

"There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke; and from there, if there is no mist; you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa"

That is Alan Paton's description of the road to Grandpa Henry's little farm in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa.

Grandpa Henry grew up in the hills and valleys of Kwa-Zulu Natal. He had a white German father and a black Zulu mother. Whenever visitors came, Grandpa's Zulu mother had to hide him away, and pretend to be 'just the maid'.

It was in the hills and valleys of Kwa-Zulu Natal that Grandpa Henry met Granny Irene. She too, had a Zulu mother. Her father was a Scotsman, who had twelve other Zulu wives.

1948: Grandpa Henry and Granny Irene live together on the farm.

South Africa is no longer a single nation, but one divided by race. They called it: apartheid. Black, White, Indian, and Coloured: mixed, tainted beyond repair, but in the eyes of the law, not as despicable as our darker ancestors, our Zulu mothers.

My father grew up in this South Africa. He grew up on the farm, where they lived off the land. They fished to pass the time. One day, my father, and his father perched on a rock, on the grassy banks of a dam, fishing, when two white children walked by. The younger child said to my grandfather, "Hello boy. How are you *boy*?" Perched on the rock on the banks of the dam in KZN, Grandpa Henry did not respond to *that* child but instead, turned to my father and said in Zulu 'Just look at these white children raised to call an old man like me "boy".'

1962: my mother is born and, like my father, she is labeled coloured by apartheid law.

But my mother grew up in Wentworth, a coloured township in the city, where she swung from mango trees and raced through the red sand. She bought three-cent samosas on Sundays and watched the smoke from the nearby oil refinery disappear into the sky. In the city, everyone and everything had its place. It was in *this* South Africa that my mother looked into her father's eyes, pointed at a beach as they drove by, and said, "why can't *we* go there?" there were no words fit for eight-year-old ears to explain: "net blankes, whites only." So my grandfather hid the truth, mumbled an excuse, something about parking space... He told a lie to protect his children from the truth, and hoped that things in *this* South Africa would change.

27 April 1994. The new South Africa is born.

I was a four-year old, holding my mother's hand, and my one year old brother was asleep in my father's arms, but there to make history anyway. So that years later, we could both say, "we were there when our parents voted for the first time".

Like my mother and father and their parents, I was born in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal... But I didn't really know *their* South Africa.

Because to me, growing up in the hills and valleys of Kwa-Zulu Natal meant: chicken curry. Braais, and the smell of sea-salt; tea-time at school, and riding the green bus to the public pool. It is where my mother, a teacher, taught me to read *Green Eggs and Ham* ("I do not like them Sam

*I Am*”). KZN is the warm loving winter sun. It is every crisp morning. High tide and low, dusk and dawn on the Indian Ocean. KZN, where once, I thought I would live forever, with my parents and my little brother in the yellow city house at the top of the hill.

2013: here I am. So far from home, far from the hills and valleys of KZN. Part of me yearns to go back. But another part thinks I am being naïve. My South Africa is 52 million people, 11 official languages, and one democratic government. It is beautiful, but it is scarred. Our South Africa, where 50 people are murdered every day. Where, 17% of adults are HIV positive, and the gap between rich and poor continues to grow.

2013: I am graduating so soon. I find myself trying to connect my past to my present and make a plan for my future but every day brings more uncertainty...  
There is one thing I do know: South Africa’s past, *my* past; the hills and valleys of KZN will stay with me forever, in my thoughts, in each action, in every single one of these words.