

An honest woman tracking down the truth

Nothing is sacred to South African author Dalene Mathee except the search for truth.

It is the quest for the unattainable that has led this honest, robust boerevrou on an iconoclastic path to what may be international success as a writer.

Her latest novel "Circles in the Forest", a mystical tale set in the Knysna forest, originally written in Afrikaans, was recently launched in Britain.

Now the book will appear in countries ranging from the United States to Germany, France, Israel and Iceland.

Set in the 19th century, "Circles" describes events in Southern Africa from the perspective of the original Afrikaans settlers, and tells the story of a family of woodcutters whose lives and destinies are bound up with a herd of wild elephants.

Mrs Mathee did the English translation herself to ensure the Afrikaans nuances came through.

This is her fifth book in between marriage to a long-suffering husband and rearing their three, fiercely independent daughters.

Dalene Mathee, author of the best-selling book "Circles in the Forest", is an earthy individual who believes a woman's place is in the home, rearing intelligent children. She spoke to MARIKA SBOROS.

In an interview on her return from London this week she had no qualms about saying she sent her daughters to university only so they could find a good husband.

Her eldest is still there, seven years later, doing a masters degree in languages, still searching for Mr Right. The other two haven't found him yet either.

She emphatically declares that a woman's place is in the home. The world's troubles are caused by women fighting against their natural inclinations, she says.

"I want to write a book about the stupidity of women. They have so much power, they are so naturally wise. They must use their instinctive knowledge to rear intelligent sons and daughters.

"They must push their husbands all the way to the top. They must be the power behind the throne without ever sitting on it," she says.

While her conversation is littered with such self-

deprecating phrases as "I'm not my husband's equal," in the same breath she tells how she has used her considerable writing talents over the years to bolster the family income.

It is nonsense that women have to vegetate if they are stuck at home with babies, she says.

"I used my time to learn as much as I could. I read Shakespeare while I breastfed them. You can learn a lot in those 10 minutes on each breast," she says.

Mrs Mathee was born to write. Her first memories are of a soul dominated by a desire to be a purveyor of the truth as she saw it through the medium of the written word.

School was a jail for her, and she avoided university after she matriculated.

She is self-educated in philosophy and the classics, and metaphysics is her main interest.

She is grateful for the



Dalene Mathee ... having a husband and three children has not held her back from her chosen career of writing.

many mentors who have come her way.

"I have met many wonderful men and women who have taught me so much. I believe in the old saying that when the pupil is ready, the teacher will be there. So it has been with me," she says.

She turned away from the Dutch Reformed Church in which she was raised as a child in Riversdale, Cape, because she found the dogma obstructed her search for truth.

When her children were small, she tried out her bedtime stories on them.

"If they fiddled with the sheets, I knew the

stories were no good. If they cried with me, I knew the story would be good," she says.

As her children grew, so did her ambitions. She was rejected many times by the SABC when she applied to do script work. Magnanimously she now forgives them for their lack of foresight.

"If they hadn't rejected me, I would not have gone to stay in the Knysna Forest and become obsessed with its secrets. I would not have written 'Circles,'" she says.

● The English translation of "Circles in the Forest" will be launched today. It is published by Viking Penguin at R18,95.