

Foreword - Healing through Story Telling

The "16 women tell 16 life stories" is a compilation written by New World Foundation for the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women and Children, 2011. The 16 women who were selected to tell their stories are from the Lavender Hill area, Cape Town, an area notorious for gang violence and drug addiction. The women and children of this community unfortunately have had to bear the brunt of this violence which also allowed a culture of violence to penetrate throughout the community including people's homes and the children's playing fields. So one can imagine the amount of healing needed amongst these brave 16 women.

These women have been brave enough to use the medium of storytelling to tell their stories to a writer who then compiled the stories for this printed anthology. It was not so easy for them, drawing up all that pain and history of violence, some of which they still currently experience. Some have instructed to remain anonymous for potential further victimization in either the community or in their home with the latter being more prevalent. Many also asked for some of the details in the stories to be eliminated. Germaine Greer's theory "the personal is political" still rings true even until today after very progressive laws and policies have been passed worldwide to protect our marginalized groups.

The 16 selected women have been failed by our country, our society, the community, and some even by their own families in many ways. This has led to even further and deeper trauma that affects and penetrates the rest of the community and its families. Theorist Martha Cabrera eloquently explained this as "Trauma and pain afflict not only individuals. When they become widespread and ongoing, they affect entire communities and even the country as a whole. Multiply wounded societies run the risk of becoming societies with inter-generational traumas." In almost every story you will read of the layers and layers of wounds caused by emotional, physical and verbal violence.

I would like to emphasize that this group of ladies selected was not the difficult task in compiling this anthology. There are many like them with similar stories but it was the question of who we knew of that would most likely be bold enough to share their story knowing that they would have to return to the same household and/or community. Some speak of rape, some speak of verbal and physical abuse of their husbands/partners, some speak of poverty, alcoholic parents, the experience of their children on the drug 'tik' and the untimely death of their loved ones through the violence in Lavender Hill. Many of the stories have a combination of the above, yet the women move on and some struggle on.

As New World Foundation we are touched and blessed to have these women tell their stories to others and to begin a process of healing where dark secrets are not fostered and the shame can begin to fade. Following the printing of this book, the 16 women gathered in a private evening ceremony, with two friends or family each, sharing their stories with lots of lit candles, tears, good food and support. To the women who shared their stories: We honour and salute you and may this process be the start (as we have already witnessed) to your healing and your brighter future. To the reader, we believe that these stories will give you insight into a world other than your own, a place called Lavender Hill.

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