

Great things are done by a series of small things brought together

VINCENT VAN GOGH



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EIGHT MORE COVID-19 DEATHS IN WESTERN CAPE

THE Western Cape has recorded an additional eight Covid-19 deaths, bringing the total number of deaths from the virus in the province to 137. As of 1pm on 15 May, the Western Cape has 4 592 active cases of Covid-19, with a total of 7 586 confirmed cases and 2 857 recoveries.

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METRO

■ EDUCATION

Help Thamsanqa fulfil his dream

Won scholarship to US school of arts, writes Musa Ndlangamandla

DESPITE the threat of Covid-19 and its rapid and pervasive disruption to our daily lives, Sello Thamsanqa Mpho Ngwaxaxa, has set his sights on acquiring more knowledge and skills to ensure a better future for himself, his family and his community.

While many young people are tempted to throw in the towel as the nation struggles to cope with economic challenges and lockdown isolation, Ngwaxaxa is determined to make the best of a scholarship he has landed with the New York University's (NYU) globally renowned Tisch School of the Arts to study film and television with the best the world has to offer.

"The university offers a dual degree opportunity in which I may obtain a second degree namely a bachelor of science of business in relation to film and television. The best part about this is that both degrees can be earned within four to five years of studies," says the owner of Ngwaxaxa Studios, a pioneering black arts company committed to unearthing talent among young people and magnifying their voices in society.

His goal is to acquire the international skills required to grow the arts and positively contribute to the

economy of South Africa.

But the challenge for this 19-year-old, who graduated cum laude from the National School of the Arts (Gauteng), is that while he has secured the scholarship, it does not cover health insurance, stationery, supplies, residency, living expenses, transportation.

The cost of tuition is \$84 224 (R1.5 million) per year. The scholarship Ngwaxaxa has received is worth \$24 100 per year. He needs to raise R1.1m to cover the expenses not covered in the scholarship.

Adding to the burden is that Ngwaxaxa lost his mother in 2008, at the age of 7. He faces an uphill struggle to provide for his siblings and to pursue his academic dreams.

Ngwaxaxa is seeking philanthropists with funds from the public and philanthropist to cover his expenses which are excluded from the scholarship, so that he could fulfil his ambition to chart a path that other young people across South Africa can follow.

"I am young, I will admit that. Which makes it rather difficult to merit my funding request. But I don't have anyone else to turn to. My mother passed away when I was 7 years old and the little that she did

leave behind has helped me get this far. My father neither plays an active nor positive role in my life," says Ngwaxaxa.

"I am aware that my circumstances are similar to those of millions of young people across the country, and that I cannot sit on my laurels. The world owes me nothing and I have to work hard to seize the opportunities in life.

"However, I am a child of the state with my older sister as my foster parent who herself is unemployed. The principle lies then: that in this seemingly hopeless and harsh reality, an unprecedented opportunity has risen. A chance to change my reality."

He dreams is for Ngwaxaxa Studios to be as big as Disney Pictures, based in South Africa.

"As a creative, Ngwaxaxa Studios will be a gateway to the stories of our people, our triumphs and our failures. It will be a portal to worlds beyond the ones we know. My focus is on the youth of South Africa and inspiring them to love their homeland and their roots," Ngwaxaxa says.

He counts Nelson Mandela, Miriam Makeba and Dr John Kani among many South Africans who are his role models.

DESPITE winning a scholarship, Sello Thamsanqa Mpho Ngwaxaxa is still short of funds to boost his study at prestigious New York arts school.



100 water tanks donated in Mamelodi

THE Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation, Lindiwe Sisulu, received a donation of 100 water tanks from Danish Ambassador Tobias Elling Rehfeld, in Mamelodi this week.

The water tanks will be distributed to the needy communities in an effort ensure everyone has access to water for the regular washing of hands with soap in the effort to reduce the spread of Covid-19.

Sisulu received the tanks during her assessment of temporary residential units that are being built by the Housing Development Agency for Mamelodi hostel dwellers.

During the event, Sisulu indicated that some tanks will be donated to schools around Mamelodi.

Sisulu applauded the Danish Embassy for lending a helping hand in the fight against Covid-19 and said the donation will go a long way in improving the lives of their intended beneficiaries.

She added that South Africa has strong relations with Denmark.

"The Danish colleagues play a large part within the Strategic Water Partnerships Network, more particularly within Water Stewardship, ensuring the most innovative leadership is shared within the partnership."

Sisulu emphasised on the importance continued collaborations as there is a need for more industry partnerships in the human settlements and water and sanitation sectors.

Poet's joy at being recognised

Don Makatile

The History of Intimacy, an anthology of poems, has won Gabea Baderoon an accolade at the Humanities and Social Sciences Awards 2020 but like a mother asked to choose which one is her favourite child, she is at her wits' end to tell. It is her fourth anthology but also carries some gems from her previous works.

"I think for any writer, this is a difficult question. Firstly, you want to be loyal to the strange entity that is a book, even one that came from your own mind. So I am grateful that *The History of Intimacy* came to fruition and has been well-received. But on the other hand, I am currently working on the manuscript for the book again to prepare it for a US edition and in this view I keep finding flaws ... To answer your question about poems from earlier collections, I included "Closer" from my earlier book, *The Museum of Ordinary Life*, since that is hard to find. However, all the other poems in *The History of Intimacy* have been written since the publication of my last book, *A hundred silences*, and some of them have appeared in journals and anthologies," says Baderoon, an Associate Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and African Studies at the Pennsylvania State University and an Extraordinary Professor at Stellenbosch University.

Of the award, Baderoon says: "To receive the NIHSS award is one of those impossible events that you can't even dream of. I barely even breathed when I heard. I was surrounded in that wonderful moment by fellow writers, editors, publishers, journalists and readers at the award ceremony but a part of me wanted to go to some quiet place and just feel the impossibility and loveliness of it.

During the lonely and difficult parts of writing, when it is unbelievably hard to do, the thought of the award gives me a sense of fullness and wonder at my work being read and recognised. The award is also for my editor, Rustum Kozain, and my publisher at Kwela, Carolyn Meads, who both worked on the poems so brilliantly and tenderly during the making of this book. So I thank the Institute for creating these awards and nourishing writing through them." In the credits, she pays homage to the late National Poet Laureate Professor Keorapetse Kgositsile,

known widely in his life as Bra Willie. Bra Willie was an influence in her writing, she says: "I started poetry writing late (a beginning which I write about in the opening poem of this collection). Because of this, I owe an infinite debt to my teachers, the ones who recognised my hunger and gratitude.

Keorapetse Kgositsile is one of my teachers. He saw something in me which was not yet there. I am so grateful for his presence in my life. It was thanks to him, and my friend Ingrid de Kok, that my first book, *The Dream in the Next Body*, was published.

To me, and to many others, Keorapetse stood with us throughout and I was blessed to be at Abantu Book Festival and see him a few days before he passed. He was a good person, a giving person, someone whose attention was deep and reciprocal. I will never forget him, so of course I must write about him." The poems in *The History of Intimacy* are emotive and varied and speak to issues about the Soweto 1976 uprisings and the advent of television, prison visits, looking at old family albums and other everyday experiences like the photographer's caravan outside Home Affairs.

Is life the canvas of a poet?

"Yes, the book encompasses the terrain of my life and all the themes you mention. Things like, the first time I saw a Black person on television, the hidden landmarks of slavery in South Africa, why I desired the skin of white boys.

These experiences feel piercingly real to me, though some of them are decades away in memory. I had to write about them so that I would find out why they haunted me and what they wanted from me. Things like this that are difficult to acknowledge, that refuse to be forgotten - they are the things that poetry is for." There are indeed such things as a lift-me-up poem; a poem for a good day and a poem for a bad day, Baderoon concurs. "Not You, a poem to lift you up," she says, "Cardinal Points, for a good day and Surface, for a complicated day."

Did she always know she was going to be a poet?

"My path to poetry took very long - I only really started writing at 30. However, very early in my life, I was blessed to have an aunt

who spoke to me endlessly, even when I was a baby. Later on, though I was extremely shy as a child, I had no problem speaking in public and I think my aunt's gift of words has followed me all my life. So I believe in talking with children and reading to them. It's an infinite gift."

But is a poet born, or made?

"In my own case, I was taught, both by my family's love of talking and reading, and when I took classes in poetry later on. Whatever abilities I had were given shape by my teachers. This is why I treasure teachers and I hope that we South Africans will restore our schools to the centre of our intellectual lives again."

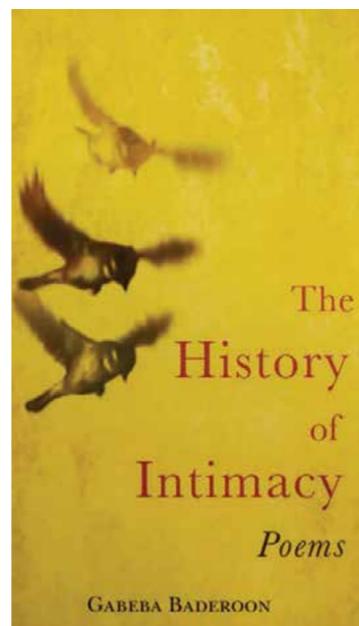
Who do you read, if so many people gush about your poetry?

"I recommend that everyone reads hungrily, broadly and pleasurably. The truth about any good writing is that it surprises you and moves in directions you could not imagine. What could be better in our jaded and often disillusioned era? The poet whose work always stirs and chastens me is Rustum Kozain, whom I've been lucky enough to know since we were students at the University of Cape Town (UCT). To my delight, he was the editor of *The History of Intimacy*.

"I find it almost impossible to explain why these poems will remain with me forever. It's better for you to read them. But if I were to fail to say why, it would be in the case of "Kingdom of Rain" that it is about experiencing an impossible "moment of grace"

Thanks to the African Poetry Book Fund, I've encountered Ladan Osman's stunning *The Kitchen Dweller's Testimony* (from which I drew the epigraph for my book *Regarding Muslims*) and the striking work of my fellow board member Aracelis Girmay. As a student in the UK in 2002, I discovered Mark Doty's shimmering poetry of objects and memory.

I also love reading the austere Swede, Tomas Tranströmer. Because I moved countries in 2003, I happily lost myself in the bookshelves of my partner and there I read



The History of Intimacy penned by Gabea Baderoon won the Humanities Awards 2020 Best Fiction Poetry and Short Stories award



the Russians, Yevtushenko and Akhmatova. I've been lucky enough to edit and therefore deeply immerse myself in the collections of Epiphanye Mukasano, Bandile Gumbi, Natalia Molebatsi and Phillippa Yaa de Villiers, all poets from whom I've deepened my knowledge of how to write. I am open to reading everything, and after all these years, I know pretty quickly if the poems move me or not."

Wow! If that was a word, I'd be happy to use it for the first time in my writing life as a journalist.

I then ask Baderoon: Is there a poem that has stayed with you forever, from someone else's pen? What makes it so?

"Rustum Kozain's "Kingdom of Rain" in *This Carting Life* and Shailja Patel's poem "How Ambi Became Paisley" in her book *Migritude*."

"I find it almost impossible to explain why these poems will remain with me forever. It's better for you to read them. But if I were to fail to say why, it would be in the case of "Kingdom of Rain" that it is about experiencing an impossible "moment of grace", and how poetry can retrieve that too-brief, irrevocably lost moment and bring it back, piercingly and unforgettably.

In the case of "How Ambi became Paisley", Patel's writing ensures that the hist-

ory of a pattern that now anonymously covers my body instead enters me and evokes a knowing and a fury that I cannot let go. These poems exemplify the intellectual, aesthetic, psychological and political power of poetry."

I then conclude by asking her: What makes *The History of Intimacy* the title poem? There must be something special about it for it to earn not just a spot on the cover but maybe in the heart of the writer too?

To which she responds: "One of the effects of apartheid for me was that I learned to despise what was closest to me as a Black South African. Whatever was important and meaningful happened elsewhere. I ignored so much and discarded so much, something I realized too late.

The title poem, "*The History of Intimacy*" is my attempt to atone for this, where I turn to the things that I lost and rejected, and which I can only retrieve in memory and words. In "*The History of Intimacy*", I write about Livingstone High School, one of the great Black intellectual centres of the country during the 1980s, about my mother's Parkinson's disease, about how apartheid was not only about laws but about our bodies, our skin, our minds - it came so close. So how to remember that history that was so intimate ... this is what I contemplate in that poem."