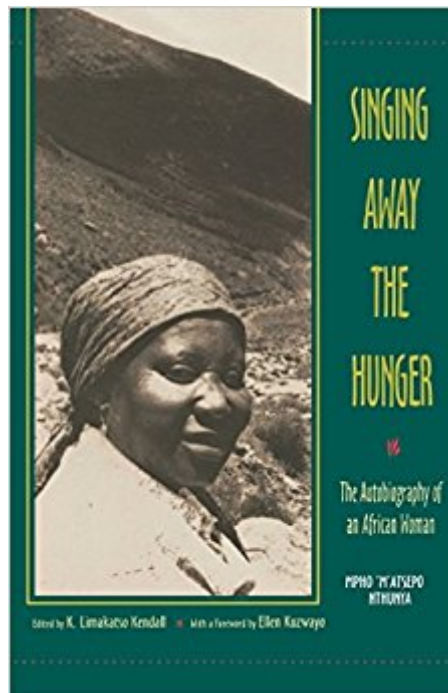


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# Singing Away The Hunger : The Autobiography Of An African Woman



## Synopsis

"... this gem of a book deserves a wide audience. Appropriate for African and women's studies courses and a must for college and university libraries." *Choice*... Mpho relates the story of her life with an integrity that makes for utterly compelling reading.... The fortitude of this woman, now in her late 60s, is a lesson to us all." *The Bookseller, United Kingdom*"This is a fascinating autobiography..." *KLIATT*"... a powerful autobiography of a Lesotho elder who tells her life as an African woman in South Africa. The focus on black culture and concerns as much as racism allows for an unusual depth of understanding of black concerns and lifestyles in Africa." *Reviewer's Bookwatch*"An African woman's poignant and beautifully crafted memoir lyrically portrays the brutal poverty and reliance on ritual that shape the lives of her people, the Basotho.... A commanding and important work that will captivate readers with its unique voice, narrative power, and unforgettable scenes of life in Southern Africa." *Kirkus Reviews*"... a stunning autobiography of a remarkable woman... Nthunya's telling is eloquent. Although her voice is generally one of dignified emotional distance, it is punctuated by her very human humor and pain." *Publishers Weekly*"... recommended for collections in African folklore." *Library Journal*"I am telling my stories in English for many months now, and it is a time for me to see my whole life. I see that things are always changing. I was born in 1930, so I remember many things which were happening in the old days in Lesotho and which happen no more. I lived in Benoni Location for more than ten years, and I saw the Boer policemen taking black people and beating them like dogs. They even took me once, and kept me in one of their jails for a while." *Mpho's Masepo Nthunya*A compelling and unique autobiography by an African woman with little formal education, less privilege, and almost no experience of books or writing. Mpho's is a voice almost never heard in literature or history, a voice from within the struggle of "ordinary" African women to negotiate a world which incorporates ancient pastoral ways and the congestion, brutality, and racist violence of city life. It is also the voice of a born storyteller who has a subject worthy of her gifts and a story for all the world to hear.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This implausible memoir is from a woman who experienced extreme adversity, suffering the loss of six children and her husband and then struggling to support her remaining family as a domestic worker. It is the narrative of a woman with a primary education who speaks eight languages and once had a prosperous farm. Nthunya is also a storyteller, relating how her mother was expected to marry someone her father selected for her, thereby collecting a bride-price. But her mother prayed that she would die, only to have her father and husband-to-be pass away instead. Another tale concerns the author's brother-in-law, who put a cruel spell on her and her children after her husband died because she wouldn't allow him to step in as their father, as is the custom. Eventually, three of her sons died, and she blamed her brother-in-law. A tragic, depressing look at life in South Africa; recommended for collections in African folklore. ?Ann Burns, "Library Journal" Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

An African woman's poignant and beautifully crafted memoir lyrically portrays the brutal poverty and reliance on ritual that shape the lives of her people, the Basotho. Though set in Lesotho and South Africa, hers is not a story of apartheid and racism per se, although both are a subtext of Nthunya's stories. Rather, it is a rare glimpse into the almost exclusively black African world and culture of the Basotho. It is the story of Nthunya's almost unimaginably hard life: a childhood without clothing, shoes, or food (she literally ate grass); the mother she vividly brings to life, a devout Roman Catholic who inspires her daughter's resilience and belief in God and transcendence; the death of her husband and murders of her children, brother, and father; work as a domestic to support her children. Among the most fascinating aspects of her narrative are the unbending rules of custom and ritual that determine everything from marriage to everyday activities. Yet this is not a dark book. It is filled with Nthunya's love of natural beauty, as well as her sense of humor, hope, and dreams.

Nthunya's story might have been suffused with resentment and rage, but it is not. She does not dictate our emotions, but extracts them through the power of her voice. The single exception is Nthunya's warning about poverty and the jealousy it incites. In her stories she reveals how jealousy corrupts and destroys. She concludes with a warning and a dream for her people: "Maybe if there is one day enough for the hunger to stop, we can stop being so jealous of one another. If the jealousy is no more, we can begin to have dreams for each other." A commanding and important work that will captivate readers with its unique voice, narrative power, and unforgettable scenes of life in southern Africa. (17 b&w photos, not seen) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

*Singing Away The Hunger*, is an account of Mpho 'M'atsepo Nthunya's experiences in Africa. Born in Lesotho in 1930, she gives a detailed insight into the types of dress, people, jobs, and attitudes that were common during that Era. She gives us a grave look into her experiences with the racism present during the South African apartheid on a first-hand basis. She begins the novel in a very structured time line she starts retelling her story as a young girl, who lives with her very poor mother, who is a borderline religious zealot. Even going so far as to tell Mpho's brother Sephefu, "You must not give Mpho anything. God will feed her. She will not die" (p. 14). She continues the time line describing her experiences as she matures from a girl into a young woman, and the somewhat comical "kidnapping" that lead to her double-marriage to her husband Alexis (pp. 30-33). Keeping the same structured storytelling, she recalls stories about how she went from being a prominent herder (p.63) to a poor woman after the death of her husband, barely able to provide for her children on the meager amount of pay she was making working for the University or in people's homes as a type of live-in maid (pp.118-132). I liked the unrelenting manner in which taboo and "private" information was easily given and spoken about as an accepted as a way of life. Mpho did not censor her words or the situations in any way. Her life story was presented as raw, emotional, and unrelenting. The editor had one simple goal in sight, to get Mpho's story across honestly and starkly, in order to make a lasting impression on all who read Mpho's book. I was also thrilled with the fact that the editor used the foreword to stress this point. That this novel is Mpho's and that it is Mpho's story to tell. The only critique I have of the book is that it tends to jump around a bit. Mpho will introduce a topic but not fully explain it until later in the novel when the topic is reintroduced and intertwined with a second topic she is discussing, only to then later tie up the loose ends of both topics. This in no way draws away from the character and telling of the story, it is more of a personal annoyance. *Singing Away The Hunger*, is a must read book that I have already recommended to so

many friends and colleagues. It is one of the most riveting, attention-keeping autobiographies that I have read to date. It gives incite into the various cultures and customs present in early-mid 1900s Africa . A very intelligent woman, Mpho speaks eight languages and has the ability to relay her stories in vivid detail. Often as I was reading the book, I would have no trouble picturing and imagining Mpho's surroundings or actions because she has a great gift of being able to narrate a story in such a way that the reader is sucked in. All the trouble and struggles Mpho experiences, only seem to increase her internal strength and drive, while leaving her with an appreciation for the tough life she has had to live through, and leaving the reader with the knowledge that someone will always,always,always have it much worse than you do. This book reminds me that even on the worst day, of the worst week, of the worst month, of the worst year of my life, that I am infinitely more well off than massive percentage of people on Earth, and that I should be grateful for all the opportunities and privileges that I possess. This book truly is as Mpho refers to it, a mohlolo, a miracle/wonder.

Mpho `M'Atsepo Nthunya narrates her life story to her American friend and Editor Kathryn Kendall. Mpho is a Lesothosian woman of seventy years,who has a story that she desires to be made known to her people and others. The general trend throughout the autobiography is economic struggle. As a child Mpho wore a sack as a dress, ate grass, and endured the cruelty of her grandmother. In her adult years she dealt with an evil brother in-law, lost of property, bouts of unemployment, and a myriad of deaths. Throughout her life she struggled to require the needed resources for herself. Mpho finds stable employment, which is something that is hard to obtain for women. While in school, Mpho learned many languages including English, which allowed her to translate her story to Kendall. Mpho dropped out of school early and married Alexis and went to live in the Maluti Mountains. While in the mountains Mpho bore five children, all of whom survived to adulthood. Mpho lived well in the mountains because Alexis had a good job in the city and would send her money; those around her deemed her rich. But when Alexis died, Mpho is left to take care of her five children on her own and those in her house. Sometime later, Mpho moved to the city and went through a plethora of jobs until she found work as a maid at a University guest house. It was at this place that Kendall and Mpho met and became good friends. By the time Mpho writes this book she has experienced the deaths of her mother, multiple in-laws, three sons, and is struggling to provide for her nine grandchildren and daughter-in-law.The autobiography is extraordinary because it is created by a woman with only a fifth grade education among people who are generally illiterate. As the eldest of her family, Mpho is responsible for the passing down of history, culture, and stories.

Which makes her exceptionally qualified to ornate her life story in an understandable way. A discrepancy maybe present because Kendall was the one who asked the questions to Mpho, the questions may have been shaped by Kendall's experiences or presumed knowledge of native life. Also, Mpho may have shaped her answers in a way that she believed her audience would like, emphasizing some things while leaving out other things. During the making of the book Mpho was present to instruct Kendall on how to edit her book. Though the author spoke English, she did verbalize that it was easier to tell the story in her native tongue, thus she could not express herself to the extent she desired. It would have been better if the writing style was not so scattered, the book was written in a quasi-chronological format. Throughout the book is sprinkled flashback moments that in my opinion disrupts the flow of the chapter and makes it difficult to map out Mpho's life. Yet still, her story was so compelling and interesting to me that I went on a search for the editor to express to her personally how much I enjoyed Mpho's autobiography.

If you are reading this review, the chances are you've never slept in a rondavel, drincken joala, or visited a sangoma. You may have a motsoalle, but you probably didn't know what to call her. This autobiographical book of stories by a Bathoso woman is absorbing and entertaining, well worth the read on that basis alone. A true and honest look at Lethoso culture as it was and is experienced by one woman is an unexpected bonus. Thanks to M'e Mpho for telling her stories and to Limakasto for bringing them to us.

Interesting book by very hard working woman with an amazingly hard life. If you're interested in Lesotho, this is a good read.

Learned a good bit about the customs held in s.Africa. plenty of deep topics addressed in this book from a woman's role to alternate medicines. nice read

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