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### Born A Crime: The Power of a Mother's Love

The book *Born A Crime*, is about the life story of Trevor Noah, whose birth was literally a crime in Apartheid South Africa. The Immorality Act of 1927 forbade intercourse between Native Africans and Europeans. If anyone was caught doing this, it would mean imprisonment of four to five years. Apartheid was the definition of segregation, and the means to keep groups separate, only harbored hate and discrimination. This was a dangerous time to be born, but Trevor Noah's mother was a strong woman who despite her own struggles and trauma, protected her son at all costs. Her love was more powerful than any unlawful system, because love is above the law. She did not have much economically, but she used what she had at her arsenal to combat life and gain freedom.

Patricia Noah went through many hardships; segregation, sexism, racism, being economically disadvantaged, traumas from many events of her life, trying to gain independence in a place that was very difficult for anyone, let alone a Native African Woman. The love she had from her son made her strong but I believe it is also her faith that kept her intact. She was an extremely devoted Christian, despite this religion being forced onto her, and her country, She found herself having a deep attachment to this religion. She was so faithful in her beliefs, she went to three churches! "The reason we went to three churches was because my mom said each

church gave her something different. The first church offered jubilant praise of the lord. The second church offered deep analysis of the scripture, which my mom loved. The third church offered passion and catharsis; it was a place where you truly felt the presence of the Holy Spirit inside you.” (6)

An example of Patricia Noah’s economical situation is mentioned in the book. This mention could be seen as minor to many people, but to Trevor Noah, it is very significant, so much so, it still affects him to this day. “My mom had this ancient, broken-down, bright-tangerine Volkswagen Beetle that she picked up for next to nothing. The reason she got it for next to nothing was because it was always breaking down. To this day I hate secondhand cars. Almost everything that’s ever gone wrong in my life I can trace back to a secondhand car.” (9) There is a distinction that because of that car that kept breaking down, this led to his mother meeting the man that became his stepfather, where they both faced abuse.

Patricia Noah used language to get out of potentially dangerous situations, make connections and deal with everyday life in South Africa. Her son, Trevor, noticed this and learned to do the same, and just as she did, he used it to his advantage to survive. “Outside of that, my mother picked up different languages here and there. She learned Zulu because it’s similar to Xhosa. She spoke German because of my father. She spoke Afrikaans because it is useful to know the language of your oppressor. Sotho she learned in the streets. Living with my mom, I saw how she used language to cross boundaries, handle situations, navigate the world.” (54)

Trevor Noah’s mother Patricia used her wits and her will to be more and strive for a better life. She came from a family where there was generations of poverty. She worked hard and

worked her way up to making decent wages. But she was pressured from her family to use all her wages to help out her family, she called it a “black tax”. She wanted freedom to be her own woman, no matter what that meant. “She ran all the way down to the train station and jumped on a train and disappeared into the city, determined to sleep in public restrooms and rely on the kindness of prostitutes until she could make her own way in the world. My mother never sat me down and told me the whole story of her life in Transkei. She’d give me little bursts, random details, stories of having to keep her wits about her to avoid getting raped by strange men in the village.” (66)

Patricia Noah was a real, honest and smart woman naturally, who despite the many struggles she faced, she did not let that affect the way she raised her son. “My mom’s attitude was “I chose you, kid. I brought you into this world, and I’m going to give you everything I never had.” She poured herself into me. She would find places for us to go where we didn’t have to spend money.” (71)

One thing that Patricia Noah had, that was quite significant which helped her throughout her life, was persistence and ability to never give up, and to see the bright side of things and laugh. Trevor also was able to learn this from his mother and used this to find his own path and make a life for himself. “She never let me see us as victims. We *were* victims, me and my mom, Andrew and Issac. Victims of apartheid. Victims of abuse. But I was never allowed to think that way, and I didn’t see her life that way.” (272) After his stepdad shot and almost killed his mother, she recovered and chose to seek enlightenment by looking on the bright side. “She broke out in a huge smile and started laughing. Through my tears, I started laughing, too. I was bawling my eyes out and laughing hysterically at the same time. We sat there and she squeezed my hand and

we cracked each other up the way we always did, mother and son, laughing together through the pain in an intensive-care recovery room on a bright and sunny and beautiful day.” (282)

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Patricia Noah was not only successful in accomplishing independence for herself despite her struggles and extreme disadvantages in life, she was able to raise a son, who went on to become a comedian, writer, producer, actor and a T.V host. All the lessons she had taught him while simultaneously using those abilities to survive, granted her freedom and the freedom of the rest of her family. She set out to make sure her children would not receive the same fate she had been exposed to as a child, and she succeeded.

## Works Cited

Noah, Trevor. *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*. Cornelsen, 2020.