Before publishing a collection of her late husband Joe Slovo's writings, struggle veteran, leadership coach and academic Helena Dolny turned to a book on death. She recorded 57 people's testimonies on ritual, dignity, bereavement and living a rich life. In this edited extract, eNCA news boss Mapi Mhlangu shares her mother's story.

**Before Forever After: When Conversations About Living Meet Questions About Dying**
by Helena Dolny

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**BOOK REVIEW**

How Somgaga overcame

**Dominoes: Unbreakable Spirit – The Somizi Mhlongo Story** by Somizi Mhlongo and Lesley Mofokeng
Brand Arc Media 176 pages R200

It took me just two hours to finish photographing. TV star, radio DJ and gay icon Somizi Mhlongo’s memoir. It’s a story of how one man has overcome life’s challenges.

To be honest, I wasn’t sure what to expect, not used to a celebrity trend these days. The cover of Dominoes: Unbreakable Spirit is inspired by musician and actor Brian Terms – first single, perfectly reflecting the story of keeping hope and faith alive in the face of life’s trials.

In his memoir, Somizi offers frank revelations about his lowest moments, his first gay sexual experiences, his health, an alleged sexual assault case and other stories. The foreword is written by Bheki Cele. Somizi, who co-wrote the book with Sowetan entertainment editor Lesley Mofokeng, says it’s a story of how he reconnected with his mother, Fiona.

The relatives proposed that the funeral should take place in the KwaMashu community. “We wanted to do things our way, with our own traditions and not assume our mourning tradition of sitting on the streets to wait for the bus home every other weekend. My mother dictated her wishes and I wrote them down. We wanted to be seen by my sisters. We wanted to be seen by people who will come to pay their respects.”

Mapi told me the story of her mother’s illness, who taught many people in the community. She had varicose veins from a young age and spent most of her life walking barefoot. The author, Helena Dolny

**After:**

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Dolny Mhlangu, Mapi, grew up in the township of Vulethi. Her mother was a life-long teacher who taught many people in the community. She was born in 1935 and when she was 22, she married a man who died in a car accident. Initially, her stories were completely accomplish, but the first talk took place just between me and the relatives. I asked what policies she had and we looked at the list of the funeral parlour. I went to the funeral home and I spoke to the family. She was in such pain as I said my goodbyes.

When I phoned on the Wednesday morning, they told me she had just passed. That's when I realized that there is a point where Mhlongo loses everything and doesn't have a plan. My mother dictated her wishes and I wrote them down. "I have taken my exercise book and told them. "I have to go to the hospital on the Thursday because it's Mother's Day. That day she's going to go to the hospital. I want her to go to the hospital because it's Mother's Day."

I asked a nurse if she wanted to go to the hospital and she said yes. We took her there and she was treated there. She was in such pain as I said my goodbyes.

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