Noni Jabavu, daughter of DDT Jabavu and granddaughter of JT Jabavu, is journeying with her Makiwane and Bokwe uncles, Rosebery and Cecil to Lovedale in the mid-1950s. Bear in mind that the Makiwane clan was connected to the Jabavus, Bokwes and Matthewses via marriage. Carried along on their narrative of the past, she recorded her impressions of the school which they, Modiri Molema and so many others had attended. What makes this excerpt autoethnographic rather than specifically autobiographical is its concern with community history and custom, rather than with the evolution of Noni Jabavu’s “selfhood”.

“We drove on. So I settled down. They [the uncles] picked up the thread of their talk. I sat back to look at the passing scene again. We crossed yet another bend of the winding Tyumie and arrived on the outer edge of the campus of Lovedale, the missionary institution: fir trees, oaks, elderly mission houses with near, thatched roofs as well as dozens of modern new ones built since my day. The great school had continued to grow. As the sun’s rays beat down on it the place looked established, solid. As indeed it should, for it was a hundred and fifteen years old; a venerable age in a young country When my uncles and aunts, and even older Lovedalians, talk about it, they generate an atmosphere that reminds me of a similar one in England among people linked by an old school tie.

My uncles began to reminisce about principals and masters of other days - Stewart, Henderson, Hunter, the memorable boarding mast Geddes. They spoke with affection about these good Scots names for it was a Scots mission. Uncle Rosebery’s father John Knox Bokwe had, as a young man, been secretary for seventeen years to one of these splendid principals. I too could share in the ‘old school tie atmosphere’ that now prevailed, having been a day girl before going to England and walked from home at Fort Hare, along the path that had led over the suspension bridge that we called ‘uvetyevetye’ as children, a game that was strictly forbidden. Now we drove up the hill. Over its crest, the great expanse of Victoria Hospital came into view. Nowadays it seems to spread like a town, the flowering of the early work of another Scotsman, Dr. Neil Macvicar, long since dead; but ‘continuing’, as people said, because his son lived in the locality practising as a doctor at Alice. The district was conscious of its links down the generations. The road became execrable. We raised the usual cloud of dust. Presently we had to crawl, picking our way through potholes, ruts, gashes of incipient dongas, and were almost in the ‘locations’ — hideous name by which African villages in South Africa are officially called; though some, to be sure, are called “townships”.

People walking towards us gave greetings; all knew the doctor. Nowadays a wire fence surrounds the village for it is now an ‘enclosed location’ as they will all be eventually, under apartheid, Dr. Verwoerd’s policy of ‘good neighbourliness’; the better to police and control.”