MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Volume 1

Stories of Men Making a Difference

This book is the first volume in a three-part series comprising stories, analysis and faith-based resources. Its aim is to mobilise positive changes in the ways that men – and women – understand male identity in South Africa.

Edited by Daniela Gennrich

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MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA
a three-part series comprising stories, analysis and faith-based resources

Volume 1 Stories of Men Making a Difference

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Men and Masculinities in South Africa

Almost twenty years into South Africa’s democratic era, the process of transformation to social justice has only just begun. The Bill of Rights in our celebrated Constitution includes gender rights as an essential part of our shared vision for racial, class and gender equality and justice. And yet, prejudice and violence against women, children and sexual minorities continue. Male domination persists in society, and many doctrines and practices of churches reinforce the patriarchal tradition. But there are also signs of hope: the numbers of women in leadership positions are increasing; many organisations are working for gender justice; gender-based violence has become a national concern; and there is evidence that attitudes are slowly changing.

In many ways, it seems as if gender justice has been truly forgotten in the kitchen of the nation building project. The SA Medical Research Council’s gender research unit found that 30% of women are sexually abused in South Africa; that one in four men admitted to having raped a woman; that a large proportion of men align themselves with an oppressive version of masculinity; and it named South Africa the rape capital of the world. Rape is always horrifying, but particularly the “corrective rape” of Lesbian women and rape of the very young, the very old, and even the disabled. Gender injustice is also prominent in the church. The voice of women is largely marginalised. Some churches continue to assert that women cannot take up ordained or lay leadership positions, and many still preach women’s obedience to men.

This situation is not confined to South Africa. Even in some of the most ‘liberal’ and developed countries, oppressive perceptions of masculinity dominate. A strong masculine ideal is not to care, since caring is seen as a marker of femininity. Many men base their sense of male worth on performance, rather than on the quality of relationships. Women and men who do not fit the norm are damaged and diminished in painfully obvious ways, and also in less visible ways, by hegemonic forms of masculinity. Women also play their part in perpetuating the male-dominant versions of masculinity and femininity through socialising their own children into them.

What hope, then, do we have? Hope lies in the large number of gender activists, NGOs and gender interventions, in South Africa and elsewhere. Local community men’s forums show that many men are ready to participate in gender transformation. Other initiatives include the HSRC’s travelling photo exhibition of men in caring
situations, and the Medical Research Council’s Stepping Stones project to enable rural men to relate to women differently. The South African Men’s Forum has publicly challenged gender injustice through legal and media channels. The One Man Can programme and the Targeted AIDS Intervention (TAI) tackle the vital links between gender and HIV prevention.

But change requires men to be willing to confront their own gender stereotypes and oppressive practices, and to learn to relate anew to fellow human beings. This leads them to engage in caring – together with women – in situations which require them to learn new attitudes and skills. The success of such programs depends on the creation of safe spaces where boys and young men can begin to hatch new gender outlooks and behaviour, away from the oppressive and controlling gaze of other boys.

Two NGOs closely involved in gender transformation work are PACSA and the Sonke Gender Justice Network. PACSA’s Gender Desk, formed in 1996, established a Men and Gender Project in 2005, having recognised that gender injustice is best addressed by working with both men and women. Sonke, formed in 2006, works widely with many partners in Africa and South Africa to prevent domestic and sexual violence, reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS and promote gender equality and human rights.

PACSA and Sonke have collaborated in the production of this three-volume series. It offers a unique compendium of resources on various aspects of masculinity, and is born of many years of direct experience and research in numerous communities.

**Volume 1** contains encouraging stories of real men trying to make a difference in their lives and sharing their struggles, pain and victories.

**Volume 2** analyses destructive consequences of gender inequality from different perspectives, in relation to the difficulties experienced by South African men in light of conflicting traditional, cultural and religious assumptions; political and social upheaval; and the revolutionary demands of the Constitution.

**Volume 3** contains resources to assist readers to engage with gender issues in their lives, churches and communities. Most of these chapters offer Christian faith resources for groups and individuals who want to grapple more deeply with masculinity and gender issues from a social justice perspective. There are also accounts of community-based initiatives to bring about gender transformation. This series is most obviously useful to men and people working with men. But it offers useful resources for women too, since women play major roles, either in maintaining oppressive forms of masculinity, or in challenging them and developing alternative, healthy masculinities.

The work of gender transformation is ongoing. We invite readers to use this material to contribute to the vision of a world in which men, women and children can enjoy equitable, healthy and happy relationships in a just and democratic society.
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While it is valuable to look for role models of positive masculinity in literature and in the Bible, we come across many role models in our everyday lives as well. During 2007, PACSA approached some of our longstanding ecumenical partners with a proposal for a project that would look for the positive in men, instead of what had become a habit in the media of reporting countless cases of abuse and violence on the part of men. So we approached The Witness newspaper, and they ran a series of stories about and by men, called Men Making A Difference. One story was published on each day of the 16 Days Campaign Against Violence Against Women and Children. Eight of those stories are contained in this collection. We added five others, because of their inspirational power.

There are questions for reflection and discussion at the end of the collection, which can be used in cell groups, book clubs, or even Bible study meetings. While the stories are not Bible stories in themselves, they certainly offer insights into God's transforming power in our everyday lives, if we are open to it.

We invite readers to enjoy these stories, celebrate the power of life-giving relationships and stand in awe of the human capacity for transformation and healing.
1. A Message to Men

Tosh Kwamanda

My name is Tosh, and I am from Trust Feed. I grew up in a family with a poor background. I grew up with my grandmum, because my mum was working as a domestic worker at New Hanover. She was a single mother, but she was always strong for me, as she is now.

I started school in 1989, and tried to work hard. But we often didn't have food in the house, and I struggled to concentrate while feeling hungry. My mum was the only breadwinner, and my granny did not earn a pension, so the smaller children and I often didn't have proper uniforms or enough food to eat. I was motivated by the people around me. The older guys at school would protect me and look after me. I managed to get my Matric in the end.

When I was younger, I used to like rushing after the ladies, because the older guys said if you don't have a lady you are stupid. Since all my friends had girlfriends, I wanted to have one too. I was only 15. However, I started to realise that if you get involved at that age, you start doing bad things like drinking alcohol and smoking, and fighting with other guys. If you find out that your girlfriend is involved with other guys, you would fight with her, maybe beat her. That was not a good thing. I remember with my first girlfriend in Std 7, I found out one day that she was involved with my friend. I beat her so badly, she ended up leaving school, because she was afraid that other schoolchildren would laugh at her, and she was afraid of me.

In 2001 I joined the PACSA activities in my community. I realised then that one should not abuse women and children. That helped me a lot, because as a young boy I had not had a father to guide me, and so that programme helped me to understand the issues around the community. It also taught me how to communicate with other people and take care of them, instead of fighting.

One of the workshops I attended was the Healing of Memories. It helped me a lot. I used to believe that I had to be strong and
do bad things to be respected by women. I listened to women's stories about how they had been abused by their partners, and it made me realise how it feels to be a woman. I started to look back to my mum, and how she had also been left by my father. One of the women said she had been infected by HIV because her man had been HIV positive. When she found out her status, he was so furious that he just left her. I realised then that I had done some things to the women I was involved with. I started to see that as a young man I needed to take responsibility, to take care of other people, rather than just looking after myself.

But it was hard, because the men who were my friends at that time were drinking and doing bad things, and they put pressure on me, asking, “Why are you suddenly changing when we have been doing these things together for so long?” I tried to change my friends, and tried to go to church, to become more motivated. Some of my friends went to church, but still carried on behaving badly during the week. They don’t go to church any more. In the end, they just left me alone, but I received help through the church, my friends in Masibuyisane, and from PACSA around issues of morality.

I am now a lay minister in my church. I am in love with a woman from Pietermaritzburg. She is a good lady, and I am hoping to marry her one day. Now when things go wrong, we sit down and talk about issues, and I also try to encourage her in her life. For now, things are good because nothing is going wrong between us. She is also a person of faith and we are in the same church.

When I became unemployed, I started working as a volunteer. I worked for a while with Noah teaching children basic computer skills, because I wanted to do something for children to uplift their standard of living. I had never thought I would ever work with children, but it was a blessing to me. I helped them with their problems, motivated them and gave them hope. I tried to teach them to understand the issues in their community and to participate as they got older. They need to see people who are living in a different way, doing good things as role models, rather than admiring the things that are not good.

I am involved now with Young Christian Workers, trying to encourage young people to take a stand regarding issues of unemployment, and to engage government
around getting decent jobs for young people. I also work part-time at Trust Feed as a Community Animator with PACSA. We are trying to share information around the community, so they can participate in local government processes, and can lobby the municipality to deliver services to the local community. I am also a leader in Masibuyisane Reconciliation and Development Organisation. Our aims are to build a community of hope, whereby people can understand the importance of reconciliation, and to bring about development in our community by working together. It is time to move forward and leave the old divisions under apartheid behind, and we need to avoid fighting between the political parties.

What I would like to say to young men out there is that you must take charge of yourselves, and take responsibility for your lives, because things have changed now. You need to believe in God – one of the things that helped me was to believe in God – in order to find direction in life. Otherwise you will end up nowhere – or maybe even in jail. Also make an effort to participate in the issues happening around your community, especially HIV and AIDS and abuse, so you can find another way of thinking and living your life.
2. He Took Responsibility

In 1998, while I was doing Grade 11, I had a friend in a nearby local school. We had been friends since we were in Grade 8, so we knew and understood each other, and we shared all our secrets.

In that Grade 11 year, my friend fell pregnant. She gave birth to a baby girl. The father of the baby was very supportive through my friend’s pregnancy, which was a difficult time as her home was a traditional one and her parents were old-fashioned.

When she gave birth, her child was disabled. She could neither walk nor talk. But the father of the baby was there for both mother and child. He never abandoned them. Remember, he was also young and attending school. He could have split up with her and denied everything, but he took a stand and took his responsibility. So for me he was a hero.

Unfortunately, their baby died when she was three. But this man was still with my friend. He was there for her and he was supportive. Now they are happily married and their marriage has been blessed with three children.

He could have split up with her and denied everything, but he took a stand and took his responsibility.
So for me he was a hero.
3. Through Him, I am a Better Person

“Chocolate”

I thought my father hated me. I grew up in Ashdown and went to one of the boarding schools in northern KwaZulu-Natal. I am the eldest and, as a girl, was expected to take responsibility for work in the home.

But I felt there were too many responsibilities and I failed to fulfil all of them. So my father allocated my time for me – he planned everything: when I had to do what, and when I had free time. I was not happy with that as I felt I didn't have enough time for myself. My father was very strict and I was sure he hated me until I was out of school.

I then had a child out of marriage and my Daddy made sure I was punished for the wrong I did. He would not talk to me and if he did he would always remind, though in a polite way, that it was wrong to have a child outside marriage. He made sure that I took full responsibility for my son. I neither worked nor went to school at that time and my son needed to go to the clinic. My father knew that I didn't have money for that, but he didn't care. He just said: “Make sure he gets to the clinic”.

After a while we sat down and talked about everything. I then learned that it was not easy for my father to punish me. He said: “You are a woman now, no longer a child. So you must take responsibility for your actions and have to deal with the consequences of what you do.” He wanted me to learn to be responsible, to learn how to manage my life. So he challenged me.

Today I am a better person; a young woman with pride and dignity who knows what she wants. I've got a perfect son whom I love so much and a Daddy who is proud of the job he has done – mentoring his little girl to this stage. Daddy is such a lovely person who has respect for women. I love you Daddy.
4. Real Men Do not Abuse!
Real Men Protect!

Skhumbuzo Makhathini

I am a man of 47 years old, born in a family of four sons. I am the second-born. My youngest brother died in a car accident in 1988. My father was a policeman and became sick and died in 1978 while I was doing Standard 9. This affected me emotionally.

My mother was his second wife and she did not get a cent. I then became a gardener so that I could pay my school fees for Standard 10. I passed Standard 10 in 1980. My mother also was working for the white people, washing their clothes.

I worked for an electrical wiring company up to 1994 and then was retrenched. I was a shop steward. After I was retrenched, I never had full-time work again. Instead, I worked for Game Stores as a temporary worker till 2000. I became sick and my half-sister asked me to go for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT). I went for VCT because I was not scared of anything. I got my results back – I was HIV positive – and started to take vitamins.

I then started a successful support group and later became chairman. We assisted a lot of people and my health condition became better as a result of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) who assisted me with ARVs.

I got my results back – I was HIV positive – ... my health condition became better as a result of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) who assisted me with ARVs.
with ARVs. I then became a TAC volunteer and observed one of my colleagues die of a TB-related disease in 1994 as a result of failing to disclose his status. He would have received support if he had admitted his status.

I continued to volunteer for TAC and joined uMphithi Men’s Forum in 2005, because I saw that men were not coming out and disclosing their HIV/AIDS status. These men would victimise women, and put their lives at risk of further infection. If you become a member of the Men’s Forums like uMphithi, you receive support and learn. I have personally grown and learnt a lot as a result of uMphithi Men’s Forum.

I have a high respect for other people’s human rights. If men can come together there will be no one looking down upon anybody.

THE NATION NEEDS REAL MEN!
5. “It took me 20 years to realise that I’d done something wrong”

David Smith


Dumisani Rebombo was 15 when he raped a girl at his school in 1976. Twenty years later he met her to apologise. Now 48, he is a gender equality activist and is married with two daughters and a son. He says:

“I didn’t have any goats or cattle, which brought a lot of ridicule from my peers. There was constant jeering that I wasn’t a real boy. Some of them said, ‘There’s a girl who’s full of herself and doesn’t want to know us; you need to be party to disciplining her.’

“I made the decision to agree to it. I was given beer and I smoked. I remember that, after the act, it was reported to the whole soccer team and my friend and I were given a standing ovation.

“I moved away and it faded from my mind. It took me 20 years to realise that I’d done

In my work in the HIV field I met unemployed women and every single week they reported violence from the men. I couldn’t help but admit that this was something I had done myself.
something wrong. In my work in the HIV field I met unemployed women and every single week they reported violence from the men. I couldn’t help but admit that this was something I had done myself 20 years before.

“I went to see my religious mentor and said, ‘I have to go and apologise to my victim.’ He said, ‘You were only 15 years old, it’s in the past, what if she reports it?’ I said, ‘That would be justice for her.’

“When we met, she recognised me and was surprised. I told her, ‘I realise I caused you pain 20 years ago. I understand how wrong this was and I came to apologise.’ She was silent and she started crying.

“She said, ‘After you, two other men raped me. I’ve never told anyone that. Every time I think of it my whole body shudders. I’ve never really been well. Sometimes, when my husband touches me, I cringe and he wonders why.’

“She said, ‘The fact that you’ve come 600 miles to apologise helps me believe you, and I’m grateful. Do me a favour. Teach your son not to do what you did to me.’

“I thought I was going to leave my load behind, but when she said that, I had a new load to take with me.”
6. The Magical Paradox of Masculine Strength

PATRICIA WATSON

“What is it like living with a strong man?” you might ask. Does it mean he hits you? Does it mean he is like a father to you? Or does it mean that he protects you, treating you like each new morning’s mysteriously woven spider-webs? Is he worried that, if merely brushed, you will crumple and be useless unless he is there to fend off life’s evil and keep you intact? Do you want to be kept intact?

Or would you rather live with a man who will build his own complex web right next to yours, where you can explore life’s adventures together? Isn’t a strong man one who is secure enough to let you live life for yourself, in your own space, on your own terms; and yet, is man enough to partner you as you live out your own experience?

Isn’t a strong man one who is secure enough to let you live life for yourself, in your own space, on your own terms; and yet, is man enough to partner you as you live out your own experience?
not treat me like an eternal child. A strong man will not feel threatened when my spirit soars, or when I want to explode existing boundaries and push the limits of conventionality. A strong man will stand by and applaud as I mature into the full power of my femininity, as age confers wisdom and womanly strength, and frees me from the natural constraints of motherhood. A strong man will celebrate my strength. I am privileged enough to be married to this kind of man.

Yet you might be asking, “So, how has he proved his strength, this strong man of yours?” A good question. I know he is strong because I did things that would have shattered the fragile masculinity of a weak man. A few years ago, I left my strong man. I left him, partly, because I thought he was weak: he did not fit the image of what popular culture tries to tell us a ‘real’ man is. He did not fight me; he did not try to father me; he did not treat me like his little woman; he did not force himself on me because it was his right as my husband. He was never jealous. He did not hit me. However, he did not really see me either. I was simply there to come home to: a part of his life, an appendage, like a mother, a daughter or a sister. I was convenient to have around. In my muddled mind, any kind of attention from him would have seemed masculine and strong compared with the indignity of going unnoticed.

But I also left him because he seemed afraid of me. He seemed afraid of my strength. He seemed afraid of my yearning for independence. He seemed afraid of my growing rage at being unseen. I interpreted this fear as weakness when, in reality, it was only ignorance.

After I left, for a while my strong man continued to seem weak. He behaved like a spoilt child whose favourite toy had been taken away from him. But, gradually, I began to notice that this man was no longer fighting me, but was fighting FOR me. He was fighting for me using civilisation’s most potent weapon: peaceful freedom. He let me go.

And, over time, he grew stronger: he freed himself from his own expectations of what constituted a ‘real man’. I saw that he no longer needed me to be his mother, his daughter, or even his sister. I ceased to be his appendage that needed constant checking to make sure it remained attached. Instead, he released me to become that most wild of creatures, a one-of-a-kind woman walking next to, not behind, her man.

That was two years ago. Since then, I have seen inside the heart of a truly strong man. I have seen my husband become secure enough in himself to cease trying to impose limits on me. I have come to respect his strength that is most evident in his celebration of my independence. I have grown to revel in the paradox that the real strength of a man, in relation to his woman, lies in simply watching her walk away from him. He knows that if she chooses to return, she chooses him because she knows she is seen by a man whose quintessential masculine strength is not diluted, but is concentrated, by the limitless expression of her femininity. This is the kind of strong man I am proud to call my husband.
7. Abused but not Taking Revenge

LINDANI HADEBE

This story is about a man who was a mechanic in one of the rural areas in Zululand. He was humble, frank and free. He helped everyone. Even if people did not have money he would fix their cars on credit. He was loved by everyone in the village.

Some of his clients took advantage of his humbleness and began to abuse him by not paying. Still, he would continue to help his debtors! We could not understand the reason behind it.

He began to talk about his debtors openly to his friends. Some of his friends encouraged him to exchange sex, especially with his women clients. He refused to do that as a result of his Christian beliefs. His financial situation became worse and worse. He then visited them one by one to determine the reason why they did not pay. Still, they kept on promising to pay once they had money!

He was then invited by one of his clients for a dinner. The client happened to be a widow. She explained to him that she was unable to pay him, but that she was prepared.

She then took off her clothes and said: “This is the payment I have for you.” The mechanic refused the offer and left... The mechanic’s friends laughed at him and said: “You should have accepted the free offer.”
to offer an alternative. She then took off her clothes and said: “This is the payment I have for you.” The mechanic refused the offer and left. Unfortunately, the widow was not by herself, she had a maid in the house, who overheard all this. The maid spread the message across the village. The widow got furious and fired the maid. The mechanic’s friends laughed at him and said: “You should have accepted the free offer.” This scenario became the talk of the village. The mechanic could not handle the situation and decided to leave the village with his family.

This story is a reflection of some hidden scenarios that are faced by men and women. Sometimes poverty can lead to immorality, but that does not justify the response. This man is a true reflection of one of those good men who are making a difference in people's lives. Sometimes when you do good people take advantage of you. Men and women alike should emulate this man. He was abused but did not take revenge. I salute men who humble themselves and do good.
8. Coming Out

NTUTHUKO DLADLA

When I first discovered that I was sexually attracted to people of the same sex, I instantly knew that I was different from other boys, and that was perceived as being abnormal. Back then, I knew that the word ‘gay’ was associated with all these mixed emotions I was going through. I found it very hard to accept that I was gay.

Time went on and as it did I lost strength to fight these feelings any more, and I knew the best thing to do was to come to terms with them and accept myself, move on and disclose. It all seemed so real and uneasy at the same time, but the time had come and I had to do what was best for me.

I had attended several workshops at the Gay and Lesbian Network as I wanted to know myself better. They have workshops such as Gender and Sexuality, which help homosexuals know their sexual orientation better, as you meet other gays and lesbians who have the same problem as yours. I attended and things went well. Thinking that the worst was over, something triggered
in my mind and made me realise that the next step that I had to take was disclosure. This is one of the most difficult things a gay person has to go through. But I thought to myself I had come this far and wasn't going to give up now. I pulled myself together, relaxed, and went through with it.

Shock, denial and rejection were emotions and actions that were a spot on my face but I didn't expect this from my parents. Parents have expectations about us. I decided to take a step back and let them deal with this in their own way, and so they did eventually. My mother was the one person who was supportive throughout this process. Right through I knew that she was hurt but she tried by all means to calm my father down as he was making waves about the whole dilemma.

To my surprise, one day all of this came to an end. I was told that they might not like the route I'd taken for myself, but they'd tolerate it because I'm their child. Though tolerance seemed inadequate, at least it was something, so here I am still surviving.

As time went on, I suggested to them that we should seek counseling together so that they could move on properly. They took it as a good idea so we went for counseling at Lifeline. We had the most understanding counselor ever. She told my parents that being gay is not a choice, but is something that you are born with. So it helped them a lot as they know that I didn't choose this but I was born gay.

When you are disclosing there are steps that parents go through. The first stage is SHOCK and the second is DENIAL, the third is GUILT, the fourth is being able to EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS, and the fifth is MAKING DECISIONS. The last one is TRUE ACCEPTANCE, but not all parents go through these stages as some actually already know before you tell them, but they are waiting for you to open up to them.
9. Emancipation of my Masculinity

Siduduzo Mncube

I was born in 1987 in one of the biggest townships in Pietermaritzburg, Imbali. Recalling my growing up, I see a lot of friends, especially girls. It wasn’t an issue to me that I enjoyed girls’ company. I had Barbie dolls. When playing house, I was either a mother or a sister.

My aunt’s husband was the only person who was concerned about my girlish behaviour. He owned a number of taxis. Every time there was a taxi being repaired at home, he’d send me around to get spanners. He would tell me the sizes and I would have to bring them as he instructed, otherwise I would be in trouble. Every day when he came back from work, I had to run and find the nearest group of boys because he didn’t want me around girls. A part of me was not entirely satisfied with his way of raising me.

Just before my teenage years, I developed an interest in men. Not boys but men. Men with hair on their torso up to their chest. It was my little secret until my ‘girl’ peers started talking about boyfriends. At that time I knew I didn’t want a girlfriend, so I had to get a boyfriend. At age 11, I met this boy who lived not too far from home; he became my first boyfriend. We had a public relationship; we held hands walking up and down the road. I don’t think people noticed what was going on. We looked like friends who were fond of each other. He regarded me as his ‘girlfriend’; it didn’t bother me at all because I had my girly tendencies.

Then one weekend, we didn’t see eye to eye and he wanted to hit me. He chased me all the way to my house from school. I ran inside the house and he waited by the gate. When my older cousin came back from school she found him at the gate and asked: “What are you doing here?” “I’m waiting for Sduh”, he replied. My cousin walked in and told me: “Someone wants to see you at the gate.” I told her I couldn’t see him, but I wouldn’t say why. Then she went out to him to find out why. He told her I was his girlfriend and that he was going to teach me a lesson. My cousin called her friends over and everyone
was laughing that I had a boyfriend. Later they asked him if he knew I was a boy. He said no, he knew I was a girl. We had never had sexual intercourse ever! We used to tumble and roll on the bed, kissing. Never did we take off our clothes and try to mess with our genitals. I always assumed he knew I was a boy. I was baffled when my cousin told me that he said he didn’t know I was a boy. At the end of the day he whipped my behind pretty good and we broke up. But then later we got back together. In total, we were together for 8 years.

When I went to high school, I was on and off with Boy #1. I was friends with a lot of girls, and had met a few gay guys. Surprisingly, I made acquaintances with boys. I was best friends with Dumisa Ntayiya. He was my guide to masculinity. He got me into a lot of things like cigarettes, weed and girls. I kept away from my ‘girls’ and made friends with a lot of guys. I developed this character that showed itself when I was with my homeboys. I got to understand their language. It was mostly about girls and sex. After a year in my new clique, I got a girlfriend. One night she was able to sleep over at my house. We cuddled on the couch as we watched TV. We went on to French kissing and I got aroused. I was ready to penetrate her and hopefully be satisfied, but she wanted us to go to the bedroom. When we got there and started kissing and fondling again, somehow it didn’t have the same effect on me and that ruined the whole evening. The next day I told my boys: “I got it all last night”. When my girlfriend found out, she smacked me across the face. It definitely became the worst day of my high school career.

From that day onwards, I was sure where my life was going. I knew I liked men more than girls. I accepted being a gay individual. I told people that I was gay. Honestly, I didn’t know all the things I know now about gay men. All I knew then was that I was a feminine boy who preferred dating other guys rather than girls. My family didn’t know, except for my cousin, who later realised she was a lesbian. In Grade 10, when I was about 16 years old, I got into an intimate relationship with one of the boys in my clique. We used to see each other every other afternoon during weekdays when our parents were at work and we were back from school. One Wednesday afternoon, my clique boyfriend arrived late at my house. He insisted we get down and dirty. We started kissing and taking off our tops when my mum arrived back from work. It was a big issue (as expected) that I was sucking face with another guy. Mum was

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Honestly, I didn’t know all the things I know now. All I knew then was that I was a feminine boy who preferred dating other guys rather than girls.
disappointed, I assume. I'm sure she was ashamed. However, I don't believe she was shocked. Growing up I had had girl tendencies. I was so feminine; she was practically dressed by me for every special occasion. I told her which hairstyle she must do. I knew every trend for women. At the back of her head she must've suspected I was gay. When she found out she wouldn't speak to me, but I suddenly had curfew and she treated me like a girl. I couldn't leave unless she knew where I was going. She expected me and her to take turns with preparing supper. She raised me like a proper girl. At the same time, she wanted me to be the man of the house and see to all the garden work, yet she knew I couldn't even hold a spade. She would talk every day about having grandchildren and meeting a wonderful daughter-in-law.

In all the years that I have spent in this world, I have realised that the society we live in reacts differently towards feminine gay men. Especially 'straight men'. However, they are willing to be around closeted gay guys or rather straight looking gay men. Recently I embraced a macho/butch personality and have been received better by my society.
My name is Thulani Xaba. I was born in Dundee in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. I am a widower, living with my family in a village called Glencoe.

I was brought up by my mother after my father had disappeared. After some time my mother got married to another man.

My life changed completely because the treatment I was getting from my stepfather was not good at all. He would not allow me to eat food in the house, passing remarks if my mother recognised something good that I had done. I cautiously accepted this treatment for quite some time. I then decided to go and stay with my granny because I could not cope with the life I was living; it was very traumatising.

My granny was very kind to me; she taught me many things, such as cooking and gardening. The time went by and my granny died. I was left with uncles, who eventually died. My life was more miserable, as I could not go back to my mother. I tried, without luck, to look for temporary work to get some food.

When I heard that my stepfather had left my mother, I decided to go back to my mother.

My mother was left with four children to look after: my two brothers, my sister and me. She did not have work, so she had to invite different men to visit her in our house in order to get food for us and to pay school fees. Every week we used to see different men coming to the house. Although there was food and some school money for us, it was a difficult time for my mother and myself. But because there was no one else to support us, she had to do this to survive.

My brother and I finished Matric in that difficult situation. He found employment with the SAPS. Then life began to be good. I was employed by the Department of Education as a private teacher. We supported the family together until my brother was called to rest. Then I was left to be the breadwinner.
My mother became sick and eventually died of cancer.

I was left to look after my brother and my sister, who are younger than me. I got married, and we were blessed with three beautiful children, one boy and two girls. Life went well; we were a happy family. As I was involved with the Institute for Healing of Memories I was invited to go to Pietermaritzburg to facilitate in one of the workshops for two and a half days. While I was in that workshop, I received a call from my sister-in-law, saying that my wife had died. I was stressed and depressed. I cried. I did not know what to do. One of the facilitators drove me home, where I found out it was true, my wife was really dead. When I asked what happened, they told me she drowned in the dam. I asked how, and was told that she went running to the dam and drowned herself.

I could not understand that. I kept on asking, “What did she say or do?” The answer was, “Nothing.” I was miserable. When I saw my children, I cried. I could not sleep nor eat for the whole week; my wife was everything to me. The days went by until the funeral was over. Three days after the funeral the local paper came out with a picture of me and allegations by my in-laws, saying that I had killed my wife. They said that they didn't want to see me anymore, nor talk to me because I had killed their daughter. I felt the whole world was on top of me because I was also confused and traumatised by her tragic death. It was made worse by the fact that I was not at home when she died, but 450 kilometres away. I could not grieve for my wife; everything happened so soon. I was covered by a cloud of sorrow and pain, dealing with the loss, loneliness, allegations of the paper and also facing the challenge of being a father and mother at the same time. My church did not support me, my friends did not support me, but community members were with me in prayers. I received calls, even at night, from different people I used to support in their hard times. I also felt the presence of the Lord with me.
I thought of the writer who once said: “When days are dark, friends are few”. Life was miserable for me: I had to begin to live a new life without a wife, mother nor elder in my family to share my feelings with and the pain I was going through. I had Granny who helped me with the children, but I couldn’t share so much with her because she was suffering from both diabetes and high blood pressure. I felt anger, hurt and depression, and that I could not take any more.

One day I had a silent morning and the thought passed through my mind, saying, today was the time for a turning point. I went to my in-laws and told them how I felt and that I was tired of being a prisoner of the anger and hurt that they had caused in my life. I said I wanted to talk about this once and for all. I discovered that they wanted to reconcile with me but did not know how to take the initiative. They apologised, saying they didn’t mean what they did, that it was because they could not accept death, that they felt better if they could push the blame onto me. “We are very sorry, please forgive us,” they begged. I realised that it was not about me, it was about us. I decided to forgive them, because I wanted to be free of the hurt and anger in my heart. It was not easy at all but because this was affecting my daily life, I had to take at least one step toward healing. Not to forget what had happened, but to acknowledge it and live a better life.
“How shall we call ourselves?” I asked the children. We were sitting on boxes in the entry hall of our new house in Pietermaritzburg. This day – the 1st of July 2002 – is embedded in my memory. We were busy discussing the rules of the house when the question of who we were came up.

They were five, all boys: three from a children's home in Zululand, one from an institution in town and one entrusted to my care by his family after the death of his mother. The oldest was seventeen and the youngest seven. The Khuleleni Children Trust - the small structure we had created, a group of friends and I, to give a legal basis to the enterprise - had bought the house the month before. The previous owners had vacated the premises during the week-end.

One of the boys - I do not remember which one - replied as if it was the most obvious thing on earth: “The family!” And indeed this is how we see ourselves. We speak of the family money, the family holidays, the family car. When they see us coming, my Dominican brothers say, “There is Philippe’s family.”

In this family they are the children and I am the father. This is what they call me since we moved into the house. The younger two and my daughter, who came to stay with us later, say Dad. The older boys call me by my name, but when they refer to me in the presence of others they also speak of me as a father. With its later additions our family now counts seven children. All have a long history with me. They are not blood-related, but having spent a good part of their lives together, they react like siblings. They remember me from the time that they were little. I got to know them through my involvement in the Thandanani Children’s Foundation, a local NGO for abandoned children and children infected or affected by HIV and AIDS, in the early 1990s. I met the older ones when they were five or six.
Two were in nappies when I first saw them. Before we bought the house they made regular stays in the priory where I used to reside. I have seen them grow. As all children do with their parents, they come to me when they have a question about their own childhood.

If I am the father, where is the mother? Deep in their hearts, as I discovered when they trusted me enough to talk openly about it, the question of their mother’s absence is always present, like a wound that never fully heals. They live with this question. Meanwhile, we had agreed, my friends and I, that the Trust would employ a childcare worker to assist me in the running of the house and represent a female element in this predominantly male group. She works five days a week and does overtime when I am away from home during the week-end. She is accommodated in a cottage on our property.

Now I am used to being a father. At the beginning it was like a Christmas present I was not sure I could open for fear it was destined for somebody else. The children had no such hesitation. They are those who made me father. I learned something important: one does not become a parent alone. It is not something one decides single-handedly. As in any intimate relationship, being recognised by the other has a deeply transformative effect. The child makes the parent as much as the parent makes the child.

I had doubts about the possibility of being a father for good reasons. When I was a young man, one of the consequences of my decision to be a religious was that I had to renounce marriage and therefore parenthood. It was a hard choice, which I never seriously questioned despite the pain - sometimes intense - it provoked in me. I remained faithful to this decision because it was life-giving, although in another way. Catholic priests, the only ministers of religion who do not have children, are commonly called Fathers - in contravention of an injunction by Jesus that explicitly forbade this practice (Mt 23: 9). This did not apply to me because, while being a professed religious, I was never ordained to the priesthood. Today, by a strange irony, it is I, the non-priest, who have become a father. In the language of the faith one could call this providential.

When I go shopping with the children or fill up the car at a petrol station, the attendants often ask, with a touch of curiosity, “Who are these children? Is it an orphanage?” I respond, “No, they are my children.” After a pause, seeing that they do not understand, I add: “I adopted them.” The same happens in the schools where my children are enrolled. To avoid a long story, I simply say, “They are my adopted children”. Most documents give two options: parent or guardian. I tick ‘parent’. But what is my relationship to them? Those who hear my story want to know, “Did you really adopt them?”

I always give the same answer. There are three types of fatherhood: biological, legal and social. For the first I score zero per cent, for the second fifty per cent and for the third one hundred per cent. The colour of my skin and the disposition of my hair amply demonstrate that we are genetically different. Sometimes I say jokingly to one of my children who is HIV positive: you are
the son of my blood. It is because one day I inadvertently absorbed some of his blood, fortunately without any consequence for my health. He knows what I mean. In legal terms, I am either the foster father or the legal guardian of the children. I did all the paper work and have been supervised by a social worker. But these legal categories are very western. In an African context, what counts is the social fatherhood: the fact of raising children and providing for them. From that point of view there is no dispute that I am, now and for ever, the father of my seven children.

A parent – in my case, a father – is first of all a provider. Before embarking on the journey of fatherhood, I took advice. A friend warned me: looking after children every hour of the day, every day of the week, from January to December is very demanding. Was I prepared to take on that burden? My experience of children thus far, while intense and multifaceted, had been limited. After taking out nephews or nieces, god-children or any child I happened to know for outings, I would comfortably return to my occupations while the parents of these children were left to feed them, send them to school, take care of their health and give them direction in life. Being a parent is a full-time job. This is what I discovered after July 2002. Day after day the food had to be on the table, beds made, chores done and the house maintained. The housemother assisted me, but at the end of the day I was the one in charge. Every time I went away from home for professional or family reasons, I had to find replacements, making use of a network of friends who thankfully were willing to help me in such circumstances.

A key component of my role as a parent is to provide education to the children. One has to learn the ropes. Good schools have to be booked early: February or March of the previous year. Most of my children attend or have attended so-called Model C schools, that is, government schools with more teachers and better facilities, though with higher school fees. All have become fully multi-racial. Attending parents’ meetings is an art. To achieve success you need to study the last report carefully beforehand in order to identify the weak subjects. You then ask your child to brief you on his or her teachers. Finding them in a packed hall, full
of teachers and parents, would otherwise be almost impossible. You then arm yourself with patience and join the queues. Back home, you call your child and deal with all the problems highlighted by the teachers, one by one. “How come you did not submit your assignments in English?” “I learned that you are a bit disruptive? Is it true?” “Do you know that the next tests are coming in three weeks?”

Health is another area of concern in the life of a parent. The first challenge is to distinguish what is important from what is not. One of my children keeps asking to go to the doctor, the pharmacist or the dentist. Apart from a few sports injuries, quickly healed, he is very healthy. I have to understand the reasons for his anxiety. Others suffer from more serious ailments. One is HIV positive. In the early years, in the absence of any treatment, I had to prepare myself for the worst. Then came the antiretrovirals, first at an exorbitant price, then free of charge but with the obligation to join the queues in a public hospital, and only recently available at a pharmacy in town through my medical aid. For my son and for me, it has been a long journey but, thank God, his treatment, initiated more than ten years ago, is successful. Since then another member of the family, a young adult, has contracted the virus. After the moment of shock and the difficult talking, we had to take the medical route, this time with the benefit of experience. Recently one of the older boys, who works as a volunteer in a poor area, was diagnosed with tuberculosis. For him - and for me as a matter of consequence - this has caused a lot of stress. In a family not all conditions are serious. The problem is their frequency. There is hardly a week without a visit to the doctor, the dentist, the pharmacist or the physiotherapist. I am a good customer. Fortunately the nearby pharmacy is one of those which closes late at night. When a problem is reported at supper time, I take the ailing child with me and show him or her to the pharmacist, hoping that a visit to the GP won’t be necessary.

The role of the parent is not only to provide food, clothing and education to the children. It is also to set boundaries. To say that this is the most challenging part of my experience as a father is an understatement. There have been times, particularly with the adolescents, when I nearly lost hope. Children who grow up in institutions are survivors. A children’s home is a jungle, with good care sometimes but not much emotional attachment. To get what they think they need, the children resort to cheating, lying, stealing or bullying. They struggle to understand that a parent can frustrate your desire not because he is against you but because he wants you to grow well and be happy. My first task when the children came to stay with me was to undo the bad habits they had developed in institutions. I do not know if I fully succeeded in this enterprise, but with a lot of hard work - panelbeating, as the house mother once said - the social skills of my children have improved markedly.

When I invited the children to stay with me, I naively thought that with smaller numbers, sustained attention and emotional support the problems of behaviour that had been reported when they lived in institutions would gradually come under control. This was not to happen. Nearly all – not all,
Adolescence is a time when children push the boundaries to their limits ... It is a time of madness. During these trying times my authority as a father was constantly put to the test.

Fortunately – were caught in incidents such as disrupting a class, bunking school, being found drunk in the street, stealing, and committing indecent acts. I remember a week during which I had to deal with three separate crises at the same time. Adolescence is a time when children push the boundaries to their limits without consideration of the consequences for themselves or their environment. It is a time of madness.

During these trying times my authority as a father was constantly put to the test. Paradoxically these hurdles made me become the father that I am today. With the support and sometimes the mediation of my friends, I managed to persist. My strategy was never to give up, never to let a transgression, however small, happen without a response. The most difficult was to have the offender admit to having done wrong. They would flatly deny, against all evidence. I had to out-smart their lies. When, after much effort, some form of recognition had taken place I imposed a sanction. In our family there is a hierarchy of pains, the highest being what we call grounding. By this we mean staying in one’s room for a day or a day and a half with permission only to go to the toilet or for a shower. Only serious offences are punished in that way. It is not very common. I always ask the offenders if they agree to being grounded. “Do you accept that I treat you as a father would do?” Yes, they do. “What does a father do when a child does something wrong?” Placed on this terrain, they have no other choice than to respond, with some reluctance: “Punish them”. “This is what I am doing now,” I conclude. I then give them a piece of paper with questions such as “How shall I repair what I have done” or “What is my goal?” When the time of isolation is over, I call them and ask them again why they had to be grounded. We hug each other as a sign of reconciliation.

Only once, the conversation did not follow the usual pattern. When asked if he recognised me as a father, the young offender answered, “No.” “If this is the case, you can go. The door is open. I consider you as my child, but I cannot be a father alone. If you are not my child, I cannot be your father.” He quickly backtracked. “No, that is not what I meant. You are my foster father.” I then said, “Fine, but remember, when you turn eighteen, as a foster father I have no obligation to look after you.” He then replied, “You are my father. I accept being grounded.” It had taken a gamble, but I knew my son well enough to know that I had a good
chance of winning the battle. This hard ex-
change of words marked a turning point in
our relationship.

This brings me to another dimension of fa-
therhood. What these manifestations of er-
rratic behaviour on the part of my children
had in common was to signal their insecu-
rrity. They thought they would never be able
to do what was expected of them. All chil-
dren are like that, but some more than oth-
ers. Because of growing up in institutions
and experiencing various forms of abuse,
mine were particularly vulnerable. The first
duty of a father is constantly to reassure his
children. We do not exist by ourselves. We
exist in the eyes of others. What parents
say, show or feel about their children is of
paramount importance. Children know be-
fore we open our mouth what we think of
them. But words are important. We never
praise our children enough. If I have done
anything of value all these years, it has
been to demonstrate to my children that
they were worthy of the trust I put in them. When he was in Grade One, my last-born wanted me to see his teacher every day. He maintained this type of expectation until his early teens. He wanted to be reassured. At first I did not understand why. Today he is a very successful learner.

Like so many of their peers, my children have suffered grief. A successful family is a place where the feelings of sadness, anger and confusion associated with loss can safely be processed. From that point of view, my children have been my best teachers. It is by listening to them that I discovered how important it is to validate the emotions of a child. The younger they are, the easier it is to adopt the right attitude. A few months after the beginning of our family life, the youngest two, aged eight and ten respectively, started to have bad dreams and cry uncontrollably. For me it was a frightening but helpful experience. They were simply saying how much they missed their respective mothers. We found ways of dealing with this huge amount of pain. One made a drawing of his mother and the other one told me the story he wanted to be written. The drawing and the story were then burnt in the open fire. We lit candles and developed a special prayer for their mothers and all the other people absent from their lives. Later they created memory boxes. Both are now teenagers. They still check their memory boxes from time to time.

In recent years stronger links have been developed between our family and the local Dominican community, of which I am a non-resident member. On Saturday evenings we often join the brethren for a drink and on Sunday mornings those of us who go to church – the number varies – choose between the eight o’clock mass and the students’ mass at nine thirty. My children interact all the time with the Dominican students. They exchange CDs, go to parties and discuss politics.

During the last ten years five baptisms have been celebrated in our family, the last one this year. I never saw myself as a missionary. It is rather the people of South Africa who are missionaries to me. But in this instance I was one. Unintentionally I was the instrument of several conversions to the Catholic Church. I hasten to say that one of the children has, in the meantime, joined a

Because of growing up in institutions and experiencing various forms of abuse, [my children] were particularly vulnerable. If I have done anything of value ... it has been to demonstrate to my children that they were worthy of the trust I put in them.
Pentecostal church. We have lively theological discussions at supper time.

Even though precedents exist, in Afghanistan for example or, closer to us, on the East Rand, it is unusual for Dominican brethren to raise children. Living outside the community is less exceptional. Throughout the world Dominican brethren are authorised to live extra conventum for reasons of ministry such as parish work, sisters’ chaplaincy or teaching. This is my current status in the Dominican Order. In 2002, after a time of discussion and discernment with the provincial, the chapter of the local community and the provincial council formally approved my decision to raise children.

But it is more than a question of status. The reality is that I have two loyalties: to a religious order in which I made profession thirty years ago and to a group of children, some of them grown up, to whom I am a father. To weave together these two identities is no easy matter. They produce, as for a man who has to choose between his career and his family, moments of tension.

The nodal point is the vocation of the Dominican Order which is to preach “at the frontiers”, as a recent general chapter expressed it.

While holding a discourse on family values and concentrating its efforts on a small number of middle-class families who fit parish structures, the Church is notably absent from the real terrain of the family, which is the multiple associations of men, women and children that constitute the families of today. Whether we like it or not, the time of a unique family model based on marriage, if it has ever existed, is no more. In South Africa, two thirds of children are raised by single mothers. In Christian countries marriage is increasingly becoming a minority choice. Against this background it is more necessary than ever to create spaces where children can grow to their full potential under the guidance of loving parents, whoever these are. I like to believe that my children and I, through our being together, are not ‘just’ a family, but also represent a form of Christian ministry.
“Only September and I’m sweating already”, I thought as we stepped out of Phumzile’s two-roomed house in Mpophomeni. We had been visiting Phumzile for three months since she asked for help to care for her sister. It had been a good visit and we felt close to the sisters as they spoke frankly about the struggles of living with HIV and poverty. Not all visits went this well, and it often took months to get past the shame and assure people that we did not come to blame or moralise.

As Dudu and I were about to get into the car a man approached and introduced himself as Nkosi. “Please come and see my neighbour,” he said. “He is very sick and needs help.” We had already seen the four families we were due to visit that day and were keen to get home. He must have seen the reluctance on our faces because he said, “His house is just over there, we can walk.” As he opened the door, the first thing I noticed was the emptiness of the house. Its only room was completely bare, except for an old steel bed in the corner and a newspaper page stuck on the wall. The bed was unmade and empty.

“He must have gone out,” I thought. “He can’t be that sick after all.” Just then the blanket moved and a soft moan came from the bed. As we stepped closer, I saw a gaunt face, jutting cheekbones, and eye sockets deeply sunken. His thin hair was light orange from starvation and I watched his pulse racing through the huge artery that bulged and collapsed on his temple. He was taking his breath in short rasping pants through cracked lips, crusted brown and white with dried blood and saliva. While we stared, overwhelmed, Nkosi bent down, picked up a cup and a cloth from next to the bed and dabbed gently at the crusted lips, trying to get him to sip some water.
Briefly his eyes flicked open, the huge white eyes in his disappearing head, looking through and past us.

As he squeezed drops into his mouth, Nkosi told us his story. His name was Kagiso and six months ago he had come alone from QwaQwa hoping to find work. Soon after moving into the rented house, he became ill. Two weeks before our visit, not having seen his neighbour for a few days, Nkosi came to check on him and found him lying in his bed, confused and incontinent. Nkosi washed him and brought some food and tried to feed him. Kagiso had never spoken about exactly where in QwaQwa he was from, nor about his family, and he had no ID or other documents to help locate them. Nkosi had taken it upon himself to come every morning and evening to feed Kagiso and clean his bed of the diarrhea which had overtaken him. But he continued to get steadily worse until he was now barely conscious and too weak even to swallow. Overcome by the horror of a person so broken, and my impotence to do anything for him, I feebly looked around the room, perhaps hoping to find some answer or inspiration there. I noticed the page stuck on the wall. It was a Witness feature about a friend’s Antarctic expedition as part of the South African research team. I remember staring at the photograph of the landscape – bright, crisp and pure, with my bearded friend looking so vigorous, so alive, with a limitless future before him.

I felt my disparate worlds colliding in that hot room. The comfort of suburban life, the stimulation of my work and the ease of relaxing with friends. A world of so many options and so much room to manoeuvre. And this grinding world of pain, despair and drudgery. Crushed by the tectonic collision, my eye caught a small advert beneath the article offering free lectures on the logistics of moving to Australia. “That’s the answer!” I thought. “If I take my family away from here, I won’t be constantly tearing these two dragons apart, wrenching my mind from one absurd reality to another. I can forget about the ugly world and surround myself with peace, order and beauty.”

Even as I thought it, I knew it really offered no escape. Reluctantly my mind moved back to the withered, gasping man whose landscape I had come into. If he was to

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Nkosi had taken it upon himself to come every morning and evening to feed Kagiso and clean his bed of the diarrhea which had overtaken him ... Nkosi taught us that this man was not worthless; his life was not futile – because he was our neighbour.
survive, his extreme dehydration needed help we could not offer. We phoned for an ambulance and watched as Nkosi carefully smoothed his blankets and spoke softly to him – his lips next to Kagiso’s ear – and then drove Nkosi to the community centre where he would wait for the ambulance to direct it to Kagiso’s house. On the way Nkosi told us about himself. He also lived alone in a one-roomed house like Kagiso’s and hadn’t had a proper job for four years. He survived by getting work for a day or two per week in his neighbours’ gardens or helping with small renovations. If there was no work he depended on his neighbours’ kindness for some phuthu, bread or rice, which he ate with the cabbage or spinach he grew in his garden. Work had been more regular recently and so he had some extra to share with Kagiso. This was all said without complaint or self-pity, and I thought with shame about the plans I had made to extend our three-bedroomed home and my irritation with our old car.

Kagiso died at Northdale Hospital that night – with no one there to notice. No family, no friends and no one to hold his hand or speak softly into his ear. His memory also could have disappeared, but for Nkosi’s last act of mercy. When Nkosi went to the hospital and was told that Kagiso had died, he asked what was to become of his body. The nurses told him that, if unclaimed, his body would be given a pauper’s burial and left to lie in an unmarked grave.

Nkosi and Kagiso lived in the poorest part of Mpophomeni, where people often go hungry and it is not a shameful thing to ask neighbours for food, because it will soon be your turn to help. Knowing that no family would ever come to claim the body, Nkosi went home and visited his neighbours. He spoke to them about this man who had died alone, far from anyone who knew or loved him. These neighbours gave Nkosi small amounts, the largest single donation being R20. After a week he had the R600 needed to pay the local undertaker to collect the body from hospital and provide the most basic coffin.

Two weeks after he died, Kagiso was buried in Mpophomeni. Over 100 of his neighbours were there to honour the memory of the man most of them did not know, but whose life had become incredibly significant to them. Nkosi taught us that this man was not worthless; his life was not futile – because he was our neighbour.
13. Tony Shelembe, a True South African Hero

Daniela Gennrich

The sister at the local clinic looks up wearily, and surveys the queue snaking out of the main door onto the road. It's going to be another long day...

“Next ...” A young man approaches. “Sawubona, Sister”.
“Yebo, Buti. What's the problem?”

The somewhat sickly looking man explains that he has a persistent headache, and his abdomen is distended, or swollen. The sister puts on her stethoscope and listens briefly to his chest, takes his pulse and blood pressure, and sends him off with a small plastic packet with the word ‘Painadol’ written on it. “OK - next...”

A tired, careless moment, a missed opportunity to diagnose a life-threatening condition ...

But who was this man? As I sat in his house the other day, surrounded by his family and friends, the rain pelting down on the corrugated iron roof, I noticed a faded photo of a 14 year-old Tony, and asked people what they remembered about him. This is some of what I heard.

A grandson:
“I cannot eat when I think of my little grandson. Who is going to take of care of me when I am sick? Who is going to look after the cows and the goats for me? I should have gone before him. Who is going to bury me now?”

A son:
“I am Tony’s mother. Tony was very helpful, at home and in the community. He loved his children very much, they were very important to him, but all children were important...”
“He was not talkative and didn’t fight. He loved to braai meat outside on a Sunday. He was often making jokes. One day when he was 14 and I still had a car, he just took it and drove away. But he was humble and just said ‘I am sorry, Dad’. He could not resist driving!”

A brother:
“He was always there for me when we were growing up.”

A father:
“My dad was so kind. He did all the things I wanted. The best part was when he used to take us kids to go swim in the river. He bought me a bike for Christmas.”

An athlete and a role model:
“My dad was a marathon runner. He got three Comrades medals, and eight others for running. He won three gold medals for his soccer team.”

A community leader:
“He was a good leader. I always remember Tony with his smile. I remember the work he did with us in the community since 2000. I remember when the committee was divided, and some wanted to follow one person and others wanted to follow another. And Tony said, ‘No, this thing is too big, we have to continue the work, however scary it is’. And we have continued to work until now. The stigma is less, and more people come forward for help. Tony left us in the middle, but we know that God is there...”

“He was like a son to me, chatting about his future and where he wanted to go. He wanted to be an NGO director and quietly went about making it happen. Working day to day to make a difference, it was never about the money or the status, always about how things would change.”

A caregiver:
“He was not like other men. He helped orphans talk about their sadness, helped gogos looking after their grandchildren. How many men have that gift to give children?”
[– a community member]

“Tony used to come straight away when we called for help. He used to drive us to hospital when we were sick. But he was not like a taxi driver. He used to talk to us to help us not to be afraid.”
[– a gogo in the community]
“He helped me to take my medication correctly – what will I do now?”
[- a young woman in the community]

**A friend:**
“I remember his dedication, his respect for the young and the old, his smile, his tiny body, his funny caps and his good heart.”

“He was many things in one. He was there for everyone, mothers, children, friends. Whatever he put his mind to, it became possible. Even though things were a struggle he never accepted failure and always found a way forward. He never lost hope.”

“He was not afraid to confront you when things went wrong, to work things out honestly.”
A lover and a husband-to-be:
“I fell in love with Tony on the 9th August 2004, when we were both doing home-based care training in Howick. One day he took me to uMngeni River and he told me he wanted to marry me. I did not agree. He begged me until I finally agreed. He has just finished paying my mother lobola (bride price) for me. We have started wedding preparations. Next month we were going to collect our rings at the jewellery shop, and we were paying off a bedroom suite.”

“Then he got sick. But he never gave up hope. I remember one day when he was very sick, he tried to get up and go to work. He loved his job. He also loved talking with me about our future and our babies. I miss his smile. When he called my name, he said ‘love’. Everywhere I go he still goes with me. I wish someone could bring him back to me.”

A visionary:
“I remember he said: ‘This community is going to have a vibrant economy and there will be no more unemployment. And most of all, there will be no HIV stigma and we will be free. If I die, please don’t let anyone say it was nthakathi (witchcraft). Tell them I was just sick.’”

“The Hilton Valley Committee chair has committed them to continue working to fulfill his vision. Even though they have very little funding, they have vision and they have hope.”

So, who was this man, passed over so easily by the Health System?
The answer is best summed up in the words of his daughter Luyanda, as I was bringing her back from shopping yesterday, when she saw Tony’s cousin in the distance: “Look, look! Daddy IS here! ... Oh no, sorry – I forgot ....”
Questions for Discussion

These questions can be used by group facilitators who want to use one or more of these stories as a tool or code to stimulate open conversation about gender issues in relation to men. A facilitator might use all or some of the questions, or simply keep the questions in mind when opening up a free conversation in response to a story.

Each set of questions begins with 3 general questions, which are more or less the same for all the stories. They help the group to engage with the story directly and begin to explore their reactions to it.

1. The first question is intended to make sure that everyone understands what the story is about.
2. The second opens up the space for participants to share their initial responses.
3. The third encourages the participants to begin to apply the example in the story to their own lives.

The remaining questions go more specifically into aspects of the story itself, and help the group to go deeper.

Depending on time and what comes out of the conversation in response to the first 3 questions, it may not be necessary to introduce the others, if the issues have already been discussed. However, they may be useful to probe into an issue, and to take the conversation to a deeper level if the facilitator believes this is useful.

1. A Message to Men
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
   3. How is Tosh a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this
example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?

4. Tosh’s mother was ‘strong’ and the only breadwinner during his childhood. How do you think this affected Tosh’s understanding of manhood as a child? Of womanhood?

5. How did peer pressure affect Tosh’s relationships with women as a teenager? Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? Knowing what you know now about gender-based violence, would you have acted differently?

6. How did listening to women who were survivors of gender-based violence affect Tosh’s understanding of women?

7. In what ways did Tosh become involved in and serve his community? Does this make him a role model?

2. He Took Responsibility

1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?

2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?

3. How is the father in this story a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?

4. From your experience, when a woman becomes pregnant, does the man responsible often stay involved in the life of the mother and child? Is this story unusual?

5. How do you think fatherhood contributes to defining manhood? Are men who are caring and compassionate fathers seen as ‘less of a man’ or ‘more of a man’?

3. Through Him, I am a Better Person

1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?

2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?

3. How is the father in this story a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?

4. The father in this story was very controlling during his daughter’s childhood. How do you think that affected their relationship?
5. Not until after the daughter had a child outside of marriage did her father discuss this as a moral issue. Do you believe it is important to have discussions about sexuality and pregnancy with children? How does this help define fatherhood?

6. Do you think the father in this story treated his daughter with compassion, especially during her pregnancy? What do you think he could have done differently, if anything?

4. **Real Men Do not Abuse! Real Men Protect!**
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
   3. How is Skhumbuzo a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?
   4. Why do you think it is particularly difficult for men to disclose their HIV status? How do you think this affects their understanding of being men?

5. **‘It took me 20 years to realise that I’d done something wrong’**
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
   3. How is Dumisani a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?
   4. How did peer pressure affect Dumisani’s relationships with women as a teenager? Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? Knowing what you know now about gender-based violence, would you have acted differently?
   5. Do you think Dumisani did the right thing to find his victim and apologise to her? As his counsellor said, he took the risk that she might charge him. What do you think of the risk he took? Would you have done the same? What other options were there open to him, and what would have happened if he had chosen rather to do something else?
   6. What was the result of his apology for the woman he raped? If you were that woman, would you have reacted in the same way?
7. What did Dumisani commit to doing after this? What ideas do you have for ways he could teach his son not to rape? Could you use any of these ideas in teaching other boys and young men in your own community?

6. *The Magical Paradox of Masculine Strength*
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
   3. How is Patricia's husband a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?
   4. Through his marriage relationship, how does Patricia's husband define his strength? How is this part of his understanding of being a man?
   5. Patricia believes that culture defines ways of being a 'real' man. Do you agree with the characteristics she mentions? Why or why not?
   6. Patricia describes her marriage as a partnership between equals? Do you think this is typical of marriages you know? If not, do you think it should be? Why or why not?

7. *Abused but not Taking Revenge*
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
   3. How is the mechanic in this story a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?
   4. If you were the mechanic, what would you have done in the same situation? If you are a man, how does this situation define your manhood? Do you think transactional sex is ever the solution to a problem?

8. *Coming Out*
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
3. How is Nthuthuko a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?

4. At first, Nthuthuko's parents were very negative about his sexual identity. What did he do in response that made it possible for there to be healing in his relationship with them? What can we learn about how to handle family conflict in a life-giving way?

5. What has this story taught you about life as a homosexual person? How has this affected your attitude to differences in sexual orientation?

9. Emancipation of my Masculinity
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
   3. How is Siduduzo a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?
   4. Do you know any gay people in a similar situation to Siduduzo? Are their experiences similar to or different from his experience?
   5. Siduduzo speaks about his struggles to be accepted as a gay man, and says that it is better for him when he pretends to be a macho male. What do you think it is like for him to have to hide his true identity? How has this story influenced you in terms of how you will relate to homosexual people in future?

10. It's Not about Me, It's about Us
    1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
    2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
    3. How is Thulani a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?
    4. After being left by both his father and his stepfather, Thulani's mother was forced to engage in many relationships with different men to support her children.
Do you know similar stories from your own life in which men abandon committed relationships? How does this affect your understanding of manhood?

5. How was Thulani affected by the death of his wife, particularly because of the reaction of his in-laws? He openly showed how he was feeling. Is this an acceptable thing for a man to do, in your opinion? Why, or why not?

6. Thulani wrote that he did not feel supported by the church. What could have made his situation different? How would your own church community have responded?

11. The Children who Made Me a Father
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
   3. How is Philippe a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?
   4. Philippe talks about 6 aspects of being a father. What are they? Do you know many fathers who play all these roles? If you are a father, how many of these roles do you play with your children? How might you become more conscious of the way you live out being a father to your child/ren?
   5. Philippe says at the end of his story that there are many types of families in South Africa, who do not fit the traditional Christian “mother, father, children united in marriage”. What other forms of family do you know in your neighbourhood or community?
   6. From reading this story, what do you think is needed to make a ‘real’ family, other than its shape or size? Does your family have these qualities? (If you are a father - What would you need to change in your family to make your children really feel secure and know deep in their hearts that, no matter what, you are their father?)

12. The Neighbour who Loved
   1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?
   2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?
   3. How is Nkosi a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life,
and what could you change about your own behaviour in response to Nkosi’s example?

4. Nkosi had no proper job and himself often had to depend on his neighbours for food. But he was still able to give to his neighbour while he was sick. What was it that he gave to his neighbour? Do you have things in your life that you might be able to share with others, even if you do not have much yourself?

5. What was the ultimate gift Nkosi eventually gave to his neighbour? Could he have done this alone? Two important traditional values in Zulu culture are ilimo (supporting others and standing together for the good of the community) and ubuntu (the spirit of respect and dignity in human relationships). How can we see these values lived out in this community? What can we learn from this?

6. The writer talks about how he read the advert for moving to Australia above the dying man’s bed, and thought about leaving the country! Can you remember a time when you felt like running away instead of dealing with the deep pain and suffering of those around you? What did you do?

13. Tony Shelembe, a True South African Hero

1. What is this story about? Who are the characters?

2. What is your first reaction to this story? How does it make you feel?

3. How is Tony a positive example for men? As a man, what would you change about your own behaviour in response to this example? As a woman, based on this example, what positive behaviours would you encourage from the men in your life?

4. What did Tony’s relationships with his family and his community say about the type of man he was – particularly in his relationships with women and children?

5. What sort of relationship did Tony have with his fiancée? Do other men you know treat their partners with caring and affection? Did this make him less or more of a man?

6. What sort of legacy has Tony left in his community? What kind of legacy would you like to leave behind? Imagine what people would say in an article about your life, or in a speech at your funeral. What would you like them to say? What do you need to change in your life to make this a reality?
Gender transformation work is critical to sustain our country’s democratic process. PACSA and Sonke Gender Justice Network share the ambitious aim of bringing about fundamental social change that includes the prevention of domestic and sexual violence, achieving gender equality, responding to HIV and AIDS and deepening democracy and human rights.

Working with gender activists, NGOs and local communities, they have compiled a three-part series to contribute to this agenda by promoting positive male norms.

Volume 1: Stories of Men Making a Difference
This volume contains personal stories of men who offer role models of positive masculine norms and ways of being a man in South Africa today.

Volume 2: Understanding Masculinity in South Africa - Essays and Perspectives
The essays and interviews in Volume 2 analyse some of the many different ways of being a man that exist in different sectors of South African society. Perspectives offered include those of traditional African culture, religion, gender rights, gay and lesbian rights, and our democratic Constitution. These insights show that positive change is an important (and possible) part of creating a new more inclusive and just society.

Volume 3: Faith-based and Community Resources for Change
Volume 3 contains resources developed by people working on these issues with men and boys. It aims to equip people working within faith communities and wider society who seek to bring about change in the perceptions of men – and women – about what it might mean to be a “real” man in South Africa today.