

Serowe celebrates Bessie Head's birthday

**INSIDE
TODAY**

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SEROWE - Writers, poets, students from Botswana and neighbouring countries remembered the renowned writer, Bessie Head, by celebrating her 70th birthday in style.

Bessie, who was one of Africa's prominent writers, died in 1986 at the age of 49 and would have turned 70 this month, hence the action-packed festivals, which started on Saturday afternoon with a display of books on sale to literature lovers.

A concert, which featured guitarist band Thunder Echo, Meshack Ranamane and performances by some poets followed later at night. The High Court Judge Unity Dow, who is also an author of some works that include *The Heavens May Fall* and *Screaming of The Innocent*, officiated at the event on Sunday.

In her remarks, Judge Dow described Bessie Head as Botswana's most important writer without doubt, saying: "She wrote because she understood the magic of language and imagery".

There was also a tour of Head's exhibition at the Serowe museum that featured the lamp and a typewriter, which she used and a bus tour where people explored significant sites in the village.

It was at her residence at Swaneng ward where her only son, Howard Head, planted a tree in her honour. The Bessie Head Heritage Trust was also announced.

Another highlight of the commemoration was an award ceremony, dubbed "Bessie Head Literature Awards" where local writers displayed their works. The event, which was organised by Pentagon Publishers, a local publishing company, demonstrated talent and featured short stories and poems.

Mr Monty Moswela became victorious in the poetry section while Ms Bontekanye Botumile scooped the first prize in short story writing.

According to the Director of Pentagon Publishers, Mr Ray Seeletso, the awards were part of the celebration and acknowledgement of Bessie. He said there were aimed at encouraging local writers to come out, realise and appreciate their potential. "It helps those who have talent to come out and utilise their gifts," he said.

The day ended with a 70th birthday party, a wine and cheese fund-raising evening event. The last day of the commemoration, Monday, saw Swaneng Hill School drama group performing a play dubbed *Death and Life of Bessie Head*.

There were also various cultural performances and presentation of poems by Mr Goodwill Tlokwe, Shakes Kubuitsile and Mr Barolong Seboni, a writer and University of Botswana lecturer.

Head's works include *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, *A Question of Power*, *The Collector of Treasurers* and *Other Botswana Village Tales*.

She came to Serowe, in 1964 where she taught at Tshekedi Primary School after giving up her South African citizenship subsequent to poverty, racial segregation and gender discrimination, which she suffered in that country.

After losing her job as a teacher, Bessie was declared a refugee and turned to market gardening and writing. She was given Botswana citizenship in 1979.

In the 1960's she moved into the world of journalism where she met well-known African journalists and learned writing skills.

As a famous writer, she was invited to many writers' workshops and seminars. Her life was marked by frequent overseas travels after 1976, where she represented Botswana. She attended international writers' conferences in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, England and Nigeria.

Some of the sponsors of the event included Kgaswe School, Debswana, Teemane Manufacturing Company, Desert Sands Hotel and the National Museum and Art Gallery.

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