

Tribute to an amateur: Jobe Mafuleka
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Part 1.

Jobe Mafuleka was born in 1925 in Manguzi, Ngwavuma District in northeastern KwaZulu-Natal (Maputaland). In 1943 he obtained employment as a farm hand in a sugar cane farm, where he worked until 1946. In 1947 he started working as a domestic worker in Eshowe, where he learned to cook and bake. Jobe worked for this family until they left South Africa in 1949. He then went back home where he remained for two years. In 1952 he decided to go out and seek employment once more, but this time he went further south.

He ended up at Mtunzini where Ian and Jean Garland employed him as a domestic worker, specializing in cooking and baking. Jobe learned the names of the trees through his father who was a warrior and liked trapping animals. When the turn of his fathers regiment came to go and serve the chief, he would tell the young Jobe to check the trap he had tied on a tree and would call the tree by its Zulu name – this forced Jobe to learn the names.

Ian Garland also instilled a love of trees in Jobe while working for the family. Ian would go out during the day and come back with a branch or a twig of a tree and show it to Jobe and ask for a Zulu name. When Jobe knew the name he would tell him, but when he did not know he would say so. Even though Jobe is illiterate, he knows the different families of plants through his observations and only needs leaves to be able to identify trees.

If he has one plant in his hand he can relate it to another plant in the same genus or family by looking at the veins of the leaf. This helps him to remember the name of that particular plant he has.

The tree that Jobe likes the most is *Balanites maughamii*, Green Thorn or uGobendlove in Zulu. He likes this tree so much because when he mixes different parts of different trees to make his ritual emetic (*uBulawu*), the mixture wouldn't be perfect and to his liking until he adds the roots of this tree. The wood of *B.maughamii* is also used in craftwork, and one can make a handle of a rifle or a panga out of it.

His second favorite tree is *Strychnos madagascariensis*, Black Monkey Orange or umKwakwa in Zulu. The skin of the seeds (the integument) of this tree makes a dish that is highly valued in Maputaland. This dish can be stored in glass jars for up to two years.

He insists that he is not an inyanga even though people do come to him with some ailments and he is able to help them. Of all the trees that he knows, he has an idea of uses for about half of them. Jobe is not only interested in trees but also collects old bones, unusual stones and fossils and brings most of his finds to the Garlands.

He knows a number of herbaceous plants as well as the Zulu names of approximately 450 plants. Over the years he has brought about 2000 plants (about 150 tree species) from Maputaland to Twinstreams, the farm of the Garlands, where they have been planted.

Family: Jobe married Gulaphi Zungu in June 1959. They were blessed with six children, four girls and two boys. Unfortunately one son died in 1964 at the age of four.

The four daughters are married but not the son. Some members also like trees, with their eldest daughter showing a special interest. His second eldest daughter works for the Garlands.



Jobe with some of his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Botanical experiences: When Jobe started working for the Garlands as a cook, he was given a special garden to run. Since the Garlands were in sugar cane farming, Jobe eventually transferred to the farming side where he became an Induna. During his stay with the Garlands, Ian would take Jobe to the forest, where they would teach each other the names of trees and collect seedlings and seeds.



Jean and Jobe at the Garlands home in “New Forest” Hillcrest.

They would go to places like Ngoye Forest, Ngwavuma, Mzimkhulu and Lake Sibayi. Apart from farming, Ian also conducted environmental classes for various groups and Jobe’s knowledge of trees was utilized. On of their many excursions to Ngoye Forest, Jobe and Ian got lost while they were looking for *Encephalartos woodii*. Jean and the brother of Ian who found them preparing to spend the night in the bush rescued them.

Retirement: Jobe retired in 1988 while still employed by the Garlands. He still spends much of his time in the forest looking for unusual plants and collecting old bones, unusual stones and whatever looks interesting to him. He is also a subsistence farmer, farming mainly maize, a few other crops and looking after his livestock.



Jobe at his home in Manguzi.

Ian Garland
New Forest – Hillcrest.
Part 2.

Jobe Mafuleka first came to work for us in the early fifties as a farm laborer. Like most of the other laborers he hailed from *eNyakoto*, the north, from Maputaland (Tongaland). As good fortune would have it, he found his way into the kitchen. This was real good fortune because it was the beginning of a life-long friendship based on a common interest in the great wealth of nature that abounds in Zululand.

We soon became aware of Jobe's vast interest in all living things because he showed an intense interest in the great number of "wild pets" that found their way into our house. All manner of things were brought to us including a young bush pig that had been snared, snakes, weasels, gents, owls, a young bush buck, bush baby, a Woolly-necked Stork, a Palm-nut Vulture that had fallen out of its nest, and many other things that needed care. Jobe was always there to help and give advice.

During the fifties, when I was involved with running mini-Wildlife trips for the Natal Wildlife Society to such exciting places as Ingwavuma and the Pongola flood plains, and Oribi Gorge, Jobe was the natural choice for camp cook. Not only did he cook for us but he was there as a source of information. Jobe was quite invaluable in this dual role.

Jobe's real value, however, came to light as a botanist in the sixties when we were collecting botanical information for Eve Palmer's magnificent three volumes on the "The Trees of Southern Africa". It was wonderful to have somebody with us who knew the trees of Maputaland like the back of his hand! What a wonderful botanist Jobe was and still is; not only does he know the different species, but he recognizes the family characteristics. With his knowledge and skill he is a wonderful teacher – and there is nothing more exciting than going in the company of Jobe, up to the flood plains of Maputaland, to Lake Sibaya and Kosi Bay – not only looking at trees but also looking at the whole spectrum of *Imvelo* – Nature.

What of the man? Jobe is a strict disciplinarian, a non-drinker with a frugal diet. His discipline extended harshly to moral judgment. He hated dishonesty and abhorred anything that was "wrong" almost to the state of intolerance. So it is not surprising that in his retirement he spends most of his time as a consultant – people from miles around seek after his opinion.

Jobe is unable to read or write, but he is a well-educated man with a prodigious memory. He is a wonderful companion and teacher and has been responsible for most of my knowledge about the trees of Maputaland and their uses. His knowledge of medicinal uses of plants is vast and there is still so much to be learnt from him. Jobe is indeed a rare person – extremely knowledgeable about the environment. He is also well versed in tribal matters, where his understanding of people's behaviors and psychology serves him well. I value Jobe Mafuleka immensely as a man with a rich sense of humor, who has been my friend, teacher and adviser for over forty years.



A great-great grandchild