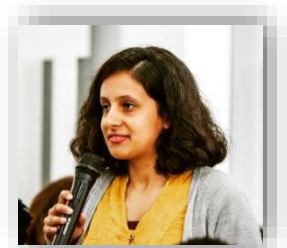


Written by Haafizah Bhamjee



Opinion

Yusuf Daniels' Living Coloured is a Rare Gem

With its beginnings in a series of viral Facebook posts by Yusuf Daniels, who describes himself as an “accidental author”, this little book is a quick read that will have you laughing long after you’ve put it down.

In just 96 pages, Daniels gives his readers a captivating collection of memoir short essays that depict his youth in clear imagery and authentic language. It is the authenticity of Daniel’s writing style that first had me drawn towards his book.

Diverging from the style of traditional literary publications, particularly non-fiction, Daniels is comfortable using colloquial language and slang. This adds to the essence of the type of story he is telling and makes it feel homely.

The narrative follows young Yusuf or “Yussie” as he navigates everything from street games to apartheid segregation. While reading you can’t help but salivate over his vivid descriptions of Ramadan and Eid feasts, or ‘Heyday Treats’, or laugh at young Yusuf’s childhood blunders including one incident where he made the mistake of teasing Ruthie, the neighbourhood terror, without the safety of a locked gate between them.

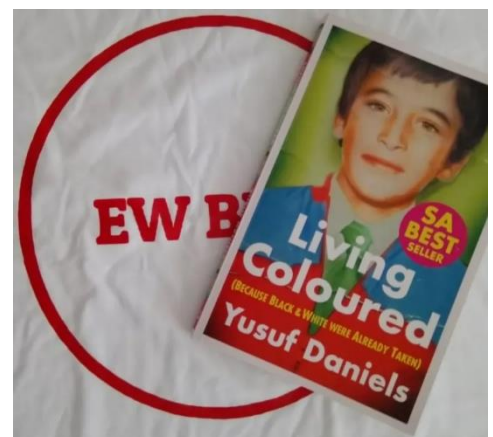
Without cringe irony, which sometimes taints these sorts of narratives, *Living Coloured* transports the reader to a time when children played together in the streets unsupervised and were as safe in their neighbour’s homes as in their own. A time when two children could wander down to the nearby dam for an afternoon of fun. When neighbours invited each other to their dinner tables with open arms, and young romantics frequented the ice-rink to skate together (and make out). A picturesque time that most people of my generation find hard to imagine.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading about his participation in the *Malay Choir* and the Kaapse Klopse, and the street games that even the adults joined in. However, Daniels is wide-eyed and aware of all the undesirable aspects of his childhood and does not attempt to hide these from his reader. In one section he describes the impact of gangsterism on the youth of his community and how baseball helped keep him away from that lifestyle. In another, he mentions when his family, and others, were removed from District Six after the implementation of the Group Areas act of 1950.

In a time of high political writing and wide-spread political and historical commentary which is usually so strung up on relevance and populism that it becomes inaccessible to the average person. Daniels offers his readers a clean, refreshing, emotive and meaningful telling of shared lived experience.

Living Coloured is a rush of culture and community, experience and identity, politics and the home; a narrative set in apartheid depicting the Cape Coloured community without cheaply sensationalising the politics of identity.

An important, and often untold, narrative sorely needed for our democracy. I wish it had come sooner. An absolute treasure!



Living Coloured Book image