

## **A Moment that Lasts a Lifetime**

### **Finalist**

By Keabetswe Leshoe

Bound by the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean lies the beautiful land of Africa. Many call it the Mother Land, some say it is that continent that looks like a question mark, and a few, including myself at some point, have considered its shape to be like that of a lopsided ice cream cone, with some scoops leaning heavily to the left. To me, it is the continent that carries my birthplace: South Africa.

South Africa has great natural beauty, eleven official languages, rich natural resources, and is the only country in the world to include another country within its borders. Another thing I love is the horizontal 'Y' shape on the flag which represents a once divided nation converging and working together in harmony.

South Africa was given its nickname "Rainbow Nation" to acknowledge its attempts to create a semblance of unity, (also called 'Ubuntu' (Xhosa), 'Botho' (Sotho and Setswana), 'Vanhu' (Shona), 'Vhuthu' (Venda), 'Mensdom' (Afrikaans)), in an ethnic diverse country after apartheid ended in 1994.

Born in a small town called Mahikeng, I started learning at a young age that you do not have to know someone to greet them. We refer to this as Ubuntu, a Xhosa word which translates to "I am because we are..."

At first it did not make sense to me, but as time went on and I got older, I understood that in my culture, everyone is your mother, everyone is your father, everyone is your sister, and everyone is your brother. I was to treat everyone, outside of the house I grew up in, with the same respect as those who lived outside of it.

Growing up, I had a lot of book smarts which a lot of my peers found to be a little more than they could handle. Because of my intelligence, it was hard to make friends. I felt alone, even though I was surrounded by a crowd of people every day.

One Sunday afternoon while we were at church, right after the service had ended, I noticed that my mother was going through the same thing as myself. Men and women that we attended church with would greet the ladies my mother was standing with, but not her. How she responded was inspiring to me.

She greeted them after they walked past her. Not sarcastically, but in the same manner she had greeted the ladies she was with. As we were in the car driving home, the sun caressed my face as the wind from my open window fanned me.

Normally on a sunny day, my thighs “stick” to the car seat, but my skin was sitting pretty on the car seat. We passed by the usual sceneries when heading home from church: two gas stations, some trees, and nice houses; some with nice gardens and some gated with a high wall. It was a great day.

I asked her why she did that, and she responded, with a calm and inviting voice, by saying, “Madume ha a rekesiwe (saying hello does not cost anything; being kind and respectful does not cost anything), and no matter how people may treat you in life, always be respectful because that is how you were raised.”

I went back to school the next day, which was Monday of course, and that was the first day of the rest of my life where I eventually made new friends, lasting memories, and left a footprint at the school that many uses as a stepping stool to this day: kindness is the best form of humanity.

That moment I shared with my mother has made me into the woman I am today. Because of that moment, I have been complimented on my kindness and my manners wherever I travelled, whether it was in China or here in Virginia and even back home in South Africa, and I thank my mother every day for that moment; a moment that lasts a lifetime.