



IN MEMORIAM

Nadia Goetham

The late Nadia Goetham was a phenomenal publisher of authentic South African stories.



Thabiso Mahlape

From the time I was asked to write this tribute, not a day went by where I did not agonise over what part of Nadia Goetham to honour, what parts to share. I have agonised so much about what I would say to you today to honour the love and heart that Nadia was - both as a friend and as a phenomenal publisher.

She came into my life as a colleague but by the time she met her untimely death due to Covid complications she was my friend, and one of the greatest loves of my life. I am not quite sure where to start and where to stop.

I hear her voice in my head telling me “come friend, just go for it man”.

I have obsessively listened to all her voice notes since she passed, and it is, therefore, no wonder that I almost always feel like I can hear her voice. Just not when I need it though. In those moments her voice eludes me. It is when I need her the most that her voice goes to whatever place her spirit has gone to.

And so, with what I imagine to be her permission, I let you into Nadia's mind.

[2018/01/29, 07:14]

Nadia Goetham: Morning... trying to isolate and identify feelings... on a scale of 1 to 10, how nervous were you with your first solo publisher book launch?

Nadia sent me this message on the morning she was preparing to launch her very first book as a publisher. When it came to everyday life, I knew of her anxieties and dilemmas. But on this morning Nadia let me in on her insecurities about work for the very first time.

The beginning

[2018/01/29, 07:36]

Nadia Goetham: It's Jacana but in so many ways it is me too... I've always been behind the scenes, even as a reporter, copy editor, managing editor... but this! Jirrrr!

Nadia was a very confident person, that's how she walked into my life. As a strong-headed, knowledgeable production manager who seemed to have all of Joburg's cell numbers in her phone.

As a colleague, Nadia was strict and diligent and I almost hated her for it. I am a more of "let's get it done when it gets done" kind of person and she was "I am sorry but I am going to need you to do this right now" kind of person.

As a production manager at Jacana Media, Nadia would become one of my greatest teachers through her way of working. She was a force in my eyes.

Her insecurities that morning softened her for me. Later at the launch, she wasn't at her steadiest. It wasn't the rip-roaring success we had all imagined it would be. But with all of that, Nadia Goetham the formidable publisher was born that day.

The end

When Nadia started publishing, her task was to find big current affairs sellers. And she did. Somewhere along that journey she got a sense that her being a Coloured publisher in South Africa demanded that she looked beyond the bestsellers and big names and do the work that needed to be done. If I am to trust my memory, it was with Daniel Yusuf's *Living Coloured* that the penny dropped. Not only was the book a runaway success, but it also highlighted that there was yet another underrepresented community in publishing and that its audience was parched and ready for books that represented them and their lived experiences. It is in the books she published thereafter that her legacy shines the brightest.

Nadia still had more plans for the South African publishing industry. Other than us having lost a loved one and a cheerleader, this industry has lost its biggest champion. Where most of us were ready to give up, she always saw yet one more opportunity and one more book.

The only thing that could dampen her mood was just how thankless publishing in South Africa was. It made her extremely sad, but she loved it and all of us in it.

Her publishing years were her happiest. Honour her by buying and reading local books.

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Thabiso Mahlape is a publisher and owner of Blackbird Books, a publishing platform dedicated to giving new talent a voice and an entry into the literary space. She contributes to different publications.

