

The battle for air in Durban south

BREATHING SPACES: ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITS OF DURBAN'S INDUSTRIAL SOUTH
MARIJKE DU TOIT AND JENNY GORDON
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BOOK REVIEWER: ESTELLE SINKINS

PHOTOGRAPHS have the unique ability to capture a moment in time, something which is beautifully illustrated in *Breathing Spaces: Environmental Portraits of Durban's Industrial South*.

As Bobby Peek, the director of Groundwork, says in his foreword: "Memories are what make us a society ...

"Sadly, those whose histories are recorded seldom write their own. *Breathing Spaces* changes this through visual history ... [it] takes us into the homes and lives of people — into their joy and their resistance."

Every image featured in the book was taken in first decade of the 21st century. The pictures share the battle of the communities of Wentworth, Merebank and Lamontville — which are in the shadow of two of South Africa's four refineries — to have clean air.

And they come as a timely reminder that the 300 000 people who call greater south Durban home are engaged in a new battle — this time with ANC government — which wants to demolish

their homes to make space for a dig-out port.

As George Ruiters, of Wentworth, says in his interview with writer, Marijke du Toit: "I don't believe that people should think small and have this idea that because the Engens and the Saprefs

and the Mondis are so powerful they can do nothing about it.

"It is useless sitting back because then you give that idea to your children too.

"You should open their mind to the possibilities that the bigger you are, the harder you fall.



"When communities are fed up, and when they stand together, they can make a difference. Change comes about through people wanting to see change."

The panoramic landscapes and environmental portraits used in *Breathing Spaces* were shot by social documentary photographer, Jenny Gordon, and form part of the *Breathing Spaces* project, which ran from 2002 to 2007 and included an exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery.

These images are interspersed with photos from family album; extracts from Du Toit's conversations with the people portrayed, their friends, family and neighbours; and a selection of photographs taken by local residents who participated in workshops and exhibitions in the area.

Using both colour and black and white, the book delivers a fascinating and poignant history of greater south Durban and the community's ongoing struggle for social and environmental injustice.