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At school the teachers used to send me to town regularly. I was fast, and as my father discovered from his horse, I was equipped with a jet-engine. One day I broke a record, by leaving school at 11.20 am, going a distance of over 4 miles and back. When the bell announcing the end of the recess rang I was back at school. The teachers thought I had lost the money and decided to come back before I reached town. However, I showed them everything I had gone to buy. They asked whether I had got a lift back. I said no. The school principal took me before the school assembly and told all the children at school about my speed.

From then on I was encouraged to become an athlete. But there was never much time for that, especially after my mother passed away. School was a pleasure, the only problem being money, not having enough to buy books and clothes. We used to take turns. Monday I would go to school. Tuesday my brother would go and I would mind the cattle.

One day, while we were swinging on the gate at the entrance of the school, I lost my grip. All I remember is that I saw some stars. The rest I can't remember. When I regained consciousness it was dark. I was at home sleeping, surrounded by my relatives and neighbours. My mother called me and I replied. She asked if I felt any pain, I said yes in the arm and the leg. She wanted to give me some food but I told her I had no appetite. She tried to spoon feed me a little but I couldn't eat much. I was

taken to the doctor the next morning. He did his best and failed. I was then referred to the local Medicine-Man: my grandfather. With the little he knew, he tried his level best. But he was only good as a herbalist, and this, what hurt me so, was beyond his powers.

He failed in his treatment. I was taken out of school and sat around doing nothing

But without warning my grandmother, my mother's mother, came to our homestead. She and my mother took off into the distance carrying me on their backs. For this, they took turns. They never told me where we were going. By this time I was used to travelling long distances without a word being uttered as to our destination. But anyway, I was delirious, I even preferred death to the agony I was in. However, as you must have guessed, I didn't die. But that day, strange things happened.

We walked for about 6 miles, until we came to a big kraal with many huts. At the entrance of this kraal there were a number of bottles hanging about. All of them contained some watery substance. I was still on my mother's back. When we went past the kraal's enclosure, all my pain seemed to disappear in a miraculous way. I even asked my mother to take me off her back. She refused. But after many requests she agreed. I walked into the house.

The house was strange and deserted. The Healer was not at home. We waited patiently for his return. It was dark when he returned. He came back riding a horse. He ordered us to pray. We started praying, and he started praying for the sick. I became frightened. I had noticed that as he prayed for you he would hit you with a shambok. This I didn't like at all. I found this unacceptable, I thought about running away from the whole thing. I stood up pretending that I was going to pass water - but before I got out of the hut the Healer got me with his shambok and started hitting me.

Strange enough, despite the blows, I never felt any pain. He told my mother that I was trying to run away. He began telling me about my sickness. It was mesmerising: he told us everything about me as if he had a video recording of my life. We all spent the night at his house. The next morning the Healer demanded that I be left behind. My mother and

granny left me. I felt rotten. But what else could I have done, I had to do as my parents told me. So, I stayed at his house, forever homesick.

The only times I enjoyed were the times of singing and chanting. I used to like singing a lot. But everytime we finished singing I used to think about home and the good meals my mother used to cook. I missed my brothers, and my friends. I stayed with the preacher for three months. I got better and went back home. A goat was slaughtered to welcome me. People ate the meat and drank the beer. I was home again safe and sound.

And so it came to pass that I returned to school. Surprisingly, I did very well at the end of the year. I passed, and got back into athletics again.

There are many memories which are rushing at me demanding to be told but unfortunately I do not have the time to do so. Perhaps one day when we are free from all this drudgery I will make the time. But anyway, let me spend sometime on aspects that the youth of today might find interesting.

During our times there were different youth stages. There were fully grown young men (young adults), those that were at the right age for taking wives. Then there were the teenagers, those were chasing after young maids. Then there were boys looking after the livestock. These age groups never used to mix socially. Let me put it this way, even the elders came in different classes. There were those that were Christians, Churchgoers, who wore clothes and the Traditionalists. There were those that wore fine clothes, trying to be "real" gentlemen, mainly those that went to colleges, teachers and clerks, and those that worked in big cities. These left the "stick"-life behind, ("civilization" was judged in terms of whether or not one still carried a stick).

Among those who wore clothes there was a group called Izindlavini (those who behaved in an erratic, uncontrolled fashion), they wore big black trousers and white shirts and white caps, and Long-Tom underpants. The trousers were decorated with black and white patches of cloth and a lot of buttons. Even during cold weather they never used to wear overcoats. You would even find them having their shirts in the hand with no tops on come sun come rain. There were days when you would find them wrapped in heavy bedspreads or wearing khakhi trousers, with a 40 inch bottom (40"), wielding sticks and a knobkierie. These

knobkieries would be stuck into one of the loops and would hang on the side of the body. They used to go in small groups of about 3 to 5 playing mouth organs, and each one of them would have a whistle hanging by a long piece of string on their necks.

There was another group with a similar style. The only difference would lie in the length of the trousers. Their's were short three quarter trousers. That's how they earned for themselves the name Unozikhindi (meaning short pants).

The last group was called Ntshontshiwe. These groups never used to quarrel. All they did was chase women. A girl would fall in love with a member of Ntshontshiwe group, then she would leave him and fall for a member of the Short Pants (Unozikhindi). She might get married to him or move on to a member of the Ndlavini group. The people who really disliked each other were the Gentlemen and the above three groups. This was because the above three groups used to illtreat the Gentlemen. Everytime a Ndlavini or Unozikhindi met a Gentleman he would ask him where his fighting sticks were, why was he wearing shoes, and whether he realised he was eroding God's earth. And, as you might have expected, they used to beat these guys up since they did not carry any sticks along.

The people who wore traditional clothing were divided into groups as well. There were the Mashawe, who were well disciplined and lived by their own laws. Among them there was a Magistrate, a Judge, a Prosecutor, a Chief, an Induna, a Policeman, a Secretary, a Food Minister, a Chairman, an Entertainment Officer, and an Information Officer. They did not fight anyone. They only lived for fun.

The second group among those that dressed up in traditional ways were the Nombolas. They used to tease people wearing European (Western) clothes. They would tease them that those clothes made them into weaklings, into people unable to defend the area from its enemies.

All this made for a lot of excitement in the social life at my home place. But you could also feel that things were changing fast. People think of the countryside as a place of cows and peace. Yes, both exist and existed but you had to be a daredevil or you would be beaten up to nobody's business.

The only time that was a real pleasure was Christmas time. It was a season that everyone looked forward to. If you had something new, like a new dance or a song or a play you would perform it, during the Christmas season, during the Christmas festival.

And it was great, because it was the only time all the people could afford to be together, because of the migrant labour system.

People came from the factories, the mines and the plantations. Students came from colleges from far away. And everybody would return with something new.

I remember one year, the miners came back with a new dancing style learnt from the Bhaca people. Everybody was so excited that they won all the festival prizes. They even came with a new way of dressing, with all of them wearing similar hides. It was really beautiful. Everyone old and young enjoyed it to the fullest. Every aspiring dancer copied it. In no time it was taken up by most of the youngsters in our area and it soon became a local way of dancing

We learnt the lesson that when you go somewhere you should come back with something new and progressive for the community. Even if you go to school somewhere, you should come back with some knowledge to give to the people. Even if it was something to entertain your local brothers and sisters, it was welcome. So that in the end, although you would find some misunderstanding among the different sectors of our community, we all welcomed any progressive act from our fellow brother or sister no matter whether they were from the Civilized, the Ndlavinis, the Ndombolas or the Unozikhindis.