

VERASHINE PHILLIPS, journalist, Head of Digital at Power 98.7 and former Editor of *HuffPost SA*, had to pick up the pieces after resigning from the online news site following the publication of a controversial blog

This year tested me to my limits. I learnt who my real supporters were and who'd been waiting to stick the knife in. It was a very difficult experience, but it also offered the richest learnings.

My vision for 2017 was to make a success of the space I was in professionally and take *HuffPost SA* to greater heights. These dreams were thwarted when resources were withheld and a toxic work environment developed. I tried to stay the course when perhaps I shouldn't have.

Whenever I've experienced a disaster in my professional life, it's forced me to take a step backwards and re-evaluate what I really want from life and how I've let my failures – and successes – define me.

My lowlight this year was definitely the fake blog saga at *HuffPost SA*. The attack from the white right in the USA and SA was very hard. I was particularly taken aback by the extreme anger to my initial response to the blog, where I wrote that while I didn't agree with everything in it, it was true that white men enjoy disproportionate power.

The highlight was winning the Press Ombudsman appeal, which showed that the blog – and my response – weren't hate speech. An even bigger highlight was the support and encouragement I received from various quarters and coming to work at Power 98.7 shortly after leaving Media24. The entire incident made me realise that we can't effect meaningful transformation, and create media for and by black people, without first getting the ownership of media companies right.

I was afraid that everything I'd fought for and built over a decade had been destroyed overnight. One malicious man threatened to ruin it all, which was devastating.

My coach, Helena Doiny, was my voice of reason and encouragement, as was my husband. Organisations like Media Monitoring Africa were wonderful. My previous team and colleagues at the *Mail & Guardian* reached out and showed support throughout the ordeal. The team I'd built and left behind at *HuffPost SA* was also incredibly supportive. My faith as a Christian was my rock.

In 2018, I'm looking forward to healing and getting back into the groove of creating meaningful and solid work that does a service to our democracy.

I'm going for a five-day hike along the coast in the Transkei just ahead of New Year's Eve, to celebrate my husband's birthday with friends. We'll end the hike at Coffee Bay and see in 2018 on the beach, under the stars.

MY EPIPHANY & I

BY Aurelia Mbokazi

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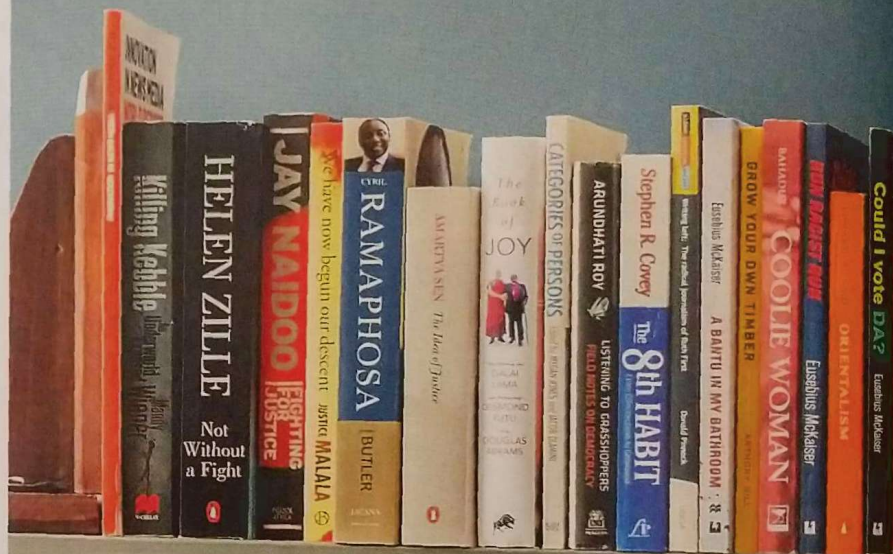
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Month of muses – The Ninevites, Verashni Pillay & Lindiwe Hani

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