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**different people  
different places**



Stories in the Street is a community based group that runs storytelling events and workshops. We use personal stories and traditional tales to communicate the diversity of culture and experience in the UK.

“Shared memories are so important. You can say a single word, and if the other person shares the same background and culture, then they will immediately have all the associations of the word in their minds.

This is why we need to explain life in each particular culture. So that with this background knowledge, it is possible to communicate with each other”

THE AFRICAN HEART!  
EVERY ONE CONNECTS IN A WAY



This is about  
Africa, Big Big Africa  
with different people  
and different languages  
but similar culture  
and one mind!!  
Hence Similar Stories!  
God bless AFRICAN RICH CULTURE!

## Introduction

These stories and images came out of a series of "Stories in the Street" workshops that took place during six African Culture days. We met, ate together, talked together and told stories. We covered many topics – education, marriage customs, hosts and guests, children and adults, coming to England, going home, old traditions and new attitudes.

Each topic threw up many memories, and the memories led to many stories. Stories are a very good way of sharing experiences. They show how we carry inside us many influences that we are not aware of. These influences make us what we are, and affect the way we see the world. We hope that through these stories and images it will be possible to get an insight into the ways in which the members of our group see the world. And perhaps these stories will remind you of stories of your own....

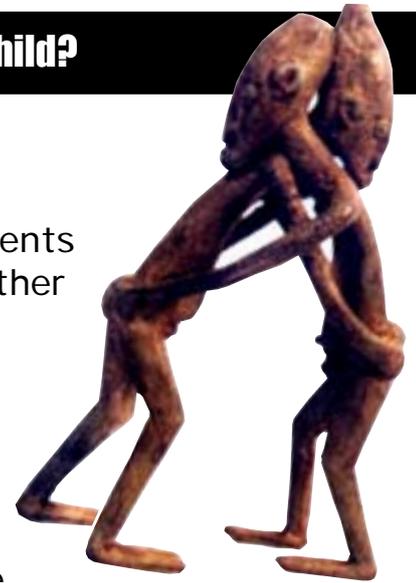
## What were your responsibilities when you were a child?

### Fetching Water

Young girls and boys in Africa (Nigeria) help the parents with fetching water from the stream if there is no other source of water.

I used to fetch water after school. There was a stream across the road, and I used to fetch water from there. I eventually got very skilled at lifting the bucket by myself on my head. A piece of cloth is made into a roll and placed on the head to balance the bucket. We used to use a smaller bowl to clear the water of leaves first before scooping it into the bucket. There were always bamboo trees next to the river. And I can still remember the smell of the stream.....

There were frogs fishes and tadpoles in the water. The water was used to flush the toilet, wash clothes and baled out for drinking. Alum was put in it to make the sands of the water settle down. I remember the water was very slippery when used with soap, because of the alum. A plank was placed across the stream for people to get across. The marks on the lady's face are tribal marks which traditionally were used to identify different villages in case there was a tribal war.





**What festivals did you celebrate? What memories do you have of them?**

## Guy Fawkes Day

This happened in the 1950's in what is now called Soweto....

November 5th. was one of the days we always looked forward to as youngsters. We never knew who Guy Fawkes was or where the whole idea came from. The occasion was just passed down from one generation of kids to another.

On this day we would dress up in our mother's or father's clothes and apply all kinds of make-up i.e. powder, lipstick, floor polish or even some yellow concoction made from flowers that grew in the open fields. We would walk from house to house singing a song "Penny, penny for a Guy Fawkes" (whatever that meant!). This earned us sweets, cold drinks, cakes, pennies – or we would just be shooed away for being a nuisance! At the end of all this we would congregate in some abandoned building and have a real feast!

We did not have any fireworks but used empty cans, drums, to make as much noise as we could.

It was only when I came to England that I found out who Guy Fawkes was.

I am reminded of this memory every year when kids go "trick or treating" to celebrate Guy Fawkes day.





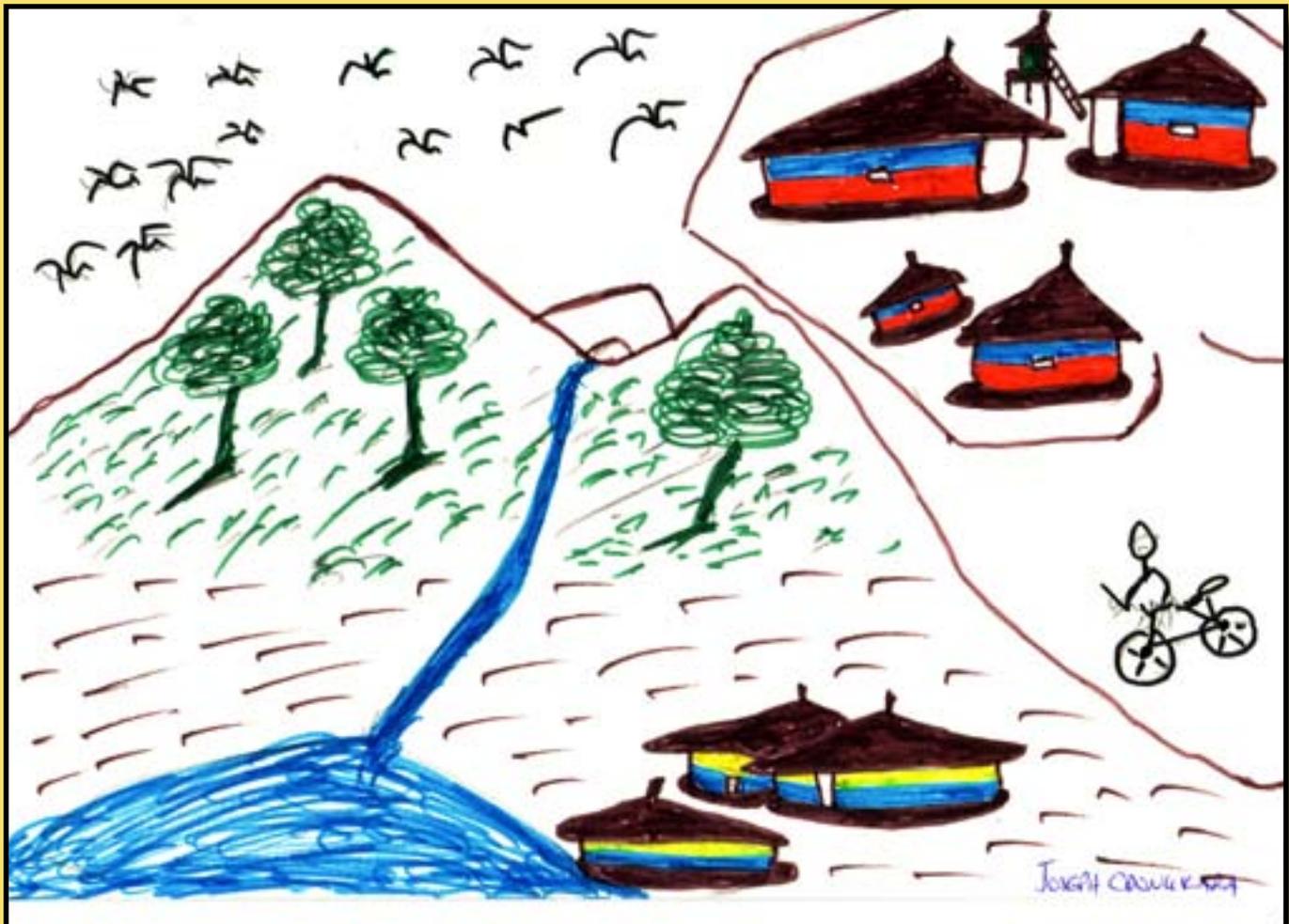
**When you were growing up, what was your attitude towards people who were older than you? How were you expected to behave?**

## The Bicycle

This drawing depicts a homestead in an Acoli clan in Northern Uganda. The drawing depicts colours used especially to colour the outer walls of the huts. The colours in the drawing are the true colours used...

The little boy is taking a Raleigh bicycle to the uncle opposite their village, some 7 km. away along a hilly path. The boy rolls the bicycle all the way, because he has been instructed to do so. It would be easier for him if he could ride it, but he respects the words of his elders, especially their instructions, as unquestionable. He would not under any circumstance climb onto it. He rolls it along all the way.

I remember that when we rode the bicycle without permission, we used to put a broom on the back of it, so that our cycle tracks would be brushed over as we cycled. And we used to clean the bike afterwards, so nobody could tell that it had been used. The result was that the bicycle was always sparkling and clean!...



## What were the traditional customs that you saw when you were growing up? What is your attitude towards them now?

In the Alur Culture in Uganda, when you are planning to get married, the groom and his party must carry ropes to the bride's home. The number of ropes you take signify the number of livestock you are willing to pay for bride price. The ropes are in different sizes; bigger ones for cattle and small ones for goats or sheep. Occasionally the sizes of some ropes get misinterpreted by the bride's people and result in a stand-off between the two parties... as there is no animal for medium sized ropes!

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## Marriage Customs

Nigerian marriage ceremony. The Groom's family sends a letter - "we have seen a rose in your garden, it is a very beautiful rose..." etc. Then they come to visit the family. They are given a hard time, the bride's family refuses to listen to them, they have to knock many times. They kneel at the entrance (a sign of great respect) and remind the family that they have sent a letter. Then they have to bring money and food - yams, salt etc. Then there is a meal. The extended families both come together. This enables them to check that they are not related, and the marriage can take place. Each member of each extended family introduces themselves and says who they are. Then a false bride is produced covered in a veil. The groom's family must say - "no, that is not the one, her legs are too skinny", other things like that. This happens for two pretend brides, then the real bride. Then the marriage can take place. When the bride leaves to go back to the groom's family, she cannot bring herself to go. She is crying, her family are crying, she has to be pulled away by the groom's family. This is a great contrast to the way in England. The point is to connect the two families together, to make everybody know everybody so that the bride is not ill treated, so that the groom values the bride, because he has been through a lot to get her.



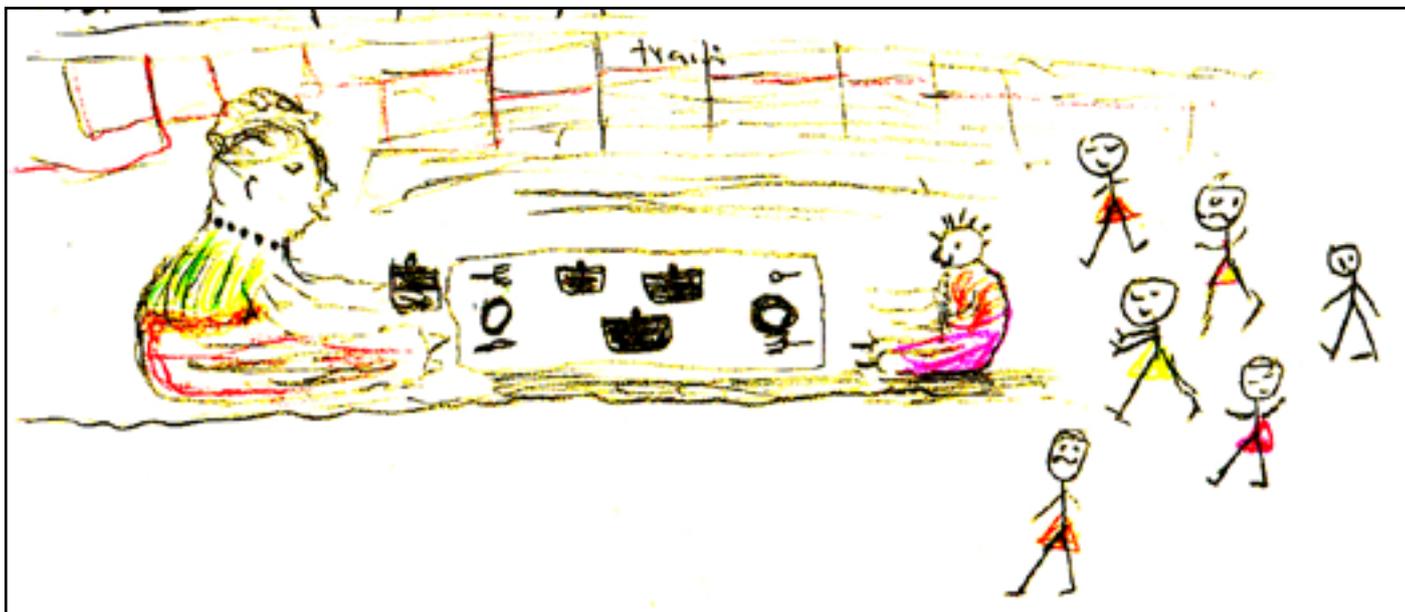
**What games did you play as a child? Did you have older relatives who you spent time with? What things did they teach you?**



## Childhood

A bored child is told to go to his aunty and get an agamon, this is something that doesn't actually exist, but the aunty knows that the child needs to be kept active, so she says "oh, I don't have one, but I know who does" and she sends him to someone else in the village, and that person sends him to someone else, and he is kept occupied in his search until it gets dark, and then the last person tells him to go home and tell his mother that he can't find one. And this is how village life works, because everybody knows everybody else, and they can all co-operate to solve each others' problems.





**When did you begin to become independent from your family?**

## The Meal at the Station

I was thirteen years old when I went to boarding school in Natal (South Africa). Before leaving I had to visit my grandmother to get her blessing. I spent the weekend with her in the suburbs in Jo'burg where she worked. She promised to come to the station to see me off (I was very excited at the prospect). The train was due to depart at 10pm. At about 8.30pm most of the children (students) were already gathered at the station and there was a lot of excitement. I looked round and saw my gran approaching. She was carrying a box, covered in a white cloth, on her head. I wondered what was in the box! She found a nice quiet spot, unwrapped the box, brought out 3 pots, plates, forks and knives and laid everything on the ground. Then she started dishing up, and instructing me to eat before the train leaves! By then, all the other children were standing there looking, some laughing and whispering. I felt so embarrassed – I wished the ground would open up to swallow me. I could not even say “no” – because if you were offered food, you had to eat, and of course I could not disobey my gran – you just did what you were instructed to do.

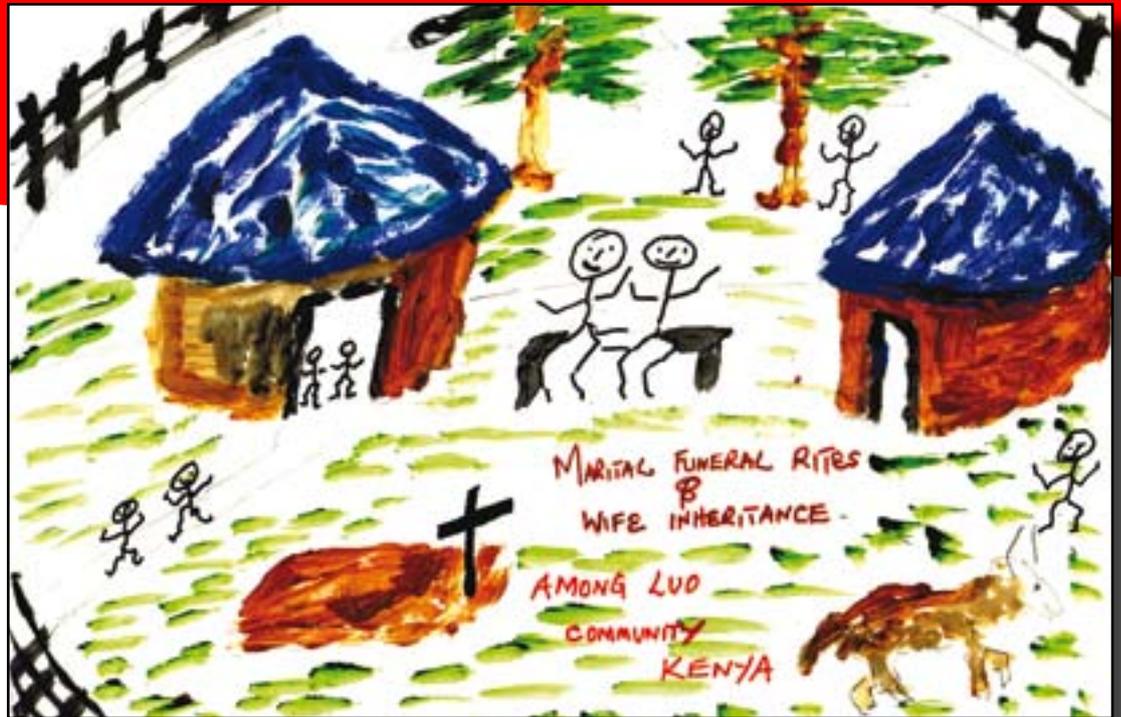
I was teased about this for months afterwards at school. I cannot remember what the food tasted like, but my gran became my least favourite relative!





# My Culture ...

My culture is to respect elders and to be polite and to help others apart from my own relatives. When you are matured you get married and start a family and be responsible to all the family needs. You should join organisations like church and other clubs which can help in society ...



## Marriage Customs

When I was sixteen years, the first boy I met, his name was Charles. We were singing in the church choir together. One day, he invited me to go with him to visit his sister. I refused because I was shy to look at him when we were out of church. One day Charles wanted to visit me in the evening. I told him "we are not allowed to sleep together. You have to pay lobola, or tell my aunt" ....



**What did you learn from your own culture, that you still believe in now?**





**Did you grow up in a village? How is life different now, compared to your childhood?**

## Life in the village

Everyone wakes up early in the morning.

Most people would go in the same direction for instance to the bush to cultivate cassava, plantain...

Houses don't have locks, no one thinks of stealing something from other people as there is no need, people share all they have.

Children have to travel miles to attend school, situated in the other village.

In the evening everyone is back to the village, which gets animated.

One day a boy came from the town and started stealing stuff, and this changes life in the village.



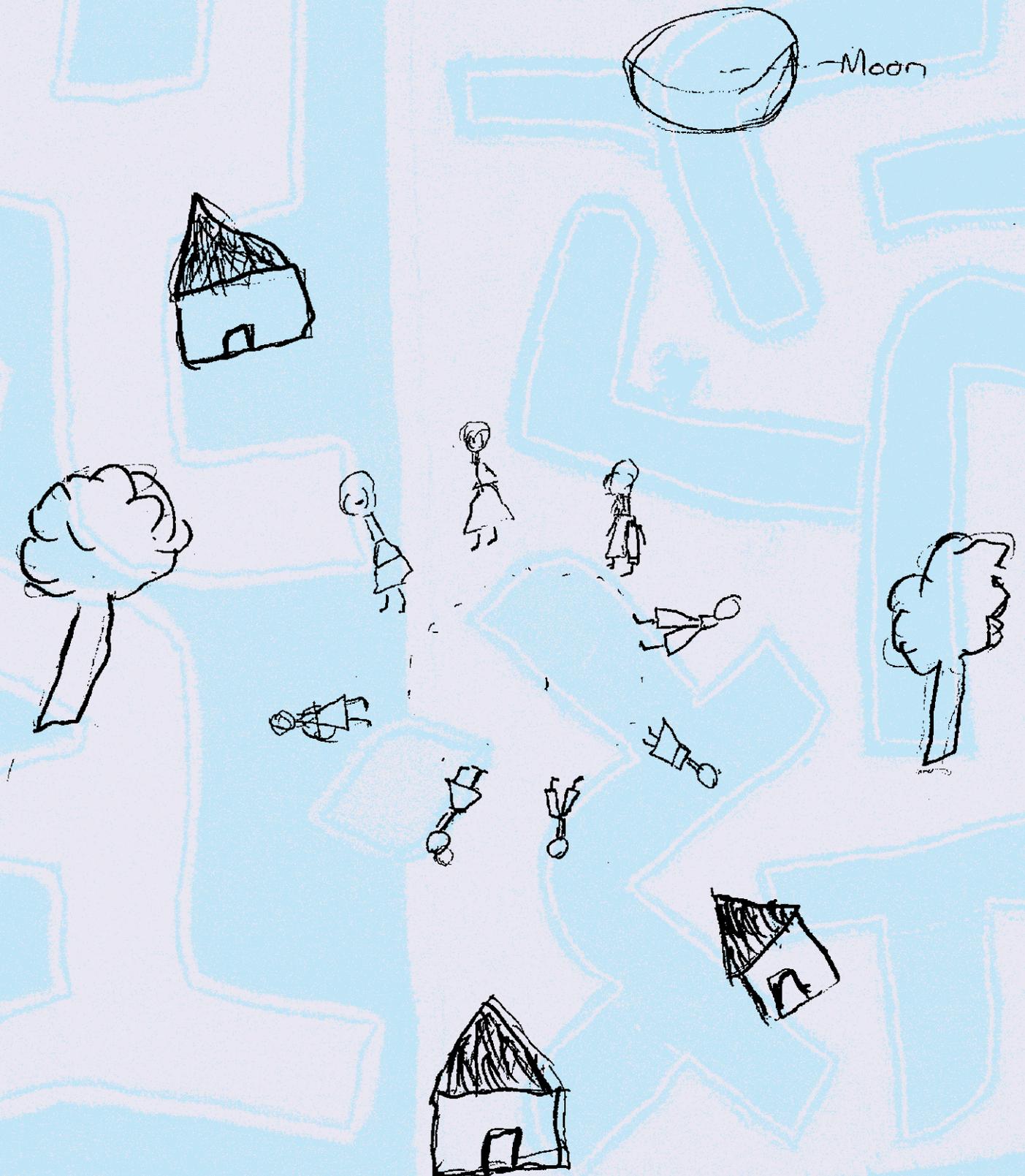
# Our Tree

I had two brothers and three sisters. Unfortunately my father and mother got divorced. My mother had to leave the village and she took my eldest sister with her. The day they left, my father was away at work. He was going to be away for several days (weeks?). My mum told us that she was going for a visit and she would be back after a few days. At the time I was about five years old and my eldest brother was eight or nine. My mum left with my eldest sister, and we other children stayed. We were on our own, because our dad was away. We had to cook and clean for ourselves and we were not going to school. As young as I was, I did not understand exactly what was happening. As I was then the eldest girl, I had to look after my sisters who were younger than me. I became their mother then. The five of us used to sleep in the same room and share the only blanket we had. Finally, my father came back and moved us to another village near his sister, and then we started going to school. When going to school we went past my auntie's house, and I used to steal food for my sisters. Until one day she caught me and gave me a beating. But that did not stop me looking after my sisters and stealing food. But then we found a tree in the bush that was full of fruit. We used to eat the fruits every day. We called it "our tree". We did not tell anyone about our tree....



**Did you have to look after younger brothers and sisters?  
What did you have to do for them?**

**Who were your friends when you were a child? How did you meet them?**



## Childrens's Games

Children playing outside during the full moon. Here they are in a circle singing and playing games. Children have travelled from long distances to play with friends.

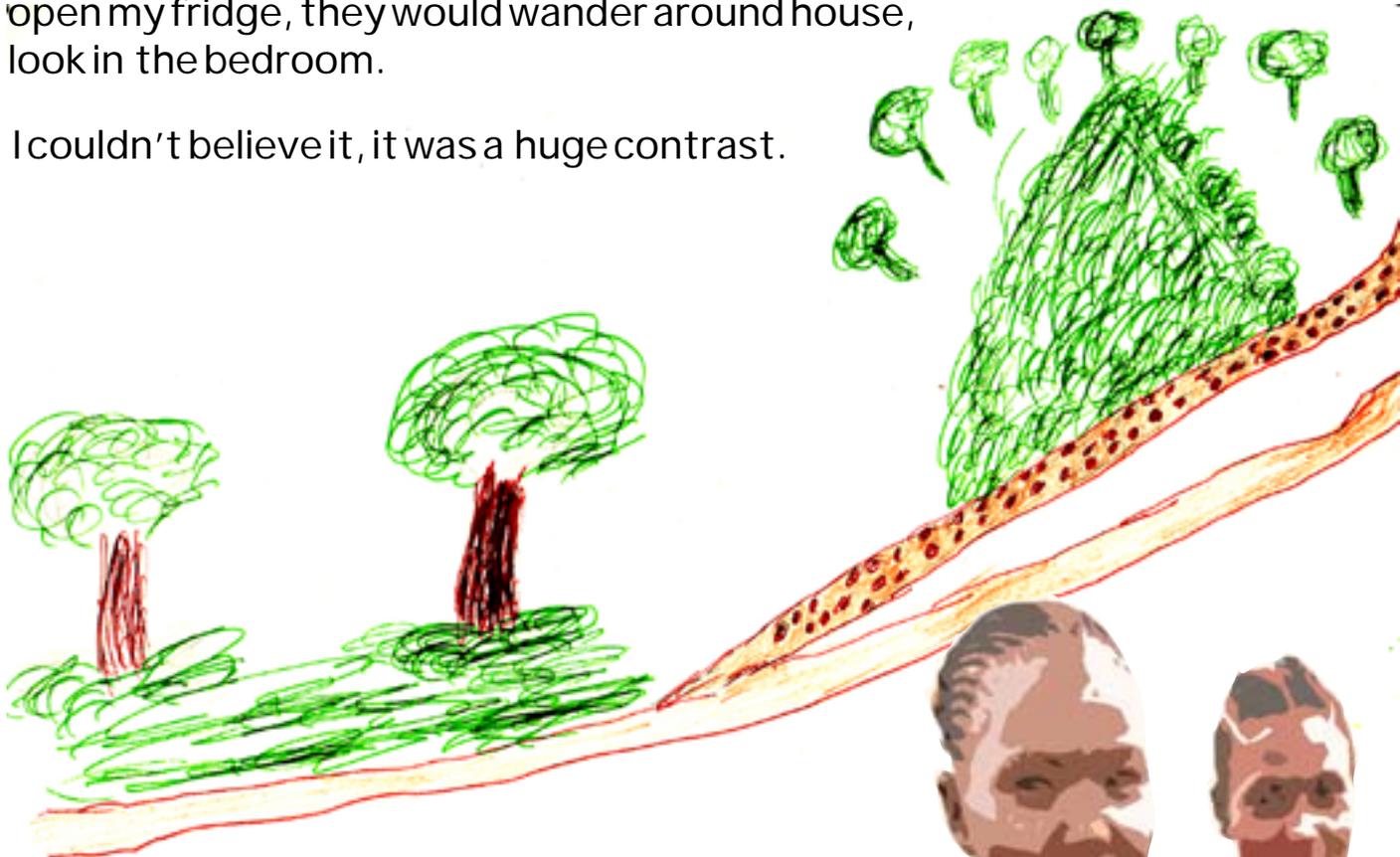
**When you first came to England, what were the different beliefs and customs that you noticed?  
What did you feel about your own beliefs and customs?**



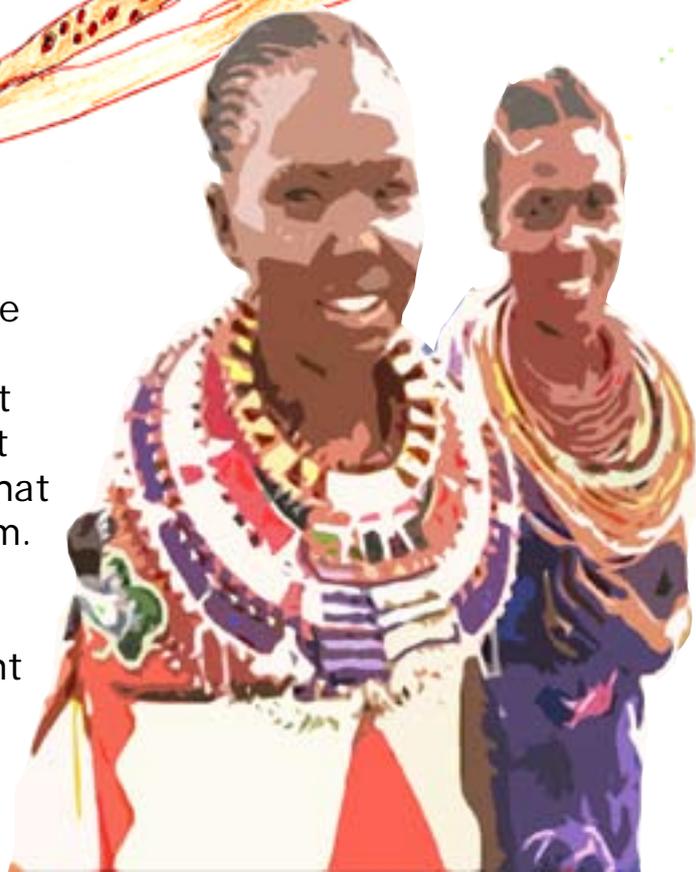
## How Should a Guest Behave

If you are invited to a house in Africa, you are offered a chair, and as a guest, you would not think of leaving that chair, except to go to the toilet. A guest would never think of going to the kitchen, or moving around the house. They would remain in that chair. The reason for this is possibly because of the danger of being accused of something, eg poisoning food, if a guest was seen in the kitchen. If they stayed for four hours, the guest would stay glued to that chair. I was amazed when I came to England to find that my friends would open my fridge, they would wander around house, look in the bedroom.

I couldn't believe it, it was a huge contrast.



There were two roads out of our village – one was a straight road, and the other was a curving road which was covered in stones. It went past a hill side. We used to believe that fairies and witches lived in the hill side and that you mustn't look around or you will see them. We used to go there at night, hoping to see them. Now when I came to England, I didn't hear of any similar type of story. So I thought to myself "these African beliefs must be wrong, I should forget about them...."





I left my village in Uganda to go to university in England. In a village there are traditions that must be followed if you are leaving. The whole village came to see my departure. Someone sprinkled water on my feet, and I had to make a solemn promise to return. When I was in England, I received a letter saying that my grandma was dying, and that I must return. I returned at once and saw my grandmother in the village. She said "at least I have seen you again, even if I have not seen your children..." The next day she died.

**Have you changed since you have been living in England?  
When you go back to your old home, what changes do you find there?**



When I came back from university, the whole village had gathered to welcome me. Now I was regarded as a very high status person, and I was asked to settle disputes and give advice. But I didn't have the cultural knowledge that was required to take on this role and I felt guilty that I didn't know how to act or speak in these situations. Also, if you come back to the village after studying abroad, it is hard to marry because people believe that now you are too high status for their daughter. But sometimes if a man died and had wives, these wives needed to remarry their husband's relatives, and they were offered a choice of assembled brothers and cousins. They would naturally pick out the man with a university education, because he was of such high status - this could lead to very embarrassing situations.



## What is your attitude towards time?

### How do you measure time, and how do you keep time?

When there are meetings in Africa each person will speak and make their point, but they need to give the background before their point can be understood, so they start a long way back, and take their time to explain everything. The result is that each person speaks for a long time, and the longer they speak, the higher they are regarded as a public speaker. This affects attitudes towards time. If you say that there is a meeting and it starts at 3 o'clock, then people might come at 4.30. They would anticipate that the speeches would be long, so some people might not come till 7pm. If this is applied to meetings in England, then when the person turns up, the meeting is long finished, perhaps the building is shut....

This attitude is related to the type of life - if life is slow, in a rural and agricultural setting, then time can be taken, and no rush is required. In villages in Africa, people use the cock to tell them the time. Some people get up when the cock crows for the first time - these are people who have a long way to go to get to their fields. If you work nearer, then you can get up when the cock crows for the second time. If you are really lucky, then you only have to get up when the cock crows for the third time...



Our school was in one large hall. Every class was in the hall. There were no books so everything was learned by rote, or we scratched in the earth or used slates. Sometime we were reciting our times tables, and the class next to us was reciting a different times table and we got distracted. In summer each class sat under a tree. We used matchsticks or stones to learn arithmetic. We used to go round collecting them at weekends, so we had enough for school.

Children are rewarded and encouraged to be well behaved. An elder might be eating some porridge, and then beckon the good child - "here you can finish it". They would lick it clean. Badly behaved children are not offered extra food. This makes a big difference if food is scarce.

Children are expected to run errands and be helpful. An elder might say "go to you uncle and get some salt and pepper.." And then he would spit on the ground, and the child must come back before the spittle has dried. The child runs off, comes back dripping in sweat, salt under one arm, pepper under the other arm.....



**What sort of education did you have?  
How does it compare with the education that children receive today?**

# The mat

In Uganda, every woman learns how to make a mat. When you get married, you get mats as presents to symbolise hospitality in your house. Visitors are given a mat to sit on when they come to visit. It's very comfortable and always kept clean.

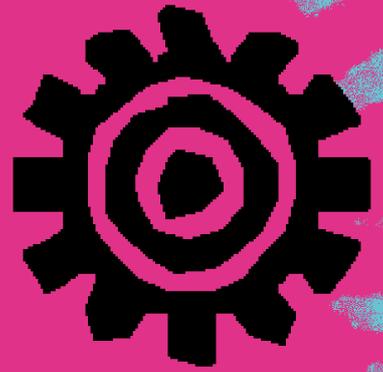


In our village, each family had their own herds and their own kraals. There was a bull that lead each herd. The bulls would return with the cows each evening, and the bulls would have fights. The children would call out "the bulls are fighting" and then they would run to watch. They would say "our bull will beat yours next time"

When I was at school, all the text books used English names. For instance if there was a question with a person in it, the person was called Tom or Mary. And there was something called "a sweet shop" that used to appear in some of the questions. I used to think to myself "What is a sweet shop?"

**What objects and possessions have special significance for you?**

**What is your opinion of the English way of life?  
What is good, and what is bad about it?**



## Different Places, Different Customs

I was born in a village in Uganda. When I came to go to University, I went to study at Oxford. My father came from Uganda to visit me. On his first morning in England, he went from house to house to knock on the doors and say hello. This is a normal way of behaving in a village. The result in Oxford, was that that people called the police to say "There is a man outside here, he is harassing us."

My mother also came to stay. She only stayed for two weeks. On her first morning she asked "Where are my age mates. I want to sit with women of my own age. Where do they meet?" In the village she could expect to find women of the same age, to sit with them and talk with them. I had to explain to her that in England, everybody sits in their own houses on their own, and watches television. She was so horrified by the isolation of English life that went straight back to Uganda.