

Suraya Bibi Khan CV and Biography

I was born in Sophiatown in 1952, raised in the nurturing environment of an open and non-racist family. My mother was a dressmaker, and my Father a watchmaker, and we lost our small business due to the Group Areas Act, which not only uprooted our family, but also caused us, and specifically the children, to be separated from each other.

I attended various schools as our family trekked from one area to another; depending on when and where the "GGs", (the government vehicles that were used to forcibly remove people from their homes) would take us. After the Sophiatown removals, we lived in Everton with my final schooling years taking place in Watervaal when our family moved to Vrededorp.

My childhood days:

I had a very, very carefree upbringing as a child. Oh! Even when we had forced removals, as we were moved out of Sophiatown, and were shunted from pillar to post, I love my memories and the years as a child in Everton. I now understand my father's wisdom, with no B Com's or Masters or degrees or matric or any certificates of any kind, he nevertheless had that special wisdom. He came from another university, the university of life, and the wisdom you get there, no one can replace and no one can teach you from books... My father had that special wisdom... In being removed from Sophiatown, I was taken to another area for my upbringing. Rural Everton was an area that had all the ingredients for a child to grow up without prejudices.... I didn't know that there was such a thing as *Apartheid*, or what it meant, because Mrs Molefe across the road used to be there for me, so was Goko, Mrs Jansen, and Appa Pahad, all the people of the neighbourhood and families that lived in Everton. We grew within a racially integrated society, we didn't know racism, and I didn't know what poverty was, so I had this carefree life.

My Mother occupied herself with sewing, CTM's, cooking and baking and the daily koeksisters that I took to school to sell, while my Father kept busy repairing watches. We had an extended family support, and no community member looking down upon you as a poor person. We had a wealthy, healthy, stress free "living in spirit" that is

lacking today. I was sheltered, as the children in Iraq were even during the invasion; I saw adults in the village making sure children are protected from the impact of the bombing.

Whilst my Father was on Hadj during 1968 my Husband sent the woman with whom he was boarding to present his proposal. For my father this was an answer to his prayer, and although I was determined to live my life only to take care of my parents, I felt enlightened to take a partner that was chosen by Allah. No parent would ever wish ill for a child, so I finally embraced the idea to take care of Abdullah who had not had an easy life. His Father had lost two wives before his Mother died soon after his birth, the first wife in childbirth, and the second after her son died. He came to South Africa and stayed with family when his Father died.

My Mother, who spent her formative years with my Maternal Great Grandmother, who used to do laundry to bring her children up, would always say "Goodness never gets rotten," and remind us to always be helpful. That is why my Mother became active in the feeding scheme initiated by Rose Moonsamy and myself during 1990. Within a year we were thirty five women engaged in five schools providing a hot meal once a week on a Wednesday to over twelve hundred primary school children that had been identified by teachers. This was a project with no funding and all the groceries plus vegetables were sourced from businesses in Lenasia. The women contributed one rand per person in their household for spices and any emergencies. No one was above anyone else and it did not matter how much work you did. We used a monthly rotational meeting system for the sourcing of the venue, the chairing, the taking of notes, and task allocation like vegetable cleaning, providing the nurturing and meals to children at school, cleaning up, cooking rice and the cooking of the main meal.

It was an honour working with women in the community of Lenasia; serving underprivileged children that desperately needed a plate of food because they didn't have much at home. The wonders that I saw of children caring made my heart sing. We would go to the schools and request the teachers to assist in identifying the children in need so that they may be given cards to collect the plate of food and avoid waste. Without fail one would find a child coming forward and saying "Aunty my friend has lunch, but please she shares her lunch when I don't have food so please can she also have some food". That sharing, that caring that one witnessed gives one so much hope; I did not see any "uppity" attitude of class, nor any rich or poor distinction.

Children shared. They cared. They are children. They had not learned about the nasty habits that people pick up as they grow older. One does not know if these nasty habits and mannerisms come from parents or where they are picked up. Is it nature or nurture? I do not think any parent teaches a child bad behaviour. Now it is that caring nature that children have that one wants to nurture. It is that need for us to have peace in childhood and throughout one's lifetime that one needs to ask for.

Can you imagine children all over the world going into labour camps; children being forced into child labour as a means to survive, children picking up stones to throw at army tanks because they want to fight for the land of their birth and for the suffering of their families and for freedom? A child learning to have hatred, that's not right, is it? So, please, my appeal is to parents and children to take part in activities for Peace.

That is why I am trying to reach out to all that will engage because it is the children that are going to change this and bring Peace. They are going to spread the word, going to join up as members, and bring about peace in this world. They are going to give us the courage and guidance by saying, "We want a better life" rather than hearing about adults fighting, and about and for what? Hope for peace will not be a dream only, as was the freedom we fought for in our country.

My greeting therefore is one of Peace and my message is one that promotes Peace, because this is the dream I wish to convey about our future: One does not want to go over the old saying, and children must be tired of hearing about it, but the fact remains, THAT YOU CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE.

During the 80's I became involved, as an activist in the Anti-Election Campaigns of the United Democratic Front and in the Women's Movement. At a TIC meeting in the Ramakrishna Hall I heard Oom Beyers (Naude) say that he would die happy if he could one day have a fellow Afrikaner understand and believe what he stood for. This made a great impact on me, and I again heard Murphy Morobe at the Central Methodist Church talk about the impact we can individually make, "Imagine," he said, "if one person's life can change so much, what we can do in the collective..."

The Lenasia Women's Congress was formed after the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW) that was launched at the JISS Centre (formerly JISWA) in Lenasia in December 1983. A TIC member, Faizel Mamdoo, part of the United Democratic Front, called us to see to the preparation. We, Fazila Seedat, Kim Morgan Safoora Sadek and myself, saw to the venue and the additional challenge of the meals. Our President was Ama Naidoo and our Patron Ma Sisulu.

Some of the Voluntary Community work I have participated in:

- In 1991 I was elected to the executive of the Lenasia Civic Association, part of the Civic Association on Johannesburg (CAJ), with activism in Housing, Health, Education, Transport and Crime Prevention. Continued with voluntary community work, capacity building in civil society, for the community to understand active participatory developmental democracy 1995 -1997
- Participated during 1992 to 1994 as LCA member to initiating the process Lenasia Community Police Forum (prior to this becoming a statutory structure) elected to serve.
- Initiated and mobilised women from Lenasia, feeding schemes in five Primary schools during 1990 – 1999
- Chairperson and founding member of Southern Areas Commuter Representative Association SACRA, advocacy and lobby, impact positively, changes from permits to tenders awarded for improvement of public transport services 1997 –2000.
- During 1993 Malie Fakier, Dudu Chile and I initiated the consultative process for the establishment of the Women's Institute for Leadership, Development and Democracy (WILDD) established in 1994
- Assisted with the Call of Islam (Lenasia group) and with individuals and families to fight for Justice, 11 workers killed in the factory fire 2001, Esschem case ended 2005
- Solidarity volunteer – Palestinian Solidarity Alliance - (because I witnessed the impact of the Iraq invasion)
- Since 2004 voluntarily established South African Women in Dialogue - SAWID Southern forums Region G of Johannesburg at grass roots, launched 8 March 2005
- Member of the Board of Trustees of the National Development Agency

Employment

I worked in a number of companies (1978 – 1990) sales rep, clerk, bookkeeper, administrator, and financial officer, culminating as an accounts officer for Sage Trust Co, previously known as Northern Trust, then a major South African financial institution.

Recruited into the NGO sector, 1991 joined Development Resource Centre - DRC at its implementation phase as head of administration and finance. The DRC was responsible for the NPO Bill as one area in creating an enabling environment for NGO's. In 1997 joined Public Services International, 1998 Southern African Grantmakers Association - SAGA and in 2001 SANGONeT providing support to staff with advice, implementing financial accounts systems for quality management system. On a part time bases since 2004, I have worked at Womensnet as a bookkeeper / accounts officer, key performance area to ensure audit reports and systems are compliant, provide monthly accounting reports and board financial reports.

THIS MESSAGE TO CHILDREN OF THE WORLD WAS WRITTEN IN IRAQ AND FINALISED THE FIRST DAY BACK HOME.

We the SOLIDARITY ACTIVISTS FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND PEACE GREET you in Peace and ask that you take this message to the Elders, Parents and Leaders of the World.

With the access to media and information you receive world news immediately and you are seeing an Invasion presently. Please know that this is real and MOTHERS and CHILDREN are CASUALTIES as AMERICA AND THE COALITION FORCES INVADE IRAQI AND ISRAEL BRUTALLY ENFORCING ITS OCCUPATION ON THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE. This aggression is unjust and uncalled for and IS NOT AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW.

We plead that you our children learn of peaceful and non-violent action from leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi so that you our future DO NOT LEARN HATE due to greed and intolerance towards one another.

Your Parents care, nourish and cherish you as do Parents in Palestine and Iraq their Children, and have dreams for your future as Parents all over the world have for their Children.

Please show your young and caring nature by helping and having discussions and debates on Truth, Justice, Peace, leadership qualities, dignity and respect in your school meetings and call on your religious leaders in Churches, Mandiers, Masjids, Temples and Synagogues to Preach the message of Abraham, Jesus, Moses and Mohammed (peace be upon them) of PEACE.

Having travelled a long way in the hope of leaders to consider peaceful solutions, which was unsuccessful, I persistently hope for peace.

I returned reluctantly to SANGONeT from Iraq whilst I was determined to work for justice with civil society.

In 1990 when I joined the NGO sector it was with a corporate understanding of quality service in finance. I was used to the impact of providing clients with simple clear financial statements that reflected a quality service.

Trust, honesty, compassion, understanding, logic, reliability and integrity is what is required in any relationship between employer - employee, business, government and all citizens, whether dealing for monetary gain or not.

We all have to examine this in order to establish what we wish to achieve for our future and the generations to come. What is the legacy that we should leave behind? Is this based on material items or can we aim to leave this world with a good reputation as an honest and truthful individual?

The present situations that we often face with fear require reassurance, honesty and integrity if we wish to overcome them. There seems to be an epidemic of fraud in all sectors of business for profit and non-profit as well as civil society, and we need to turn this tide around if we want to ensure that the dreams we had in 1994 will become a reality.

SURAYA BIBI KHAN

Career spans a number of companies and organizations over three decades, worked in the financial and administration fields. Later recruited into the NGO sector and in 1991 joined Development Resource Centre (DRC) at its implementation phase as head of administration and finance. The DRC was responsible for the NPO Bill as one area in creating an enabling environment for NGO's. Between 1997 and 2009, worked at Public Services International, Southern African Grantmakers Association, SANGONeT and Women'sNet giving advice, assisting and implementing financial account systems for quality management.

"Unsettled many times in my childhood days due to the Group Areas Act which sparked her fighting spirit and she became an activist. As an activist, she mobilized and chaired a number of forums fighting for human rights and justice, with a specific focus on women and children's issues".

Teamed up with individual women from the NGO and CBO sectors, and held public meeting and events since 1992. In 2004 voluntarily established in the South African Women In Dialogue (SAWID) - Southern Forums involved in the planning, management and implementation of the movement. This movement was formalised on the 8 March 2005 International Women's Day to ensure community ownership and participation in the movement. Women are encouraged to attend open dialogue meetings whereby moral regeneration, racial integration, poverty alleviation, promotion of BEE charters and harnessing ICT at grassroots level issues are discussed and implemented.

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