

## ***The Indicator* Newspaper**

**(Ameen Akhalwaya and Zaytoon Akhalwaya Abed)**



**Ameen Akhalwaya / Zaytoon Akhalwaya Abed**

While trying to think back to all those years, memories of days gone by come flooding in. The 1980s was a turbulent time in South Africa, and Lenasia was at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle. During this time, my late father, Ameen Akhalwaya, embarked on a journey to create one of the most memorable and inspiring newspapers of that time.

My father was the Editor and founder of *The Indicator* newspaper, which was founded in 1985 in Lenasia. My mother, Farida, was the backbone of the company and created an interactive children's column, "The Indicators Club". Later, she was affectionately known as "Mama Cat".

As kids the office became our second home. We studied, did our homework and played, while my parents slogged to get every issue out on time, ensuring its excellent quality. When asked to write a piece on *The Indicator*, I realised I was too young to remember the main aspects of the paper's birth. So, based on sound advice, I have left the story to my father to 'relay' to you.

I can't think of anyone explaining the history of *The Indicator* better than his own words. These are excerpts from my father's book, **Comrades and Memsahibs**, a collection of his greatest articles over the years, compiled posthumously by his dear friend and colleague, Quraysh Patel. These excerpts are taken after the demise of the *Rand Daily Mail*.

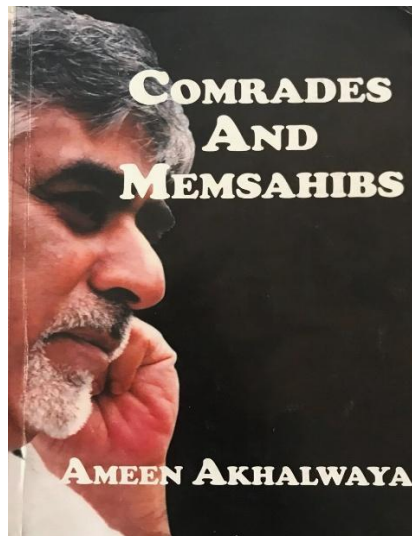
*"My timing was appalling. My package was based on just the two-year stint at the Express and the Mail. With R17 000 instead of R80 000 in my pocket, I decided, with my marketing graduate brother Fazil and Farida, to launch The Indicator in Lenasia.*

*Friends and family chipped in with about R30 000. Politicians such as Mandela congratulated me for my "extraordinary bravery" in launching an anti-apartheid newspaper, and oddly enough I've come to be remembered as editor of The Indicator rather than for what I thought was my most creative work with the Mail.*

*The Indicator was my biggest mistake. I could have taken a couple of jobs as foreign correspondent and lived well off dollars and pounds. Instead, The Indicator crushed me financially. Sure, it had a healthy volume of advertising, but a few advertisers wouldn't settle their accounts, so we spent our time paying off interest on overdrafts and loans.*

*As the first "alternative paper of the 1980s" - The Indicator beat the Weekly Mail to the press by a couple of months - I thought we would get much support from comrades as we tried to obtain foreign funding. To my surprise, foreign funders said they'd been told – by people in the alternative press – that The Indicator was nothing more than a commercial enterprise which supported the Azanian People's Organisation and the PAC! We did eventually obtain some foreign funding, but it proved inadequate.*

*With the closure of The Indicator imminent, Mandela stepped in. The ANC raised sufficient money and said the paper would be taken over by a trust of community representatives. The SABC offered me the job of executive editor of current affairs, which included Agenda.*



*Messages of congratulations and good wishes poured in. The reaction to my appointment was extraordinary.*

*It happened once before, in 1981, when I was awarded the Nieman Fellowship to study at Harvard University, but certainly not on this scale.*

*Newspapers and radio stations interviewed me, people stopped me in the street to say good luck. I'd be lying if I said I did not enjoy those moments of attention.*

*But the reaction to my appointment was varied, Suddenly, some well-known public figures realized that they had somehow overlooked messages I'd left with them a few years ago.*

*Amid the regrets have come invitations to lunch, dinner, braais, shows, birthday parties, and so on. Thanks, but no thanks.*

What was interesting was the reaction of the people of Lenasia. They don't dish out praise easily. In fact, many of them are quite cynical. If somebody achieves something, the antennae of suspicion go up. Has he bribed someone? Is he a collaborator? Has he used his influence in the "boetie-boetie" network? Has he been involved in some other skullduggery?



**First issue of The Indicator, 14 May 1985**

*That cynicism is understandable among people who've had to battle hard to rebuild their lives after the ravages of apartheid, while watching a lot of chancers cash in and live the high life. But the many who've expressed good wishes to me genuinely wanted me to do well.*

*As with the Nieman award, people want to identify, to be able to share in something of which they are part.*

*And that is why I was so deeply moved by the goodwill, not only from Lenasians, but also from friends, acquaintances, and strangers from all over South Africa and several countries abroad.*

*In the early years of The Indicator, we suffered financially. That was when our local café, grocer and butcher started to give us goods on credit.*

*Since then, whenever we've hit a bad patch financially, they've been there. They've never demanded that their accounts be settled.*

*The sad thing about moving to a new area is that we can no longer use the services of people who were there to help in difficult times, especially now that a regular salary means that we can pay them immediately and in cash.*

*We have also been fortunate that, despite not having medical aid, we could call on three to four doctors who would flatly refuse to accept a cent, except for medication.*

*I can't mention the doctors' names for ethical reasons. For the same reasons, I also can't mention the names of a couple of lawyers who've gone out of their way to give me legal advice whenever I've called on them.*

*They, too, never charged a cent. Neither of these guys are rich. One of them, a highly talented advocate based in Durban, has made other big financial sacrifices by helping people with low incomes.*

*Even if the medical or legal profession allowed their names to be publicized, those professionals would be more than a little upset if I wrote about them.*

*While I was on a course, our printer and bank started to turn the screws.*

*A couple of friends quickly cobbled together sufficient loans to ensure that the issue of the newspaper would come out.*

*The shareholders - family and close friends - who invested small sums to get The Indicator going eight years earlier are simple, hard-working people. They haven't received dividends, nor have they asked for any.*

*In fact, in the first couple of years of The Indicator when my wife Farida and I sometimes had to work a 17-hour day, they would look after our children.*

*In that sense, we've been extremely fortunate. None of our friends can be classed as being remotely wealthy, but their loyalty has been overwhelming.*

*Can I forget such people? I would be truly heartless if I did."*



**(25 February 2025)**

