

Annari on the move

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After ten exciting, stimulating and demanding years, Annari van der Merwe has left Kwela Books, the publishing house she established in 1994. Her brief for the new publishing house, an imprint of NB Publishers was to focus on the development of new writers in an effort to broaden the writing and reading culture in South Africa. It was hoped hereby to give a voice to those South Africans who hitherto had not had the opportunity to make their voices heard.

Because of the nature of Kwela and the kind of authors it was hoping to promote, Annari had not only to source her authors, she had also to persuade some of them to actually write as not all of them had finished school. Caring for her authors, she continued to cajole and nurture, occasionally bullying but always helping and supporting them in the editing and rewriting - without losing the strong individual identity of the authors or debasing the authenticity of their voices.

And succeed she did as attested by the success of Kwela Books.

More than 30 new authors made their debut at Kwela under Annari's nurturing guidance, while several established writers also chose to publish their work with her.

Before her departure from Kwela Books at the end of 2004, the novel **Bitter fruit** by Achmat Dangor became the first book originally published in South Africa to be short listed for the Man Booker Prize, while in the same year another Kwela publication, **Confessions of a gambler** by Rayda Jacobs, won one of South Africa's most coveted literary awards, the Sunday Times Fiction



Prize, as well as the Herman Charles Bosman Prize.

Annari grew up on a sheep farm in the Richmond district of the Karoo. After matriculating at Jan van Riebeeck High School in Cape Town she went to a high school in Virginia, United States of America (USA) on an American Field Service Scholarship. She graduated from the University of Port Elizabeth with a BA degree in Afrikaans-Nederlands, English and French and then a BA Hons in Afrikaans-Nederlands, cum laude. Her PhD in Afrikaans Literature (on the poetry of Breyten Breytenbach with André Brink as promoter) was completed at Rhodes University in 1975, followed by a three-year stint of post-doctoral studies at the Rijks Universiteit in Utrecht in the Netherlands. She also worked in broadcasting with Radio Nederland in Hilversum, Holland.

On her return to South Africa from Holland in 1978 she was appointed head of the children's and youth book division at Tafelberg Publishers in Cape Town, subsequently becoming senior editor, a post she held until 1993.

Annari has lectured at both Rhodes University and the University of the Western Cape. Aside from a wide range of speaking engagements and participation in seminars,

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book fairs, festivals and workshops on publishing and the book industry - both locally and internationally - Annari has also served as advisor to the Centre for Creative Arts, been a member of the advisory committee for the Centre for the Book of which she is currently a board member; she has co-chaired the trade interest group of South Africa's Publishers' Association (PASA) of which she is currently an executive member. She was a trustee of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair from 1996 up to 2000, served as a member of the executive of the Book Development Council of South Africa and also as national chair of the Children's Book Forum of South Africa after its inception in the 1980s.

After a decade of living and breathing Kwela Annari felt she needed a change, new challenges, new pastures. After a short break in Japan she came back to Cape Town before packing her bags for Europe, then Argentina and finally Botswana, the Okavango and Namibia, before taking up the newly-created position of publishing director with Random House Pty Ltd on the first of July. Her primary task will be to establish for the company a local indigenous publishing imprint to be known as Umuzi. Of her new job Annari says, 'There is no job as rewarding to me as being closely involved with the publication of a good book. The vibrant creative environment in South Africa at present and the contribution that publishing can make toward reflecting this dynamic reality is irresistible.'