

Bessie Head



6 July 1937 ~ 26 April
1986

Bessie Amelia Emery was born on the 6th of July 1937 in Pietermaritzburg. She was born in a mental hospital, the daughter of a white woman named Bessie Amelia Birch and an unnamed black father. She was brought up in foster care and then in a mission orphanage.

She obtained teaching qualifications in January 1957 and from 1956 to 1958 she taught at Clairwood Coloured School in Durban.

From 1958 to 1960 Bessie got involved in the world of journalism, working as a journalist for the Golden City Post and Drum magazine. At the beginning of 1960, she joined the Pan Africanist Congress, a political movement. On the first of September 1961 she married Harold Head and in March 1964 Bessie Head left South Africa on an exit permit to Botswana, where she lived and worked as a lecturer and writer until her death on April 26, 1986.

Her Books

The Cardinals , written in 1961 and published in 1991

When Rain Clouds Gather , 1968 reflecting her involvement in agriculture at the Bamangwato Development Farm and her life in the refugee camp in Francistown)

Maru, 1971 dealing with racial prejudices

A Question of Power, 1973 dealing with the psychological effects of her mental breakdown and other issues such as race)

The Collector of Treasures, 1977 short stories reflecting different issues

Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, 1981 short stories

A Bewitched Crossroad, 1984 novel about the history of Botswana

THE BESSIE HEAD LIBRARY

Msunduzi Municipal Library (formerly The Natal Society Library) has provided public library services for the people of Pietermaritzburg since 1850. On 1 April 2004, libraries and staff of The Natal Society were integrated into the Msunduzi Municipality as Msunduzi Municipal Library Services. The main library, named the Bessie Head Library, and eight branch libraries, aim to provide a comprehensive library service to all residents of the Msunduzi Municipal area.



THE BESSIE HEAD LIBRARY

The Natal Society Library, the public library in Pietermaritzburg, was administered by the Natal Society for over 157 years from 1850 until 2004. On 1 April 2004 the Natal Society Library and its staff were integrated into the Msunduzi Municipality and became the Msunduzi Municipal Library Services. In June 2005, during a major project where main streets and major public buildings in Pietermaritzburg were renamed, the Main Library building became the Bessie Head Library.

The Adults Reference Library has been in existence for 157 years. It was founded by a group of prominent residents who hoped to promote the Colony by collecting and disseminating accurate information. This library has an extensive collection of reference materials and information resources with which it is able to support research, business, government and vocational endeavors and the needs of tertiary level students.

The Legal Deposit Collection was established in 1916, when this library was one of the 5 libraries in South Africa accorded Legal Deposit status. This privilege has helped make it into one of South Africa's major research and information libraries. Legal Deposit libraries play a unique and very important role as custodians, in perpetuity, of this country's cultural wealth and information. Through the Adult Reference Library all the citizens of South Africa have access to this huge collection of South African books, pamphlets, government publications, periodicals and newspapers.

Recently renovated at a cost of R30-million from Carnegie and KZNPLIS.