

THE BRIDGE



WOMEN'S MONTH 2026

PREVIEW EDITION

A GIRL FROM
THE CAPE FLATS

The Ending God Was Writing

DR JOY SAVILLE-YORO

Her extraordinary journey
from Mitchell's Plain to
medicine

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
CAPE FLATS STORIES

Cape Flats
STORIES



THE BRIDGE

Letter from the Editor

Tarryn-Lee Bell · Editor-in-Chief

This Women's Month, we launch something deeply rooted in the power of story. It is fitting, therefore, that we begin with the story of Dr Joy Saville-Yoro from Mitchell's Plain, whose journey reflects not only the experiences of one remarkable woman, but also the complex history, resilience and possibilities that exist within communities across the Cape Flats. Her story provides an important starting point for a magazine that seeks to look beyond the surface of our communities and to explore the experiences, histories and people who have shaped them. This special edition is the result of a partnership between The Bridge and Cape Flats Stories, grounded in a shared belief that storytelling has the power to connect people who may otherwise remain separated by geography, history, class and circumstance. We believe that when people are given the opportunity to tell their own stories, and when others are willing to listen, we begin to understand one another differently.

In doing so, we create opportunities to challenge assumptions, confront difficult histories and recognise the common humanity that exists beneath the differences that often divide us. The stories featured in these pages are not intended to sanitise the realities of our communities or to present an idealised version of the Cape Flats. They are stories that emerge from the rawness of lived experience: stories of trauma and triumph, displacement and belonging, inequality and resilience. The Cape Flats carries a history deeply marked by forced removals, spatial segregation, poverty and exclusion. Yet this history cannot be understood only through the lens of hardship. Alongside these experiences is a profound history of resilience— of families and communities that have continued to love, create, nurture, organise, dream and build despite the circumstances imposed upon them.

The Stories That Connect Us

Building bridges. Amplifying voices. Changing the narrative.

There is also something deeply African about these experiences. From the Cape Flats to communities across South Africa and the wider African continent, there are histories that, although shaped by different languages, cultures and political contexts, contain remarkably familiar experiences of displacement, marginalisation, inequality and trauma. Equally familiar are the stories of courage, faith, resistance, community and hope. By bringing these stories into conversation with one another, we have an opportunity to recognise not only the differences between our communities, but also the experiences that connect us. This is where the purpose of this partnership becomes particularly important. Bridging the gap between communities begins with listening. It requires us to move beyond stereotypes and statistics and to see the people behind the headlines, the history behind the circumstances and the human being behind the label. It requires us to amplify voices that have too often been spoken about rather than listened to, and to create spaces where lived experience is treated not merely as testimony, but as knowledge. Through this magazine, we hope to celebrate women whose lives demonstrate that adversity does not have to define destiny. Their stories speak of identity, dignity, courage and possibility.

They remind us that where we come from may shape us, but it does not have to determine where we are going. More importantly, they invite us to reconsider the ways in which our individual stories contribute to a much larger African narrative. This is ultimately what The Bridge and Cape Flats Stories seek to build together: a platform where stories can cross boundaries, communities can encounter one another and voices that deserve to be heard can reach beyond the places from which they originate. We believe that storytelling can do more than document where we have been; it can help us imagine where we can go together. As you turn these pages, I invite you not simply to read these stories, but to listen to them. Listen for the history, the pain, the courage, the lessons and the hope. Perhaps, in doing so, you will discover that the distances between our communities are not always as great as we have been led to believe. From the Cape Flats, across South Africa and across Africa, these are stories that deserve to be heard.

“Building Bridges. Amplifying
Voices. Changing the Narrative.”



A Girl from the Cape Flats

The Ending God Was Writing

“My story was never simply about becoming a doctor.”

If you had told the little girl from Da Plain who dreamed of becoming a doctor that she would one day walk away from that dream, only to find it again almost twenty years later, I would never have believed you. Looking back now, I can see that my story was never simply about becoming a doctor. It was about discovering that God's plans are always greater than our own.



ORIGINS

Growing Up in Mitchell's Plain

Smokkies, violence, trauma—and the ubuntu that shaped a doctor.

I was born in Portlands, Mitchell's Plain, in 1984, but my earliest memories belong to New Woodlands, a place of deep contrasts. On one hand, it was filled with laughter, friendships and an incredible sense of ubuntu (community). Yet, on the other, it was marked by gangsterism, smokkies and violence. A smokkie was a house in the neighbourhood where alcohol was sold, frequently without a liquor licence. It was part of the landscape of the Cape Flats, woven into the everyday life of communities like New Woodlands. It was also a place that sold the white pipe—mandrax. Mandrax is the street name commonly used in South Africa for methaqualone, a sedative-hypnotic drug used to lace dagga (cannabis). It became particularly associated with the Cape Flats during the height of the drug and gang crisis. As a child, I didn't realise how abnormal some of those experiences were. Gunshots at night were simply part of a Cape Flats child's life. And then there was my best friend.

I witnessed how her father regularly abused her mother. It was only years later that I recognised just how much my young mind had quietly absorbed the societal dysfunction. Trauma has a way of becoming background noise when it is all you've ever known. Yet when I think of Mitchell's Plain, violence isn't first what comes to mind. It's the joy of remembering the drawing of hokke (hopscotch blocks) in the gravel along the pavements. Neighbours arrived unannounced because nobody needed to schedule a visit or play date. I remember sugar being borrowed without ever expecting it back, meals being shared whenever someone had a little extra, "bak rogers", children playing in the streets until the lights came on, and a community that looked after one another. That was where I first learnt Ubuntu—the belief that I am because we are. It is a lesson that still shapes how I practise medicine today.



IDENTITY

I Wasn't Broken

I simply experienced the world differently.

I attended Mitchell's Plain Primary School from Sub A (Grade 1) to Standard 3 (Grade 5). That is how we 80s and early 90s kids understood it. Looking back now, I realise I was always different. I was quiet, academically gifted, socially awkward and terribly uncoordinated. I was usually the last child picked for snowball, a ball game, because of my butter fingers and complete lack of athletic ability. I often felt like I didn't quite belong. It was only at 40 that I received a diagnosis of high-masking autism. Suddenly, the little girl who always felt "different" finally made sense to me. I wasn't broken. I simply experienced the world differently. Despite never quite fitting in, I was allowed to dream. My greatest dream was to become a paediatrician and, ironically, that dream was born in a hospital.

"I wasn't broken. I simply experienced the world differently."

Where the Dream Was Born

Every doctor who cared for me planted a seed.

I was the middle child and, sadly, my mother’s sickest only girl. I spent countless days and several nights at Red Cross Children’s Hospital with severe gastroenteritis, meningitis and chronic ear infections that eventually required surgery. I even had debilitating constipation that required specialist care. It was here that deep seeds of healthcare were planted. Every doctor who cared for me planted a seed. Long before I understood medicine, I knew I wanted to help people by the way my doctors had helped me. In 1996, my parents made one of the hardest decisions of their lives. They discovered that my eldest brother had started spending time at the smokkie alongside local gang members. They knew that if we stayed, our future could look very different. We left Mitchell’s Plain in search of safer opportunities, settling in Goodwood, a previously “white”

area in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town. For one year, I attended De Vrijzee Primary School. Academically, it was the happiest year of my schooling. Excellence was celebrated, and for the first time I found myself sitting at the special table with the top students. Yet this new chapter brought a different challenge. South Africa was only two years into democracy, and racism remained deeply entrenched. Being called “nie blanke” and “mate” quickly reminded us that although we had left one hardship behind, we had entered another. My parents decided that no child of theirs would grow up believing they were less than anyone else, and after only a year, we moved again.

“EVERY DOCTOR WHO CARED
FOR ME
PLANTED A SEED.”

1996

RED CROSS CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL

Was I Strong Enough?

The hospital where the dream began became the place where it died.

High school at Windsor High School in Rondebosch East reignited my determination to study medicine. By Grade 11, I had already started asking older girls at church who had been accepted into UCT's medical programme what I could do to strengthen my application. One recommendation was volunteer work, and so I immediately signed up with an organisation called Friends at Red Cross Children's Hospital. My role was beautifully simple: play with children whose parents were unable to visit regularly because they couldn't afford transport. I thought I was going there to help. Instead, those precious little children helped me. They changed me forever. I remember a specific little girl whose tummy was so big she looked nine months pregnant. She had a tumour growing inside her.

I remember a baby, not yet a year old, who had survived a shack fire but lost an arm and a leg. His hospital room carried the smell of paraffin, yet his laughter filled every corner of it. His joy filled my heart, yet his suffering broke me. For the first time, I wondered whether I was emotionally strong enough to become a doctor. Ironically and sadly, the hospital where my dream had first been born became the place where it died. I convinced myself that perhaps I wasn't resilient enough. Maybe I wasn't intelligent enough either. My confidence crumbled, and my marks followed. I stopped believing that medicine was meant for someone like me, and I had no backup plan.

“For the first time, I wondered whether I was emotionally strong enough to become a doctor.”



NATURAL MEDICINE

Healing and Outcomes

Mohammed Zaid changed how I understood faithful service.

A gap year wasn't an option in our home, so after matric I enrolled in a Science Foundation programme at the University of Cape Town for students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. During that same year, my best friend introduced me to Natural Medicine offered at the University of the Western Cape. This was a five-year double bachelor's degree. It felt like the perfect compromise because I could still become "Dr Joy", while avoiding the trauma I believed came with conventional medicine. Years later, in 2013, while working for a public benefit organisation, I met a little boy named Mohammed Zaid. He was diagnosed with pulmonary hypertension, a rare, life-threatening condition with very limited treatment options for children. Our team supported him using complementary medicine alongside his conventional care. Initially, his response was remarkable. He laughed, played and lived like every other little boy his age. Even his specialist commented on how well he was doing. Then, sadly, he developed a respiratory infection and died. I spiralled into depression and found myself standing once again in the shoes of my seventeen-year-old self, convinced I wasn't cut out for this work. Then something unexpected happened. His mother never blamed me. Instead, she continued bringing sick children to me. Her trust changed me, teaching me that healing and outcomes are not the same thing. As doctors, we are not called to control life and death, but to faithfully serve.

"His death devastated me, but his mother's grace partly saved me."

Enough Light for the Next Step

Every impossible door opened just enough for me to keep walking.

I fell in love with natural medicine, its philosophy, its emphasis on treating the whole person and its multiple approaches to healing. But deep down, something remained unsettled. Every time I asked God whether I should pursue conventional medicine, I would hear the same encouragement from people praying over me: “God has a plan for your life.” I believed them, but I desperately wanted Him to tell me what that plan was. Of course, He didn’t. Instead, He asked me to trust Him one step at a time. By 2016, my longing to study medicine had become impossible to ignore. I applied to Wits University’s Graduate Entry Medical Programme (GEMP) and passed the entrance examination.

Then life became difficult. My husband’s salary was cut by 60 percent, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and financially, we were barely holding on. When my acceptance letter arrived, I had only R3000 in savings, just enough to secure my place in the 2017 class. That was all I had. But it was enough. Before registration, my fees came through and I received a bursary from the Al-Imdaad Foundation. Looking back, I realise God rarely gives us the whole staircase. He gives us enough light for the next step. Every impossible door opened just enough for me to keep walking.

2016

“God rarely gives us the whole staircase. He gives us enough light for the next step.”

There Was Only Enough Grace

Full-time medicine, part-time work, motherhood and marriage.

I consistently achieved distinctions, never scoring below 75%. While my tuition was covered, our living expenses remained overwhelming. In April 2017, my husband was retrenched. My previous employer graciously allowed me to continue working remotely around my studies, but our income simply wasn't enough. My mother and her prayer warriors kept praying. And just like that, the Vuya Foundation awarded me a scholarship that covered many of our living expenses that year. Studying medicine as the mother of a two-year-old with very real adult responsibilities remains one of the hardest seasons of my life. The workload was relentless.

Every six weeks there were examinations and every six weeks there were tears. I balanced full-time medical studies, part-time work, motherhood and marriage. There was never enough time, only enough grace. By God's faithfulness, every examination I feared became another reminder that He had carried me further than I could have carried myself. My medical training continued through internship and community service, where long hours, exhaustion and emotionally demanding work refined not only my clinical skills but also my compassion. Those years taught me that medicine is as much about humility and presence as it is about knowledge.

THERE WAS NEVER ENOUGH TIME,
ONLY ENOUGH GRACE.

RESILIENCE AND FAITH WERE MY MEDICINE.



HER PRICELESS LEGACY

She Taught Me How to Pray

Faith became my foundation.

Looking back, I realise my mother's greatest legacy wasn't simply that she raised me. She taught me how to pray— a legacy so many Cape Flats children have said saved their lives. She showed me what unwavering faith looked like, even while facing cancer. She often reminded us: "To whom much is given, much is expected." At the time, I thought she was talking about achievement. Today, I understand that Mommy was talking about responsibility. Her faith, so effortlessly lived, became my compass. It helped me navigate the Cape Flats, my trauma and the extraordinary resilience that comes with being a brown child. Her faith became my foundation, and her prayers became part of the strength that carried me through to medicine.

"To whom much is given,
much is expected."

My Mother's Passing and My Obesity

When grief changed the way I understood health.

When my mother sadly passed away in 2022, grief settled into every corner of my life. My life was never the same again. Food became my comfort. It became my escape from sorrow. Combined with the relentless demands of hospital work, I progressively became more obese. For the first time, I wasn't simply treating patients with obesity. I was one of them.

FOOD BECAME MY COMFORT.

IT BECAME MY ESCAPE FROM SORROW.

Finding Joy Again

Mind, body and soul.

After completing my in-hospital training, I found myself unemployed for several months, a reality many South African doctors know all too well. Instead of seeing that season as a setback, I used the time to complete my Diploma in Child Health. But something else happened during that season. I rediscovered the gift of simply being present. I could attend church consistently. I could enjoy family gatherings without rushing back to my textbooks. I could listen to my daughter tell me about her day and watch her dance routines over and over again without feeling guilty that I should be studying. That season changed my understanding of success. For years, I assumed my journey would eventually lead to specialisation. But somewhere along the way, I realised that the life I truly wanted was one where I could serve my patients without sacrificing the people God had entrusted to me.

So I chose private practice. It wasn't necessarily the easier path. It was simply the right one for Joy. Around the same time, I began my own journey of healing through a holistic approach: healing of the mind, body and soul. Over the last two years, I lost 30 kilograms. But the greatest transformation wasn't the number on the scale. I regained my energy, my confidence and, in many ways, my life. Living through obesity changed the way I practise medicine. Today, when women sit across from me feeling ashamed, exhausted or defeated, I don't just see a patient. I see someone whose struggle I understand because I have walked that road myself. My consultations are therefore never simply about weight. They are about dignity. About hope. About healing. And about reminding women that their health is worth fighting for.

MIND. BODY. SOUL.

“My consultations are about dignity. About hope. About healing.”

Where We Begin Does Not Determine Where God Can Take Us

A message for every young person who dares to dream.

I am still that little girl from Mitchell's Plain. The difference today is that I understand that dreams don't become reality because we are extraordinary. They become reality because an extraordinary God can use ordinary people who are willing to trust Him. When I look back at my journey, I can see His hand in every door that opened, every person He placed along my path, and even in the seasons when I thought my story had come to an end. I now understand that where we begin does not determine where God can take us. My hope is that every young person who reads my story will dare to dream beyond their circumstances. That they will trust God even when they cannot see the next step. And that they will remember that whatever they have been given, they have also been given a responsibility to use it to serve others. Because if God could write this story with my life, I believe He can write something extraordinary with countless others too.

Dreams become reality because an extraordinary God can use ordinary people who are willing to trust Him.



To My Mom, Glynis Saville

13 February 2022

Thank you for giving me the greatest gift of all—Christ. Your faith, so effortlessly lived, became my compass. It helped me navigate the Cape Flats, my trauma and the extraordinary resilience that comes with being a brown child. Your faith became my foundation, and your prayers became part of the strength that carried me through to medicine.



WITH LOVE, JOY

A GIRL FROM THE CAPE FLATS