



# MY CLASS

Newsletter of the Jozi Book Fair

Issue No. 42- March / April 2018

## EDITORIAL

This is an exciting year for the Jozi Book Fair (JBF). As we celebrate our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, on the top of the list is building a movement of readers and writers, especially within communities and townships. With this year's theme, *Literature and Working People*, we invite you to host events and exhibit at the Festival in September. The JBF is a people's festival, of education, culture and all art forms. The Festival is curated by the public, a unique feature, where 60% of all events is hosted by the public. We invite you to share: interests, art and perspectives as part of a growing movement of readers and writers.

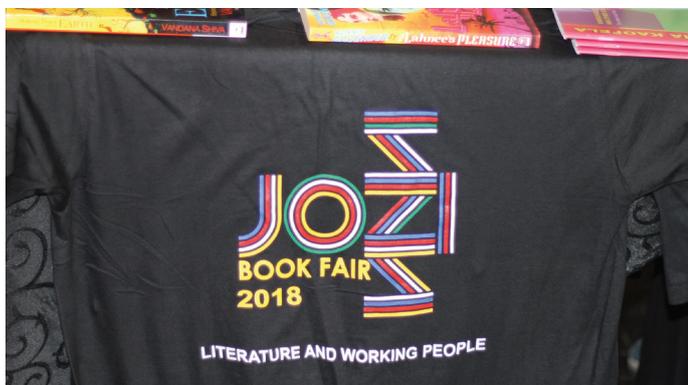
The theme, *Literature and Working People*, is also an opportunity to mobilise working people of all ages to deepen a reading and writing culture, build intergenerational bridges within communities and civil society. To promote the theme, the JBF will host *monthly writing and reading workshops* for the public for FREE. Come deepen your skills, tell your stories and read amazing lives of working people. We encourage you to form book clubs, meet and read regularly in all our languages.

Every month, *My Class* will feature articles related to aspects of the theme to stimulate debate. In this edition, we include poetry and a short story related to the theme.

Enjoy! Read the word and the world!

In solidarity

Tia Maria



## Public Call: Host and Exhibit at the 10th Jozi Book Fair

Don't miss out! Register to host and exhibit at the coming 10<sup>th</sup> Jozi Book Fair, a platform for debate, for readers, writers, artists, publishers and the general public. The JBF Festival is curated by the public. Anyone

## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 10<sup>th</sup> annual JBF Festival, 30 August -2 September 2018, at Mary Fitzgerald Square, in Newtown.
- Public Invite: EXHIBIT & HOST EVENTS at the JBF: Deadline 15 June 2018. Forms & T&Cs available on website and the office.
- Short Story Competition for only JBF Schools: Deadline 31 May 2018
- Contact Us: Email [jozibookfair@khanyacollege.org.za](mailto:jozibookfair@khanyacollege.org.za) Phone: 011-3369190, Website: [www.jozibookfair.org.za](http://www.jozibookfair.org.za)

can apply to discuss and showcase work linked to the 'word'. Progressive NGOs, communities, progressive, small, indigenous and self-publishers are encouraged to participate and host/exhibit and sell books affordably. While the JBF has no gate-keepers, we will not accept content that is misogynist, patriarchal or promotes discrimination.

## Invite to JBF Monthly Reading and Writing workshops

In light of the JBF 2018 theme, *Literature and Working People*, JBF will host monthly reading and writing workshops for the public to deepen their skills and build a movement of readers and writers. These are FREE, stand-alone workshops and participants can submit their work and get feedback from the facilitators. While we invite the public, youth are especially encouraged to participate. The work produced will be highlighted in JBF and Khanya College's media platforms. Participants must register with the JBF.

Reading workshops will be on the following dates:

Date	Time	Registration deadline
12 May 2018	9:00 – 13:00	7 May 2018
9 June 2018	9:00 – 13:00	4 June 2018
14 July 2018	9:00 – 13:00	9 July 2018

Writing Workshops on the following dates

Dates	Time	Registration deadline
21 April 2018	9am -12 pm	18 April 2018
19 May 2018	9am - 3 pm	14 May 2018
9 June 2018	9am - 3 pm	4 June 2018
14 July 2018	9am - 3pm	9 July 2018
11 August 2018	9am - 3pm	6 August 2018

## FEELINGS AND FEET

By Mavis Smallberg  
From Feelings and Feet, 1998

I'm just finding my feet  
in this business of saying  
out loud  
just how I feel

And you?  
Do you know about feet?

They can tiptoe or bounce  
or drag or dance  
they twirl on the spot  
or run like a shot

Feet are important  
don't underrate them

The placement of feet  
one after the other  
can take you from this country  
right into another

And planting one's feet  
firm on the ground  
can keep you safe  
can keep you sound

Be patient with me  
don't laugh at me efforts  
as I'm just finding my feet  
in this business of saying

out loud  
just how I feel

## SHADES OF HISTORY

By Mavis Smallberg  
From Feelings and Feet, 1998

Three seabirds fly across a lilac sky  
layered with azure, pink and palest amber  
echoing the moon.  
How beautiful is our bay from out at sea!  
Those wind-whipped sailors must have breathed  
a sigh when, with billowing sails, they first  
set eyes on Table Bay.  
It is without surprise that I understand  
why they so much wanted to stay.

We welcomed them, bartered with them.  
Soon they would be gone.  
We were wrong.  
It took us seven years to realize  
that they wanted more than sheep.  
And for our folly, hard we fought.  
Our land was not for barter.  
Eykamma was the first to fall,  
the first Khoiman to be slaughtered in that war.

He died as bravely as any Dutchman,  
the diarist said

But he and many others after him, were dead.  
Then survival forced us to adjust;  
although they enslaved some of us,  
raped some of us,

In the end, we married some of them.  
They did not see the beauty of their offspring  
Like snakes who leave their eggs alone hatch,  
so they left children  
Denied then, sent the wedded mixed ones

## REMINISCENCES OF A JOB SEEKER

Jan Ceasar Mbele  
A short story taken from *Staffrider* Vol.3 and 4, 1989

'Hello...' a chilling voice at the other end of the line rang  
in my ears, '... this is the M&M Company, can I help you?'

'Yes,' I said. 'My name is John. I'm enquiring about the  
outcome of the application I submitted to your office and  
I ...' I was cut short.

'What position have you applied for?' a voice asked amid  
the rustling of papers at the other end. I told myself that  
I'd at last run into luck.

At last I'll be able to wake up in the morning and head for  
work.

I'll leave behind the cold, cracking old bed that for years  
has been my nest. A friend on which I cried out my  
frustrations. A reliable steel structure that withstood my  
massive weight. When I was in a drunken stupor, I would  
crash-land on it but leave it intact.

I told myself that before very long I would have some  
money in hand. I would be able to buy myself some shoes.  
My old reliable 'grasshoppers' were now semi-retired,  
with holes in them big enough for my toes to get fresh air  
without any trouble. The socks I bought some two years  
back- before I was retrenched - could only cover my legs  
from the heels up and I had nothing but tattered strings to  
balance under my ailing feet.

I looked at my lower limbs. What I saw made me blush.  
My trousers were long past their prime. Holes made them  
look like fishnet. My one knee protruded from a big hole  
and this together with patches of different colours and  
different materials was enough to make a spectacle of me.

I looked around. People passed, some minding their own  
business. Others glared at me. Some with pity, others with  
disgust.

But that didn't make me worry, not even some of the  
remarks like:

'He must be crazy, how can a young man like him dress  
like that?'

'He is a disgrace, why can't he go to work, his peers are  
working?'

Others were sympathetic: 'Just look at what unemployment  
can do to a man', 'Poor chap! He must have been hunting  
for a job for long time now,' and another added, 'Maybe  
for years.'

Somewhere in what they said the truth lay. Years had passed, months and days on end without me securing employment. Today, I told myself, was my day.

It had been a long time since I last said, 'My Bass, askies, ek is laat. ' I'd long forgotten – in spite of a vigorous exercise to recall – how to respond to a question such as, 'how much would you like earn?' I braced myself. I'd answer it if it was asked. Say one hundred rands and one fifty rands. Sure that is not enough, but how would I answer without spoiling my prospects of employment.

'Hello! Are you still there?' the voice brought me back to the present.

I responded, 'Yyeesss I...' then I remembered that it was a prospective employer and I quickly repeated, 'Yes, I'm still hanging on.'

'You'd better come at once, the manager would like to see you.'

She hung up the phone.

'Peanuts, peanuts, peanuts, madopi, fifty cents, five bob,' a gentle voice was heard down the street next to the telephone booths where I stood after phoning. I looked around and saw where the voice originated from. A boy, barely out of the cradle, was negotiating his way among the multitude, selling his merchandise. Some bought, others didn't and some, seemingly wanting to buy only asked generously how much a packet cost. Perhaps they were discouraged from buying by the untidiness of the seller.

He was untidy. His once beautiful T-shirt, with a 'Sun City Bophuthatswana' logo on the back, was in tatters and hanging against his chapped skin. His unkempt bushy hair looked like balls of dirty wool with smaller, differently coloured, blanket fluff completing the adornment. He wore a pair of oversized trousers carelessly cut, apparently with the aid of a knife, to fit him. He occasionally put his hands in the side-pockets to prevent the falling trousers from sliding down over his buttocks.

Now he had only three packets of peanuts inside an apple box.

He came towards me and put the box down next to me. He looked up at me and set of yellowish teeth flashed between his dry lips. He grinned a greeting, I grinned back.

'Yes laity.' I was surprised that he enjoyed his selling activity. I couldn't help but curse the architects of the devilish laws and regulations that had forced this fragile boy to abandon the warmth of schooling and driven him into the streets.

I looked at him. He was still smiling. In him I saw the duplication of most of our generation. The tiredness in his eyes was that of a typical witness to the Nationalist Party's atrocities. In his eyes one could read the history of our time. When he smiled again the signs of absolute poverty and suffering were momentarily eclipsed by a flame of gentleness. That there could still be smiles from this suffering soul, confounded me.

I was hurt, but not surprised, to notice that from such a rich and prosperous country like South Africa there could be these disadvantaged children who could not enjoy the fruits of their parents' toil. That in a country boasting of massive economic viability there could be those workers whose children could not enjoy the benefits of their labour.

I looked up at the skyscrapers, the blocks of flats, and saw small children on balconies playing joyfully with an assortment of toys.

Along the street others of the same colour were pedalling their bicycles briskly between the people doing their day's shopping.

The privileged colour.

I looked down at the boy again. Still smiling, he offered me a packet. I took one. I thanked him and went away after having told him of my business.

It did not take me long to reach the factory where I hoped to get a job. I stood at the entrance gate waiting for the matjekelane to open for me. There was no one. The gates were locked. I stood there hoping that someone would come to open the gate.

Suddenly, I heard singing voices full of African melody. Then around the corner people came our brandishing placards. Some pronounced: 'WE DEMAND A LIVING WAGE', 'BOSSES GIVE US A LIVING WAGE', 'FORWARD WITH THE STRUGGLE FOR A LIVING WAGE', 'DOWN WITH STARVATION WAGES'. Amid all these voices were heated shouts of 'AMANDLA! AWETHU! VIVA COSATU! VIVA ANC! PHANSI CAPITALIAM!!'

The workers, I could see, were on strike and the bloody capitalists would not give in. industries were doing well with massive profits. The workers were demanding a share from their toils and yet the Boers refused them their share.

My instincts told me to look around. What I saw nearly boiled my blood. Just behind me, along the street, milling towards me, were mellow-yellows and hippos. Suddenly the sound of gun-fire filled the air and teargas fumes burned my eyes. I couldn't breathe. I ran for my life. I ran away from the zone, from the machinery of Apartheid, the grotesque abomination of racial capitalism which for years on end has been pursued with unparalleled brutality against the majority of South Africans, workers and students alike. I ran away to another war zone, the township. There, the might of the state was called in to crush the workers' legitimate actions.

On my way back to the township I avoided, to the best of my ability, walking near the tarred road leading to the location lest I be seen by the green and brown camouflaged on the hippos and other hideous machineries of war. I suddenly remembered the night vigil and the advice of my elders not to attend it. I, however, felt an obligation to attend. Firstly, the deceased was a distant relative of ours. Secondly, he lived in the same street as ours. Thirdly, he happened to be my friend from school. Fourthly, he was a comrade who had been shot two weeks back during the police sweep against 'crime'. I heard later from his

sister that he was wearing a COSATU Living Wage T-shirt. Perhaps that was his crime, but how he actually met his death, I didn't know. It appeared in the unrest report that a black man died in Thabong after throwing a stone at the police vehicle. That was all.

I reached the township well after five and smoke from makeshift stoves greeted me with a burning sensation in my eyes. All this awoke me to the reality that if I wanted to stay alive and endure the suffering further, I had to avoid these big waterlogged rundowns we call street and go for narrow garbage-filled trenches planned to be storm water drains.

I reached home and was greeted by a worn-out figure I call Mother. She informed me quietly that 'makgowa a ne a o batla'(boers were looking for you). I nearly jumped into the sky with joy when I heard this good news. I thought I had at last found employment – that my dreams had come true, that God had answered our prayers. I didn't ask her for details lest I spoil the occasion that needed celebration. I was on fantasizing about what I would do with all the money I would earn. I looked around the house and perceived that the mkhukhu needed some painting and the windowpanes, shattered a month ago by the impact of a rubber-bullet, needed replacements.

I looked at my mother and instantly I felt a pain running up my spine and a feeling of hurt eclipsed my joy. 'How can you look so sad when you should be ululating because soon I'll be working,' I asked, and added, 'And I will look after you.'

'You don't understand my child! she responded. I was to learn later from her that the boers looking for me were in fact Maponesa in a mellow-yellow. Mind you, in truck. In a truck. Surely I wasn't that big to need truck plus a contingent of despotic police. But that's how it is done.

I went into my bedroom. Were it not for a beam of light from outside, entering through an opening between the carelessly arranged and fastened corrugated sheets, I would have walked right into overturned bed. The wardrobe was empty. The contents, old clothing and much older blankets my mother received from my late grandmother, had been strewn on the floor forming a mat. The boxes into which I put books and some of my clothes were empty too, their contents thrown out into a heap. My COSATU diary and COSATU News were gone and so was my old COSATU T-shirt.

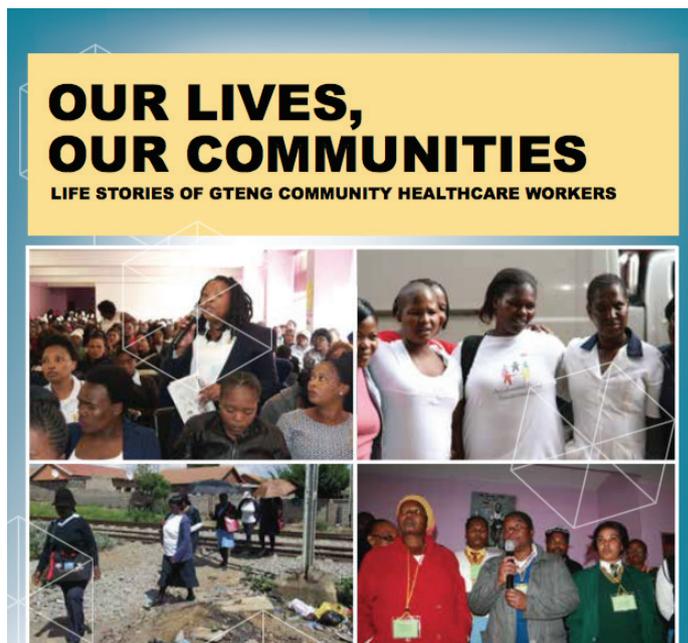
I went outside and teargas fumes blinded me and burned fiercely in my chest. I went back inside only to be forced out again, as the mkhukhu was shaking violently while a roaring engine threatened to run it down. Outside I was again greeted by teargas fumes. My God, I was going to choke in this. Next to the house a menacing hippo stood. My hour had arrived. If I could survive this I would go job-hunting and perhaps get one. But for now my hour for an encounter with the SB had arrived.

## Launch Of JBF Theme

The Jozi Book Fair launched its theme, *Literature and Working People*, at a well-attended gathering on 24 March 2018. Director, Dr. Maria van Driel, said that theme brings together all the work of the JBF, to bring literature of, about and by working people to working people; to discuss issues of colour, class and gender; and to make literature more accessible and affordable to all working people.

The Guest speaker, Her Excellency, Venezuelan Ambassador to South Africa, Ms J Moreno-Merida welcomed the theme of the Fair and linked this to the struggles of working people all over the world. The Ambassador discussed the gains of working people in Venezuela under the late Hugo Chavez: free education up to university level; providing more than 2 million houses for working people and prioritizing women's leadership and eradicating illiteracy.

The highlight of the launch of the JBF theme was the CHWs launch of this book, *Our Communities, Our Lives*. Consistent with the JBF theme, it highlights the life-stories by women workers about their lives, their struggles with Smartpurse and be recognized by the SA government, the Department of Health, patriarchy, the conditions of work and their lives and their aspirations. This was a lively discussion. The book is available from JoziPrintShop. Read and meet the authors at the Festival in September.



*JBF creates readers & writers in all languages & promotes affordable publishing and books*

### IMPRINT

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