you see, she's very cheeky." Maybe I was cheeky by not answering her.

And my sister said, "But can't you see her arm is broken or she can't use her arm?"

And when she pick me up for the second time, she look at my eyes and my tears were just rolling, and she asked, "How? Where?" And then I went to her and I'm full of this mess, my vest and I didn't use panties, I didn't have panties...You know when you got a panties, you can roll things in your panties but I was full of the mess because I don't have a panty to roll in my dress. She say, "You're untidy and everything." She was smart, she was from Cape Town...I came close to her. And then she couldn't really bring me close to her because I was dirty with the mess, and smelly. I remember she took the back of my dress and she tore it. I stood in front of her, she wanted to see my arm. And she found this side was navy to shoulder, really, really navy. And she said to me I must lift my arm. And when I lift my arm, my arm didn't lift up. It was broken till now. My arm has broken. It was broken from that time. I can't stretch my arm straight.

ALI: ...How did it break?

GERTRUDE: I fell. And but at the time, it was about a year. It was before I ran away the first time. And it was still paining especially when it was cold. She said, "Why?" And she started to want to be a mom. And I didn't need her at that time because she should have seen this from the first day...

ALI: What made her come to the farm?

GERTRUDE: It was to come and visit her parents. And then she started to take me to the doctor and I slept in hospital for three weeks. And they said unless if they can operate me, and she said no, they can't operate me, the whole thing. Which was very, I was hurt in that process. So, that's the first part. That is before I ran away from that farm finally to Joburg.

...I met with my buddies which was Ntombisa and Nozabalisa...We met and we talk and everything was right, it's approaching Christmas, it's crazy. And they had this auntie that was oh, coming to visit Ntombisa's brother, that was Ntombisa's brother's girl-friend...Apparently they spoke with her that they wanted to go with her to Joburg, and she said yes, but it was gonna be a secret thing. And they fill me in in this secret that this is going to happen. (laughing)

...The day after New Year's Day, they have to prepare and then they will be leaving in that week. And I told them I want to go and they also said, oh, they understand, I definitely need to go. But it was just...something that came suddenly and we were ready to go. And they got money. They had money to pay the ticket, I did not have money. (laughing)...And they knew my family in the, my grandparents, that family, and my aunt, they don't give me money...They knew I didn't have excess money.

So we started working the strategy to get me money. So right through at Christmas, we were collecting money for me to run away in January. And finally, that last day, we got it right. We get the clothes, not really a lot of clothes. We just get the clothes. I put my clothes mostly with their clothes. And, we went to everybody in the farm and tell them we going to town, they must give us, send us, if they want to buy stuff because it's far from town. So if someone is going to town, you must tell everybody and then it's their chance to buy sugar, what they don't have at home. So, they gave us money for sugar, another one will give us for soap, or whatever. And all the time we knew, that is not going to buy soap, we collecting my ticket. (laughing) I laugh because today, I'm so, I just love blessings. I just forget about those people's money that I ran away with. Shame.¹⁹ Poor people.

So, they did, but I don't think it was enough, you know. I don't think it was that big, I can't remember. Okay, we went, we left. We walk from four, half past four or five in the morning, very early. You must leave early because it's very far. When you leave about half past four, you will be in town about, maybe nine. So, and it's hot, so you must really leave early. So we left...And, somehow my brother knew I was running away during the day. Because he came looking for me.

I was hiding in this woman's house. So now I was in the middle, I was caught in the middle. I must not let this woman know I'm running away with her. She's not going to accept that. And no one must see me. During the morning, it's fine, but till 12:00, 1:00, nobody must see you still in town because it's the time that you're supposed to start walking back to the farm. So as of that time, I must really hide. So I was hiding and my brother came and he said, "I heard you are running away." And I said, "No, I'm not." And he said, "No, I'm not going to say you must go back, I'm not going to tell anyone. But do

you got enough food, I mean, did you eat?" And I said, "No, I did not eat." And he went to look for food to get me. And, but he didn't come back - I don't know why, what the reason was for him not to come back.

When he came back, it was too late. It was the time that we must head on, we must go to the train station. So, he helped us to hide. He took our clothes straight to the station and then we were going like children that are going to the station, you know, going amongst people that nobody knows us. And when we get there, he's the one that help us to check nobody sees us. So we get there and then we hide under the carriage, under the seats. So, then he pushed the clothes, the suitcases and people's things underneath. So we didn't have a chance to say bye bye baba, we hiding. And you must remember it's the totally not the picture that you got in your mind. It's totally out. It's not like a train station here in Bellville or something...They collecting it, it's a slow process. Very funny. I can't even try to explain to you. But we ended up leaving at about half past four.

And we left. I'm still hungry. I didn't eat the whole day. And after we left, then the two started to sit straight because the auntie knows about them. That they're running away with her, but she doesn't know about me.

ALI: So you didn't buy a ticket?

GERTRUDE: No, they bought the ticket for me. Yeah, I was under the seat. And they kept the ticket by them just in case I ended up being seen, then I won't be thrown out or whatever. I got the ticket. It's just that I'm hiding away from this auntie mostly. And we left and they ate their supper. I think we were somehow around Molteno, or whatever. But they ate their supper. That was fine, I could take it, but I was very hungry. And they were talking, you know, talking. And I was imagining everything because I'm under the seat. And they started to switch off the lights and sleep. And I started to wee because I was really holding my urine. And I wee. Why I wee now, nobody can notice when the wee runs through door, or whatever. So I wee. So I was smelling.

And, at night, the following day, now, they started to get themselves nice...They're going to be in Krugersdorp, in Joburg. And they started eating, I couldn't take it anymore. I was very very hungry. I started screaming. And also in my mind, I knew, I'm far away from Dodrecht now. You know, it will be hard for her to take me back. If she's going to take me back, she will have to first get to her place and then get the process to take me back and I started screaming and my friends started to make like (hustle), "Don't make that." I think they were saying, "Don't do that to us." And I scream. I was mostly very hungry.

ALI: And tired!

GERTRUDE: Ja, and I was wet.

ALI: And hot.

GERTRUDE: Ja, ja, tired, really. And then they pull the thing and then they found me there. She said - what's this? No, you can't do that to me! And, shame, poor woman.

Her name was Dorothy...And, I was standing there. She could recognize my face. (deep exhale) She was, shame. What can I do? No, no. She was just confused and confused! She said, "You're smelling!" And I said, "Yes I do. And I'm hungry." And, I was crying. Okay, she made food for me and she said, "Go and wash." And I wash, you know those tiny little thing in the train. And I wash myself and then she was surprised when she found out I got clothes. And she said, "You guys planned the whole thing!"...Then I dressed, but I didn't have shoes. So we dressed and then we said, getting ready to get off in Krugersdorp. So, that's how I ended up in Krugersdorp.

Coming of Age

I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not give myself up to despair. That way lay defeat and death.

- Nelson Mandela



GERTRUDE: So, that's how I ended up in Krugersdorp. The other girls was Ntombisa and Nozabalise...I think they were, Nozabalise was maybe 14 and Ntombisa was 13 and I think I was 11. So we went to Germiston, to Dorothy's sister...It was so nice to be in a train...now we getting bigger. We sort of like, maybe facing the world. (laughing) So we get in Germiston and she was waiting for us there...She got us there to find us jobs, to baby-sit for people. But she didn't succeed. Where she was, it was a poorer area then where Dorothy was. It was more, I think it was poor whites, not very very poor, but poorer than Dorothy's place in Krugersdorp. And I was hoping I must not get any place there...I wanted to be in Krugersdorp rather than being in Germiston.

But her bosses were very nice. They were poor but much nicer. They saw us, she took us to introduce. And I think also she was strong, she was very strong than her sister. She will tell the white people, "I have to." You know, she was good. She had a say somehow. So she introduced us to them and they look at us, "Gosh they must work."...I think they really feel sorry for us, so she was going to start to look for a job. They will take us to these people and then they must choose which one they want. So, the people chose Ntombisa. Ntombisa was taller. And she was taller, she had breasts, she was okay, you know. So I think they trusted her. They took her and on the inside, I was saying, "I must not be chose here. I don't want to stay here." But...I had no choice, I can't say it verbally. And they took her. And, the other woman that was in Pretoria, that was her friend, took Nozabalise. So I stayed without having a job.

Then she said that I must come back to Dorothy, to Krugersdorp. And I remember that night, it was very late. And when I got in the subway in Germiston,...I ended up being alone waiting for the train. And the train changed. Instead of this platform that I waiting, they said people to Krugersdorp must go to another platform. And we ran. I couldn't hear properly because they were announcing the train in Tswana, Zulu, all these languages there. And, you know, that noise, "Wah, wah, bah, wah." You can't properly pick it up. And, also, I had a fear already, "Will I be able to hear this?" So in my mind, there was this thing, "I can't hear, I can't hear." So I followed people and I keep on asking, "Is this Krugersdorp? Are you going to Krugersdorp?" But I asked that in Xhosa, so I knew there would be someone who speaks Zulu. And I started wandering around. Nobody was in the subway underneath. And I started singing. Oh, God, I sang my favorite song. All these years when I'm in a corner, I used to sing this song that said, "Even in darkness, you can see God." I had a trust on my angel but I think I thought only God who can bail me out of this one, not the angel or anything else. [laughing]

So, I said, "Even if in darkness, you can always see God." And your name shines through. It glitters right through. I was sitting there but I was nervous but I could sing, but not sing loud, I could dream the song in my mind...So I got from Germiston to Krugersdorp and...you pass Joburg which is dangerous, you pass Joburg station. But at the end I ended up going there. When I'm in Krugersdorp, safer. The intimidation in Krugersdorp is actually not supposed to be seen on the street as a black child or as a black person. Otherwise, that's the only danger. There are no people who are walking up and down, skollies¹ or anyone that can hurt you. So I knew if I'm in Krugersdorp I'm safe. I

must just not be seen by the police. Or whites that can call the police and say there's a child walking around here. So I ended up getting there, so I was safe.

In Krugersdorp, Dorothy was working for a Jewish family. When we get there, she had just one room to stay in as a servant's quarter. You know, as she's working for them as a domestic worker. And she was forced to keep us in that room. No one must see us because she's not allowed to keep children.

ALI: Not allowed by...?

GERTRUDE: By the employer and by the law.

ALI: The pass laws?

GERTRUDE: Yeah, the pass laws. And the employer, otherwise the employer will be in trouble. You know, and she is not supposed to keep anyone. So then we stay there.

The pass laws were created to reinforce the strict "apartness" among the races, which apartheid mandated. They actually existed since 1850 when they were enforced by white communities in the Cape and Transvaal. In the Kimberly mines in 1870, black miners were required to carry passes. After apartheid was officially instituted in 1948, Blacks were relegated to living in Bantustans, rural areas with poor agricultural potential, established by the Department of Bantu Affairs unless they could prove with a pass that they were employed outside the all-black area. The Department of Bantu² affairs was a white government department established to oversee the separate native governments in Bantustans or black nations. The Native's

³Representative Council governed the Bantustans until 1950 when the Minister of Native Affairs (later to become the Minister of Bantu Affairs) decided to separate blacks of South Africa not only from whites, but also into tribes so as to weaken their resistance. The chiefs in the Bantustans would now be "government-supported"⁴ instead of being an independent governing body of Blacks. In 1967, the Department of Bantu Affairs described pass laws as follows:

It is accepted Government policy that the Bantu are only temporarily resident in the European areas of the Republic for as long as they offer their labour there. As soon as they become, for one rea-

son or another, no longer fit for work or superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country of origin or the territory of the national unit where they fit ethnically if they were not born and bred in their homeland.⁵

Gertrude fit strangely under this law as a “Bantu” child who was too young to work, yet she did not have a family to return to at the “homeland” assigned to her ethnically. Many people did not fit neatly into the structures created for them by apartheid, a situation that often turned ugly. If coloured children were dark-skinned enough to be black, for example, the state could and did remove them from their families or schools and relocate the children in black areas. They justified such acts under apartheid.

The time Gertrude spent in Krugersdorp truly gave her an induction into the ways of life as a black person in apartheid South Africa. Up until that point, she had lived on the farm, under the control of the Birch family, in Ilinge with Lindy and her so-called Dad and in Krugersdorp. She didn’t know much about the laws that constructed her social status and her life as a farm worker. Nor did she know much about the lives of urban domestic workers like Dorothy, with whom she stayed at first in Krugersdorp. The pass laws and the institution of domestic work were pillars of apartheid: one legally restricted movement of Blacks, Coloureds and Indians, while the other was a social institution which reinforced the disparity of class differences among the races. Due to the institution of domestic work, Whites could live a high-quality life given the extent of cheap labor. Among many other institutions like the mines and homelands, the pass laws and domestic work served to divide black families. They constructed a society in which one of the highest paying legal positions available to the average black citizen was the position of absolute servant to a white family. The patriarchal ideology that governs all parts of South African society reinforced this gendered division of labor.

Domestic work did, and still does have appealing features to people seeking jobs. One of the advantages of domestic work is that it provides many security and health benefits as a result of the personal nature of the work. Individual families tend to provide more for their domestic worker than might an industry such as a mine or a farm, where a worker is often no more than a slave laborer.⁶ The employers might even pay school fees for the children of their domestic workers. Sometimes, they just act as a lending source, helping a domestic worker educate her children on a payment plan, so that eventually the domestic worker repays her employer everything she borrows. That can be critical for someone who does not qualify for bank loans.

Domestic work can include chauffeurs, gardeners, child care-takers, cooks and maids. For the most part, when people use the term “domestic worker,” they are referring to a woman who lives on the family property and performs all necessary domestic work including cooking, cleaning, ironing, pool cleaning, dish washing, child care, walking the pets, walking the children, walking the elderly, drink serving and any other household task which the owners of the house require. Many of the jobs done by domestic workers is considered demeaning for a white woman to perform.

The fact that so many white children in South Africa grow up with black women changing their diapers, feeding them, wiping their bodies, doing their laundry, cooking their food, washing their dishes, pushing their shopping carts, etc., means that they grow up with the understanding of “black” women as servants. Though domestic workers are often given better medical care and sometimes pension funds or loans from their employers, the nature of the personal relationship with employers can be complicated. Having left their own children at home, they spend all of their mothering on “white” children. Their own are neglected as a trade-off for income. The domestic worker is part of the employer’s family only in the sense that she spends time with the family. Meals, vacations, weekends and picnics are all times when the domestic workers must work. These are not vacations for them. Employers often believe that their domestic workers love their families. Though emotional ties do exist, domestic workers often harbor great resentment towards the family that takes advantage of their time, pays poorly (even when paying the standard salary) and exposes the domestic worker to all of the richest parts of “white” South African living while allowing her to reap precious few of the benefits. Jacklyn Cock writes about a newspaper article labeled “Tearful farewell to ‘nanny’ of 41 years.”⁷ The story was set next to an article about Cock’s work that read, “Domestics an exploited group, says lecturer.”⁸ Her findings through interviews with 225 randomly sampled domestic workers and their employers are that many families believe their domestic workers are one of the family. They believe that good-byes will be tearful. In reality, according to Cock, “in no case in the Eastern Cape depth sample did the domestic worker consider herself one of the family.”⁹ Domestic workers get in-kind payments, which can mean a number of things. Usually in-kind payments include a room on the back of the house and medical care. Paradoxically, these are necessary components of keeping a healthy worker on the grounds of the house so that she is available whenever needed. Employers will generally include such in-kind payments in the salary though they are more of a benefit to the employer than they necessarily are to the domestic worker.¹⁰

When she arrived in Krugersdorp, Gertrude lived with Dorothy who was a domestic worker already hiding two nursing students in her room. This, of course, was illegal under the pass laws. It was illegal for Gertrude because she was officially an unemployed “Bantu” and should have been in the “territory” of her “national unit” where she fit “ethnically.”¹¹ Because of her age, however, she did not actually fall under the laws in any concrete way. She was not over the age of sixteen, the designated age at which she would have needed a pass. She was not the “wife, unmarried daughter or son under the age of eighteen”¹² of an African who had either a) “resided there continuously since birth” or b) “has worked there continuously for one employer for not less than 10 years.”¹³ Though she did not have a pass, it was much safer for Gertrude to live with Dorothy than it would have been to live in a township on her own as she did at Lindy’s. She did not know anyone in the townships nor did she have a place to live. At this point, she was living close to Johannesburg where the townships were much more like cities, and it would have been easy for a twelve year old girl to get lost or hurt. Here again, a black woman took Gertrude in though she did not know her or her family.

GERTRUDE: But one day, she send me to buy bread and her employer's daughter didn't go to school. She was sick. So she send me to go and buy bread. And I went to buy bread and this child, in her room was looking through the window and she saw this little girl passing by. And, without letting Dorothy know, she walk out and when I got back, she wanted to play with me. I

think they were pretty lonely, man, or something. She wanted to play with me and I was shaking, you know. And I went to the room and she went to the room and she found there's three of little girls that are there. And this woman now, Dorothy, found this tragedy. This child saw and she's going to tell her mom. And her mom knew at the end of the day about this.

I don't think it was funny. Maybe she shouted at her. But [Dorothy's employer] started to connect me with the Parker family. Because they were teaching together. She knew the Parker family were looking for someone to play with their little children or to do something, I don't know. So I ended up being connected with the Parker family. And the Parker family also couldn't keep me there, so they asked another people to look after me.

Only a child herself, Gertrude found a family in need of someone to entertain their children. Black children all over South Africa were working for Whites at that time. Boys were in the mines while children much younger than Gertrude were still on the farms, continuing to work as she had when she was younger. The fact that she was paid to entertain children who were barely younger than she was at that time is not surprising. One has to wonder why the Parkers did not feel more responsibility for this nice, young child with whom they trusted their children.

GERTRUDE: When I was in the farm, I didn't know anything about police. And when I got in Joburg, or after I met the Parker family, they didn't want to keep me in their yard. Why? They had the room. Why, because that room was for their children to play, so it was full of toys and everything, so they wanted their children to have a space. And so, they said they would take me, but I must get a place to sleep, which was strange. They could see I was a child. But I spoke to another auntie that I didn't know - she was Bugelwa from Kingwilliamstown. And for her it was very cute that I'm so young and I can work and study. You know, she found me in the corner of the street sitting with my books and writing. And it was also very strange to see a black child in the street...in Krugersdorp, or in any place where there was white areas in South Africa.

Rarely does one see homeless children sitting against a wall doing school work as Gertrude was when Bugelwa and her sisters saw her. But today in South Africa, it is hardly at all rare to see a black child in the street, as it was then. Homeless children are everywhere in

South Africa. Often they are just playing or wandering in public spaces. Frequently, they are trying to help park cars for money or they are begging in a doorway or marketplace. Sometimes, they will sleep on busy sidewalks during the day as to be more safe and alert at night. White South Africans today wonder where all of South Africa's problems with poverty are coming from under the "new government." Essentially, the materially poor have just relocated to areas from which they were previously banned. The poverty, the crime, and the homeless children have always existed. It is only now crossing the racial boundaries, which until 1990, kept white areas relatively free from the effects of poverty.

GERTRUDE: But anyway, they found me in the afternoon sitting there and writing, and then they ask, they were sisters, three, and ask, "Where do you live and everything?" And I explain. They knew Dorothy. Dorothy, the one that got me to Joburg. And they knew her. They say, "Are you staying with her?"

And I said, "Yes, but I'm not supposed to stay there."...And then Bugelwa said, "You can come and stay with me. I stay alone." And I went to stay with her. And she went to see the Parkers because Dorothy couldn't speak English properly. Bugelwa was much better to speak English. And so, she went to see the Parkers. And she wanted to know why don't they keep me in their place. And they explained the whole thing and she said, "I will keep her for awhile. But she's not going to stay for a longer time because I'm also not allowed to keep an extra person in my room."

ALI: This is because of the pass laws?

GERTRUDE: Because of the pass laws. And I stayed with her. So each and every afternoon I'll come to her. If I baby-sit, I look after the Parker children, they will come and drop me at Bugelwa's boss' place. And sometimes they will take me to school, you know, to study something straight, sit with a teacher and talk.

And, as we were at Bulelwa's place, the neighbor saw us in Bulelwa's, Bugelwa's place and she called the police. And they came, midnight. And ah, Ali! It was a terrible thing. And I just closed my book after I study. And I just fall asleep. You know, that tired, man. I was working during the day and I just study and I could fit in on those studying and working because I did that mostly the rest of my life, you know, though I was twelve at the time. And I just closed my eyes and then a big knock, say! And the dog in the yard! Ooh, oh, I was so scared! And you know what, it was the Kruger's Day¹⁴, it was October...the first of October, it was the Kruger's Day.

ALI: *They don't have that any more?*

GERTRUDE: *No, no. And they just took us to jail a day before the Kruger's Day.*

ALI: *You and Bugelwa?*

GERTRUDE: *Bugelwa and the other girls. Bugelwa's sister's children were there also, that they were doing nursing.*

Bugelwa had taken a big risk to let three young women stay with her in order that they could be in the city to work. They were trying to create a life for themselves. Under the pass laws, however, that wasn't possible.

GERTRUDE: *Ja. And we went to jail. And in this van, it was like when the van turn in the drive and then it goes to this side, ja, it's fast man. I was thinking, "What is happening to me?" And I got a nightie and just a jacket, you know, sort of a blazer, something like that. And it's so cold. And when we get there, I don't know how it happened, it was wet. From what I can remember – the place where we were – it was wet, wet, wet, wet – the floors. We went to the cell and were sitting in the corners. For me, it seems as if it can't be a cell, that you can't keep people to something like that. We couldn't sleep which means I didn't sleep right through, and it's Kruger's Day. So it's Kruger's Day, no one can come and fetch us. It's holiday. No one worries about any documents or anything, so we sat there the whole day. I'm crying, I can't say a thing, and Bugelwa's madam came to fetch her. But the three of us, we couldn't go anywhere because we are not working for any madam. The other two were helping in the hospital, the hospital for mental people.*

ALI: *And the Parkers?*

GERTRUDE: *The Parkers, they didn't come that day. I think they were not, because I was not registered to work. It was a complicating issue with my age, I'm not supposed to work. What are they going to say? You know, I don't know how they got it right, but*

they came to there on the third day to pick me up. They said they were trying right through. But I didn't ask them how, I was just happy that I'm out that day. So, I started to have a sense of, you know, apartheid. And I started now to be curious and ask why are we not allowed that and that and that. And the Parker explained to me, because Mrs. Parker was right from England. She explained to me what is happening, she explained to me because now I was gonna be more cautious and they were forced to put me in their room now. And I was gonna be more cautious now not to walk around because they know about us.

But anyway, so I was shaking right through. Ja na, and I was so sick after that. I was very, very sick. I pick up cold and everything. So, then I came back and I started to stay with the Parker family permanently. And it was for me okay because I will just stay in the yard. I was not allowed to be in the street. I would just read my books, you know, and play with the children. But I did not enjoy myself because Mrs. Parker was very strong. When she's angry at her husband or something, we must all know we can't speak, you know, we do everything.

I didn't have to count my bread. I didn't know about that. You know, I was just eating whatever. They will dish me as they are dishing, so at that side I was very lucky.

Gertrude was fortunate to have such generous employment from the Parkers. Though a few domestic workers have very good relationships with their employers, most domestic workers complain of being restricted and powerless within the household. Often they are allotted a given amount of food which they can eat and no more. One of the biggest complaints of domestic workers, in fact, is that they must prepare meat for their employers, yet they can never eat it. One woman interviewed by Cock, who has done extensive research on domestic workers, said the worst part of her job is "Not eating what I cook." Another said, "Cooking the dog's food and not eating it."¹⁵ Servitude in South Africa can be extremely ugly. It does not just subordinate people. It dehumanizes them. Often domestic workers are given two pieces of bread per day or leftovers from family meals. Fear of theft of food is great on the part of white employers, thereby contributing to rules such as these. The fear is ironically rational: knowing that domestic workers have families to support and that they are paid barely enough to do so, employers must – if subconsciously even – assume that their employees get food and money in alternate ways. If any "petty pilfering" does occur, Jacklyn Cock calls it "situational rebellion. . . generated by the powerlessness of [the domestic worker's] situation which blocks any overt expression of dissatisfaction."¹⁶ Gertrude did not find quite such strictness or need for rebellion in her situation with the Parkers, possibly because she was still a child.

GERTRUDE: *Whatever they eat I eat, you know. And if I want to add more, I'll add more. So, that one was very nice. But what was funny, one day [Mrs. Parker] said to me I can make myself Viennas, or egg. Viennas is, uh, like a sausage. And she said you can*

make for yourself Viennas or you can make bread. And I didn't understand properly. I thought she said "Make yourself Viennas and egg and bread." And I made the three of them, in the afternoon. And just when I finished doing that and I sat outside to eat, she said, "How can you make, why did you do this?"

I was so shaking and I said, "Didn't she say I must eat?" I mean she was for me so funny because she never said I must not eat. She said, "This is a waste and..." I was shaking and her husband was very scared of her. So he was standing also there. He could understand I misunderstood the whole thing and, at a later stage, he said, "No, darling, she did not understand." And she was very angry. Once she start to be angry, she will be angry. But when she's okay, she's sweet, you know. So she was that type of a person. That's one of the things that didn't make me to feel happy there. They had a huge house, double story house, you will hear her screaming from upstairs and you know the day is bad today.

But, one day she was in hospital and Mr. Parker started speaking Xhosa to me. She went for something for her nose, having a operation, and Mr. Parker will give me instructions in Xhosa. And I ask him how, how come he knows Xhosa. And he explain, he is from Uki. Uki is next to Dodrecht. And he knew the Birch family. Mrs. Birch, he knew them all, the sons and everything. So in my mind, I started to think, "They are going to call the Birches and tell them I'm here, so I have to run away." Because one thing that I did not want, it was to go back to the farm. And so that's why I ran away from them. That month end, I started to say, "I have to get the money to send it to my grandparents." And then I could run away. But it was already the end of the year.

It was the following year. It was the following year because I was starting standard eight with them. So, I left. I left the Parker family.

When I decided to run away from them, I said to them, I need to get the money that they were keeping for me. They kept the money because I told them I want to go back to school. And at the same time when I was with them at that year, I was doing my standard seven, they were teaching me standard seven. I don't know how they got to get it right, but I was doing my standard seven. I was doing my test, they were both teachers. My tests and everything, and I was looking after their little children as well, two girls.

I decided to leave them and come and look for my mom and I said to them, "I need the money to send to my grandparents, my grandparents are very sick in the Eastern Cape." And they gave me the money. And they ask how I am going to send it because I was pretty young, maybe 11, 12, you know. And then, I said to them, "No, the auntie that brought me in Joburg, she's the one who's going to send it to them." So, they trusted me, they gave me the money. And it was my last day, their last day to see me.

ALI: But they didn't know that?

GERTRUDE: They didn't know that. And at the time, I already collected all my clothes that was in a room where I was sleeping and store it bit by bit and hide it somewhere. As a child, I didn't even think that someone might find the clothes and steal it from me. Safe enough, they were there. But it was not my real clothes, it was my backpack and uh, plastic bags? I can't remember, but I know most of the things were in my backpack, like my school books, or something like that, you can put it on your shoulder. So that day I went to Krugersdorp station, I thought it was very easy.

And I went to this train station and when I got there, I didn't realize trains, it's times, you know? I just went there to say, "I'm going to Cape Town." (laughing) "I want to buy a ticket."

"Where in Cape Town?"

"I'm going to Mbegweni."

"Where is Mbegweni?"

"It's in Huguenot."

And they started to check "Where is Huguenot?" I didn't know Paarl. And then they say, "Oh, it's in Paarl. Okay." They say, "Oh, it's tomorrow. You can only get the train from here to Park station in Joburg, the train station in Joburg. And then from that station, you can proceed to go." ...They told me how much must I pay and my money was really lower than that. It was not enough.

So, I was stuck. I couldn't go back to the Parker family because I saw, the following day, I saw them moving up and down, looking for me. I was standing a distance, they couldn't see me. I knew they were looking for me. They did love me, but his wife, Mrs. Parker was very rough. ...She will get angry and shout, you know. I didn't like that. But when she's nice, she's nice, you know.

But then, what do I do? I started to think about the auntie that I used to pass when I play with the Parker children and I will see she's getting ready to sleep over in a little place somewhere.

Languages

When Gertrude ran away from the Parker family, she sought out an auntie whom she had seen around, living in a field. The word "auntie" comes from both English word which

Xhosa speakers use to describe older women – “auntie” or “mama.” Gertrude’s children use the word “auntie,” as a term of respect. Though it can refer to any woman, it usually connotes a black woman when used as a third person pronoun as opposed to a title (e.g. ‘the auntie’ vs. ‘Auntie Ali’). When Gertrude talks about the “auntie” she used to pass, it conjures images of a black woman whom Gertrude might see as an aunt or mother-like figure. She is also, importantly, talking about an auntie she had passed outside; the woman is homeless. At this point in her life, Gertrude has run away from the farm twice with no intention of returning. She has run away from the Parkers and she needs to find a way to get to Cape Town. She is seeking her mother this time, but more than anything, she needs an excuse to get to Cape Town which she has dreamed about for so long.

GERTRUDE: ...I went to look for that place. And I find this woman making fire and around this fire she had the blankets around, you know. She had sort of like small things that she was cooking, making water for her to drink tea. I sat next to her with my luggage. And I said to her, “I want to go to um... my name is Nonzwokazi and I want to - I’m going to my mom, I’m looking for my mom. And I know she’s in Cape Town.” I show her the paper there with the address, but she didn’t understand me. She was Sotho. I mean she was Tswana. So she said her says. And I was saying my say in Xhosa. So we are looking at each other. No one understand another one. I think she didn’t understand me, definitely. And I thought she would understand me because Zulu is famous and Zulu is like Xhosa. But then I started switching on to speak English and she understood me.

Under the new constitution, South Africa has eleven official languages. Like the people, even the languages have racial connotations. There are nine so-called black or African languages: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.¹⁷ Of these, isiXhosa or Xhosa and isiZulu or Zulu are the most widely known. The two white languages are English and Afrikaans. Being a white language, much like being a white

person, means that you occupy a special place in the power hierarchy of languages. Though

neither is widely spoken outside the cities, one who does not know or understand one of the white

languages will suffer the pain of miscommunication frequently. There is no guarantee that people will speak both languages, but generally people will know a bit of one or the other, especially in urban areas. The white languages, being the means of communication of the Whites, are necessary for all people to learn if they desired to communicate with the people in power: white farm owners, businesspeople, the government and the law. Missionary schools taught people English and the Afrikaner government attempted to force people to learn Afrikaans - one of the leading causes of the Soweto uprisings of 1976. Afrikaans actu-

ally became the language of the Coloureds in the Cape. It is called “Cape Coloured Afrikaans,” considered “lower class” and is actually greatly influenced by English.¹⁸ For people in rural areas, learning English or Afrikaans wasn’t always necessary. In fact, for white farmers in rural areas, it was necessary to learn the black language in the area because of a sheer number of people with whom one would want to communicate – without the inconvenience of depending on proficient white language speakers.

The nine languages commonly called black or African languages appear throughout the country in multiple forms and places. Each is spoken in a certain territory of one of the former homelands or Bantustans. Under apartheid, the Xhosa-speaking people were concentrated in the Transkei and the Ciskei, along the south-eastern coast of South Africa. The majority of the people in those areas (now called the Eastern Cape) are consequently Xhosa-speaking. But you find the Xhosa everywhere, and the urban area in which they are most, populous outside of the Eastern Cape, is Cape Town. The Xhosa language in the city of Cape Town, however, can sound extremely different from Xhosa in the rural Eastern Cape, or even rural areas just outside Cape Town. It is a newer form of Xhosa, which incorporates new words and English words.

Like all languages, the African languages do not have words for many things with which they did not formerly have contact. Before contact with the Afrikaners and English, the Xhosa had never had a need for words like “professor” or “car” because they did not have the object yet. The word “professor” is particular to a certain kind of higher level of organized schooling that did not previously exist in their culture. That is not to say, however, that the Xhosa did not have names for their wise teachers and leaders, just like the English. The word “inkosi” means chief, “ngugqirha” is doctor, but they didn’t have a name for a university professor, so they adopted the English “iiprofesa.” Such words might still be unknown in parts of the Eastern Cape where people are extremely isolated and have no need for them.

The evolution of the word for “car” is different than that of “professor” because it did not exist in either Xhosa or English, before the 1800s. When cars came to South Africa, the Xhosa called them “iimoto.” The Afrikaners called them “kar” or “moto.” One of the most incredible aspects of Xhosa (and likely the other black African languages as well), is that it borrows words not only from English, but from Afrikaans as well. That aspect of Xhosa is what makes it uniquely South African. It has incorporated languages of both “colonizers,” if you will, to make an entirely new language today. The word for window is “ifestile” from the Afrikaans word ‘venster.’ The word ‘isipili’ which means mirror comes from the Afrikaans word ‘spieel.’¹⁹ Within cities, there is a common South African vocabulary includes words from all of the languages simply because it is impossible to have so many languages in such a small space and not have them start to merge.

When Gertrude and I visit the rural areas of Grabouw outside Cape Town, she struggles to speak what she calls “the really Xhosa.” She simply doesn’t know enough Xhosa to cover the ideas she has learned in English. And she can’t remember those words in her vocabulary which are English or Afrikaans mutants that the rural women might not understand. Xhosa, as a tradition and a language, exists in phases and degrees. When one doesn’t

know a word, she simply transforms the word she does know into Xhosa style. The lives of people like Gertrude epitomize the constant negotiation that occurs between evolving cultures that have been significantly influenced by other cultures.

The negotiation, however, is not simply a broken Xhosa communication between Xhosa speakers. It is also a broken line of spoken communication between blacks in South Africa. With nine black languages, Blacks do not exist as one homogenous racial ethnic group, though Blacks today have a much stronger reason to identify with one another than they did 100 years ago. Whereas tribal and language differences used to separate people, apartheid has greatly changed almost all conflict from ethnic to racial. Even among Whites at the turn of the century, the English and the Afrikaners were fighting the bloody Boer War during which they held one another's families in concentration camps. Now, however, Whites share the common identity of power. Ethnic differences still exist between Afrikaners and English, but in South Africa, members from those two groups will most likely have more in common with each other than with a black African. Likewise, a Xhosa person will have more in common with a Sotho person because they are both black, despite their different histories and traditions.

GERTRUDE: And then I said to her, "So I don't have a place to stay and my money is too little to get me in Joburg, I mean in Cape Town." She never chase me away, you know. She ask where I come from. I lied to her. I didn't say I'm coming from the Parker family because I thought she will ask where are they and then she will go and tell them. And I lie to her. And she gave me her tea, I refused to drink it. I didn't want to drink it. I was hungry enough. And she share her bread with me. I didn't eat the bread. I don't know why. I think I was scared of her. She had a blanket and then she was getting ready to sleep and then she said I must come and sleep with her and then I slept with her. I put my clothes on and then I slept there. I share that night with her.

So I shared three nights with her. And every morning, we wake up and go and hide the stuff, the clothes, and then we go and she would go and make char. She was working for the people around. She was okay, but she didn't have a place to stay. Which makes me to wonder if they did ask her if she's got a place to stay, you know. And I know that the bread/food, was something like she must eat two or three slices of bread a day. Depends to each family. Because she was working for a few people. But I remember in that week, she was working for one family twice, two days a week. And this woman was a well-known singer in Joburg. She was a singer. So, I know in that house, she was eating something like two pieces of bread, I think.

This auntie worked as a char, which is a form of domestic work, but is much less dependable. Usually the in-kind benefits are few because a char will work for a family only one or two days per week and often she might work for more than one family. The personal connection between a char and her employer has even less potential than that between a do-

mestic worker and her employer. Often employers will not assume any responsibility for health care, insurance or pensions because chars only work part time.

*GERTRUDE: And we will work and then I will help her to wash the windows and floors and she will instruct me how to do it. **But what amazed me is that she kept me there. And she was sharing that little food with me. And Ali, the last day, she took the train with me and we went to Park Station. The communication was very scarce because she couldn't speak English good. I also couldn't speak it good but I think I was much better than her. When she speak to her bosses, she's speaking Afrikaans. So, when I got to Park Station with her, she's the one who took control over everything. She bought the ticket for me.***

Oh, first, let me tell you this, she toasted the two slices of that day for me. And she gave me as my provision. That amazed me. She should have thought, if she...toast the bread, it's gonna be hard, it's gonna be hard for me to eat it. But she toast it, and she put butter on it and she wrap it in a paper, you know, those wrapping papers, and she put it in a plastic. And she gave me as my provision. And when we got in Park Station, which is Joburg station, she took money from her money, the money was in her bra. And I saw here putting her hand out of the bra and counting this money. You know, this money was so shrink. You know, the ten rand was shrink, shrink. I don't know if you understand what I mean.

ALI: Crumpled?

GERTRUDE: Yeah. And she make it so - like iron it. And then she counted the money and she add it on my ticket. Though that ticket didn't get me straight to Paarl. It was not enough still. But she add her money which she's struggling so hard to get it. And she gave me her food for the day. And she toast it! I love the part of toasting it. Because she was adding love onto it.

ALI: Do you remember her name?

GERTRUDE: No, I don't know her name! I wish I can know who was she, you know. And, um, she got me on the train and she told me, you will do good in life. You know, and, I left that place. I left Joburg at the time. I went, I came searching for my mom.

Paarl/Mbegweni

GERTRUDE: I remember my days when I got in Paarl, in Huguenot, I think this was somehow a day to, to choose whether I want to fall or I want to continue. But I did not realize I was caught in that. I think seeing these children, or seeing these students from school with their uniforms and being clean and laughing made me to dream, dream more than before, or to dream again. And, but when I got to where my mother's boyfriend lived and my mother was living with him in the hostel, I suddenly couldn't dream anymore...When I got there, I didn't think really she was living there. I mean, I couldn't. There was a lot of guys, you know, men, that were there and...it's just...one big huge room separated by sheets and curtains. And they cook there, they cook separate sometimes, sometimes they share food together. And this was...so new, very, very new life. I remember I was so caught, you know I was so confused. And the beds were made, you know, made up so high, put a lot of things under a bed and then it was high, high, high. Why was it like that? It's not because what people say, the people were scared of Tokoloshe, or, you know, bad spirits. It's not because of that, it's because of they making a space to pack the things under the bed and then they feel it's safe. I learned it in a later stage.

So, I stayed there and my mom said, okay, she just got me, she gave me food, and I was eating and I was confused, I was drinking Maheru. Maheru is, it's not a beer, it's sort of African beer, but it's something like an African beer, but it's not a thing that can make you drunk or there's no alcohol in it. So I was eating and drinking that. Until that stage, my mom did not realize, didn't really see or she couldn't see I was sick, I was not working right. And I didn't tell her. I was faced with a new woman in front of me, or not a new woman, but with someone that I don't know. It's the first time that we'd been together, you know, and, so I was feeling really uneasy with the whole thing and now I'm with strangers, totally stranger in a very strange place.

Upon arriving in Cape Town, Gertrude sought out her mother who was living in Mbegweni, a township of Paarl. Paarl lies just outside Cape Town in the wine country of the Western Cape. She lived with her mom no more than a few nights before she moved in with her aunt in Mbegweni who ran a shebeen, or township bar. She did not spend much time in the busy and crowded township of Mbegweni before she started following her mother to work in Paarl where she was the domestic worker of an Indian couple named Jaime and Julie.

Julie and Jamie were both classified as non-whites under apartheid. As Indians, however, they received a much higher education than a Black would. Under apartheid, Indians and Coloureds were given governing bodies separate from Whites, which could govern and spend money on their population as they deemed appropriate. The Indian legislature chose to spend the majority of their money and power on developing a strong system of education for Indians. The legacy of that decision can be seen in the literacy rates of 1991 where Whites are 97% literate, Indians are 82% literate, Coloureds are 60% literate and Blacks are only 30% literate²⁰ as a result of Bantu education which was controlled by the Whites. Both Julie and Jaime were doctors, and Jamie had his own practice in Paarl.

Gertrude spent time at Julie's house often working or cleaning with her mother. If her mom did not make it to work, she would go in her stead. Julie became a close friend and foster mother as Gertrude spent more time in Julie's safe home, which lay outside of Mbegweni in Paarl. She signed up for school and attempted to complete her standard eight, but in the meantime, she became extremely sick. She was in and out of hospitals and meetings with traditional Xhosa healers for two years.

It was 1980, Gertrude was roughly seventeen and South Africa was ablaze with anger, oppression and resistance. P.W. Botha had assumed office in 1978 with the nickname Groot Krokodil or the Great Crocodile. Botha made superficial reforms to create the facade that he was easing apartheid while actually maintaining it on a severe level. The decade to follow was full of conflict, the most serious of which was Black on Black. As oppression increased, pressure to resist increased. Breaking a strike or a stay-away from school was not an option for most black children because the retributive violence for being a traitor was severe. Violence escalated to such a point in the mid-80s that Archbishop Desmond Tutu threatened to leave the country: "If we use methods such as [necklace murders]... then my friends I am going to collect my family and leave a country that I love very deeply..."²¹ Gertrude found herself frustrated with attempts to pass standard eight with both her sickness and the stay-aways holding her back.

GERTURDE: It was just a short while after I come from Joburg when I could not go to school totally. I tried to kill myself. I was alone at that time. I was in my aunt's place in Paarl. Everybody in the morning wakes up and go to work. I was the only sort of a teenage. And she had just one son...and...the twins were born later...And their house was very careless...it was a shebeen, so it was careless, there were any type of poison. But anyway,...that particular day, I was under pain. I was seeing my dreams, you know, fading away. And I couldn't stop dreaming. The dreams were still there. I still plan my little plans, "When I'm out of this one, I'm going to do this." I couldn't stop dreaming. That's why I know even if you under any difficult situations, you never stop dreaming. And those dreams that the ones are the most hurting because you feel you don't do anything about them and you dream and you dream. That's why I always think, at the same time, people need to be given a chance to build their self-esteem and to do something. ...So I was frustrated about not being able to...succeed my dreams and I was sick. I decided to make a short cut and kill myself.

But it was really funny. I think God was there. Definitely my angel was there. Because also at that time,...I still knew my angel is with me, but when I decided to kill myself, I just forgot about my angel for a while. But it was very funny. My granddad, my mother's uncle,²² showed up. Ali, after I finished mixing everything, and he showed up...I mixed everything that I knew it was a poison in front of me...I didn't want to have a slow death.

...I could see my funeral. I knew who was going to cry. I didn't think my mother will really cry...I was giving her a totally gap or a space in her life. It was gonna be minus one out of eight children, you know, so minus a huge problem. And, I can't lie to you because when I was sick, she will come and bring me Maheru...Maheru is a Xhosa...drink. And she will take me to the witch doctors. My aunt ... was angry at this whole thing of the witch doctors because one of the witch doctors said, "How can you?...That's why this child is like that – How can a child of this age never slept with a man? This child need a man in her life." And my aunt was strict with this whole thing. And ever since then, she said, "You throw all his things away, Gertrude, what if he's giving you things that you're going to run around or not even be able to run around, call men to come and sleep with you because you can't walk?" You know, so we were very angry about this whole thing.

So my mother tried her way of believing...how to be cured. So I knew she was going to cry, but at the same time, I knew it was gonna be a relief. I even pick up words how, how, why I think it's was gonna be a relief. I said, surely people will say to her, "It's better than being sick all the time." You know, and she's also going to say, "It, it was the way that God wanted." So I was settled with her. I knew my aunt will be very hurt, but at the same time, I was taking a problem away from them, you know. And I knew Julie would be mad. But also, I was not their child. You know, I was not their responsibility. So it will be, it was just they care so much about me and it will, there's a lot of people that they will care for them when I'm gone. So that's how I plan my funeral. That's what I knew, who's going to cry or not. And I knew my sisters would be very hurt, though they did not stay with me for a long time in life, but at the time when we were together, we were sisters and I was still writing letters to them. Ja, and I knew my funeral is not gonna be big because my mother don't have money. No one has got money to have a big funeral. So it was going to just be a short and well and peaceful thing. And I will be finally with my angel.

This passage is reminiscent of a suicide note left by a black South African woman of 21 years in 1995: "Mama, you are the person who should be happy because you can now have plans on how to spend your money. I'll no longer bother you with money for transport, lunch and clothes."²³ She was one of seven youths to kill herself in the same small village within a six month period, an indication that the legacies of apartheid do continue to live

and breath. Many terrible events have killed black children throughout apartheid and since: police brutality, starvation, disease, township violence, mine accidents, township fires and rapes. The most tragic of all might be the burden that youth felt they imposed on their families, as a result of poverty. Luckily, Gertrude did not get very far in her plan.

GERTRUDE: ...So my granddad showed up...I think it was around about 12:00...He was just angry that people are leaving things careless. The house is untidy and he started picking up everything that was around there, including my mixture. And he throw it in, he just put it in the sink, and I was just looking at this old man. "Why is he here?" I was totally confused. "This time of the day, why is he here?" And I was shaking, of course. I will really terrified because he was going to be angry if he knew what was happening. And he threw this thing halfway in the sink. So I did not succeed to kill myself.

When I got here, find my mother, that she don't have a home, she's staying with a boyfriend in a hostel. She doesn't want to stay with me, she doesn't want Julie to see me, I should have been defeated totally that time because that was what I was longing for for the rest of my life, to have a mother that can look after me, that can teach me things, to have a home! Mostly to have a home.

And also, when I ran away from the Parker family in Joburg, first sharing those nights with that woman, I should have just followed the other children that were on the street. I refused that. But I had this hope of looking for my mother...Can you imagine that? When you get here, you find this woman that you been seeking and this home, you find it's not there. I never had a chance to say, "I'm going home." I never had that chance... When it was 1980, when it was again, there was few killings on students when I was at school but still sick...So many of us failed. When I heard my results that I failed, I refused to make excuses of, "But, Gertrude, most of the year you didn't go to school, you were sick, you were in hospital." And I refused to give myself the excuse of, "But it's because there was lot of boycotts."

I blamed myself for that year. I said, "I could have done this." And I didn't say, "I'm not going back to school next year." I went to school next year. I took a time to walk to Julie and tell her that I failed, and I made it to her as she will understand that I have no excuse to say why I failed.

And she told me, "But baby, you were sick." And I was crying and I refused anything that they were telling me. She was very angry. So that is...a time I can say I fought not to be destroyed. But that time of me getting here in Cape Town and find my mother not having a home, Ali, it was a distraction in my life. It was like a waking up on saying, "This is your life. Your mother is not there to do anything for you. You have to stand in this life and be strong." And at the time I'm thirteen years old.

...I started to feel, "I'm not going to kill myself. I must continue dreaming." I don't think I wanted to try it again because I stayed more to Julie afterwards. And at Julie's place I

was more cared for...it was more a home. There were not things lying around and they will always try to get the doctors that can help me, you know. So it was more driving around, driving around to specialists, to the hospital...And also, Julie was always giving me a reason to dream again. She will buy clothes for me, she will buy books to read, she will tell me, "When you doing standard ten, you will be this, when you finish, you do that." So I had a huge reason to live and I was encouraged all the time being with Julie.

Julie and Jaime had three small children and many connections to the struggle. They spent much of their time hiding and smuggling freedom fighters across the border and they educated many other children like Gertrude. They recognized Gertrude's potential immediately, and she went to live with them to get out of Mbegweni. They were not a charitable family – they helped people who helped themselves. They saw Gertrude's ability to work hard in life and they supported her efforts to do so.

GERTRUDE: When Julie met me, I was older. And Julie also told me, Julie hated apartheid. They were both doctors. They hated apartheid. But they never put their hate to be in me. They didn't pour that hate in me. And they were doing very well in their lives. They still do. So they did not wanted me to say, "Oh, I must relax," you know...or, "I can't do anything because I'm discriminated." They wanted me to do things, though I'm discriminated. Both of them, they got a huge influence in my life, they really do. And take challenges. Julie is a challenger, but not in the sense I am. She's a challenger on business. You know, she helps her husband, she loves to dress smart, she buys big name cars, you know. Her children goes to good schools. Even then, she was always looking after her family must prosper. And I took that a lot from her, but she will always say, "I think you are stronger than me, Gertrude. You know, you are a really strong person." So she did gave me the credit.

Maybe because I hunted my mother so much, or my parents so much, I wanted all the time a fulfillment of love in my life. I was always hugging, even if I did not hug a person physically, I will hug a person or embrace a person's life by just listening. I wanted to listen to people that got sisters and friends...It made me to sort of like picturize my home with my really family and fit in on what she's showing me and fit it on my vision of my family. Because I think recently I started to stop to say, "I will never have that home." I hunted the name home, to go home. Even after I was married, to just say, "I'm going home to my family, to my mom, or to my parents." I never had that, so it stayed with me for a long time and I think I had a reason for it. So I embrace each and every person's life. When they tell me about their families and everything, I love listening to it and it's like I can listen more. Because it makes me to dream or it gives me to stay on a good family...It makes me to keep that family I want in my heart and to picturize that family that I created for myself, the parents that I created for myself, making bigger and bigger because it's not a reality. So I have to listen to something to make that family alive. I became to be so involved with the family system by many, many families that I cannot recall.

Which mother can ever just give her beautiful little girl to her sister to raise? Not her? Who can not want to see this cute little girl facing slowly life? Doing things, talking a lot, crying, who cannot want that? So there must be a reason...and I don't have to know why she did it, how she did it, because it looks like I'm getting old – I don't have these answers. And if I'm going to keep on searching them, I'm going to become also one of these perpetrators that are having an excuse not to go forward, are living in the past and clinging in the past. So what do I do then? I just create something that makes me better...I just take what I can take and make it the best and just leave the negative of it... somehow my angel or God there gave me so many moms that has loved me so much. It's hard to just say it's Julie only or maybe it's Julie, Mrs. Birch, the mother that I don't know that kept me for days. It's hard to say that because I just made an example to you of many people who will talk about their mothers and their sisters or their families and I will listen to them...I hunted for my knowledge. I still hungry for knowledge, you know that. I'm very hungry for knowledge. I hunted for what I did. No one brought what I got in me. By just listening to one person,...I always wanted to learn.

That's what make me, Ali. That does not make me super special. That does not make me specialer than anyone. But I'm special because I did many things for myself, you know. I teach myself to many things. And I compromise a lot. I still do. I did before. And I never look at compromising as it's cowardness...I don't look at compromising as it's a scallum person. I look at compromising as it's a good thing.

The part of Gertrude's personality which emerges here is the one that makes her so magnetic. She is one of few people who is able to grasp the challenge and beauty of forgiveness and compromise. This part of her character resembles that of Nelson Mandela, in that he has gone out of his way to forgive all the people who hurt him. After he was released from prison, Mandela invited his prison guards meet with him whenever they like. He had tea with the wives of all the past presidents and the wives of some ANC leaders, encouraging them to talk with one another, to discover sameness amidst all their differences. He harbors no resentment and sees only the potential for power in renewed relationships. Both Mandela and Gertrude are greatly admired for this rare skill.

GERTRUDE: ...It's hard for me to say I did not have people to teach me. But I did not have people to...concentrate on developing this child. Because I have to face it and they have to face it, they did face it. They were not my mothers, they were not my parents, to make sure everything happened. If it comes in their mind or I come across anything, they will tell me "That's wrong." "That's right." "You must be like that." But Ali, if a child is not yours and you do not adopt that child as your child, you don't pay attention on the child's really upraising. That child has to help her or himself, then you feel you can help that child.

In many times, Julie told me that. She will say, "Gertrude, stop saying I have made you the way you are. I have helped you. You have helped yourself." That's what has encouraged me to help you. That's what has encouraged me to take out the money from my pocket and buy book for you and make sure that you're fine because, whatever that you were doing, it was showing me you want something out of yourself, but you don't have someone that can do it for you and I tried to make sure that you got there." And what Julie used to tell me, or...tell people about me is that, "What has amazed me, I met Gertrude in a age of twelve or...thirteen years old and she knew exactly she want to study, she knew she want to be a doctor...She could speak English," which was seldom for a black child in South Africa to speak English at that time. It doesn't matter it was good or what, but to be able to communicate. "And she could clean and she could stand for her mother's, in her mother's job when her mother disappear. And she knew...at 6:00, she must be at home." You know, many things, that I didn't think I was impressing Julie of it, but she was totally impressed. And at the time she was young, Ali, her husband just started to be a doctor, she had a child, but she decided to help me. Ja, she's amazing, she's really amazing. And she was a black person as well...she was Indian.

Before it used to bother me a lot because I lived in Julie's house, maybe I'm looking at them down. And Julie's house is beautiful and Julie's rich. But what was nice for me, Julie herself, she regard her as a black person. The reason why she took me to a township school, she did not want me to think I am rich as she is. Though she did not say that verbally. She let me know. . . after a year or two years and she said to me, "Gertrude, I want you to know what happens in townships, and I want you to know there's a huge difference between our education as coloured people [meaning Indian] and there's a difference between the white education to us as coloured, and you're lower."

...She wanted me to know and she told me, just for a year, that I have to go and do it. And I'm glad that she did because I would have looked at black people as, look at my people as they are stupid today. When I work for the paint industry,...there was two guys there, the other one was a coloured and the other one was a black guy. And there was a woman that was white. They were all taking orders. And this guy, the black guy, had standard ten and the others had lower standards. And he was the most one that was suffering to do the job. Because his standard ten is like the coloured guy's standard eight and his standard ten is like a white person's standard six...So if I did not have to go to Simoneppe, I wouldn't have been able to check that. Simoneppe is in Paarl, in Mbegweni.

Family

It is what we make out of what we have,
not what we are given, that separates one
person from another.

- Nelson Mandela



BOY: Okay, it's a short story, but I'll make it very long. The first time I met Gertrude, it was in the afternoon when I came from work. I saw her standing with a friend of mine, a old classmate and then I make inquiries from this guy, "Who's that girlie you were standing with?" And, okay, he explain to me she's also a standard eight kid in the same school, Simon Hebe... And then I said, "But I'd like to meet her." But it seems to me that he was, he didn't like the idea that I said I want to meet her...

Then one day, about two weeks after that, uh, there was a rent boycott in...Mbekweni. And then some of the teachers were arrested because they were also a part of that toyi toyi or whatever – protest march...Unfortunately, because I was a cop at that stage and...because of the people I work with trust me very well when it comes to, when they have to walk among a lot of blacks and then, this one white guy, a colleague of mine was talk to take photos of the march and then, I was his, I was there for his protection. If anything could happen, I was the one that was there to protect him. And right in front of the line, I saw the friend of mine, this old classmate of mine, Norman Corner. And next to him, there was this little girl shivering, as if it was cold, because she was so scared. And that day, I saw her again for the second time. And I thought, "But is now the bad time to talk to her. Because if I can approach her now, there will be problems, because then they will see her as a sell-out, talking with a cop." And then I make sure that I find out from the others where she stays and all those things...A week after that, I met her again and then I told her that I want to see her and then we had a chance to chat, tell her who am I and to know her more...And since that day, we met each other.

Gertrude and Boy met very early in her time in Mbekweni. According to her, he had plenty of girlfriends, but pursued her friendship and they were close for five years before they started dating. She was not interested in having boyfriends because she was too busy with school and work. After she moved into Julie's, she would go to school during the day, work in a garage pumping petrol after school and then work for Julie at night. On weekends, she helped out at Jamie's practice doing secretarial work. She still dreamt of being a doctor and did not envision herself in a marriage. After graduating from secondary school, she went on to a nurse's college in Mowbray. When she was 23, she and Boy started dating.

GERTRUDE: ...Before I knew I'm pregnant, I was between Julie, Julie was like my home, and I will be at Julie or at my aunt. When I went to go and visit Boy for a night, Julie will think I'm with my aunt and my aunt thinks I'm with Julie...I didn't want to give them any clue of who I'm really everyday with...They trusted me, I used that trust of being able to go to Boy. But mostly my clothes was at Julie's, my books were there, everything was like at home there. And Julie, at the time, started to renovate her place...But week-

ends I will always say I'm going to my aunt, whereas before I didn't like to go to my aunt weekends because it was a shebeen house...I didn't like the way they were handling their life mostly weekends. But now, I was more to Boy because now we starting to have sex whereas before, we were just like friends.

But I was lucky enough because Boy knew that I was pregnant before I can even know... He keep on telling me I must go to the doctor and he gave me money to go to the doctor and whenever I say, "But I don't need to go to the doctor," he say to me, "But you need to go to the doctor. Look you picking up cold and all that." And I went to the doctor and I said to him, "Boy, the doctor said to me I'm pregnant." And Boy said, "Oh, really, how do you feel about it?" I said, "I'm mad. I don't think it's true." And I was in Rosebank House College, at school here in Mowbray. And I told him, "I'm going to go to Groote Schuur¹ again." And I went to Groote Schuur and they said to me, "Oh, you are pregnant. Three months pregnant." And I was really mad...I didn't have periods before I slept with him. The first time I had period, it was the day I slept with him...then I was pregnant shortly after. So I didn't have any cycle of the period...Now my womb is removed. So, my time with a period is very short in life.

Gertrude's womb is a subject that has plagued her for a long time. When she didn't have her period as a young girl, she was told she wouldn't be able to have children. Many black women in South Africa have what Gertrude calls "the womb problem." When Gertrude and I interviewed women of SAFE for economic policy research, 10 out of 24 women mentioned having a "womb problem" without even being asked about it. The problem consists of lower stomach and upper thigh pain, especially potent when it's cold or rainy, and present whether or not a hysterectomy has been performed. Gertrude and Boy believe that under apartheid, black women were given a poison to prevent them from successfully reproducing. Their theory has never been substantially proven. In fact, many factors could cause this tragedy including malnutrition, poor water sources, a sexually transmitted disease or a lack of medical attention. Given the history of the apartheid regime, however, it is not unimaginable that they would poison Blacks in this way. Regardless of whether they did or did not, it is telling that Gertrude and Boy suspect it of them. Nothing is too extreme to imagine of the apartheid regime.

GERTRUDE: So, when I knew that I'm pregnant, before Julie can know, I started feeling guilty. So I started moving slowly from Julie. And I started to think, "Where do I go then? Because I can't stay with my aunt." So then we started to think and my sister, Nomvume, just came from the Eastern Cape and she was with my aunt...in Mbekweni...When I was with Julie, my mom will leave for a while and then I stay and clean for Julie and her house and everything. So I went to look for [my mom] at that point of time and she was in New Crossroads...New Crossroads, it's where they got proper houses. The Swedish government builded houses for people. So, she was staying with a family in New Crossroads and I went to look for her there and these people told me she's got a plot in

the Old Crossroads...When we found out about the plot, we found her and then we told her we going to help her.

Crossroads is a squatter community outside Cape Town, which received international attention in 1978. In that year, the apartheid government tried to dismantle the area, which had less crime and better schools in its citizen-governed informal settlement than the government-controlled townships. The quality of the community slowly crumbled, however, as the government cracked down on it. Mark Mathabane visited in the late '70s at a time when the South African authorities razed the homes of Crossroads every day so as to force its Xhosa residents to move back to the Xhosa homeland of the Transkei. Despite having grown up in Alexandra, one of the roughest Johannesburg townships, he wrote of a visit to Crossroads:

What I saw there made me cry. The place was worse than any ghetto I had ever seen. The shacks were made of plastic, tin and cardboard and stood near clumps of blue gum trees, whose branches screamed like ghosts in the icy Cape wind. There was no running water, sewerage system, streetlights or privacy. Malnourished children ran around half-naked, with distended bellies and large heads full of sores. Here and there a mangy dog licked the bloody feces of a child with dysentery. Here and there a rasping cough of someone with tuberculosis issued from a shack. Women washed their rags in leaky, rusted washtubs.²

The people of Crossroads suffered for their refusal to live in black townships or return to the Bantustans, but their perseverance paid off. The contrast of the squatters' patience and vulnerability with the government's violent cruelty was recognized worldwide, for the first time. This international attention brought the security of "permanent resident" status to 20,000 Crossroads residents so that they could remain in the Western Cape.³ International sanctions increased in the late 70s, becoming even more severe and, as Gertrude said, foreign governments helped pay for the reconstruction of abused communities.

Despite this progress, the government continued to clamp down and violence in Crossroads escalated.

The year 1985 was still more disturbed. School boycotts and bus boycotts often led to violence. There were worker stay-aways, clashes between township residents and security forces and attacks on black police and councillors. . . government officials cultivated and gave surreptitious assistance to vigilante mobs, as in the destruction of the Crossroads settlement near Cape Town.⁴

By the time Gertrude moved into Crossroads in 1985, chaos reached an all-time high. She moved into one of the most tumultuous areas in South Africa having never lived somewhere so deeply affected by the struggle.

GERTRUDE: I moved out of Julie's because I was pregnant and also...they were extending their house. The house was small. But mostly,...I move out because I was feeling embarrassed that I was pregnant. I didn't want her to say,..."You can't stay with me anymore." I initiated that and I did that step. And Boy also thought it's unfair for me to stay at Julie's after she did so much for me. I was really cold towards Julie. Julie was not cold towards me. I was cold towards her, I was miserable about what happened...I felt I failed..."How can I fall pregnant? How can I not finish what I wanted all my life?"...I felt that failure, I really felt it. I struggle, I stayed in Crossroads. So I was distracted at the time. But I had Boy that was with me and we got married.

Julie...was renovating her place so there was a lot of material to build a shack house from what she was throwing away. And the guy that was the builder, Julie's builder, would...ask his boys, the people that were working for him, to load some other stuff and come and drop it for us at the entrance of Crossroads...Nobody could just drive in Crossroads because people were very scared of Crossroads and especial people with cars. There was a lot of burning of cars happening and sometimes people will just try to get in Crossroads and they will come out without their cars or bakkies⁵ there because people will just hijack them or whatever...

So, we builded this house shack and it was a small kitchen, and also small lounge, but it was bigger than the kitchen and two rooms...It was lovely. Boy came to help us and make it nice. It was nice, but our hands were really sore because we didn't really know how to use hammer and all this stuff...We enjoy doing it, but we will be tired and hands will be spoiled, we burned going to the trash, looking for some other material things like you know, the carpet and to look for Nevlon for the floors. And we will be looking for boxes because mostly companies and people from suburbs are throwing their things in the trash...Some will find materials...you get a lot of stuff there, you pick up plants. So then we'll pick up all this stuff and then we'll get it...in

Crossroads and build and make the house nice. And the other thing what was nice there, if you have pick up something that you not using, then you give it to the neighbor, to someone that is building her other place because there were people also building. And we were not the only teenagers that were in that problem.

...I think the house was finish about December, January because I can recall December, we were still carrying some building materials in a taxi and it was embarrassing because people are looking at these teenagers carrying boxes, for instance, pieces of wood. But it was fun. And ask, "How do you carry this?" When you get out of the taxi or get out of some other things, you must put them on your head, and you pregnant at the time. I think we finish about January. But it's very hard to think a shack is really finished.

People always say if you building a shack house, it's never finish, it's a lifetime building because when the wind shows up, you have to rebuild again. When it's raining, you're starting to see falls.

So I was now stuck in Crossroads. I once went to Julie one day and I felt like, "I shouldn't have been here." It was like, the way they looking at me, I think they were very disappointed. But I introduced Boy to them. They found him nice, but they didn't like his job. They actually told me, they don't like his job, but they told me he is a nice person. But they don't like his job and they worried he's going to dominate my thinking. He's going to hurt me in the long run. But when they were saying that, I couldn't think it was going to be like that and it did, it did, it still does. So, and they worried about my children's future as well because they said I'm going to struggle to get married to a policeman. And they used to say, "These people don't think, other people are thinking for them. They just robots." And at the time, I did not think like that, but when I was in married after a year, I think I started to see it clearly...

Naturally there is a lot of anger in the non-white communities towards non-white policemen who worked for the apartheid regime. Steve Biko, in defining black consciousness, says, "Any man who calls a white man 'Baas,' any man who serves in the police force or Security Branch is ipso facto a non-white. Black people – real black people hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their defiance to the white man."⁶ One of the most powerful black consciousness thinkers and leaders ever to live, Biko represents the opinion of many South Africans in this statement, especially young people involved in the movement from birth.

BOY: I think to be a policeman in the old South Africa. Um, First of all, before I wanted to become a policeman, I wanted to become a teacher. And then, because I like working with the community or with people, helping people. But, uh, due to circumstances, I become a policeman. But in the old South Africa, um, it was a little bit sad because even my own family didn't want, even some, even now, they don't want to accept me as, uh, part of the family member because they still see me as a sell-out. They can't get it over their hearts. And especial when, um, after I joined the force, they uh, put me as, or they recruited me to become the so-called security branch member and that was more worse. Because in the old South Africa, ...if you a member of the security branch, they really, they hate you. They don't even want you close to them. So, it was bad because I have to lose, sacrifice my job or my family. And, so I decided the best is to sacrifice my family rather sitting, doing nothing or joining them doing all those illegal things. And then, but, uh, physically, the job itself: Um, the job itself was very, I can't say was, it is, it's a nice job to do because you are there for the community. And whether the people see the old security branch as a, a bad part of the police, I don't see it as a bad part of the police because, at that stage, it was really, we were there to protect our country. Because the people, who they called terrorists in those days, were out, not only to attack we as cops or

the soldiers, but they also attacking civilians, innocent civilians. So, I'm proud to be a part of a team that was fighting for the safety of our country. No matter if they call me a sell-out, but I was proud to do that. Because, my, um, due to the sources that I've got, that I recruited in those days, I have recovered a lot of arms, fire arms and some hand grenades. And I, which I believe, those hand grenades should have been used to innocent people. So, I save a lot of innocent peoples' lives.

Apartheid lasted officially for 42 years, from 1948 to 1990. In that time, the options for South African Blacks were more limited than they had ever been throughout history. Blacks born before Bantu education had a few options. In the 1960s, however, when Boy was born, very few choices were left up to the individual. He wanted to work with the deaf, but he could not work in a white school and black schools for the deaf did not exist. As a policeman, he did what he could and what he grew to believe in as a result of circumstance. Though it was not his first choice, he doesn't show any interest in defending himself.

At the end of a war, in which there are never just two sides, the individual must judge, or choose not to judge, who to condemn. The multiple layers of agenda, strategy, hero, survivor and outcome blur the conviction that might be possible in a time of peace. In this war against apartheid, participants included the apartheid state and all of its employees (black and white), white employers, individual black workers and servants, the Broederbond, the African National Congress (young and old members), Umkhonto we Sizwe - the military contingent of the ANC, the South African Communist Party, the Pan African Congress, black protestors, white protesters, the exiled community and countless others. Each person within each group understood apartheid differently and confronted it accordingly. As Boy's character unfolded, Julie and Jamie grew warmer towards him, despite their initial mistrust. So too did his function as a policeman have a positive side as it enabled him to move Gertrude out of Crossroads to begin a life they might never have been able to live under different terms of employment.

GERTRUDE: So I stayed in Crossroads visiting Boy and Boy will visit me. But not long that I could visit Boy because Boy moved from Paarl where he was working in Paarl, where we were having all these nice times. He moved to Stellenbosch and in Stellenbosch, he didn't stay alone, he was staying with his foster parents, so visiting was shut. So only when he's got a chance to run away from his foster parents, he will come and visit me in Crossroads.

My sister was four months behind, so we had four months in between our pregnancies. I started to get sick, I started to swell, I started vomit, I started not to be able to pass urine sometimes as the time was getting close. So...we decided to get my eldest sister from Dodrecht to come up and to be able to help us both...At the same time, my sister wanted to leave her husband to come to Cape Town. So I wrote her a letter, I gave the

letter to the taxis that were going to Dodrecht and I send a half of a ticket. I asked Boy for the money...I did not say, "Come to Cape Town." I said if she want to, she must come. Or if she does not she can take the money and use it for whatever that she need...After a week or two weeks, she showed up...When she came, she had a child that was...six months...She had a baby and...her two daughters, I'm nearly to give...birth, there's my sister that is also just four months between...

In this house, we don't have really someone who's supporting us financially, but Boy was supporting me...All this time as we were building the shack, the house, I was selling coal and charging a rand...so people were buying that a lot. And also I was selling paraffin, but mostly coal was really helping me...and also Boy will give me money at the same time...

It was nice to stay with my sisters. Not very long, my brother came...His name is Moses. He is the guy that left school to go to the mines I think in the age of...fifteen. And at the time, he really did love me and love us all...because he actually went to the mines for the youngest ones to study or to go to school.

It was not rare in South Africa for young boys to go the mines to support their families. Working conditions were extremely harsh, boasting few safety codes underground where miners worked in extreme heat and tight spaces. The mining compounds where the men lived were for men only and young boys often faced pressure to take part in homosexual relations. Drinking was encouraged as a way of limiting the capabilities of workers to resist their situation.⁷

GERTRUDE: And my sister, also, the eldest one, got married to the guy that she didn't love, she never knew, to pay back my grandparents of raising us. I can say, they have sold their future for us, the two of them. And really, she was paid lobola...

But my brother came and immediately he was not okay with me. One day we were sitting...my two sisters and myself and our neighbors and he came and he ask for food and all the other things...Just the night before that, I heard my two sisters talking about, "...She is the one that is got education amongst us."...But this day, my brother was very...up and down and trying to pick up any fight or anything...He asked for food and I told him, "We just ate, I just cleaned the dishes and there's no other food. And anyway, there is no money to cook all the time, he should have been there at the time." And we didn't know he's coming because sometimes he doesn't sleep there...He said I must not tell him what to do and when to do it and he said, "I'll kick you and you'll give birth with your mouth."...And he was definitely angry and he said I'm the only one that I'm educated in the family...

"Don't think your education can give you control over my life." Which was quite stupid because I was not educated that much, I just had standard ten and I was still struggling to be educated...But anyway, I understood because he left standard three and my other sister left school in standard four and Nomvume, when she fell pregnant, she was doing standard five and Themkosi left school in standard seven...so maybe they could have said I'm educated, but it was a big mistake because my mother did not give money for me to go to school...I work hard for my education and Julie supported me and many many people. They didn't really know my journey, my struggle because they just met this sister and now she's sort of like famous, she's going out with a policeman, she's pregnant with a policeman's child...Life started to turn at that time and I started not to understand my sisters, I started to be lonely, I started not to share much with them...I started to be careful.

...There were other people that will come and visit us, so I made my house clean and also nice. I knew the...guys that knows me will come and visit me...and I did not want anyone to come find me below that they can imagine. I did not want them to find me losing it, losing the battle...because at that time I was in the way of thinking, "I'm losing the battle of surviving." And I was also thinking,...I'm one of the people that really the enemy has succeeded to destroy. So, each and every opportunity that I had to better the situation, I will use it.

My sister started to see I'm really having problems with my pregnancy and she will...call the elder people that were staying around us to just come and check if I'm okay...People will come and pray for me not to die with the pregnancy and Boy will try to show up, but it was now harder as that time, Crossroads was starting to get more dangerous...He couldn't come with a car. Whenever you need to go out of Crossroads, you have to walk and at the time, I was having problems to walk. It's not just a short distance, it's very long...

I got in hospital and I was admitted to stay for a while...Again, I was lonely. And the only person that I knew cared so much more than anything else, it was Julie and Boy. I made a commitment to my baby that day that I will definitely look after her. I was confused about...anything...What is my really last name? What is my really clan name? What is really, who is really my father?...How to get hold of him, how to talk to him?...Who will be my child's granddad? I made a promise right there that I will look after my baby...

So, Evelyn was born on Tuesday. Evelyn was a very sick child. [She] is born 1986, the 22 of April...And Ali, I came out of hospital...with a baby that I treasure so much, I want to do the best for this child. Boy went to fetch me. He came to fetch me from Groote Schuur...On our way, they call him to say he must be in Stellenbosch as soon as possible. So he just drop me outside Crossroads. I got a operation...on my tummy underneath. I got a baby that is few days, maybe three days, on my arms, it's shooting in Crossroads...and the enemy that is shooting me is using the father of my child against me. He has to drop me there with his child and stand with the enemy. Oh gosh, do people know what we went through as police wives? He did not stay with me in Crossroads, he will

just come and visit me and maybe sleep over...It was a shooting, '86, it was terrible, oh it was a distraction. Many people died in Crossroads. Next to my house, the whole family died. I don't know why they didn't shoot right through our house or our shack...After that, I stayed in other places, in other zinc houses in other areas because many people left Crossroads.

Boy's story

Boy and Gertrude came from two very different directions in their lives. Part of what they shared in common was the fact that they both longed for a family when they were young and they desired to make their family everything they imagined a great family to be. They also both had to grasp the reality of a world that was not prepared to yield them some of their longest felt dreams. Gertrude did not become a doctor because her life took a different turn when she met Boy. Boy, too, could not follow his dreams because he lived in a time when opportunities were limited. His history is just as challenging, eclectic and lonely as Gertrude's.

BOY: Okay, my kids, I tried to raise them or to give them a better education than what I had. Because, in the past, we had this Bantu education. And this Bantu education really couldn't build us up to become certain things in life that we wanted to be. And even when you were in Matric⁸ in the Bantu education, you'll never get the same job that the kid who was in the coloured school or the white school, the same job that they had. You were forced to always try lower than them because they knew that Bantu education was not the education for a person to go and do office job. We have to start very low.

We're praying that they must go further than where we are. And that's what we want and what we pray and hope for them so that one day, they can also visit America, all the other countries, or maybe get a job there overseas. Because I am, for instance, I'm proud of my mom. She raised me up alone as a single woman. But she tried her best although she didn't have any education. She was a domestic worker...She died as a domestic worker and now one day I will die as a little bit educated because people see a person who's a cop as little bit educated. So I climbed a little step higher and I want my kids to go, to take the sky as their limit.

I was still very young. I don't know what age was it because due to certain reasons in our culture, you can't ask your mother lot of questions who's not there close to you. So, but what I know, that my father left us while I was a very small baby. And in our family I've got two elder brothers and a sister, so I was a baby, the youngest of them all. And then, after my father left, we moved into my grandfather's house where we stay and we grew up. And then when I was eight years old, my grandfather died. And so due to the fact he died, there was no extra income at home. My elder brother was forced to leave

school and work at a butchery. There were nights that we have to sleep eating only chicken intestines. Only my brother get that from, they throw it away at that butchery and then he pick it up in a plastic bag and bring it home. And then, with the money that he earned at that butchery, he could send my other brother and my sister to school.

And then at the age of nine, I was still not at school and then my mother sent me to her uncle...His only kid was a daughter...And then he said he will raise me. My family are black, pure black, but my uncle married to a coloured woman. She was coloured and he was black, but then they raised their only daughter as a coloured. Many times, they shout at me calling me kaffir, forgetting that their father is also a kaffir.

“The word *Kaffir* is of Arabic origin. It means 'infidel.' In South Africa it is used disparagingly by most whites to refer to blacks. It is the equivalent of the term nigger.”⁹ The extremity of the term Boy's uncle used against him mirrors the extreme complexity of Black-Coloured relations under apartheid. Coloureds were a race of people in South Africa who were neither European nor black African. The Afrikaner government did not know quite where to place them, as reflected in this sentiment of Afrikaner Prime Minister Hertzog in 1925, “...the 'coloureds' are of us, speak our language, have our culture, are Western by any standards, but different only in that they are darker.”¹⁰ In 1950, the National Party set out to redefine the coloured identity, attempting to entrench their strategy of “divide and conquer” among the races. “Recognising that identification is firmly rooted in material experience, the NP set about restructuring the social, political and economic world of the people they defined as Coloureds...which served to segregate Coloureds and break their links with people defined as white, native or Indian.”¹¹ The Coloured labour preference policy which denied Africans jobs in favor of Coloureds was a part of the National Party's strategy of “undermining non-European unity.”¹² The irony of Boy's uncle's disdain for his African heritage is that he was acting exactly as the apartheid government would have him act by shunning his own nephew. Later in the movement, more Coloureds began defining themselves as Black so as to feel solidarity with the movement. In general, however, the coloured position in South African society has always been a precarious middle ground between white and black.

BOY: Okay, he was my uncle and he was nice, but there were certain things that happened that really didn't make me happy...I once told my mother, she was very upset, but I told her not to be upset because at least now she don't have a lot of kids to look after...That foster mother, my uncle's wife, when I was in standard three, she forced me out of school because she said her daughter only passed standard three. But her daughter's problem, she failed for three years

standard three, she could not pass standard three and she was forced to get out of school and do work. And now she also wanted me to leave school at standard three because she said her daughter leave school at standard three, why must I go further?

She went to the shop where her daughter was working and talked to the owner of the shop to give me a job. He was nice enough, he gave me a job, and he said he can only give me a job for weekends and also during school holidays because he found out that I'm a very intelligent boy and that I can go far in life. And then with the money I earned at the shop, I was forced to give it to her as it is and she wouldn't give me any pocket money or things like that. And that's where I started to struggle. Because after that school holiday, I went to school, [my aunt and uncle] didn't want to pay me my school fees, they didn't want to pay my books...

I also met a friend of mine who has a similar problem. And he also is raised by strange people because his mother throw him away. So we became friends because we know how to struggle both of us. And he was not working and I was lucky with the work. And I used to, when I worked weekends at the shop, I used to steal money from the till. And then when he came to the shop, I gave the money to him. And he take the money. Because I was scared to steal, so I wouldn't steal big sums of money. The amount that I steal was a twenty rand. And then that money I gave to him and, because he was a lucky gambler at that age. I think he was also thirteen, fourteen years old. And then he take that money and go to his friends and they gamble. And then sometimes, they double up the money and then when he was lucky to double up the money, then we share the money then we could buy books or whatever is needed at school and we pay our school fees. And sometimes when he lose that week, we're out, we'll just be hanging around having nothing. And, sometimes we were lucky. Just people met us on the street and sudden like our faces. And that person will give us maybe some few things because we're always close together and he's also light in color like me. And many people thought that we're Coloured, and to hear us speaking Xhosa and while they think we're Coloured. It's the thing that makes them to feel to give us some money...His name is Harry, Harry Matyatya. He's one of the fortune guys in South Africa because he's travelling around. I don't know now, but in the past he was walking around with two IDs. One ID was a coloured ID so that when he looked for a job in a place where they need Coloureds, he can produce himself as a Coloured. And then when he must produce himself as a black person, he also had a black ID.

...Harry was a lucky gambler and I was the one that was lucky enough to have that part time job during the weekend. And then we also make provisions for the day we don't have money. When we have money enough, we'll buy some peanut butter and jam and hide it somewhere at the school yard under tree trunks and we'll buy a whole loaf of bread because sometimes it happens that when we go home, they don't give us food, especial my family. They don't give me food to eat so I have to prepare for the next day for food. And then we buy for a week. We used to buy two loaves of bread and then that loaf, when we at school, at lunch time, we go to that secret place of ours, take out the peanut butter, jam and the bread. Sometimes we get there, some hohas³ in the bread because it's hidden outside, under a tree trunk, so you just shake, shake the hohas away and put the peanut butter just with your finger and the jam also with your finger on your bread and we eat. And after we snack, we jump out of the hiding place and go and play with the other kids. We never shared our feelings or our problems with other kids. They

always see us happy and under no circumstances we want them to know that we were struggling in life.

While I was still at school, after the main quarrels that I forced myself to go to school, after [my aunt] said I must not go to school, one night when I woke up in the middle of the night, she was busy choking me. I don't know why...Luckily I was fit enough because the kind of job they give me, I was forced to go to the bush to chop wood and I was forced to carry heavy tree trunks to bring them home. Because they don't want those thin pieces of wood, they want those big. And by then I was very strong for my age. But I managed to push her away from me and then jump up and stand to one side. And many people ask, why didn't I scream why she was doing that? My question is, what if my uncle should have stand up there and find her doing this what she was trying to do, to kill me? Then the whole family would be upside down.

Because that uncle of mine and his wife were Coloured, so I learned to speak Afrikaans in their house because they're only speaking Afrikaans at home. So, what happened, after I left school, I go to look for a job. I try all over, many places, but because I was a Black at that stage, I'm still a black person but at that time, when you are a black person, it's difficult for you to get a job. Only Coloureds could easily get a job...I went to several places, the other place I went it was also me and this friend of mine Harry and another guy. We went into this garage and asked for a job. And then what they did, when they suspect you that you are a Black, then someone will come behind you and scare you. If you shout, "Yo!" then they say, "Oh, only kaffirs shout like that." But if you don't shout "Yo!" then you pass as a Coloured...Due to...those kind of interviews, I lose the job.

Then I went to a place, Chora Brick. I first sit down there the whole day and watch them how they take people in. And I found out when you coloured, they will accept you, but if you have a Xhosa name or African name, then they won't accept you. And then...the following day, I went back to Chora Brick and I told them my name is Boy and my surname is Smith and then, due to that, they gave me a job and I started to work for Chora Brick for two years. But I work only as Boy Smith for a year and a half. After I get a promotion...as a supervisor and I realized that they really need me because I'm the only one that can work with the group of people there. And I'm the only supervisor that all the people like in the company. Cause people will always run away from their supervisors and come to work under my group of workers, my team...At this company, there was a lot of black people working there and they also had a supervisor there, a black guy, also as a supervisor, but he knew nothing about Afrikaans...The manager will ask him to translate to the black people because he was always worried about the production. And because Chora Brick was a brick making company, so there's certain way of you must touch a wet brick so that you can have a good quality brick, and if you grab it too hard with your full hand, the edge of that brick is going to be skew and they have to sell those bricks as rejects, not...for expensive. And this poor guy always say to these people when he translate it, "Now, my friends, you heard what the baas said, he was speaking in front of you. All of you were here, all of you got ears and you heard what he said." But most of those people don't even understand a word of Afrikaans...That's one of the things that

really touches me. Then one day while he was busy interpreting, I said, "Okay, let me help you. I'll interpret to those people today." And then that's why even the managers like me because after I interpreted, I do the interpretation to those people, the people were doing the things that the manager want them to do...Now they have the full message whereas in the past, they didn't have the full message because this guy didn't interpret what the manager was saying. And as I said, due to certain things like that, that makes me see the company really needs me. And if they find out I'm a Black, they won't chase me away.

And then I go back to him and say, "Listen, my man, I am not Boy Smith, I am Tetile [Teal-eh] Sgwentu." When I told this to him, he nearly fall off his chair and he say, "How dare you do that to me? How am I going to explain to the pass laws and those people that I employed you for so long and now going to them to organize the papers for you to work here at this company?"

I said, "Okay, it's up to you. You can chase me away or you give me my job." And he also informed me, "Listen, if we change your surname and your name now, one thing you have to remember is number one, your money is going to drop." And I said, "Okay, I don't care about the money as long as you know the truth that I'm not Boy Smith, I'm Tetile Sgwentu." But, then,...company people do have contacts at the Bantu Administration Board. The Bantu Administration Board is the board where all the Blacks were forced to go and register there. But it was difficult to go and register there if you don't have money. You must have money to register. So then I was registered as a black person at the Bantu Administration Board so I can be a legal worker at Chora Brick. Since then, I work as Tetile Sgwentu until I made the application to join the police force, that was in 1982.

The stories Boy tells here reflect another African life, one manipulated by the ever-present influence of apartheid. They demonstrate the amorphous nature of apartheid: an institution which affected everyone, deeply, in uniquely personal ways. At first, Gertrude's and Boy's separate experiences appear to be completely different. Compared with other South Africans, however, theirs were probably the most similar to each other. They were both equally hindered by racist laws. Both worked to get through black schools. Both had families that were rendered ineffective and unsupportive by economic conditions. Both fought the system in their small, personal ways. Most importantly, both survived difficult and lonely childhoods, maturing with a longing to nurture a family or a community. Despite their regrets, they both chose to live in the present and to make that present precious for their children.

The first year of marriage

GERTRUDE: ...I believe in somehow I chose my own somehow tradition. Not culture, but tradition. Somehow I chose my religion. I chose how to believe on things, what suits me, what's the best.

ALI: *And Boy did as well?*

GERTRUDE: *Boy was more, when I listen to his story, he was more to, he was told how to believe...His people were, his foster parents were people that were believing in the way that we see Christianity now in South Africa. So he grew up believing that the spirits is the one that can chose a wife for him. More, more, more he didn't have the control for his life. He didn't have really a say. He believes on many many things. Oh, they were believing on...they can't have girlfriends, be strong to God and many many. When I met Boy, I was very frustrated with the way he was believing and I totally told him I disapprove of that...*

ALI: *What happened that made him believe that way?*

GERTRUDE: *His foster parents. He stayed with people that believed that way, you know, they believed in many things and still he struggled to get loose out of that. He does, he very loose out of it, but he still struggles in many, many ways...He was too much oppressed in that side. Whereas with me, I was definitely not. When it comes to religion, I was free.*

ALI: *Was his foster family Xhosa?*

GERTRUDE: *No they were Christian, they were coloured. Not really coloured. They were black, but they were black people that ran to coloured. To be coloured people. So, his foster parents were terrible. Really terrible. They were very controlling. Still controlling. And my foster parents, all over, I didn't have really controlling foster parents.*

...They will stand in front of the whole church and say Boy is married to a child that is a sinner...Or maybe, they were warned not to be friends with me because it was like I was going to influence them. I was going...to give influence from the outside world because they were living in the holy world, you know. And, and the other thing is this, they were taught not to, they wouldn't just maybe say "Hi..." you know, because they're holy or they are sisters. And there I come and I'm "Hi..." And I call these mothers, it was Mama Joyce and Mama Joyce was one of the holies in the church and I say, "Hi Sweetie." And Boy will say, "But you don't say this to these people." This weekend, he's going to tell me, "Don't do this," the following week I start with another one. You know, so, it was always like that and I just say, I say, "Hi, you got, ooh, your skin is beautiful." And Boy say, "You don't touch older people in their faces." Oh God, I'm messing up all the time.

The biggest conflict in the first year of marriage for Gertrude and Boy was his cold and controlling family. Not only did they treat Boy cruelly, they refused to accept Gertrude at all. She did not fit in at his coloured church, of which Boy's uncle was the minister. They were shunned not only by his family but by the entire community. That first year was a test: either Gertrude had to change so that his family would accept her, or Boy had to leave them behind.

GERTRUDE: When I met Boy, he couldn't really speak English...He was just Afrikaans, Afrikaans, Afrikaans and I hated Afrikaans. We got married and Boy's parents chased me away because they did not want a kaffir in their house and they wanted a coloured woman. And they had one anyway there, but just Boy did not love her. And we got married. And we had a child.

Ali, it was like I had to protect my daughter in Afrikaans. And how do I do that? I'm totally completely under Boy's hand...And I have to obey my husband in so many many things. It was like totally the change of my life...He never wear shorts because he believe God can never look at a man that is wearing shorts. How much more to a woman wearing a pants? He would not just walk without a top because God can never look at him. How much more to me that I can wear any fancy stuff? I was very frustrated. You have to dress close, close. Everything is close, not even an inch of your bra or your flesh outside. But they did not mind about long skirts or what, but it must not be shorts too, not even anything like mini. It must be really somewhere there, down below your knees.

But the other thing that I was also worried about me and my daughter. I think about my husband as well, but about my home. I was worried about...to see my home language become Afrikaans slowly by slowly. And do I allow this or what do I do? Luckily they chased us away. We stayed just for three nights or four nights at Boy's foster parent's place. And they chased us away.

And we...moved to this farm and we got this young baby baby Evelyn. But she was a year old. And it was a terrible farm in...Stellenbosch. In the same house where we stayed,...there was a woman that was been bitten by a snake and she died. And there was also a family that moved after their baby was bitten by the spider - she or he died too. And Boy's family knew about that, they did not let us know. Boy knew about, after a few days after we move in and he did not tell me that you must be careful and he started burning things around the house...He told me he did not tell me because he had no other choice. So he was worried I was going to be frustrated. And I came from a place where there's lights all over...and it's dark - black. And I'm so scared at night. If I forgot the washing at six o'clock, outside, I will only take it tomorrow morning. I don't want to go outside.

We got married May and we stayed till I think mid-November. We move in on Thursday...and Friday night, Boy's family came to fetch him, that he must quickly come, they need him. Ali, I don't know if there's anyone that has ever been hated by people like that. They did not say a thing to me, you know. And Boy, at the time, was still really listening to them. If they say this, he has to do it, otherwise, he's not blessed, you know, God can never bless a child that does not listen to his parents. And they had hold on him because they made him feel guilty that they look after him from six years old. So he will always try to repay them in a way...

I was supposed to say 'Baba',⁴ but I refused that one, I called him 'love' ever since we called each other 'love'...and 'Boy' when I'm mad or when I just disagree on things. But Evelyn was sort of like forced to say 'Baba' to her dad. I hated that one, but I did not make a move immediately.

But this night,...Ali, they knew people died in this house. Boy went to a thing...They say it's a sing night, like a concert...And they went to Mfaleni which is far, for that whole night! He came home...I think it was about 4:00,3:00...I was just mad. I said, "Boy, did you just marry me to just kill me? Because anyone can come and just come and kill me and my daughter?" It was not a safe house, Ali. No one can ever know till the following morning. I was so mad. And it was not a proper door...anyone can just kick the door and you in. And there's no window, we just got boxes in the window. There's no proper cover that was there. And I was mad about that one. And I really told Boy, I think I must just go home. I don't want you to kill me here with your people. And he was apologizing and everything.

But that was not the last one. Many, many things like that were happening and he, they will just come and call him, he must go and do this and he's gone. I'm alone at home. And he has to take his uncle here and there for preaching and not just for preaching, for going to other people to gossip, man, to sit there and gossip. It was a low, low life to me. But it was also, I was confused because they were using a lot of God, God, God. So, I couldn't really say, "Don't do this." I was also scared not to be blessed by God or to be killed by God...Ah, what a stressful life. Totally against everything I had learned in life. My self-esteem was pressed down, was challenged like anything. My integrity, how I look life... And what was challenging it, it was the name God, not the people around that. As I said

to you, slowly, slowly I came out of it. But we moved, November we moved...to Strand and we lived in a flat.

BOY: The finally move from my foster parents: Many people ask me questions, "Why didn't I walk away after I started to work?" I didn't want them to say, in the heart, they raised me up. No matter how they raised me up. But at least every night a place to sleep. And that was my guilt. If I can leave them away, and say, "Okay, I'm old enough now, I'm working," then start to go and look for some places. I'll stay in that guilt no matter they handled me or they treated me bad the way they treat me. But I still have that shame in my heart that at least I had a nice place to sleep. I slept in a house, not outside in a field or those places. So when I started to work, I still stayed by them and then, even my salary, also went as it is to them. They also didn't give me any pocket money...but I wanted to show them what they tried to do, they do that to a person who's got feelings about humans. That was one of the ways that I wanted to say thank you to them.

But after I married my wife, Gertrude, then the problems stopped there. Then I realized that even my uncle, he was behind the whole thing. He knew what his wife was doing. But he was always the person that will come and talk nice to me. He's the one who always talk to me softly. But after I married Gertrude, I found out that he is also, he's got the same mind as his wife. And that's when we decided, okay, they can't say I never gave them anything because I worked for about seven years working for them, taking my whole salary for them. And, so they can't say I didn't do or I didn't give them anything. So that's when I decided to go totally away from my family. And my other families, like my cousins and other close families, they only started to hate me when I started to join the police force. So, in other words, my only family I got now, it's only my wife and my three kids...Gertrude, Evelyn, Thania and Siphso.

The Sgwentu religion

South Africa has a wide variety of religious institutions. In addition to Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity, traditional spiritualities or religions are represented differently by many different African tribal groups. Though Gertrude has been influenced by traditional Xhosa beliefs as well as the beliefs of her Muslim foster family, she has consistently believed in a Christian God. She studies the Christian Bible and daily prays to a monotheistic, omnipresent trinity. Yet, she continues to struggle to find a church that can meet her needs. As a child, she attended Father Buha's church happily. It was a Christian church led by a German priest, attended by an all-black congregation.

Now, with her family, she seeks a Christian church which will be true to the Christian God in which she believes. The Christian churches which most closely resemble that of Gertrude's childhood are located in townships. Gertrude hesitates to take her children into the all-black congregations of townships, however, seeking a less racialized environment.

They tried "His People," a new evangelical and highly technological Christian organization which meets in theaters rather than churches. "His People" turned out to be an almost all-white congregation which preached primarily to the issues of South African Whites. Gertrude and Boy found His People Bible studies to be highly insensitive to and misunderstanding of their needs, as a result of racial and economic differences. It was also highly patriarchal, and therefore repellant to Gertrude's feminist religious self. The Dutch Reformed Church is the Afrikaner Christian church, which not only is very white, but worked closely with the apartheid government to justify segregation policies as sanctioned by God. Ultimately, the Sgwentu family has opted over time to continue to pray and worship God independently of organized Christianity. Gertrude evolved many understandings of religion on her own.

GERTRUDE: So...I don't understand. I'm a Christian, I just disagree on things: sinners, on judging people, because God, according the Bible, we must not judge. And if he says we must not judge, we must not judge. And I think, if we start to call people sinners, we are controlling them. And what makes the world today is people that decided they too holy and they step in people's boundaries. They started to make a meaning on other people's spaces. And that's why we are so crumpled in the world. And I believe God is looking at us in the angle that he want to see this net. And in South Africa, in the world, we started to make a example of a...triangle. Whereas I don't think it's the method that God want. God want to see a net. When he looks at us he wants to see a net and a net can never be a triangle rather than be a flat, level net. And we started to come out with our laws that push the others to be in that triangle to be in top and that's what people still doing. They still want to be in top, in that triangle and look at others down. Whereas I believe that post belong to God. If there is God.

I believe there is God as a person and I believe his son is Jesus. And I love him very much. I praise him. And so in this net, if we are, if you looking at a net, which means each and every person has got a space of making a meaning. But if I'm going to just want to do a zigzag snared by a net, or if I'm just going to stay on top there, I won't be just filling my space. I want to just lead, and lead, and lead in their spaces and that is harming people. And we still, in order to mess up that net, we still using Christ, we using God. We see sinners – we better than the others. So, totally, Christianity, I don't understand it.

Gertrude's deep personal religion may explain her victory against the countless challenges she has faced in her life. Armed with a solid faith, she always grew stronger in adversity. Oppression has always created heroines – human beings who are forced to search more deeply into the human soul to understand and forgive those forces that drive the oppressor to commit unthinkable atrocities. It is there at the center of the soul that the understanding of how to counter such evil, the strength to rise up against it with conviction, also lies. Gertrude did not have any superficial comfort to rouse her soul to the surface and accept

her situation. She continued to seek comfort and answers more deeply in her soul, in all of the spirituality she ever knew. It was there that she encountered the God that has remained with her since. Her religion is uniquely personal.

*GERTRUDE: ...I come a long way with God. When I escaped Dodrecht, I trusted God. When I used to be sent to go and buy stuff from the farm to Dodrecht and come back, I trusted God, I trusted my angel. I wouldn't have trusted my angel if there was no God because there won't be any angel. When I was in Joburg, when I shared the nights outside with the auntie that I didn't know...I trusted God. **I just trying to trigger anyone's mind that will be listening to this and say, "I trust God." I can't let go of that. I trust, He opens doors for me. And the other thing that is so strong in my mind about trusting God is: I'm not educated. I, I do so many things that many educated people can't do. I stand, I can stand many things that educated people fail to do. I, I surprise myself in many things. Where does that come from, in terms of the world? In terms of people can be only psychologists if they got degrees. In terms of, people can do social workers when they got degrees. Uh, in many ways, maybe I'm just trying to justify my or maybe to praise myself, but I don't mind because I really trust God. I trust God. The huge amount of love that I got, it's from Him. I draw it from Him. I couldn't just do it without Him. And to people that come from, from families, maybe, full families, they wouldn't see things the way I'm seeing them. They would, I'm sure maybe they will totally disagree. Oh, especial people that are educated, you know, because they got a way of analyzing things. So, I trust my God. I trust my God very very much. I can never turn my back on him. It's like, maybe when, when one, when one is...If I will be forced maybe to to, to turn away from God, it will be like I'm turning away from my father and my mother.***

...Even when I tell my children about how to trust God, how they should respect God, I, I don't force them to believe on God, but I tell them about the God that I, mommy believes on Him. And I would love them to challenge me and to challenge themselves on that. But I believe it's the only way...that keep on working. And, God works in our lives in different ways. He, He works with people by just putting a tremendous love in one's heart...He's got a unique way to working with each individual...I have survived many things because of that. I survive hurt because of that. I became to be educated because of that. I became to be strong because of that. I became to learn, to compromise because of that. I love God.

Because of her conviction, Gertrude is able to confront people of all races, political convictions and educational levels on issues in which they invoke God to defend forms of oppression. Christians worldwide struggle to understand issues such as homosexuality and abortion within a Christian context. Through their work with a variety of people, Gertrude and

Boy have both become extremely liberal in their religious beliefs. In fact, it was the homophobia and pro-life sentiments which drove them away from "His People" when they realized that such attitudes only furthered oppression of different groups of people, something they had both pledged to work to prevent. The following is the description of a conversation between Gertrude and an Afrikaner woman whom she met at a bed and breakfast on our trip to Durban.

GERTRUDE: And, I said, "What do you think about abortion?" And she said, "God said killing."...And I said, "Do you define abortion as killing?" "Ja." "But does God say that? Who has ever spoken to God really? What if I said I spoke to God and you said it's right? What if another person say God is saying that – God speaks to us in the unique way in our, in his own way of communicating with each person...It's so funny, would you say David was a sinner? Would you say Samson was a sinner? Abraham? Esop? Many of these guys did something and God still called David as his friend. He chose Samson and Samson was a guy with women – today you look at a person who does, I mean, go out with women and that one and then you say – that's a sinner. David was doing all what he was doing and God, God amazing said David is his friend, according the Bible that was written by these guys that we don't know...

The issues of abortion and homosexuality, which had very little significance to the movement under apartheid when all people were oppressed, have become some of the central dividing issues among the leading political party, the African National Congress (ANC). Though the South African constitution is one of the most liberal in the world in terms of gay rights, they have had trouble practicing the law of the constitution in reality. South African law is presently precariously pro-choice and the ANC is polarized because of that fact. Religion was so inextricably intertwined with the movement that the conflict which arises in post-apartheid South Africa as a result of religion is counter-intuitive. Former Archbishop, Desmond Tutu encountered this issue throughout apartheid and beyond: "The Churches must beat their breasts in deep penitence for their part in helping to divide God's children into warring camps, instead of being agents of unity and justice and reconciliation . . . our dividedness undermines the Gospel of Jesus Christ. . . How can we say apartheid is evil and contrary to the Gospel of Love when we practice such a sad ecclesiastical apartheid?"¹⁵

Both Gertrude and Boy lean to the left on issues of abortion and homosexuality. Given their strict and serious religious backgrounds, it may be surprising that they developed such flexible viewpoints. Boy, in fact, is the trusted confidant of homosexual men in the police force. This ability to embrace people who are oppressed shows that they do not simply try to ignore discrimination. Instead, they counter it with love and acceptance.

Starting over in Strand

When they moved to the flat in Strand and made the decision to leave their families

behind, Gertrude and Boy began to build their own family in which they would both be supported. The process of that family's conception involved almost two years of detachment from their foster families. Different parts of their marriage were hard for both of them, especially Boy's job as a policeman.

GERTRUDE: It was very hard for me...to get married/to be married to a policeman in the apartheid regime. Hard and painful in means of danger, and also that my husband was a security police. So, that means I had to always be alone, many things that we couldn't share. I didn't know that there are things he couldn't share with me. But as time goes on, I...ask him about things at his work and he won't be able to share with me...He told me there are going to be people...who are going to be checking my involvement with the struggle and my family history and everything...then I can be allowed to get married with him. I don't know how far is the truth of that and how did they go about that because I ended up being married with Boy in spite of me being involved with so many things in the struggle.

We were married and it was...very very difficult...They were hunting the freedom fighters...so it was that in and on and sometimes he can't tell me where is he going to...It was quite lonely life, but I think love kept us united...I did not question anything rather than what he's telling me...I believe my husband, I don't think he was involved in any of the killing of people in the security branch. Because if he was, he should have been in a higher rank today. He's only promoted now in the new South Africa.

His seniors have always questioned him because he's quiet, he won't just be involved and he's a good listener...They couldn't really read his mind, so they couldn't trust him to tell him about secrets. He is a hard worker and he is intelligent.

...He was earning very little, he was cut out of the world of the struggle. Many things that challenges me in life, he was against them...and I found him as he was a victim of discrimination in terms of religion and he was a victim of discrimination in terms of the state, his work, and these two are very powerful...He will call people terrorist and I will be so mad and angry and it will be sort of like a argument at home. And he will be against what they doing, Why are they burning things? Some were really good things that he was arguing about, but it didn't seem as if he was seeing the birth of new South Africa, you know. Because he was in a system, working for the system. And slowly he started changing, but it will be in and off, it will be in and off. And I think he grew up in a farm and, as a child of the foreman and, you know, the foreman has to really praise the boss. And also as the child of a...senior person in their church and again joining the police...It had a hold on him. The power of these three was destroying his mind...And I was totally coming out of another angle...that I just wanted to do my things.

...I did not stop loving him. My focus was to change the way he looked at things, not his world, just the way he looked at things. I think if he had continued that, we were going to divorce. I was not going to be able to stay with him if his mindset was not changed. And it did change my mindset also on how I look at so many things because in his belief in the church, he was good on that...

I used to be very frustrated when he was around friends because most of these guys, they were in a similar situation and they...also undermine black children...really black, not coloured...I used to hate that and I did not like his friends.

And that was it. That was my life with him...As I was growing, I started to be more and more frustrated especially...with my children. I will just try to protect them in any way of the way I think if they can believe on the way their dad look at life, it will destroy them...I wanted my children to be challengers...I did not want my children to be "ja, baas." And at the same time, my foster parents Julie and Dr. Jaime, they were freedom fighters...in a quiet way...I learned to be a freedom fighter in a quiet way, in a slow movement, to know my standing point and...not be a follower. They were not followers, they were...quiet freedom fighters and they helped so many people.

I will doing things in that way when I'm in public, but when I'm with Boy, I will...challenge that. I was worried because he was young and he's like he's going to work for the white man the rest of his life or listen to the white man for the rest of his life...That was really worrying to me. It was like, "Oh gosh...we are very far apart." I was really really worried...But we work together now.

Children

Gertrude's second daughter followed Evelyn within two short years. Thania Sgwentu, the spitting image of Gertrude, was born in August of 1988. Neither Evelyn nor Thania nor Gertrude were covered by medical aid when they were born. The state is supposed to provide medical coverage to all of its employees and their families, but, because he is black, Boy was the only member of his family who received coverage. Thania, born in August 1988, came much more easily than Evelyn. Gertrude and Boy moved to their own flat and began working out the details of their family. Remarkably, they channeled the regret they felt about their own childhoods into creating an incredible family for their children.

GERTRUDE: ...When Thania was born,...we were not in the medical aid and that is 1988. I think, after 1990,...we as a family started to be full in the Medical Aid...I remember when I gave birth to Thania, Ali, we were in debt to pay the hospital and we were sent to lawyers by the hospital and this guy will call Boy and come and negotiate with him how many he

can pay, to give birth to his child! And he's a policeman! Because he's the only one that belongs to the medical aid, not me, not his children.

Sipho was totally different than the girls because...we were full in the Medical Aid. Mandela came out of jail February 1990 and Sipho was born 92 May...The situation in the hospital – there totally was a hope. There was more pretence from the white side towards us...There was more than just teeth, there was a shape of a smile from their...cheeks. Whereas,...before they were just stiff. That gave me hope, Ali...I started to love things around the country...I started to listen to things, like rugby, the Springboks.¹⁶ I think I started to know about Springboks after Mandela was released. I hated to hear about Springbok before that...I started to look at cricket. Because...my son will be able to do this one day. I started wanting my country to win other countries when it's the World Cup or anything whereas before I wanted them to fail, whatever they competing with. There was a slowly positive attitude on looking at the bigger things in the country...I started to claim this country as it's my country. Whereas before, it was my country, but...I hated this country...I started to move forward, to help other women to know this is their country from '89 because there was already some positive things happening like South Africa is about to be born...We sang in Pretoria and people stood for Nkosi Sikelel'i.¹⁷ So, my attitude was somehow changing saying, "Guys, plan your future, start planning your future or be serious about your future."...Totally, when Sipho was born, I was grasping the feeling of "I'm not a terrorist here, it's my country..."

When my children were starting to understand. After we moved from the farm, we lived in a flat. And, so it was a good place to live, to stay. My children did not understand or know anything about squatter houses or township life. We protected them from these things, but we did not want them to see these things in a negative way. One day I was...we drove in Stellenbosch and we were driving amongst the squatter houses. My two girls were in the back and I was holding Sipho in front. We heard them saying to each other. "Why are these people so dirty? Look – they're throwing their dirty water in the streets. Look the way they dress, they untidy." At the end, Evelyn said to Thania "Don't talk like that – it's mommy's people and mommy's gonna be hurt." Because their daddy looks like a coloured man, they believe I'm the only black person in the family. They are all coloured. (laughing) Black people are accepted as mommy's family, my people. We did not respond at that particular time, though I was quite worried about that. The same day we drove past Kayelitsha along the beach. They were talking about the squatter houses to a white friend and they were laughing about the untidy people. Evelyn was six and Thania was four.

I don't want my children to be raised by anyone else, rather than me. I would not want that. I would not want what happened to me. I hope God has no, did not plan their lives to be similar to what I went through. Though I'm strong today, I can do things, but I would not want anyone to go through that, not even if just anyone, not even if it's not my children because I love every being, I really love every human being so. I went through terrible things, oh, but it doesn't mean that I can wish for anyone that can go through that.

...One day, I was...disturbed when I...listen or saw my children's reaction negative towards the people in squatter houses or towards people that are called bergees¹⁸ or bergers. And towards maybe, I can't say poor because we're poor too, but the people that look a little bit funny. Or funny, is it the right word? I don't know. But anyway, I was really distracted and frustrated or I was disturbed more than anything else because...I find if I allow my children look at people like that, it will be like...somehow I'm oppressing, you know, I'm teaching my children to oppress and to undermine another being, another human being. And, what I did there,...I slowly spoken to them. Maybe sit down for a few hours or for minutes in a way of...whenever it's a family time or it's the mommy and kiddies time...Sometimes when we talk we call it girls time. And I sat down with them and I told them about how they must look at people, or not how they, not must, but how one should look at another being and told them, "What you see in a person, it's not always the way that that person is, you know, because life can turn you into many things."

I told them about how I grew up and how things were happening around me and I said it's...God's mercy that I did not become like a drunk person and what. And also, I worked towards that goal, that mercy of God. I make sure that I'm not going to totally lose my dreams and some of these people did not lose their dreams. I don't think there's anyone actually that can ever lose their dreams. I think, what makes one to be like beggars or bergees, it's because of seeing that those dreams are not in action and there's no way to put them in action or to to vision, I can say. So, I explain slowly what, how things have been in South Africa and I was very careful, you know. I'm always careful when I talk to my children or to anyone about South Africa, even if you're a student from the State¹⁹ or anything. I don't want to create anger in a person's heart because of what happened to me or what happened before in South Africa. I always believe people need to have a space to judge things by themselves or to know, to really see how they must put this thing, or must think about a thing. I, I always just raise maybe my opinion but in a very careful way. So, I think if I can do that to anyone else rather than my children, I will be more careful when I talk to my babies. So, I was really careful about what I was saying to them. I'm always careful because I don't want them to hate white South Africans or to hate any white in that manner.

So what I did then...it was about why other children at their school that are so rich having Pajeros, Mercedes Benz and their mommies are working there and, you know, and maybe I'm just not working or maybe they own business...Because one has to tell, we have to tell our children about what made us not to be there, and at the same time we cannot always blame it to the white people about what happened. Because, if we maybe blame it to the white people, our children will stay always saying, "We were discriminated, our forefathers were discriminated, our parents were discriminated" and they won't take responsibility. They won't work towards really surviving...So, I carefully explain to my children what happened before and the way I see things. And I told them as well, "That...does not give those people a reason, some of the people, to be beggars. That does not give anyone to be untidy, to be dirty. That does not give anyone a chance not to steal, that does not give anyone anything to do things negative or to harm anyone because we have to deal with things." If there is God and God is alive, He is looking at us

and it's true that when people say God will never give you anything that you can never survive on, you know...So, I believe whatever what has ever happened, we are dealing with it in South Africa. We are, we are and we are slowly getting there, you know, and it's going to take years, of course. I can never forget that, it's going to take really huge years, numbers of years and maybe my children are still going to work towards it for their children, you know. And that doesn't mean I bless it to be like that. If there's any escaping route, I will use it and I will advise my children to do it, but escaping routes never really take you to the end of your road.

If you bless a person,...it must be real, because to me it counts a lot. It's what makes Nonzwokazi today. It makes Thania, Evelyn, Siphon. It what is flowing to their children. What those people have done for me is going to flow to my generation...So I'm thankful...The hurt has happened to me does not determine my eyes or my spirit to see the good that people did on me...I don't want that and it does not justify it. And I hate to see myself flowing in the hurt or anger towards people.

The consequences of cultivating hate

GERTRUDE: The children that killed [Mrs. Birch], it's the children that were from her farm...They first went to break in...She was in town and the killers were also in town, in the location...They first went there to check what was happening and they stole TV and all that, but the police managed to bring the things back. And Mrs. Birch was gone with the family to Durban, but there was a running of horses. And one of their horses has won lot of money for them. And those children came back to look for that money. They thought she's got it because they knew she's like the head of the family that was still alive. And they came to look for it. And they found her. The only thing they found that was there, the money, that was R300. And I think they thought she's still hiding it. And they still think, "She's going to die any minute, but she still don't want to share money."

In 1992, Mrs. Birch was one of many victims of the farm murders that have been occurring with great frequency since the end of apartheid. Between 1992 and 1997, 2730 attacks were carried out on farms and 464 farmers were murdered between 1994 and 1998.²⁰ It is not clear whether the murders are part of an organized movement, though according to *New Africa* magazine, "documentation found at the scene of some attacks indicated that gangs are connected to renegade groups claiming connection with the Pan Africanist Congress."²¹ Conflict exists over the motivation for the murders. They may be an orchestrated attempt to drive white farmers off the land, as *New Africa* suggests. The South African Police believe they are a side effect of crime or theft. Gertrude asserts that they are functions of personal anger and revenge, especially recognizing that it is not rare for the victims of farm killings to be "subjected to monstrous cruelty and sadistic torture."²²

GERTRUDE: When I heard about Mrs. Birch, the people that has killed her. It's the children that I can say maybe, they were a generation after me. Because they were about 16 and when they were 16, I think I was about maybe 28...If, Ali I can say to Evelyn and Thania...they facing this life today. Okay, South Africa is free. And they have to compete with the white children that are coming from privilege privilege privilege houses, families that they have, they had money that was invested before they were born or conceived. And they don't have money. And when they hear about how those children got to be so rich, that brings hatred slowly to their hearts. So, when I hear about the children that has killed her, it was the children of the people that was working for her. It's their sons or grandchildren. So those grandchildren heard the story about my granddad was working for the Birch family, ended up working for Mrs. Birch...and she is so rich and owns farms...And what they think those children? "...Maybe if Mrs. Birch's husband paid my granddad well,...I shouldn't have been in this poverty today." So that anger made them face Mrs. Birch and not see that she's human...I think it's reasonable what I'm saying and it does not justify that...But that hate of, "You discriminated our forefathers, you still winning money today, you still keeping for your grandchildren...Damn! Look at me! You spoiled my whole life! My children, my children to be born, my grandchildren!"

...First they found R300 and they still did not want to take R300, they still want to kill her...And cut her! Into pieces! That's a terrible anger. It's like, if I kill someone like that, I'm dead too. I don't see myself as a human being anymore. I mean, cutting someone, see blood slowly, and cutting someone that you know...Mrs. Birch that they know! Their forefathers, their fathers worked for this family and they still decide to kill her like a, like a bird, like when you cut chickens you're going braai. That's terrible. That's a tragedy...

So I don't want my children to look at anyone,...any Afrikaner, any white South African and say, "You have stole my mother's money, my granddad and everything." I don't want to build that to my children, but I have to be careful in teaching them about the past, their forefather's past. I don't want them not to know that. I want them to know. Because at the end, they might think, "Black nation is stupid. Why didn't you compete with these guys? Why are you not there?" They must know what happened but carefully not pick up hate on it. Maybe anger there and there, I can't say they won't. But hate. There's a difference between anger and hate.

School

GERTRUDE: And the other thing is this, Ali, we are saying, "Now we doing so better, we doing so right and all that." You find it's, schools children, our children, we got them in the school, in two schools last year. We tried to put them in two schools last year, they were not allowed. And children in this street were allowed to get in this school, they said we are too far.

ALI: Why were they not allowed?

GERTRUDE: Because they black. Two coloured children in this street, they were allowed to get in these particular schools. So, that is not democracy. Definitely, that is not democracy. And when we got there, this man told us all the laws, all the laws they can't take children from other towns...It's here in the Heldeberg Basin, it's in Somerset West. I can drive children to get to school any minute, Boy can drop them, we can hire taxi to get them there. He told us all the things, they can't be subsidized and everything. And Siphos friend, was Siphos in Loretto in the same school, he was, he couldn't take his teacher, Siphos teacher, this year. And then his parents decided to take him to the same school in Beaumont? No, not in Beaumont, in, but in one of the schools here, I forgot the name. He was taken immediately. The following day, he, he was starting in that school.

ALI: Why don't you fight that through the law?

GERTRUDE: But, you, fighting is another thing. I cannot put my children in that situation. If I fought, I might end up winning. I think I can win that. And then my children are gonna be frustrated. They going to have the same, going through the same thing that I went through. I don't want my children to have a sense of being discriminated because it's a very hurtful pain, you know? They do have it now in many things. I can't protect them all over. They do have it, but they got a huge backbone of standing on that, you know. Do you know? Because, they not forced to be in that school, they know they can do it, you know. And Thania is the one that they listen to at school anyway. (laughing) You know? So. I don't want to...put my children in frustration. And, I can't just fight it for other people as well. I got too much better things to do, you know? And, also, if I fight it, I must not look at the principle, I must look at the broader picture, because our country is still in the hold of the white South Africans. We still really swimming under them because economically we have no money. Indians don't have money, Blacks don't have money. So, they are still holding all the things. Where there's money, there's power. Understand? So that's, democracy is still a dream to us.

Evelyn (13), Thania (11) and Siphos (7) are extremely successful and sweet kids. Evelyn is more shy and graceful and she excels at modern dance and tap. Thania is an extremely

quick-witted and gregarious socialite who, like Gertrude, could talk anyone into doing anything. She too excels at modern dance, but her success is due to her attitude while Evelyn's is a result of her style. Siphos is a regular cricketer, but he also loves to tap dance with his sisters. All three children are well-loved at school by teachers and students alike. The following interview with Thania and Evelyn reflects the extent to which Gertrude and Boy have succeeded in inculcating an understanding of apartheid without encouraging them towards hate.

ALI: Tell me again what you think about, um, the past, are you angry about apartheid?

THANIA (11): I'm not. I got through it. Well I'm not really, when my parents told me, I didn't really take it that serious. Well, it was then. I thought of it then, well I thought of it, you shouldn't be angry of it because it happened, I can't do anything about it now. Anyway, if it happened then,...well if I was there, I would be really, really angry, but I wouldn't like spoil the whole thing.

ALI: Spoil what whole thing?

THANIA: Like, I would carry on with my life, ja. I wouldn't like be angry all the time and like being moody and bad to every white person I see on the street.

ALI: How about you, Evelyn, are you angry?

EVELYN (13): Well, I was angry when my mom and my dad told me about it, but then I thought that I shouldn't be angry because I should just carry on and accept what happened in the past...and carry on with my own life and be friends to Coloureds, Whites and Blacks. And you know, and there is still some racist Coloureds and Whites these days, but, you know, they should just learn to get along with Coloureds and Blacks.

ALI: Umm, let's see. Oh, will you tell me what your mom does?

THANIA: My mom works with women. She, I think she really likes it. She started about, when I was born she was busy with it still. Ja, she started like when we were in a really young age. She, I don't know, she loves working with women. And she loves helping people too. She was gonna be a nurse, I think you know that further on in the story. And then, um, she was going to be a nurse. That just shows how much she likes working with people. I like working with people too, like healing them and talking about life, but I couldn't stand the blood and all that icky stuff that a nurse does.

EVELYN: My mom likes working with women a lot. Even with men, though, she counsels men and women. And she, she likes giving...poor people things they don't have like...opportunities for studying. Like, I can't remember what this lady or girl was, but she gave her a chance to study.

ALI: What do you think of that work, is it good work? Are you pleased that your mom does that, are you proud of her?

EVELYN: Yes, I'm very proud of my mom, that she does that.

THANIA: Ja, she's doing a great job.

ALI: Do you think that SAFE is part of the family?

THANIA: Ja.

EVELYN: It has to start on the family.

ALI: Why is that?

THANIA: Because let's say my dad hits my mom and she goes out to tell other people not to, other men, not to hit their wives, why do that if her husband hits her?

ALI: What role does your dad play in SAFE?

THANIA: He counsels men.

EVELYN: He used to be a counselor as well, right? Rape Crisis.

.....

ALI: Can't you tell me about the Sgwentu family – what you think about your family?

THANIA: Well, we get along very good, well we supposed to.

ALI: Are you good friends with your family?

THANIA: Yes, but sometimes we have our ups and downs, like all families. Ja, my mommy says it's good to argue.

GERTRUDE: Sometimes.

THANIA: Sometimes. But not a lot – you shouldn't do over it.

EVELYN: *Overdo it.*

THANIA: *You shouldn't overdo it.*

.....

ALI: *Is there anything else you want to say?*

.....

ALI: *Do you want to know anything, Gertrude?*

GERTRUDE: *I want to know what they think, going back to apartheid, the past. Do they think it's affecting their family today? The progress of the family, the wealth of the family, the, um, any progress, like education. I want to know that.*

THANIA: *Well the part that I said I was angry about the first bit, it was because of the education that they gave. Yes, they didn't give much education and I didn't see any reason why not to.*

GERTRUDE: *Yeah, but especially about daddy and mommy, now what do you think? Do you think because we couldn't have good education and we couldn't be educated, is that affecting us? And how does it affect us? If you think it's affecting us, how? And if you think it's not affecting us, again, explain why do you think it's not.*

THANIA: *I think it does affect. Like because when sometimes, like my dad has to be working for the state for a whole eighteen years, right? And like, the people at work, it's like they don't treat him right and then he comes frustrated home sometimes, ja.*

EVELYN: *I think it does affect our lives sometimes because it's...they did have a, well I think they did have a good education cause they are quite*

smart people. But if they had a better education like white people, they should have had better jobs to, so my mother could afford to go around and see other women in other places.

Oliver Tambo once said, "The children of any nation are its future. A country, a movement, a people that does not value its youth and children does not deserve its future." South Africa has not necessarily proven itself worthy of the future which the Sgwentu children will undoubtedly improve through their mere existence in it. The lives Gertrude and Boy have given them thus far have been fully unsupported by the government, past or present. They are a part of an interim generation of people who bear the heavy burden of the apartheid legacy in their youth. Though the institution has ended, though there is no longer a greater force against which to fight, they will continue to encounter apartheid's effects for years. No one knows how many such interim generations will pass before this phenomenon subsides.

Gertrude and Boy have, and fully deserve a future with, a beautiful and healthy family. Their children are not only polite, they are fun to be with and exciting to talk to. Their accents are a humorous combination of the influences from the Afrikaans-speaking area in which they live, the Xhosa accents of their parents and the British accents they pick up at their Catholic school. Their language reflects their privilege and responsibility of truly being "children of the new South Africa." They are being raised to respect Xhosa speakers and to speak it as a second language. Their first language is English, often to the frustration of Boy who speaks English as a third language. Afrikaans is the children's third language, spoken with greatest fluency by the youngest, Siphoh. His seven year-old mind will adapt to anything which helps him win against the neighborhood boys in marbles. As their worlds expand, they are learning more black languages from friends and neighbors, the most recent one being Sotho. Truly, the Sgwentus are a new South Africa family.

SAFE and South Africa

This is one of the most important moments in the life of our country. I stand here before you filled with deep pride and joy – pride in the ordinary, humble people of this country. You have shown such a calm, patient determination to reclaim from the rooftops – Free at last! Free at last!

- Nelson Mandela



The first night Gertrude and I talked about writing her biography, she showed me her many different paragraph-long attempts at writing. She searched through a box of crumpled papers that had been smoothed out and placed in old, wrinkled plastic covers for protection – the haphazard beginnings of her life story. Maybe when a woman is 34, she can't hope for more than a few odds and ends scribbled on old paper to represent her life. It is the living of life that constructs the best of the many pieces one barely has time to put together, much less smooth and polish, until it is almost finished. Though she is young, Gertrude wanted to begin the process of recording her life. It makes sense that the phenomenon of stability reached after so many years of disparate existences in multiple places, would make Gertrude want to finally solidify those early years, to confirm that they actually happened. The proof of their existence, however, is not a book or a thesis, it is the person those experiences have formed today.

This chapter is a compilation of stories and statements that reflect the reality of Gertrude's life in 1999. It describes her work with SAFE and the ways she deals with the legacy of apartheid in relationships, politics and her work with women. These ideas are born specifically of her history and her experience as a black South African who considers herself one of many charged with the task of mothering a new and better nation for her children.

Of all the people who helped Gertrude through her youth before she finally settled down with her own family, she most fondly remembers the auntie in the field, the homeless woman who cared for her in the three days between Krugersdorp and Cape Town. The memory of the auntie who had nothing, yet shared everything with Gertrude, continues to inspire and remind her how to create and maintain a wealthy life.

GERTRUDE: You know, all the people that have ever done things for me...Mrs. Birch, Lindy's mom,...the Parker family in Joburg,...Julie, my last foster parent, my aunt in Paarl - I think of these women and many many others, but they're not compared to the woman that has looked after me for three days in Joburg. When I was sleeping, outside with her...when I was sharing the night with her in a empty space. Sort of like bergees...we call it in South Africa, "bergees," people who are homeless.

I find she's the most strong woman, that woman. Mrs. Birch at the farm, she had money. Lindy's mom had a house, she was a teacher. All everyone had things. She didn't have a home, she didn't have money. She shared her bread, her lunch, the entire lunch for the day, and she gave it to me as my provision to come to Cape Town to look for my mom.

...When I think about the woman when we slept outside for three nights, four days, when she gave me that toast, Ali, I don't think she gave it to me to be full and crush inside and go to toilet and be done. I think she gave it to me for life. You know, when you eat toast, you break it in pieces in front of you. And surely she knew that. Who was giving that toast to her to say toast this bread for that child?

So, you break the toast in pieces, you have a piece in your hand, but most of the toast is on your dress. So, which means I did not eat all the toast. So, I pick up these small, small pieces of bread – picking them up to put them in my mouth. You have to wetten your fingers with your tongue and pick them up. What did she learn me really that day? It's that life is hard and sometimes life is breaking into pieces.

I can't put these pieces together. There's no fruit from this thing. I think she was telling me that nothing can satisfy you from the outside if you're not satisfied inside. If you have hope and faith, you can go anywhere. No fancy huge basket that is full of anything can get you anywhere. Only you can get there. So I think that when I think of that toast. And, her words, "You will do good in life," with two slices of toast! It's a blessing that follows me and it is the way I choose to live my life.

Gertrude has been following that auntie's example her entire adult life. Evelyn was just a baby when Gertrude and Lindiwe began the used-clothing project and the building work in Nomzamo. She had just moved out of Crossroads squatter camp and was struggling with her own marriage, when she started counseling people who needed help. Young women from Boy's church started ignoring instructions to shun her and they went to Gertrude, requesting advice for troubled marriages and abusive relationships. Women were attracted by her freedom from conservatism and authority. She defied the subordination of women promoted by both Boy's church and Xhosa tradition. Insisting that God wants his children to be happy, Gertrude advised women to take a stand on their relationships and to recognize their own dreams. That was just the beginning of twelve years in which Gertrude has forged strong relationships with people in need.

Gertrude works primarily in three communities, all of which are classified as squatter communities or townships. Just three kilometers from her home in Strand lie the communities of Nomzamo and Lwandle, both of which Gertrude has frequented since her work with Lindiwe in 1987. Like with Lindiwe and the women from Boy's church, Gertrude has always attracted clients with her non-judgmental character. They find her easy to talk to and subsequently, a good person with whom to unpack fears, problems, confessions and needs. She started by counseling friends who then brought others to her for help. The social workers in the area could not speak Xhosa and they therefore had no access to the most needy people in the community. Gertrude and Boy could speak Xhosa, English and Afrikaans and therefore could talk to anyone who needed help. They also had a car so they could take people to the hospital, when needed. Ambulances take hours to respond to calls from townships and cars in townships are in high demand, therefore rendering fast transport to the hospital unavailable. Gertrude and Boy, however, drive people to the hospital and then go inside to ensure that the doctor understands the needs of that patient.

The misunderstandings between white Afrikaans-speaking doctors and black Xhosa-speaking patients are frequent and severe. Not only do the misunderstandings result from language, but also culture and economics. Often, residents of Nomzamo and Lwandle

walk the ten kilometers to the hospital, a difficult trek when one is sick. When they are told to come back the next day for their operation or appointment, they sleep in the field behind the hospital because they cannot walk that distance while they are sick. Women who are raped experience the same problem and, with the terror of being raped again, they sleep behind the hospital because they have no other option. Gertrude and Boy try to eliminate this unnecessary trauma by speaking for the people at the hospital. Without the language and social barriers hindering communication, Gertrude and Boy are generally able to arrange a room and food for patients, especially rape victims. The function they perform for the townships near them, especially at the hospital, is a social service that ideally, the state should perform. Until the state can organize the program and funds to do so, however, Gertrude and Boy continue to fill that role for the people in their area.

For a few years, Gertrude worked as a secretary and a bank teller for extra money with which to support her family, but ultimately she and Boy decided that she should develop her work into a bigger organization, knowing that some day they might get outside support. They place a great amount of faith in a God who, in their eyes, has always provided for them.

After realizing the great amount of need that exists in South Africa and Gertrude's potential to fill it, they could not stop working. Gertrude traveled to other communities within a 120 kilometer radius of her house, seeking opportunities to help people. "Help" became more than just counseling. She started acting as a liaison between social work organizations and communities that need the services rendered by those organizations. She brings rape counseling

agencies, development organizations such as the Amy Biehl Foundation¹ and skills courses to

communities, and acts as a mediator through which those organizations can establish themselves.

The areas where Gertrude works are rural enough that the big Cape Town agencies usually have no connections there. Gertrude offers them a way in. She also continues to take people out of the

community, translating their needs in hospitals, arranging for education or computer courses and connecting them to women's groups and celebrations in other communities throughout the Western Cape. Finally, she works to build networks within communities so that people know the neighbors they can trust when Gertrude is not there.

SAFE's most popular course, rape and domestic violence counselor training, started in 1998. Its popularity comes from the fact that Gertrude requires people to take it before they participate in any of SAFE's activities. She believes that as people are trained to be counselors for domestic violence and rape, they empower themselves on a new level. They learn the law and the protocol for dealing with abuse in the home. Many of the people with whom SAFE works cannot even read, but through this course they know how to recog-

nize, define and fight domestic abuse and rape. Gertrude asks, "Why bother teaching someone how to use a computer if she's being beaten at home? Why bother helping her start a business? First we have to plant the seeds of empowerment which start with knowing that a woman can have control over her own life." Though a small percentage of the people who complete this course actually go on to be counselors, they go on to work with SAFE in a great variety of ways and to cultivate the seeds of empowerment that Gertrude has planted: a sense of worth and a resistance to abuse. The following is a description of Gertrude's first rape and abuse counseling session in which she worked with both men and women.

GERTRUDE: When a person is teaching to people, empowering a person that you think, a human being that you think has been a victim, that person has to be empowered, involved with the one that is perpetrating...because in the past we did not do it. For an example, when we were doing the domestic violence course, rape crisis course and mixing just three guys with a huge group of women, [the women] wouldn't say anything, they would not oppose the guys. Especially at the beginning, I was very, very frustrated. [The men] think they are the ones whose got all the answers because they men. But now I'm starting to see that [the women] strong, they standing for it, they say no, they argue with them. So which means, if we can grow somehow a society like that. I'm not saying everybody should do that. It depends to the level of women. When you see those women are really, really weak, you can't mix them with men because they just gonna be destroyed. But if you see there are those that you see they strong, just...help them to empower themselves by arguing with men, especially if it's the same sort of like age or generation because we want the generation that is healthy all over in the world. We want the generation that a man must stop thinking, "She's a woman, she has to do this, that's where she belongs." We want a...woman that understand, "I don't have to obey this...guy in front of me. I have to tell him what I want. And if he does not want, to hell with him..." So if we putting these people in separate corners, they won't know that. And they won't feel they can say whatever. They won't feel a man hurts, though he's a man; a man can be destroyed, a man can listen and just shut up and listen to you as a woman. I've been doing that. I don't scared of any man, of any educated, of any kind.

...I'm not the only one who's not. And there are those that are not, but they just might need a little bit of empowerment, they need just a little bit of being in the same pot-jiekos,² you know, when you mix everything inside. Just put them a little bit...till they get used to it and who knows? So that's what I'm trying at SAFE. But I don't take bunch of men to involve with

SAFE because I still know it's still a problem. We [women] are raised obeying men...If I can just put a bunch of men, I will scare a lot of women. I might thinking I'm helping and in fact, I might be destroying people's self esteem. But so far, it has worked and it's working. We're working together. Those men, they are looking for a office for SAFE and they looking for SAFE and they know it's not their thing, it's a woman's thing. And they

bringing other mens inside...SAFE belongs to women and they are aware of that, fully aware of that.

The excuse of what makes rape and domestic violence today so high, I think it's an excuse. Men grew up – their fathers beating their mothers. Men, boys grew up this way and way. You know, that their mothers were the ones that are doing this. It might be, it might not, Ali. I grew up in that society as well. My husband grew up in that society. You see, he never does that. He cleans the floors. I mean he kneels down and cleans the floors. He's the one who's looking after our children more. And I don't force him to do that. He does it. And he grew up in a house where his uncle was waiting for everything to be done for him. And he grew up without, he had foster parents. When we have the excuse of, "It's because you never have a proper family." I did not have a proper family. I had people's other families. I did not have a father and a mother, you know? Why do I love working with people? Boy never even saw his father. I never saw my father, I don't know who's my father. I never stayed with my mother. Boy...he stayed with his mother up till the age of six...at the age of six, he was sent to the other people. But he does not take that anger to me or to anyone. In fact, he is counseling rape victims. He's teaching people about domestic violence. He's now involved with police, teaching police to understand...the domestic violence and especially women. He's not angry at his mother. He's not angry at any woman...Is that a excuse? People that are putting those excuses, can they interview other people like Boy? Can they interview people like me? And hear our side?...I don't think it's always that you must have an excuse in order to heal something... We have to just walk out of the excuses of many things. Who can say I was never discriminated? I'm fully discriminated, I was oppressed. I did not have education, my husband did not. Many many good people did not. But they not clinging on that. We just can't, we can't just keep on harming our country, harming the world, killing people, raping people and say, "It's because of the past." Are you going to stay in the past? So I disagree with excuses of why people are raping others, why are they doing that...I totally disagree in any level, in the social level, discrimination, politics or anything. There is no excuse to harm another person.

Starting SAFE in Grabouw

Grabouw is a farm community just far enough past Cape Town to be called a rural area and deserve the classification. It is only a twenty minute drive from Gertrude's house in Strand, but on the opposite side of a mountain pass which is impossible to cross on foot. A taxi ride over the pass costs enough that the people of Grabouw are essentially cut off from the urban benefits Cape Town offers, such as competition in medical care, food prices and public transportation. The women with whom Gertrude works in Grabouw are mostly farm workers and pension earners, few are lucky enough to have the higher paying jobs of domestic work or char. The people of the black area of Grabouw are mostly Xhosas and they speak what Gertrude would call, "the really Xhosa" which incorporates almost no English, and they follow "the really" rules of traditional habit and dress. Gertrude got involved

with them when she first heard there were no NGOs working in their area and went to see what she could do in the community.

GERTRUDE: ...Mam Xhaymbie, I met her through organizing women's groups...I went to talk to them and Mam Xhaymbie came in. There were a huge lot of people, and she came in eating food. She sat there and the others were asking, "Can you share it with us?" And she said, "No, I can't, I'm very hungry." She just came from the plucking of apples and said, "I'm hungry, I'm tired." It was on Saturday about 3:00. And I said to her, "You did not tell me what is your name and my name is Nonzwokazi." And she said "Oh, are we waiting for this child? Is this this child that we're going to listen to?" And I said, "I'm not a child, anyway, but if you say I'm a child that's fine. I'm a child to you...but I'm not a child. I'm a woman with three kids."

And she said, "And she's sitting down!" You know, they were so amazed that I can just sit on those small chairs, the creche³ chairs...I was sitting with them and my bag was far away from me and I went to those toilets, the creche toilets to go and wee and they were so like, "Aaah!" I was using Boy's car, the Conquest...and they said, "You're the first person to come from Cape Town and come and talk to us and sit like and relax with us." The others will just come and ask us to sign papers and stand there and they going to the car. I said to them, "Anyway, I'm not from Cape Town, I'm just around the corner...from you."

Ali, that day was not a formal thing. They ask me sort of all of questions...They ask me many many things, things that I thought, "Gosh, is there people...that doesn't know simple things like that?"

The first day when I was in Grabouw, it teared...my heart apart. Being amongst a group of huge womans that look so like they're losing their dreams. Like they are in another island, another world. And we...have to buy the same things, we go to the same shop, there's no discount for them...Life was so unfair just by looking at them. The anger of apartheid started to rise in my heart...I was very angry. And you can't talk to them about apartheid. They don't know what is apartheid really...and you start to say, "Where can I start talking to these people?"...Even if you explaining to them, they don't understand the explanation...You hear them even today, they will say, "You must not talk your English. Don't mix English when you talk to us." It's so hard to explain things to them.

...They think the old government is Mandela – this is a new government. It's so hard...to make them to follow what is happening today. They just know they were discriminated, they know that they don't like a white man, they happy with Mandela. I don't know about Thabo, I'm sure they happy with Thabo...but Mandela is the huge guy for them...which is a huge guy for every one of us...To them it was not the ANC, it was Mandela.

...It's so sad, man...and you find people think they can't do anything anymore about their lives. And they have given up to be servants, to take anything that can come on their way just to give them food. And they got children, you know, they got grandchildren. They are in this same life. It's so unfair...And they sang for me and they said in the song that they sang, they said, "God, we know that you haven't forgotten about us..." I just walk out there, I was crying. I was

supposed to come to go back for another meeting to the Strand. I'm telling you, I stayed there till 6:00. I was so hungry when I walk out there. And they were singing and say, "We praise you, we always know you always with us...you haven't forgotten about us."

And I was saying, "God, why did you bring me here? I don't want to see this. What can I do about this?" And...already I sense it, it's a huge problem. Where do I start? Who can help me with this?

...And all the time I'm talking and I'm going on and my children are in the car. Ach, they always know mommy. Sitting there and waiting for mommy...But when these women, the Grabouw ladies, and they were singing and they got me in the car and they were waving and they talking to my children and they saying, "Oh, it's true, she's got three kids..." And when we drove away, Thania started to say, "Mommy, that was too much." But she was smiling to them while they were greeting her. (Laughing) I said, "Oh, I know Lolly, and I'm so sorry." We just went home.

A lot has changed for the women of Grabouw since that first meeting. MamXhaymbie (Mom Kime-be), especially, has developed a close relationship with Gertrude. At the time that Gertrude went to Grabouw, MamXhaymbie was seeking someone to counsel her daughter, Thabisa. She had been severely depressed since her father died.

MamXhaymbie's husband had worked on a farm in Grabouw. As night watchman, he patrolled the grounds alone every night for ten years, with nothing more than a baseball bat for protection. One night, he came upon two men breaking into the farm house and they shot him in order to get away. Though the murderers were found that night, they served no time for the murder of the black man. It was as if the authorities appreciated the assistance. Or maybe they didn't have time to think about it as it was 1989 and the entire system of apartheid was on the brink of disaster.

At the farm, MamXhaymbie's husband had a small house where his wife and three children lived with him. They were forced by the owner of the farm to move away within the week. David, the youngest, was eight months old. The only squatter area close enough in Grabouw was Rooidag, a small piece of land which was owned by a white farmer who, when he tired of the conflicts in South Africa, left the country leaving all his land behind. He allowed his farm workers to continue to live on the property, next to an old broken-down building, which they turned into a creche. Many people continued to move onto the property after the farmer left. Mam Xhaymbie, too, went to Rooidag to find a place for her

family. She built a squatter home in the back yard of a kind man who lived in a tiny squatter home himself.

The murderers, being black men, and poor, lived in the same small squatter area of Rooidag. The Xhaymbie family had to face them, and the fact of their freedom, every day. Thabisa could not cope. She did not talk to anyone for months. After a while, she would talk, but she wasn't the same for many years. When Gertrude went to Rooidag, in Grabouw, for the first time, MamXhaymbie asked her to work with Thabisa.

Since then, both Thabisa and the rest of her family have been making great gains. Thabisa finished her standard ten and, through programs Gertrude arranged, she attended a two year Bible College. In February, 2000, she begins work at a teaching college in Cape Town. MamXhaymbie successfully created a flourishing business, with a loan from SAFE, selling fruits and vegetables within the squatter community. After living on a pension for nine years, this business has provided her with her first chance to save. She tells Gertrude every day, "I know God has not forgotten me." It is her way of saying thank you.

MamXhaymbie is not the only person Gertrude works with in Grabouw. Gertrude has also counseled many rape victims, especially those that come from families still very much engrained in Xhosa tradition. Rape Crisis, an organization in Cape Town, calls Gertrude to handle their clients because they know she can deal with people who speak the Xhosa language and practice Xhosa tradition. Rape Crisis is a fully funded organization which pays its workers, yet does not pay Gertrude for the help she gives them. Still, she keeps counseling because the people with whom she works wouldn't get help if it weren't for her. Many of those Xhosa clients are in Grabouw.

GERTRUDE: I will...go to Grabouw and make sure, what is the situation in that family. To accept the situation and to understand the tradition of the family. How are they handling themselves?...I will never go to a house wearing pants if it's black people – never. If it's the first time, I wear my dress and I don't wear a short dress. I wear a dress under my knee because if you go to a black house or it's a African family, and you're wearing pants, you might not be accepted, though they want to talk to you. They might think, "She's counseling our daughter. She's going to teach our daughter though she's married, they must wear pants..." So wearing a dress is always safer. It's always safer, that's how also that I think people got impressed...But I never pretended to put a scarf on my head because I hated it.

So I will go there and tell them I'm married, they will never believe...I will assess the situation. And if it's the situation I have to sit on the chair or maybe say, "Yes, Baba," that really tradition respect, I will do that. But I won't do it good because I'm never good on being subservient.

An example of SAFE work

SAFE (the foundation for South African Female Empowerment) is an organization run and led almost exclusively by Gertrude. It depends entirely on her work and vision. She does all of the thinking, planning and organizing. Very few people, even her most passionate volunteers, have the time, money or supportive spouse to put as much time into SAFE as she does. In fact, until 1999, she did not even have outside funding. As a result, all loans and activities made by SAFE before 1999, were a product of Gertrude's ability to fund it herself or find donations. SAFE therefore runs in sync with her excitement and motivations. Gertrude's ultimate goal for SAFE is to help revive the lost dreams of the women with whom it works. This is one story, told entirely by Gertrude, which sheds some light onto her substantial character while exemplifying a small part of what she does through SAFE.

GERTRUDE: ...One of my incidents that I faced once in my life was, um, (laugh), I was getting really excited, trying to get the women from Grabouw to see Mandela – President Mandela. Because it was their dream to see Mandela. One day I had a meeting with them, just a ordinary meeting. Not even, I can't call it a meeting, an informal meeting where we just sat and they told me about their dreams and they ask me about what do we mean when we say rand is low because they still see the quantity of the rand the same. And they were asking about overseas and all the countries and, as they thought Egypt and Israel is in Heaven. And they were, you know, many many things that was really hurting me to see people that are in the really island that they are forced to live in by other people. And, a island of the poorest.

But, in one of our topics, it came out that they would really love to see Mandela and interact with him, talk to him or just to see him close. And I started working on that because it was the only dream that I thought I can really try to give it to them or maybe to, sort of like bring it close to them. So, it was the time that Mandela was, uh, it was the year before '99, that Mandela is going to retire. So the womens wanted to give a present, especially the womens of the ANC. So I took this as a opportunity to bring the women from Grabouw close to Mandela. I knew that it was not possible for them to talk to him, but they will see him talking in front of them. I started the arrangement. And I wrote a letter to the ANC Women's League head office and I asked them if they could help me to get the ladies there. And I also asked them about what I would love, if it's possible, that the people from the rural areas, not only from Grabouw, all the rural areas, if they can be in front when we go to this march, that they can be able to have the feeling of seeing Mandela close to them for those that who never saw them. Including the Grabouw ladies.

And so, apparently in this letter, I scratched some sentence. And I told, I asked them as well if they can give us some money to hire taxis. And I faxed

the letter to them. And one day, a few days after that, I had a call. The person on the other side just said, "How can you send me a letter that has got a scratch in it? And how do you think how must I know? How much do you want? You didn't say how much you want. You said 200 and you told us about another amount and," you know, she was going on and on and on.

And I said to her, "Hello. Can I talk to you? Can you give me a chance?" And she, she was quiet. And I said to her, "When you pick up the phone. And dial 845-8759. And the phone rings on the other side, you must know you have knocked at my door. And that door is mine, Nonzwokazi Gertrude Sgwentu. And you must know how to talk to me. You must say, "May I speak to Nonzwokazi or Gertrude?" And then you tell, and if I say, "Speaking," then you say, you introduce yourself and you tell me why are you calling me. You don't pick up the phone and yell at me and say your say. This is my house. That's how things are done here. You don't do things the way you do at your place or anywhere."

And she said to me, "I'm calling from the ANC women's league."

I said, "I don't mind whether you're calling from the ANC women's league or whether it's Winnie Mandela or anyone who's calling, even God in that sense, God knows how to talk to me – He never yell at me. Because he know I got feelings and he knows this is my house and this is my phone. Whether you come from -"

And she said, "I'm old, I'm an older woman."

I said, "It doesn't matter how old are you. You can be 100 years old. This is my home. You never yell at me. And you must know the manners to talk to people and especial phone manners and professional manners. Here I only talk to people who got manners because I got them." And I say, "And I'm sorry I'm not going to talk to you." And I drop the phone.

And after that, I walk up and down, I was doing what I'm doing. Not very long after that, the phone ring. And I pick up the phone. And this woman said to me, "Hello. This is Ms. Makasi here. I'm calling from the ANC women's league. I'm a treasury of the ANC, I want to know about the letter you faxed to us. And I want to find out why did you scratch the letter and not sign above your scratch? And how much do you want because I'm not clear of how much you want and -"

And I said to her, "Oh, who did you want to speak to?"

She said, "I would love to speak to Nonzwokazi."

And I said to her, "Oh, you're speaking to me, that is Nonzwokazi."

And she said to me, "You are really a strict child."

I said, "Strict, strict." And I said, "Oh, I guess I am. I am really a strict person. It's just that I'm professional."

And she said to me, "But, blah, blah, blah, you know, we are so used to each other,...we're so used to talk to people of our color and all that."

I said to her, "No, you're not used to me. And even if you're used to me, when it's professional, you must be professional. Because I cannot let you do that. And one day you going to do it, if you haven't done it yet, to other people. And that person is going to say "Black people speak like that, including Gertrude." Whereas, Gertrude Nonzwokazi Sgwentu does not speak like that. And when we want to challenge the world, we have to step on professionalism because that's the language of the world." So, that was one of my incidents, but anyway, I ended up taking the ladies from Grabouw to the gathering, or the march in Cape Town and I faced some really problems there.

The people from Langa arrived, Langa, Guguletu, Mitchell's Plain, around there. They arrived at half past nine. Whereas, we people from the rural areas arrived at half past seven. And when they arrived, they started to control us as usual, they wanted to control us - which I couldn't allow that. And people were promised to have food and they were really hungry. There were people as far as Beaufort West which is very, very far from Cape Town. And I started to be really frustrated about what I was seeing there. So, we were told the people from the peninsula, or Cape Town, they wanted to be in front and I couldn't take that. I told, I went straight to the woman that was in charge...Nomakyalala. I said, "I'm a little bit frustrated about this. These people just arrived now and they just around the corner. And they want to be in front. And the people from the rural areas don't know Mandela, they want to be in front and to show that they want to be in front, they were here half past seven, seven o'clock. And it looks like you're allowing these people to be in front and I'm really not happy with it and I know other people are not happy, but they're scared to talk to you, so can you do something about it?" And they tried to, she said, "Oh no, she understand, comrade." And they tried to sort of rectify the problem.

And I started to say, "Uh oh. I couldn't see any progress..." When we were coming close to the Parliament, I started to pull the people that I could see they were coming from the rural areas and I put them in front. And this woman, and one of them challenged me from the ANC women's league in a sense and I said, listen, "Mandela walks in and out Cape Town. (S)He goes to places like Langa and all that. So you guys are used to seeing him. If you really really think good, you should give other people a chance to be able to just be close and see this wonderful person that has free us all, close." And, it was a big thing. But, I ended up getting the ladies that I could recognize in

front and I ended up being one of the people that was really really next to Madiba.⁴ And, but I didn't really worry about seeing Madiba because I'd been seeing him many many times, but I was really trying to get the ladies from Grabouw and other rural areas to be able to see their lifetime dream. That was one of my incidents.

Most of Gertrude's "incidents" occur when she is trying to bring women of different races, languages, educational and professional levels together. One of her primary objectives with SAFE is to connect people who would not otherwise be in contact, who both have something to offer a mutual relationship. Often this means simply having parties or teas with white, black, coloured and Indian women who would not usually socialize with each other. Sometimes it means recruiting a white friend to teach computer classes for some of the black women of SAFE. Gertrude's agenda requires educated South Africans to be able to see the potential in relationships with others who, despite their lack of education, have a depth and richness in their lives, developed through their experiences. Like Gertrude's story, those relationships can be extremely valuable if people are willing to explore worlds outside their own.

GERTRUDE: *But how do we move forward? We need other people to, to use their lights, to show us the way. To, not just to, to use their lights in terms of just they are the ones that are leaders...To lighten our way, to give us a chance to find our own way by using their lights into our lives and I just wish I can have a way of saying this in a maybe a proper English to say it. Why English? Because English is the taught, the language of the world. It's the lucky language that was picked up by someone and to, to control the world. So, unfortunately, if I think I can say this in Xhosa, who's really going to listen to it? And the one that is going to translate it to the big guys as English, it will be, sort of like, when it get there, to the proper person that is meant to, it will be mixed, and not really the really message that I would love. So, that's how I look at life.*

Politics

Politics play a major part in the lives of every South African. As Gertrude says, "We are all politicians in South Africa." June 2, 1999, South Africa held its second democratic elections ever. The elections were just as enthusiastically attended as the first, when people stood patiently in line for three days to elect Nelson Mandela. Thabo Mbeki (Mmm-becky), deputy president to Nelson Mandela, was elected the second president of the new South Africa. Mbeki is the British educated ANC legacy whose father, Govan Mbeki, spent 27

years in prison with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island. Raised to call his father “Comrade” instead of “Dad,” Thabo Mbeki had the political ANC community for a family.

South Africans have varied reactions to Mbeki. He is a tough man with strong reform policies. Mostly, he scares people, especially those unprepared for change. Nelson Mandela had an enormous task, that of reuniting the many pieces of a shattered nation. He filled his role better than any other person could have and there was no question that he was right for the job. About Thabo, there are many questions. In fact, the second presidency provokes controversy because only so many options exist for South Africa now that apartheid has ended. No one knows which one will best for the nation. Part of the legacy of apartheid is an empty bank account. The government used the last of their funds during the final years of apartheid, enforcing their policies to the very end. South Africa’s leading commodities, gold, has dropped in value since 1990 and severely depleted the potential of its reserves. Critics of Mbeki say he seeks only to create a black middle class, neglecting the majority of the country. Others say a black middle class might be good in a country like South Africa, if it means that they begin to build new opportunities for the lower class. Others ask for a democratic socialism. Most people say, give him a chance. They trust him enough to see what he can do. Here is what Gertrude says:

GERTRUDE: And looking at Thabo negative, I don’t think people are looking at him really negative. I think mostly they are comparing Thabo with Mandela...Thabo is a totally private man. We don’t know much about him. And he’s...got his own style. And he knows what he want to do. Mandela, we knew a lot about him. So now people are frustrated because they don’t know about Thabo’s life, you know, his ways.

And he did tell the white people of South Africa that things are not going to be smooth. They’re not going to be smooth. So it’s either they must take their clothes and furniture and move to Europe, or they stay and wait to see. Which they chose to do that. Maybe those that have left, it’s good for them...He told the people of South Africa, as black people, that it’s not going to be smooth and they still chose to vote for him and they didn’t, the ANC didn’t play this thing like Mandela’s still going to be President. They showed, they told the people immediately it’s Thabo. So whenever you vote, you know you voting for the president that is going to be Thabo Mbeki. Look at last time, the ANC had 62%. Now, look what they’re heading on.⁵

So people believe on the guy and I believe totally. And I’m, I am for the change of this country, Ali, and I’m going to be one of the people that Thabo can...count on. I’m going to support him and I’m looking forward for this challenge of this guy. And I’m looking forward that he’s going to tell me, “Don’t think SAFE can just, can be strong if you don’t work hard.” I like it. I like that. And I like that he’s not going to tell me, “Don’t think that because you were discriminated, you going to just get things free.” I love it because he didn’t hide it. He is say, he said that. And, look at the thing of the police. He did not say, “Oh, oh police are just dying and dying. People are being so

funny.” He told them that it’s because of the corruption in the police, police are killing themselves. If he was a person that...is a pretender, he should have thought, “If I said that, police might just, you know, toyi toyi or do something.” He is a leader. Thabo is a leader. Maybe, Thabo, it’s good that he’s taking this second time, this second round because he wouldn’t have done it good in the first time. People needed to be comforted by a guy like Mandela. They need assurity, they needed to say, the people that believe in the apartheid, they needed someone like Mandela who can say, “It’s okay, it’s okay. It was not right to do it.” You know, in a soft manner. I don’t think Thabo should have done that, so he, we were not going to see him as a good leader. The second round is really for him. We can’t think we gonna be brushed out in all the time and say, “It’s okay, Mommy can come, mommy kiss the wound.” We can’t think we going to leave that. This is life. Mommies don’t kiss wounds all the time. So Thabo isn’t going to kiss our wounds. Mandela did the good job to kiss our wounds. And if we still want ten years...for our wounds to be kissed, which means we saying the world must fly and leave us here. So I’m really, I’m looking forward to that.

Gertrude’s politics and her hope for South Africa revolve around creating supportive family-like networks throughout the country. She has faith that the Mbeki administration will help her do so if she works hard and stays true to her word. She realizes that this will take perseverance and hard work, but she’s tough. And she knows that by supporting its people, she will help the nation itself to grow, just as a family grows with the individual development of each person in that family.

Gertrude believes that the common ground between human beings of any race or culture is the relationship with a mother, a family. The common link between women, therefore, is the act of mothering. Thus, Gertrude contributes to the development of South Africa by working with its mothers. She encourages women to see the power they have, greater even than presidents of nations.

GERTRUDE: When the race is run, we have succeeded to believe on our dream, as Mandela did. Mandela dreamed in many ways that this country will become, we will, we will be here...I just think we as women of this nation, we are chosen ones to take this step further.

I’m trying to say to everyone in this world, “Communicate and as women, we can do it – these are our children: Thabo, Kennedy, Clinton, all of them – Mandela – all over. They are ours. We brought them here – they can’t deny that, they are ours. We’re the first ones to change nappies. We have changed their nappies. They started to think maybe they something else when they started to hide their private parts from their mothers, but they

still our children. We still feel, we still love them. We still feel. I never gave birth to Mandela, but in a way, I did, because whatever hurts him, it hurts me and it's a deepest pain. It's a pain that is never confused with anger. It's never mixed with anger, but it's a pain that draws deeper. And when that pain come, I keep quiet. I know women keep quiet when the pain comes. And I know in the slow motion, they cry. And, I'm proud to be a woman. (more softly) I'm proud to, to love women this way I do. I'm proud to hug them. I'm proud to wipe their tears. I'm proud to wipe my tears. I'm proud to give birth to a child, to look after that child, I'm proud because God was proud before I could be proud of myself.

Maybe the question is, "...Can I really put things behind myself? Can I really think I'm not hurting anymore?" Maybe I can't. Maybe I can, I don't know. But I think, through my experience, I learned to be strong. And to survive. And to help others do the same. I can't say I'm helping them. I think they're meeting me halfway. I learned to move on with my life. I learned to transform myself. I learned to accept reality. The pain never goes away. A pain does not easily go away. I think one do carry pain, in many ways, sometimes we turn pain into love and sometimes we turn pain to, to surviving, or, or sometimes we turn pain into hate, or we, to fear. But, I don't like to be controlled by pain, I don't like to be controlled by fear, I don't like to be controlled by anger...

I believe on communication a lot, but I, I don't want to communicate to a person out of anger or out of fear or out of, out of or maybe playing right into the palm of his hand. Because, we been tested in many ways. I've been tested in many ways by many human beings, by people that have challenged me to be a good person and by people that have challenged me or have tested me to, to destroy me. And, as a as a woman, as a child, as a black person, as a human being, as just is normal, I think being challenged and being tested is something that is there. It's not always discrimination or apartheid. I think it's there.

Conclusion

The truth is that we are not yet free;
we have merely achieved the freedom to
be free, the right not to be oppressed.

- Nelson Mandela



Throughout history, countless stories have been written with the intent of demonstrating the true evil that results from a nation divided against itself. Biographies, autobiographies and memoirs pour out of South Africa as they did after the Holocaust in Germany and slavery in America. The literature represents generations of people who must reconcile themselves to their history and their future as a nation. People separated by race, religion, language, tradition, name, education, occupation, community and belief must work to overcome those divisions. In South Africa, the divisions were legislated. All over the world, however, people self-impose divisions in their communities and nations that cause pain like that caused by apartheid. The stories will continue to flow out of those wounds as long as they remain open. In South Africa, that will be the case for a long time. The lessons gleaned by Gertrude Nonzwozazi Sgwentu from her personal experience were learned in a South African context, but they do not have to remain in that space. This story is applicable to anyone's life, at any time, as a testament of survival and a promotion of unity.

The reality of reading a life story in print gives the illusion that the life story is complete. The beauty of Gertrude's story, however, is that it is not a stagnant work. Gertrude continues to change and her story changes with her. In fact, Gertrude's story and the way she relates to it will change each time it is read and understood by another person. As readers are changed by this work, so too will the work change because the context within which it is read has been altered. The world itself changes each time one human being understands another more clearly.

The story has yet to be finished also, because it has yet to be lived. Today Gertrude continues her struggle in South Africa. Against what does she struggle? When she cannot pay her phone bill, she struggles to convince the Afrikaner woman at Telkom, who has never smiled at her and might never, that she technically has two weeks before they are allowed to turn off the phone. She struggles to have a break from her family because never, in thirteen years of mothering, has she had someone whom she trusts to leave her children with – no grandmothers, no aunts or uncles, no trusted neighbors. She struggles to go to the beach with her family without feeling estranged from the all-white population of strangers. She struggles to advise black friends on how to escape the daily fear of township life; which should they do first: move out of the township or send their children to better schools? She struggles to find a way to guarantee the success of any child when such a guarantee does not exist in South Africa. She struggles to run a women's empowerment organization in a manner official enough that she can get funding, despite her lack of experience in organization leadership. She struggles with a physical body that never served her well; she has had 19 operations in her lifetime including a hysterectomy and an appendectomy. She struggles to write ideas for which she does not have words. She struggles to earn an income for doing a job that is critical to the healing process in South Africa, though the money for such a position is not available. Her struggle is between the point where she stands now and the point where she wishes to stand tomorrow.

Essentially, Gertrude has not and will never stop struggling. The fact that she succeeded the many trials of her past does not guarantee a smooth future. She may end every day victoriously and still rise each morning to a new struggle. For as long as the legacy of a divided people continues to exist, Gertrude will struggle along with all South Africans.

The struggle for South Africa will be made easier, however, if it can be determined how Gertrude succeeds in her daily struggles. Why is it that she did not become disillusioned, like many before her, and give up on herself? Why did she not just stop struggling and grow content with a subordinate and servile existence? Gertrude's cousin/aunt, Pumeza, still lives at the farm in Dodrecht. For 35 years, she has lived there and worked for the Birch family. She grew up there, married there, had her family there and even now, her children live and work there. She sees her husband, who works on the railroads, twice a month. A similar fate might have awaited Gertrude had she stayed there. Somehow, she knew there was no future for her in Dodrecht; she knew to escape when she was twelve. She took full responsibility for her education by going to school in Ilinge, Krugersdorp, Mbekweni and Paarl. She then went on to pursue tertiary education in multiple forms – teaching colleges, nursing schools and universities, none of which she could complete because of health and family circumstances. Pumeza, on the other hand, still lives with Ethel on the farm, and she still only has her standard four education.

Many factors in Gertrude's life contribute to a composite explanation for her victories, and her drive for success. The fact that she had no immediate family means that from her earliest memory, she has been an outsider. She never had a comfort zone in which she found security. In thinking that she could find one if she sought her family, she continuously ran away from people with whom she could have lived comfortably, though not necessarily successfully. Pumeza lived on the farm her entire life because it was just comfortable enough, that leaving would be too scary. Leaving for Gertrude, however, offered just enough chance for comfort, that it always seemed better than staying.

Gertrude's solitude, especially throughout her youth, also led to an independence in mind and heart which led her to assimilate many different cultures into her life. Her ability to relate to people of all races and across cultural lines comes from the fact that she does not primarily identify with any one given culture. Her independent and personal views of religion have also been significant byproducts of this solitary lifestyle and have supported her throughout it. Developing a strong relationship with God, in lieu of a family structure, enabled Gertrude to live and travel by herself between families, comforted by the idea of her angel, and God, staying by her.

Gertrude's personal religion was also encouraged and aided by her ability to speak English well. The fact that she was a smart child meant that she could read the Bible with ease and that she enjoyed reading. At school, she was frequently rewarded for her intelligence. She loved school and she continued to pursue it because it made sense to her, not because she knew it would help her build a better future. She enjoyed learning about the world beyond Dodrecht. Her pursuit of education also catalyzed her drive to leave Dodrecht, to go somewhere that she could continue to further it. Her education, essentially, was the consequence of her natural affinity for and interest in it, as it is for most young successful students. For her, however, that affinity was the motivation to pursue six more years of schooling after she left the small school in Dodrecht, which could not offer standards five through ten. Most kids without an affinity for education are either spoon-fed their classes until they realize its importance, or they miss their chance. Without such an

excitement for learning, Gertrude could have stayed on the farm her entire life, with nothing more than a standard four education.

The English lessons promoted by Mrs. Birch also made Gertrude's schooling more accessible. From an early age, Gertrude spoke English with Mrs. Birch because the old woman liked her and she enjoyed giving her attention. This attention was brought on by two qualities which, as a child, Gertrude could not control. Firstly, Gertrude's desire for attention and love made her an affectionate and needy child, appreciative of and responsive to any attention she rendered. Secondly, Gertrude is a beautiful person. She has an expressive face with a big smile and bright eyes. Her skin tone is so rich that in high school at Simon Hebe, she was beaten for wearing make-up when she was not wearing any. Her skin is lighter on her cheeks and darker over her eyes so that a natural blush and eye shadow are ever present. Essentially, Mrs. Birch thought she was a cute kid. In addition to her need for, and positive response to attention, Gertrude's physical appeal encouraged Mrs. Birch to give her special treatment and assistance with school fees.

The same two qualities that attracted Mrs. Birch also appealed to others throughout Gertrude's life. Her physical attractiveness and her generous manner of expressing gratitude, in addition to a great humility, a fierce optimism and a die-hard perseverance, combine to create a woman with whom anyone would want to work. Three different families accepted her as a foster child, not only because she was in need, but because she was charming and she was fun to have around. Gertrude is a magnetic human being. The positive responses she receives from people as a result of this magnetism, make her even more optimistic and excited about life, increasing her charm.

Though these qualities combine to form a hypothesis for Gertrude's success, they do not actually provide a recipe for a successful life. The value of these qualities lies in the solutions they create in the composite experiences of the person to whom they belong. Gertrude must now discern what she has learned, that can contribute to the personal growth and healing of others in South Africa. That challenge is, in part, what she tries to do through SAFE. As an adult, she recognizes the importance which economics play in the success of daily struggles. Though she is not rich, Gertrude has a certain degree of freedom, which comes from the stability of living in a two-parent household with a steady income. American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, once said, "Hard, visible circumstance defines reality. Out of poverty comes conflict." And out of prosperity, peace? Hardly. But out of just economic returns, out of the assurity of food and survival comes stability, a willingness and an ability to share.

Thus, Gertrude is the product of a complex network of factors, over many of which she had little control. In her life, she continues to seek an understanding of the challenges and subsequent successes she maintains. Through her work, she constructs a net of support that has the potential to contain other South Africans, until that component of stability and reconciliation manifests itself in their own lives and in South Africa. The preservation of her story, through this biography, will hopefully serve her efforts in this heavy task, which lies before people in all nations, wherever divisions between human beings occur.

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