

SIBUSISIWE VIOLET KANXELE MAKHANYA

1. Remarkable community leader and educator, Sibusisiwe was born in 1894, the daughter of an uneducated father who had worked as a foreman for a shipping firm in Durban, and a mother who had enjoyed a basic schooling. Both parents were Christians and wanted their children to be educated. Sibusisiwe began her schooling at the local school in Umbumbulu and at the age of 15 she went on to Inanda Seminary near Durban. In 1912 she completed a teachers Training Course at Adams Mission near Amanzimtoti and in February 1913 was posted to a one-teacher school at Imbizana where she established a School Committee to enlist parental support.

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cartoon - teaching at the one-teacher school.

2. She spent a few months in another post as head teacher at Ncwade before going to teach at Inanda Seminary. During her time at Inanda Sibusisiwe spent vacations travelling in other parts of Natal and Zululand teaching people about diets, and sewing and weaving and gardening and also trying to establish youthwork in close association with the missionaries of all churches. Her interest in social work grew and the then Director of Native Education arranged for her to get a scholarship from the Phelps-Stokes Foundation. As soon as her dream had come so close to being a reality, she pursued it with vigour. Her first five months in America were spent at the Penn School at St Helena Island near Frogmore in South Carolina. From there she went to Booker T. Washington's famous Tuskegee Institute to complete her year financed by the Phelps-Stokes foundation. After this she was recommended to the Schaufler College of Religious and Social Education in Cleveland, Ohio and there she went in order to enrol. As she lacked funds she sought work at the college. She was given the task of cleaning the bathrooms and toilets!

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cartoon - cleaning toilets at the Cleveland College.

3. She also collected money on speaking tours of the USA - she talked about South Africa, this enabled her to enrol at Columbia University to study Rural Sociology and Psychology under the famous Professor Mabel Carney. In 1930 she returned to South Africa to Umbumbulu with a purpose and a programme. One of her very first tasks was to establish the Bantu Youth League of South Africa in July 1930. She felt that migrant labour and Urbanization had done much to disrupt community life, she felt that the Bantu Youth League would help to minimize the effects of this disruption. Sibusisiwe spent the rest of her life in Umbumbulu where she established day schools and night schools for the herdboys, clinics for mothers and their sick children and classes in gardening and nutrition. The school that she built was renamed Sibusisiwe High School in recognition of her contribution and the Umbumbulu Community Centre still stands as a tribute to her life and work, although after her death in 1972 many aspects of her work came to an end.

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