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Empowering African Writers

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**LUBACHA DEUS
LUBACHA ABDUL**

Behind the Blossoming Burt Award

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Featured Writers

Esther Enewerome Odafe - Nigeria
Benny Wanjohi - Kenya
Markham Marcus Kafui - Ghana
Idris Firdaws Onozasi - Nigeria
Esther Imonmion, - Nigeria
Claudine Karangwa Ingabire - Rwanda
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Jasmine Kapya - Tanzania
Ojji, Chinazaekpere Joy - Nigeria
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Kimberly Chirodzero - Zimbabwe
William Khalipwina Mpina - Malawi
Hannah Hazvibvumesu Tarindwa - Namibia



EDITORIAL

*Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.*

It's a wrap! 2018 is hugging us goodbye. We mark the end of year in style. It goes in record, that we held our first ever writers conference. From all corners of mother Africa, we assembled at Abuja for a physical get-together.

We got to meet in person, the people behind the great works we've been enjoying. Virtual interactions have been awesome and now face-to-face mingling even great.

We celebrate you, dear reader for your continued support, undaunted love, feedback and the solid sense of togetherness this past one year. Also, to our contributors, who let their craft find a home with us, thank you for the trust. We hold you in high esteem.

We gracefully acknowledge the fact that, the end of a line, is the beginning of a new race. Catch you here again in the New Year for another literary road trip across Africa. Happy holidays!

**Wakini Kuria,
Kenya,
Chief Editor,
WSA**





AFRICAN WRITERS
DEVELOPMENT TRUST
To Empower Writers of African Descent

“Until you can look at yourself beyond the comments of others (criticism and complements) and still see that inner self worth, you are yet to be FREE.”
- Oduwaiye Opeyemi Abdul-Qadr, Nigeria



Welcome Address Delivered at the 2018 African Writers Conference and Awards November 30 - December 2, 2018

The African Writers Development Trust AWDT is a Non-Governmental Organization that exists to integrate, empower, and mentor Writers and Arts Enthusiasts of African descent. AWDT promotes reading culture, encourages cross cultural learning, sharing of creative ideas, mentoring, capacity building among writers irrespective of their economic, religious, cultural, tribal, national, political or philosophical orientation.

Currently, the AWDT publishes Writers Space Africa (WSA) –a highly acclaimed and widely circulated monthly literary magazine which features works of writers from all over Africa to a global audience. Past and present editions of the magazine are available free to download at www.writersspace.net.

The organization also publishes Poetica, a magazine dedicated to everything poetry from poets and writers of African descent. This magazine is published quarterly and can be downloaded for free at www.poeticamagazine.net.

The African Writers Conference is an event conceptualized by the African Writers Development Trust aimed at bringing together writers of African descent to a common platform, building bridges for the transfer of values, engaging a conversation on how to advance the fight for the girl child as well as other collective shared interests.

The objectives include:

- To provide a gateway for continuous engagement and cross interaction on the issue of the girl child.
- To promote cross cultural discussion that will lead to the development of literature on the African continent.
- To foster mutual understanding for peaceful co-existence.
- To identify, endorse and celebrate excellence in African writing.

For more about AWDT, please visit www.writerstrust.org.

Do enjoy the conference.

Regards,

Anthony Onugba,

Co-founder and Executive Director

aonugba@writerstrust.org

Winners of the 2018 African Writers Awards



Winners have emerged at the 2018 African writers awards held on December 1, 2018 at the International Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria. The event which paraded the finest writers in Africa was a celebration of the beauty of the girl child. The winners at the event were;

1. Children's Literature – Manu Herbstein (Ghana) for 'Roise'
2. Flash Fiction – Maryhilda Ibe (Nigeria) for 'Fragments.'
3. Poetry – Chiamaka Onu-Okpara (Nigeria) for 'A Battle Cry to be Read Loudly and Softly.'
4. Short Stories – Benson Mugo (Kenya) for 'Dawn.'

Special awards were also given to some writers of African descent who have contributed immensely towards the growth and development of the African literary space. Those recognised were;

1. Sandra Oma Etubiebi (Nigeria)
2. Wakini Kuria (Kenya)
3. Edith Knight Adhiambo Ochieng (Kenya)
4. Nahida Esmail (Tanzania)
5. Halima Usman (Nigeria)
6. Saka Dbosz Junior (Nigeria)



FLASH FICTION

CHICKEN WING

Esther Enewerome Oḍafe - Nigeria



The aroma of fried rice and chicken heavily filled the air around the face-me-I-face-you compound we lived in. The sound of firecrackers mingled with the excited voices of children showing off their new clothes were heard. The girls would swing their heads just so their beads could jingle, and the boys would argue whose sneakers had brighter lights.

“Mama Ejiro happy Christmas o!” A neighbour greeted.

“Happy Christmas Mama Chidi.”

My Mother responded as she served my brother, Dafe, and me a plate of fried rice and a piece of chicken – typical Christmas delicacy. Dafe joyfully took his plate while I stared at the piece of meat.

“Ejiro don’t make me collect that food from you!” Knowing my Mum’s temper, I quietly walked away but I wasn’t satisfied. I had assisted my Mum in frying the chicken the previous day so I knew we had more than enough to go round.

Immediately she left the house to greet the neighbours, I walked into the kitchen and opened the pot of fried chicken. I picked up a drumstick to eat but realized that it would be easily noticed if it was gone so I put it back and picked a wing instead.

“Ejiro!”

“Ma,” I answered and ran to the kitchen. Dafe was standing beside her with a smirk on his face. “How many pieces of chicken did you take from this pot?” The look in her eyes cautioned me not to lie. But something else was wrong. Why would my Mum ask how many pieces of chicken I’d taken when it was just one missing from the pot? Unless...

I looked at Dafe and I knew he had seen me take the chicken wing. “It was just one wing.” As soon as I said those words, what followed was a deafening slap.

POETRY



ONCE IN A YEAR

Benny Wanjohi -Kenya

Good morning! The sun rises in the east
Announcing arrival of the day of the feast
The dog yawns, the dove leaves its nest
Insects, visit flowers, from their night rest

The bell at the tower of the Church rings
Time to attend the Christmas service
Sing about the birth of the King of kings
And hear a sermon from Pastor Gervase
Before returning home for the festival

The goat bleats, kicks, and fights for its life
As it succumbs to the grandfather's knife
Activities increase in every wife's kitchen
As they prepare round chapatis and chicken


Mounted in the middle of the homestead
A homemade Christmas tree is twinkling
Relatives arrive with city sweets and bread
As children excitedly play in a gathering
around their uncle who's acting Santa Claus

Smoky pots from every hut are brought out
On sisal mats the old and young spread out
To merry with the delicacy of every dish
Until darkness calls for the goodnight wish!

*Chapati - a flat pancake of unleavened bread cooked on a griddle.

DAWN OF A CALENDAR

Markham Marcus Kafui - Ghana



When the midnight angelus sounds
And the fire crackers begin to kindle forth,
Rejoice ye men of women,
Rejoice women of men
Oh Rejoice, all ye inhabitants of the earth
For harvest is past and harvest is here
Leap forth mortal men for there are those who seethe
And there are those who seethe not
The stars are a witness to the shift in time
But let the immortals judge between the old and the Gregorian
For some speak with and some speak without
So men of the field, save the moment
Let your wells birth water till dust settles on your heart
Thus the moon dances to your merry quietly
As dawn awakes,
Only to await your next harvest.

SOUL-MATE CHRISTMAS

Idris Firdaws Onozasi - Nigeria

A promise I made, quietly to myself
To find a soul-mate, this Christmas
One with a face that lights the firmament
A beautiful soul, an adoring heart

The first I met, has the soul of a priest
But a crooked face, surgeons can't correct
The second, beautiful, a master piece
But has a troubled heart, so violent

The third, so polite and full of love
But his soul so corrupt, he is a thief
The fourth, his face gorgeous like rose
But when I look closely, his nose doesn't fit

So they all are, with missing parts
Until I decided, to admit defeat
I couldn't find a soul-mate, this Christmas
But sure I will, on New Year's Eve.



THE CHRISTMAS AURA

Esther Imonmion, - Nigeria

Can the night fade away
For excitement till dusk
As the euphoria paves the way
For celebration nonstop.

The night seem longer than usual
Voices of children playing in the moonlight
Mothers in some sort of cooking ritual
As we all watch the night.

The sound of sonorous music reverberates the air
The smell of steaming stew inspires hunger
As the dark births a day; bright and fair
The shouts of MERRY CHRISTMAS quake like thunder.

I Bleed your Ink

Claudine Karangwa Ingabire - Rwanda

For my words that flow like a river,
With the ink spewing across my page,
So much to say, so much to write to soothe your soul,
Let me narrate between the lines of your stories,
For my heart to bleed the pain from the scars that you carry,
For my voice to be heard as I speak for the voiceless,
It's not that you are numb and helpless.
This ink that flows in my veins,
Pregnant with stories untold,
Alphabetical surges Steaming,
Building up wails and screams,
Thunderous claps and ululations,
Emotions swirled up inside,
Let me be the mouthpiece.
Let me articulate your inner most,
When you fail to fathom.
When you fail to shape letters,
to form the right words to express yourself,
Let me bleed your ink.



A BITTER-BROKEN CHRISTMAS

Tanyaradzwa.N.L Mtema - Zimbabwe

Hastily she waited for the day.
She dreamt of it so beautiful,
Beautiful than the long gone decades.
Chanted with joy, a heart full of imaginations.

Preparations adorned the beauty of their homestead.
Women meandering from one corner to the other
A busy day it was!
Girls and boys at one end enjoying their melodramatic plays.
Christmas a season of shared happiness with suspended sorrows,

It was not as perfect as it seemed.
It's not Christmas without the "Jerusalem dance."
What then is Christmas without rice and chicken?
What is Christmas without our luscious brew?
Men gathering in unison share the joys of life,
Kissing other men's lips as the mug of brew circulated.

And then fate takes a twist turn!
Sweeping away the joy of the day
Fire!
Men and women scattered all over with buckets of water.
Sight-seeing the thatches of our old hut falling inside as,
Ears dominated the cries of agony made by the innocent soul.
It was too late!
He died a painful death!

FAMILY TIME

Phodiso Modirwa - Botswana

My father comes back for Christmas
With a chiselled build of a body
Mountainous and strong
His hands like two pendulum
Swaying back and forth
Between away and here

He and the other men return home
To women with golden brown skin
African sun kissed dark and beautiful
They return to these backbones
Pillars holding homesteads together
Holding the floods at bay
When the lack and diseases rage
They are back to their own again

Back to celebrate Christmas
Over large meals and loud chatter
To remember a Christ born
Share gifts heartfelt
Because here in Africa
Christmas is synonymous
With family time

THE VILLAGE IN SEASON

Miriam Kalekye Kyalo - Kenya

Before the New Year's crossover
Bus parks are full of crowds
It's departure time for everyone
As they usher in the festive season

Children graze at the roadside
Children gaze toward the main road
To see if uncle will surprise them
With gifts of shoes and garments

The kids answer to the calls of mothers
Who're making the sweet chapatis
There are whistles and ululations
As they play merrily in the wet sand

At sunset the clan sits round the bonfire

Where the elders tell ancestral tales
With silent bites of the roasted meat
Echoes of laughter run into darkness

The long-distance relatives unite
As they recapture missed moments
The cocks crow in low rhythmic tones
As if they know their slaughter hour is
nigh

Traditional dancers wear intertwined
leaves
Making uniformed entertaining moves
Marking the end of one season
Till the next, when it'll be Christmas again



CHRISTMAS IN NAIROBI

Isaac Kilibwa - Kenya



Hectic, the last sennight, has always been
As masses flee the capital for home.
Of humans the choked streets have been scrubbed clean,
The unfamiliar breeze allowed to roam.
All roads lead away, coaches new paths tread,
Sardines packed with nostalgia ridden men,
Flee, like to honeymoons the newlywed,
Men do not mind their slim pockets bitten.
But the forlorn city, ah, she exhales,
And leisurely stretches her nimble limbs.
Serene poetries shrug from their shy shells
And breathe amity with their silent hymns.
As calm as they come is Nairobi's Mass,
Drained of guarded harm, noise, and sad flowers.



A Confused Mind Is A Lost Soul

Jackline Christopher,

Tanzania



Writers Space Africa

LUBACHA DEUS LUBACHA ABDUL

Behind the Blossoming Burt Award

BY SANDRA OMA ETUBIEBI



If I hear you say you don't care for recognition for your work as a writer, I may greet you with respectful silence, but be sure that somewhere within the frenulum of my tongue I have called you a liar! Sure, recognition or not, many writers will always write –some for the joys and the rush, many for fame and fortune, and others for a cause. Yet, who says you can't have it all? Who says that a cause is without its rush, its fame and fortune? While all of this is playing back and forth within your cerebral cortex, let me introduce a modest, humble, and brilliant writer who is presently enjoying the notoriety that comes with recognition and applause for a work well written.

He is Lubacha Deus Lubacha Abdul –what a name! Born 27 years ago in the Western Zone of Tanzania along the shores of Lake Victoria, Lubacha is a teacher specialized in Literature and Linguistics. He is an editor, aspiring publisher and youth activist; all bounded together into a developing writing career. He lives in Dar es Salaam.

Our WSA Celebrity for this month is the proud winner of the 2018 CODE Burt Literary Award. If you're like me –curious to know more about the award and the man Lubacha – you'll enjoy my robust question and answer session where he eloquently talks more about himself, his writing, his award, and his fans.

Enjoy!

Q: What role does your specialization, Literature and Linguistics, play in your writing and ability of expression?

A: Prior to specializing in Linguistics, I had a limited ability of expressing ideas in English language because I don't belong to English language native speaking community. When I switched my writing to English as the way to connect to the world, I was obliged to have a great knowledge of the language. Linguistics has played a great role towards widening the understanding of socio-linguistic patterns that in turn has enforced great expression whenever I lift my fingers to type on a screen. With literature, I am comfortable that whichever feature I include in my writings I have a great understanding of it. For example I like using extended metaphors (literary conceits), de-familiarization and the question of binary opposition when assigning roles to my characters. Studying literature and linguistics has propelled me to write my works weighing them on formalist approach of criticism which denotes that the key to understand the text is by the text itself. As a literary critic I do close reading.

Q: Tell us about your writing?

A: To me, Writing is more than just getting words out of my head. It's a well-practiced way of thinking, behaving and creating. I like storytelling, not because am too verbal but because I have that passion of playing with words in a good way. I write young and adult fiction, with thematic focus that affects them positively. I always give an insight of judgment to the society about issues affecting both young and adults. An Austrian novelist, Peter Handke, once said "If a country loses its storytellers, it loses its childhood." That's true. This is what keeps me writing fiction works to accommodate the changes and misconceptions derived from societal systems. Although my first two writings are novels, in the near future I am going to write poetry, short stories, flash fiction and plays.

Q: What propels you to write? What do you write about and why?

A: What propels me to write is the duty I have as a writer; to write for the community. Writing is a habit patterned over a routine. I write every day to make a great flow of my ideas. Writing is practice. And If I realize what I've written doesn't make sense to me, I erase it. There's no loss when the mind is not satisfied. But every day I must have something to download from my mind. I write about socio-cultural issues and their effects towards creating a responsible generation.

Q: Growing up, what were your dreams for a career? And how does that measure up to your experiences today?

A: I grew up in Chato district, seeing my uncle holding books from Monday to Friday on his way to and from school where he taught English language. I was pulled to be a teacher since then. Whenever I saw him in the evening, sitting on a wooden chair in the yard, holding his English written book on the left hand, while occasionally sipping his tea after each thin rustle of paper, I asked to sit by his side, throwing childish questions about reading. He was kind and loving and responsive. It was the best feeling as I grew up knowing that teaching and books are an everlasting engagement. When he passed away in 2004 while I was 13, I missed a figure to ask and learn more about the secret behind the books. He left books which I couldn't read because they were far advanced compared to my education level by that time, and worse enough were written in English, a language that I hadn't mastered yet. I started reading Swahili stories, most of which were written on newspapers. When I was appointed a school librarian (pupils section), I got a chance to interact with variety of books. Although I was young, it appeared that I fell in love with adult books especially those with adventures and unbeaten heroic char-

acters (Ben Mtobwa's book was my first encounter in the library). With exposition to many books, I completed series of readings within a short period of time and I felt like I had discovered a new world that was hidden behind tall mountains. Reading books influenced me to write. Growing up knowing that teaching and books are inseparable entities made me believe that I can teach and write at the same time and now, here I am; a teacher and writer.

Q: When you self-published your first novel in 2016, did you sell it? What did you do with it?

As I majored in Literature and linguistics at university, I made a commitment that before my graduation I must have something for my classmates (relating to my course of study) that would be our greatest memory. When I self-published My first Girlfriend, I sold it at a lower price that was affordable to anyone (on campus) who wished to buy. I was amused by the people's positive response that gave me the courage to make writing my greatest companion in life.

Q: What is the Burt Awards?

A: The CODE Burt Literary Award is a literary award and readership initiative that recognizes excellence in locally authored and published literature for young adults aged 12-18. The objective of the prize is to champion literacy, build language skills, and foster the love and habit of reading by ensuring that young people have access to high quality, culturally relevant, and engaging reading materials. In 2008, CODE established the Burt Literary Award with the generous support of Canadian philanthropist William (Bill) Burt and the Literary Prizes Foundation. First established in Tanzania, the program has since expanded to Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Caribbean, and Canada.

CODE is a Canadian based international development organization that works in partnership with local organizations to expand literacy in Africa, the Caribbean, and Canada by supporting the professional development of teachers and librarians, by providing children and youth with access to high quality reading materials, and helping to strengthen the local book trade and national publishing capacities.

Q: How did you hear about the Burt Awards? What informed and influenced your

decision to enter?

A: A friend recommended the awards to me, after he read my first novel. Although he had a little clue about the awards but he advised me (if possible) to submit my novel *My first Girlfriend* for 2016 literary prize competition, assuming that it could win. I didn't hesitate. When I approached CBP (Children's Books Project) the novel was rejected on the grounds that it didn't fit the criteria of the target audience (Young Adults) but I was enriched with information about the award, thanks to Happiness, the coordinator. Learning that the competition was open to anyone, I was influenced to write something that would fit the criteria. Therefore I had to go back and twist the scope of the audience in the new novel I was working on and came up with *If she were Alive*, a title that hooked the award in 2018.

Q: There are many writers with good manuscripts out there, please explain to them the possibilities that abound in entering their works into such contests.

A: A quote from Janice H. Reinold explains it all. She says that in today's modern world, people are either asleep or connected. That's true. Writing is enterprise that a writer needs to be connected to a variety of situations and people. I would say this; Writers with their manuscripts on devices and papers have to interact. They have to attend literary festivals, book fairs and reading hubs and stay closer to social media. Information is the most valuable commodity. You cannot be informed unless you keep yourself in a network. In Tanzania for example, there's Peer Writing Support program in which writers write their stories and submit them to a local facilitator who does literary critique together with writers during our meeting sessions. The aim of this program is to keep writers well equipped with quality and relevant stories that would be published or submitted in such contests and keep them in a network that would provide them with relevant information about various opportunities.

Q: Are you aware of the process behind the judging process for the Burt Awards?

A: For BURT awards, I am not sure if the criteria put on the calls for submission are the only hints considered in judgment. Perhaps there are plenty of them but I am not exposed to. All I know are the general criteria put on submission calls for stories to be eligible to contest; one being focusing on young adult as the primary audience. The

requirements are always made clear when the calls are made. That's what guides me before I throw my story into competitions.

Q: When and how did you receive the news that you won the Burt Awards?

A: To be frank, I wish I knew about it before I lifted my feet to the awarding hall but it never happened. I got the news about winning when I was announced at the ceremony. It was all revealed on the spot. The feeling of waiting was so scary that I felt unusual tautness in my stomach. It could've developed to acute diarrhea if they delayed announcing the winners, I swear.

Q: So, how does winning feel like?

A: Several times I tried to imagine how Cristiano Ronaldo felt whenever he lifted a Ballon D'Or or Golden boot award but couldn't grasp the real feeling till winning knocked at my door. Winning thrills the body parts, making the body boil while pushing the adrenaline to allow humorous and enthusiastic blood flow. In winning, there's a kind of pleasure you can't explain clearly by words, but to cut the story short, it feels good to be recognized.

Q: How do you hope to maximize your new found status and influence?

A: I need to diversify my writing by widening its scope; I mean engaging into other genres such as short stories, poetry, plays and flash fiction. I have been receiving calls and emails asking me if I have done other writing apart from novels and I think the time has come to quench their thirst. I have a plan to release an anthology of short stories next year. When it comes to literature, I believe I can write anything worth reading and plagiarizing.

Q: You have a desire to become a publisher. Tell us more about that.

A: In Tanzania we are struggling to build readership culture. We are investing in youth to let them regard reading as part of their life. To supply the reading community with sufficient materials to read we need to encourage youth to write consumable works. As aspiring publisher, I'm determined to create a harmonious firm that would help young writers from secondary schools and universities (Who cannot get a room to publish) to have their works published and linked up to the market after launching them. As a publisher, my role is to let upcoming writers get exposed to the world of writing. The approach will base on publishing anthologies developed from different stories written by upcoming writers basing on one theme that will be communicated by the publishing

house. The theme will change in each call for submission to enable young writers swim in a wide ocean of ideas.

Q: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

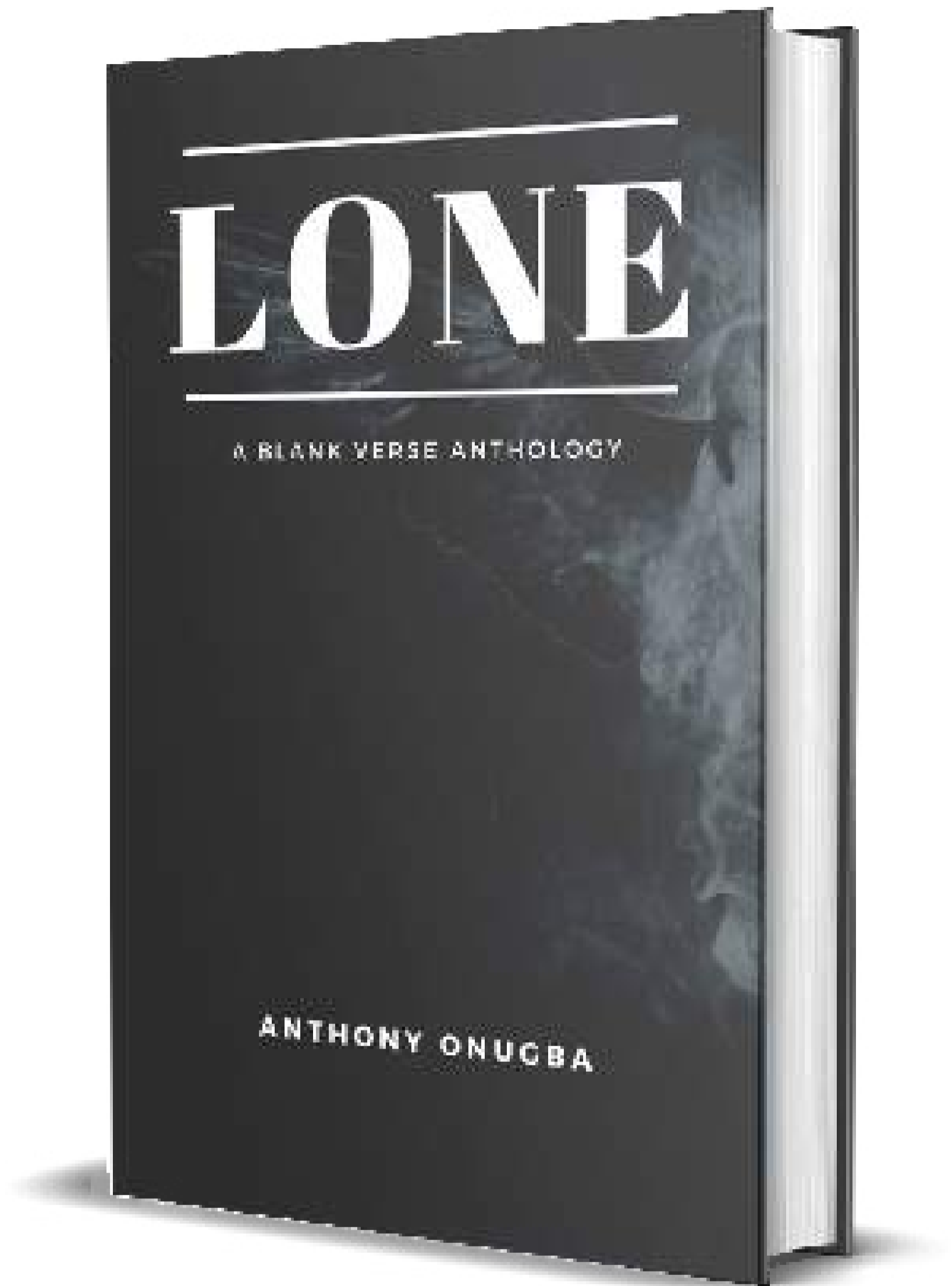
A: Hilary Hinton 'Zig Ziglar', the American author and motivational speaker said there's no elevator to success, you have to take the stairs. Well, I am really excited by the steps "stairs" I've taken up to this far. It's really encouraging that I am not stuck to where I was before. My writing is growing, improving from one stair to the other, with a bunch of folks behind me. In five years, I see myself as someone with deep expertise in writing and publishing industry. I see a public figure whose influence is piercing across the seas to other continents. I see a role model, a symbol of hope and existence. I see me.

Q: To your growing fan base, what would you say?

A: I love my fan base and I am proud of it. They have been too supportive to the extent that I feel privileged and humbled by their love for my works. Whenever they don't see a new release they don't hesitate asking. I like it. You guys (My fans) have my word that this is just the beginning. I won't let you down, I promise. We had a good start and I hope it doesn't end here. The future is exciting. You just have to be ready. Thank you.

You must have felt it too, didn't you? The richness and realness of a passionate personality driven by a consummate love for the literary space –I know I did. Oh, but there's so much to Lubacha Deus Lubacha that space cannot provide! Did you know that he is currently on a unique mentorship programme to build his skills towards the publishing industry, or that he had received Editing training from Children's Book Project (CBP) in 2016, that he works with Bridge for change, a local Non-Government organization that acts as a career hub for youths in Tanzania, or that he is also connected with READ WITH ME programme run by CODE from Canada and Children's Books Project (CBP) from Tanzania? It's amazing the many things I get to hear, learn, and imbibe –did I tell you I love my job?

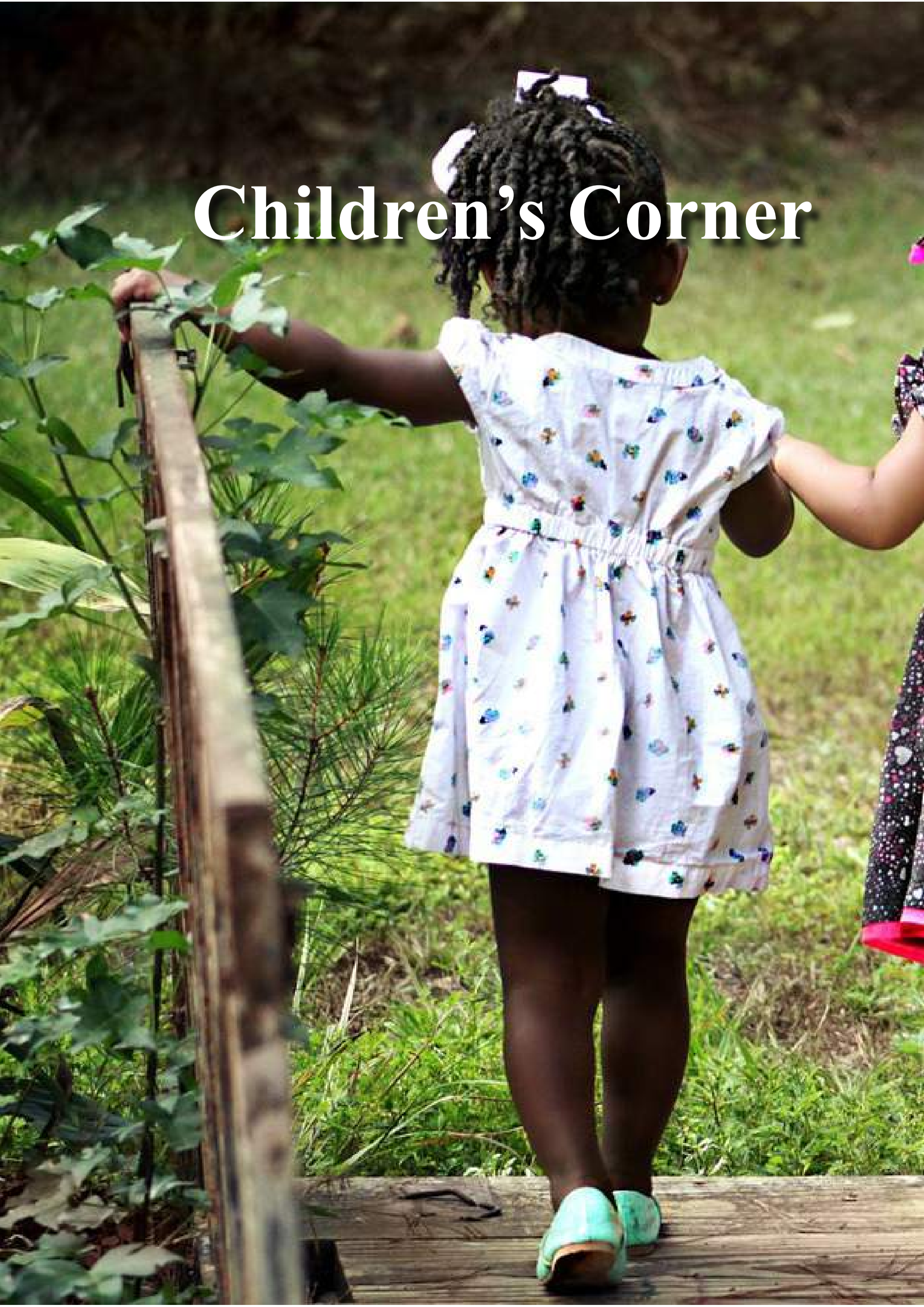
Thank you dear Lubacha for such inspiring moments beyond these written pages, and more awards to your works; we pray.



Coming Soon in 2019

* The image on the cover is for promotional purposes only.

Children's Corner



An Absentee Father

Gift Siyame

Father's footsteps are heard for the first time in days,
Mother gets up and holds a spade,
"Open the door," father yells,
Mom tells me to be still.

Morning comes and we're all alone again,
Mom's bruised yet flashes a smile my way,
I see her holding back tears but I'm not that strong,
So I run upstairs and cry all day long.

I sleep without a proper meal,
I don't get it, what's his deal?
Why did he marry my mother?
Did he really have to become my father?

I give up on him,
For he'll only come back in my dreams,
I have to start fending for the family,
I'm only five, why did he do this to me?

Oh father,
What have you done to mother and I?
You've left us all alone,
To fight life's battles on our own.

This is so unfair,
I dare say this so-called father is a bag of air,
I pray I don't grow up to be him,
From today this father is no more to me.



GIFT Siyame: She is 12 years old. Her hobbies are writing poetry and reading. She would like to grow up into a compassionate and kind African citizen. **Ambition:** To be a paediatrician.

My Imagination in a Book

Fautia Mogaeka

As I open the book,
Not caring about the look,
Ready to be engulfed,
In a world full of wonder.

As I read the first line,
The picture in my mind is divine,
I forget the world around me,
Oh, the images I see!

Funny people, tall and short,
Riding on the back of a horse,
People playing tag on the shore,
Others building sandy forts.

On and on I read,
Other images leaving me bewildered,
And suddenly I am in the end,
I sit back with a beam,
And Alas! I disappear from my dream.

FAUTIA Mogaeka: She is 12 years old. Her hobbies are: reading, poetry writing and singing. She would like to grow up to be an industrious and responsible African citizen who respects and helps the poor and needy. Ambition: To become a Scientist.

Fautia was among the fifty best poets in a nationwide poetry writing competition in Tanzania (August 2018) dubbed "A Poem for Peace". The competition was organized by The American Embassy, Soma Book Café and Waka Poetry Consortium.



My World, My Peace

Jasmine Kapya



**Did you know that big things come in tiny packages?
But to my surprise some haven't had it for ages
Something that our souls and hearts mostly desire
That makes us calm and be admired.**

**When will war end
If there is no one brave enough to stand and defend?
When will terrorism stop?
Is there anyone who knows
Where peace could be bought?**

**Peace, many are fond of your work,
That keeps many hidden shadows in the dark
Peace you're something we need to acquire
For you're something that keeps us inspired.**

**We shall fight against violence
And keep hatred wrapped in a pit
Let's join hands and promise to be true
I welcome you, Mr Peace.**

JASMINE Kapya: She is 12 years old. Her hobbies are reading, writing, taking part in science experiments and listening to music. She would like to grow into a humble and committed individual out to change Africa and the world for the better. Ambition: Neurosurgeon.

A dark wooden table with a brown paper napkin, two cookies, and white tulips. The napkin is folded and has two cookies on it: one is a golden-brown shortbread cookie and the other is a chocolate chip cookie. The tulips are white and are partially visible in the top right corner. The background is a dark, textured wooden surface.

ESSAYS



PLANTS AND CHRISTMAS VALUABLE AND INDISPENSABLE

by

Ojji, Chinazaekpere Joy – Nigeria

Christmas is a time Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a festive, colorful and well celebrated event by Christians on the African continent and all over the world. Christmas, uncommon to most of us, also portrays the significance of plants. From the 19th century till date, natural plants such as the Pines, Spruce, Mistletoe, Coniferous trees, amongst others, are used in the beautification of homes, churches, streets and play grounds during the Christmas festival. However, in most African countries, artificial Christmas trees are used in place of natural plants.

Most Africans can attest to the fact that Christmas delicacies are most times preferred to meals eaten on ordinary days not necessarily because it's more delicious, but because the season comes with a feeling of warmth, love and fun. In Nigeria,

most individuals and families travel to their respective villages for the Christmas celebration, uniting both enemies and friends. Most times, the children often have to eat from a large bowl of soup. They sit under trees at night singing songs and sometimes exchanging gifts. It is a time to merry and visit relatives one hadn't seen for a while. Christmas is a time to consume the cow, goat, chicken, turkey and fish within a space of two weeks to one month, and not necessarily from your home.

It is a seasonal experience and is much fun compared to other seasons. The harmattan wind blows as though it's assigned to rip the flesh off your bones and may eventually leave your skin shrunken and white as snow. One needs to keep warm by the fire, have a warm bath and a sumptuous Christmas meal spiced with the smoke from the wood, giving it an entirely different taste from cooking with a gas cooker or stove. All these boil down to the usage of wood as an energy resource and plants for food in African homes, with an increase during the festive period.

An average African child would always want a dress for Christmas. It's not fun without showcasing a colorful designed outfit. Many parents may not afford to get a new dress for their children, but for Christmas, something must be done. Dyes and resins used in the textile industries are secondary metabolites derived from plants. The more we fell plants for the benefit of the textile industries and other human activities without replacement, the more we pose a threat for the unborn African generations, leaving them with little or no fun for the Christmas.

If I need a fabulous natural Christmas tree by my doorway this year, then I must encourage reforestation or replanting of that felled species. It encourages sustainability and balance in the ecosystem. We need rainfall after the harmattan; other organisms require a habitat just as Africans are privileged to exist on earth.

Plant species have become vulnerable, rare and some are undergoing extinction as a result of man's impact such as agriculture, industrialization, urbanization, mining and other activities. The indiscriminate use of pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, construction works, dumping of municipal, industrial sewage and toxic wastes by man have steadily reduced the quality of our environment leading to ecological im-

balance such as erosion, pollution, deforestation, disease outbreaks, desertification and other negative effects on the environment. Plants cannot thrive well in such conditions and would eventually die. Man is adversely faced with these threats.

We need plants for food, shelter, oxygen, carbon and water cycling, purification of air, aesthetics and other valuable purposes. Therefore, conscious efforts should be put into place when harvesting natural resources (plants).

Forests (plants) should be conserved by reforestation, forestation, prevention of bush burning, prevention of plant disease outbreak, educating the general public and establishing laws/agencies to check mate irrational use of the forest resource. This will go a long way to preserve the plant population.

Christmas activity is just one facet posing a threat to plants, compared to other major human activities. Christmas is a gift to the mankind. Enlightenment will help us celebrate it better.

#People Loving And Nurturing Trees (PLANT).

#Create a Better Atmosphere for Christmas.

#Plant a Tree Today and Plant Christmas at Heart.





My Christmas Vs Gena

by

Meaza Aklilu - Ethiopia

It's January 6. I am traveling to Ethiopia for the first time to visit my grandparents. I hate traveling when it's New Years time, but my daddy convinced me otherwise

We arrive at the capital, Addis Ababa around mid night. The well decorated airport tells me that it is still Christmas time. I'm so tired that when we get to my grandparents house, I head straight to bed.

The voices of many people shuffling their feet up and about wake me up in the morning. It feels like they are very busy with something. Then, there's a gentle knock on my door.

"Are you awake?" I hear my father's voice

"Yes, come in." He is carrying a beautiful Ethiopian Traditional dress on his hand. "Are we going to church?" I ask him that because the only time we wear beautiful clothes is when going to church.

"No." He smiles at me. "We are celebrating Christmas."

"What? Why today? Didn't we already celebrate it two weeks ago?"

Sitting on my bed, he raises his index finger up in the air and says "That was USA Christmas, but we are going to celebrate Ethiopian Christmas today."

"How is that possible?"

He thinks for little while, puts on his long explanation face and says;

" The difference between The Gregorian Calendar and Ethiopian calendar is pronounced even in the way the twenty-four hours of a day are counted or in how a day beings or ends. In Ethiopia, the day starts when the sun rises early in the morning and day ends when the sun



sets. Day hours count from one to twelve since sunrise. Similarly, night hours count from one to twelve from sunset to dawn.

Ethiopian Christmas falls on January 7 of the Gregorian calendar which corresponds to Thahisas 29, 28 when it is a Leap Year (Zemene Yohannes)-Year of John, of the Ethiopian calendar. Thahisas corresponds to December but unlike December in the Gregorian calendar, Thahisas is only the fourth month of the Ethiopian year which begins in September."

We call it "Gena or Lidet". Gena is both a cultural and religious holiday at the same time. Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Gena festivity is preceded by weeks of fasting and the holiday is known as "Lidet" (or B'irhane Lidet) - literally means "birth" (Nativity)."
And with that, he hands me the dress and walks out. I quickly dress up and head to the living room. Everybody looks so great in their traditional white clothes, but there's no Christmas tree.

When we sit down for breakfast, plenty of traditional dishes are served. Traditional foods like kitfo, tibs, key wot, gomen, ayb, doro wot and so many other dishes I know nothing of. Traditional drinks like tej, tela, areke. I never saw such plenty food all at once.

Everybody starts giving me Gursha when I start to eat. A gursha is an act of friendship and love. When eating injera, a person uses his or her right hand to strip off a piece, wraps it around some wat or kitfo, and then puts it into his or her mouth. During a meal with friends or family, it is a common custom to feed others in the group with one's hand by putting the rolled injera or a spoon full of other dishes into another's mouth.

I felt loved and protected. After the meal, I went outside to watch the kids playing. The game resembled hockey, surprised, I asked my cousin "Are they actually playing hockey?"

"This is not hockey. This called Gena or qarsa. It is a traditional field game. It is played among

two teams who attempt to throw a wooden ball in the air and hit it with sticks, the goal being to prevent the opposing team to bring the ball to their village. We play this game around this time of the holiday. It is where the Holiday name Gena gets its name.” said my cousin. They invite me to play and it is an incredible game to play.

We spend the rest of the day going to our Uncles and aunties house to wish them “Melkam gena” happy holiday.

I got to celebrate two holidays related to the birth of Jesus Christ; Christmas and Gena.

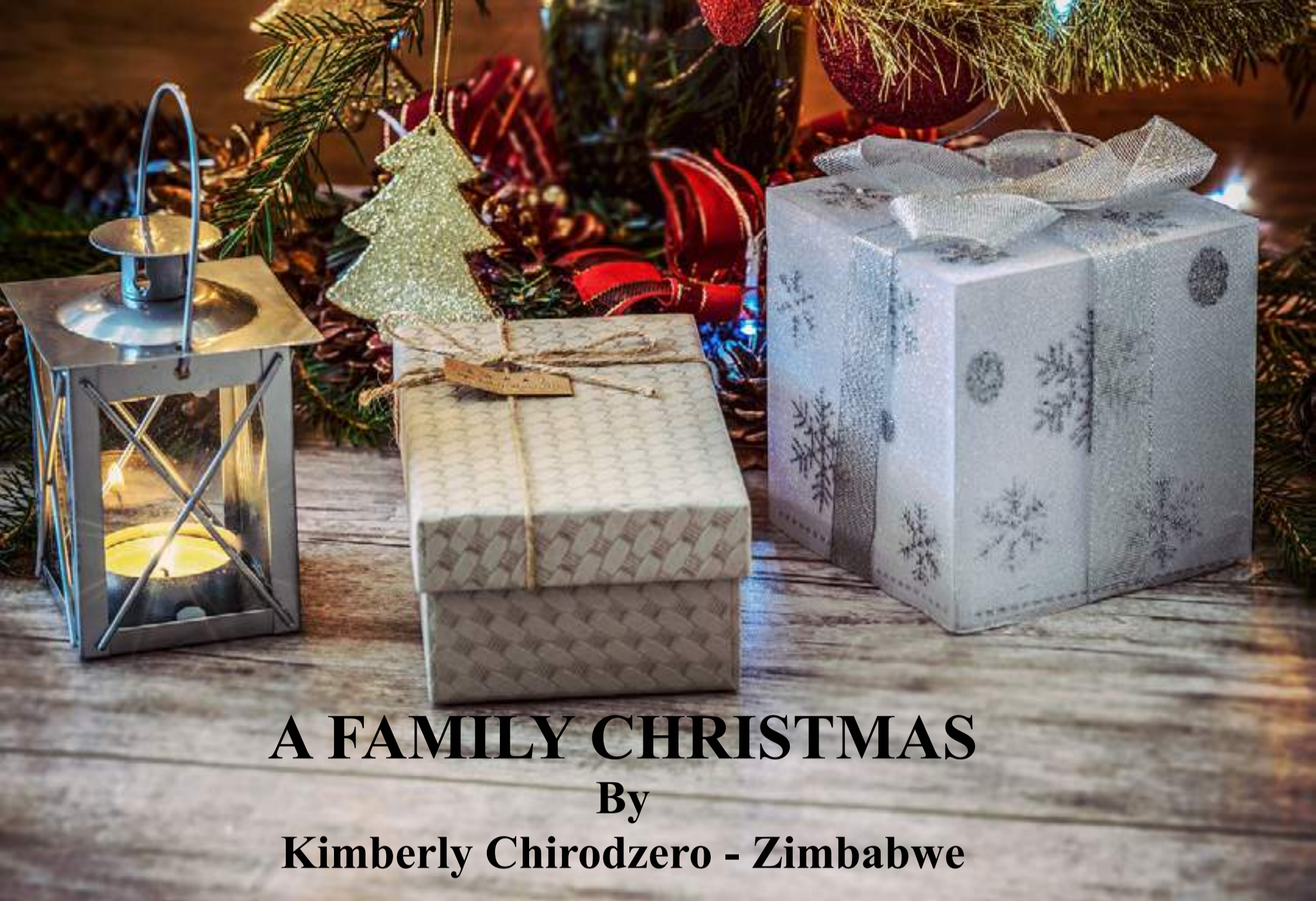
Melkam Gena!

Merry Christmas!





Short Stories



A FAMILY CHRISTMAS

By

Kimberly Chirodzero - Zimbabwe

It always starts the same way. At the break of dawn when the rooster crows, Auntie Vongai opens all the bedroom doors in the house and screams, “Merry Christmas,” until we are all wide awake and grumbling. She ignores everyone’s grumbling and the lethal looks thrown her way. Deep down no one is really angry at her anyway. In exactly three hours Auntie Vongai has made sure everyone is bathed and dressed in their best. The older girls, my three cousins are in the kitchen, finishing up on the Christmas feast. The older boys, my two brothers are outside setting up plastic chairs and a huge oak table under a mango tree, whose overhanging branches will provide shade when the sun gets hot. No one bothers Grandma until everything is set up.

This year I turned sixteen so I don’t fit in with the older girls or the younger children, my nine-year-old sister Lindiwe and Auntie Vongai’s last born, eight-year-old Matipa. I am still sitting by the window when a loud knock comes at my door. “Father is here,” the excitement in his voice is palpable even through the closed door. “He is early,” I mumble with a scowl. Christmas is Father’s one defiant act against his second wife. After Mother died, our father married the personification of Cinderella’s evil stepmother. Our house became a battlefield until Father had to choose a side. He chose the evil woman over us then came and dumped us on Grandma. Every Christmas he comes without fail, car loaded with groceries and clothes for us. Themba, my oldest brother

and I ignore Father but Vusi still harbours dreams of having a real relationship with the treacherous man. Still, he is my father and it is Christmas so I will greet him.

Grandma's house is a two-storey mansion. All her five children contributed to building it after she told them she wanted a house in the city. Although huge, it is also homely. I attribute this to Aunty Vongai's touch. Aunty Vongai is an African woman in every sense of the word, but when her husband decided to marry a second wife because all the children they had were girls, she couldn't take it so she left. In the living room, I find my aunt sitting with her youngest sibling, Uncle Tino whilst Father sits by himself to the side. I approach him and greet him respectfully.

Uncle Tino is grinning at me and nudging his phone at me. "Look at your cousin, Thandi. Isn't she the cutest baby ever?" he says, all smiles. Uncle Tino lives in the UK with his wife and their one-year-old baby. For years Rosa couldn't get pregnant but Uncle Tino only loved her more. It's comforting to know that betrayal is exclusive to my father. I used to fear that treachery is embedded in our blood. Uncle Tino is my hope so I let him show me all the baby pictures in his phone. He tells me that his wife is in the kitchen helping my cousins and they left their toddler in the UK with Rosa's family.

In the kitchen, my cousins are moving in tandem as they pass casserole dishes and pile rice, beef stew, and chicken in them. Mary and Miriam are the eldest, identical twins. Maria their younger sister smiles as she follows their instructions. Rosa is laughing at something as I come in. Uncle Tino's wife is beautiful and she has the easy bearing of a woman who knows she is loved. We hug and exchange pleasantries then the twins pounce on me. Before I know it, I am stuck carrying casserole dishes from the kitchen to the mango tree outside.

A car parks in the driveway close by and Aunty Rudo exits. She is Grandma's fourth child. She looks tired, as she always does. The reason for her tiredness exits the car next. Uncle Brian is a drunkard and the bane of his wife's existence. He can never keep a job and leaves all the responsibilities to my aunt. No one knows why she stays with him and such questions are not asked on Christmas. Their son comes out and I wave him over. Kuda and I are the same age. I rope him into helping me carry dishes from the kitchen. I think he rather likes being around happy people and no one does happy like the twins on Christmas day.

By the time Kuda and I are done setting up all the dishes and plates, the whole family

is walking out of the house and across the lawn. When everyone is seated, Grandma raises her oak cane for silence. She uses the cane on all of us and as a way to command our silence. The moment that cane goes up we all fall silent, even Lindi and Mati. Grandma is the matriarch of this family and we all pay her the respect she deserves. “Thank you all for being here, my children and grandchildren,” she begins the same way she does every year.

“Only one of my sons is late being here but he called me to say he is coming.” Someone sniggers but nobody utters anything. We would all forgive Uncle Mike anything because we all think he hung the moon. “God has blessed me with a big and happy family. All my children are blessed and their children, wives, and husbands,” Grandma goes on. “Well, besides my oldest son who is now married to a witch.” Several people choke at this statement including Father. I hide a smile. “And my daughter married to the fool.”

“Bring me my rice and chicken, child,” Grandma calls out. Despite all the different kinds of delicacies prepared each Christmas, Grandma’s meal of choice is always rice and chicken. She says that is what Christmas means to her and she is too old to change now. Someone has placed an old radio on the lawn, the kind that plays cassettes. The riveting voice of Oliver Mtukudzi croons out an all-time favourite. Amidst the laughter and dancing, no one notices a car pulling in to the driveway until Uncle Mike starts walking towards us. Uncle Mike is a wanderer. He has never married and he travels the world following unsubstantiated myths. He is odd for an African man but he is ours and we love him. He is always telling wild tales of his travels and he always brings a weird but fitting gift for everyone.

After Uncle Mike has greeted everyone, the twins approach him. “What did you bring us?” Miriam demands as Mary nods vigorously. Uncle Mike smiles mysteriously and lowers his bag to the grass. He takes out two identical silk scarves printed in reds, blues, and yellows with art printed on it. “These are Grecian silk scarves telling the story of the twins Castor and Pollux who loved each other so much that when Castor died, Pollux asked the god Zeus to let him share his life force with his twin. The two were transformed into stars.” As he speaks he points to the artwork that tells the same story. When the twins remain motionless, Uncle Mike looks uncertain. “You were born in June under the sign of the twin brothers so I thought...,” he trails off as Mary brushes away tears and Miriam carefully takes the scarves as if they might break.

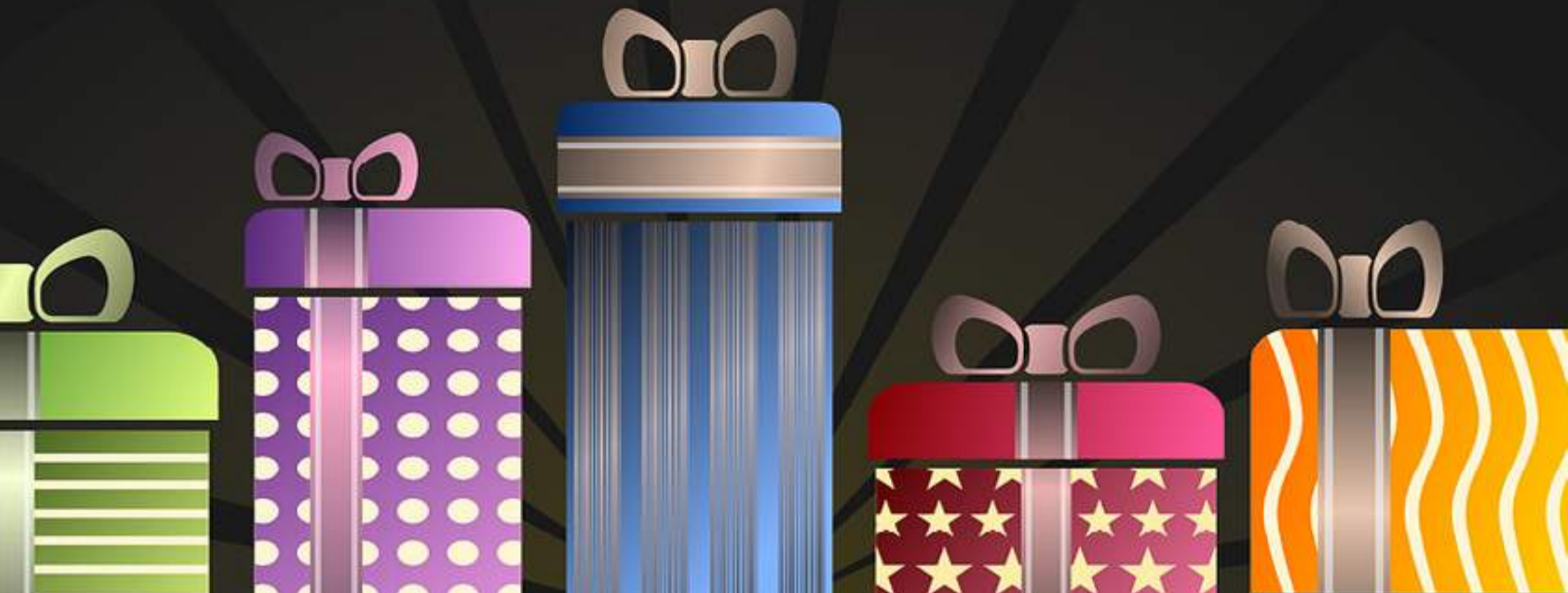
He turns to me next. “I found this whilst wandering the streets of Dublin earlier this year,” he pulls out a long silver chain with a circle hanging on it. The design looks like hearts interlocked and knotted over and over in unbroken loops but still producing more heart symbols. “It’s called a Celtic love knot,” Uncle Mike indicates the design. “What is that?” I ask putting it around my neck. “It’s a symbol for love. As your name means loved one I thought you should have the matching symbol around your neck because we all love you, Thandi.” I thank Uncle Mike with tears in my eyes because he has given me something I desperately needed after Father’s rejection; to know that I am still beloved.

Uncle Mike continues to go around giving his gifts to gasps of shock and delighted laughter. I have no doubt he buys our gifts at the local flea market in whatever city he happens to be in but he buys them after considering who we are inside. As I look around my family I catch them in a moment when everyone is either smiling or laughing and my heart is full. Even Father is smiling as he watches his brother give Grandma her gift. It is a casing for her cane. A casing that Uncle Mike swears once belonged to a long lost queen. Although my family is not perfect, on this one day we are united. We laugh and dance with each other and travel beyond the borders of our home through the gifts Uncle Mike brings.



The Christmas gift

William Khalipwina Mpina - Malawi



Christmas day would not go without a party and sharing of gifts. It was a day for activities most people baptized themselves into without a groveling gesticulation. That the day was the birthday of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was an indubitable fact but as it turned out, everybody celebrated the day as if it was their own birthday. It was said that the dynamics of society had led to the evolution of handling the day but I thought everybody was just oblivious of the day. Jubilations, merry-making, eating and drinking, everybody doing with the day as they wished for countless decades had driven the entire community into thinking that sitting in a church talking about Jesus was a waste of time, but to enjoy themselves and probably commit the worst sins on this day.

I have a friend whose feet did not touch the floor of the church. On Christmas day, for the sake of nourishing his incessant yearnings, he would rush to the market and buy a bottle of fruit juice, one kilogram of meat and two kilograms of rice which he would send to his wife by a bicycle taxi. Undoubtful that both his wife and child were nurtured with what they requested, he would scamper straight, wave at the nuns at Salubeni Catholic Church, and visit Ma Phulani for a gourd of maseke, locally brewed beer. After that, he would trot to Aunt B Bottle store and get 'cold' ones till midnight. At exactly 00.01 hours, he would stagger home with a comprehensive feeling that the day had been well spent; his back followed with curses from his girlfriend, a bar girl, for not spending a night at her house.

I have always wanted to celebrate the day differently, like spending the whole day worshipping God, mainly for the gift of life, but forces from friends, neighbours, and relatives had propelled me to go eating and drinking without thinking too much about God and Jesus. Almost everybody, on Christmas day, would spend their income and forget about life after Christmas, especially the month of January. I crowned the month of January a high ranking

accolade and called it General January because most people braved it with steeplechases; biting into the whole thirty plus days without money.

Chrissy and I had prepared for this day long before and saved enough to pull down the 'General'. We calculated to spend the day indoors to escape from the slavery of extravagant spending. Decorating the sitting room with a Christmas tree, beautiful flowers and a myriad of tiny fairy lights, she ensured that our radio was blaring out Christmas carols. Our expectation was that we would have visitors but limited to sister-in-law Nyakhave with her husband, Uncle Chrispin with his wife, Nephew Neffie, Brother Chipi and Bigman Chifundo. As we waited for them, a girl known as Aufi about ten years old slithered into our house. She was a Muslim girl who had befriended Chrissy for a long time. I thought Chrissy had deliberately chosen not to tell me about her because of her shabby dress. All I thanked God for was that she was one of our visitors on this important day. Composed, she seemed to know exactly why she was here. We warmly welcomed her.

Earlier in the morning, Chrissy had confided in me that I had to give her enough money to buy all nice Christmas things because we might have visitors we did not know. This was true. Stuffed with brown chicken pieces, well-cooked rice and a lot of vegetables, the dining table provoked my hunger to eat more than I always did. There was a five-liter bottle of fruit juice and a bottle of wine which Bigman Chifundo requested on the phone. Our guests arrived carrying gifts, their faces beaming with laughter and smiles. We ate, drank and made awful speeches; imitating political leaders. Laughter, thanks, dances, and sounds of happy birthday songs mixed with shrieks of joy filled the air.

Aufi, all of a sudden, went outside and leaned on the wall.

Chrissy ran behind her. "Why stay outside? Let's go inside. Feel free. Eat, drink and dance," Chrissy said.

Her face downcast, Aufi shrugged her shoulders. It was like she was uncomfortable after eating strange food, but her small mind was laden with thoughts.

"I saw you brought something. Was that our gift? Where is it?" Chrissy asked.

"I hid it behind the house. I thought you do not allow such gifts as makaka (dry cassava) and nandolo (peas). I was about to throw them away."

"No, bring them here. In fact, Richard likes them."

Aufi strolled behind the house and came back with the parcel. She later offloaded what was eating her mind; first the death of her mother. Second, mysterious deaths of three of her neighbours including a prominent businessman in her village and the headmaster of a primary school who had promised to help her. Finally, she told Chrissy that she was sent to look for Richard and give him a Christmas gift.

Chrissy felt sorry for Aufi and hardly vacillated to invite me to this meeting. I signalled Aufi to follow me as I led the way to sit under the mango tree, where she slowly narrated her story beginning with an introduction of her mother who was a nice, intelligent and hardworking woman. I remembered her mother. This was a girl who, during her prime,

out of all the girls in her village, had done her parents and everybody proud by excelling in education. She passed with good grades at her senior secondary school level. But she did not see light at the end of the tunnel. No breakthrough after so much hard work because she got pregnant and married early.

I looked around to check if Chrissy was listening to this. I saw her laughing with nephew Neffie. After she finished explaining, ten minutes later, Aafi pulled a torn envelope from her dress.

“Before my mother died, she said I must give you this letter on Christmas day,” Aafi said.

“Thank you.” I immediately threw it into my trouser pocket. “I will read it later. Let’s go back into the house.” I persuaded the girl.

Straight from the place, I rushed to the toilet and opened the letter. It said.

Dear Richard,

I hope you will understand what I have to say. First of all, I would like to ask for your forgiveness. You must forgive me because I have opted to write to you after such a long time and I wished for you to read this letter after my death. For many years, I have lived on earth a very bitter woman. I never achieved what I wanted in life. I was a fool. I trusted my parents more than trusting myself and focusing on the bright future that my teachers thought I would have. Secondly, I would like you to forgive me for denying your hand in marriage. I am sure you know that I carried your pregnancy. You were willing to take me as your wife and ‘help the baby grow healthy and attain a good education,’ if I must use your language. Instead, my mother said you were not rich. I had to marry a fisherman who already had four wives just because he was rich. It was painful to abandon my Christianity for Islam to satisfy the wishes of my parents and my new man. When your daughter was born, she was named Aafi by a man who was not her father. Four years later, the man died. Five years after he died, there was pain all over my body. Richard, please forgive me. I had to write this letter because the future of Aafi is uncertain. Accept my Christmas gift.

Sincerely,

Martha.

Dusk had fallen. Chrissy was enthusiastic to hear what Aafi was up to. I thought she saw that I was nervous. While the guests in their drunken state were chatting clamorously, she leaned on the wall as she waited for my explanation. Aafi was inside the house sleeping on the sofa. I begged Chrissy to follow me out into the evening air. The sky was bright with stars but my heart was dark, laden with the weight of this unforeseen circumstance. When we reached where the light from the security bulb was glowing ridiculously, I threw the letter into her palms. Before reading the letter, she stared at me. I looked away. She read it silently and later heaved out a sigh.

“Let’s go inside. This is our special gift on Christmas day.” She whispered in my ear.

“Alright,” I responded.

As the guests were staggering back home after the party, Chrissy prepared a bath and a bed for Aafi.

MY BIG BROTHER: THE CHRISTMAS HERO

Hannah Hazvibvumesu Tarindwa – Namibia



The silence after Garikai slammed the door sent cold chills down my spine on the hottest day in October. Surely I had not just experienced what happened in our house. My oldest brother had done what we had thought could not be done. He had spoken words that even refused to replay themselves in my head. For those thirty seconds of silence, I could have sworn I heard the echo of the slammed door, ridiculous as it may have been at that time.

My step-father instructed us - my younger brother and I - to leave the sitting room and we did so unquestioningly as we did all other things in that house. Yet Garikai - the door slamming big brother - had just broken that order of unquestioned obedience in our household. My younger brother, Gonesai, went to the backyard through the kitchen door. He was probably headed to our mother's vegetable garden where he found solace weeding unwanted plants or watering the whole garden until someone reminded him that he was not the one paying for the water. I, on the other hand, was not satiated by what had just happened in our small Kambuzuma house.

I retreated to my room, eager to hear what that man we called baba and never daddy had to say to my mother on the unruly and rebellious behaviour of her son, who she should have taken to the Apostolic faith church, to get deliverance as prescribed by his sister, who

seemed to be the chief advisor of most, if not all of our family decisions and activities. We were forced to call her *tete*, she had refused to be called *aunty*, saying that it made us seem like strangers, not knowing that that was the intention, to keep her at arm's length. Our home was a small five-roomed house with thin walls; often times it seemed I was the only who remembered that fact.

The first voice that spoke was that of my mother, as soon as she thought I was enclosed in my room.

"We are not discussing this Phillip," she said curtly, having seemingly found the courage to speak against him for the first time in a long time. Something must have been in the water that day. Within a minute, I heard the front door closing and not with a slam as had been the case a few short minutes before. I sighed, knowing there was no story to wait for. I went on to my three-quarter bed, which was supported on two sides by bricks ever since the legs broke off some years ago.

I began to wonder what that year's Christmas was going to be like without Garikai. It would be strange to you my reader why I would think of Christmas at such a time of family tension. Well, it was because ever since I was fifteen and Garikai nineteen, he was the self-designated Father Christmas of the neighborhood and I was his elf. It was something we did without the knowledge of our mother. We made extra cash and Garikai had warned me that if our mother found out, we would not get any extra clothes or the secret lunch we would have in town at a fancy restaurant of our choice on the 27th of December after three days of working, getting photographs taken with ghetto children and giving them chocolate sweets in return for anything between 50 cents to US\$3.

For the first two Christmases, we did not work in Kambuma but in other ghettos, Warren Park, Kuwadzana 5, and Kuwadzana 7. We had friends there so we could change into our work uniforms and have a shower when we were done. Our friends' parents praised us for being innovative in harsh times and helping our parents whilst other children were just waiting for their parents to give them food and gifts. We just smiled back at the compliments, they had no idea that this was our escape plan.

In our third year, we wanted to enlist Gonesai, who was now sixteen years old and had finished writing his 'O' level examinations, but he refused, stating that it was a silly business and embarrassing. Garikai and I knew that in addition to thinking the job embarrassing, Gonesai was slightly more afraid than we were of our step-father finding out. We had been afraid but by year three, we had some savings and the risk was worth it.

The day that Garikai had slammed the door after telling our mother how she had abandoned us by marrying that cheating giant who caused us grief, I felt elated but frightened by what was happening. Our stepfather had just walked in from work in Glen View, he was shocked to find his wife shivering and weeping whilst her 23-year-old son towered over her. He had asked what was happening and Garikai had, to the shock and surprise of all present in that room, looked the man straight in his eyes and said, “You do not question how I speak to my mother.” Then he had stormed out.

After all that drama, the only thing on my mind was our Christmas business and the money we had saved in order to escape not only the national hardships but the burden of a mother who sought solace from a cruel man who cared little for her children.

That was in October, now in December, while in a coach to South Africa with my two brothers seated next to me, headed towards a new reality. I wondered if, in South Africa, we would find a place where our Father Christmas and his little helper show would be welcomed. Garikai was sleeping. He was my forever Christmas hero.



Conversations with Nonny



So it's Christmas, what's the big deal?

To tell you the truth, I never and I still don't understand what the hype is about when it comes to the month of December. I mean I get that it is the end of another year, the festive season to most. Yes, it is the season to be merry! But it is also season where we are faced with the challenge of "Marry Christmas" and "Merry Christmas". Initially, I had planned to talk about all the nice activities people get up to during the festive season. When it hit me, I honestly do not see the reason why we make a big deal out of another month on the calendar, with 31 days. I mean, what is the hype about?

Come to think of it, at home we have never really celebrated Christmas like that. We never got a huge tree, decorations, or even the presents. When I would watch Christmas movies and see other kids enjoying such a Christmas, I would ask my mom why we never got all those things and she would always say the same thing to me, "Nonhlanhla! That's how white people celebrate Christmas, we are not white." When she called me by my first name, I knew better than to question her again.

Now, Christmas ekasi (The Hood) was a bit different from what I saw on television. I am not sure about other African countries but down here, in South Africa, we have somewhat of a common trend. The trend is every year in January people are broke and have no money to spend. This is most common with black South Africans, especially in the townships. Mostly everyone is concerned about all the debts they made in December to fund a fancy and lavish lifestyle. One thing you must know about us is, that when December comes, everyone needs to be on point. There's no time for bread or pap (expert at braai parties), we eat chicken and rice with salads every day.

As I grew up, I realised that everyone around me wasted money on trivial things. When asked why they would do this, they would respond, “Ke Dezemba Boss” meaning “it’s December Boss.” In December, people usually get paid their year bonuses, schools are closed, and most work places close for the holidays. So during this time, we have a lot of free time on our hands. What do we do? We go shopping, we go on holidays, we go to weddings, and we go drinking from Monday to Monday.

I mean, I don’t have to be anywhere in the morning, so why not?

December has everyone feeling like there is no tomorrow. We pay no attention to the fact that there is still 11 more months before the next December, we only focus on the here and now. Please don’t get me wrong, I am in no way against having fun and people living their best lives but doing everything now, at the same time, not thinking about the future? Now that’s just being reckless and irresponsible. I know you are probably thinking, “Oh my God! Nonny is such a party pooper.” But you know what, come January Nonny will have money for groceries, Nonny will have transport money to go to work, and best of all Nonny will be debt free.

So my advice to you this festive season is to drink and be merry but before you do that make sure that the kids at home have new and proper school uniform for the coming year. Make sure that you put aside money for school fees, textbooks, groceries and everything else you might need in the New Year. Most importantly, **DO NOT MAKE DEBTS!** If you don’t have the money to make it happen, don’t borrow from someone else because you will end up paying so much more than you initially needed.

Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



BLUNTNES IS BRUTAL



Gender Issues: What Are We Teaching Our Children?

It's Christmas season- a moment to jolly with the kids, right? Yeah. You must be thinking of those memorable beautiful things to give to the young minds. Toys, clothes, a visit to the zoo, amusement park, and many more are great ideas. But while doing all that, find a moment- even if it's just five minutes- to educate your kids on gender issues and the importance of gender unity during those moments of bonding with them.

This article isn't about Christmas, really. It's about kids and what we teach them in Africa and the world at large. It's about schools, their teachers and what they tell the kids. It's about you as a parent or guardian consciously developing interest in knowing what they tell your kids at school. It's time to create a gender balance among boys and girls of the world today and it begins with first, painting a positive picture of the girl which depicts equality.

I'll start by narrating a past event in my life. When I was a kid in primary five (here in Nigeria), I was once asked to go on my knees because I dared challenge my teacher's ideology. It was Social Studies class, and he was teaching on the topic, Family. He made a statement: "Once a woman's bride price has been paid, she becomes the man's wife and PROPERTY." Then, he asked the class to repeat after him. All did except me.

He turned to me asking why I said nothing. I shook my head angrily with the abrupt reply: "Because you're lying. I don't believe you!" I told him straight in the face that girls weren't properties and deserved respect. He was infuriated and yelled at me to kneel down beside the class door. That memory lingers in my head till date. I sustained injuries on my knees because I stayed on my knees till the closing hour- 12 noon to 3.30pm. I was just ten years old.

At teenage age, I once heard of a woman who lost her daughter. Sympathisers told her that her loss wasn't that great because she had her son alive. Now that I am older, I often wonder what teachers teach boys all over the world about ladies; likewise what they teach ladies about men. I now understand why there has been so much domestic violence in homes. By the time a boy is told his wife is his property, he would definitely treat her like a property (beat, slap, kick, and even kill).

Back then, schools organised debates with topics like "BOYS ARE BETTER THAN GIRLS." I recently found out that such debate topics are still used in some schools. In fact, I witnessed one during my NYSC year in 2016 where I served my country as a teacher in a secondary school. I had to speak up against the idea. The principal felt I was challenging his authority- I've always been a stubborn individual, in the positive sense, though- but when he listened to the facts I presented to him, he jettisoned the topic.

It is a very detrimental topic for young minds to debate. It would mold their perceptions negatively on both sides; boys would see girls as less and girls would see boys as oppressors and evil. The tenderness of their minds would make them unable to absorb the consequences of the debate which would, in turn, lead to a lasting war between both genders for decades and centuries.

There's need to look into what is being taught in school curricula, and to what these teachers tell their pupils and students. What you inculcate in a child today is what impacts on his mindset and molds his beliefs. I should educate you on this today if you are oblivious of it: teaching a child the wrong thing is rubbing that child of his or her right to good education; it's an abuse of the rights of the child, after all, a child is entitled to and has a right to good education.

Here's a reason you should be concerned as a parent or guardian: Child Rights International Network (CRIN) revealed some bizarre false facts being taught to kids in schools on gender which is unknown to many parents. It reads, "According to secondary textbooks in India, unemployment has increased because women have taken the jobs, (sic) donkeys work harder than housewives and complain less..." (CRIN)

Look around you today, men bash women and vice versa. This is as a result of gender disparity which was inculcated in them right from childhood. The culture of superiority was imbibed in men which denied women of their rights and opportunities; however, women, upon enlightenment, felt betrayed and fooled and thus, express their grievances through aggression towards men while the men refuse to soft pedal on their superiority mentality.

If this issue of creating a gender balance mentally is not addressed while it is still early, I fear a future where men and women will live in enmity- survival of the fittest gender would become the case. We need each other- male and female- to survive, develop, and advance, else, the world would only malfunction. Education begins from home; therefore, the responsibility lies in our hands as parents and guardians to change the mindset of children on gender issues.

This season, I indulge you not to discriminate the children based on their masculinity or femininity. Wishing you all a gender unbiased Christmas.

Footnote: I am deeply grateful to all my readers who took their time to read each article on my column throughout this year. I wish you well this holiday and I assure you that Bluntness is Brutal will be bigger and better next year.

To honour some of my readers for their followership, I will be giving three of them \$42 each based on the following guidelines:

- Download the January, February, and March's edition each month it is released
- Read it
- Write a summary of the article on my column for each of these three months listed and round it up with your perception of the article and the columnist
- Post on your Instagram handle, follow and tag me (@gabrielinagabriel)

Winners will be selected in April. Readers from all nooks and crannies of Africa and beyond can participate. There's a probability of increasing the number of winners as well an increase in the prize. Goodluck.

About the columnist

Gabrielina Gabriel-Abhie is a writer, editor, blogger, and broadcast journalist; a columnist with Writers Space Africa online magazine.

She is the CEO of The Roaring Writer which renders book editing, ghostwriting and social media management services.

She was shortlisted among the finalists for Homevida 2017 scriptwriting competition, as well as the winner of Writers Space Africa season two flashfiction contest.

She uses her writing, often times, to address nature or preach her propaganda. She believes that writers can and have the responsibility to effect change in their world through writing.

She can reached via gabrielina.gabriel@gmail.com or theroaringwriter@gmail.com





AFRICAN WRITERS
DEVELOPMENT TRUST
To Empower Writers of African Descent



Empowering African Writers

CALL FOR SUBMISSION

Writers Space Africa (WSA), an international literary magazine, published by the African Writers Development Trust (AWDT), is calling for submissions for its 25th edition under the theme "New Beginning". We are also accepting submissions from children below 18 years of age for the children's corner. There is no word restriction.

We accept submissions in the following categories:

Articles/Essays – 1,200 Words maximum

Flash Fiction – 300 words maximum

Poetry – 1 poem, maximum of 24 lines

Short Stories – 1,500 words maximum

Jokes – 1 joke per writer

Artworks – maximum 3 artworks in high resolution

Personalised quotation – 1 quotation and must be the original work of the author

Please note the following:

You're only entitled to submit for one category.

The Deadline for submission is December 12, 2018.

Our editors will revert to selected unpublished writers on areas of improvement in their work.

Due to the number of entries we receive, only selected authors will be on our website.

The author retains copyright.

Your work must be thoroughly edited before being uploaded.

We will in turn edit selected entries to suit the publication.

The magazine will be released on the 1st of January, 2019 on our website.

Please visit www.writersspace.net to upload your work