

highlife

SOUTH AFRICA

CHANGE YOUR VIEW

MAY 2017

HOME? IT'S COMPLICATED...

...WHAT (AND WHERE) MADE ME ME

By five South African authors



Felis Caracal Buff.

PORT ELIZABETH

VE TO

Felis Caracal Buff.

MEOW?

URBAN



TAKE AWAY

SCREAM
Durban

CROWDS
(AND THIS 60Y)



SUNRISE AT NIGHT

NICK MULGREW
DURBAN

TWO A.M. TINNITUS. The dead days of late summer, the amber-drenched streets of Overport.

Five sweat-drenched manchildren pour out of a car and onto the landing of Johnny's Roti, formally known as the Sunrise Chip 'n Ranch. Each hands over R20 through a grated window and receives a warm, paper-wrapped package of carbohydrates, thick as a boxer's bicep. Inside, slap chips and processed cheese, their choice of ketchup, veg gravy, meat gravy, all wrapped in a manhole-diametered roti.

In the sweat-resistant heat, they sit on the sidewalk and quench beer-pricked appetites, taking turns to stand up and lose two bucks to the claw machine. Other cars soon roll up, too. The crowd trade jibes about



the hard-core punk bands they'd spent the evening watching; bands no one knows now – the Rising End, Go! Go! Bronco, City of Gates. Performances of men jumping off stages, hanging from rafters; songs with bad lyrics about community and being true to yourself; the world's most aggressive sing-alongs.

In retrospect, these were less the Wonder Years than the Blunder Years.

I wore women's jeans, waistcoats with T-shirts and once did the Macarena in a circle mosh.

I played in a band with a singer who couldn't sing, and a bassist who initially couldn't play bass. (I won't tell you this band's name because its Myspace page still technically exists.)

Still, this scene, on this kind-of-not-great street in my hometown epitomises teenagerdom to me: perched on that vertiginous precipice, adulthood sprawling before you, one hand on the

Here, look through the glass, scratched and greased from years of old breath. Here is the morning light. Here is the mouth of the oHlanga, where the reed beds stretch for miles. See how easily the world unfolds here, through the hill's cleft, along the eternal coil of the M4. Pass the old La Mercy Hotel and its pastel trim. See the mangroves on the river's edge. Find the cerise of the houses in the old forest."

GALA DAY

railing, the wind at your back. Early-2000s middle-class counterculture in Durban consisted mostly of loud music, excruciatingly bad fashion and chip-and-cheese rotis. While I only really enjoy one of these things now – the latter, obviously – all three still feature high on my list of What Makes Durban Durban, and What Made Me Me.

A childhood of playing bad, niche music is great preparation for an adulthood of writing bad, niche prose. And especially in Durban, South Africa's third city, not cool enough

for the limelight, not small enough to be easily romanticised. There are a hundred failed artists, musicians, writers and comics in eThekweni who believe that art from Durban is more honest than art backed by the cultural capital of the Cape or Gauteng.

It's the world's oldest and least poetic truism. Durban is true to itself. That's why it's a good place. ■