

MEMORIES WE LOST by Lidudumalingani Mqombofhi - Memories we Lost and Other Stories Study Guide

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[About the Author](#)

The author Lidudumalingani was born in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa in a village called Zikhovane.

Lidudumalingani is a writer, filmmaker and a photographer. He grew up herding cattle and moulding goats from clay and later grew fond of words and images.

He writes about music, art, culture and films for the Mail, Guardian and Africa is my country.

He has published in literature journals Chimurenga chronic and pufrock and the second short, sharp story collection Adults only.

He currently lives in Cape Town.

[The Title](#)

Memories we lost is a biography. The life of a sister seen by a younger sister.

The story is about mental illness and its effect.

It is first described as this thing that takes the narrator's younger sister. Over time it robs the sister of the ability to speak and remember hence the title Memories we lost. The title is a reflection of loss and regret.

[The setting](#)

The story is set in South Africa, indeed the author Lidudumalingani is a South African. A number of South African indigenous words are used in the story.

[The plot](#)

The story Memories we lost is about challenges brought by mental illness to the victim and those around

them.

The mental illness is schizophrenia. It is a mental disorder characterized by many symptoms. It causes a breakdown in the relationship between thoughts, feelings and actions. There are many causes of the disease and hereditary is one of them. It's no wonder the disease runs in the narrator's family. The narrator's father was a schizophrenic.

Events and actions in the story rotate around a sick sister. The sickness is terrifying and attacks without warning.

The narrator tells us that after the attack is over she would mumble a prayer and would embrace the sister for a long time. This suggests to the reader that the illness is horrific and painful. In one of these attacks the sick sister screams and disappears into the night. All men and boys go out in search of her. The men or boys disoriented and peered shuffled in the dark and split into some groups as instructed by a man " Hours later they return but without the sister. It is the mother who returns the following day carrying the daughter.

In a different episode as the narrator is telling her sister a story, she is seized by an attack and knocks her head on the wall so much one so hard that she bleed profusely. An effort to shield her from doing this fails because of the abnormal strength that the sister has during an attack. The episode is so memorable to the mind of the narrator and says, "The smell of blood lingered after many sunsets had come; even after the rain had come "

The disease makes the sister violent and destructive. This is evident in a case where she flung a desk across a room smashing the glass window. In yet another moment of attack the ill sister pours hot porridge on the sister's chest causing her a lot of pain and harm. It is due to the disease that the narrator's sister drops out of school and cannot continue with her schooling 'This thing, this thing that took over her followed her to school and had to drop out ' This makes the narrator who loves the sister so much to absent himself from school. Eventually suffering the same fate The narrator spends much time with the sister playing eg drawing sketches. It is while narrator is in school that she learns about schizophrenia. She comes to understand that it is what the sister was suffering from. She further learns that there is not medication for the disease and has no cure. The medicine she was taking was of no help. The sisters secretly decide not to take the medicine anymore "The first thing my sister and I got rid of was her arsenal of medication "

Henceforth they buried all the herbs and the narrator demonstrated to the sister how to fake taking medication drinks.

Like any good mother, the mother has made many attempts to have the girl cured. She has used herbs, modern medication, prayers and even consulted.

The younger sister tries as much as possible to bring the sister to be her old self. In one such episode the sisters are playing in the rain. They are happy and the disease appears to have 'left' the sister " We jumped in the rain in that moment, my sister returned; she smiled and laughed. That day we began to form new childhood memories, filling the void left by one that had been wiped out "

The mother sees them in this state and she imagines that the disease was going to come again. She organizes for another ritual to cure the daughter. This time round she organizes for a Nkunzi (witchdoctor) from another village famous for baking people on a fire from cow dung and wood. The narrator is aware that effects of ritual is unknown as dangerous ritual and says "I had not heard anyone who had survived either " She could not allow this to happen to the sister. The both ran away to the unknown place. Just like the father before them the two sisters are escaping from their village and the people. They want to put enough distance between themselves and the home memories and secrets that stamp them as belonging to a family known for mental illness.

But at the end hope is on sight, for after walking the whole night they reached a town and a hospital in sight. They knowingly fifteen each other grip.