Opening extract from

Long Walk to Freedom

Written by

Chris van Wyk & Nelson Mandela

Illustrated by

Paddy Bouma

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A personal tribute from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, close friend of Nelson Mandela.

I first met Nelson Mandela (Madiba) in the 1950s when he adjudicated our college debating contest. We didn't meet again until the day he was released from prison in 1990.

Madiba was never angry or complained about his twenty-seven years in prison. He believed in peace, and he taught us all an essential lesson about forgiveness when he invited his former prison guard to be a guest at his election as President of South Africa.

He cared deeply about people and worked hard to set up charities and raise funds to build a better future for South Africa. Madiba believed children were a huge part of that future, and contributed from his salary to set up the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. So it is wonderful that this book exists for children to share in the story of his inspiring life.

One of my fondest memories of Madiba is how funny he was. I once made fun of the bright, colourful shirts he wore and he replied that at least he didn't wear a dress in public, like me.

Our world is a better place for having had a Nelson Mandela. He has taught us so much about understanding and respecting each other for our differences. He was amazing, and I feel blessed that he was my friend.

Johannesburg, South Africa, March 2014

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Illustrations by Paddy Bouma
Text abridged by Chris van Wyk

Abridged from the book LONG WALK TO FREEDOM by Nelson Mandela

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Image on page 7 courtesy of Tom Stoddart Archive, Getty Images
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NELSON MANDELA
LONG WALK *to* FREEDOM

ABRIDGED BY CHRIS VAN WYK
ILLUSTRATED BY PADDY BOUMA

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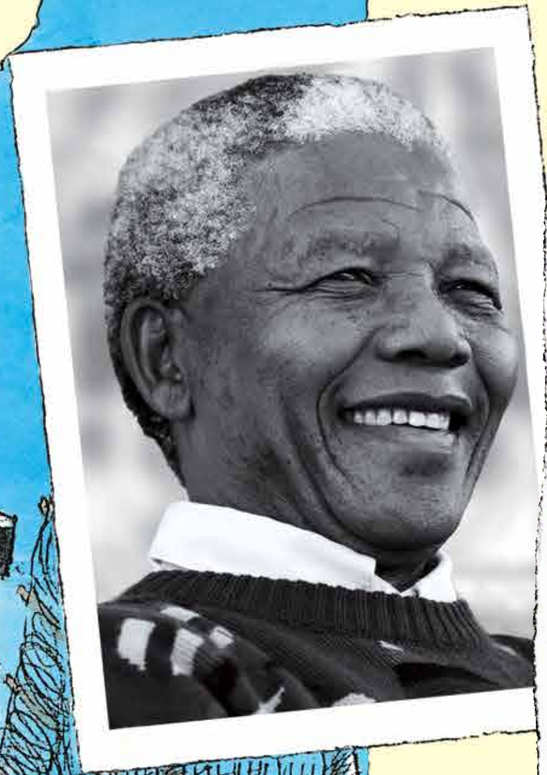


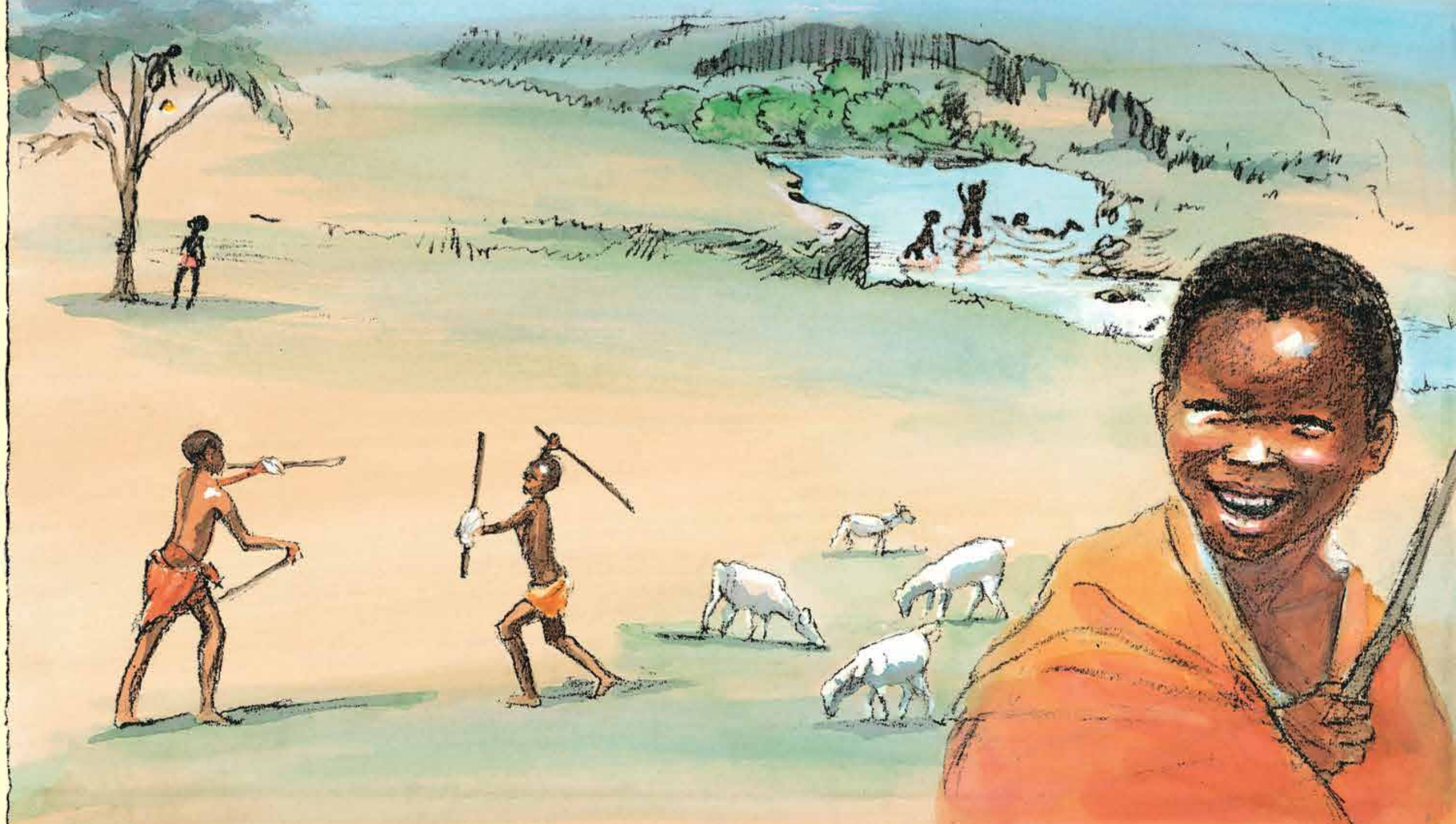
My name is Nelson Mandela. I live in South Africa, a beautiful country on the tip of Africa. Today South Africa is a democracy. That means all adults vote to choose who they want to run the country. But it was not always like this. When I was born, South Africa was ruled by white people only. As I grew older I began to see that this was not fair. I wanted to change this way of government so everyone had a say. My friends and I called this the struggle for freedom. The struggle lasted many years and I was one of the fighters. This is my story . . .

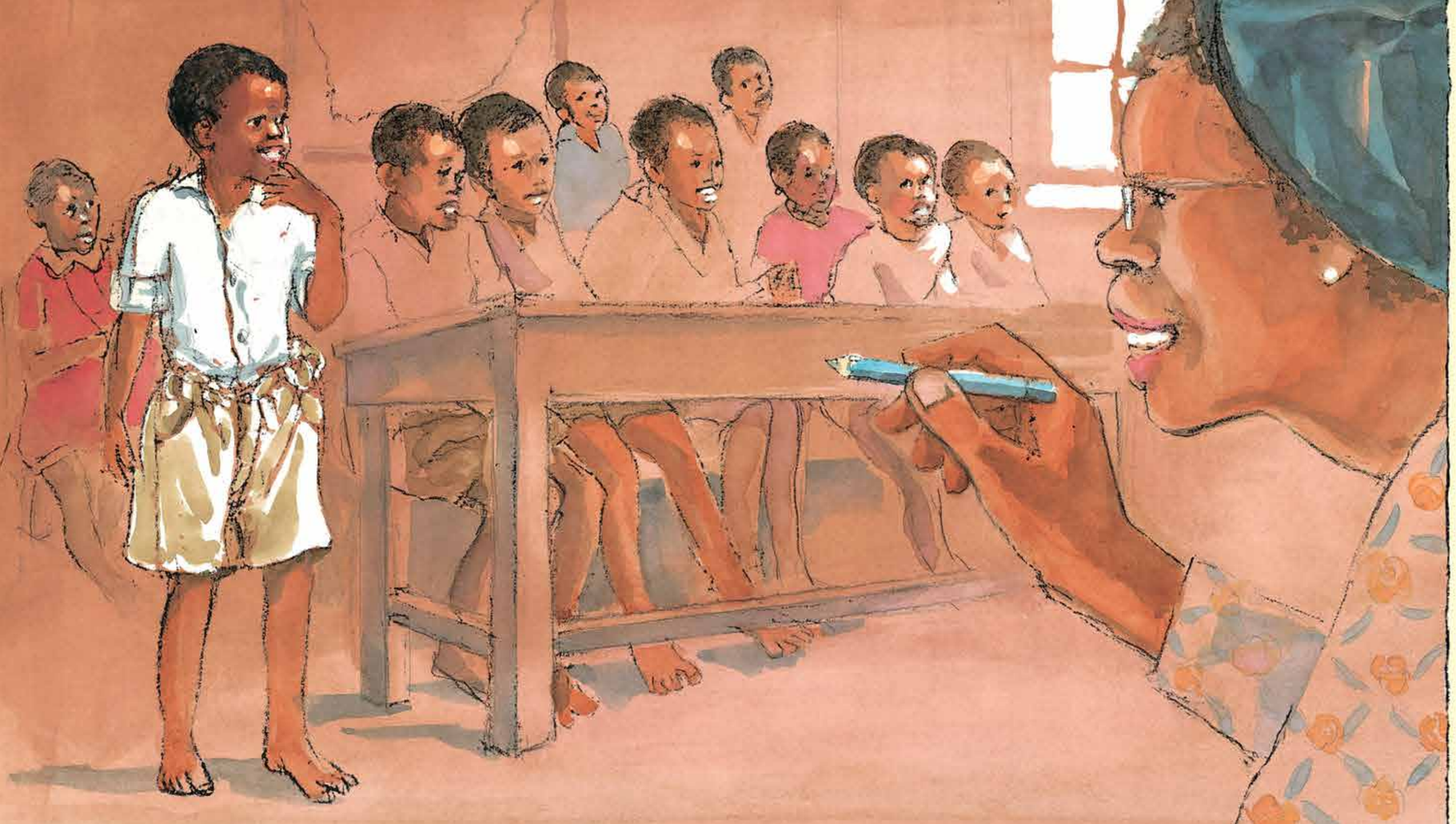
Long, long ago, white Europeans crossed the seas to South Africa. They fought over the land, and they also fought the tribes of people already living there, such as the Xhosas, the Zulus and the Tswanas.

Hundreds of years later, I was born into the Thembu tribe, one of many tribes that made up the Xhosa nation. I entered the world in the tiny village of Mvezo, in the beautiful Eastern Cape, on 18th July, 1918.

My father was a Thembu chief, a leader of our people. He named me Rolihlahla, which in Xhosa means "troublemaker". Did he believe I would grow up to be a troublemaker? I don't think so. Nobody knew what lay ahead of me.

When I was a young boy, we moved from Mvezo to the nearby village of Qunu and I began herding our family's sheep and goats. Those were happy days. My friends and I swam in the rivers, stole honey from beehives, and played stick-fighting – a Xhosa boy's favourite sport.





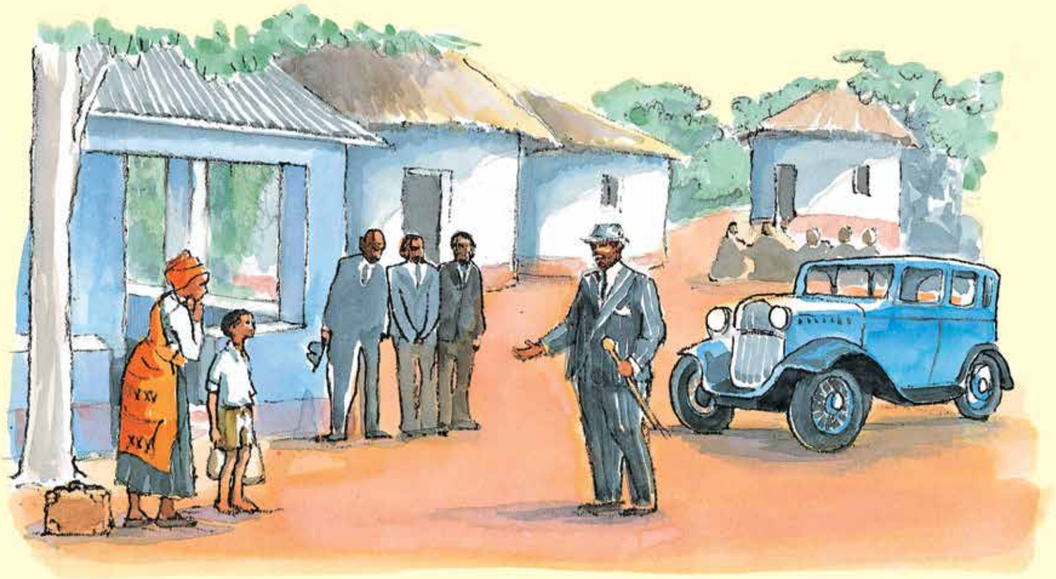
When I turned seven, my father decided to send me to school. It was a mission school, built by Europeans who had come to South Africa to spread Christianity. No one in my family had been to school before. I didn't have fancy clothes but my father took a pair of his old trousers and cut them off at the knee. I used a piece of string as a belt. But the school wasn't fancy, either – it had only one classroom. None of the pupils wore smart clothes, so I fitted right in.

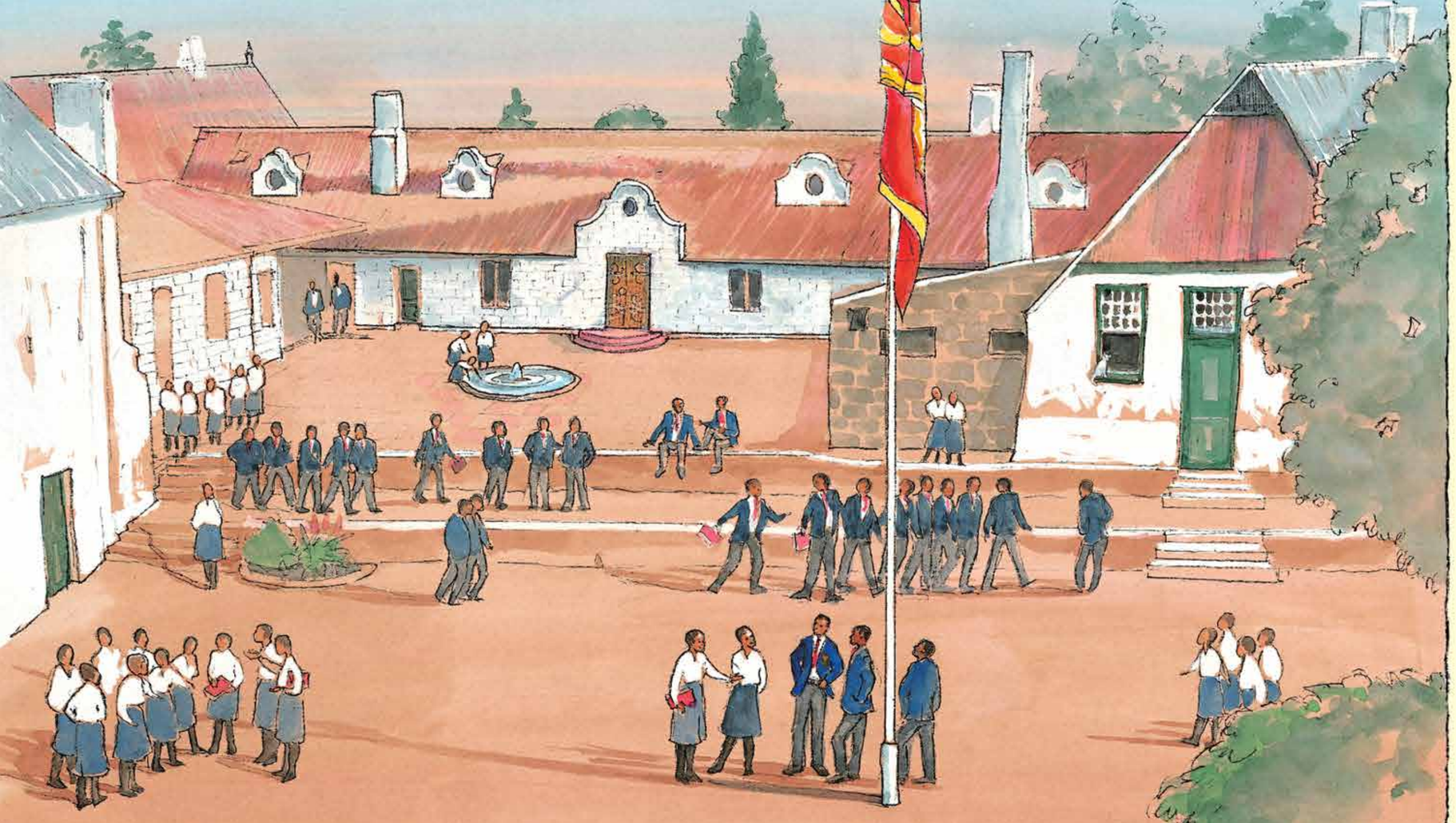
Our teacher gave us new names. Mine was Nelson. Nelson? At that time the English ruled our country, so our teacher thought we should all have English names. It sounded very strange at first, but I soon got used to it.

I was learning at school but I was learning at home as well. My mother told me stories from long ago, full of wise lessons about being kind to others.

My father taught me to be a brave Xhosa boy. I wanted to grow up to be just like him. Sometimes I even rubbed ash onto my hair to make it grey, like his.

But after my ninth birthday, my life changed. My father grew ill and died. My mother took me to live with my father's friend, Chief Jongintaba, in the nearby village of Mqhekezweni. Uncle Jongi was the acting king of the Thembus and was a very important man. He had a motor car and lived in a big house called the Great Place. It was an exciting new experience for me! My mother still came to visit me though and I was always happy to see her.





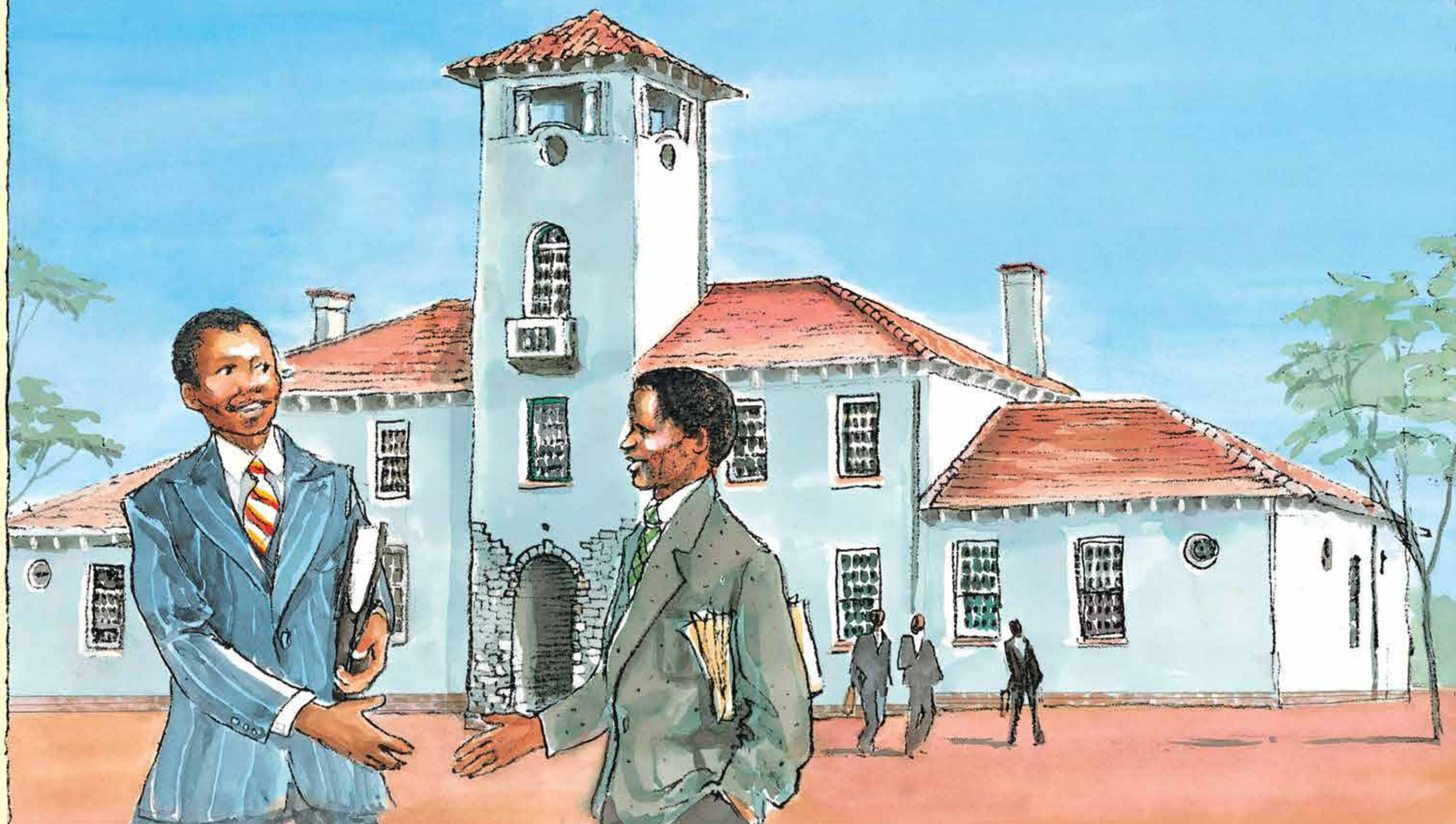
Although I missed Qunu, I loved my new life. Uncle Jongi's son, Justice, was a few years older than me and we became best friends. We rode horses and ploughed his father's fields together. We had a lot of fun!

But life was not all about riding horses. When I was 16, Uncle Jongi sent me to Clarkebury boarding school. In those days many boys and girls did not finish their schooling, but my uncle believed education was important. Three years later, I joined Justice at Healdtown, the biggest school for Africans in the country. This is where I completed my high school education.

At the age of 21, I enrolled at Fort Hare, a university for black students in the Eastern Cape. Uncle Jongi bought me a new suit to wear. It was very different from the cut-down trousers I had worn when I went to school. I felt very grown-up!

Young black people from all over the country came to study at Fort Hare. It was the first time I had met people from other tribes, such as Sothos, Zulus and Tswanas.

I made new friends, including a clever young student called Oliver Tambo. Although we didn't know it then, Oliver and I were to become very important in each other's lives.



I worked hard at university but I had fun, too. I took up running, boxing and ballroom dancing. One night, my friends and I snuck out to a dance-hall. We thought we were very daring — until we met our teacher! But suddenly my student days were cut short. I was elected to sit on the Student Council, but only 25 students had voted. Most did not vote because the Council could not change the thing that concerned them the most — the bad canteen food. I told the Principal that I would not sit on the Council without the students' support. He was very angry and threatened to expel me, but I wouldn't change my mind. I never went back to university. Was I living up to my name of "troublemaker"?