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Ingane YAMI

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Illustrations by Elizabeth Goode



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Sibu goes to School

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Illustrations by Elizabeth Goode

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It was a very big day for this child of mine. Today Sibu would go to school for the first time. Nerves and excitement danced inside of me as I was sure this would be a good place for him to learn and make new friends, but I also felt worried to see this little man leave me and find himself in the great big world out there.



I had been awake before the sun to get everything ready. Our clothes were washed and I hung them out to dry for the day.



I prepared his favourite breakfast; warm porridge with sweet milky tea to give him energy for such an important first day. He looked so smart in his crisp new uniform and shiny shoes.



At last we were ready for the big day!

Sisiza Abantu Special School is a place where children with different gifts go to learn. It had been built many years ago by missionaries in the village below the mountain where we lived. Still today, children from all of the nearby villages meet there to learn together and share their gifts.



We got to the bus stop early, the morning was cool and the air was fresh. My child smiled as he held my hand tightly. I could tell he felt excited, but maybe a little shy too.

Waiting at the bus stop was a young girl a little older than Sibu. She had a school bag with a badge that had “Sisiza Abantu” on it. Sibu was going to her school! “Good morning!” I said and signed at the same time, to include Sibu in the conversation. “Good morning Gogo!” she replied.



I introduced Sibu and explained that he would be starting at her school that day. “My name’s Mbali, nice to meet you Sibu!” she said with her voice and her hands. “There are a few other children at the school who use their hands to talk,” she explained. “They have taught me some words and I’m trying to learn more.” She showed Sibu her sign name, which looked a lot like the sign for “flower”.

Mbali was a hearing child who had been learning sign language from some of her other deaf friends. Her skin was white like milk and her blue eyes gleamed behind thick spectacles. Her soft blonde hair was neatly tucked under a big floppy hat which protected her pale skin from the burning African sun.





They sat next to each other on the bus, and after twenty minutes were giggling and communicating as if they'd known each other forever.

Mbali was holding a fifty rand note in her hand the whole way. I asked her about it as I wondered whether Sibu also needed to take money to school that day. She explained that it was for Mrs Ndlovu, the school nurse. She supplied Mbali with special sun screen to protect her sensitive skin.

As we arrived at school, Sibu sat up straight looking at all the different children who would soon become his new friends. Some of the boys were already playing soccer, their shiny black shoes becoming dustier with every kick. A group of older girls were sitting on tyres, smiling and laughing as they caught up on all their holiday news.

Sibu's eyes lit up to see their happy hands talking. "SAME ME" he signed, as we both watched them talking with their hands.



This was a special place where children who were different could feel safe in their differences.

I held Sibu's hand as we went to find his class. Mbali waved goodbye as she ran to greet her teacher.



We had a wonderful time that morning meeting the children in Sibu's class. Other children also used their hands to talk. Sibu was the only one with hearing aids. Mr Xulu showed us around the school. Sibu's brightly coloured classroom was a warm and friendly space.

Sibu chose his desk in the front row. Being near the front would be important for my child as he needs to be able to see the teacher very clearly without other things distracting him. I showed Mr Xulu his hearing aids and gave him some extra batteries to keep for Sibu.



When the bell rang for break time this old body was tired.
It had been many years since I had last been at school!

Sibu tapped my arm as he pointed to the corridor. There
our new friend Mbali seemed very upset as she desperately
looked for something.

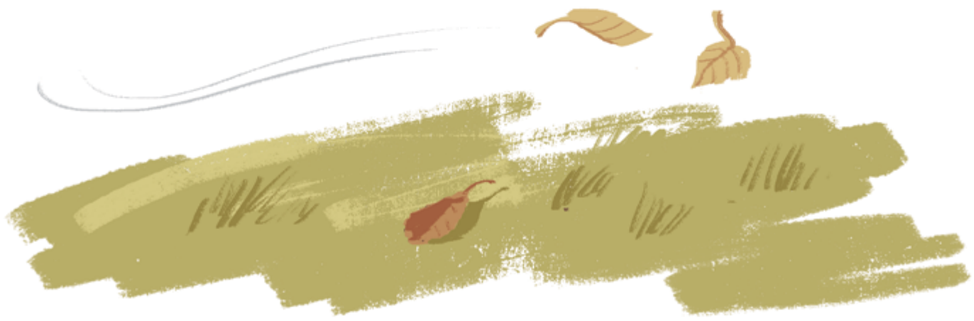


We rushed over to see if we could help.

"I've lost Mrs Ndlovu's money! I had it
with my books and now I can't find it,"
she explained as plump tears
rolled down her cheeks
behind her spectacles.

I explained to Sibu what the problem was and without a second thought he began to search. This child of mine's world is quiet but his eyes are always sharp and ready.

Within a few minutes of searching his waving arms caught our attention. He had found the money! Somehow the morning breeze must have taken the note for a little flight. It had landed in the nearby garden like a big red butterfly between the violet petunias.







In relief Mbali ran over to Sibu and gave him a huge hug. “Thank you!” she signed, her bright smile bigger than I’d seen before. “You have excellent eyes!” Sibu looked so proud that he was able to help his new friend. His gift had helped her.



When it was time to go home the three of us made our way to the bus stop. It was noisy and busy and I worried about how this child of mine would do this safely every day. The taxi drivers weren't careful and my boy couldn't hear them hoot as their way of warning everyone to move out of the way. Our new friend Mbali, who needed Sibu's sharp eyes earlier that day, grabbed his hand and helped him get to the bus safely.



"Thank you Mbali," I nodded as I showed her that I had seen her care. "You are both going to need each other. Your gifts are different. They can be gifts for one another too." When we arrived back home my heart felt full of gratitude. It had been a good day!





As I cleared the bushes of our dry washing, I noticed that my pink duku was missing. "Sibu, do you think those wise eyes could scout the yard for my duku?"

Eyes beaming and bent over with laughter, my boy's giggling hands signed, "GOAT – HAT - GOAT"! I looked around the corner to where he had come from. Rama, our ram, must have walked under the wet clothes earlier in the day. He looked pleased with his new pink hat wrapped around his horns!



Marvellous things happen every day in our lives. With a special boy and different new friends, special gifts and daily challenges to solve, every day is exciting and unique! That's a blessing to me... to have days filled with moments to treasure.

