

My water, life and surfing. . .

Author: Lungi Phinda

I am a 36 year old South African Xhosa man. I live in Johannesburg and I was born in Alice, Eastern Cape. My parents are divorced, and I have a 30 year old sister. I am married to an incredible 32 year old Xhosa woman, and she was born in Mthatha. Together, we have a 5 year old son, and another on his way. I have reasonable and kind in-laws. I have a handful of friends left. I'm an actor, V/O artist, producer, director and entrepreneur. I'm a story teller. I am blessed and I am grateful.

Growing up, at home in Alice, we were encouraged to dream. I certainly did... There is nothing I did not dream about. I dreamt about being a head of state, being a successful architect, a wealthy entrepreneur. I would tell my parents how one day; I was going to buy them top of the range luxury cars that they would be driven around in, and I would own an orchard(as I got older the orchard became a vineyard). There would be a big Victorian home surrounded by the fruit trees, with an amazing view of the river, mountains and the ocean. This view would be complemented by a beautiful rain storm... I wanted to feel it. The storm, the water, the wind, and I wanted to smell the air.

I had seen on television how gorgeous a picture it was to surf in a mild ocean storm. I imagined and dreamt that I would catch those waves and get the same picture in the backyard of my orchard. So, when I first got to East London to do my schooling, I met a few surfers. We had many conversations about surfing, in a mathematics classroom with a sea view. One particular conversation stands out for me, I had met a young man by the name Wesley. He was an avid and passionate surfer... During one of our conversations, he shared with me his tragic loss of a friend of his. The friend was as passionate about surfing, but lost his life to a shark attack. As he shared with me the details around the events of the day and days leading up to that tragedy, he suddenly kept quiet. I decided to let it go... I looked out the window to the ocean, and when I looked back at him, he had broken down and was quite emotional. I did not know what to do, so I apologized and asked our teacher to attend to him. He did... I went back to my desk and looked back out to the sea. So beautiful, and so calm the ocean was that day. So majestic, yet so dangerous under different weather conditions. I started thinking about the sharks... How do they just live in the water? At the time, I was not the best swimmer. In fact, I was terrible. Because I believed life and breath always went hand in hand. I couldn't understand how these predators lived under the sea. If I was so terrible at swimming, how was there life out at sea? I opened myself up for stories and education of the existence of life in the ocean. I realized this was a whole world I had no knowledge of. I knew nothing about the ocean, and life in the ocean. So, I thought it best to learn about the ocean before I go looking for trouble.

In my research and education, through reading and communicating with elders, I got to hear stories of how rivers have a life too... How rivers also react to bad weather and how dangerous that can be. Apart from the obvious dangers, like crocodiles, drowning, etc... People have lost lives, loved ones and property to river currents/flows. What was of particular interest to me, was also how blessings came from the river.

During one of the school holidays, I had gone home, and my parents and I travelled to the village my grandfather was born in. The was a ceremony that included a few rituals... One of those rituals involved communication with the ancestors... This time we did not go to the kraal, but we went to the river. Something very fascinating happened while the elders communicated their messages and received messages. We had brought offerings along with us. A cloth and a few other items, but what stood out for me was how the cloth sunk to the bottom of the river. It spun like water going down the drain and everyone around seemed pleased. The ancestors had welcomed the offerings. One particular instance that brings this notion to the western world/platform of entertainment is in the movie, Lion King. Rafiki finds Simba living with Timone and Pumba. To get his attention, he tells Simba that Mufasa is alive. Obviously, this is unbelievable to Simba, and Rafiki takes off followed by Simba going to see Mufasa. They get to a dam/stream/river and Rafiki tells him to look in the water. Simba looks and at first, he sees his own reflection. When he looks again, he sees his father/Mufasa in the water. As I kept talking to the elders about such things, I also got to find out that similar rituals may be performed at sea. People would go to the sea and communicate with the ancestors, for various reasons. Healing, prayer, wishes, etc. So, I began to realise the power of water...

I was not going to surf in the ocean, and I was not going to swim in the river, because I respect the life in the water. I was raised not to “play” where my elders sleep...