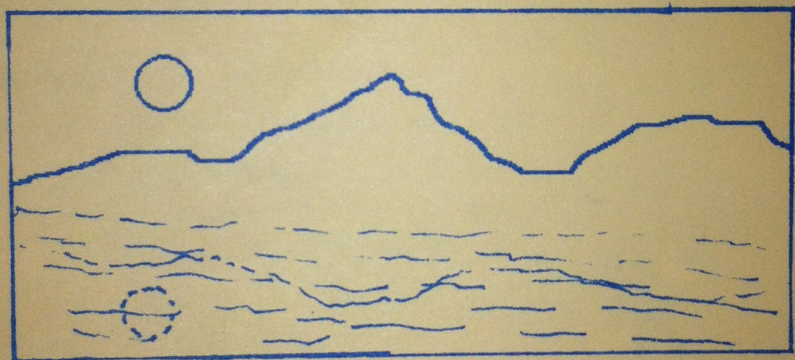


Stories that Heal.

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stories to be used for self healing,
reconciliation to the past and change.



Michael Morain.

Michael Morain.

Stories that Heal

TO TREVOR

Wishing you success.

M. Moran

4/2/97.

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Stories that Heal

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Preface.

The nature of healing people and the nature of storytelling are two very similar things. This is so because memories are composed of images and stories are the same, so it is natural that they should compliment each other. The stories in this book are based on such themes and have arisen out of work with people for healing and reconciliation. An example of this is the poetry for peace initiative which Nisa Malange and I worked on together.

When the launch of the " Poetry for Peace" book was organised we asked people who contributed to come and read at the launch.

For those who may not have heard about this work, the theme of the book and the programme which proceeded it was to commit people to peace and reconciliation.

We held the launch a day or so after the miraculous elections for a new South Africa in 1994.

A friend Vusi, was one of those who read. He stood up in front of the audience and related how he had been going towards a train when some people came up to him and shot him through the head. The crime was politically motivated as he had been doing work for the party he supported.

Fortunately, he did not die, but his speech was affected slightly and of course he has scars.

After telling this story, he then read his poem. It was about how we are all part of humanity, no matter our political affiliation, that we are brothers and that we must all together work for peace.

There were many people in the audience hearing this who did not have dry eyes by the time he was finished. Another memory is of December 1993, when we held a day of readings for peace in Durban, South Africa. We had famous poets, as well as lesser known poets come and read.

What I remember most is the participation from the public. Many of us remember a very old lady who came and said a few words for peace. I remember people who would be regarded as street people or outcasts, who said something for peace. Parents and their small children. People from the

international community, all were there, all were treated equally and all said something for peace.

It makes one believe that despite the negatives, there is hope for humanity and it made me believe in the power of writing to transform.

To develop this theme of how writing and stories can have a healing power we need to look at history. In primitive societies and societies throughout the ages stories, legends, images have dominated. The Egyptians with their hieroglyphic writing is but one example.

Dreams and images play a very vital role in the consciousness of the human race. It is said by psychologists that the subconscious of anyone works on images. Is it any wonder that storytelling has come to be a very great influence on humanity?

From the generations of humanity has come the growing picture of the evolution of humanity. We see it in the legends and traditions of all societies.

How can we use the above knowledge?

I am a romantic at heart. I believe in the value of stories, myths and legends. In a letter to a lady in America I wrote about South Africa:

" The land where east meets west, where legends are sung around camp fires and new images are born every day."

I truly see South Africa as that.

Storytelling is at the essence of this. In Africa there are many people who teach their traditions and values, who teach what they know by means of stories, passed from one generation to another. It is interesting to note that many stories around the world have characters that in essence are similar. Look at a lot of the fairy tales. Compare any story and I am sure you will find the majority of images there.

Another example of the image process is television programmes. Have you noticed that many programmes follow a similar theme? They have a father type figure, a mother type figure (male or female) plus children type characters. Of these latter characters one will be a comedy character. In television programmes this pattern along with good and evil, heroes, etc. is repeated over and over in differing programmes. Just notice how many television programmes have similar plots or themes.

There are good and bad stories, as well as television programmes. Despite having said this what one may classify as bad images may not necessarily have a bad influence. Recent research published in a book "The healing of the gods, " describes how investigation into the legends of the Greek gods and other stories of other lands, has led the author of the book to conclude that the Greek Gods had very human qualities for a definite reason. He concludes in his book that the Greeks used these images for therapeutic purposes. Thus if a person was troubled with say, an overbearing mother, by going to the god associated with those symptoms and working with images associated with the god, a healing process could begin to occur helping to resolve the whole problem. This is an interesting idea and the book is very well worth reading.

This tends to confirm the idea that myths, legends stories and writing about ones problems may be a means to resolve problems and people may be aided by stories.

When I attended a conference in Portugal in 1993, one of the psychologists there talked about the use of sand in therapy. Sand was placed in a A4 size block and the person was encouraged to draw in the sand. From the drawings problem areas would become apparent and the sand was used to help

the child alter the drawing and this would alter the perception of the child. I understand that this type of therapy works very well. In a similar way writing can be used as just such a tool.

Stories with strong images that catch the imagination and attention, are bound to effect, but not only this. I have been taught as a teacher that the hand is the way to the intellect and so many other levels for young children, yet it is also so I believe for older people. So writing can be a way to change peoples perception of themselves and the world.

For children and adults stories can also be an exciting tool to stimulate memory, imagination and creativity.

The above is intended to give you insight and glimpses into how writing can be a powerful tool to help heal an individual, a nation. The stories in this book are seen as aid to helping this process and they were written with 9 to 13 year olds in mind. However I have found that they can be used for 15 to 18 year olds and in addition they will assist adults. At the end of this book you will find a section detailing exercises one can use to guide one in using the stories for the healing process and to show how they can be used to facilitate the process of writing stories for healing.

These exercises can be used by a reader on his own but preferably should be used in a group and are intended for those nearing adulthood or adults..

The stories can read without using the guidelines as well, just as stories. Whatever you do, I wish you enjoyment of them!

The Author.



How the Leopard Changes.



The sun had set but moments ago as Zuma and I sat around our small fire sipping coffee.

We watched as Venus sparkled in the night air and the stars came out one by one - like flowers opening their petals to an invisible sun.

"The violence is heartbreaking " said Zuma breaking the silence, his words seemingly at odds with the peace and beauty surrounding us.

"I know, " I said, " Just the other day a friend of mine, a fellow writer was killed. She was a talented writer."

Zuma sighed.

"It is terrible" he said, "We need to do something. Violence begets violence. People are not dealing with the problems of the past. They are not facing their hate and anger, just acting them out."

As he said these words, my hope grew that the stories he told might provide some solution.

"The stories you have told me, " I said " seem to have a lot of meaning and perhaps they could help."

"I have one now" he said and began:

" A long time ago when the leopard was young, it was not as fast as it is now. It had no spots and it did not hunt as well as it wanted to.

One day the leopard was wandering through the grass, pulling up some here and there and running it through its teeth to taste its flavour.

It came to a pool to wash away the taste and stopped to look at its reflection. As it stared at itself it began to feel sad.

'How can I change?' it thought, 'how can I achieve? My prey are too fast for me.'

As it was wondering, a drop of water fell from one of the leaves above the pool and rippled the surface of the water. When it cleared a strange figure was reflected in the water.

The leopard turned quickly to get a look.

It was a human figure, dressed in different skins.

'Who are you?' the leopard growled.

In those days everyone could still understand each other.

'I am a maker of magic' said the figure.

The leopard spent a while looking at the figure trying to evaluate the strange sight of one who was supposed to make magic.

'If that's the case then make me run faster,' said the leopard.

"Why should I do that?" asked the magic maker.

'Huh, I knew you were lying all along' said the leopard turning to go away.

The magic maker grew sad.

'You think to make me angry and to force my hand by saying that', he said looking at the leopard with compassion, 'If you want it that badly then I will grant your wish, but you may not like what you get. There is a price.'

And he touched the leopard with his bone wand, but the leopard felt nothing but the touch.

'Really?' said the leopard and turned away tail in the air. He turned again a few paces on but the figure was no longer there.

As he went through the day he found he could run faster and he could hunt better than he ever did!

He was overjoyed.

When he looked in the water the next morning he found that he was spotted. He was shocked. Was this part of the price?

As time went by he discovered that the spots were a good disguise, but he also noticed that the other animals began to fear him more and more. He became lonely.

The maker of magic appeared again to him one day.

'Do you like the price?' he said.

'No' said the leopard and he would have killed him on the spot but he hoped the maker of magic would do something.

'Change me back'

'Sorry' the maker of magic said, ' Everything has two sides to it, you will have to make the best of it or you will have to change yourself.'

He disappeared.

And that is why the leopard looks so sad. He has not yet learnt to do that."

He ended the story and smiled at me.

I sighed.

" It is the beginning of everything" I said. " That's where it came from."



The Wise Adventure.



The fire crackled and subsided, sending its glow into the night.

"You know, " he said, " Your frustrating circumstances of today remind me of a story"

We had been rambling in our conversation, with my complaints foremost. I asked him to tell me the story.

"Well" said Zuma, " You will have to listen to the story and decide if it can help.

What I am going to tell you happened a long time ago, when our ancestors could still understand the speech of animals.."

I nodded. Sounded like an interesting story.

" In a small village their lived a man and his wife with their ten children.

The man especially worried a lot - he always thought the worst was going to happen.

This one particular day had been very frustrating. His beer had been drunk by some animal, his wife had just told him she was expecting another child. Those he had were screaming on top of their voices. On top of all of this he had a narrow escape from a lion when he was hunting.

So he was muttering and complaining to his wife.

She was muttering under her breath, because she had heard all of this sort of thing before. Eventually she could stand it no more. Enough was enough.

'Why don't you go on a quest?' she said.

'A quest?' said the man astonished.

'Husband, you are always complaining so why don't you find the answers?'

Her husband was not happy with his wife speaking this way, but he controlled his temper and asked her:

'What would I be looking for?'

'Why the answers to your frustrations - it would be a wise quest.'

He pondered. A wisdom adventure. The more he thought of it the better it sounded.

However he could not admit that his wife had come up with a good idea, so he said:

'I will sleep on it and decide tomorrow.'

So he did and the next morning he asked his wife: 'If I were to do such a thing, I am just curious mind you, where would I start?'

'Where you are ' said his wife. However knowing this to be too vague for him she said further, 'You might ask a few of the animals like the rabbit, the owl who are said to be wise.'

'Hmm, 'he pondered, 'I am glad I thought of that. Yes I think I will do it.' And off he went.

The first creature he encountered was the Rabbit. Rabbit was staring closely at the ground intent on something.

'What are you doing' said the man.

The rabbit pretended not to notice him.

'What are you doing?' repeated the man.

'Shhh,' said the rabbit, 'I am listening to the carrots grow.'

'Why would you do that?' said the man.

'Then I know when they are ripe, said the rabbit, 'surely you know everything has a sound that shows when it is ready.'

So they stood there for a while.

'I can't hear anything' said the man, 'But I wonder if you could help me'

The rabbit looked at him crossly.

'What is it?'

'I am looking for wisdom" said the man.

The rabbit pondered.

'Put your ear to the ground and you will hear the carrots grow, that is the start of wisdom. Learning new lessons.'

So the man did so and the rabbit made some excuse to leave, asking if the man could listen for any sound and he would come back later for a report.

So it happened that the hedgehog who was passing saw a very strange sight. A man who was lying with his ear to the ground.

'What is happening?' asked the hedgehog.

'Shhh, I am listening to the carrots grow.' said the man.

'How ridiculous, a man cannot hear carrots grow!' said the hedgehog and he laughed and laughed and went on his way.

So the man walked away ashamed at having been tricked.

He decided to go home because he was not in the mood to go on.

At home he told his wife the story. As she listened her smile grew broader and broader and eventually she was rolling around with laughter and the children joined in.

'I have learnt nothing' said the man.

'Yes' said his wife, 'You have learnt how you can be taken in by others. In a like way you have been taken in by your negative thoughts. Life is supposed to have fun and laughter, at least the rabbit taught you that.'

And the man thinking about it began to laugh.

He had found wisdom."



Becoming Big.



The moon had risen over the sea, casting orange light over the waters. It had not quite yet turned from old age to youth.

As Zuma and I stared at it, he smoking his pipe, we mused together in silence.

"Did I ever tell you about the day the elephant became big" he asked.

"No you never did" I said.

"In the old days the elephant was about the same size as the other animals. He had lost his hair early on and they used to make fun of him because he was bald and grey. They used to say things like:

'You look all washed out!'

'Careful or you will get lost among the stones!'

'You are so short, be careful or you will trip over your trunk!'

This hurt the elephant and he decided one day that he would go away.

At that time the world was all connected, so he was able to wander until he found himself in totally new surroundings. He became happy because there was no-one to taunt him.

After a while however he became lonely and wanted to go back, but when he thought of what awaited him he could not. This unhappy state of affairs continued day after day.

One day however, after a bath in a river he went to scratch himself against a Baobab tree. After a good scratch, he felt sleepy and closing his eyes he was soon fast asleep. Sleeping he dreamt.

A great shining spirit came to him in his dream and touched him on the forehead.

'Little elephant,' the spirit said, 'You are so sad, will you let me help you?'

'Who are you?' asked the elephant.

'I am the spirit of the Boabab tree you rest under. I am a magic tree and I know of your troubles.'

The elephant was doubtful.

'Ah' said the spirit, 'Let me show you something.'

And he brought before the elephant the faces of all those who had tormented him one by one. He showed the elephant their innermost thoughts, desires and dreams. The elephant saw how unhappy his tormentors were in themselves. He understood why they sought someone to torment.

'How do you know this?'

'I am the spirit of this tree and my spirit is part of the spirit of all trees. We are one. As a spirit I am also one with the animals, the earth, the air. All partake of each other so they all connected and all come from the same source, the great spirit over all.'

'That's very confusing' said the elephant.

'Answer these questions' said the spirit:

'We all breathe the air?'

'Yes'

'We all drink water?'

'Yes'

'We all need sunlight?'

'Yes'

'If we all need similar things to live, it shows we have a common link. The only difference between us is the type of food we eat and the form we take. The things we share are a link and it is through the spirit of all that is the same that we can know each other and all things.'

'I think I understand' said the elephant.

'We are all brothers and sisters. You saw how insecure your brothers and sisters are. Here is a small plant that says what I have told you. Eat it and you will grow wise.'

With that the elephant awoke.

In amazement he saw that the plant of his dream was near him. He ate it.

Each morning thereafter he found a plant beside him when he woke and this continued for fourteen days.

As the days went he felt his wisdom grow, he understood things more. He found that he was physically growing as well.

After the fourteenth day no more plants appeared.

By that time however he was ready to go back and he did.

The animals were astonished by his size and after a while even more astonished by his wisdom, for he could help them with their problems.

And that is how the elephant became big, wise and kind and why he, not the lion is king of the beasts."



The Old Man and the Fire.



Darkness lay like a blanket all around, soft and warm. The fire crackled and rose higher into the night, its sparks illuminating the faces of those sitting around it.

Ntokozweni, a young girl, beads in her hair, wearing traditional maiden dress, sat close to the fire, looking into the flames, holding her hands as near as she could. Mary, with golden hair flecked by the fire, in her rough farm clothes, sat nearby, watching the flames as they tried to lick Ntokozweni's hands. Jonathan, coffee coloured from the sun, his dark eyes reflecting the fire, sat cross legged in his short pants and jersey of blue.

On the other side sat Zuma, hair greying, a hunters look and wrapped in a blanket - many coloured in the light, the patterns almost moving, as the flames rose and fell.

"Ntokozweni", said Zuma, "You have had some tough times, ne".

"Yes" said Ntokozweni shyly, hardly daring to look at the venerable figure of Zuma.

Ntokozweni and her family had had to flee their homes as a result of violence. Her mother had sought work on the farm of Mary's parents. Mary and Ntokozweni had become fast friends and could not be separated. Ntokozweni was still afraid that the people who committed violence would find her and she often had bad dreams about this.

"I am going to tell you all a story," said Zuma, "An old, old story that comes to us from so long ago that not even the trees, who live so long, can remember it.

Many moons have been in the sky, since the Spirit of our Ancestors was on earth. He was a great spirit, a mighty warrior, skilled in many things. He discovered the wind, he named the trees - as one names one's children, the animals he called brothers and they as they listened to his voice grew stronger.

One day the Spirit of our Ancestors was walking and he came to a calm, clear pool. He was tired after the many things he had been doing, so he lay down to sleep. As he slept, he dreamt."

"What did he dream?"

"He dreamt that he saw the future. He saw people walking from his heart, walking from him to the future. So many people! You can imagine! All sorts of people, big and small, ugly and fat."

"Even some like Mary?"

"Yes and Peter and anyone you can think of. As they walked, animals, plants walked with them - they talked and played together."

"The plants walked!"

Lots of laughter.

"Well, lets say they were there along the way to be played with. As they got further and further into the future, he saw that many of the animals and plants were no longer there - until eventually, the people walked alone, lonely and tired. In his dream the Spirit of our Ancestors was very, very, very sad."

"Why was he sad?"

"Well, his companions were no longer with his people and he knew that something was wrong.

When he woke, he said to himself, 'I must leave a message for my people, to remind them of what I have seen, so that they will remember'.

So what do you think he did ?"

"Some magic?"

"Well, yes and no. He asked the Great Spirit - that is in everything -to create the seasons: spring, summer, autumn, winter - to remind men that everything changes and can change. Not to take for granted what is there. The seasons say, ' Look at us', they remind us that the animals and plants are not always there and we must remember that we are a family. We can depend on each other surely?"

There was silence as Zuma finished, only the crackle of the fire.

He turned and looked at Ntokozweni for awhile, in a calm and joyful way.

Ntojkozweni looked back, not knowing what to make of the story.

"Ntokozweni, you must feel this story here" said Zuma pointing to his heart, "Because it will not make sense here." He pointed to his head.

"You have gone through bad times. People can be bad sometimes, because they do not understand themselves, or you. They do not know we are all part of the same life, that we are linked. If they understood that, they would know you are just as valuable as them and to hurt you, they hurt themselves. You have a right to peace, to be left in peace. Seek it in kinship here with your brothers and sisters. Listen to the birds and animals, the peace in lying beneath a tree. Listen to your heart, it says peace - you are safe with us."

Ntokozwini, began to understand this a little and she could feel her worries starting to fade. Peace was coming to her, though it would take time. She was safe here.

In the distance, the laughter of the hyena, seemed to say "Men are so stupid" and it warmed her heart to the Spirit of Life.



A Meeting.

It was a number of months since I had seen Zuma. He had been away on a quest to the Karoo and I was looking forward to hearing if he had gained anything from his journey.

As I came over the hill to his house, I saw him standing outside smoking his pipe, reflectively looking at the valley below. He was looking very well.

I greeted him and he returned the greeting warmly.

After pleasantries and some small conversation, I asked him eagerly to tell me what had happened to him.

"Well, what I will do is tell you of one incident," he said, dropping into reflection again briefly. "It really was the heart of my journey and I think it may be helpful to others."

I nodded.

"It was a cool dark African night, the Southern Cross particularly bright in the sky, when the event I am about to describe happened. I had been thinking about Africa and where it was going, all the stories, the legends. I saw in my mind's eye many images from the myths and legends of Africa and one that kept coming back to me was of Africa as a mother to us.

There was something here that moved me, almost as if it was a forgotten memory.

On this clear night, it seemed to me that the time was right to think about this further. In doing so I fell asleep and dreamt a strange dream.

It seemed to me that a veil was thrown between me and the stars. The light about me grew brighter and I smelt a scent of roses, and then it was that I saw the figure of a beautiful woman.

She spoke to me and said, 'In the heart of the world is an ancient flame that in breathing one is never the same again.'

I understood in my dream that she was referring to that an essential energy which is in us.

She then said, 'I have sought you for many ages. My love is a cloak that has kept me warm. My light is a form to hold you. Together we will follow the stars.'

I awoke with her words in my ears and knew the treasure she bestowed on me. That was my experience."

I was slightly confused. "You will have to tell me what it means," I said.

"The message I received is simple," Zuma said, "We have to realise that the essence of life is that we are part of everything. The basis of this is love. When you realise that you are loved, not only by family and friends, but by everything out there in Africa, in the planet, you have to love yourself. You pour it into your body, emotions, mind. Thus you will be healed, renewed and become free."

We sat in silence, the firelight reflecting our faces which showed peace.



Guidelines for use of the stories.

Each of the stories can be used to start a process of healing. Set out here you will find a number of exercises that can be followed, but they are merely guidelines.

One can present the exercises as part of a workshop format with groups of people, preferably a small group situation. They can be done by the reader on his or her own, but a group situation is better for the support it gives.

It is essential that those who participate do so in an atmosphere of love, trust and respect. While these exercises will do this in the process followed, every endeavour should be made before the first exercise to set up this process. An introductory session where people can get to know each other is advisable as a minimum. Also participants should only be allowed to come if they are prepared to participate fully. Any less would hinder the spirit in which this is done. Everyone must contribute and discuss.

First exercise.

Read: How the leopard changes.

Start discussion of the story by asking everyone how they feel about it. Develop the theme by asking them how they would define themselves in the light of the story, who are they, how do they feel.

Guide them to see how their past experiences influence them. Once you have done this, ask them to go home and write a story about themselves.

Second exercise.

Start by recapping on the previous exercise and ask people to read their story. Allow everyone to say how they feel about peoples stories.

Then read: The wise adventure and start discussion about it.

Ask them to go home and rewrite their story showing what they gained and what they learnt from their experiences. They can include how they benefited, how others can benefit from their experiences.

Third exercise.

Let them read their stories and let others give their responses to them. Show them how writing can help them come to terms with the past.

Indicate how they have created something and that they do so every day in their lives whether they decide to follow a career, a religion, to read a book, to build a home, to create a drawing, to make friends.

Then read: *Becoming Big* and discuss what it means.

Ask them to go home and create a story of what they would like to do with their life. How would they like their life to be and what can they do to change it.

Fourth exercise.

Let them read their stories and let everyone give feedback.

Then read: *The Old Man and the Fire*. Start a debate asking them if they feel nature can be a source of wholeness, healing and what they feel the message of the story is.

Let them go home and write a story of how they could bring healing to others.

Fifth session.

Let them read their stories and give feedback.

Then read: *A Meeting* and discuss the story and whether it has a relevant message. Debate with them about how it can help practically.

The group is to go away and write a story about love.

Sixth session.

Let them read their stories and discuss the matter.

Then summarise the meetings and what has been learnt over the six weeks. Discuss how they can continue to apply these stages over a period and that healing is cyclic, they can use these over and over for a healing process and show others how to do this. Ask them if they want to continue as a group to facilitate the healing process and to start other groups themselves. Teaching others is

healing. If they do not want to continue end the group on a positive note.

Stories that Heal



How the Leopard Changes

The Wise Adventure

Becoming Big

The Old Man and the Fire

A Meeting

Guidelines for use of the stories

Michael Morain writes under a penname, due to another author having the same name as him. Although a new writer to the South African scene, since he started writing poetry in 1993 he has gained recognition. He received an international award in 1993 for poetry published in America that year. Lifetime membership of the International Society of Poets, based in Washington, DC followed.

Community involvement has been through the Congress of South African Writers and lectures in Creative Writing for the Culture and Working Life Unit at Natal University. He is a founding member of "Poetry for Peace" and co-editor together with Nisa Malanga of the "Poetry for Peace" book, aimed at peace and reconciliation work with communities in South Africa. Further work has involved lectures for the Creative Arts Centre of Natal University and for the Grahamstown Foundation.

He has published two poetry books in South Africa: "Healing Africa" and "Music in the Earth". Author also of "A World to live in" based on early education work and "Gold like Dust" a new novel published solely on the internet. Poetry entitled: "A Touch of Light - stories and poems of Africa" is also published on the internet at: <http://www.writersg.com>
