



Buy some flowers today

When I wrote what I thought would be my final column for the FM a month ago, I referred to my upcoming birthday, which happened to coincide with the anniversary of the 1987 stock market crash. What I did not mention, however, is that I also used to share a birthday with my late mother.

Like any parent, my mum taught me many lessons I'll never forget.

One of the most valuable was that I should never buy flowers to put on her grave, as that would just be a waste of money. I would remind myself of this when I used to visit, picking up a bunch of something on my way to her retirement village; even if it was from a petrol station forecourt, it would make her smile.

I was reminded of this in the wake (no pun intended) of the reaction to my column last month. As a reminder, the piece was essentially a love letter to a magazine which everyone thought was on its way out. Put differently, I was presenting some long-overdue flowers to the publication on its deathbed.

As a consequence, I got more direct comments from readers than ever before, all of them adding a bouquet in honour of the dying publication (not to mention that they'd been waiting for my impending death as a columnist before reaching out).

A client who owns and runs a substantial business spread over multiple locations in South Africa wrote the following: "My father introduced me to the FM when I was a student. Every Friday he would arrive home, walk down the passage and fling the magazine onto my desk. I can remember saying to him: 'I don't understand half this stuff.' To which he replied: 'Well, if you don't read it, you'll never understand.' Ever since starting to earn a salary and right up until today, I have subscribed to and learnt from the FM – I can't let go of the habit. Like you, I can



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remember where I was when the 1987 crash happened, as well as my reaction to it, learning how to take knocks. All wrapped up and written up in the FM."

A friend who cut his teeth in corporate finance sent this via WhatsApp: "In the days of double cuffs and wearing a tie somewhere in the upper echelons of the bank, when the FM still arrived in a plastic wrapper with my name on the top right, I did feel like a *meneer*."

One of my friends from the world of asset management, who also started his investment career at Old Mutual many years ago, reflected: "I wonder how many editions were dropped off in Pinelands in those days? I looked forward to reading my copy each Friday. There's no truth to the rumour that I started from the 'funnies' on the back page, though I distinctly recall the hilarious joke about the Irish kid attempting to put 'contagious' into a sentence in vocabulary class. I'll buy the final edition this week and store it next to my paper certificate of one De Beers share."

I have yet to ask about the joke ... perhaps next time when we meet for a beer.

Finally, for the first time in 40 years,

I reconnected with someone I went to university with. We've had zero contact since living in the same residence in the early 1980s, and since then his career has taken him from Joburg to George via East London, Durban, Pretoria, Cape Town, Vryheid and Riversdale.

And here we are today, connected via LinkedIn, all thanks to the column he's been reading on the quiet over the years, until he finally revealed himself in the form of a comment on last month's piece.

Long live the column and columnist!

Then, miracle of miracles, a benefactor stepped in at the last minute, and the FM is back from the brink. As a result, I'm also back to write another day. To loosely quote Mark Twain: rumours of my demise as a columnist have been greatly exaggerated. Following this near-death experience, I'm grateful and excited to be offered a second innings.

One more point: if you're lucky enough to have a mother who is still alive, send her a bunch of flowers today while she can still appreciate it and smell it! ✕

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