

## Mary Ann Ebenezer (1917–2005)

A pioneering educationist and the first Indian woman in Pietermaritzburg to get a university degree, Mary Ann Ebenezer died in her home at the end of April.

According to her niece, Miranda Ebenezer-Chye, Ebenezer (88) never complained about her health. She would say she had the usual aches and pains that came with old age. On the day she died she got up, potted around the house, then went to lie down. She died in her sleep.

Ebenezer came from a family of educators. Her uncle, Jonas Ebenezer, was the first Indian teacher at Woodlands High School and her father, Job Ebenezer, was the first name on the school's admission book.

The second of ten children, Ebenezer attended the Methodist Mission School. She started teaching at the age of 15 and went on to study part-time to gain her teaching qualifications. She was also only 15 when she contracted to buy the family home at 563 Pietermaritz Street, where she continued to live until her death. Her sister, Dorothy Pechey, said that the late Leslie Smith, the lawyer who was selling the house on behalf of a client, was so impressed by her determination and the deposit that she had saved up for that he [Smith] agreed to sell the house to her.

Ebenezer was granted permission to study part-time for a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Natal. Ebenezer-Chye recalls her aunt telling them that at university she was considered a rarity as many of her fellow white students had never seen an Indian up close.

When she had to teach at schools that were staffed by white teachers, the university had to write to the schools to obtain permission for her to eat her lunch in the staffroom and to use the toilet facilities.

Later, Ebenezer, together with two other graduate teachers, Kamala Singh and Mina Naidoo, were the first Indian teachers to join the all-white staff of the Pietermaritzburg Indian Girls' High School. She remained at Girls' High until her retirement in 1972.

Ebenezer was a keen traveller who visited exotic destinations during her teaching years, including the Amazon, the Far East and other African countries. On retirement she embarked on a six-month world tour before settling down and devoting her spare time to church work. Her family were founder members of the Methodist Indian Mission in Pietermaritzburg and long-standing members of the Methodist Church in Thomas Street, which later moved to Mountain Rise.

Ebenezer was a member of several organisations including the Professional and University Women's Association. She is survived by three sisters, Dorothy, Thelma and Mercy, and her nieces and nephews.



Mary Ann Ebenezer

The Witness

NALINI NAIDOO