

Where we come from



A collection of worker stories by
Vusi Bhengu, Goodman Kivan, Nester Luthuli,
Gladman Mvukuzane Ngubo, Madlinyoka Ntanzi,
Marrasta Tembe Shabalala and Niresh Woodraj



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Shabalala and Niresh Woodraj**

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Introduction

This is a first collection of short stories and poems written by workers in a creative writing course. This course was part of a two-year programme in cultural work, organised by the Culture and Working Life Project and COSATU.

We wrote this book to share our stories and to show people how we live in the rural areas and the townships. We hope that the readers will enjoy our work and we ask them for patience: we are still crawling. We arrived blank as white paper but now we have confidence in what we are doing.

We would like to thank Astrid von Kotze, who made this creative writing course happen, for her dedication and care.

We hope this book will encourage other people to write their stories and share their talents.

Thank you.

The writers.

Where I come from

A collection of poems

Madlinyoka Ntanzu

Where I come from

I come from the Mandini area.

In my place there are lots of factories.

I come from many people.

I come from many policemen

and many tomatoes.

I come from a small area with small houses.

I come from a smelly place.

I come from good-music area.

I come from much sugar-cane.

I come from much bush and also snakes.

I come from a cold area where men are shot.

Nester Luthuli

Where I come from

I come from a tin of fish
there is a lot of water around me
Breathing fresh air from the water
down from the sea
There is beautiful clean sand and prawns
Nearby there is a nice round tree
where I sit when I am resting and when I am tired
I listen to the bird's music singing lovely songs
under that tree
I don't want anyone to sit under it
Because it's beautiful for me.
I look at waves and the waves want me to look forward
I fall asleep very quietly.
Whenever the wind is blowing
I can wake up I am fast asleep.

Goodman Kivan

Where I come from

I come from the desolate place of wild animals
where life is hunting.
where there is no hurly burly
of cars and people.

The place where you hear the hisses of snakes
in the sunny days of summer.
The singing of birds in the early mornings
of cool summer.

The place to entertain foreign visitors
because of the quietness, and for hunting.
The place for holiday makers
during summer vacations.
Hence I say it is a desolate place
I come from.

It is the place for wild animals
because big forests are scattered
all over the place.

The scarcity of cars is known
because of the density of forests.
This is the place where I come from.

The place of mangoes, bananas, guavas
and oranges.

It is the place where you struggle
for transport to town.

The cars are the donkeys and horses
because of the narrow roads.

Yet it is the place for life
because of it's environment.

I come from the place called Mahlethini,
the place of animals.

Yet the place for the people.

Marrasta Tembe Shabalala

Lapho engivela Khona

Ngivela ezihlahleni ezinkulu
Ezihlahleni ezinkulu eziluhlaza
Ezweni likamoba no mangwe
Ezweni lamathanga nobhatata
Ezweni lenjemane namabungwa
Ezweni lamadumbe nombumbula.

Ngivela ezweni lapho imizi engabonakali khona
oyizwa ngomculo wezinja
oyizwa ngomculo wezinkunku
oyizwa ngokukhala kwezingane
oyibona ngokushunqa kwentuthu.

Ngivela lapho imoto, umgwago okungaziwa khona
imigwago yakhona imizila yezinkomo
lapho indoda enganankomo ibizwa ngendojeyana
izimoto zakhona okuyizihlibhi.

Ngivela ezweni labantu
ngivela ezweni lengoma nenduku
Ezweni elilambele izintaba
umdali owalidala esekhathele
ngivela kwaMhlab' uyalingana

Kulapho lapha engivela khona.

Gladman Mvukuzane Ngubo

Where I come from

I come from a place
with dusty untarred streets
where our washing
becomes dirty on the lines.

I come from a place
where the bucket system
is still existing
causing unhealthy conditions
to human beings who are proud
of what they are.

From people of different types
that's where I come from
Some are drunkards,
and some are daggasmokers
but some are intellectuals.

I come from a place
where some children are schooling
and others are tsotsis
pickpocketing their parents.

I come from a place
where people are buried
every saturday
while others are wedding
dancing and celebrating.

I come from a place
where most people
wake up early every day
to face exploitation
while others are coming back
from night shifts.

I come from different people
with opposing attitudes
from that place
where innocent prominent figures
were gunned down.

Yes, I come from Clermont.

Vusi Bhengu

Where I come from

From the noisy and unstable township I come

BhaBha of the R 1's play their part.

Screams of our people are the only music

I listen to.

Smell of flames of burning houses

is the kind I know.

Hatred and mistrust is the core

of the community.

Caspirs full of soldiers

fill our narrow one-way roads.

Electrical street-lights are destroyed

with a purpose.

Police vans are the masters of our roads.

There is no time for lovers

to share their love.

Every man and woman

is an untrained soldier for survival.

Corpses lie on streets

like stones or rubbish.

Ready-made food is eaten because

there is no mother to cook

as everyone is a soldier.

There is no one to care for a crying baby

she is also a defenceless soldier.

To wash one's body

is a waste of time and risky

rather defend it.

Goodman Kivan

The Man who stole the miracle briefcase

This is a story about a man who stole a briefcase not knowing that he was not actually stealing a briefcase but a miracle.

Fifteen years ago I was doing Standard five in the tiny place of Izingolweni in the district of Libongwe. For many years there had been a big drought in that area and there was no sign that there would be any rain falling.

At about noon on the sixteenth of November we heard the usual noise of the fast passing cars in the streets adjacent to the school yard. All of a sudden we rushed towards the gates to see what was happening. To our dismay we saw a man being escorted to a policevan by three uniformed policemen. We were told that the man was being apprehended for stealing a briefcase that did not belong to him.

What had happened?

When he opened up the briefcase a miracle happened. How? The rain began to rain heavily, and there was a big storm. Many people including myself ran away crying, up and down the streets, in different directions, to look for shelter. Even the one who stole the briefcase ran away. And the rain was falling hard, and there was thunder and lightening. Then I felt a cold chill run down my spine, not knowing what to do. Even the thief was in a dilemma.

At that moment of confusion a fleet of police vans arrived to investigate the causes of the pandemonium. Realising that he was in danger himself the man who had opened the briefcase handed himself over to the police and told them that he was a thief but that he had not known that he was not stealing a briefcase but a miracle.

The police asked the man where the briefcase was and they found it and ordered him to close it. Once again a strange thing happened. As the man closed it the sky cleared and the rain stopped.

The people all thronged to the streets to look at the marvellous and miraculous briefcase. But to the utter surprise of everyone there were only two small bones inside the briefcase. Nothing else.

The man who stole the briefcase was not charged or officially apprehended as is usually the case. On the one hand the man was blessed for bringing rain to the country after such a long time of drought. On the other hand the police themselves were afraid that another strange thing might happen if they charged the man as an offender. So he was asked to return the briefcase where it belongs. That was the case and the story ends.

Nester Luthuli

The storyteller

It was after supper, when my grandmother and my two brothers Siphon and Themba and my mother and little sister were sitting together. My grandmother said: "let me tell you a story".

"One day when I was twelve years old my mother asked me to go and collect some firewood. I was happy because I always liked collecting firewood because it gave me a chance to play with my friends. I woke up early in the morning when the sun was rising. I took my slasher and inkatha and went to the forest.

When I was there I suddenly heard a sweet whistle sounding. I tried to listen. It uttered again: 'hello Ntombi'. I wondered who was calling my name and I answered: 'hello, who are you?' The voice answered: 'look at me and you will know who I am.' I asked: 'Who told you my name?' But the voice didn't answer the question. It just continued talking.

I looked up at the tree and saw a beautifully coloured bird. The bird asked: 'Do you want me to help you collect firewood for you?' I said: 'Yes if you can' (I could not believe it).

The bird said: 'let's collect the firewood together'.

We collected it together and in just a few minutes there was plenty and I said: 'thank you very much'.

Then it asked again: 'Do you want me to tie your firewood?' and I said: 'Yes, thank you', and I was surprised and could not believe what was happening.

And then the bird said: 'Do you want me to put the firewood on your head?'

And I said: 'Yes please, it is heavy.'

And the bird flew up right to the top of a tree and sang a beautiful song for me:

'Ungafik' usho laphe khaya
ukuth' ubonile inyon empofana
egilo lide kwelempofana
wenomsa ku-ku-kuwe nomsa ku'

They were so surprised at home to see me come back so soon. My mother asked me: 'why did you come back early like this?' But I had promised the bird not to tell anyone what had happened.

And my mother asked me again, to get more firewood. The bird helped me again and sang the song for me again. At home they asked me to tell them the truth, and I told them the whole story of my bird. And my mother sent me again to go to the forest.

I went to the forest hoping to meet my friend, the bird. But when I came there, next to the tree I didn't see anything and there was no voice of the bird. The bird was gone. Then I felt drowsy and I just went to sleep under the tree where I used to meet the bird. I didn't wake up until the afternoon.

I heard a voice shouting, like my mother calling me: 'Thembi! Where are you? Come home now!' Then I woke up and I realised that I was dreaming. It was dark in the forest and I couldn't see the way home. There was no firewood.

My mother asked me: "Where is the firewood?" I didn't answer, I just cried."

Themba and Sipho asked: "How did the bird collect the big firewood - because it is a small little thing?" And they also asked: "How did the bird tie your firewood? That's all amazing, granny."

And my grandmother said: "It is only a story. But it is very important because it teaches you that you mustn't promise your friend that you won't tell a secret and then you go and tell everybody. You will be punished badly."

Marrasta Tembe Shabalala

Ekugcineni

Umnumzane uNgozi Gumede, ongasekho emhlabeni, ubeyisakhamuzi endaweni ebizwa ngokuthi kuseMbuzini, eNyakatho nelakwaZulu. Naye-ke wabe eganiwe enabo nabantwana okwakungabafana abathathu namantombazane amabili.

Njengabantu basemakhaya nabo babeziphilisa ngokulima kanye nemfuyo. Besekuthi enye ingxenye yesivuno sidayiswe ukuze bathole imali yokuthenga okuyizidingo zasekhaya.

Noma babephila impilo emnandi yasemakhaya kodwa ubaba womuzi wayehlala njalo engathokozile ngenxa yokuthi abantwana bakhe besilisa babengawuthandi umsebenzi wokulima nokho ongumgogodla wempilo yasemakhaya.

Noma kunjalo impilo yaqhubeka, zedlula izinsuku nezinyanga kanye neminyaka, kodwa njalo ubaba wekhaya wabe ecabanga ngesu ngalisebenzisa ukuze amadodana akhe aqonde futhi angene athi shi emsebenzini wokulima.

Yebo, izinsuku zedlula kanti naye ubaba uGumede wayengumuntu osekhlile kakhulu. Kwathi emva kwezinsukwana, wahlatshwa ukugula, kwashesha ukumcacela ukuthi angase awushiye umhlaba ngenxa yobudala bakhe.

Kwathi esekulesosimo, esegulela ukufa, isu lafika. Wabe esewabiza amadodana akhe amathathu wasethi kuwo, 'Lalelani lapha bafana bami. Ngendlela esengigula ngayo sengiyabona ukuthi kungenzeka ngihambe kulomhlaba noma nini. Nakhu-ke engithanda ukunitshela khona. Kunebhokisi lami elakhiwe ngezinsimbi ebengilokhu ngigcina kulo yonke imali yami. Eyamaphepha, eyesiliva, imali ebomvu kanye negolide engabuya nalo ezimayini. Ngaligqiba kuleyansimu yami enkulu kunazonke, angithi niyayibona?" "Yebo, baba, siyayibona."

"Manje ngenxa yokuthi sengigugile angisakhumbuli ukuthi ngaligqiba kuphi nensimu, kodwa ngempela ngiqinisile ukuthi lelibhokisi likhona. Okufanele nikwenze, ukuze nilithole kuzodinga ukuthi niyilime yonke leyansimu ngesineke niyezwa?" Amadodana athi, "Yebo siyezwa baba".

Emva kwezinsuku ezintathu uMnu. Gumede wabe eseshona. Kwathi sekwedlule izinsuku zokumzilela, amadodana aqalake ukuyilima. Ayilima aze ayiqeda yonke, futhi ngesineke kodwa imali lutho ukuyithola. Sebeyilimile insimu bayiqeda, kwacaca ukuthi ibhokisi alitholakali abesehlala phansi abonisana. UVusi okuyindodana endala yathi, "bafowethu, sesizenelisile ukuthi ibhokisi legolide alikho, yini esingayenza njengamanje?" UThemba indodana yesibili, waphendula wathi, "mina okwamanje ngisadidekile."

UMusawenkosi, indodana encane, yathi: "Noma ibhokisi legolide singalitholi kodwa ukuze silondoloze amandla ethu esiwakhiphile silima insimu enkulu kangaka ebesingakaze siphuphe ukuyilima thina, ngicabanga ukuthi kungcono sivele siyitshale ummbila yonke. Kuthi isivuno sisidayise ukuze sithole imali ngoba lena ekababa asiyitholanga.

Nebala bavumelana ngalombono. Base betshala ummbila yonke insimu. Safikake isikhathi sokuvuna, nebala badayisa bathola imali eningi. Ekugcineni amadodana abona ukuthi akukho imali ebigqitshwe lapha, kuphela indlela ubaba wabo ayeyicabangile ukuze babone ukuthi umhlabathi yilapho umcebo ulele khona.

Eqinisweni alikho ibhokisi elabe ligqitshiwe, kuphela ilisu ubaba wabo alisebenzisa ukuze izingane zakhe ziwuthande umsebenzi ukuze zizokwazi ukuziphilisa uma eseshonile. Nebala amadodana aqhubeka nalomsebenzi agcina esecebe kakhulu.

Madlinyoka Ntanzu

Impi phakathi kwendoda nowesifazane

Wezingane zami ake nisondele lapha nginitshela ngendawo engake ngavakashela kuyo. Lendawo engangivakashela kuyo ibizwa ngokuthi iKwaMashu. Lapho engathi ngifika ngafica abantu abanengi abadala, izingane nazo zihlezi inqwatshana lapha eduze komjondolo. Kulapho-ke senizozwa khona indaba.

Awu mangithi ngiyabheka ngibona indoda kanye nowesifazane bebanga ubheseni wokudla. Ethu lo wesilisa: "wena uvele udle wedwa nje mina ungangiphakeli, awubheke ukuthi udlela esitsheni esingakanani lesi siminzi lesi." Owesifazane waphendula, "ucabanga ukuthi uzonakwa yimi wena ingathi ulibala utshwala, uvuka ekuseni uze uyobonwa ngakusasa njengoba ufika nje ukudla kuphakwe kwabola." "Heyi! wemfazi ngingathi ngikhuluma nawe ubulokhu ubawuza lana uyangizwa?" "Cha angikuphenduli ingani nguwe ongisukelayo."

Cha abanye bayaziphuzela nje abanakile ukuthi zishaphi, kanti lezingane ezihlezi eduze komjondolo sezithule zimangele zibona abantu abadala benza umsebenzi wezingane belokhu bekhombana ngeminwe. Omunye ephebeza omunye nomunye ekhomba omunye. Indoda le iphethe inkunzimalanga yesagila esidonse phansi. Ithi isuka ithi "uyabona mfazi ndini mina angiphendulwa umfazi ngizothi ngisuka ngibengikubhonya

ngesagila lesi," esho esidedela. Awu! owesifazane ebesidumela ithi indoda, "Heyi! wenzani, ufuna ukungishaya?' Iphendule inkosikazi ithi, "Engani uwena ongishayayo". Isho isibambile isagila.

Iphinde indoda, "dedela lapha wena awuzwa?" Naye ethi ingani uzongishaya nje wena usudiniwe ngoba ngikwazile ukuvika. Zithule njalo izingane zimangele zona, laba abanye bona babheke ukuziphuzela amajuba belokhu bethi, "awusiyeke ngoba laba badakiwe." Bedonsana kube ongaphansi nongaphezulu akekho ohlula omunye. Ngiyethemba zingane zami niyayizwa lendaba. "Yebo baba siyayizwa lendaba, impela yona isifundisa esiye isifundo."

Cha bo njalo yilokhu kuwongaphansi nongaphezuku laphaya kumama nobaba. Kulezingane kukhona eyodwa esiphatheke kabi kakhulu, ibona abantu abadala bebanga into encane futhi elubala. Cha kwale manje kulomfana aye manje kubona laba abalwayo. "Baba, baba!" "Yebo mfana wami." "Kungabe nibangani?"

"Cha mfana wami buza kuye unyoko lo." Apendule owesifazane, "Abuze kimi ukuthini? Ngoba uwe ongisukele. Nawe mfana wami uzibonele nje engibhonya ngesagila lesi esisibangayo." Aqhubeke umfana omncane, "Cha kodwa baba nomama ayilungile lento eniyenzayo." Iphendule indoda, "Yebo mina ngiyezwa mfana wami." Aphinde umfanyana,

"Ngoba awubheke nje abantu manje babuka nina." Ayi aphenhule umama, "Mtshela mfana wami ngoba uyena ongisukele." "Cha mama nawe unephutha ngoba kufanele uvele ubaleke ungamlindi ngoba ubengeke akufice." "Cha ngiyezwa mtanami". "Ngiyezwa nami mfana wami," kusho ubaba, "Zinhle izeluleko zakho sengathi mfana wami ungakhula nazo."

Aphenhule umama, "Yebo baba. Hawu! base bexolelana njalo umama nobaba. Wangabe esaphinda ahluphe uma ezidlele amanzi amponjwana kwase kuba yikhaya elufudumele ngengane nje encane ebanikeze isiyalo. Cha-ke zingane zami ngiyethemba nojabula ngalendaba enginitshela yona ngoba isiyaphela lapho."

Vusi Bhengu

The migrant worker

The man has a long mustache and there is an imvubu, a sjambok, in his hand. His big stomach gives the impression that he eats a lot of starchy foods. He does not wear shoes. It seems that he stays in the hostel.

In the mornings he is always running which shows that he is late for work. In the train he speaks loudly and harshly as a priest preaching in church. He likes to boast about his wife who is in the rural areas of the Nongoma district. He also tells the people that he has a lot of cows at home. He talks so much about himself, saying that he is not afraid of any man in the world and that he cannot stand for any nonsense.

He is probably very harsh on his wife and children using his sjambok day and night. He visits his home once a month on weekends. On Sundays, in the afternoons of those weekends, the children keep on saying: "thank God tomorrow is Monday, the devil is going."

One day late in the afternoon at work something happens. The man receives a telephone call from his wife, telling him that one of their sons has died in an accident. He was knocked down by a car. He speaks loudly on the phone asking questions, reproaching her, but it cannot cure the situation - the boy is gone.

The man tells his wife that he will come as soon as possible. He reports the tragic event to his colleagues at work and his employer gives him permission to go home.

Early the following day the man and two of his colleagues travel to KwaNongoma by bus. You cannot imagine him, the way he behaves on trains. Today, there is no loud speaking and no boasting. He is silent as a sky.

Late in the afternoon they arrive at KwaNongoma. His friends are waiting to see the big family and many houses and cows that the man has boasted about. But on arrival they are shocked to find that there is only one muddy-grass hut and it looks like it might collapse any time.

The wife is in mourning but the friends can judge that even without the tragic event there is no happiness and harmony in this family. The children are weak and pale. There is only one big three-legged pot.

A temporary outside building has been erected for keeping the body. There are no funeral services available here. They will bury the child at half past three in the afternoon. At two o'clock people are coming in for the funeral. There are not enough seats so they just sit on the dusty floor.

At three thirty the body is taken up to the graveyard. There is no priest and no one sings any gospel songs. An old man with white hair reports how the accident took place. After his speech the body is buried and everything is over. The men drink Zulu beer whilst the women have amahewu. Soon all the people dispersed.

Later that night the two friends sit with the man and his wife and family. The man harshly asks how his son could have been killed: "Where were you ? Didn't I tell you that you must always keep an eye on the children? Where was my son going to and for what good reason and were you fast asleep at the time? Talk woman, I am talking to you, you fool."

One of his friends decides to intervene: "look here my friend, we are not here for quarrels. We accompanied you as our friend and we are here to meet the situation as it is. I don't think that you have any right to talk like this during the time of mourning. You must not blame your wife for an accident. I think even in your presence such a thing could have happened. How does an adult get knocked down by a car with his eyes wide open? Forgive and forget, God has given and God has taken."

"And now, let us go out to look at your cows, my friend." The three men go out. The man is leading them down to the other side of the mountain. He shows them one cow and in a soft voice he confesses: "My friends, I did not think that you would ever come here with me. I've got nothing. This is the only cow. This is the only house. I am sorry I bragged about something which I do not have. It was wrong of me."

So the other friend says: " I think you have discovered that everybody can make mistakes. Even your wife can make mistakes."

Marrasta Tembe Shabalala

Ukungazi kufana nokungaboni

UMnumzane UBheka Shabalala wayethathwa njengomunye wamadoda acebile asemakhaya, ngoba phela wayenezinkomo eziyikhulu, nezimbuzi eziyikhulu, besekuba isithembu samakhosikazi amathathu. Phela emakhaya uma unonkosikazi oyedwa ufaniswa namajuba wona ahamba ngamabili okuyindoda nomfazi.

Ngeshwa elikhulu, kulesithembu sakhe munye kuphela unkosikazi owaba nenhlanhla yokuthola umntwana, naye futhi waba yedwa lomfana ogama lakhe nguMziwakhe. UMziwakhe lona wabe enothando lokuya esikoleni, wabe esecela-ke kubaba wakhe ukuthi amdedele aye esikoleni. Nokho uMnumzane Shabalala akazange ayithande indaba yesikole.

Phela umsebenzi wabesilisa basemakhaya ukuthi babe nolwazi lokuphatha imfuyo, ukwakha izindlu, ukulima ngezinkabi, ukuzingela kanye neminye imisebenzi yasekhaya. Bese kuthi emva kwalokhu bese uyaganwa kungaleyondlelake ubaba kaMuzi engazange ayithande lendaba yokufunda. Ngoba futhi kunenkolelo yokuthi uma umuntu esefundile akabe esathanda ukuhlala noma akhe ekhaya. Kodwa-ke wagcina esemvumele ukuthi aye esikoleni. Wabe esengeniswa ke esikoleni uMuzi, waqhubeka kahle kakhulu nezifundo zakhe waze waphothula ibanga leshumi.

Emva kokuphothula, wabe esengena esikoleni sokufundela umsebenzi wezokuphatha kwezamabhizinisi. Wabe eseqashwa kwesinye sezitolo ezinkulu zaseThekwini, njengemenenja.

Kwathi evakashele ekhaya ngamaholide, wabe esecelwa uyise ukuthi baxoxe.

Ubaba: Muzi mfana wami kuyiqiniso futhi nawe uyabona ukuthi usukhulile kufanele ngabe usuganiwe, ukuze nawe ube yindoda phela nami sengiyaguga.

UMuzi: Yebo baba, ngiyabona ukuthi sengikhulile futhi sengiqalile nokubeka imali ebhange ukuze uma ngiganwa ngivele ngilobole ngokushesha.

Ubaba: Muzi, uthini? Uthi imali uyibeke ebhange? Khona lena kobelungu la uyithathe khona futhi? Ungibona nje konke lokhu enginakho izinkomo, izimbuzi ngisho unyoko imbala ngangisebenzisa imali engabe ngiyibekelwa ubaba eyimbela phansi ndawothize njengoba nami ngenza, ngisho nemali ebovu ngisenayo. Wenake eyakho uyibeka kobelungu, uma labobelungu bebaleka uzothini?

UMuzi: Cha baba abukho ubugebengu emabhenki khululeka.

Ubaba: Kulungile qhubeka ke nalamabhenge akho ngoba phela usucabanga ukuthi uhlakaniphile kakhulu ngoba usufundile.

Emva kwamaholide uMuzi waphindela emsebenzini. Kwathi emva kwezinyanga eziyisithupha uMuzi esukile ekhaya indawo yakubo yahlaselwa izikhukhula ezamukisa yonke imfuyo yakubo nezindlu. Kwasiphuka ngisho nezihlahla.

Ngenhlanhla abazali bakhe basinda. Kodwa okubi ukuthi abazali bakhe basala dengwane bengenalo ngisho nesaka lodwa leli lokwembatha. Basala nababekugqoke emzimbeni kuphela.

Emva kwalezikhukhula uMnu. Shabalala wamelwa ingqondo engazi ukuthi usezowondla ngani umndeni wakhe ngoba phela umcebo wakhe oyimfuyo wabe usuhambe wonke, kanti nemali yakhe wabe engasayazi ukuthi wayibekaphi ngoba izihlahla ayebona ngazo lapho ayeyimbele khona zabe zisuphunwe izikhukhula.

Kwathi esadungeke ingqondo, kwabe sekutheleka indodana yakhe engalindele ngoba phela yabe izwile ngomsakazo ukuthi indawo yakubo ikhungethwe izikhukhula.

Wafika neloli ligcwele ukudla, izimpahla, namatende nokunye okuzidingo zempilo. Wabuye waya endaweni engahlukumezwanga izikhukhula wafika wathenga izinkomo ezinhlanu, izimbuzi ezinhlanu ukuze uyise aqhubeke nokufuya.

Indodana isikwenzile konke lokhu, uyise wabe esethi: Ngicela ungixolele ukungazi kufana nokungaboni. Ngangingazi ukuthi isikole kanye namabhange kuwusizo, ukuba konke lokhu osukwenzile ngabe akukho besengizofana nenja engenamniniyo mntanami. Ngixolele futhi ngikufisela inhlanhla.

UMuzi: Baba ungakhathazeki futhi asikho isidingo sokuthi ubonge ngoba nami ngikhona nje emhlabeni kungenxa yakho.

Gladman Mvukuzane Ngubo

Tsotsi in Town

I saw him standing on the verandah of one of the furniture shops. He was in his late twenties. He was wearing dark sunglasses, matching his pitch black round face. His slender body was clearly structured under jeans which seemed to be the second layer of his skin. His long hair was uncombed and seemed as if it had been away from water for quite a number of days.

His jaws were moving slowly, as he was steadily chewing gum. His teeth were the only white part of his face. He was looking intently at all those people who were immaculately dressed. I realised that because he was looking at them in such a way that even when they had passed him, he was turning his head slowly, examining them thoroughly.

"Hm, he seems to be dangerous," I whispered to myself after watching him some minutes. "Why does he bother me so much?" I asked myself, "it's in town, and there are plenty people like that one. Maybe as I am watching him, others are looking at me quizzically, too." Those questions bothered me simultaneously.

I immediately checked my mind and reminded myself that I had some things to do in town. And the first thing I was supposed to do was to go to the same furniture shop, where the guy was standing, and pay my account.

"Should I go there?" - that question struck my mind and I felt my heart beating rapidly inside my ribs. I sweated a bit and fumbled in my pockets for my handkerchief.

I was still wiping my face when I suddenly heard the terrible scream of a woman on the opposite side of the road, in front of the furniture shop. I caught a fright and my handkerchief fell down. Immobilised, I held my breath and watched: something was happening.

I saw the guy with the dark sunglasses jumping like a springbok from the veranda, managing with all his might to cross the road. He was now holding a white purse in his left hand and something was glittering in his right hand. I didn't hesitate, it was a newly sharpened knife.

As he was running towards the other side of the road where I was standing I stepped back. All this happened within a few seconds. Many things were taking place now. A group of people were surrounding the screaming woman on the other side. Some were shouting: "Catch him! There he is!" And on the side where I was standing people were frightened too, also making a noise. Cars that were passing by suddenly stopped making their own music by hooting loudly.

Fortunately the running guy passed some metres away from me and continued with his terrific marathon up the road. Some young men from the crowd were on his heels, risking their lives to grab him. But the guy seemed to be a better-trained athlete than them. The gap between them grew wider.

The young men were now no longer using their feet to chase him but they were kicking him. The white purse and the knife were lying far away from him.

From nowhere the police had arrived. They lifted him up, collecting the white purse and his knife and threw him in the van like a mealiebag.

They drove to the furniture shop and took the screaming woman into the front and down to the police station they drove.

I shook my head and suddenly remembered that I had some things to do in town. I went inside that furniture shop for my account and proceeded with my other commitments.

Vusi Bhengu

From the station bench into the first class compartment

It was in 1979, when I was still a schoolboy. I was returning from a holiday at my cousin's house in Johannesburg.

I was waiting on a station bench when I turned my head to the right and discovered, that next to me sat a lovely, attractive young lady of my age. Suddenly I could feel the power of love deep down in my heart. I tried hard not to show anything and also to avoid staring at her again and again. But I did not succeed.

Shortly afterwards the train came. The young lady went straight to the first class compartment and I followed in her steps straight to the same class as if she had some magnet on her body. I sat opposite her so that I could look at her.

I introduced myself to her, and she said her name was Sheila. She spoke in a friendly manner and I was surprised as I felt very inferior to her. She told me that she was a student at Fort Hare University. I felt ashamed about my standard and by the look in my eyes she noticed that something had gone wrong in our conversation.

"Did I startle you, Vusi?" she asked. "What is wrong?" I saw the need to tell her the truth: "I am only in standard eight."

Then I attempted to declare my love for her. I could hardly speak. Words would not flow but because of that invisible feeling I tried my best.

She looked at me with those big bright eyes and said, "Vusi somewhere somehow you are wrong. You must never ever talk about standards to me. I can see you are ashamed and guilty about your standard of school. But please be free, let us talk as equal people".

At that moment a ticket examiner came in. That was the most embarrassing moment in my life. I only had a third class ticket in my pocket! The ticket examiner clipped her ticket first and then asked for mine. I gave it to him very hesitatingly. "Hey, you bastard, you must be mad", he shouted. "Where is your ticket, you small tsotsi, this is the first class!"

I could not hold back my tears and did not reply. Sheila intervened and asked, "Vusi, what is wrong with you? Why don't you just add on the price of your ticket to meet the right price?" Miserably I admitted: "Sheila, I have only enough money for a taxi from Durban to Umlazi."

"Ag man, you are wasting my time, you fool, wait here I am coming back," the ticket examiner said and left. "Vusi, can I offer some help. We will talk about it later, okay?" "If it is possible", I said in a choked voice. "Quickly, here comes the ticket examiner with the police."

"Tsotsi, where is your first class ticket? Talk man, or let's go," the police said. She softly intervened: "How much is needed on top of his ticket?" "Six rands, ten cents lady", the ticket examiner said. She paid him and he left, threatening me: "Sooner or later you'll eat the prison cold pap! Be careful, you young fool."

"Thank you one thousand times, Sheila," I said. "Let me explain everything". By now I was completely confused and embarrassed. I did not know whether to continue declaring my love or not. So finally I said: "Do you know, Sheila, what happened on that station bench in Johannesburg? I was almost shocked as if you had some electrical plugs in your body. You see I followed you into this compartment directed by my emotions, but mentally I was out of mind. You cannot imagine how much love I have for you. I feel ashamed and I think I acted foolishly, but please forgive me. I love you but as it is now I feel very small."

She replied: "All that happened proves to me that you love me. Forget about all the bad things. I do not know who planned our meeting, I do not know what made me pay the kind of respect I paid to you but I also feel the same. I love you. However, I have a little problem concerning trust. I cannot trust you completely at the moment. We have to give ourselves a chance of communication, maybe telephonically or personally, until we get to know and trust each other."

At 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon we jumped off in Durban. I said: "Here is my phone number, please write yours in this diary. Can I have a good-bye kiss?" I held her with joy and love and kissed her. We were lost in love and did not notice the people around. I looked into her eyes and saw love burning. I asked: "Sheila do we have to part now?" I could not hold back my tears and she in return did the same. I kissed her for the last time with my tear-drops falling to her white shirt and her tear-drops falling to my uncovered chest. "Good-bye, Sheila, I shall phone, also please phone me."

Then we parted. When I was across the road, I looked back to see her on the other side of the road. I saw her looking straight across at me. I waved my hand with love, half crying and half smiling. She also waved and blew me a kiss. Loudly she called: "I love you Vusi".

On the way to Umlazi I was deeply concerned about our future communication, but I was even more worried about the conditions of poverty under which I lived at the time. The telephone number I had given her was our neighbour's number. We were living in a shack on an ungravelled land site.

Barely an hour after I got home I was called across by our neighbour's son for a call. To my surprise it was her on the phone. "Hello", she said, "I could not stand it any longer. When will I see you again Vusi?" Happy to hear her voice I answered: "Thanks darling for your call. You mean a lot to me and definitely tomorrow I'll tell you when and where we can meet. Good-bye my love." She replied: "I miss you Vusi, good-bye for now."

I could not sleep that night. I was worried about her coming to my side. I did not even have a bed to sleep on, only that old sponge with one pair of sheets. How could I invite her to these conditions? Late at night my mother came to me and asked: "Vusi, what is wrong with you? Why didn't you touch your food tonight? How was your journey? You don't look as happy as you are supposed to after a holiday in Johannesburg."

"Mama, I shall tell you the whole story in the morning. Don't worry there is nothing serious, good night." In the early hours of the morning I finally decided that at whatever costs she would have to come. Early next morning I went straight to the shopping complex and phoned her. We arranged to meet at Durban station the next day and I would take her home.

On the way home from the phonecall I felt half happy and half sad and apprehensive. As it was Sunday my mother had already left for church. I went outside to sit on the grass, until I fell asleep with anxiety.

Later I heard a voice saying: "Vusi, how can you sleep like this in the dust? What is wrong with you? Tell me the truth, you are not the Vusi I know." It was my mother. "Let us go into the house and tell me your problem."

I had no choice so I went inside and sat on my home-made chair. Mother sat down on her isicephu. Then I began to confide: "Mama, coming back on the train from Johannesburg I fell in love with a woman. She is a university student and she looks as if she is from a rich family. Now, I am worried about

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my background and what concerns me most is that she is coming here tomorrow. I did not tell her the truth about our situation, because I thought that if I told her I could not win her love. But now she will think that I cannot be trusted. But I honestly love her."

"Vusi, why didn't you tell me about it earlier? I am your mother, and I have often before helped you to solve your problems. If only you had told me earlier! Though we live this way I could try to organise better things from my church colleagues. For example, they could lend me an old radio. Or they could supply me with some nice food like rice and tin stuff, to make arrangements for your visitor."

"And lastly, Vusi, don't worry about someone who loves you. Love can conquer all. Maybe you'll find that she can share your dreams, your sorrows and pains. Just wait for her - God will guide you. Let me cook supper now", she said and went to our small kitchen to pump the primus stove.

When the food was ready we ate in our diningroom which became my bedroom later, while the kitchen became my mother's bedroom. While we ate we shared our thoughts about my problem. Somehow I was encouraged and soothed by my mothers' ideas. After supper I took the plates away and went to fetch water from the bucket. "Good night, Vusi, and good luck for tomorrow", mother said. "Take good care of her. I'll be there." I also wished her good night and thanked her for her advice and thoughts.

Back again on my sponge I could not sleep. Time was moving slowly as I thought about my mother's advice and worried about the next day. When I woke the next morning I went for a run as usual - 3 km to the taxi rank and back. Then I took my washing dish to our bathroom outside - a shack made from planks and roofed with damcoss. As I washed I was deeply apprehensive about what was going to happen later.

I carefully ironed my only blue sweater and my only khaki trousers. As I had no vaseline or lotion for my body I just got dressed. Then I looked into my small cracked mirror. Mother asked: "Are you ready to go to Durban station to meet her? Take your pap and then go, my boy."

It was 9 o'clock when I left for the taxi rank. Fortunately, there was a taxi already waiting and it did not take long for other passengers to arrive and fill up the taxi. We set off for Durban. The driver put on some music - and I listened to Lionel Ritchie singing 'love will conquer all'. This was an encouraging message for me and I began to move to the beat. When we reached Durban I went straight to the station. I sat down on a station bench and waited for her.

At 11 o'clock the train arrived. There were many different people getting off. But no sign of Sheila. Suddenly I heard a lovely voice: "Hai, Vusi, my love. Are you really Vusi, or just a picture of him?" With open arms I said: "Come Sheila, my love, are you the Sheila I know?"

We hugged and kissed until we found ourselves sitting on the station bench again. Then we opened our eyes and laughed: "On the station bench again," I said, "Do you remember another station bench in Johannesburg?" She answered "Vusi, you notice even small things." "Let me take your bag and let's go to the taxi rank for a taxi straight home."

We reached Umlazi at one o'clock. My dog did not bark at her. It looked tired and hungry. My mother was in the kitchen. We went into the diningroom that would be our bedroom later. "Sheila, sit on that chair", I said. "Mama, we're home". She came to the dining room and sat on the small floor mat. I introduced them to each other: "Mama, this is Sheila, the woman I love and told you about. Sheila, this is my mother."

Mother served us food - chicken and stiff pap. I was surprised because I did not know where she had got the chicken from. Then she said: "Children, let me leave you for a while. I am going to Amazimtoti to see my old white friend. I shall see you in the afternoon."

We were left alone. "Sheila, I wonder if these conditions in which we live could ever be acceptable to you. If they are, thank you. But if they are not you must tell me honestly. We are poor, but it is not and was not my mistake. I don't blame anyone for poverty, but I found myself and my family as poor as we are. My mother struggles hard to keep me at school. I don't know how because she has only temporary jobs. Honestly, Sheila, even though I cannot offer any luxury or comfort I have something special for you. And that is my love for you."

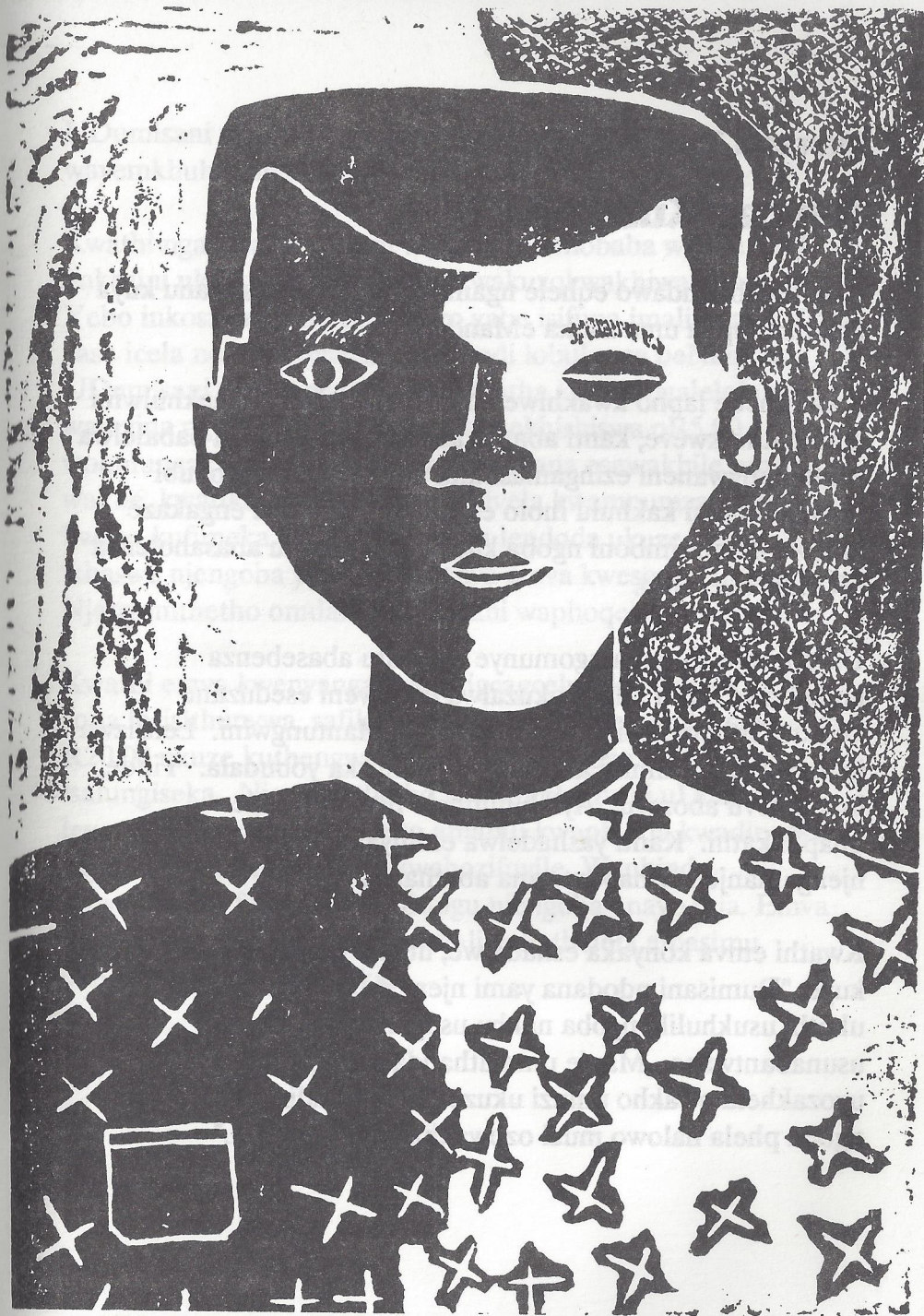
When I looked at her tears were flowing down her cheeks with no answer or sound. I also cried and hugged her. "At first I was afraid of telling you about my background because I thought maybe it would be hard for you to fall in love with me. But now I can see my mistake. It makes no difference. And now you know the whole truth. I beg for forgiveness, sithandwa."

Then I took out my white handkerchief to rub off her tears. "Thula phela, Sheila" I said, " I do not know whether you are crying because I made the mistake to bring you down to such a place I call my home. I have no television to watch, no radio to play. I admit, Sheila, it is beyond my means. The worst part of all, I have no bedroom nor bed. Sorry, Sheila, for all this. I love you."

Sheila answered: "Vusi, from the word go you were wrong. Do you remember your mistake in the first-class compartment? Do you remember what I said then? Vusi, I told you that I don't classify people. I also said that you should feel free and talk to me as an equal. Do you know what makes me cry now? I love you without reservations. You also seem to love me but with reservations which I do not like. Think about it: just because of your love that kept burning from the day I first met you, right up to now, I even decided to tell my parents about you. If you had been open enough to me on your first day or through our telephone conversation, maybe I would have arranged something to help you, Vusi."

"You see, Vusi, at home we are not rich or poor, but father owns an aquarium and a shop. I know him and understand him. He can give me any affordable help whenever I ask. He loves me because I am continuing with my studies well up to the level he used to dream about. Vusi, I love you. I accept you just as you are. I promise that we shall solve our problems together in future. I want us to share our dreams until they come true. As from today, never ever hide anything that will be revealed to me later. Love is stronger than pride. Tonight I shall share your sponge with you freely, because this love is real and strong."

I cried and kissed her. Then I said: "Sheila, I thank God for having someone like you. You are different. You are simple and straight forward. I promise to be open in future as an open window. I pray for the day when I will be working and independent to prove to you what my love for you means."



MAKRASIA

UDumisani wawathokozela amazwi kayise ngoba wayemkhulule ngenhlziyo emhlophe.

Kwathi ngakusasa ekuseni uDumisani enobaba wakhe baya enkosini ukuyocela isiza lapho kwakuzokwakhiwa khona. Yebo inkosi yabanikeza indawo yabe isifuna imali enguR70.00, yase icela nokuthi bavuselele ikhadi lobulunga beNkatha. UDumisani wayengayijoyinile iNkatha kodwa ngalelolanga wajoyina ngokuphoqwa yisimo, wasekhishiswa oR5.00 wobulunga. Kwathi emva kwesikhashana esewakhile umuzi wakhe, kwafika kuye isithunywa sivela kwamnumzane lapha kwabe kufuneka uR10.00 ikhanda lendoda ukuze inkosi ixhaswe njengoba yayizogcagcelwa emva kwesonto elilodwa. Njengomthetho omdala uDumisani waphoqeka ukukhokha.

Kwathi emva kwenyanga inkosi igcagcelwe kwabuye kwafika sona lesisithunywa, safika sathi inkosi ithe asihambe siqoqa o-R20.00 ukuze kuthengwe imoto entsha ngoba endala angeke isalungiseka. Njengomthetho wayikhipha futhi uDumisani leyomali. Emva kwamasono amabili kwaphinda kwadingeka oR5.00 bokuthelela izinja kwabazifuyile. Waphinda wawukhokha futhi umfokaZungu njengoba enayoinja. Emva kwayo kwase sekuzolandela imali yokuthelela amasimu ekhokhwa njalo ngonyaka.

Emva kokuthi UDumisani esengixoxele lendaba wabe esengibuza lokhu, "Ingabe kuyoze kube nini sikhokha? Sondla umuntu ongasisizi ngalutho, ongakhethwanga ngentando yeningi? Ngabe sisazoqhubeka naloluhlobo lwabantu kwi-South Africa entsha?"

Ngaphendula ngokuthi kuliqiniso elingenakuphikwa ukuthi sekwedlule amashumi ngamashumi eminyaka abantu baseSouth Africa bezabalazela inkululeko yalelizwe, futhi kunesibalo engeke ngasilinganisa sabantu befela lelizwe kanye namakhulu ngamakhulu eziboshwa okunamanje zisabhadle emajele ngenxa yokuzabalazela lelizwe. Kusosonke lesisikhathi amashifu kade ekhona elokhu ebukela. Ngaleyondlela kuyacaca ukuthi kwiSouth Africa entsha angeke sisabadinga. Kuphela amakhosi esizobambisana nawo ilawo asebonile ukuthi nawo njengengxenye yomphakathi ogqilaziwe kufanele azibandakanye nomzabalazo.

Emva kwalencazelo uDumisani wavumelana nami ekutheni kwi-South Africa entsha angeke saqhubeka namakhosi alokhu emi entabeni ebukela.

Gladman Mvukuzane Ngubo

In the shacks of Inanda

Getting off the green Putco bus Mr Gudlindlu Mdlalose stood for a while at the bus stop, as if he didn't know where to go now. Of course he was a little bit confused. He had not been at Maotana in Inanda for ten years. And the place had completely changed, as there were now shacks built in the area.

He looked at his shoes full of dust. They told the story of his long walk from home to the bus stop in Mbumbulu.

"I'll go straight up this road, pass the first one to the right, and the second one is where my nephew's house is. I think I'm not mistaken. Yes, truly, I think I'm not mistaken," he said softly, speaking to himself and drawing with his stick the road he was planning to follow.

He looked at his trousers, brushed them off with his hand and mumbled: "No, I'm wasting time. It's already a windy day and these roads are dusty too. So no one can recognise that I'm not from these parts. Yes, truly, no one can recognise that", he concluded his lonely talk.

He then picked up his pillow-like bag, using that old style of carrying a bag on the back of his shoulder with his stick, and up the straight road he went.

He was half hungry but very thirsty. Passing some shacks he was attracted by one of them on the left side of the road. There was a lot of noise inside. People were singing while the music from the radio was playing. And some were sitting outside with bottles of beer and cartons of Juba, playing cards. Mr. Mdlalose quickly summed up the situation.

He went over and asked the first girl he met to buy him Juba. The girl did so, and went back into the shack, singing the song which was playing on the radio.

He sat down on one of the stones in the yard and shook his juba with a smile, showing great satisfaction.

As he was opening it the people who were playing cards stopped playing and glanced at him suspiciously. They started to talk about him secretly.

"I've never seen that man here before," one of them called Max said, touching the rim of his big black hat, as if he wanted to take it off. "And we must be careful of strangers. Some people run away from their places because of violence. And I don't trust that one, his age indicates that he belongs to the other side. So, let's quickly find out about him", he added.

The others nodded, and one of them said: "Yes, you're right. Old people kill young ones in their area, and when things become tough for them they run away to us, claiming to be comrades. So, guys, without wasting time, let's check him out."

"Zacs, go and search him. He won't be scared of you because you are the youngest. Try to handle him with great care, so that he can spill the beans," said a man called Willie with his bassy voice, and he pulled up the zip of his tracksuit jacket. His cigarette was hanging from his mouth and smoke drifted out of his nostrils. "While Zacs is dealing with him you carry on playing cards. I'll stay here, and take a sharp look at them."

Zacs stood up and went to the man. Mdlalose, seeing the boy approach him, smiled widely and kindly: "Sawubona, mfane, you are a clever boy. You've come to me just as I was thinking of calling one of you to ask something. Yes, truly, and ask something", Mdlalose said using his fashion of repeating what he had already said, and emphasising it with 'yes, truly'.

Zacs knelt in front of the man and, narrowing his eyes with suspicion, said: "Calling one of us and asking something? What were you going to ask him, Baba? And first of all: who are you?"

"Thank you my boy, that is a good question," Mdlalose said, still smiling: "I'm Gudlindlu Mdlalose, from Umbumbulu. That's where I'm coming from. Yes, truly, that's where I'm coming from. And who are you, my boy?"

"It's none of your business who I am. Just tell me: For what were you going to call one of us and what were you going to ask him?"

"Okay, my son, if that question worries you, I apologise. Yes, truly, I apologise," Mdlalose said softly, still holding his Juba. "I have not been here for quite a long time. And now I am a little bit confused. I've come here to see my nephew who stays here. We've received the news that his house was attacked by unknown people. Fortunately his family managed to escape, but he was seriously injured".

"Who's he? And in what manner is he your nephew?" Zacs asked frightenedly, showing impatience for a quick reply.

Some metres away at the corner of the yard Max was carefully watching Zacs and Mdlalose, although he didn't hear their conversation. He was looking more ugly under his big black hat and, holding his ankles with his hands, staring straight at them.

Mdlalose noticed that the boy who was asking him was frightened and he replied quickly: "That attacked man is my nephew. Even now I wonder how he is." He looked down for some seconds, raised his head again and said: "He is my nephew. His grandmother and my mother were sisters. His name is Themba Mfeka."

Zacs stood up shyly. He remembered that he had heard his father talking about their relatives who were staying at Umbumbulu. "I am Vincent Mfeka. Themba is my father," he said, extending his arm to shake the old man's hand. Then he added: "Baba, I apologise for the way I've talked to you. It's

because we don't trust anyone here now. Especially the unknown old people. My house was attacked by unknown old men."

Mldalose nodded and shook the boy's hand: "Don't worry, mzukulu, I understand what you mean. I've also heard about the old people who attack others without a reason. In Umbumbulu we used to have faction fights, although those are also senseless".

Zacs told him that his father had been discharged from hospital last week, and that he was on the road to recovery. Then he went back to the group of young men and informed them about the conversation with the old man. Then he returned to the old man and when Mdlalose had finished his juba they went to Thembas' home.

After our argument I went back to my room. I felt very sorry for myself. I started to pray to God to please help me and to turn her heart. It worked. She came back to normal.

Nester Luthuli

Working as a domestic worker

My madam was a horse-rider. She liked animals so much that she called them 'my babies'. She didn't care what I ate but always asked if I had fed her 'children' - her dogs. She had six dogs and two of them were pregnant. She kept the animals in the kitchen.

What happened next was that the two dogs had puppies. I suggested that she should take them out into the garage, to stay there, but she said they would be very cold and die. There were fifteen puppies born in the same week. When I came into the kitchen in the morning the poo and wee said 'good morning' to me. I just cried because of wee and poo, and I couldn't eat.

Her bedroom was full of horse saddles. She got cross when I moved them to clean the floor. There were a lot of flies everywhere.

I asked her for an increase because my wage was very low. But she said my work was not that demanding. What made me leave was that she bought a billy-goat and she asked me to feed it like a baby, even at 9 o'clock at night. I was very upset and I showed her that I was cross. One night I packed my suitcase. I woke up early in the morning. I went back home. I didn't want to go back and look for another job because I thought it would be the same sort of work.

Nester Luthuli

An important moment in my life

I had worked for my employer for nine years. Since I had started work at her house there was nothing wrong with her, but it was going to be worker's day and I asked her nicely and said: tomorrow is a workers' day and I am not going to come in.

She was so furious about that, she said: "you must come and make us some tea and make our bed and then go". I said: "No, it's workers' day and I am not coming in because I am a worker." I did not come in to work that day.

A few months later I asked her: "May I change my Thursday off to Saturday, because I am not very busy on Saturdays. I want to learn and attend a course." She answered me like a thunderstorm: "You always want to win everything. I am the madam in this house. You must find your own house in which you can do what you like to do. I need you on Saturdays. The children will be at home and I want to have visitors."

I answered her very angrily: "I didn't know that I am in jail, I didn't know that I am not allowed to do what I like to do just because I am a domestic worker. Just tell me now if you don't want me to work on your property. I will pack now and go." And I cried. She just ran away to the bedroom. I tried to stop her: "Everything I do is wrong. Tell me now - don't run away."

After our argument I went back to my room. I felt very sorry for myself. I started to pray to God to please help me and to turn her heart. It worked. She is back to normal.

Goodman Kivan

The Union and the Belungus

A scene from a play

Two men meet in a shebeen after work. They clearly know each other well.

Mbopha : Oh, I am tired today. Maybe I would feel better if I had some beer.

Magwaza (laughing loudly): You know we are poor and I can't afford to buy beer from the shebeen, only tshwala.

Mbopha: No problem, Mr Magwaza, I drink even the home made beer. I have no problems with it.

(Both have a long drink and smack their lips)

Magwaza: Now, Mr Mbopha, tell me how your belungu behaves now that you are a union man?

Mbopha: The belungus are now kwaad vir my. They say I'm no longer good and honest, and they often harass me now. I don't know what to do about it.

Magwaza: Why don't you get away from that union of yours. Don't you know that the belungus have the power and the will to fire you from that job and you can lose everything?

Mbopha : What for?

Magwaza ; Because you joined the union.

Mbopha (angrily) : What have the belungus done for me and my family before? Look! I am poor, my family is poor. I am staying in this mkhukhu because of them. But now you say I must abandon my union? Never will I do that. How dare they ask! I will never do that!

Magwaza (listens intently and without saying anything. Then he murmurs): Hm, ndodana. Do you believe in those union men, and do you trust them more than umlungu, the one who gives you money and a job?

Mbopha : Oh yes, why not? I trust them and I believe in them and I have a hope that they will help me to fight for my rights and better pay so that I will be able to feed my old father and my wife and we will no longer have to stay in this shack. There will be a day when we will sit like this together, discussing and relating stories. But not demoralising stories - interesting ones about nature and the environment and about our kings and chiefs who died long ago fighting for this country that was taken away by the belungus who made us so poor so we became beggars in the land of our ancestors.

Niresh Woodraj

Where I am going to

I am going to a place where
there are no broken down shacks
but homes instead.

I am going to a place where
there are no killings.

A place where we are wanted
by people who love and care

A place where
there are no bodies on the roadside.

Where I will hear the sound
of happy children playing.

I am going to a place where
misunderstandings are ironed out
by sitting and talking like old friends.

I am going to a place where
people are not carrying bundles of clothes
on their head, running for their lives
after their houses are burnt down,
having no place to stay.

I am going to a place where
we are free to sing and dance.

Vusi Bhengu



I was born in 1957, two years before the people's organisations were banned. My father said that my name stands for an unretiring fighter striving for success and harmony in his family and nation.

I grew up in a mission place where schooling and going to church were important. In 1980 I started work as an office worker, which I am still doing now. My mother and the one I love have always encouraged and supported me. I dedicate this writing to them.

Goodman Kivan



I grew up not knowing who my father was. When I was three years old my mother changed my name, Andile, to Goodman, because she feared that I will be bewitched. I grew up in the rural areas. It was a place of dense forests and wild animals and many different kinds of birds. In 1978 my mother died, and I learnt how to be a man. I had to leave school and look for a job. I worked in the Hlobane mine and joined NUM. We fought for better working conditions, but in 1990 Xhosa workers were driven out of the mines by UWUSA. I was one of them.

Nester Luthuli



I was born at Nkululeko and lived near the river where people used to do their washing. It was at the time when the Indians were fighting each other.

My father gave me the name Makhosazane because he was very old, so he did not believe that he will have a child. My father was a driver of two donkeys and a cart, and I was special to him.

I am medium size and not fat like a pumpkin. I work as a domestic worker, and I am a member of SADWU.

Madlinyoka Ntanzi



I was born in a rural area. I grew up with people who liked to make us fight. This helped me to grow up strong, clever and always eager to fight. When I became a big boy I left home to search for a job. I was a metal worker until I was retrenched.

Because of this country's problems I don't have a straight place to stay. I stand for the truth: everyone must be free so that we can do things and not be scared.

Gladman 'Mvukuzane' Ngubo



I'm generally known by my praisename, 'Mvukuzane', mole. I got the name from my friends when I was very young, because they said I was shy to speak, but able to do awkward things.

I was born in Mkhumbane at the time of stokvels and marabi music. I went to school at Umzimkulu. I work in a factory in Pinetown and I am a member of NUMSA.

November Marasta Shabalala



I was born in summer on a sunny day in the rural areas. I don't want to shave because I want people to see that I am really grown-up. They used to tell me that I am a child because I am short.

As a writer, I think I'll give the readers interesting stories about our rural areas, and urban life and the struggle of workers. As a factory worker I can also tell them the struggle for workers' and peoples' rights, for which I think there is a great need in our communities in these days of changes in the world as a whole.

WHERE WE COME FROM is a first collection of poems and stories written by workers during a creative writing course.

The stories arise out of the rural and urban environments of workers in Natal; they trace some of the issues facing migrant labourers, they describe horrendous effects of the war in Natal and they paint images of problems at the workplace.