

Obituary: Paula Blacking - 30 October 1932 to 30 March 2015

Paula Blacking was born in Eshowe, Zululand, on 30 October 1932. She was christened Brenda Eleanora Gebers. She died on 30 March 2015 in Johannesburg at 82, after a brave battle with cancer. Her parents were successful pioneering farmers. She was the last born of four children. Apart from her thorough education, Paula spent a large part of her youth riding in the hills of what is now Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. She studied a BA in Anthropology at the University of Cape Town and was then sent to Imperial College, London, to learn secretarial skills. It was here that she attended as many concerts as she could in between her studies. It was here too that she visited her brother Rainier, christened Victor, at Coombe Springs. Rainier had been offered a superb job with Metropolitan Vickers before becoming the gardener at Coombe.

On her return to South Africa, Paula married John Blacking in 1955. John was an Anthropologist and Ethnomusicologist and had arrived in South Africa from Cambridge to do fieldwork with the Venda people in Limpopo province. John and Paula had five children, three of whom survive today and live in South Africa. Paula joined Subud some years before the death of her third daughter, Fiona, to Leukaemia. It was Fiona's death that led Rainier to encourage Paula to visit Indonesia. She did this in 1964 and lived in Cjilandak for three months.

Here Paula learnt about Eastern cuisine. She cooked several meals for Bapak and developed a warm relationship with Bapak's family, who were very supportive to her in many ways. On returning to South Africa, she started the *Paula Blacking Cooking School* at the bequest of her friends, who wanted to learn the dishes she had learnt in Indonesia. She started her catering business at the same time and was well known in Johannesburg for her Rijsttafels. The Cooking school and the catering business were Subud enterprises and were highly successful for 38 years.

In 1969 John was deported from South Africa and banned for his stand against Apartheid. Alone, in an often terrifying political landscape, Paula brought up her three children, Jessica Minerva, Laura and Valentine. She was offered a teaching post at a convent and started teaching part time in the afternoons and evenings. She started studying towards a second degree in languages and a teaching diploma. At this time she was asked to write the cooking column for the Sunday Times. Her journalism became a second career. She later wrote for The Star newspaper and was food editor and writer for several magazines thereafter. With her hard earned income she managed to send her children to some of the best schools and universities in South Africa.

In 1973, Paula built a larger house with extra facilities for cooking classes and catering. The house has been a great success and remained a refuge for many, especially her three children and pets. It was a "Subud house" in that it was known for its hospitality, love and culture. Culture remained an important part of the Blacking household and some of Paula's work on the food of the Venda is still to be published. Paula published two cookery books, *A Lifetime of Cooking* and *Recipes to Remember*. It was very important for her to be quiet before she

cooked and during her cooking. This was made possible through her sincere Latihan which she did diligently as a Group Helper and National Helper. Paula attended one Subud conference in Christchurch, New Zealand. She was considered by Ibu Siti Rahaju to be one of the pioneers of Subud. She is sincerely missed by her children, grandchild and Subud brothers and sisters.