



Great storytellers in their own words - Beverley Naidoo

Beverley Naidoo invites you to read novels and stories set in South Africa, the land of her birth, and in England, the country that became her home in exile.

Her writing is inspired by the personal challenges young people face because of politics around them – for instance, as a street child in South Africa in *No Turning Back* or as a refugee in London in *The Other Side of the Truth*.

Her most recent novels are *Web of Lies* (2004), a sequel to *The Other Side of Truth*; *Burn My Heart* (2007), and *Call of the Deep* (2008).

"Written with valuable insight, gritty but optimistic, this is a totally believable, absorbing read."
The Guardian* *Narrated with exceptional skill in a bracing, unadorned style...* **The Scotsman****

Beverley Naidoo grew up in South Africa, joining the resistance to apartheid while at university. After being detained without trial, she came to Britain in 1965 to study and into exile. She has since worked as a teacher, education adviser and writer.

Her first children's book, *Journey to Jo'burg*, was banned in South Africa until 1991 but was an eye-opener for many thousands of readers worldwide. In

2010, it celebrates its 25th anniversary in print.

She has written novels, short stories, poetry and plays, winning many awards including the Carnegie Medal for *The Other Side of Truth*.

Her play *The Playground* was a Time Out Critic's Choice Pick of the Year in 2005. A stage adaptation of her novel *Burn My Heart*, set in 1950's colonial Kenya,

* writing about *No Turning Back*
** writing of *The Other Side of Truth*

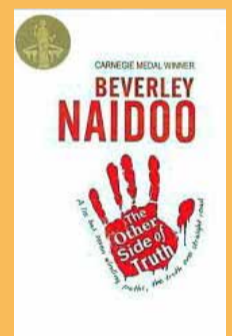
Beverley Naidoo - from original photograph by Linda Brownlee

will tour the UK with Trestle Theatre in Autumn 2010.

Her latest book *S is for South Africa* is an alphabet of poems with photographs by Prodeepta Das.

Other books for younger readers include *The Great Tug of War* and (forthcoming) *Aesop's African Fables*, both illustrated by Piet Grobler; and *Baba's Gift* with Maya Naidoo, illustrated by Karin Littlewood.

On publication, it won the prestigious Carnegie Gold Medal and the Smarties Book Prize Silver Medal



The Other Side of Truth
by Beverley Naidoo

A shot. Two shots at the gate in the early morning and a car screeches away down an avenue of palm trees.

A tragedy - and a terrible loss for Sade and her younger brother Femi, children of an outspoken Nigerian journalist.

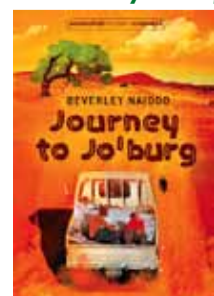
Now terror is all around them and they must flee their country. At once. And alone. Plans for their journey have to be hastily arranged. Everything must be done in secret.

But once Sade and Femi reach England, they will be safe - or will they?

"Totally gripping, somewhat shaming and entirely believable, this is an engrossing and thought-provoking read for 10 years-olds plus."
Sunday Telegraph

"...an unforgettable novel" *The Times*

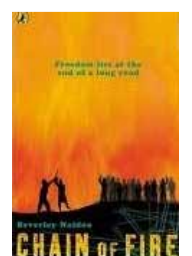
Banned by the apartheid government in South Africa, this is the story of two children's courage and determination to find their mother and bring her home...



The sun rose higher. On they walked. The heat sank into them and they felt the sweat on their bodies. On they walked. Alone again..." Another baby has died in the village and Naledi knows that her little sister Dineo might die too. But what can she do? Their grandmother has no money and there are no doctors in their village. So Naledi makes up her mind. She will have to get Mma who works more than 300 kilometres away in Johannesburg. The only way to let her know was to get to the big road and walk. So Naledi and her brother Tiro did just that...

Of *Journey to Jo'burg*, the Times Educational Supplement wrote: "...so simple and straightforward that it makes accessible even to quite young children the difficult and the profound."

In addition to her many other books, Beverley Naidoo has written sequels to both *The Other Side of Truth* (*Web of Lies*) and *Journey to Jo'burg* (*Chain of Fire*). If you have enjoyed one, do read its sequel.



Beverley Naidoo

'Why shouldn't young people learn what is really happening on Earth? The quicker we learn, the more intelligent and strong willing we shall become. That way we can make peace'

Why have you set so many novels and short stories in South Africa?

It is where I spent my childhood. For a long time South Africa was a very sick society. No justice, no equality, no democracy. Only white people had power and they made everything depend on skin colour. My father emigrated from Cornwall in England when the tin mines were closing and gold was discovered in South Africa in the 1880's. My mother's family fled from the pogroms against Jews in Russia to England from where her parents emigrated to South Africa. All my grandparents immediately had more rights than black people whose ancestors had been living there for generations. I was brought up accepting the way things were. As a child I never questioned why I could live with my parents in a comfortable home, go to school, play in the park and do all sorts of things black children were not free to do. My upbringing led me to believe that white people were superior and it was natural for them to have the best of everything. But when I realised how false this was, I became very angry at all the injustice around me - and how I was part of it. I had been brought up with blinkers. Later, when I began to write, I wanted to write stories that would challenge narrow ways of seeing.

What made you change your own ways of seeing?

Luckily when I went to university, I met people who challenged me to open my eyes. It was the early 1960's when the African National Congress was banned and Nelson Mandela went 'underground' before he was captured. I became involved in resistance to apartheid which taught me a lot. Eight weeks of solitary confinement in jail, when I was twenty-one, gave me a sense of how the country was a giant jail for most of its people. I was still a very 'small fish' at the time of my arrest. But I was very aware of the enormous commitment of many people who risked long sentences and even death for their beliefs.

What gave you the idea for the story line of Journey to Jo'burg?

As a white child in South Africa I had, as it were, two mothers. My second mother was a black

cook-nanny who saw that I was washed and fed and was always around to talk with me when my own mother was busy. Yet I was brought up to see her as a servant and to call her 'Mary'. While all white adults had to be addressed as either 'Mr' or 'Mrs' or 'Aunty' or 'Uncle', I was brought up calling all black adults by their first names, which was extremely rude. Traditionally in African society respect is also conveyed through language. That is why, in Journey to Jo'burg Naledi and Tiro call anyone older 'Mma' or 'Rra'. As a child I also simply accepted that the person who looked after me ate her food off a tin plate and that her own three children lived far away. I never really thought what it must be like for them to be without their mother. One day she got a telegram and collapsed in front of me. Two of her small daughters had got diphtheria and died. I remember being sad and shocked - but I still didn't ask WHY? I could not have caught diphtheria because as a white child I had been inoculated. It was only some years later that I began to ask the important questions. Journey to Jo'burg is dedicated to the memory of those two young children and their mother. When I was writing, I wanted to explore for myself what it would be like to be separated from your mother when you most needed her. I also wanted to feel in touch with the courage of young black people in South Africa who were determined not to put up with racism and apartheid any longer.

Why was Journey to Jo'burg banned in South Africa?

I can only guess because the government didn't give any reasons. One likely reason was that half of the book's royalties were going to a banned organisation, the British Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, that was helping the families of political prisoners. Perhaps another reason was that the apartheid government thought it would encourage readers to ask challenging questions - especially young white South Africans who were being brought up to think that racism and discrimination were normal.

What were your feelings about South Africa's first democratic elections?

I was very excited that South Africa would get rid of the old racist laws and that Nelson Mandela would be the first democratic President. But getting equality and justice is much harder than changing the laws and there are still enormous differences between rich and poor. In No Turning Back I wrote about a twelve year old boy who runs away to the dangerous streets of Jo'burg where he joins the malunde - street children who live rough and survive, if they are lucky, by their wits. Siphos's stepfather is unemployed, drinks and is violent. I wanted to show that there are no magic wands.



Why did you move away from South Africa in The Other Side of Truth?

I am interested in children who struggle against injustice and other difficulties wherever they are. Over the years I have learned about Nigeria through friends and some very fine writers. However the soldiers who stole power for many years destroyed much that was good, including people who spoke out against them. After they executed the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, I began to think about a story which involved the children of an outspoken journalist. I wanted to explore how these children would cope with being thrown from a comfortable family in Lagos to becoming - overnight - refugees alone in London.

Is what you write true?

Fiction is a very good way of exploring reality, especially from different viewpoints. I tend to do a lot of research before I create a story and characters that are fictional. So my stories are true in the sense that everything that happens could happen. That was why at the beginning of Journey to Jo'burg there are two press cuttings about real children who made incredible journeys to find their mothers.

Do you like doing research?

I love it. I often feel that I am being a detective following clues! It is also very challenging for me as new information, ideas, feelings and points of view are revealed. When I was writing Chain of Fire I was not allowed to go to South Africa, so I had to do that research in England. It was as if I was writing a historical novel. In fact a lot of my material had been secretly smuggled out of the country. But later on, I was able to research No Turning Back back in the country. I spent six weeks with a theatre director colleague and friend Olusola Oyeleye doing drama and writing workshops in the summer of 1993. We worked with street children as well as young people who were not street children to get a sense of their different lives, experiences and views. I was also helped to think about the mothers of children who run away by a wonderful educator Martha Mokgoko. She ran research workshops with her Speak Barefoot Teachers group in Alexandra, the place near Johannesburg from which my character Siphos runs away. For The Other Side of Truth I carried out most of my research in England by spending a few months finding out about the experiences of refugee children in London.

How do you go about writing?

I start with writing notes on scraps of paper as well as beginning a notebook. This is my 'first ideas' stage. When researching, I talk to people, visit places, take photographs, read and so on. The next stage is working out a plot. Although my plot may change a bit as I write, it is important for me to have a sense of the shape of the whole story and how I intend to tell it. Afterwards comes the

actual writing - usually draft after draft! Then editing - by myself and with my editor. I often ask a few people to whom I have spoken while researching if they will read my story and comment. This helps me get a bit of distance from what I've written. Altogether, it's a long slow process - but very satisfying in the end.

Get MAXIMUM value from the football next month by listening to Beverley Naidoo talking about South Africa's past and the reality of today's 'Rainbow Nation'

and then REALLY enjoy the

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On Hurst's Author Day, Tuesday 15th June, you will hear Beverley talk about her ideas, her writing, her books and also have the chance to ask her questions.

Afterwards, you will have the opportunity to buy one or more of her books (in paperback editions) and have them personally dedicated to you and signed by the author.