

Books that changed o

National Book Week starts tomorrow. The campaign is aimed at changing the fact that only are active readers. Its call to action is "read a book, share a book". The Sunday Independent the books that left an indelible imprint on them, and changed the way they viewed the wo



Marilouise Sibwele – a Cape Town doctor. Her memoir, *Thinking up a Hurricane* will be released by Penguin Books SA this month.

In Grade 1, when I opened *Fun with Dick and Jane* and the squiggles on the page transformed themselves into "See Dick run, run Dick run," my world changed forever.

The following decades continued to deliver life-altering missives like *Tom Sawyer*, *Great Expectations*, *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary*. The most recent book to join that list is Vladislav's *Portrait With Keys*. Through a series of interweaved passages I am returned to the Johnny of my childhood when the Carlton Centre, with its mustard and burgundy decor, was the height of sophistication.

Vladislav dissects the South Africa we live in now, a place where the word security means insecurity and where we affix armed response placards to our homes like amulets to ward off evil. A world where walls grow higher organically, wooden palisades sprout atop vibracrete and electric fencing kiosks above.

Through Vladislav, I am able to see beauty in decay and regeneration, and notice traces of lives running parallel to mine – the metal scavengers, hawkers and impoverished security guards.

As well as being local, pertinent and illuminating, *Portrait With Keys* shows just what an accomplished writer can do with narrative structure and form. Truly a life-changing book.



Sean B. Fal – a journalist and author. *Ice on Mars*, his last novel, was nominated for The Sunday Times Fiction award in 2011.

I'm still not certain why I picked up Dostoyevsky's *House of the Dead* from my school library. Episodically structured, it's meant to be a novel, and Dostoyevsky was at pains to point out that it was a mixture of fact and fiction, and that the characters were composites of various individuals that he'd come across in the Siberian labour camp he'd spent five years in.

At 14, having just emerged from a lengthy and sustained bout of devouring all the works of PG Wodehouse, reading *House of the Dead* was a revelatory experience. The characters seemed barely credible, a Grand Guignol of the wretched of the earth. To my inchoate mind they were rough-cut templates too: the cruel camp commandant, the Jewish clover, the brutal bandit. They inhabited a world of unspeakable brutality, reduced to a praline of daily "crab-bite for survival, carry on with us in order to live another day."

But then something magnificent happened. Through the final eyes of Aleksandr Petrovich, the intrinsic humanity is revealed to the reader: they were individuals who suffered great sorrow, hardship and grief. Above all, they were deserving of pity.

Those characters have remained indelibly imprinted on my consciousness.

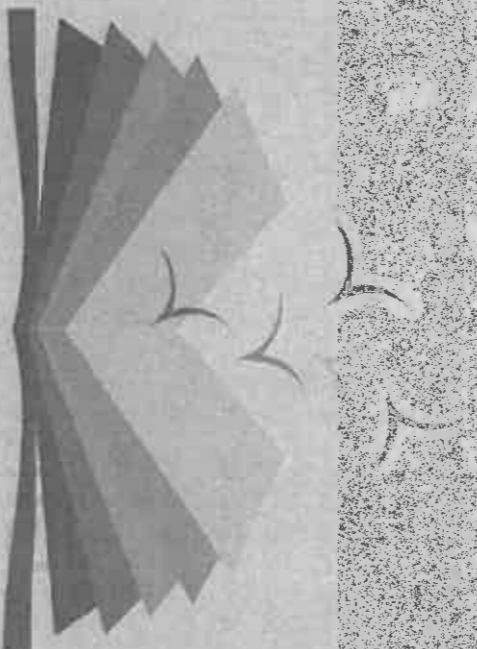


Diane Awerbuch – an award-winning novelist. Her new novel, *Home Remedies* (Harcourt Brace Strunk), will launch next month.

WHEN you get to my ripe old age, you don't read a lot of books that are life-changing. So it was an unexpectedly harrowing and enlightening experience when I finally got hold of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

Briefly, it explores what's really going to happen when the world ends with a whimper instead of the promised bang. The novel details the literal journey of an unnamed father and son through a desolate America when there is nothing left – no more sun or water or anything. With the lack of resources comes rage and regression: among other things, they have to dodge roving cannibal gangs. The two are aiming for the coast, where the father thinks the weather will be warmer. The most moving scene I think I've ever read was when he digs the last can of Coke out of an abandoned vending machine: the little boy doesn't know what it is – and they will never, ever have another one. It made me love us again, with our greed and stupidity and relentless pursuit of celebrity as real human contact eludes us.

NATIONAL BOOKWEEK



Rosamund J. Mandler – Cape Town novelist. Her latest novel is *Us and Them* (Penguin).

THE Rainbow, by DH Lawrence, exploded into my life when I was a second-year literature student and never completely left. On publication the book was regarded as pornographic and disowned by the literary establishment and the general public. I read it in two days. When I looked up, the world had changed and so had I. In the supple lyricism of Lawrence's memorable prose I found his passion, and it invoked my own. It was as if he was writing to me and for me. As the characters in the book moved from the Victorian into the modern age, I took the first tentative steps towards living my own life, towards becoming an individual with ideas of my own and a world view that validated them.

The Rainbow was a phenomenon, all the more remarkable because Lawrence's brief life was a struggle with ill-health and poverty. Yet from that harsh existence he produced work of unforgettable beauty and empathy. "One is not only a little individual living a little individual life. One is oneself the whole of mankind, and one's fate is the fate of the whole of mankind." Timeless words that resonate with me still.



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