# Helping hunter-gatherers to become ‘paper people’: literacy challenges among the San in Namibia

“…we are like ostriches still closed up inside their eggs so they cannot see…. government people can write down their own speeches at … meetings, but they don’t write down my speech. Even now I have papers from these meetings but I haven’t found anyone to read them …” Xumi N!a’an in Katz et al. 1997:7 [[1]](#footnote-1)

This respected San healer tasked Katz and colleagues with becoming ‘paper people’ for her community. Now, together with other San supporters, I’m trying to help the Ju|’hoansi of north-eastern Namibia become their own paper people. It’s challenging in ways I never anticipated.

In this talk I’ll describe my literacy efforts among San groups, both successful and unsuccessful, I’ll point out some pitfalls of digital transformations of indigenous knowledge, and I’ll seek your advice on my latest project, viz. a stakeholder-led educational radio drama intended to promote literacy – i.e. how best to create a situated learning environment for non-reading/writing adults?

Biog.

Candi Miller teaches Creative and Professional Writing at the University of Wolverhampton. 27 years ago she was a journalist looking for an indelible way to tell a story of persecuted people. The story of her San protagonist turned Candi into a series novelist, an accidental anthropologist and now, a rookie literacy facilitator. Her dream is to mentor a San writer.

Candi is the author of *Kalahari Passage*, (Tindal Street Press, May, 2012) and reprinted, *Salt and Honey* (Tindal Street Press, Aug. 2011).   <http://www.tindalstreet.co.uk/books/kalahari-passage-paperback>. Also ficto-criticism: “Walking on Ostrich Eggshells” (Informing Science. 2015);  “When Sally Met Harry” (Reframe. University of Sussex, 2015)

She’s currently blogging about her new research project here: <http://www.candimiller.co.uk/research-project>

1. *Healing Makes our Hearts Happy: Spirituality and Cultural Transformation among the Kalahari Ju|’hoansi.* Katz, Biesele & St Denis, 1997. Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)