

An Inyanga for the Ndzundza Ndebele

By Dr. Adrienne Walker Hoard

The life of a South African indigenous traditional healer is lived for his or her community, as much as it is lived for their own family and for personal pursuits. The Inyanga, an Nguni word meaning healer, or doctor, is revered within their group as the person designated to address all manner of physical ailments, family problems and/or issues associated with emotional and personal trauma.

Mjanyelwa Daniel Ndimande is a noted Inyanga, traditional healer within the

Ndzundza Ndebele nation. Mr. Ndimande works with herbs, knows the unique properties of thousands of plants, and recognizes specifically the healing properties of wild animals, small insects and snakes. He is the product of five generations of traditional healers, who have the distinct knowledge of curing ailments with natural substances.

His mother's father was an Inyanga who began Mr. Ndimande's training when he was a teenager. Young Daniel had a very quick mind and desire for more knowledge. He excelled in his practices, much to the delight and pride of his grandfather. Barren women who desired healthy children especially sought after this grandfather, who had learned his craft from his grandfather. Mr. Ndimande, like his great-great grandfather, is frequently called upon by community members to "throw the bones," to consult the ancestors for family and marital advice.

Many readers may be familiar with the term Sangoma, used for traditional healer; however, M. Daniel Ndimande describes the Sangoma as a student in training to become an Inyanga. He said that he has had several approach him for herbal descriptions and information. Within the community of traditional healers, there is a code of



respect and mutual assistance. Mr. Ndimande cannot heal or treat for his own family, but must seek help from another Inyanga. Although his is related to the Ndzundza Ndebele royal family by marriage, they maintain their own Inyanga, who caters solely to their needs.

Mr. Ndimande is noted within the Ndebele community, not only because of his prowess as a traditional healer, but also be of his skills as a hunter. He is one of the few men of his area to have killed a crocodile,

and lived to tell the story. One night he and his son, William were fishing in the Elands River, when they came upon three of the animals. Mr. Ndimande killed the largest two and left his son to take care of the very small one. His wife, artist Francina Ndimande was pregnant at the time with their daughter, Maria. The morning after Daniel's bravery with the crocodile, Maria was born, and they gave her the middle name of Nongwenya, the Nguni word for crocodile, to mark this significant event, with the coincidence of her birth.

The traditions put forth and practiced by Mr. Ndimande are sacred and valuable to the community of Ndzundza Ndebele families. He is hoping that his third son, Ephraim, who is now using herbs to cure illness will continue in his studies and follow in the footsteps of his father and generations of grandfathers, to become a practicing Inyanga. The 21st century culture of westernisation has not yet become so pervasive in Mabhoko, Mpumalanga, that the life and purpose of the Inyanga is diminished in importance to the daily existence of Ndebele people. We applaud Mr. Mjanyelwa Daniel Ndimande for his skills, talents and insights to the natural world of healing arts, the world of the Inyanga, traditional medicine person.



Dirkie Offringa, Director of the Pretoria Art Museum with Dr Walker Hoard and Elbie Hext at the opening of an exhibition of paintings by Pino Purificato at the Pretoria Art Museum

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