



Providing a feast of words - written and spoken - for the eye, the ear and the mind; as well as for the creative imagination, and for performance.

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What primarily motivates me to work with schools as author, writer, story maker and teller, dramatist, presenter, and artist-in-residence is the sense I get during visits that I'm engaging in a creative partnership with students. It is a partnership in which we all seek to learn out of a mutual passion for writing, for books and reading, for story and story making, for the creative process and when possible and necessary, for performance. But it is also a partnership in which my role is very much to mentor like I too was mentored, as a child, and through the years to the present.

Plenty of mentors I had along the way and not surprisingly many, I realize now, were teachers. Two mentors stand out in my mind: my Maasai speaking paternal grandfather, Lotasarwaki, and my Swahili and English speaking paternal uncle, Menang Silig. (Maasai is one of over 130 ethnic languages in Tanzania, where I grew up. Swahili is Tanzania's national language. English is the country's second official language, spoken by – arguably – only about 10% of the population.) Grandfather infused in me love of the spoken word, the art of which he called, and Maasai speaking peoples to this day call, 'eating' or 'feasting' on words. From him I learned not only to share stories, but to listen. With Grandfather you couldn't ask for a better listener. He was as good a listener as he was a raconteur, both of which comprise the true art of 'feasting' on words. My uncle, who was also my teacher in Middle School (Grade 5 to 8), burned with enthusiasm for reading and writing, which he worked hard to instill in his students and anyone who would listen. He himself wrote abundantly, in beautiful hand-writing, in notebook after notebook, stories that he sadly never tried or thought to publish.

Before my grandfather and uncle, my passion for writing (which *years* later led also to writing for and work in theatre and to performance) must have come from my love of books, and my love of books from a lack of them as a preschool child, despite the fact that my father was a teacher. How I wished, particularly before I began school, that I owned books! When I finally began school and to enjoy access to books, like a parched throat thirsts for water, I couldn't get enough. I prized like a precious gem the first new book to enter my possession. I was unable to keep my eyes or hands off it. Or my nose. With this very first new book and with each of other new books that thereafter came my way year after year, I savored the smell of the paper out of which they were made. The myriad smells I discovered of the various types of paper of which the different books were made, unfailingly reminded me of far off magical places. In these places, I thought, was where books surely came. And indeed, I do remember thinking what an absolutely magical thing it was, to be able to read; to decipher in black and white someone else's very thoughts!

My love of the written and spoken word lead, in different and unpredictable but exciting ways, to my involvement not only with writing but with theatre and storytelling performance, both in Tanzania and now in Canada. I love applying this valuable and wonderful combined legacy to my work with schools and in settings beyond.

Cordially,

Tololwa M Mollel