

and often need to solve problems, but as a writer, I can be completely by myself for a few hours and lose myself in what I'm doing; it's a refuge for me.

Of course, I had no idea of the sheer slog that goes into writing a book, but it was a satisfying process. The response to my book has been amazing and I'm lucky that because of my anaesthesiology work, I'm not forced into writing another book due to financial pressures. I'm toying with the idea of writing a second novel; perhaps about what it's like being a doctor in rural villages in Africa and desolate areas like the Arctic. For now though, I've picked up quite a lot of work from the *Mail and Guardian*, which I'm really enjoying. I feel very privileged to be able to juggle my passions.'

Martinique's book *Thinking up a Hurricane* (Penguin) is available in all leading book stores now.

'I USE NATURE AS A WAY TO GET MY FAMILY TO CONNECT'

Petra Vandecasteele, 47, lives in Greyton with her children, Enya, 11, and James, 9.

'All of my memories from childhood involved being outdoors. I grew up in the Belgian countryside in Flanders, running around the fields among the cows, building tree houses and even cycling through the forest to get to school. Being outside was so normal for me, and my love of nature has never left me.

A turning point in my life came seven years ago when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It actually turned out to be a blessing in disguise. At the time, I was running a successful design agency, but cancer made me understand what my true priorities were, and made me want to spend time on things that were important to me – my children, nature, travel, writing, and inspiring people to live better lives.

Starting Kids of Nature four years ago was how I decided to honour my priorities. As the main focus of my job

is travelling and writing about mindful living, my children come with me on all my trips. We stay all over the country, constantly looking for new adventures and activities in nature. Our directory now has over 700 places! My kids have absolutely thrived thanks to spending so much time outdoors, which is why I wanted to share it with other families and inspire them to fall in love with nature too.

Enya and James are balanced with an inner calm because they're interested in the world around them. I think I can count on one hand the number of toys my kids have, yet they're never bored. They don't need them – they're always climbing trees, swimming in rivers or discovering a new creature. Their clothes are constantly dirty and they're always hungry – good signs for growing kids!

I think people sometimes forget that we're also part of nature. Everyone is so busy that they don't think about the fact that we're part of a bigger system, and that on-the-go mentality has an impact on our kids. Children these days are completely techno-savvy, but being attached to a TV, computer or phone all day is not good for them.

Obesity is one thing, but kids also get bored. I've found that spending time with my kids in nature gets rid of any excess energy, brings about a calming effect – and puts things into perspective. Nature is a wonderful teacher. Of course it teaches them about things like science and the cycle of life and death, but it also teaches respect and confidence, and seeking new adventures.

One of my favourite memories I have of my kids is when we went to the dunes in Sossusvlei. James and Enya must have rolled down those dunes 30 times through this sea of sand! They loved the freedom that came with it. They keep asking when we can go back – and that was just sand!

I've found that leading by example is the best way to get my kids to do something – and spending time in nature doesn't take a lot of time or money. Do cloud spotting in your garden, or plant a small veggie patch. Instead of eating in front of the TV, we often just take a sandwich outside. Even if I only spend an hour or two with my kids in the evening after work, I want it to be the best hour possible.'

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