

# Caring Kids

A Collection of Short Stories



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Illustrations: Pandora Alberts

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*Until you have loved an animal a part of  
your soul remains unawakened.*

*— Anonymous*

Kittens... kittens... kittens!



by Pandora Alberts

## A beautiful pet called Lucy

Belinda had a special pet. Her name was Lucy and she was a beautiful fluffy white kitten with a black smudge on her nose. Her eyes were a mysterious grey-green colour and she had a long tail. Belinda and Lucy were the best of friends.

When Belinda came home from school, Lucy was waiting for her. Sometimes Lucy would jump out at Belinda from behind the gatepost, or climb up into the Jacaranda tree and whisk off Belinda's hair ribbon as she passed below.

She loved to be pushed around in Belinda's doll's pram, dressed up in baby clothes with a knitted teddy tucked in beside her! She also loved to ride in Belinda's backpack, or curl up on her lap while Belinda watched television. At night Lucy slept on her bed, where she would snuggle into Belinda's arms, purring like a tiny engine.

Lucy grew up fast. She loved to jump out of the window at night and go prowling in the moonlit garden. She stalked shadows on the stoep and made friends with a gang of other cats who walked on garden walls. Quite often she was away until the birds awoke to sing in the Jacarandas.



## Lucy becomes a mother

“You're almost a big cat now,” Belinda said, stroking Lucy's lovely soft fur. Lucy's tummy was becoming very fat.

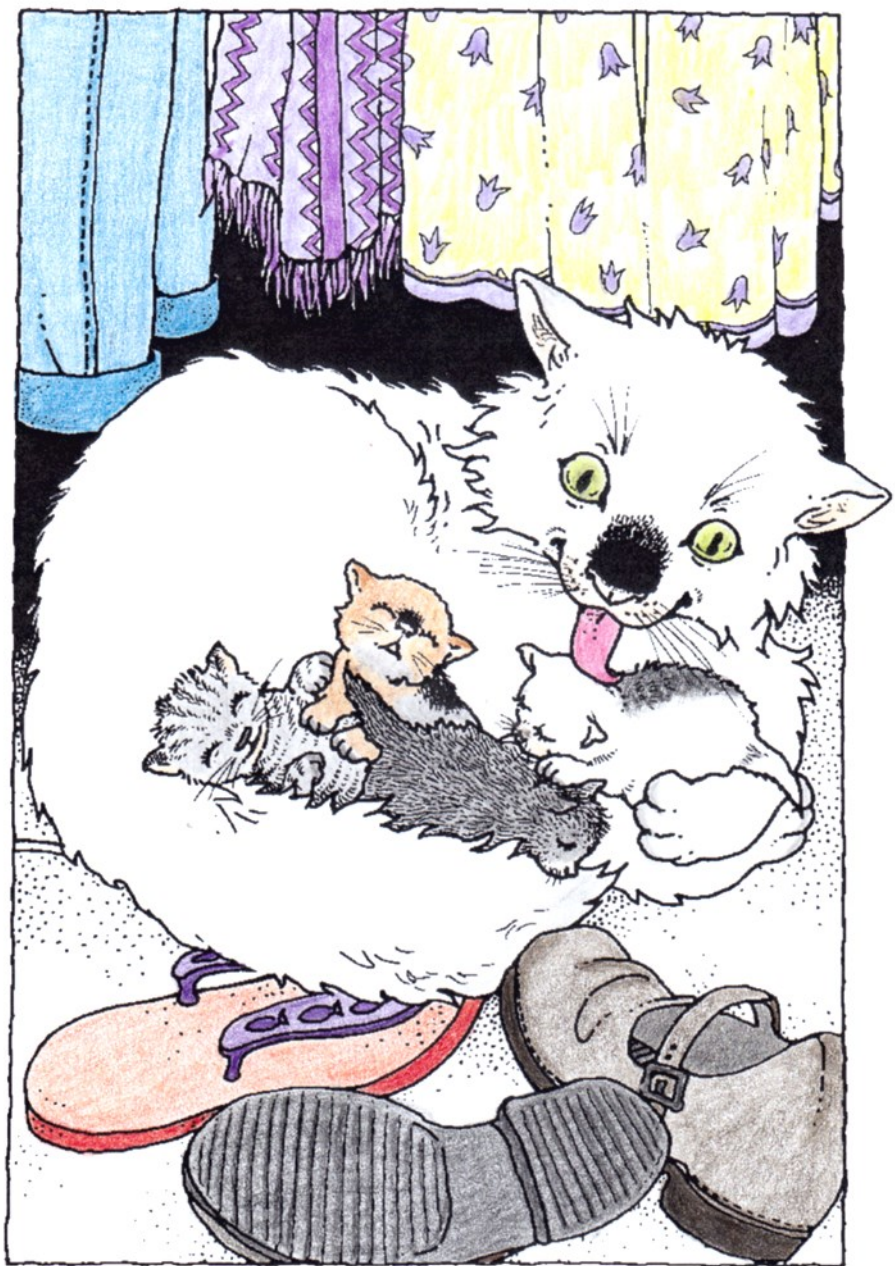
“Goodness, we'd better not give her quite so much to eat,” said Belinda's mother.

“I have news for you,” said Belinda's Granny. “Lucy is going to have kittens. The daddy cat must be one of the cats who walks on the walls.”

“Kittens? Wow!” Belinda was thrilled. She couldn't wait for the day when the kittens would be born. She was even more excited when she came home from school one afternoon to find Lucy had given birth to four babies in her wardrobe. She lay proudly licking the tiny kittens with her pink tongue.

“Oh! They are so adorable!” everybody said. Lucy let Belinda play with her babies. There was a white one, a black one, a pale grey stripy one, and a fluffy spotted one just like Lucy.

At first the kittens' eyes were tightly shut but after four or five days, their eyes opened.



As they grew, they became lively and mischievous. They climbed the curtains and jumped on the table. Mother was not pleased.

“We can't keep all these cats,” she said to Belinda. “You will have to find homes for them.”

“Oh no!” cried Belinda. “They are Lucy's children.” However, Mother was stern: “Five cats! Impossible!” she said.

With a heavy heart, Belinda took the kittens to school in a basket and gave them all away. A lot of children wanted the kittens. It seemed easy to find homes for them.

### Kittens returned, kittens lost and kittens found

That evening there was a knock on the door. There stood the boy who had taken the white kitten. Next to him stood his father with the kitten in his hands.

“We can't keep a cat,” said the boy's father. “We live in a flat on the tenth floor. We have no garden. Everyone is out all day. That's no life for a pet. Why didn't anyone ask me first whether my son could take a kitten?”



“You shouldn't just give animals away if you don't know what kind of home they're going to.”

He sounded very angry. Belinda took back the white kitten.

“I'm sorry,” she said. “I didn't think of that.”

She started worrying about the other kittens she had given away. Were they going to be properly cared for?

Tomorrow was Saturday. She decided she would visit the homes of the other children who had taken the kittens.

The girl who had taken the black kitten looked very sad. “My dog killed the kitten,” she said. “I didn't think he'd do something like that.”

“You didn't tell me you had a dog!” shouted Belinda. “Now my kitten is dead!”

“She wasn't your kitten!” the girl shouted back. “You gave her to me.”

“She's nobody's kitten now,” sobbed Belinda as she turned away.

She was almost too afraid to ask about the other kittens.



The pale grey stripy kitten was lost. "It's so strange," said the older sister of the girl who had taken him. "We put him down in the garden and he just took off down the road. He seemed so nervous. We've looked and looked but there's no sign of him."



Nobody had thought of keeping the kitten indoors in a quiet place until he had got to know his new family. Belinda watched the cars speeding down the busy road. What a dangerous place for a lost kitten!

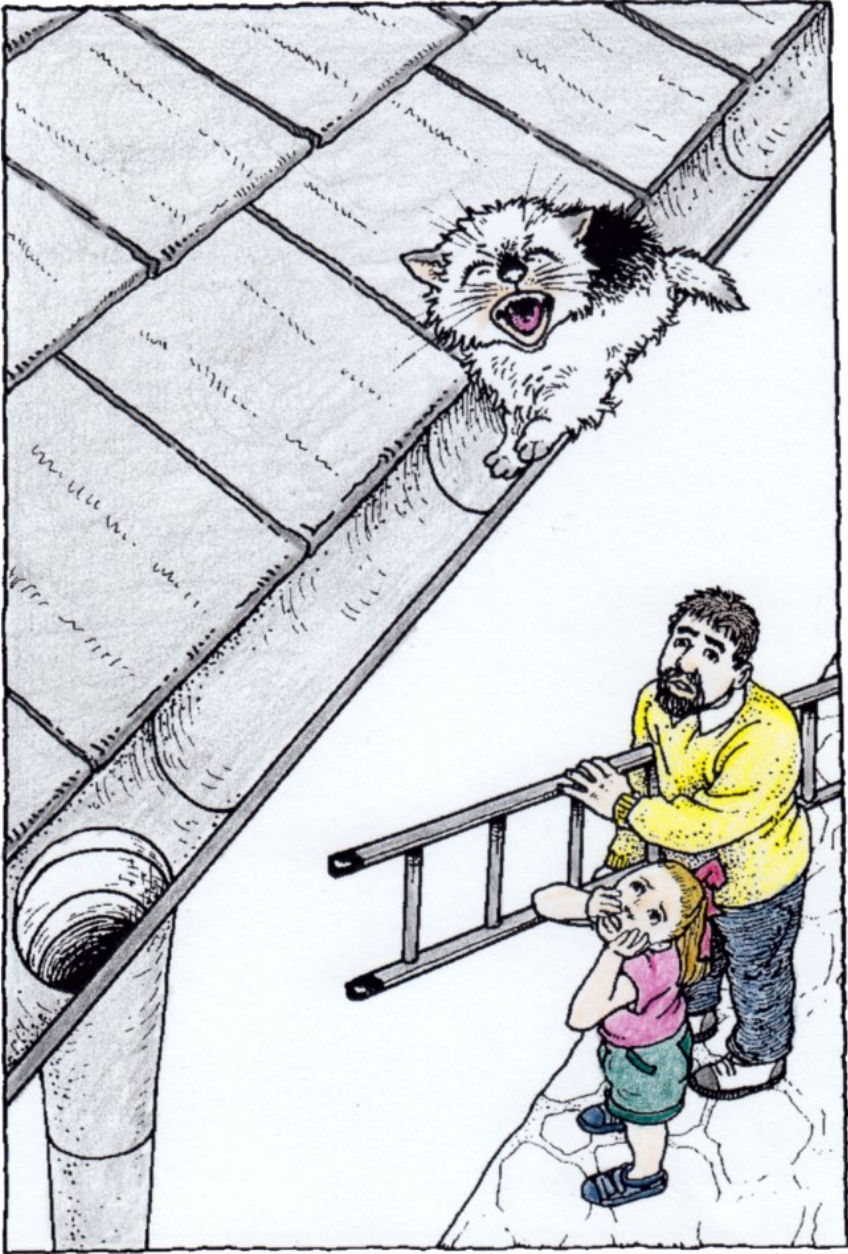
With a heavy heart she knocked on the door of the last house. Silence. Again and again she knocked. There was no-one at home. Belinda was about to turn away when she heard a tiny mew. Looking up, she saw the black-and-white fluffy kitten clinging to the roof. She was stuck.

“Oh no! How did you get up there? What am I going to do?”

She could not reach the kitten who just crouched in the gutter and mewed pitifully. At last Belinda found a kind neighbour who brought a ladder. He climbed up and rescued the kitten.

“I'm surprised that family has a kitten,” said the neighbour. “They go to their holiday house every weekend. I suppose they thought the kitten would look after itself.” Belinda held the tiny body close and felt its heart pattering under the soft fur.

“I am taking you back home,” she whispered to the kitten. “It was a big mistake to send you here.”



## Granny to the rescue

At home, Belinda had an argument with her mother.

“We HAVE to keep these two kittens,” she wailed.

“The new homes were terrible. The people didn't know how to look after their animals. They said they wanted them, but they didn't really.”

“We can't have three cats, Belinda,” her mother said.

“They will have babies too. How many cats are we going to end up with? Hundreds!”

Granny had the answer.

“There's only one thing to do, and we should have thought of it earlier. We have to take the cats to the vet and have them spayed. Then they won't be able to have babies. We can keep these three if they don't breed.”

“What does 'spayed' mean?” asked Belinda.

“It means that the vet, or animal doctor, does a small operation on the cat to remove the part that makes babies,” said Granny.

“Well, we had better do it soon,” said Mother.

“We don't want any more sad stories.”

The operations didn't cost too much. Belinda's mother said it was worth it, to avoid all the suffering of unwanted animals.

Lucy and her two daughters are happy and so is Belinda, because now she won't have to find homes for any more kittens!





# The dog who lost her coat

by Pandora Alberts

## Meet the friends

Tebogo liked to play with his friends, Siza and Shado. They walked all over the neighbourhood, playing games with other children and going to the Spaza shop when they had some money. Tebogo's dog, Lana, always went with them.

One day, Siza said: "Tebogo, Lana is scratching a lot. Perhaps she has fleas." Lana's hair started to fall out.

In the beginning it was just a little bit, here and there, but it became worse.

Tebogo

Siza

Shado



Tebogo's mother bought some flea powder at the shop. "Put some of this on her and wash her bedding," said the man behind the counter. Tebogo and his mother did as the man said, but Lana went on scratching.

Worse still, people began to look at Lana and laugh. "Look at Tebogo's dog!" they shouted. "Tebogo, your dog is naked!"

By this time, Lana had lost most of her hair. She didn't have fun any more. Tebogo was very sad for Lana. Winter was coming and now she had no hair to keep her warm.





Tebogo's older sister, Sindi, was at college. One Friday she came home from campus with a brown paper parcel.

"I have a present for Lana," Sindi said. "I knitted it myself."

Tebogo opened the parcel. Inside was a striped jersey!

"Haau!" said Tebogo. "I didn't know dogs could wear clothes."

He put the jersey on Lana straight away. When Siza and Shado saw Lana in her jersey, they laughed and laughed. Tebogo became angry and went away by himself.

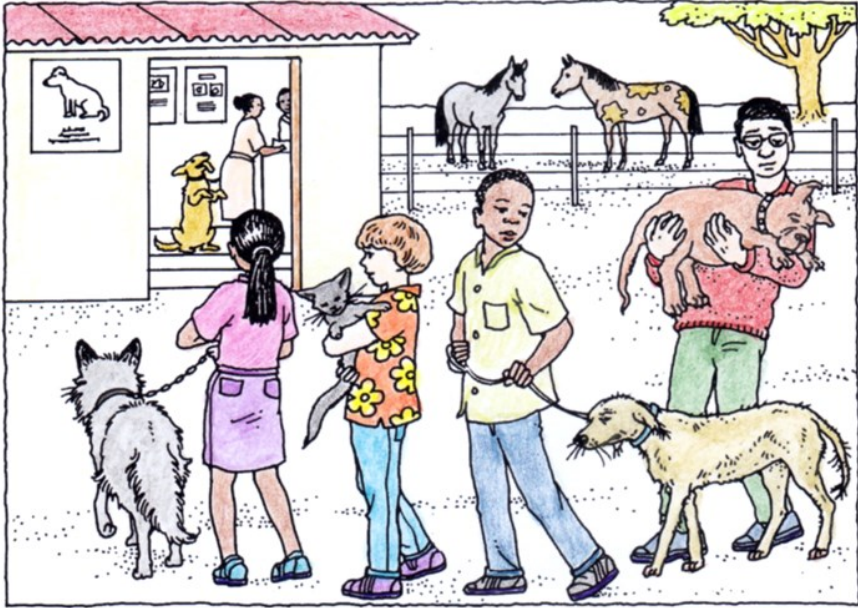


“What's so funny?” he thought sadly. “Maybe they are not really my friends.”

That night Lana scratched so much in her jersey that, by morning, it was ruined. Tebogo had to unwind the tangled wool from her paws. Nothing seemed to help poor Lana.

But mother had an idea. “Take Lana to the animal welfare clinic and see if they can help her,” she said.

The animal clinic was open on Wednesdays. Tebogo put Lana on a lead and waited in the queue with many other people and their pets.



## At the Veterinarian

When the veterinarian saw Lana, she said: "Oh, what a bad case of mange. She's got fleas and ticks too!"

She picked Lana up and put her on the table. She took a skin scraping from Lana and gave her an injection. Lana gave a little yelp, but she did not try to bite the vet.

"Good dog, Lana," said the vet. "That will begin to heal your skin." Then she put Lana in a big tub full of water and special medicine.



Lana did not like being in the bath but the vet washed her all over, even her face and ears, to get rid of the fleas and ticks that were troubling her.

“Now I want you to bring Lana back every week for an injection until her hair has grown again,” the vet told Tebogo. “Please wash her blanket every week as well,” she said.

The vet then showed Tebogo something very interesting. She pointed to an instrument called a microscope. The vet had put the skin scraping from Lana on a piece of glass under the microscope. She told Tebogo to look into the eyepiece.

“Aaah!” yelled Tebogo, “I can see monsters running around.”



“Those bugs are too small to see with the naked eye but under the microscope they look much bigger,” said the vet. “They have been eating Lana's skin and giving her mange. That is why she has been scratching so much.”

### Lana finds her coat

In time, Lana's hair began to grow back again. Tebogo's mother added a teaspoon of cooking oil to Lana's food to make her hair soft. By the middle of winter she was beautiful and fluffy.

When they went back to the clinic, the vet said to Tebogo: "Lana is cured. You have looked after her very well."

Lana was a happy and playful dog once more. She no longer scratched. She played with Tebogo, Siza and Shado in the neighbourhood again. Tebogo decided he would study very hard so that when he grew up, he could become a vet and heal sick animals.

During the Spring, exciting things happened. There was a dog show at the high school. Tebogo brushed Lana's coat until it shone. There were twenty dogs at the show. Some could do tricks. Some were very big and some were small.

Tebogo walked round the judging ring with Lana on a lead. Other children did the same. The judges looked at the dogs and made notes in their books.

Finally, the prizes were given out. "The prize for the dog with the best coat," said the judge, "goes to Lana!"

Everybody cheered and clapped and whistled. Proudly, Tebogo led Lana up to the judges to get the rosette and a big bag of dog food. Lana's tail wagged. She knew she looked wonderful.



The next exciting thing was the school prize-giving. Tebogo had come first in Mathematics and Natural Science. He knew now that with hard work, his dream to become a vet could come true.

“Lana, life is good,” he said, stroking his best friend's head. Lana sat up smiling. She knew that already.

Molo,  
king of the dump



by Pandora Alberts

## Life on the Dump

Ever since he can remember, Vusi has lived on the rubbish dump. He doesn't know how old he is, but old Gogo Mieta says she thinks he must be eleven or twelve. He is small and shy.

Sometimes when he pushes his squeaky old wire trolley to town to sell the glass bottles and cans he has collected, the big city boys tease him. They point to his dirty white cap and call out: "Here comes a 'kiewiet' bird! Look at his skinny legs! Fly away, fly away!"

Vusi tries not to say very much. He keeps to one side. If he makes any money, he hides it in his shoe. Later he will buy red sausage and fruit and bread for Gogo Mieta to make sandwiches. Sometimes he has enough left to buy a cool drink. Life on the dump is hard. Vusi wears clothes that have been thrown away and scratched out of black bags and piles of burning garbage. In the winter he is always cold and the rain makes the sores on his legs sting.

His hair always smells of smoke and his hands are cut from digging through rubbish. He wears odd shoes. They are too large so he must stuff them with rags to keep them on his feet.



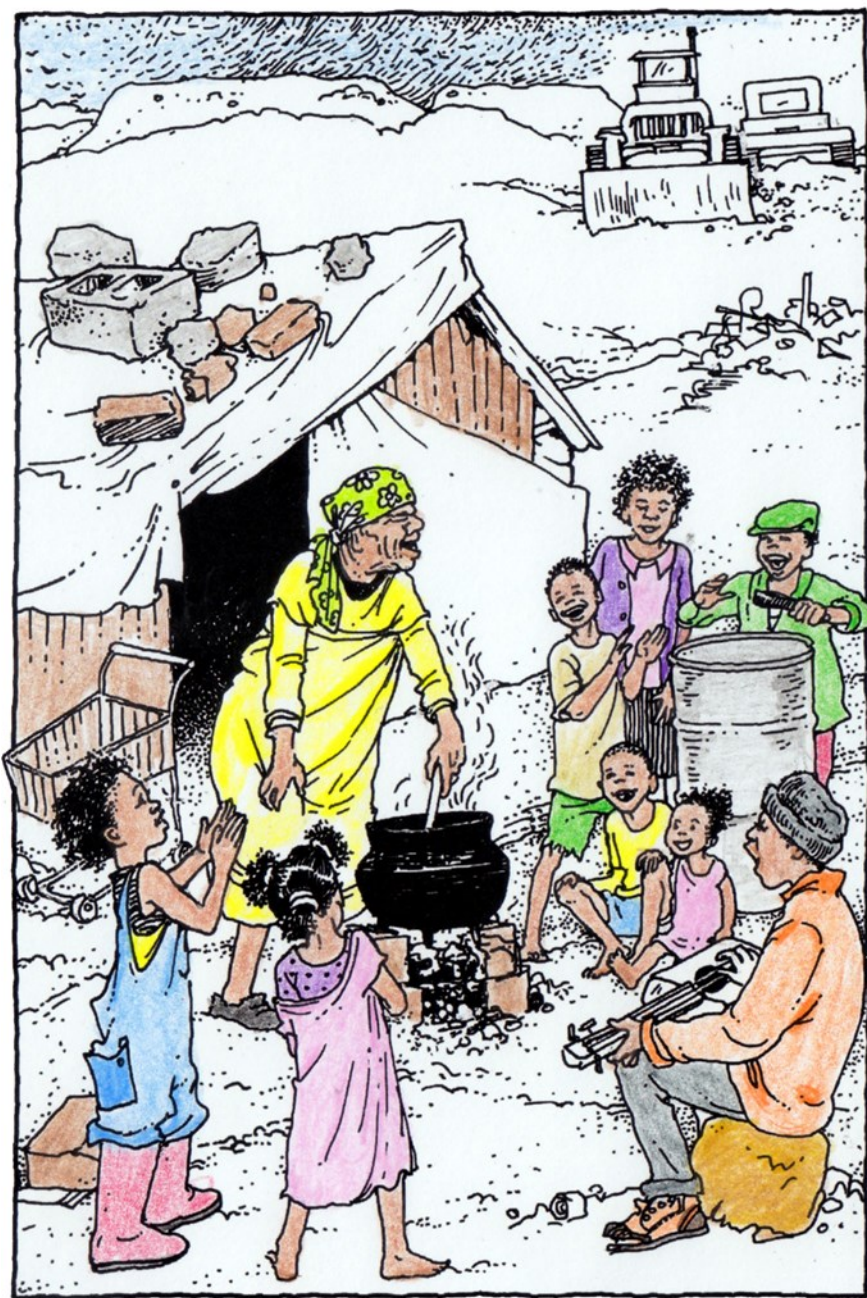
Shoes always lose their mates in the garbage trucks. Vusi wishes that people would tie the laces together before they throw them away.

Today is Sunday, and Sunday on the dump is special. The fires that make the stinking smoke have almost gone out. The huge bulldozers that push the piles of rubbish are parked and silent.

Vusi does not have to push his trolley down the free-way into town.

All the children in Gogo's shelter help to make soup in the black pot. The best thing is when they sing together. Gogo teaches them hymns and one of the older boys plays his guitar.

Vusi beats a forty-gallon drum. They sound amazing!



## A friend called Molo

Today something is missing. The big white goat who lives on the dump has not been seen anywhere. Vusi loves the goat. He has given him the name “Molo,” because it seems as though the goat greets him every morning when they meet on the mountains of garbage. Molo is half wild. He doesn't allow anyone but Vusi to touch him. They often spend whole days together. When Vusi finds something special he holds it up for Molo to see.

“Look at this, Molo Goat,” Vusi says. “A huge red shirt, with some buttons left. Don't you like it?”

Molo looks at him sideways with his yellow eyes and Vusi is sure he answers: “Ho, Vusi, I have no use for that red shirt. Look what I have. Some pineapple tops and a delicious old sock!” Molo is always hopping and scrambling. He stands on the very top of the heaps as though he owns the dump.

“We are going to put that goat in our stew pot,” warns Gogo. But Molo is too agile to be caught. He just shakes his beard and gallops away.

Now Vusi scrambles about searching for Molo. Has he ended up in someone else's cooking pot?



He looks all over the dump but can find no sign of Molo.

“Molo! Molo Goat!” Vusi is very worried.

“Come and eat your food while it is hot,” calls Gogo.

## Molo in danger

Early the next morning Elvis the bulldozer driver finds Molo lying under his machine. Vusi thinks he is dead but when he strokes Molo's nose, the goat opens his eyes and snorts. There is foam around his mouth and his legs kick.

“Eish, that goat's finished,” Elvis says. He climbs up into the bulldozer and starts the engine.

Vusi has a plan. He knows that somewhere in town there is a doctor who can cure sick animals. “Help me put Molo in my trolley, Elvis,” he pleads.

“Vusi, forget it. That goat is going to die.”

But Elvis gets down off his bulldozer, picks up Molo and puts him in the trolley. Molo wriggles weakly and then lies still. His muddy hooves and his horns stick out through the trolley bars.



Vusi begins his long journey. The trolley wheels are small and get stuck in the tangled rubbish of the dump. Molo is a big goat and very heavy. Some of the other children help Vusi to wrestle the trolley to the freeway. There he begins to run! The freeway slopes downhill. At last Vusi reaches the town. There are people ahead of him, and traffic, and shops. He has to fight to get the trolley up and down kerbs. People stare and laugh.

Suddenly the bad city boys are standing in the road. They will not let him pass. They mock him. "Here comes kiewiet! Hey, is that your brother in the pram? Shall we push him into the traffic?"

Vusi feels a great red rage glow through him. "GET OUT OF MY WAY!" he screams. His voice is huge. He is no longer shy little Vusi.

The bad boys see how his eyes shine and they fall back in silence. Vusi pushes the trolley so fast it seems it may rattle to pieces.

A long way down this road there is a big white house with a notice-board in the garden.

Vusi cannot read the name on the board. "Is this the place of the animal doctor?" he asks a passer-by. The woman nods and points. "The blue door."



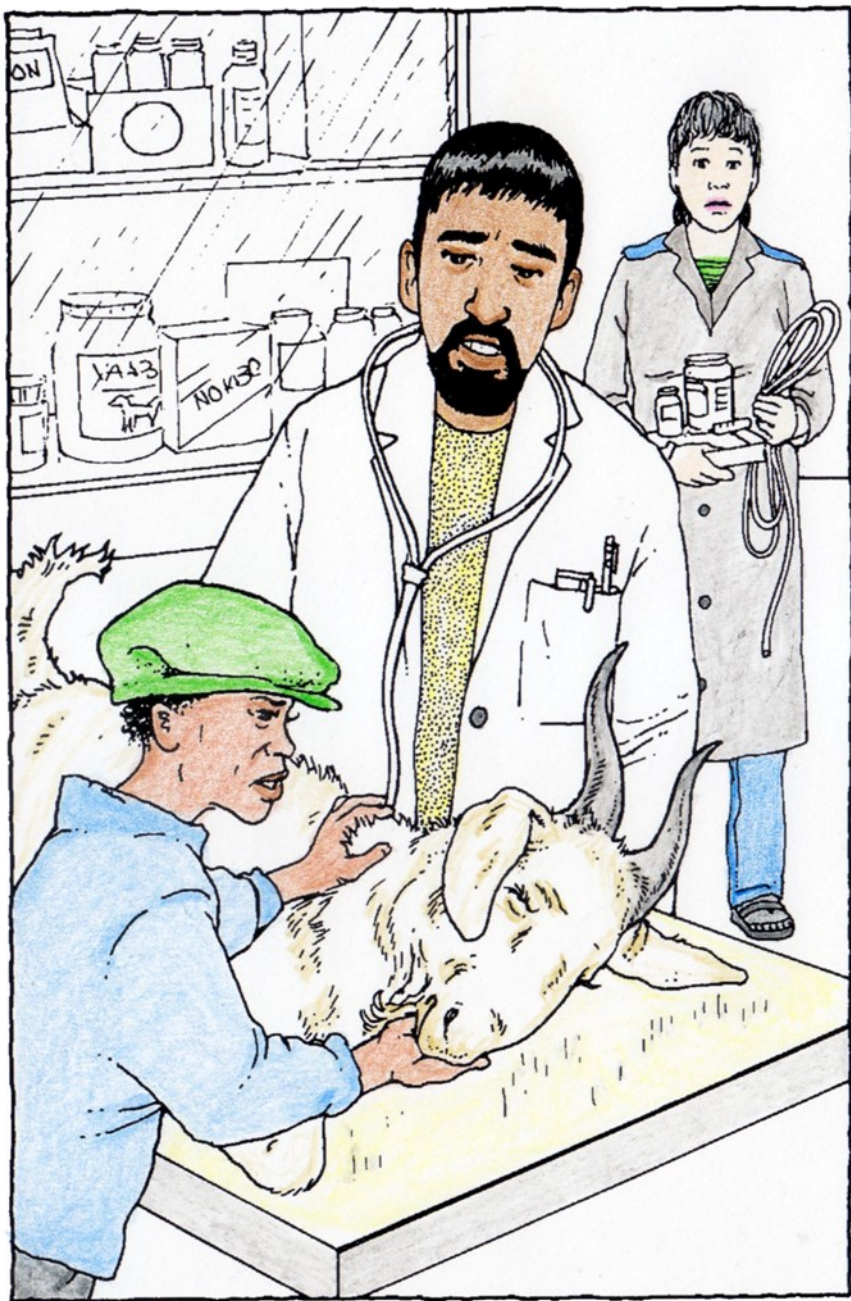
## A long, anxious wait

Inside the Veterinary Clinic kind Doctor Naidoo looks at Molo and shakes his head. “This goat has eaten something very poisonous. We don't know what the poison is. We shall try to save him, but don't expect too much.”

Vusi is exhausted. He sits down on the doorstep and puts his face in his hands. All day people bring their animals to be treated. There are cats in baskets, little dogs, big dogs, a parrot on someone's shoulder, even a snake in a cotton bag. Nobody else brings a goat. Some of the people wear smart clothes, and their animals are groomed and shiny, and they wear bright collars with little glass jewels in them. These people stare at Vusi and step around him as though he is dirty.

It is dark when Doctor Naidoo comes out to look for Vusi. He has put on a dark jacket over his white coat. He looks tired. “Your goat must stay in our hospital. He has a chance.” He looks at Vusi and frowns. “Where do you live?”

Vusi tells him about the dump and Gogo Mieta and the other children, and about their shelter made out of poles and wire and pieces of plastic.



“I think I know someone who can help you,” says Doctor Naidoo.

The person Doctor Naidoo wants Vusi to meet is a social worker called Sister Anna. She is kind and gentle and takes Vusi and his trolley home with her for the night.

Vusi has a bath in clean hot water, with soap bubbles, and a bouncy sponge. He washes his hair with silver-coloured shampoo and dries himself with a great big woolly orange towel.

This is a huge adventure! He smells wonderful.

Now he puts on some clothes that Sister Anna gives him to keep for ever. Vusi loves his second-hand jeans and a purple tracksuit top that is only a little too big.

“Now for supper,” says Sister Anna. She fries eggs and tomatoes, and makes huge sandwiches with cheese and some crunchy green leaves. Vusi picks up his knife and fork. He is so hungry he wants to cram all the food into his mouth at once. But he remembers that Gogo Mieta always insists on good manners.



Suddenly he remembers Molo Goat lying in the hospital and he can't eat anything. He covers his face with his hands and cries, "Molo is going to die!"

"Shh," says Sister Anna. She hugs him. "We will see him tomorrow. Clever Doctor Naidoo will do his best."

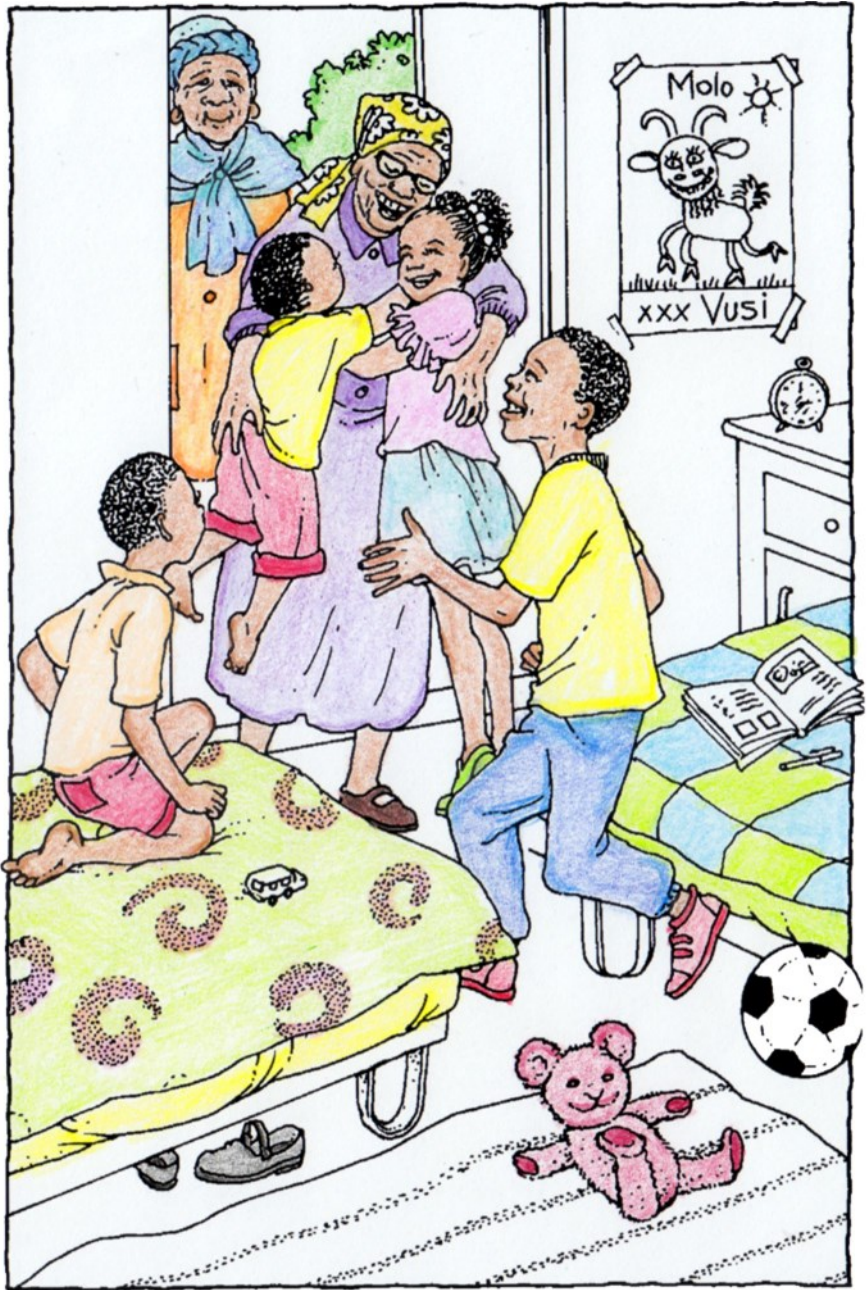
"The dump is no good without Molo," sobs Vusi.

## Wonderful new beginnings

Molo stays in the hospital for a week, and then he walks shakily onto the grass outside. Other good things happen too.

Sister Anna goes to see Gogo and the children at the dump so that she can find a proper place for them to stay. Vusi goes to school where his teacher says he will soon catch up with the other children. In his spare time, Vusi still collects the bottles and cans from the dump for pocket money.

Gogo shares a house with three other grannies, and the children have two big rooms for themselves. Most afternoons after school and soccer, Vusi goes to visit Molo who now lives in a grassy field at the animal welfare society with five other goats.



Molo puts his head over the fence so that Vusi can scratch him. “Are you happy, Molo Goat? Now that you have lovely food and five wives and no-one is hunting you for their cooking-pot?”

Molo just shakes his beard and twinkles at Vusi with his yellow eyes. It seems that he is saying, “No more rubbish for us, Vusi.”

Then he prances away across the grass, tail held high, his white coat shining.



Palesa  
finds a friend



by Pandora Alberts

## Obo in Trouble

Palesa lived with her mother and her younger twin brothers, Tshepo and Tshepang. Next door lived Mrs Malusi. She had a sad brown dog, called Obo, chained up in her yard. Often, Obo's water bowl was dry. He became very thirsty, especially when the sun was hot.

Palesa's mother worked far away and the children were often alone. The brown dog Obo liked Palesa. She talked to him when he was lonely. Sometimes she gave Obo a piece of her school lunch. The dog was very thin and hungry. Mrs Malusi did not feed him well. When she remembered, she would throw a piece of mieliepap onto the ground for Obo to eat.



One day when Palesa was coming home from school with the twins, she saw a dreadful sight. A big, bad boy was throwing stones at Obo. Obo was jumping and barking. Obo yelped when a stone hit him on the head. Palesa was so angry that she ran at the boy and pushed him over. All the people in the street laughed because he looked so silly, sitting in the mud.

“Go away!” yelled Palesa, “Leave that dog alone!”

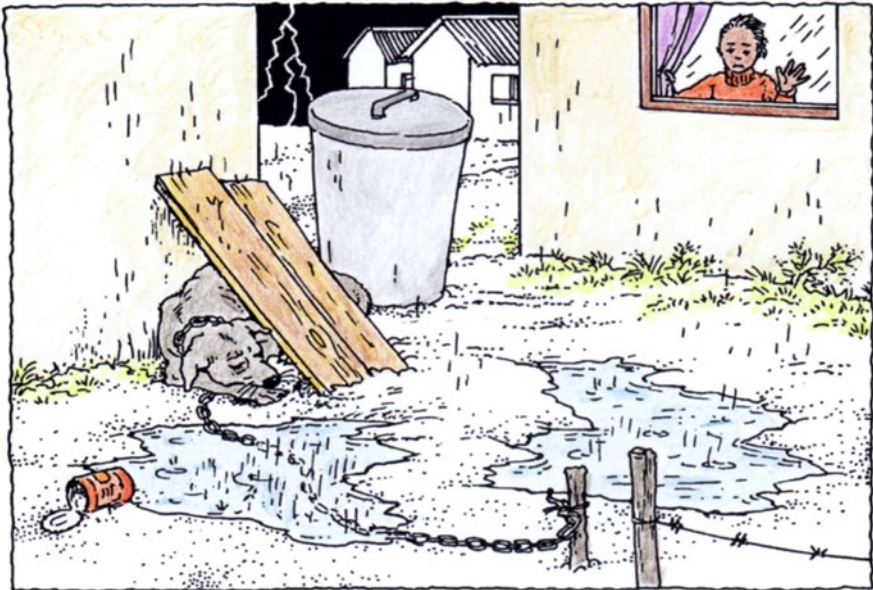
The boy picked himself up and walked away, but turned round and threatened Palesa. He pulled a horrible face. “I’m going to make trouble for you,” he said. This made Palesa very frightened, but she tried not to show it.



She took the twins home because they were crying. Luckily their mother was in the house waiting for them. “Watch out for that boy,” her mother said. “He does nasty things.”

## The dreadful storm

That night there was a terrible storm. Palesa lay snug and warm between Tshepo and Tshepang. She listened to the thunder crashing. The lightning made her house look blue and strange. Then came the rain, like hands drumming on the roof.



“How lucky I am to be warm, dry and safe,” Palesa thought happily. Then she heard Obo barking outside in the rain. He was frightened and cold. She did not feel happy any more. How could she help him? It was still raining in the morning.

Outside the twins wanted to splash in the puddles. Palesa had to drag them past Mrs Malusi's house. Mrs Malusi was in the yard. She was hitting Obo with a stick, and he was yelping. “Bad dog!” she shouted. “Bad dog. You were barking all night!”

Palesa felt herself becoming very angry. She was a bit afraid of Mrs Malusi, but she could not bear to watch Obo being beaten. “Stop, stop!” she screamed.



Mrs Malusi threw down the stick and turned on her. “If you like this dog so much, you had better take him. I don't want him any more!”

Mrs Malusi pushed Obo towards Palesa. Obo looked at Palesa with his soft brown eyes and wagged his tail.

It almost looked like he was smiling. Palesa smiled back and stroked him.

## Obo finds a new home

Mother was not very pleased. “He is a big dog. He will eat lots of food. Where will he sleep?”



“I will work at the shop for Mr Hlongwane on Saturdays, to help pay for his food,” Palesa said. “He can sleep next to our bed on the old green blanket. Please, please, please,” she whispered.

Mother smiled. “I don't like the way Obo was treated either,” she said. “Yes, you can keep him. Remember he is your responsibility.” Palesa danced and skipped all the way to school, she was so happy. When she came home, her mother had already made supper. She had fed Obo some good food.

He stood in the doorway. When he saw Palesa he ran up to her and covered her hands with doggie kisses.

“I have to work late this evening,” said Palesa's mother. “Look after Tshepo and Tshepang. Stay in the house when it is dark and be safe. Don't unlock the door till you hear my voice.”

Palesa promised she would do as mother said. She made sure the twins were fed and washed; then she did her homework for a while.

Later they watched television. All the time Obo sat next to her. Sometimes she stroked his ears.



“You are going to be a beautiful dog, Obo,” she told him. His tail wagged.

When it was dark she bolted the door and put the twins to bed. She was not afraid. Mother had to work late quite often. She was used to taking care of everything.

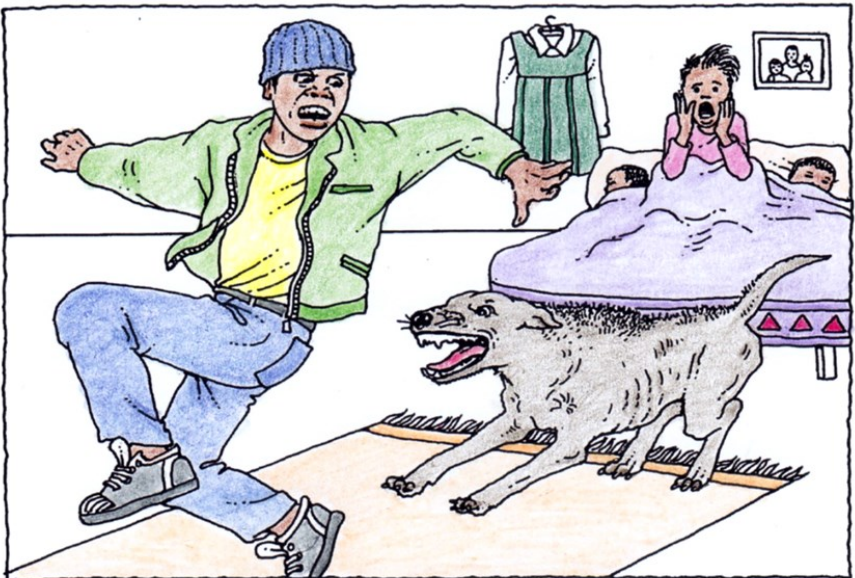
Later on she climbed into bed next to the sleeping twins. Obo curled up beside them on his green blanket.

## Obo saves his new family

All of a sudden the door was kicked open, the lock broken. There stood the bad boy who had threatened Palesa. She was frozen with fear.

“I've come to teach you a lesson,” he said. Palesa opened her mouth to scream but before the boy could walk through the doorway, Obo jumped at him with a growl like a lion. The boy turned to run, but Obo tore his trousers and bit his leg with his big white teeth.

The boy was screaming. Palesa could hear him scream all the way down the street as Obo continued snapping at his heels. The screams became fainter and fainter.



Much later Obo came back, his tail wagging and a smile on his face. The twins had slept through all the noise! Shakily, Palesa pushed a chair against the door.

She knelt down and put her arms round Obo's neck and hugged him.

“Thank you, Obo,” Palesa whispered. “Now we can keep each other safe always.” He covered her with doggie kisses and lay down happily on his green blanket. He had found love and a warm home.



# Oskar, the Watch-Pig



by Pandora Alberts



## Oskar, the Watch-Pig

Far away from the city, at the end of a long dusty gravel road, there was a farm called “Deep River”.

Willem lived there with his parents and his little sister, Annamaria, and two bouncy sheep-dogs called Sökkies and Pop.

Willem's father was a farmer. He kept sheep for their wool, and chickens for their eggs. There were fields of vegetables and many, many fruit trees, full of apricots and pears and figs.

They also had a beautiful cow called Saartjie, who gave buckets of delicious creamy milk for the children to drink. Their mother made some of the milk into cheese and yoghurt.

Willem and Annamaria knew they were lucky to live on a farm with wide open spaces and fields and a river. It was fascinating to see how skilfully Sökkies and Pop herded the sheep. Harvest time was the best time of year.

One day their father brought home a piglet from a neighbour. The piglet was tiny and pink and he had a rubbery, snuffly nose and bright eyes.



“He is only two days old. His mother has too many other babies so he has been given to us to rear,” Father said. Annamaria named the piglet Oskar.

She wrapped Oskar in a blanket and fed him with a bottle. When his tummy was full she would hold him over her shoulder and burp him like a human baby. At night he slept in a cardboard box next to her bed, tucked up in his blanket. The children loved to see him scampering around on his little short legs, his ears flopping.

If he was left alone he would squeal in an amazingly loud voice, and the children would come running to pick him up and hold him close.

He quickly learned to do his puddles and pooh outside with Sökkies and Pop.

“He's so clever,” Willem said. “We can teach him all sorts of tricks.”

Their father looked worried. “Don't get too fond of Oskar,” he warned. “We're going to make him into sausage and bacon one day.”



“What?” Willem and Annamaria wailed. “Eat Oskar? How could we do such a horrible thing? Oskar is our friend!”

“This is a farm, kids,” said Father seriously. “We grow things for food. Pigs are raised for meat.”

“Not Oskar,” Willem shook his head. “I'm going to become a vegetarian. I'm not going to eat meat again, ever.”

“You're too young to decide that,” said Father. “Now take off your muddy boots and go run your bath. Don't worry your heads about this meat business.”

But the children did worry.

Over the next few months Oskar grew and grew. He became plump and grew a beautiful coat of clean silver bristles. His cheeks filled out to make his face look lovely and smiling.

When the children came home from school he came running to meet them with Sokkies and Pop. The bigger and fatter Oskar became the more anxious Willem felt.

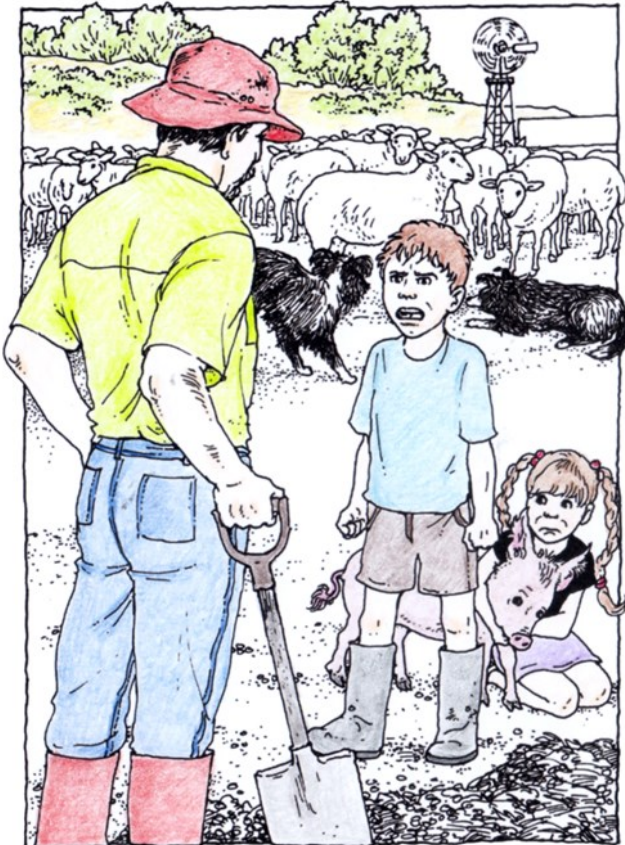
One day Oskar was no longer with the sheepdogs.

## Oskar is Missing!

“Where is Oskar?” the children wanted to know. Father shook his head. “Don't ask so many questions! Go and do your homework,” he told them.

Oskar was shut in a shed. It was time for him to be slaughtered and made into bacon and sausages.

“Why? Why? You can't do this!” the children cried.



“We do need the meat,” said their Mother. “You've eaten plenty of sausages. You love them. And how can we run a farm without eating some of the animals?”

“I hate the farm!” cried Willem. “I wish we lived in a town and bought our food from shops!”

“Well, where do you think the shops get their meat from?” asked Father.

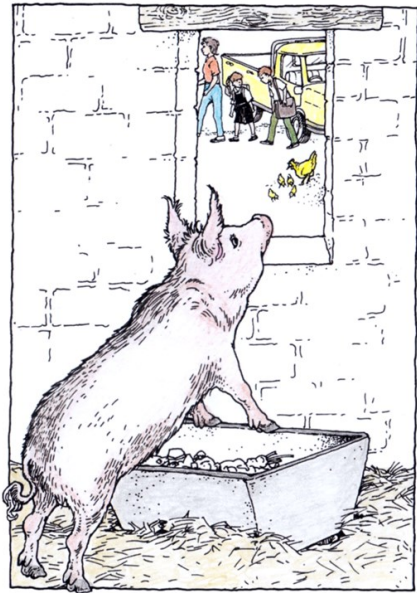
“Just leave Oskar alone!” said Willem angrily. Both children were sent to bed crying.

“I'm afraid we've handled this rather badly,” Willem heard Father say as he closed the bedroom door.

## The Farm is on Fire

In the middle of the night Willem was wakened by a terrible squealing. Something was very wrong. Sökkies and Pop ran around with their tails down. A frightening red glow flickered outside the children's bedroom windows. Willem dragged back the curtains.

A sickening sight met his eyes. Orange flames were peeping through the apricot trees. The barn was burning. Sparks swarmed upwards against the black sky like a million angry bees. There was a harsh crackling noise as even bigger flames suddenly burst from a store of fence poles.



“PA! MA! THE FARM IS ON FIRE!” shouted Willem in terror. Mother and Father leaped out of bed and rushed out of the house, dragging on jackets and boots as they ran. The terrible squealing and screaming got louder and louder. It was Oskar, shut in his shed!

After that there was great confusion. Neighbouring farmers brought in teams of firefighters. People rushed around shouting. The bright lights of motor cars swerved here and there. Water was pumped from dams and the river. Choking smoke billowed all about the farmhouse. Sökkies and Pop bravely herded the sheep into the veld and stayed with them.



## Where is Oskar?

Willem and Annamaria were taken to the neighbouring farm for safety. Just after sunrise their father came to fetch them. Soot blackened his face; there were holes burned in his shirt, and his eyes were red. He was exhausted but smiling.

“The farm is safe,” he said.

“We had amazing help. The barn is damaged and we lost some trees, but the house and all the farm animals are fine. And it's thanks to Oskar and you, Willem, who alerted us. Without you both, it could have been so much worse.”

“Where is Oskar?” asked Willem.

“Oskar is safe,” said Father. “I think he has shown us what a good watch-pig he is. Perhaps we can do without a bit of bacon.”

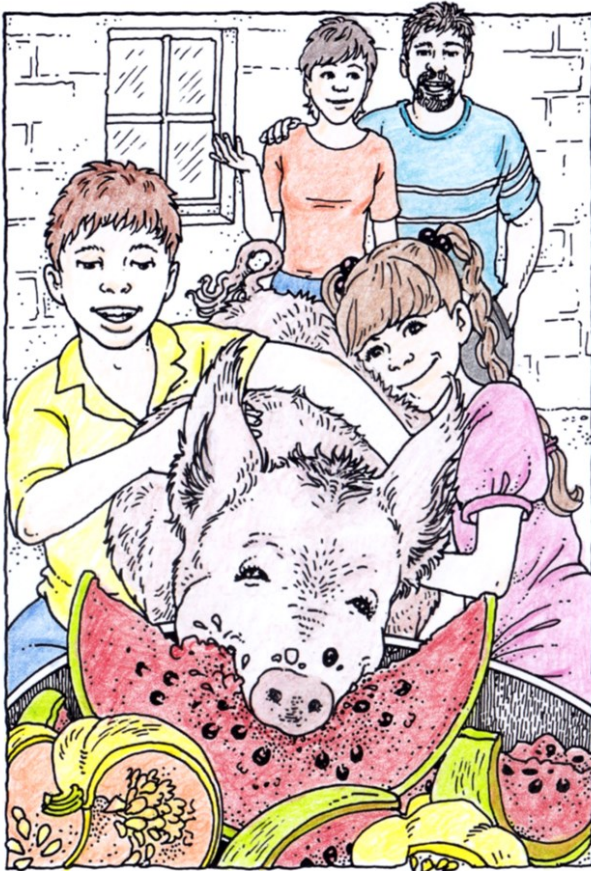
Willem and Annamaria threw themselves into their father's sooty arms, whooping and shrieking. “Oskar is saved! Oskar is saved!”



## Time for Celebration

They had a great celebration when the farmyard was cleaned up the next day. There was much for which to be thankful. Oskar was treated to a huge bucket of pumpkin and watermelon, his favourite dessert!

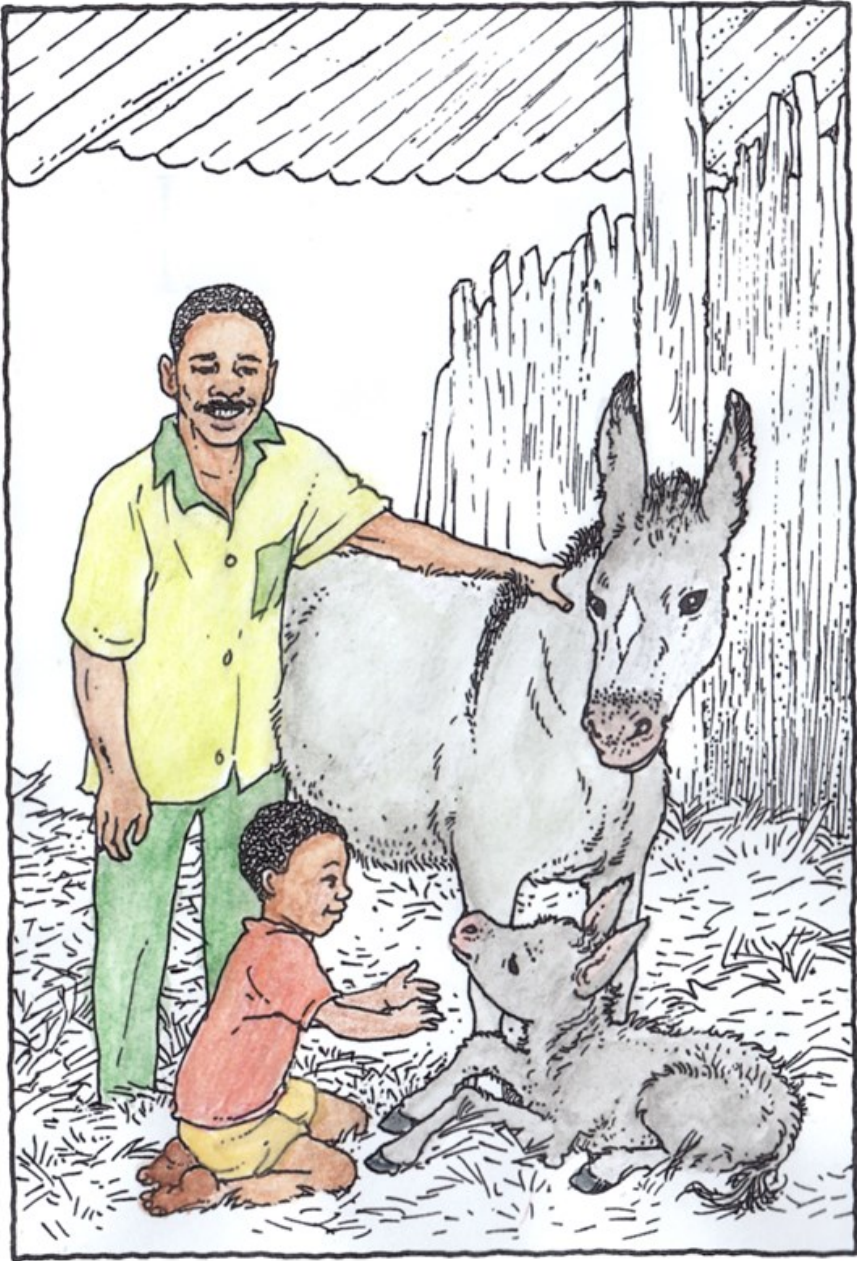
And that is the story of how the farm Deep River got its watch-pig.



The  
Precious Gift



by Peta Jones



## The Little Donkey

Thabo was 3 years old when his father's donkey had a baby foal. Thabo's father said he could give the foal a name and look after it himself. He told Thabo that in the olden days, kings and noblemen rode donkeys.

"Humans are very lucky that donkeys are able to work for us. They need to be well looked after, in return for all their work," he said.

Thabo called the little donkey Chipo, meaning 'gift'. Thabo's father showed him how to get Chipo used to having his feet and eyes touched. He explained that this was necessary because sometimes donkeys' hoofs need to be cleaned when they fill up with mud, or get thorns stuck inside them. Their eyes need to be washed when there is too much dust and too many flies that cause donkeys to weep.

Thabo loved the silky coat Chipo had when he was little, and the velvet skin around Chipo's mouth. Holding his hand flat, Thabo would give Chipo little bits of food. Chipo would take it from Thabo's hand with his soft, gentle lips.

Soon, when he saw Thabo coming, Chipo would bray loudly in greeting.

Chipo grew up faster than Thabo, but Thabo's father warned him that Chipo's bones were not yet strong. If he was put to work too young, carrying heavy loads, his bones would become twisted, and this would give him pain for the rest of his life. If Chipo was well cared for, his life would be almost as long as Thabo's, because donkeys can live a very long time.

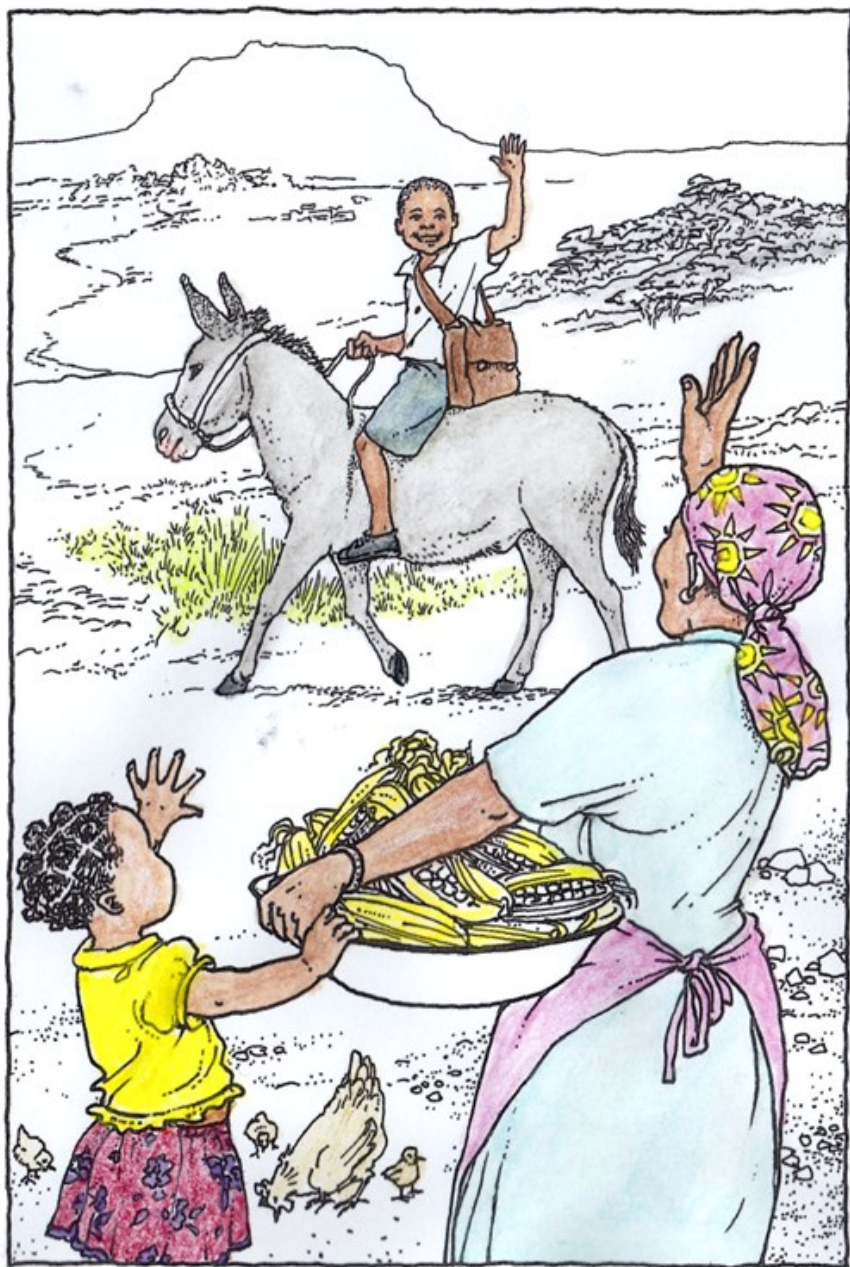
When Chipo was 4 years old and grown up, he started helping his mother pull Thabo's father's cart. Chipo also helped plough Thabo's mother's field.

But now Thabo was 7 years old and needed Chipo to take him to school. Thabo had heavy books to carry, but Chipo could carry them and carry Thabo at the same time.

## Schooldays

While Thabo learned in school, Chipo learned to find good food on the hill. Dry grass and bush is good food for a donkey. Thabo taught Chipo to come back to school at the same time every day when school closed, to carry him and his books back home.

Some of the children at school laughed at Chipo.



Sally said: “How funny to use a slow old animal. My father brings me in a fast, smart car. I can listen to the radio in the car!”

Other children said: “We come in a taxi, and we listen to music cassettes!”

Phineas said: “My bicycle is shiny and new and stays where I put it. It does not need to eat grass.”

But Thabo loved Chipo and Chipo loved Thabo and followed him everywhere. Thabo did not ask his father for a bicycle.

Then one day, riding to school, Thabo passed Sally walking along the road, carrying her heavy books.

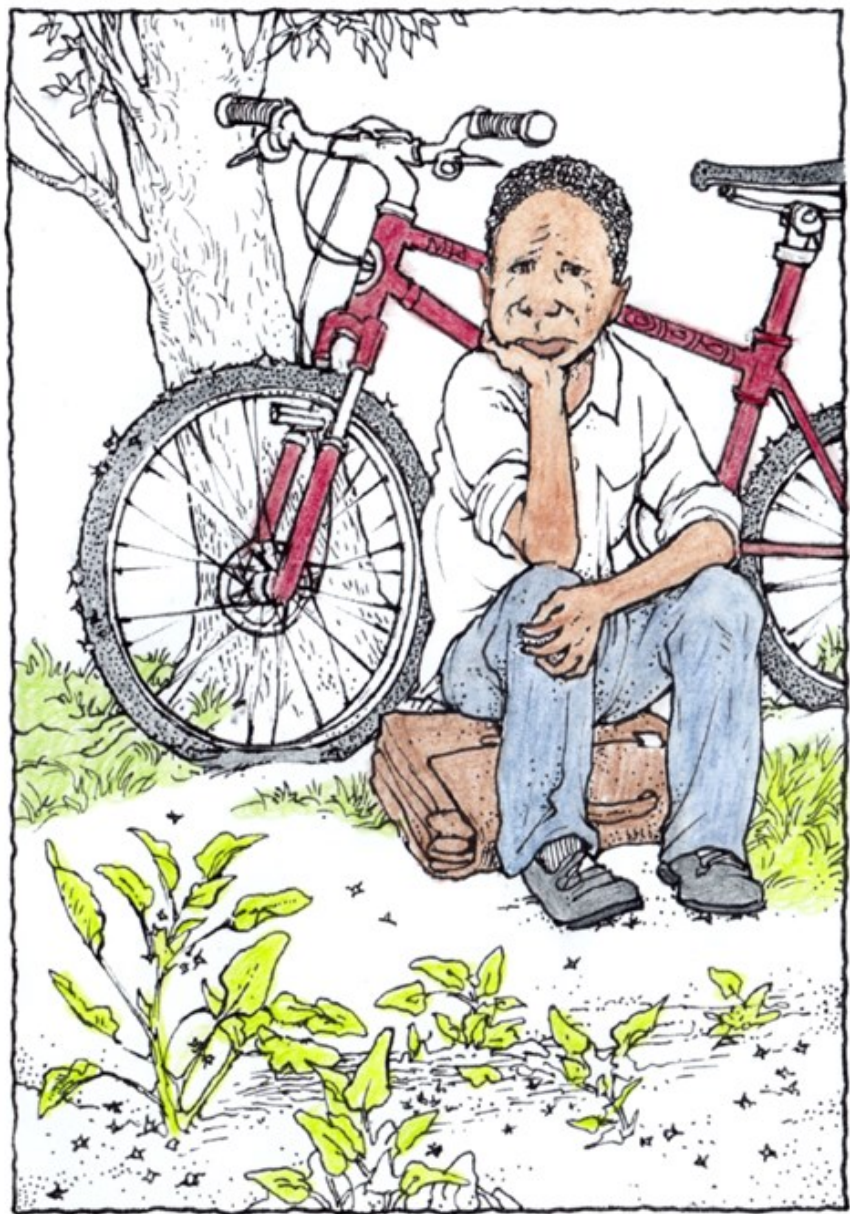
“Where is your father's car?” asked Thabo.

“There is no petrol for the car” said Sally sadly. She climbed onto Chipo and rode with Thabo to school.

“Chipo carried me as well as my books!” she told the other children. After that she rode with Thabo almost every day.

On another day, when Thabo and Sally were leaving school, they found Phineas crying.





“My tyre is flat! If I try to ride my bike, the wheel will break!” Phineas left his bicycle at school, and went home on Chipo, riding with Thabo and Sally.

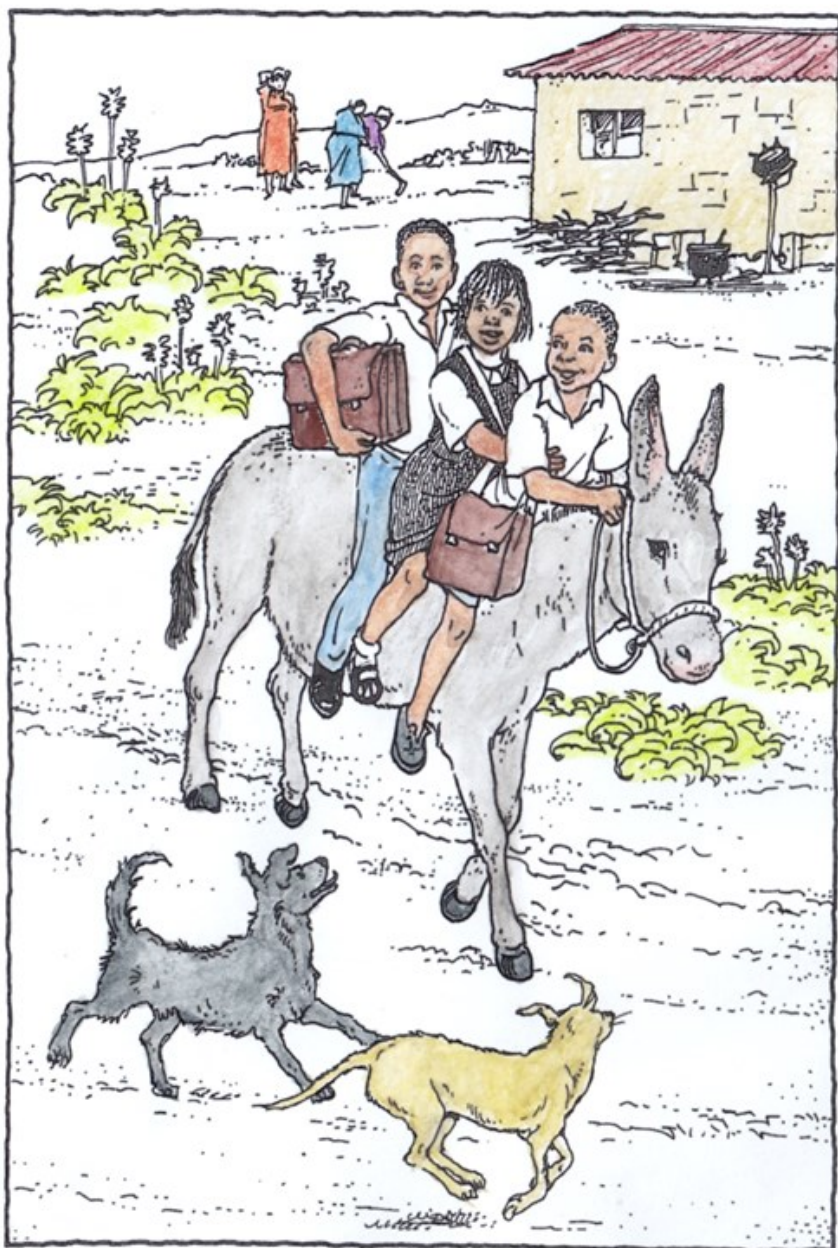
Thabo's father was angry because he thought the load was too much for Chipo. “Three children and all the books are enough for one donkey! If more children ride, or when you grow bigger, the load will be too much. Other children must get their own donkeys,” said father.

Phineas spent hours fixing his bicycle. He needed to do this again and again, because the rough roads often gave him a flat tyre and he was often late for school.

One day many children did not arrive in time for school. These were the children that came by taxi. The Headmaster was very worried. He made a telephone call, and told the teachers: “The taxi crashed but, fortunately, nobody was hurt!”

## The Taxi

After that, Thabo's father was the taxi driver for the school children, and the donkey cart was the taxi. Sally and Phineas loved this new 'taxi'. All the children at school love donkeys now.



Sometimes the children come to help Thabo and his father feed the fields with donkey manure. This way Thabo's father saves money and grows good crops. They all agree that, in Chipo, Thabo has a very precious gift.

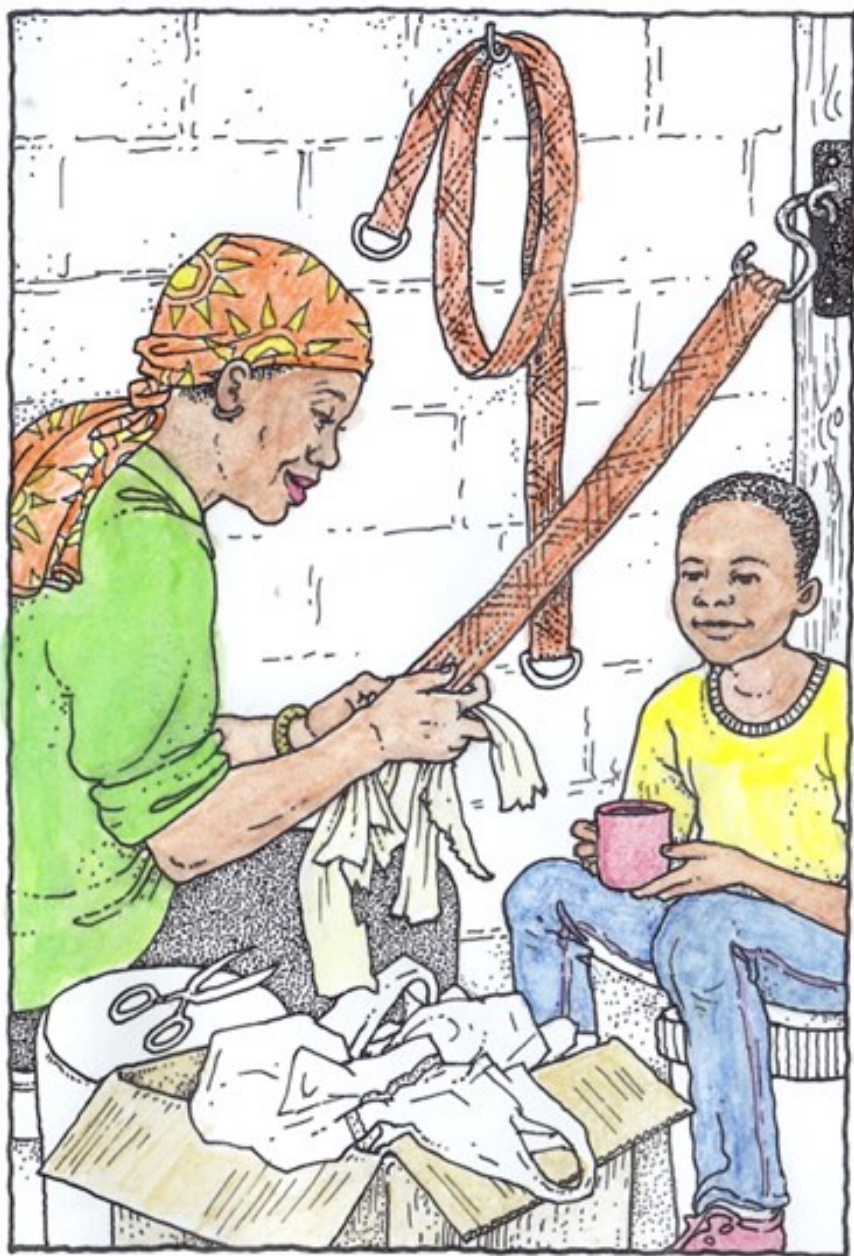
Chipo is never allowed on the main roads, and when he is on any road, Thabo is with him.

At night Chipo has a comfortable place to sleep, where he is safe. Some of the children have asked their own fathers if they can have donkeys, too.

Thabo's father has changed his two-wheel cart for a four-wheel wagon, and can carry even more children to school. If a cart has only two wheels, balancing the load can be a problem, especially for the donkeys. With four wheels this problem is taken away.

For her part, Thabo's mother has been learning to make harnesses by weaving together strips of used super-market plastic bags. This makes strong straps for harnesses and does not hurt the donkeys.

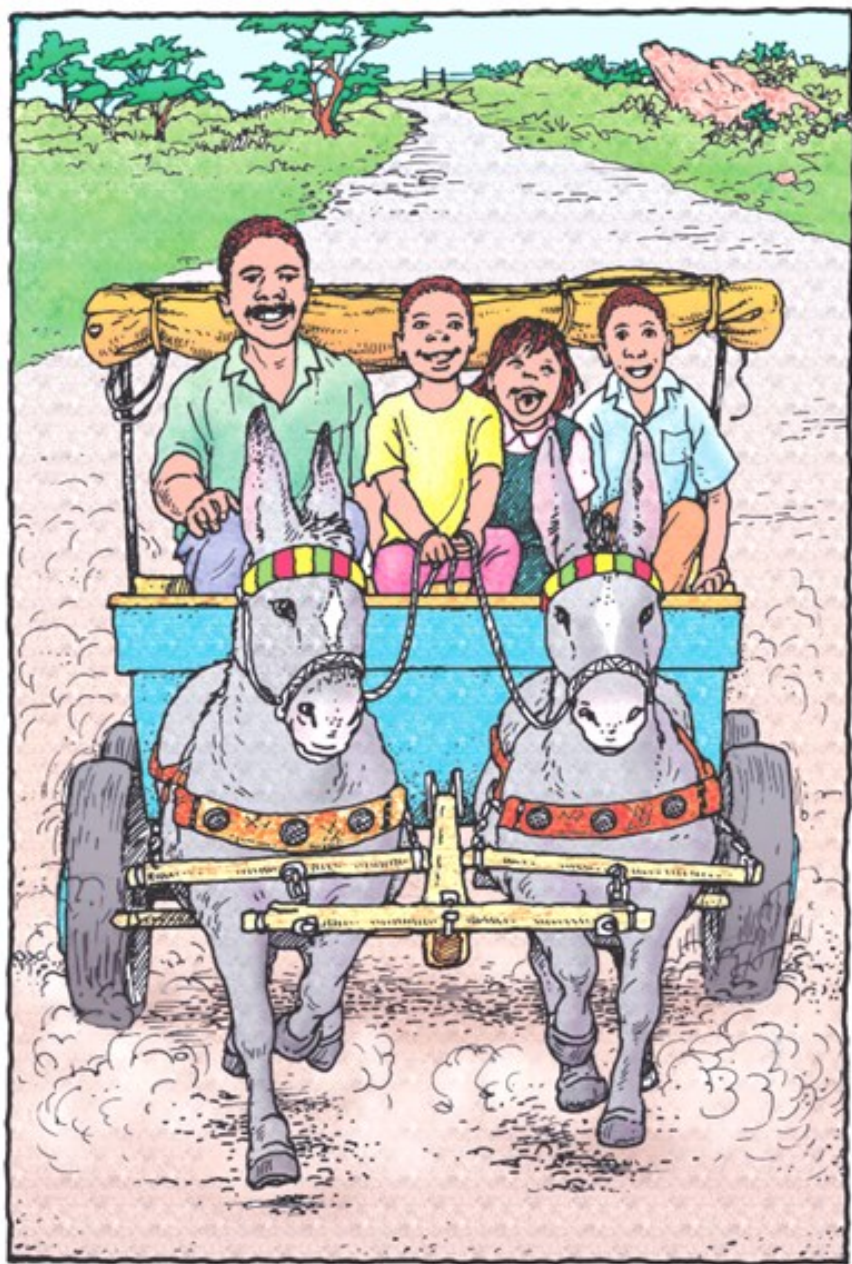
At the same time, plastic bags have nice bright colours and can easily be washed so that the harnesses stay bright and clean.

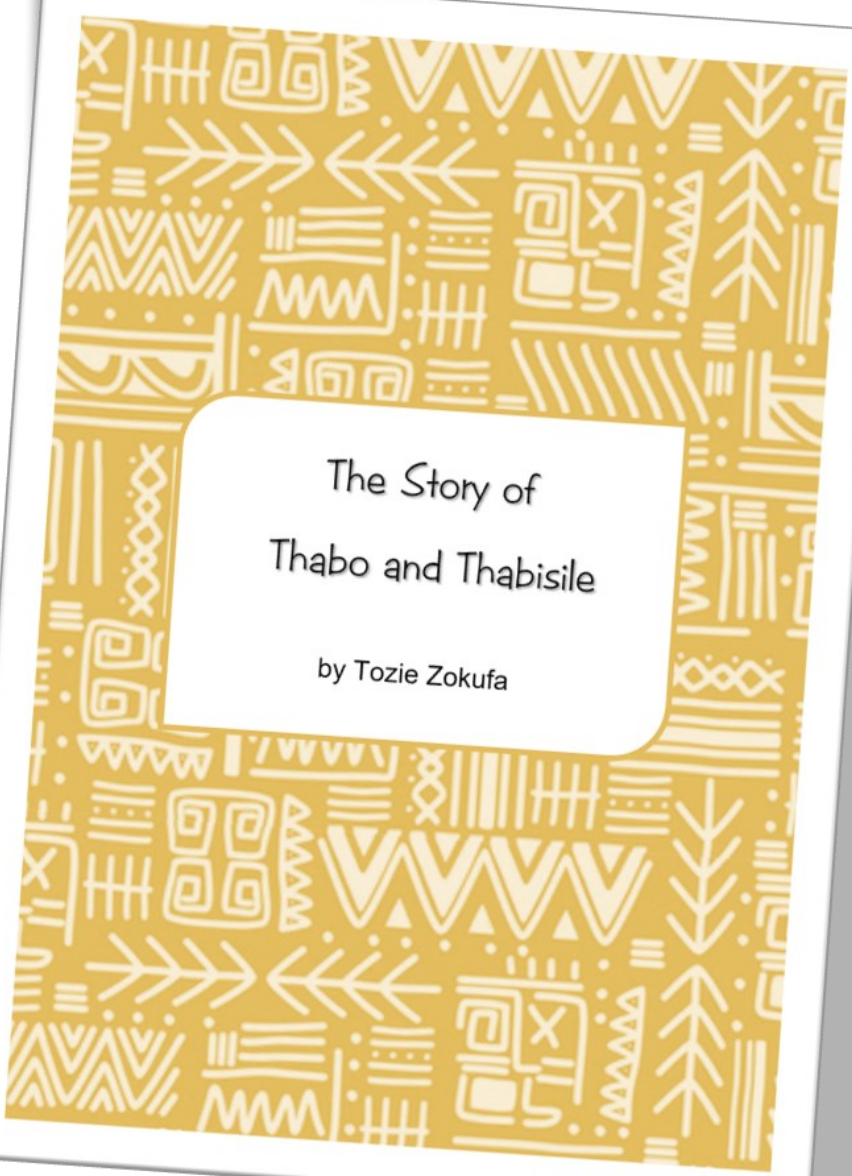


This is much better than leaving plastic bags on the ground where they can be eaten by animals. Animals eat them because they smell of food but plastic makes big knots inside their stomachs and can even cause them to die.

Now both the donkeys pulling the wagon wear reflector tape on straps across their foreheads. The wagon has reflectors behind, in case darkness comes before Thabo's father can reach home. Motor cars coming along the road can see a cart if it can reflect their headlights. The wagon also has a cover to protect the children from rain.

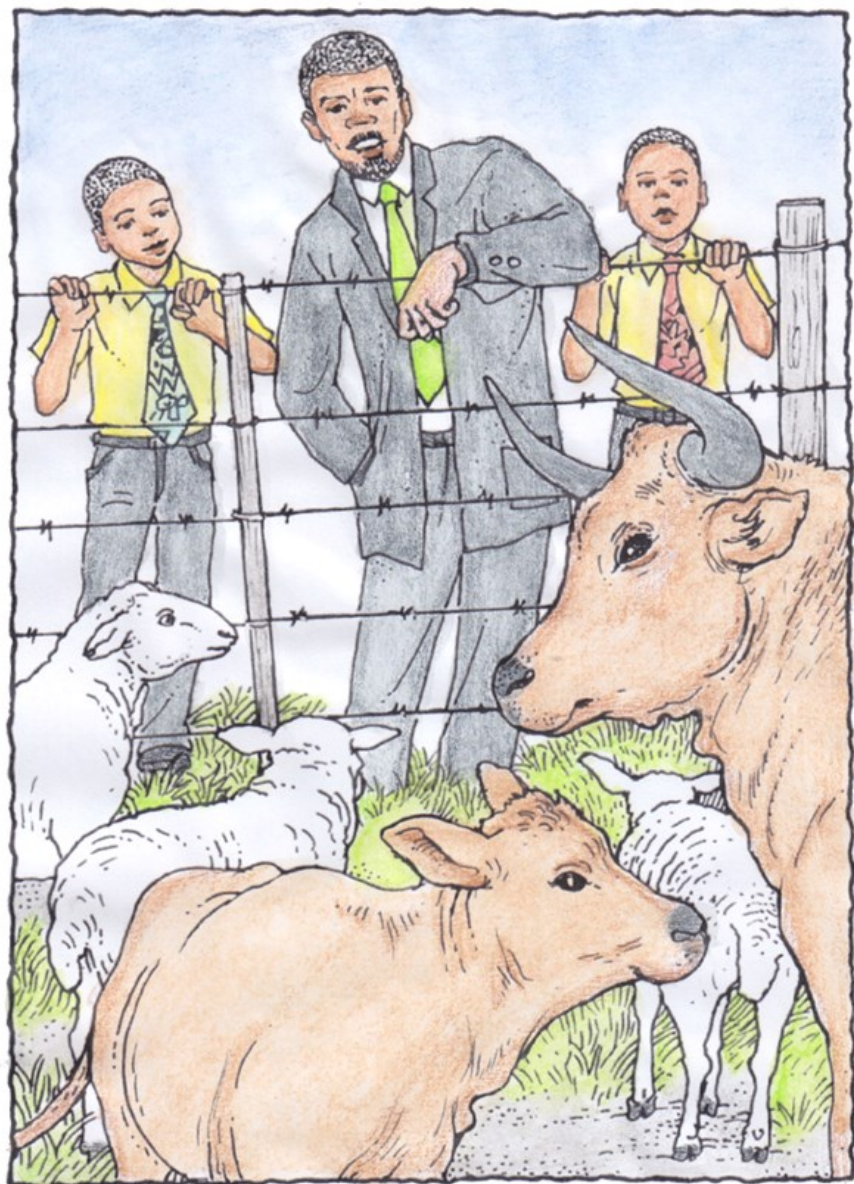
Thabo's father bought a cassette player to play in the wagon, but mostly the children sing.





The Story of  
Thabo and Thabisile

by Tozie Zokufa



On a sunny Sunday morning Thabo and Thabisile dressed in their best clothes to go to a church service with their father Mr Mokoena. The previous two days had been very hot.

Already the cicada beetles were buzzing loudly in the trees promising that this day too was going to be hot. As he set off down the dusty road with his twin boys, Mr Mokoena stopped at the fence of the kraal to inspect his cattle and sheep. He was proud to see them fat and contented.

Mrs Mokoena did not attend the church service that morning. She stayed home to prepare Sunday lunch. She cooked a scrumptious *potjiekos*, which was a family favourite.

By mid-morning, grey clouds had begun to fill the blue sky. As they stood up to sing the hymn *Avulekile Amasango Ezulwini* (Heavens doors are opened) Thabo and Thabisile heard thunder rumble in the distance.

By the time Mr Mokoena and his boys emerged from church, a light rain had started. Mr Mokoena was worried about his cattle and sheep.



The thunder was coming nearer. Lightning streaked the sky. The drops of rain grew bigger. They still had a long walk to get home. He knew his cattle and sheep were afraid of the big claps of thunder.

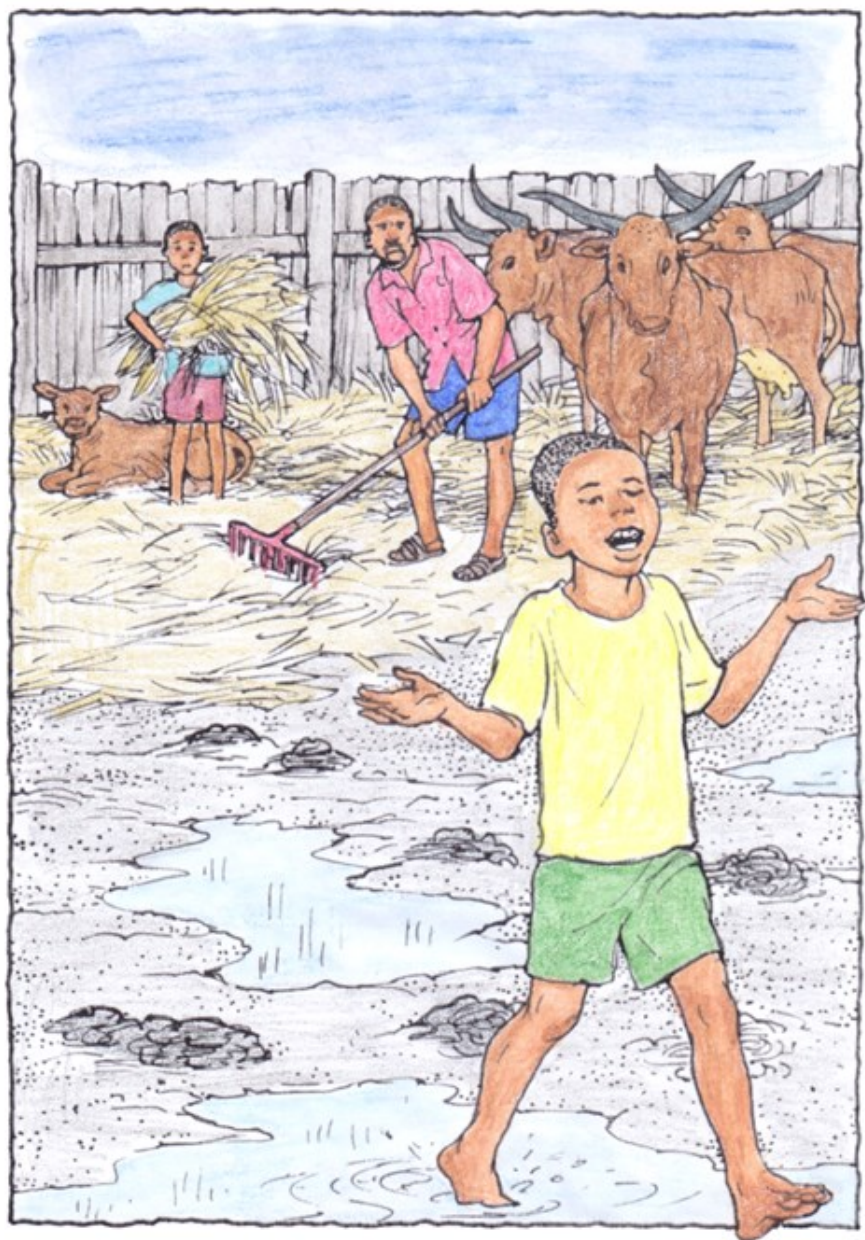
“Let's jog all the way back,” he suggested to the boys. The three of them were drenched by the time they reached home. Mama, with towels ready, waited at the door for them. A wonderful smell from the kitchen made their mouths water but Mr Mokoena said he first had to make sure the thunder had not disturbed the sheep and cattle too much, before he could sit down to eat.

By evening, the rain was still pelting down. Mr Mokoena asked his boys to help him put sand and straw in the kraal so that the cows and sheep could sleep dry and warm for the night. But Thabisile said: “Tata, I am too tired. Let Thabo help you instead.”

Mr Mokoena was disappointed at his son's laziness.

He replied: “Alright, but then, my son, you must not expect the cows and sheep to do anything for you either.” Relaxing on the couch, Thabisile nodded his head and gave a big yawn.

Thabo and his father put on their plastic raincoats.



They went outside to the kraal to lay the sand and rake straw over it. In this way, the rain would sink through the straw and sand and down into the earth, and the cows and sheep would be able to settle down for the night to sleep on bedding instead of in puddles. As Mr Mokoena and his son worked, the drenched animals stood to one side, patiently cuddling, fully aware that soon they would be able to lie comfortably.

The next morning Mama prepared breakfast. The twins were sitting at the table when Thabisile noticed that his mother had forgotten to add milk to his bowl of porridge.

“Pass the milk please,” he said to Thabo.



But his father was quick to answer. “No, Thabisile,” he said. “Remember, you should not expect anything from the cows.” Thabisile frowned. Then he shrugged crossly.

During the lunch break at school Thabisile noticed that the sandwiches in his lunch box did not have cheese in them. He glanced at Thabo's lunch box. His brother's sandwiches were filled with grated cheese. Thabisile felt a sudden surge of anger. He felt like boxing Thabo right on the nose. Thabo saw his twin was angry.

“I will tell Mama and Tata if you touch me,” he warned Thabisile.



When the twins reached home after school Thabisile saw that his mother was busy preparing *Umphokoqo* (African Salad with Amasi) for supper. He knew right then and there that there would be no *Amasi* for him that night.

When his father came home from work, Thabisile ran to greet him. "Tata, what can I do to help the cows and sheep? I know I was selfish and lazy yesterday. I've learnt my lesson."

Mr Mokoena asked: "What lesson did you learn, my son?"

Thabisile answered sheepishly: "I know now that life is about giving and receiving and not just about receiving," he said.

"Good", said Father. "Come let's talk about how you can be of help."

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THE **HUMANE** TRUST  
EDUCATION  
CAPE TOWN SOUTH AFRICA

## Louise van der Merwe

Managing Trustee | The Humane Education Trust

Director | Nature-Based Education Cape Town, South Africa

Mobile | 082 457 9177

Email | [education@naturebased.online](mailto:education@naturebased.online)

Website | [www.naturebased.education](http://www.naturebased.education)

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