

Joseph's cradle

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Shortly before Sisi was born, a terrific wind brought down the old yellowwood tree that had, it seemed, stood in the village forever. The loss was felt by everyone. Never again would children swing from its branches and never again would people find shelter from the hot sun in its dappled shade.



But Sisi's father, Joseph, was determined that the old tree should not be forgotten and so he set about carving a cradle from its beautiful wood.



And when Sisi was born, it was in this cradle that she was rocked to an African lullaby, "Thula thul, Thula baba, Thula sana."

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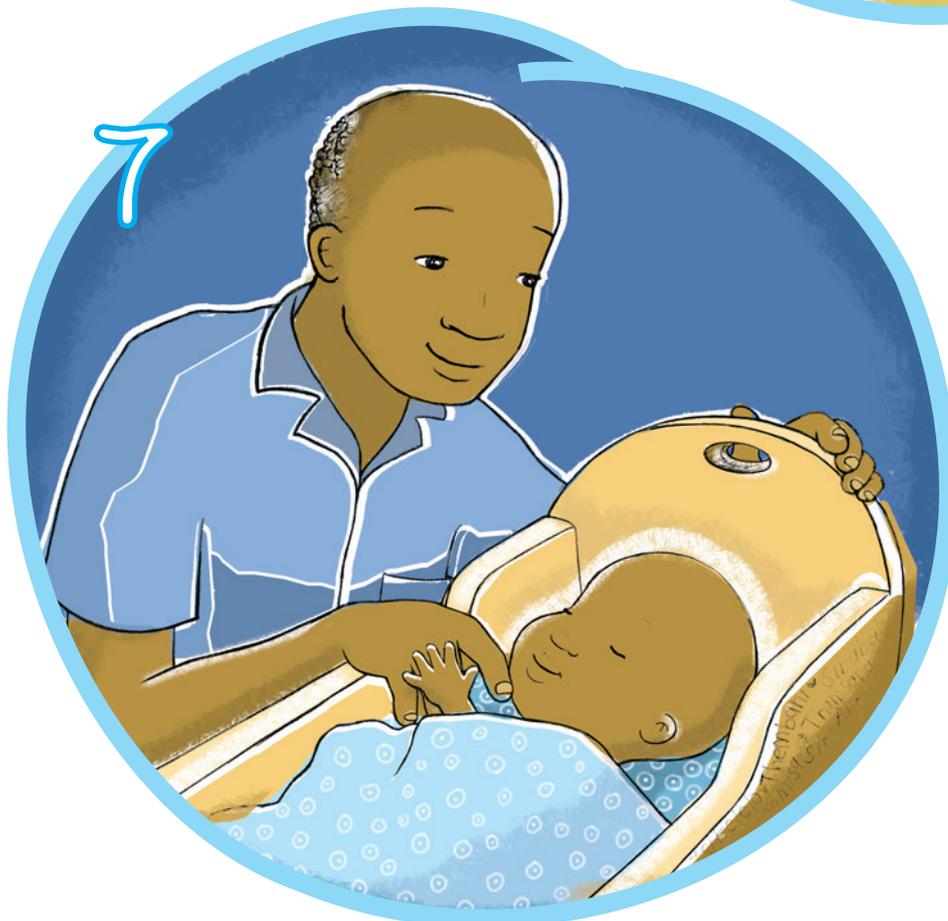
All too soon, Sisi outgrew the cradle and it was passed to a neighbour for his newborn baby. A tradition had begun. Each newborn baby in the village slept in Joseph's cradle. Then, with great care, he would add their name to the growing list carved on its sides.

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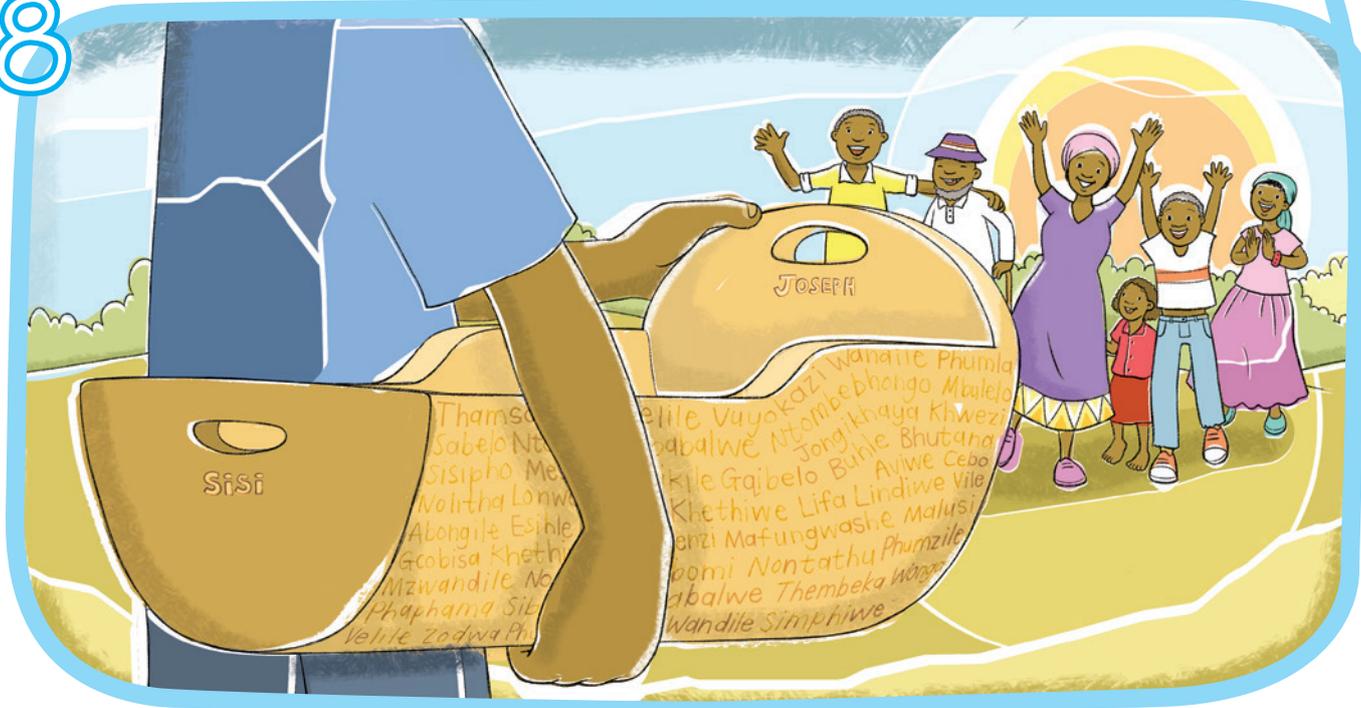
When the cradle had a hundred names on it and Joseph was an old man, a veld fire that was driven by terrific winds threatened the village. The men battled the flames while the women got all the children and the elderly to safety. All but Joseph, it was too late by the time they reached him. His death touched everyone.

Like the rest of the village, Sisi spent her time re-building, fixing and cleaning up after the fire. So it was a while before she thought of her father's cradle. Where was it? Was it being used? But no one in the village had it. Sadly, it too must have been lost to the fire. Now Sisi's grandchild, due by the next full moon, would never sleep in it.



But, in a neighbouring village, Themba's baby son was growing fast. Already he had outgrown the very cradle that Themba had once slept in. So, for the last time, he rocked his son to sleep in it. It had been kind of Joseph to let him take the cradle out of the village. Now it was time to take it back.

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The next day, to the sounds of ululating and the stamping of feet, Themba returned the cradle to the village, and to Sisi. On its sides, there were now a hundred and one babies' names and on the headboard, carved with great care, just one name ... Joseph.

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That night Sisi stood and watched as an almost full moon rose high in the sky. Soon a newborn baby, Joseph's first great-grandchild, would be rocked to an African lullaby in a beautiful yellowwood cradle. *"Thula thul, Thula baba, Thula sana."*