

Sweet Honey Nights

I spent many years -
Trying to understand my mother
And I am sure she tried even harder
To understand me – her youngest daughter
We were so alike, and yet so different
A powerful river of determination
Ran in our blood
When she wanted something
Mama sure went for it
I do the same!
And I remember it was great
When both of us wanted the same thing
But when our wishes differed
The storm, the heavy rain of tears, and the pain
To this day I remember that well

After she died I realised that
My mind did not recall
Any of the good times
The pain and the tears filled my thoughts
Soon I knew I had to go back
Shake up the bones
And try to find the other stories
From the bones of memory

The grass from her grave was swaying
In the wind, whispering a quiet rhythm
For a long time I stood and listened
Lost to my immediate surroundings
Caught up in a time when I was very young
More playful and excitable than I am today

And then I think I heard a jawbone move
I felt my ear starting to itch
And I think I heard these words:
'Sweet honey nights, sweet honey nights
Winter times in the Eastern Cape
Close your eyes, remember the smell
And the taste of honey
Sweet honey nights, sweet honey nights.
Smile a little, swallow once and the story is yours'

- Gcina Mhlophe

In her anthology *Love Child*, a combination of poems and narrative, Gcina Mhlophe shares her personal journey through the social and political landscapes of the 1980s, and her development as a writer, playwright and performer. For many years now she has been South Africa's favourite storyteller. In 'Sweet Honey Nights' she remembers her mother bringing a bucket of honey from the forest to the warm thatch hut where she and her siblings were resting on sheepskin rugs after a delicious and filling supper. 'Wide-eyed and full of anticipation we suddenly felt our stomachs making space for what was to come,' she writes, and while the winter wind howled outside, Gcina felt like she was in heaven, 'savouring our sweet honey night.'

Gcina concludes this story saying that one needs to have sweet memories such as these in the difficult and violent times we are living in. "Working so much with young people as I do, I keep trying to add my own share of sweetness; little mouthfuls of honey, one spoon at a time .."

- *Love Child*, University of Natal Press, 2002



Gcina Mhlophe, author of *Love Child*