

**KINNEAR SAXON**  
DURBAN GIRL'S COLLEGE  
SOUTH AFRICA

**FIRST PRIZE, CLASS B**  
IN THE 2009 COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION

## TRACKS

I will tell you a story.

I am lulati. I live in Kwa-Zulu Natal. This story belongs to me, I hold it in my hands and keep it in my heart. It is about who I am and what I know. I hope whoever reads this will like my story. Mrs Zondo said to me: 'Lulati, tell me about your life'. I didn't know what to write...So I started at the beginning.

*Before this little girl picks up unwraps and presents the story of her ever so small life, I shall interrupt her introduction and begin one of my own. Although I hate clichés, I will begin her tale like this. Once upon a time, in a nearby place a little girl begins a journey, one she knows all too well, on a blistering hot and sweltering day.*

My everyday is the same. I wake up just as the sun begins to rise. I walk down to the river and fetch water. I wipe my Mama's head and neck and then I make the fire and clean the floor. I put on my uniform and shoes. The buckles are rusted. There is shine.

*There is no need for me to name the virus that slowly shortens her Mother's life day by day. After these remote tasks, she begins the journey we began earlier, it entails her tiny feet carrying her across 12Km of stone and sand running alongside a train track...On the path to her school.*

When I walk I skip and run and skip and run, I let what I feel about my Mama and myself be stomped out with every step I take. Me heart beats fast and my temples pound, I like to run like the wind. The wind blows through my hair and I let my arms fly alongside me. I am brave. Before I can run I must cross the railway track near my house, that makes me shudder in my sleep. My Mama cries when she hears the sound in her ears. I close my eyes and pretend

to run when I hear her cry. I don't hear her coughing or moaning, I don't feel her fear. I don't feel her unhappiness, I am free. The railway winds and takes me in the right direction, sometimes I count the tracks beneath my feet.

There is a large and loud and long choochoo train that rides the railway that is in the middle of my township. My dream is to learn, but Mama cannot pay money for me to learn the things I want to know. We don't have lights for me to use so I can't see what I write. It is too hot to think for a long time, there are no tables for me to sit on, and too much noise. Nobody can help me spell the White people's words that Mrs Zondo needs me to learn. I think that I won't be as good as the other children. I want to stop, but Thisha says that I am good at my reading, I read a story about a beautiful white lady that falls asleep for a long time, longer than since I saw my Papa.

These fairytales I like. They are not like my story. My story has not had happy times in it yet, I don't have a godmother, I can't do magic. I am not special like those people, but maybe one day I can have a story like that, and in the story my mama will be strong like the pretty lady who has nice shoes and a nice man who will take her to a safe place, and I will have a pretty home and have nice daddy who will always care for my mama and me.

*It is amazing how some of us are blessed with fortunate and almost perfect lives, and how we still dare to question the events that don't please us or challenge us, and how above all, we long for the life of someone other than our own. How sad the human race can be, how very, very sad.*

In my township we have lots of izigebengu\* by our shack. These men are not nice at all. Mama says I cannot speak to anybody I don't know. That it is naughty if I do. There are people who go mad sometimes at night, they drink too much of bad things and then they fall and break bottles and hurt their children and wives. Mama says that they love their family very much, but don't know that drink makes them silly like baboons.

Rumble rumble rumble...my tummy makes that sound. My Thisha tells me that my tummy is talking to me, and it wants me to make it full. Mama does not work anymore, she is too too sick, so I must try borrowing money and food from the neighbours. It is difficult

because the neighbours even don't want to lend pap or beans. This means that mama and me don't have any food most times. My aunty brings us some things on a Monday. I love my aunty. She wears pink tops that show her bumps and lots of pretty smells and nice gold beads – she makes lots of money that she shares. One day she says she will teach me how she has so much of it...

When we are all at school, we have some time when we can sit outside the rooms where we learn. Sometimes when we sit outside we eat and play under the trees. Sometimes we share what we have to eat, sometimes we even have bread with jam. That is my best. Other times, the boys fight over what they have to eat. They punch and pinch and make trouble. Once my friend Zandi bled from the nose, her face got big and blue and you couldn't see one of her eyes. Zandi never brought sandwiches to school again.

I think Mama will leave me soon. She says that I must say a prayer when she is going. I don't know where she is going. I ask her if I can come with her, but she said no. I don't know why she wants to leave me. I think maybe she is very tired and wants to rest in a nice place...I know I will cry when she is gone. I will cry a long time. I will make a stream of tears that will be even longer than the train tracks.

*A black child living a life of pure suffering in every sense. Suffering the lack of proper home...suffering the absence of electricity; suffering the lack of a meal each day; suffering even the lack of her childhood and soon enough she will suffer the absence of a mother.*

*If it weren't for the simplicity of her story, I would provide metaphors; increase the number of adjectives used and probably use some alliteration or catchy phrases. But her story isn't about that; it's about something more important. It's about the life that at least 22 million people in my country live. It's about the tracks of her tears.*

\*izigebengu: criminals, thieves,