

CURRY AND KINDNESS

On a quest to find the perfect SA curry, Ishay Govender-Ypma spent a year collecting recipes and the stories behind them for her brand-new cookbook. She'll never forget one woman's story – or her delicious recipe for *potjie* beef curry

PHOTOGRAPH JURIE SENEKAL TEXT ISHAY GOVENDER-YPMA

When I think of township-style beef curry, prepared outdoors on the fire with Rajah curry powder – a spice mix I can attest to being the curry flavouring of choice of the majority of South African cooks – I think of Noxolo Gamakulu. This caterer in Qunu, a rural village in the Eastern Cape known to many of us from the late Nelson Mandela's boyhood descriptions of clear lakes and gentle green valleys, answers her cellphone sporadically. On occasion I call and speak to a set of different voices – men and women – and learn that she is out shopping or busy with a task. It feels like I've willingly ensnared myself in a game of hide-and-seek, but I've heard about Noxolo's delicious cooking and I'm not easily deterred.

Our meeting in Qunu, where she lives with her husband, Zimisele Gamakulu, a guide at the Nelson Mandela museum, is rescheduled three times. Twice, I arrive from Mthatha, 35 minutes away, hopping from foot to foot in the crisp June air

outside the site of Madiba's ancestral burial grounds, the security guard's brow furrowed with annoyance at my presence. On my third and last attempt before I move on to Queenstown where my next appointment awaits, I call Noxolo. "Wait where you are," she says softly. "Don't move." Five minutes later a man runs to the car and escorts me to Noxolo – the street signs in the village aren't recognisable to the uninitiated.

I couldn't have known that Noxolo was burying her mother-in-law and I arrive to a family in mourning. It's the third day or so of formalities and although it's just shy of 10 am, relatives have gathered under a tent pitched close to the Pepto-Bismol-pink rondavels. Fat roosters dart between us. Noxolo, draped in a thick blanket, stoops low over a set of *potjies* perched over smoking logs. Soon it will be time to feed the visitors, she says, gesturing to the tent that will swell, as it has over the past few days, with neighbours, family and well-wishers. It's here that she shares her beef curry recipe with me. Pounded fresh chilli, a sprinkling of barbeque and steak-and-chops spice, and a crumbled beef chilli stock cube are her secret ingredients that lift this curry from ordinary to lip-smackingly moreish.

This meeting occurs a little over the halfway mark in my journey last year to interview cooks from communities in the cities, farms and townships for *Curry: Stories & Recipes Across South Africa*. And it offers me a lesson in generosity that I take with me – Noxolo needn't have entertained my calls or even tried to assist. She didn't want to burden me with her sorrow and instead, when we finally met, offered me tea, a gracious smile, and her delicious recipe. Surely, it is the infinite kindness of women that holds the delicate fabric of our communities together.

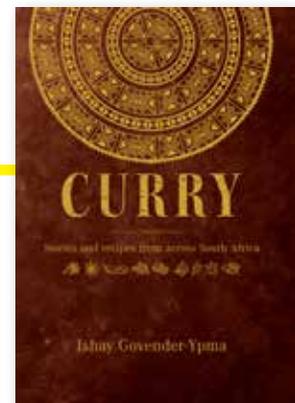
I think too of other remarkable women I met on this journey: Radiya Essak from Alberton who arranges a roti-making lesson with her visiting parents, and Fouzia Bismilla who is introduced to me by a butcher



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in Potchefstroom on the telephone five minutes before we meet. They grant a perfect stranger access to their homes and lives. While I process what trust means in these dangerous times, they would have had to do the same. In the end, these women, and countless others featured in *Curry*, extended a generous hand to me in sharing their precious, layered stories and family recipes. **W**

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Visit taste.co.za to find the recipe for Noxolo Gamakulu's beef curry and to stand a chance to win one of two copies of *Curry: Stories & Recipes Across South Africa* (Human & Rousseau, R395), or turn to page 126 for SMS entry instructions. **KEYWORD: Curry**

