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Poli Poli

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9 Highlight(s) | 0 Note(s)

Pink highlight | Location: 2,727

the gap year AMONG THE small number of Africans who completed university studies, almost all depended on funding from charitable organisations. The story within the story of graduation day celebrations is the cameo of the widowed or single mother who put her son or daughter through higher education by doing the laundry or cleaning the houses of white folks. Our society, based on white supremacy and the systemic economic deprivation of blacks, produced only a handful of affluent Africans who could afford to put their children through tertiary education. We had neither a merchant class nor a landed gentry. A few Africans with independent means were self-made farmers who had managed to hold on to land with the assistance of missionaries or through the privilege of traditional colonial arrangements. Of course, there were exceptions, such as businessmen, herbalists, shamans, heads of independent religious formations, confidence tricksters and the like. Their deeds were on everybody's tongues, as the saying went. They featured in magazine articles as 'tycoons' or 'moguls', medicine men posing near their 'mansions' or brand-new cars that were described as 'out of the box'. All the cars my father owned were second-hand. The black Wolseley was totally unfit for the potholed streets of Alexandra, and it became a ritual for the whole family, including Mama in her Sunday best, to push-start

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start it with my father at the steering wheel. It was not unusual for the car to break down in the middle of a township like Evaton, Atteridgeville or Benoni. When he was seized by the angels or the demons of the past, we were captives in the vehicle, as he manoeuvred over the potholes of the untarred township streets in search of some person or some sight to rekindle the memory of a time before we existed. Unabashed, he did not hesitate to recruit whoever was on the street to help him push-start the car. All dressed up, my mother, my sisters and I would disembark from the car and wait on a strange street. There for all to see was Papa, his good jacket abandoned in the back seat, half of his body inside the car, steering, and the other half outside the car, pushing, together with the Good Samaritans, as the car retched and groaned, jerking its way around the block. Both young and old boys seemed to enjoy the distraction of helping out and the sound of the gurgling engine coming alive again brought smiles of accomplishment to their faces. The job done, no one lingered, waiting to be paid, no one held out an open hand to be rewarded for being of assistance. But my father always

handed out some silver coins to the young ones, even though it was generally understood that there was no entitlement to payment for aiding someone in need and it did not matter whether the car was a skoro-skoro or recently out of the box. We waited unafraid in the street, secure in the unseen presence of onlookers peeping through the nylon lace curtains, or a granny there, her legs outstretched on the unfolded grass mat, with young ones hovering around her under the single family tree in the yard. Under the bright sunlight of a late Sunday afternoon, in that dense arrangement of houses all alike in rows, there was always some activity taking place. Across

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the narrow street a rusty gate creaked as a little boy pushed it open, a group of prayer women in colourful blouses matched with black skirts thumped their hymn books in joyous song, separating like the tributaries of a river to find their ways home as the sound of their till-next-times gradually dimmed to nothing, and a lone dog barked for attention. We stood there, hiding our impatience, ready to jump into the car while the engine was still running. Inside the car once more we pretended not to hear a new-sounding rattle emanating from another part of the engine. We raised our brows and moved our eyes in a dance of anxiety about the possibility of yet another breakdown. At first these breakdowns were a joke, then they became an irritation, which grew into a refusal from my mother, who would no longer accompany Papa on his nostalgic visits to homes they had lived in as young marrieds or to see the original sights he was continually discovering. I became the one who would be volunteered to go with my father, and he taught me how to wonder. He tutored me to marry my senses to the colours, the light and shapes around me and to understand that every space could provide an escape from the mundane, if you looked. Intent on discovery, he always found something new in his God's world and, as in his early sculpting, he hardly paused to finish one thing before he went on to start a new one. He revelled in the abundance of novelty, and as a... Some highlights have been hidden or truncated due to export limits.

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dived in the shadows of the water lilies. One of the presents he bought me that I have never forgotten is a kaleidoscope that he brought to KwaGuqa for my tenth birthday. I attribute my love of ethnic cultural design to his early obsession with African masks, set against the clays, grasses and unpolished metals of the continent. I still delight in the sudden burst of brilliant colour woven into any old garment from the east, west, south or north, and favour the sunburnt soil that is reflected in the setting sun just before it dips into the dark. Papa scouted certain neighbourhoods for beautiful architectural designs and he was notorious for his unexpected visits to artists he admired. He disarmed the 'owners' by his curiosity, his interest in their work. Despite themselves, they were flattered by his genuine admiration of the artistic objects they had made. No one in my family owned land or had a university degree. Yet we were considered better off because both of my parents had professional jobs and my aunts and uncles were all employed, with my uncle in Springs considered a wealthy man because he ran a

successful grocery store. By 1960, in a population of over seventeen million people, dominated by a five per cent white minority owning eighty-seven per cent of the land, a fixture of African society was a robust popular urban press. In *The Bantu World*, *Zonk!*, *Drum*, *Golden City Press* and *Ilanga Lase Natal*, we read about... Some highlights have been hidden or truncated due to export limits.

Pink highlight | Location: 2,776

In 1960, when I matriculated from Inanda Seminary, the acquisition of a BA or a BSc degree was still the highest realistic academic aspiration for an African and considered a passport to success. But this had been tarnished by the aggressive imposition of the Bantu Education Act, now augmented by the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, explicitly intended to separate Africans in higher education from the universally held norms of academic freedom. Four of my five years at Inanda had been dominated by the Treason Trial, and during that time the political opposition in the form of peaceful civil disobedience against passes, low wages and the like had spread in dramatic proportions. The unexpected development was of women in rural areas mounting an unprecedented campaign against carrying passes. It was inspired by the ongoing protests of the ANC Women's League and the Federation of South African Women, and yet it had its own momentum, fuelled by the women's determination not to suffer the same fate as their menfolk under the pass laws. The so-called influx control of blacks seeking employment in the urban areas was the cause of great calamity to rural women. They and their children were viewed as surplus, inessential to the economic needs of white South Africa, and through the extension of the pass laws to women it became the intention of the law to dump them in the rural areas, which lacked all the basic necessities for a... Some highlights have been hidden or truncated due to export limits.

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who interpreted apartheid to its victims, explaining to widowed women why they could not remain in the towns or own the houses they lived in because they were minors, telling the old men they must leave the towns because they were no longer of any use in the factories, the mines or the gardens. It was heart-rending work, even for the pastor, the teacher, the nurse, the breaking of the spirit of those who had been trained in...