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Isipho - The Gift

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Ingane YAMI

ISIPHO

-The Gift



Bianca Birdsey and Claudine Storbeck

Illustrations by Elizabeth Goode



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I knew our people would be receiving a blessing.
When he was born I saw greatness in his eyes.
We called him Sibusiso -the blessing.

Our mountain top village rests above the clouds. The fiery sun greets us warmly every evening just before it exchanges places with the moon. The people here enjoy a simple life. Every homestead has chickens, goats and sheep. The wealthy even have cows! The sweet air is rich with the laughter of children as they play in the warm sun.





When Sibu was two years old his mother found a job in the city. She comes home at month-end with supplies. She always brings home some potato samosas, Sibu's favourite city treat!

Sibu lives with me and joins me daily at my stall. We sell fried fish and chilli straight off the hot coals. It's good to see people enjoying my food. Sibu enjoys the amagwinya that the aunty across the road makes.

This child of mine enjoys many things that are the same for other children his age. He loves playing soccer on the open ground near our home.





His wire car that a neighbour's son made for him, is one of his favourite toys. His eyes are sharp and his hands are marvellous. He is, however, different from the other young boys I see.

When I would be telling stories to his cousin and neighbours, Sibu would be quiet, looking at everyone like a wise old man, just thinking and watching.

Sometimes the people would ask questions and say things like, “He might be bewitched!”. I knew my child. He was clever and kind - he was not cursed.



One day I took him to the local hospital. The doctor listened to my concerns and gave me a letter for the big city hospital. We had to catch the bus.





We packed our bags for the long journey and slept in the hospital chapel until it was time to go. Sibu was tired. The noise of the bus didn't bother him. It was still dark when we left- the chickens were still sleeping.

After a long bumpy ride we arrived at the city hospital and found our way to “AUDIOLOGY” just as the envelope directed.





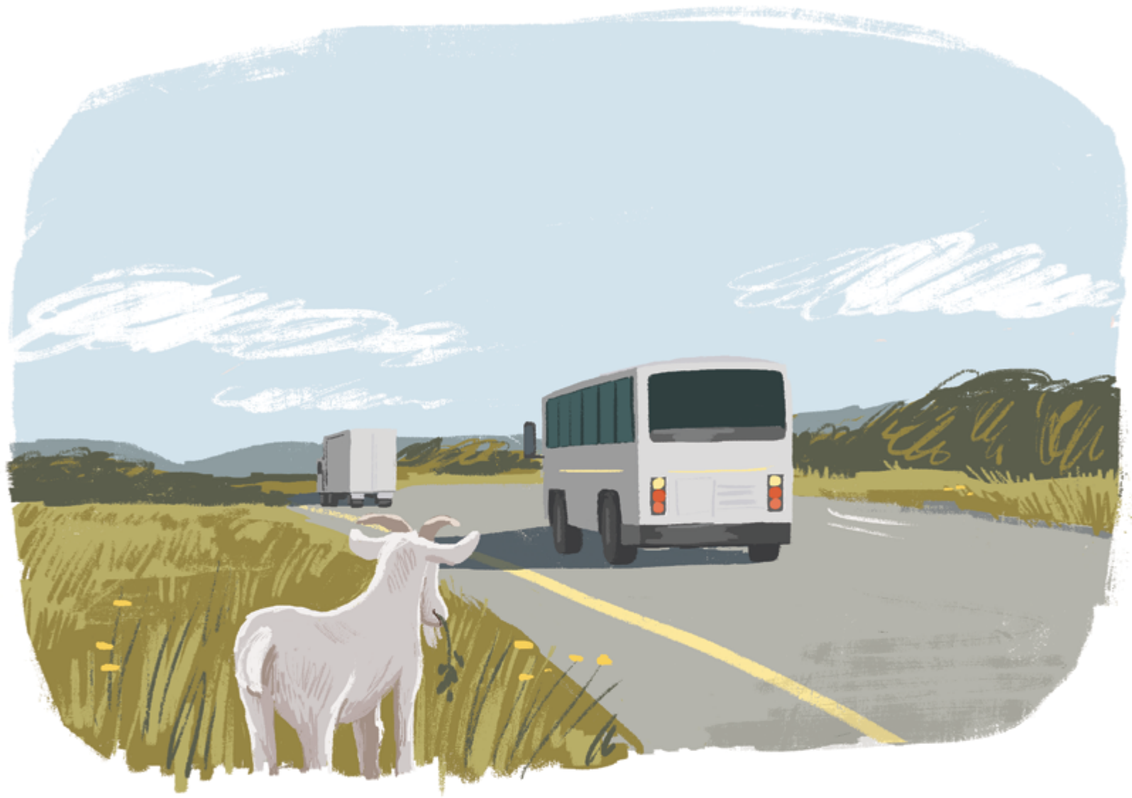


After hours of talking with my child and doing various tests, a young audiologist called me in to discuss her findings.

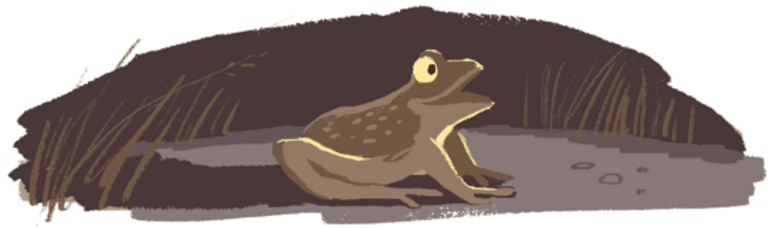
“Gogo, I’m so sorry, your boy cannot hear. He is deaf.” She wrote another letter, which she gave back to me, to hand in at our local hospital on our return, and we left.







The bus ride home was a welcomed quiet time to wonder about our future. I imagined what this would mean for our family. Why had this happened? This must be the gift that I knew was coming even before he was born. This child of mine would show me what he needed, he would teach me more than great men.



Thay night Sibu lay sleeping as I listened to the sounds of the night. Dogs barked, there were distant taxis that still had their loud music blaring, and a choir of crickets and frogs were enthusiastically singing. Even a confused rooster filled the crisp air with his call. My boy lay quiet, undisturbed by the noises which were competing for my peace. This child of mine, what will you teach me?

The next day Sibu and I met the nurse who was waiting at the hospital entrance for us. Next to her was a young man. Dressed in hospital overalls, I could see that he was one of the hospital's gardeners. The gardens always looked so beautiful and neat.

He greeted me by lifting his hand. The nurse explained that he was deaf and that he uses his hands to speak. He works hard and supports his family who live just down the hill. Jabulani was willing to meet with Sibu and me to teach us his magical language. We had a friend who understood who my boy was!



Hours turned into days which turned into weeks and months, and my time spent with Sibu and Jabulani saw my child find himself. Even these old hands moved in ways that I never thought possible. This child of mine was talking with me, and what an amazing boy he was.



When neighbours saw us talking they sometimes looked confused. I reminded them that they use their hands when they call the taxis. This is no different.



Some of the children also said they wanted magical hands! We would teach them what we knew and soon Sibu had friends who could talk to him too.



In the new year my boy would start school. He would need to go to a special school in the nearby town. That school had many learners who had different kinds of wonderful gifts. Some had magic with their hands like Sibu and others were different in other ways. All of them with the wisdom of old men! I will miss not having Sibu with me every day at my fish stall.





We had to make another trip to the big city. This time to fetch Sibu's hearing aids. He was so brave as the doctors touched in and around his ears. They taught me how to look after them and I bought a few extra packs of batteries. I was also given a little jar to put them in at night, this would keep them dry and safe.

Sibu looked proud as the shiny little machines caught the rays of sunlight. Oh, he did look handsome! The village children were going to be so envious of my special boy!



He may only be young but he has taught me so much. He has taught me to listen with my eyes, there is so much to see. The details of the flowers on the side of the road sing with bright colours as they dance in the breeze. My ears sometimes distract my eyes from noticing the special details.

Sibu doesn't have that problem. Sibu notices how people are feeling long before those old eyes have even seen them. He is kind, gentle and strong.



We stand together admiring the display in the sky. Orange, pink and golden rays weave between the clouds. It has just rained and the smell of earth is comforting. It reminds me that there is hope. Hope in knowing that when we are understood we can be who we were made to be. Hope that says, “Being different is wonderfully special.”

