

2015 Nat Nakasa Award for Media Integrity - Call for entries

Prize Money: R20 000.00

Deadline: 29 May 2015

The Print & Digital Media SA, SA National Editor's Forum and the Nieman Society of Southern Africa are now accepting nominations for the 2015 Nat Nakasa Award for Media Integrity.

Nat Nakasa was a prominent journalist and writer who died in exile. This annual award recognizes any media practitioner - journalist, editor, manager or owner - who has:

- ✓ Shown integrity and reported fearlessly;
- ✓ Displayed a commitment to serve the people of South Africa;
- ✓ Tenaciously striven to maintain a publication or other medium despite insurmountable obstacles;
- ✓ Resisted any censorship;
- ✓ Shown courage in making information available to the SA public;
- ✓ Any combination of the above.

Please submit your nomination before **29 May 2015**, accompanied by a **motivation of 300 words** to;

admin@sanef.org.za OR to Administrator, Groundfloor Room 1, Block A, Richmond Forum, 18 Cedar Avenue, Richmond, Johannesburg 2192.

The Award is open to all journalists irrespective of whether they serve a community / national newspaper, magazine or an electronic medium (including online publishers).

Previous winners of this Award are, however, not eligible for entry. The winner will receive **R20 000** in prize money and a certificate.

NAT NAKASA PAST WINNERS

1998	Jon Qwelane		
1999	Mzilikazi wa Africa		
2000	<u>Joint Winners:</u> Mathatha Tsedu Wolfram Zwecker		
	<u>Special Mention:</u> Baldwin Ndaba		
2001	Mzilikazi wa Africa Andre Jurgens Jessica Bezuidenhout	-	Sunday Times Investigations Team
2002	Justin Arenstein	-	African Eye News Service
	<u>Special Mention:</u> Elise Tempelhoff Martin Welz	- -	Beeld Noseweek
2003	Debbie Yazbek	-	The Star

Special Mention:

	David Macfarlane	-	Mail & Guardian
2004	Buks Viljoen	-	The Lowvelder
2005	Alf Kumalo		
2006	Guy Berger		
2007	Jacques Pauw		
2008	Max du Preez		
2009	Greg Marinovich		
2010	Terry Bell		
2011	No Winner		

Special Mention:
Anton Hammer

2012	Joe Thlooe		
2013	Mondli Makhanya		
2014	Alide Dasnois		

The winner will be announced at the Nat Nakasa Awards ceremony 27 June 2015.

Background on Nat's Life

In the Sixties, freedom of the press was an anathema in South Africa. Angry black voices were heard in the townships and in shebeens, but never in print. Government-controlled white newspapers freely regurgitated propaganda on a daily basis. Today, the written word has a platform without restriction - and to celebrate media integrity in South Africa, the Nat Nakasa Award is awarded on an annual basis by the Print Media SA, the SA National Editors' Forum and the Nieman Society. This year's award takes place on June 27, 2015. Nat Nakasa would have been 78 this year. If he were alive today in the new South Africa, perhaps he would have been a retired diplomat or politician, perhaps a prominent books editor, or a major publisher? One thing is certain - whatever lofty post we could dream up for him now, one thing he would remain.... a writer. "I must tread softly. This is time-bomb ground - the world of Nathaniel Nakasa. The man who, with a subtle humour in the mind, and a sharp bitterness in the heart, set out and attempted to create order out of the disorder of the South African white prejudice and racism and that other thing, South African black timidity and subservience."

Strong words from poet Mongane Serote as quoted from The World of Nat Nakasa (Ravan Press). But then, pussy-footing around the truth was never Nakasa's style. Born Nathaniel Ndazana Nakasa in 1937, he spent the major part of his adult life as a journalist in Johannesburg, a regular

contributor to the *Golden City Post*, an assistant editor of *Drum* and later as the first black columnist on the *Rand Daily Mail*.

At the height of his career in 1963, he founded a literary tell-it-like-it-is journal called *The Classic*. Nakasa's personal style gained a substantial following, although his middle-of-the-road views in a divided South Africa were often a little too liberal for some of his fellow black journalists. Nakasa had a knack for seeing a situation from 360 degrees. Says Essop Patel, "In spite of bitter nostalgia and occasional despair Nathaniel Ndazana (Nat) Nakasa had the ability to see an upside-down situation in an upside-down way." The 1960s were dark days for black South African journalists when repressive apartheid laws stifled a decent day's work, never mind inspiring any glimmer of creativity. For many the only way was out. Exile to foreign lands, far away from the oppression and humiliation that was home. As Essop Patel says in the introduction to *The World of Nat Nakasa*, "The creative output of the Sophiatown Renaissance came to an end as the bulldozers rolled in." But out of the rubble emerged a new kind of black journalist elite, and for the young and ambitious Nat, fresh in Johannesburg from Durban, these were the formative years.

Drum journalist Can Themba remembers Nat Nakasa in the early days of his career. In a tribute to Nakasa titled: "The Boy with the Tennis Racket", Themba recalls: "He had a puckish, boyish face, and a name something like Nathaniel Nakasa. We soon made him Nat." Nat was different from the start. Said Themba, "He came, I remember, in the morning with a suitcase and a tennis racket - ye gods, a tennis racket! We stared at him. The chaps on *Drum* at that time had fancied themselves to be poised on a dramatic, implacable kind of life. Journalism was still new to most of us and we saw it in the light of the heroics of Henry Nxumalo, decidedly not in the light of tennis, which we classed with draughts." Many recall Nat and good friend Lewis Nkosi being bookish and serious - not the carousing, drinking shebeen aficionados as the rest of the *Drum* team were notorious for in those days. These were heady days for Nat Nakasa and his black colleagues, a group of maverick journalists charting new territories without any real role models to look up to. Although times were bitter, for Nat it was all about crossing boundaries: "There must be humans on the other side of the fence; it's only we haven't learned how to talk," he said. Says Patel, ". . . Nat Nakasa focused his attention upon the idea of Common experience. He desired a truly South African nation."

In 1963, he saw the way clear to put out his own literary contribution in the form of *The Classic*. The magazine's main objective was to encourage ". . . those writers with causes to fight for, committed men and women who look at human situations and see tragedy and love, bigotry and common sense for what they are." Good friend and author Nadine Gordimer says of those days, "Nat's approach to *The Classic* was serious and yet light-handed, gay; candid and unflustered. He was a clever young newspaperman but had no literary background or experience - yes. There was not enough money for the venture and there were endless practical difficulties - yes. Nevertheless, he felt that day-to-day journalism floated, like oil indicating the presence of a submarine, on the surface of African life, and he wanted to make soundings of his own. He asked for help, and what's more, he did so aware that help more often than not must take the form of criticism, and in the self-knowledge that he could take that, too."

Certainly, conditions were not improving in South Africa and while Nakasa's career was gaining ground despite a system that dictated the opposite, the global village was calling with the voice of freedom. In 1964, Nat Nakasa was awarded the Nieman Fellowship to read journalism at the Harvard

University. Of course, obtaining a passport from the government of the day would take nothing short of a miracle, leaving Nat in an impossible situation. As he said in a well-known piece titled, *A Native of Nowhere*: "Sometime next week, with my exit permit in my bag, I shall cross the borders of the Republic and immediately part company with my South African citizenship. I shall be doing what some of my friends have called, "taking a grave step." Little did friends and relatives know just how grave that step would be, and how moving away from the land of his birth would affect the psyche of this sensitive writer. Says Gordimer of this emotionally traumatic time for Nat, "It was a strange time, the last year in South Africa; on the one hand, he was making a name for himself in a small but special way that no African had done before, his opinions and ideas were being considered seriously by white newspaper-readers whose dialogue cross the colour line had never exceeded the command, do-this-or-that, and the response, yes-baas. On the other hand, he had been awarded a scholarship to Harvard and was involved in the process of trying to get a passport - for an African, a year-long game in which the sporting element seems to be that the applicant is never told what you have to do to win, or what it was he did that made him lose."

Eventually, Nat "gained his freedom" in the form of an exit permit, and although missing his first flight out of the country, safely made it into the US. He was not crazy about New York and quickly moved on to Cambridge where life at Harvard was spent "steeped in the somber business of education".

Although the Harvard year was good on the learning front, things went downhill from there - Nakasa grew increasingly homesick, isolated and unhappy, although this was not largely apparent to those around him. Says Patel of his death at the age of 28, "Nat Nakasa's death by suicide on 14 July 1965 was an apartheid tragedy, and a tragedy of exile. After his year at Harvard, he wrote extensively for several newspapers and magazines in the United States. He appeared in the television film *The Fruit of Fear*, a critique of apartheid, and was to have written a biography of Miriam Makeba. But two days before his death he told a friend, "I can't laugh anymore and when I can't laugh I can't write."

Nat Nakasa was buried at the Ferncliff cemetery outside New York not far from the grave of Malcolm X, far from the country he knew and loved so well. Nadine Gordimer sums up Nat Nakasa's contribution beautifully in *The World of Nat Nakasa*: "The truth is that he was a new kind of man in South Africa, he accepted without question and with easy dignity and natural pride his Africanness, and he took equally for granted that his identity as a man among men, a human among fellow humans, could not be legislated out of existence, even by all the apartheid laws in the statute book, or all the racial prejudice in this country. He did not calculate the population as sixteen millions or four millions, but as twenty. He belonged not between two worlds, but to both. And in him, one could see the hope of one world. He has left that hope behind; there will be others to take it up."

Nakasa's remains were exhumed from Ferncliff and reburied at the Heroes Acre section of Chesterville Cemetery in Durban in September 2014.

References:

- *The World of Nat Nakasa*, edited by Essop Patel (Ravan Press) Nat Nakasa
- *Native of Nowhere* (Times Media Productions)

Ends