

Chirongoma, Sophia

Celebrating the Living Academic Legend : Insights from Ezra Chitando's Sisters, Nephews, and Nieces

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Insights from Ezra Chitando's Sisters, Nephews, and Nieces

*Sophia Chirongoma,
in collaboration with Ezra's sisters, nephews, and nieces*

Introduction

There could be no greater honour than being invited to write about my brother, mentor, confidante, cheerleader, and best friend. For those who know me well, the man I am writing about is one whom I fondly call '*bhudhi Ezzy*.' This is part of our Karanga culture, we address each other mentioning the relationship we share, so when I address him as '*bhudhi Ezzy*,' I am affirming that he is my brother whom I love with all my heart.

When in July 2019, Dr Molly Manyonganise first shared the idea of compiling this volume in honour of *bhudhi Ezzy*, I knew this was going to be a gigantic task for the editors. Knowing *bhudhi Ezzy* the way I do, he has so many colleagues, friends and protégés scattered across the globe and ensuring that all and sundry were invited was going to be a mammoth task. I wished her all the best of luck in compiling the volume and I politely declined from joining the editorial team because I felt like I would be indirectly writing my own story. I wish to congratulate Dr Manyonganise and her erstwhile team of editors for compiling this comprehensive volume to honour *bhudhi Ezzy*.

About this Chapter

This chapter is a compilation of celebratory tributes from *bhudhi Ezzy*'s siblings, nephews, and nieces (the offspring to his sisters). We have arranged these according to seniority in terms of age. The first piece is compiled by our eldest sister, Shumirai Mtero. She takes us through a rich tapestry of *bhudhi Ezzy*'s early childhood, it gives us a sneak peek into

some of his early shenanigans. As the ‘deputy parent,’¹ she has always been our family encyclopaedia and fountain of wisdom. Hence in this piece, she takes us through the memory lane to unearth the making of the professor whom we are celebrating in this volume. Likewise, the piece that follows is compiled by our second born sister, Viola Ingwani. In this piece, she creatively impersonates *bhudhi Ezzy*, she walks in his shoes and tells his life story in a riveting manner. Being the one who always had to wrestle with *bhudhi Ezzy* for literature sources bountifully provided by our late father, her account dovetails with that of our deputy parent. This is then followed by none other than me (Sophie), *waakasiira mukaka* (the one who comes after him in order of birth). The next piece is written by our baby sister Precious Ngoma, the last born in our family. Being the daring kid sister, she was always on the receiving end of *bhudhi Ezzy*’s pranks. I still remember how at some point *bhudhi Ezzy* got a thorough beating from our mother after he had exposed Precious to be stung by *Mago* (wasps).

After Precious’ rendition, the remaining pieces were compiled by *bhudhi Ezzy*’s *vazukuru* (nephews and nieces). The first one being written by Kudzai Mtero, the eldest *muzukuru* (nephew). This is followed by his (Ezra’s) nieces, Loveness Ingwani-Sola, then Kundai Allison Mtero, Isabel Ingwani, Anesu Ingwani and the last piece is written by his nephew, Tadiwanashe Calisto Junias Chirongoma. In all their contributions, *vazukuru* express their profound love and admiration for the warm, compassionate, humble, and wise *sekuru* (uncle) Ezzy.

A Celebratory Tribute of Ezra Chitando: The Legendary Academic Guru

By Shumirai Mtero

Introduction

My focus is on Ezra’s early life.

And the impact it has had on his life at large.

¹ This is the nomenclature commonly used in Zimbabwe to refer to the role of the first-born child who involuntarily adopts the parental role to assist the parents in raising the siblings.

I am Shumirai Mtero, nee Chitando.

The eldest of Ezra's four siblings.

I was born in 1963.

The next sibling is Viola Ingwani, nee Chitando, born in 1966.

Ezra comes after Viola; he was born on 21 October 1969.

Coming after Ezra is Sophia Chirongoma, nee Chitando, born in 1973.

The youngest sibling is Precious Ngoma, nee Chitando, born in 1978.

It is with nostalgia and a tinge of sadness that I recount this early part of our lives -- which has shaped our present lives.

Nostalgia because I recall some interesting details that I will never recapture.

Times have changed.

But that is the violent reality of the cycle of life.

Parents

Our early family set up has a profound bearing on how Ezra developed as an individual. Our parents- Constance Chitando, nee Masakadza and Ethiel Chitando met at Makwau Primary School in Jichidza, Masvingo province, Zimbabwe, around 1962. Our father was a newly qualified teacher. He trained at Morgenster Teacher's Training College in Masvingo, a Dutch Reformed Church institution in Masvingo province. Our mother was doing pre- training teaching and planning to train as a teacher. Fast forward - they developed a love relationship. Our mother fell pregnant with me at 21. I was born in November 1963. It was taboo then for teachers in this employment set up to have a premarital baby. They expeditiously arranged their big white wedding before the pregnancy showed. They happily wed at our grandparents' original home at Musharu village in Murinye district, Masvingo. Our mother kept her wedding gown up to when she died. It was a beautiful, very slim gown. The event set up was the big - *mushavhi* (wild fig) tree at the homestead. It's the same venue that Ezra and his wife Anna used for their wedding, 32 years later. The big tree is still thriving!

Ezra's Early Exposure to the Literary World

Our parents nurtured our culture of preparedness and dedication to studying. They prioritised good results - not only because they were academic professionals, but they were conscious of the need to develop wholesome individuals. They inculcated the reading culture and supplied the reading material. We lived in a rural area, and our father would routinely travel to town at the end of each month to collect his salary and purchase home supplies and groceries. He always brought back newspapers and magazines from town. If he happened to visit town again in the middle of the month or at other random times, he bought fewer groceries but made sure to bring any literary supplies he hadn't been able to get at the end of the month. We eagerly awaited baba's (father's) return from town. Not just for the anticipated goodies, but for the reading stuff. Back then - I think because of immaturity - we did not realise how much of a sacrifice - financially this was - but later we did. We had access to various types of literature. The magazines that come to mind are *Parade*, *Photo Action*, *Drum*, and *Moto*. These magazines featured both local and international content. Additionally, Baba brought home local newspapers for us to read, which included puzzles and comic sections. Ezra had an insatiable appetite to read and write from an early stage. These traits were not imposed on him. He read his material faster than all of us despite his age. And of course, also because he did not do any household chores - yet! So, what happened is that he would be too impatient to let anyone read a book that he wanted. He would pounce on the slow reader and snatch the book. This was a cause of 'strife' in the household! Many times, our parents had to intervene! I remember these mini battles between Viola and Ezra. She was really the target. I think it's mostly because they were closer in age. Thankfully, this was the only area where there were physical fights. I laugh every time I think of the situation back then.

Role of the Radio

Back then, the radio was a gadget not readily available in many households. It was for some working people and those who had gone to South Africa - commonly known as Joni - meaning Johannesburg. The radio was not just for entertainment, it was crucial as a tool for the dissemination of information. This was the liberation war era. Baba made sure that we had a functioning radio - all the time. He was inseparable from the radio himself. This was the pre- solar period. He bought the batteries to power it. And he would charge them in the sun if they lost power. We did not even

know about the versatile uses of solar power that now exist. The radio played a pivotal role as a source of communication especially during the Chimurenga war of liberation. I will focus on the years 1977 right up to the attainment of independence in 1980. A lot of people in our village - even immediate neighbouring ones - came to our house to listen to the broadcast on Radio Moza from Maputo in Mozambique. This was done in the evening / night. Every attendee would be accommodated - either inside the house or just around the yard. It was an orderly procedure with curtains drawn and very little lighting from the lamp or candles. There was no chanting allowed for safety reasons. People were vigilant because of threats of attacks from the Rhodesian armed forces. Our parents would attend political meetings at the local base camp called *Chikangare* in a neighbouring village. Here they would meet the liberation fighters, popularly known as 'comrades'. So, my point is to show the social interaction that existed between us and the society. We did not live in isolation.

Ezra's Early Social Interactions

My account would be incomplete if I did not mention how much Ezra interacted with his peers in and out of school. My focus will be on the home situation. Ezra was socially versatile. Our parents were not overprotective. They allowed and encouraged him to play with other kids at the river – kwaMutirikwi (Mutirikwi river). We did not have our own livestock then. But he joined the boys to play whilst they herded the livestock. He learnt to swim and play many games. The notable one was *nhanzva* (sliding downhill). This was played by sliding down from big rocks at the river. This game - *nhanzva* was very popular with the kids. But parents did not like it because of the potential risk of hitting dangerously against the rocks. I am not talking abstractly here, this was a real, concrete concern. Ezra experienced this kind of accident himself. Fearing that he might be stopped from playing at the river, he didn't report it right away. The incident only came to light when he became physically unwell due to a shoulder injury. So yes - my memories are nostalgic. Am very far away - physically - from home. But right now, I see and feel the Mutirikwi River's smells, the breeze. Such is life. Just to recapture the part on friends. I realise now that this was an informal way of his social integration. There are also social skills that he acquired. Consciously and subconsciously. For example, the boys made *mota dzezvidhinha* (toy cars out of bricks).

They also made *mota dzewayaya* (toy cars made of fencing wires). So many versions emerged from the ambitious and aspiring engineers.

Ezra also learnt *kuridza tyava* (to use the whip). There was a click sound - from the fingers or tongue - (readers who are not familiar with this exercise will forgive me here because I cannot recall or explain the details, but for those who grew up in a rural context as ours, I am sure they will visualize what I am describing). This bit is important because Ezra found it challenging and could not do it. Mai (our mother), had to pay someone to teach him until he got it right! This is surely an early practical extra lesson! It is also evidence of forward thinking on Mai's part.

Ezra's Friends

As already mentioned, Ezra had many childhood friends. I unfortunately cannot remember all their names. But I know Ruka Musharu - since deceased - who was a close pal. Ezra grew up conscious of social and economic differences without being taught formally. I will explain here. His peers in primary school, most of them - could not afford shoes to wear to school. They went barefooted. It was normal then and not out of the ordinary to not have shoes to wear as part of the school uniform. Ezra could manage to wear school shoes, but he chose to also go barefooted to fit in the situation with his friends. To me, this is not peer pressure - but an expression of empathy and being able to assess situations at an early age.

Conclusion

I feel privileged to share this part of Ezra's life. I am grateful to God for letting Ezra blossom academically. More importantly, I am grateful to God for according to us the chance to witness his life unfold before us. I thank his immediate family for supporting him as he continues to grow. Mbuya Anna - it's not easy to be married to a literary genius. You basically compete with the manuscripts, meetings, and deadlines. They are a life on their own.

Peeking into Ezra's Life: Musings of a Sister who Walked and Danced with Him

By Viola Ingwani

Unto the Chitando Family, A Son is Born!

A thinly wooded bushy trail leads to the tiny village that has been my home from the time I was born. On either side of the path is a natural hedge formed by the interwoven *rukato* (lantana camara) where many a time, I have picked and enjoyed the tasty *rukato* fruit. Just up a small hill, half a kilometer from the main dust road, is my home. Legend has it that I was born in a small kitchen, made of wood and dagga walls with a simple floor, plastered with *ndove* (cow dung). That morning, my mother went into labour. She left the field where she had gone to attend to her small plot of *nyimo* (round nuts), because her back ached intensely. The *nyamukuta* (mid-wife) was around to assist mother to deliver. The mid-wife was my maternal grandmother, *mbuya* vaMamoyo (also fondly referred to as *mbuya* vaMurozvi.) She went straight to her task with diligence. Within a brief interval, a fire was roaring in the kitchen, while a simple bed was prepared in anticipation of the delivery.

“Ululu Ululu Ululu !!!!” came the celebratory ululation, piercing the serene morning atmosphere. A baby boy had just entered the world, and that was me. I grew up to be a fun -loving lad, with loads of energy. I grew up in the village chasing chickens, if there was an instruction to catch one for the pot. My early life was filled with adventure. I would create fast -moving cars from broken bricks and could be heard saying, “One day, I will drive a Mercedes Benz.” Before I could bathe myself, my mother or my elder sisters would bath me. I really loathed the task and would flee from everyone in the homestead, being pursued through the bushes, until eventually I was caught. Then and only then, would I bathe!! It was a game to me, and all had to sweat it out before I took my bath.

Tending Livestock

I was initiated into shepherding livestock through tending the sheep and goats. Growing older, I joined older boys in herding the cattle as well. We would take the cattle, sheep, and goats to the pastures. We learnt how to guide our herd to the nearby Mutirikwi River so they would cool off. I loved those days, especially before the age of six, when we relished the life away from the elders at home. I enjoyed the games we used to play while

we herded cattle. We played *nhanzva*, where we would slide down from the top of the hill. The uneven rocky sliding area would be pasted with the sticky *nhanzva* mixture, making it easy to slide downhill. However, such adventures were not all fun, as one could get injured. When I was in grade one, I banged my shoulder on a jagged stone as I slid down the slope and I sustained a nasty injury. I hid this injury from my mother, who was a no-nonsense mum. I vividly recall my grade one teacher narrating the pain I had, which only came to light when we were doing physical education lessons, and I could not jump because of the searing pain. I got treated, but not before I earned myself a thorough beating from my stern but loving mother. Often the cattle would stray away from us as we played. All hell would break loose as we ran helter-skelter trying to reassemble them to join the main herd. I always recall when the strays destroyed our neighbors' crops and how this resulted in us being beaten.

Swimming at Mutirikwi River

We also played other games by Mutirikwi River. We would swim in the murky waters, hardly wary of the impending dangers from crocodiles. One learnt to swim both for the fun of it and for survival. If the older boys thought a younger boy was afraid of diving into the water, they would force him out of the phobia by throwing him into the deepest part of the ferocious river. This could be dangerous and could result in near drowning. Then there would be games played in the sand, building sand dunes. There were designated places where males would bath and similarly where females would bath. We frequented the male spots, where we would bath.

Our vegetable gardens were stationed at the banks of the river. Using the knowledge that one has now, that would be termed stream-bank cultivation. At that time, we did not know that. The river served as a recreational area and a site for gardening. We also got drinking water from *mufuku* (riverbed), as we did not have boreholes. The river served as our community well.

Childhood Adventures

As young boys, we were often naughty. We tied up tufts of grass from opposite parts of the path. We would be camouflaged with bushes and watch our unsuspecting victims fall as they reached our traps. We always shrieked with laughter whenever this happened. We also enjoyed the natural guava fruit which thrives in our area. Different varieties of the fruit

existed, and one always ventured into the thicket to get the best fruit. On one such adventure, I was stung by wasps and my eyes were swollen from the sting while my head throbbed as if I had a thousand drums inside. The experience was unforgettable and painful.

Then also came the time when the *mashuku* (loquats) fruit would be ripe. The trip was undertaken at dawn, getting to our destination about early morning. We would gorge in as much of the fruit as possible before filling our containers with fruit. Then we would start our homeward bound journey, getting home to be heralded by my praise-singing mother. This always encouraged us, because she would praise us loudly whenever we accomplished even a little task.

Tilling the Land

Our field was about one and half kilometers from the homestead. We would wake up early in the morning before the crack of dawn. It was important to carry all the cooking utensils and foodstuffs to prepare the morning meal and lunch. This was done to save time, walking up and down from home to the field. Work in the field was laughter-filled. We would crack jokes and share hilarious stories as we worked. All the work was done together, be it tending the crops, or harvesting. Our parents taught us to work hard and to live an honest life.

We had our breakfast under the *mushuma* (wild ebony) tree. Afterwards, we got back into the field to continue whichever task we had to fulfil that day. There were times we would tend our crops and simultaneously dig up *makugwe* (crickets). The reason for digging them up was two-fold. Firstly, the crickets threatened our flourishing maize crop, cutting down the green stalks mercilessly. Secondly, the crickets made quite a delicacy, we would roast them up until they were crispy brown and have them with *sadza*. It was a rare relish.

Unquenchable Thirst for Reading

I was the only boy, being sandwiched between my two elder sisters and two younger ones. I was well loved by my siblings. Whenever my mother assigned me tasks, there was always a 'volunteering sister' to do that for me. My mother firmly stood her ground, instructing me to carry out the task. She always emphasized the importance of acquiring all the essential life skills.

My father was a loving, quiet, soft spoken but firm man. He was a primary school teacher. It was because of his love for the academics that I grew up to love reading and studying. At the end of each month, he went to Masvingo town to get his salary. He always bought us groceries and in addition bought us magazines such as Prize and Parade. I used to stare at the pictures when I was young. As I grew older, I developed a love for reading these stories. My older sisters loved reading as well. I remember vividly the fights I had with my immediate older sister (Viola) about books. If she showed me something eye-catching in a magazine, I was reluctant to return it. She was short -tempered and would grab the magazine from me, intent on finishing her story. This always made me cry, whereupon my mother would coax my sister to give me the magazine to peruse. The first novel my sister Viola and I read together was “The Potter’s Wheel” by Chukwuemeka Ike. From there, I developed a hunger for reading and have been reading ever since.

Local Entertainment

At times, there would be films shown to us at the township, called “bioscopes”. A large lorry blurring out the invitation would go through the villages, in the main road reminding everyone of the impending fun at dusk. As early as six o’clock in the evening, children, escorted by the older ones would hurry to the township to view the bioscopes. One of the movies I remember was about a character, Ticky who was a fast runner. There would be no chairs for people watching the bioscope. Those watching would sit on the bare floor. The little ones would fall asleep during the entertainment to be carried home on the elder brother/sister/aunt’s back. Home could be as far as two or three kilometers from the townships. All and sundry would get home safely.

Early Years in School

The first primary school we attended (Mutusva Primary School) was about twenty kilometers from our home. My father taught there, so my immediate older sister (Viola) and I joined him there for the week. Our eldest sister was now in boarding school at Loreto in Gweru. My younger sisters were at home with my mother. We walked to Mutusva Primary School. My father usually cycled earlier to get to his workplace and prepare his work. My sister and I would leave on a Sunday, passing through the busy Chenhowe township. The place always filled us with joy for our grandfather (youngest paternal uncle to my father) had a shop there. I recall one

funny incident. My sister and I were carefree and whenever we left home to go to Mutusva, we hurriedly left without being thorough in cleaning ourselves up. My mother would always encourage us to be smart, but we would laugh it off and get on our way. On this 'fateful' day, we bundled our belongings into a rather dirty bag (*chisaga* in Shona). Usually, it was vegetables, tomatoes, *mabura* (sweet potatoes) or whatever else our mother would have packed for the week. We were warned about the dirty '*chisaga*' by mother but as usual, we brushed her off, gleefully starting our journey. As usual, we stopped at 'grandfather's' shop. The two of us were very good at jiving to rhumba music. We started dancing to the blaring music. One bystander exclaimed, *Kudzana munodzana henyu, asi chisaga chenyu chine svina- munapota muchiwacha*, (You two dance beautifully, but the sack you are carrying is filthy, you must learn to wash it). All the people around us stared and broke into loud, roaring laughter. Immediately, we left the place convincing ourselves that the bystander was full of nonsense and interference! Who was he to tell us to clean our '*chisaga*'? We broke into peals of laughter.

After leaving the township we would take a left turn past the Madanhire Seventh Day Adventist Church, that's the church where we worshipped during our childhood. We would meander through the villages, towards Mutusva. One memorable day, heavy rain pounded the earth till we thought it wise to seek shelter at a nearby home. We were allowed into the hut, but alas, the hut was leaking very much. We got so drenched such that we wished we had just continued walking in the rain. My years at Mutusva are fun-filled ones. This was despite the fact that the period marked the end of the Zimbabwean Liberation War, the period 1978 to 1979. During that time, the freedom fighters used to give our parents (teachers) lists of items to procure from town each month-end. They would demand denims, boots, blankets, and other essentials. I used to feel for the teachers who had a responsibility towards the welfare of the freedom fighters but also towards their own families, surviving on paltry salaries disbursed by the white colonial government. We, however, learnt to survive this harsh phase and it taught us some valuable lessons.

At Mutusva, my uncle (younger brother to my father) was the headmaster while my father was the deputy headmaster. My uncle had two of his children learning there so we were a big happy family, and we enjoyed each other's companionship. My elder sister found the company of Vakoma Martha (uncles' second born), quite heart-warming. I was almost always in the company of my cousin Clady, uncle's son who was almost my age.

In my early years in primary school, I was never one to prepare for lessons. I remember crying most mornings, remembering that I had not dug up my own lump of clay for molding in the Art and Craft lesson. The saving grace is that my mother would take up her hoe to get it for me, all the time promising to beat me up if I forgot next time. My mother and sisters always assisted me if I failed to plan ahead. I laugh a lot when I recall this.

Indelibly Etched Memories of the War of Liberation

The years rolled by, and the war of liberation reached its peak. One outstanding incident was when there was a soccer competition with a rival school, Chandipwisa. During the match, a group of gun-wielding freedom fighters joined the fun, going as far as holding a *pungwe* (mini rally) at the school. It became public knowledge that a group of freedom fighters had visited our school. By nightfall, the freedom fighters in the area called my uncle and my father to interrogate them on the purported hosting of Muzorewa's soldiers, known as "*maskuzu apo*."

My memories go back to the anguish-filled night when my uncle's family and my family huddled together as we anxiously waited for the return of my uncle and father from the camp of the freedom fighters. We hugged and wept in relief when both patriarchs sauntered back around five o'clock in the morning. Another incident was when all the teachers and villagers were forced to get large chunks of meat stolen from the white settlers' farms. Everyone had to have a chunk so that no one would sell out to the Rhodesian soldiers. We had no refrigerators, so we hung the meat outside to dry it. As fate would have it, two trucks filled with Rhodesian soldiers were seen descending into the school. We quickly bundled the meat into the nearby pit-latrines. The incident ended well with the Rhodesian soldiers explaining that they were aware that we had been coerced into getting the meat, hence we could eat it without fear.

Moving Schools

At the end of 1979, my father transferred to Mazanhi primary school, near our rural home. Resultantly, I also moved to the same school, and I was now in grade five. I walked three kilometers to school. The route to school passed through a thick bush, part of which was an old graveyard. I recall my grade seven year. There was an early bus which passed by our home. That was the bus that my father, younger sister and I always used to get to school. In that final year, I had a very strict teacher. He viciously insisted that we get to school by six o'clock in the morning to do morning tasks

before the scheduled school lessons commenced. The bus we used left at around seven and that meant I could not use the bus. Sadly, that year there was no one from our village doing grade seven, so I had to leave early in the morning, grappling in the dark alone and feeling terribly frightened of the old graveyard that lay in my path. That always made my hair stand on end but still I soldiered on.

Music Competition

Our family has always been musical. In my last year in primary school (grade seven), my mother was teaching at a nearby primary school (Chandipwisa). We had district choral competitions which were scheduled at Nemanwa growth point. My mother was leading the competition song at her school. She was an avid singer and sang the piece joyfully as we all listened. I noticed a part where the tune seemed off and mentioned there was some discord; my school sang it differently. She kept asking me to explain, but I didn't tell her. As a result, my school won the competition while my mother's school scored fewer points. I have always valued upholding principles and engaging in healthy competition.

Hopes and Aspirations for the Future

One of the things I believe in is hard work, listening to people, talking less and loving others. I have a conviction that honesty will build us a better Zimbabwe, where people feel for each other. If only we cast our thoughts on our humble past which has metamorphosed into perhaps flashy cars, big houses, and grand jobs, we would be kinder and more caring to each other. From the beginning, it has been the hands of the Almighty molding us into who we are now. It is also my belief that one's destiny is not marked by present circumstances. Our todays do not mirror our tomorrows. Whenever I travel early in the morning on a school day, watching the little boy and girl running to school, especially in the rural areas, I envision hope. Given the right chances, all people can reach their destinies. Children are our hope, they are our future backbone. We are duty bound to treat children well, provide satisfactory environments where the parent believes in the child. Our ugly ducklings may turn into beautiful swans, and oh what a Zimbabwe to yearn for!

A Social Commentary on bhudhi Ezzy: My Friend, Mentor and Path-bearer

By Sophia Chirongoma

It would be futile for me to engage in a conversation with the rich literature he has been churning over the years. That task has been undertaken very well by various well accomplished academics. Rather, my task in this piece is to briefly share about the brother who has always been my role model. Since it is impossible for me to write everything (this would need a separate volume), I will just pick a few snippets.

Playmate, Musician Par Excellence and Storyteller

Being the kid sister who immediately comes after him, from as long as I can remember, I have always been sitting at his feet, listening to his words of wisdom, revelling in his mischievous humour, and sharing the roaring laughter. One common trait that *bhudhi Ezzy* and I share is the gift of laughter!

Growing up, *bhudhi Ezzy* would tell me all sorts of tales and my inquisitive and naïve mind would enthusiastically embrace all the information. One incident that we still laugh about was when he made me believe that he was an orphan, who was adopted by our mother after his ‘real’ mum (an imaginary younger sister to our mum) had passed away. Being an energetic and adventurous young boy, he was always susceptible to being beaten by our disciplinarian mum. I could never fathom why he was always being beaten, so I ventured to ask him why this was so. That’s when he told me the tale about being an orphan. After some time, I gathered some courage to plead with our mum to stop beating up ‘the orphaned boy.’ That’s when our mum discovered the tale, and it earned him another thorough beating. We still laugh about this incident.

Whereas in some cases, siblings, especially the ones who come after each other have a preponderance of fighting due to sibling rivalry, *bhudhi Ezzy* and I were the best playmates. He would teach me games and tell me inspiring stories. Some of the games we used to play during our childhood include *chuti*, *pada*, tennis ball and soccer. He was a gifted soccer player, but our parents dissuaded him from pursuing sport because they feared that it would distract his focus on academics. He still loves soccer and is an avid supporter of Dynamos ‘De Mbare,’ and Arsenal.

Another special gift he possessed was to play the guitar. We always laugh about how one of the days he played the guitar so well such that our house help got distracted and delayed preparing food for our mother who was working in the field. When she was questioned about the delayed meal, to her defence, she explained that she could not focus on cooking because she was busy listening to Ezra playing the guitar. That marked the end of his musical pursuits, our parents banned him from playing the guitar because they wished for him to give undivided attention on academic pursuits. He has continued to appreciate music and often finds solace in listening to music.

Study Mate, Encourager and Path Bearer

In my early years of primary school, *bhudhi Ezzy* and I would often walk together to school. It was a long distance of about three kilometres. I have always been uncomfortable with the cold weather and sometimes during the biting cold winter mornings, I would feel like I was freezing. Being the protective and supportive brother, he would remove his jersey, and offer it to me. I would wear it on top of mine, and he would brave the cold. When our mum learnt about our ordeal with the cold, she ensured that she bought us warmer jerseys. Looking back, I realize just how much *bhudhi Ezzy* sacrificed to ensure that I was comfortable and did not drop out of school, such was the fate of countless children during our times.

When he moved to boarding school for secondary schooling at Gokomere high school, he would write me letters, encouraging me to study hard so that I could pass and enrol in the same boarding school. I always beamed with pride at school whenever I received a letter addressed to me, with his neat handwriting. Whenever he came home for the school holidays, he would take time to study with me. His favourite subjects were History and Bible Knowledge. Following in his footsteps, these also became my favourite subjects when I started secondary school. He always encouraged me to aim to excel and seeing the strides he was making, I felt inspired to aim higher and higher.

By the time I enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Zimbabwe, he was already a junior lecturer. I could not afford to slacken with my studies because all my lecturers knew me as Chitando's younger sister. I had to be at my best behaviour, and I knew that I had to perform very well in my studies because the last thing I wanted was to embarrass my brother by failing. He also had a humorous way of reminding me that I needed to remain focused, especially during my early days at university,

where many youngsters have wondered off the path. One incident has remained indelibly etched. I was taking one of the courses he taught and didn't make enough effort to research for a written assignment he had tasked us to work on. Towards the due date, I borrowed research notes from one of my good friends and I hurriedly wrote the assignment, citing some sources that I had not read. He marked the assignment, then on the references list, he commented on one of the texts, "what is the colour of this book?" When I met him the next time, we had a good laugh about it, I acknowledged my misdemeanour and that set me on the right path.

One of the rare and special traits that he possesses is that even if one submits a badly written piece, as a reviewer, he will never break your spirit by trashing it. Instead, he will first highlight the relevant sections, then he will politely and diplomatically suggest a hundred or more ways in which you can improve your document. That is one important lesson which I learnt from him. I always endeavour to adopt that approach whenever I read other people's work, whether as a reviewer or examiner.

I have always followed in *bhudhi Ezzy's* footsteps and almost everywhere I go, the moment that someone who knows him gets wind that I am his sister, doors are opened wide for me. However, since I use my married name, there are instances where some people take longer to discover that we are siblings. I have often watched with amazement as some people express disappointment that I didn't tell them sooner that I am his sister. Just being his sister is a huge blessing, many of the treasured friendships I have, emerged from being Ezra's sister.

Role Model, Mentor, Friend, and Confidante

I have learnt countless lessons from *bhudhi Ezzy*. He has taught me to love unconditionally, to be empathetic, humble, resolute, firm, truthful and more importantly learning to be cruel to be kind to self. His achievements have also taught me that hard work, dedication, collaborative efforts, and mentorship are pivotal pillars for success. He exudes our late father's traits, a father who loves, adores, and supports all his children equally and unreservedly. A father who spends time to listen to his children, counsel them, laugh and cry with them. In my father's absence, I look up to him as a father figure, he is my best friend. To him, I can speak all that is in my heart, knowing fully well that he will listen and counsel me whenever I am erring. He always looks at the bigger picture and keeps me focused on the glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. When he

speaks about and writes about redemptive, positive, and progressive masculinities, he surely practices what he preaches.

To my Beloved Brother Ezra

By Precious Ngoma

This is to give you your flowers whilst we are still here together (not to say you will go first, thus unto the Lord).

You have been a mentor, a counsellor, a shoulder to cry on, a friend and many other things.

You have taught me life in many ways.

Your life is a book from which I have read invaluable lessons.

You have taught me humility, although I am not sure I have fully mastered this one.

I cannot be as humble as you are.

I have not heard you blow your own trumpet despite all your achievements, academic and otherwise. Many a time, I have blown it for you.

I have observed compassion, you sacrifice so much to alleviate the next person's suffering.

I salute you for that.

You are thoughtful, gracious, and selfless.

You always see something good in somebody.

You do not judge people.

You are a blessing to many.

You have positively impacted countless lives, that's a blessing.

You have cheered on many in their journeys of life, may you find fulfilment in that.

The Lord has endowed you with a rich sense of humor.

I appreciate the many times you have lightened my burdens and many other people's with your well-calculated and humorously packaged words.

Keep on lighting other people's candles.

Associating with you by birth is a privilege.

I am quick to make it known that you are my brother because I am proud of you.

You do not take people for granted and you are unassuming.
These are rare qualities that the Lord has endowed you with and for that I am grateful.

I have learnt to value people through reading the book of your life.
You have been entrusted with the power to patiently deal with even the most difficult people.

You fit well in any context; I admire you for that.

I have greatly benefitted from the wisdom that the Lord has bestowed upon your life.

Continue to apply it to the benefit of many.

Your generosity is immeasurable.

Indelible childhood memories attest to this quality in you.

I have learnt to be a giver through your generous acts.

You have been the cement that has kept us together as a family.

May the Lord grant you a longer lease of life so that the family remains intact.

Thank you for being the brother you are.

Much love, your sister – Precious

Sekuru, Professor Ezra Chitando

Well known in the academic and development sectors for his enormous contributions, Professor Chitando has been a leading actor and voice for the poor and marginalised in Africa and beyond for many years. His work has cemented him as a voice of the voiceless including women and girls as Professor Chitando is a leading gender activist. This is rare for a man in our traditionally patriarchal Africa.

Whilst many know him as Professor Chitando, we are very privileged to know him as uncle, “Sekuru” in our Shona culture. Sekuru has been there for us since we were born and has been supportive in every way in our development throughout life. He has shown us love, care and compassion and has guided us throughout our life journeys through his rare wisdom and love. Personally, from an early age, he has provided me with invaluable advice and guidance that has contributed to who I am today. He also took me in when I had no refuge and took care of me when I was sick showing his compassionate and caring nature.

From opening up his house to host us as his extended family to being available and supportive at our important life events such as funerals, weddings, birthdays and graduations (despite his very busy schedule as an international professional), we really appreciate Sekuru's commitment to our family. We have also learnt from him and his wonderful wife (Mbuya Anna) how to be good parents and the importance of commitment, loyalty and love in marriage. These are lessons that we cherish as a family.

May the Lord bless and guide our Sekuru, Professor Ezra Chitando and his family. We love and honour this special son of Africa.

Kudzai Mtero (Muzukuru)

Sekuru Ezzy, a Man of Few Words

I have known you from my infancy

And will be the first to admit that you are not fancy

If I could describe you in one word, it would be the word "simple"

This simplicity is arguably the greatest reason why in your wake, you have left a ripple

Attesting to your unparalleled academic prowess

Only tempered by your immutable gentleness

I know you as a man of few words in conversation

But in your work, you have used words to express yourself without reservation

Writing many a critically acclaimed book

Convincing those with little interest in reading to have a second look

At your continuing life's work, that is unequivocally excellent

Achievements such as yours can only be attributed to talent

As I contemplate what to say about you

I realize that in this life, men of your caliber are very few

We now live in a world where language has been replaced by the emoji

Thank heavens, the few words that remain will find breath through your theology

If the world could have only half of your wisdom,

It would be enough to justly rule every earthly kingdom

Thank you for the academic legacy you are bequeathing to the next generation

A legacy that will bring the written and spoken word to its rightful position

I am proud to call you an uncle and role model

From the days when all I could do was toddle

You are an inspiration to many, and I could not ask for a dearer uncle

Your work speaks for itself and will never crumble

A man of few words in conversation,

But loud, emphatic and unapologetic in articulation

Loveness Ingwani-Sola (Muzukuru)

VaMacolour (Mr Colours)

Apparently, this was my nickname for him years ago, when I was a mouthy little girl. Maybe he really did mismatch his outfits a lot, or it was just the one day and the nickname stuck. As I grew up though, color would be the last thing to be associated with him...

Calm, composed, humble and exuding wisdom

Words I would use to describe my late grandfather, Sekuru vaKudzi

Father to my mother, her sisters and my one uncle

Sekuru Baba vaMutsa-Ezra Chitando

Who himself turned out to have these very same attributes

In a world led by harsh patriarchy

Where 'tozeza baba' (we are dreading having to encounter dad) is real

It's comforting to know and love a male figure such as Sekuru Ezzy

Little girls need uncles like you

To know that there are indeed perfect gentlemen in this world

And to expect nothing less for themselves

Little boys need uncles like you as well in their lives

What wouldn't we give to live in a world where the male figures in our lives were gentle, calm, wise, hard-working, and inspiring achievers, as you are?

You color our lives with all the best motivations

You are appreciated

Kundai Allison Mtero (Muzukuru)

My Dearly Beloved Uncle

When I think of my uncle, I cannot help but smile. He is the male version of my mother, more especially because they have the same haircut, look alike and both almost always have that infectious smile and laugh!

Growing up, he would always encourage us to be good, study hard and believe in ourselves. Looking at the way my uncle grew up and the success he has achieved both academically and in other areas is just impressive. Mum used to re-tell stories of how they grew up in their humble rural homestead in Murinye, Masvingo. She described how he would make toy cars and airplanes from wires and cardboard boxes and how he would play with them and announce that he was going to drive and fly. It is a marvel how all that came true, and it shows that words indeed have power. Looking at him now, I am truly encouraged, inspired and convinced that the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams!

My uncle is a compassionate and giving person and has always been. He always seeks to know if and how he can help and he is ready to assist whenever a family member is in a fix or needs help. I say this with conviction since I personally have been a beneficiary and witness to his kind deeds when he helps other family members, friends, and acquaintances.

I have always known him as the loving uncle who at family gatherings takes time to engage with every single person no matter how young or old they are. Discussions and debates on the economy, politics, and religion when we meet are what I mostly look forward to since he is a good listener but will never be shy to express his views and opinions, which is refreshing. He is accommodative and respects everyone despite who they are or what they have achieved. This is an admirable trait that many accomplished people like him do not possess.

To sum it all up, we are truly and richly blessed to have him: to cry, ponder, laugh, love and share together as a family in unity!

Isabel Tsakisani Ingwani (Muzukuru)

Sekuru Baba VaMutsa- Our Academic and Moral Icon

When I was informed that the family would be submitting small articles for my uncle for a book that was being written in his honor, and that I was being invited to write something as well, I knew that this would be a massive undertaking on my behalf. One would think that perhaps I had been asked to write a whole chapter because of the immense pressure that I

felt. Because how could I, a non-writer whose writing techniques are mediocre at best, fully and competently write about the greatest academic I know?

My uncle, you see, is a man of very few words, except of course when you engage him in discussions about religion, politics, and other intelligent conversations. I learnt quickly when I was younger that I had to put my thinking cap on, in order to have a conversation with him because that is the sort of person he is.

He is my mother's only brother. He is the icon of education and all things academic. When I hear of the mischief and fun that my mother and him used to have when they were children, it's almost impossible to identify that version with the calm, wise and honorable person that he is today. This book could not have been written for a more deserving person and I feel privileged to be able to contribute these few words in his honor.

Sekuru Ezzy, I wish you all the best in your future endeavors filled with tremendous success!

Anesu Ingwani (Muzukuru)

Sekuru Baba VaMutsa- Our Iconic Role Model

My Sekuru is a man of honor and values.

One of those values I always experienced whilst growing up was the importance of family.

For many of my school breaks, I would travel from my family's home in South Africa and spend weeks at a time at his home.

I did this for many years.

During those years, he showed me so much love and he exuded profound wisdom.

He is another amazing father figure in my life.

I would always appreciate the time that I spent at his family home during my childhood.

I am glad to have gotten to learn from and grow with an amazing Sekuru in my life.

Sekuru baba vaMutsa, you are an iconic role model to me and many others.

Tadiwanashe Calisto Junias Chirongoma, (Muzukuru)

Concluding Remarks

Compiling these celebratory tributes has been a heartwarming undertaking for each of Ezra Chitando's sisters, nephews, and nieces. We are sincerely grateful to the editors of this volume for granting us a rare opportunity to honor our beloved brother, uncle, friend, confidante, and counselor. We wish him all the best that life can offer. We continue to honor, cherish, and celebrate him.

To those who missed the invitation to contribute to this volume, may you kindly accept sincere apologies, it was not intentional. The editors tried their level best to invite the contributors whom they knew to be Ezra's colleagues and friends. However, since the book project was meant to be a surprise birthday present for him, it was not possible for the editors to solicit for some input from him on all eligible contributors. If all his colleagues and friends had contributed to this volume, it would be an unending story. Likewise, if all his relatives had been aware of this project, surely the editors would have been inundated with the contributions.

Long live VaChitando, VaChitsa, Baba VaMutsa, bhudhi Ezzy, sekuru Ezzy, sekuru Baba VaMutsa, sekuru Prof, Ezera, Ezara, these are the various designations that you joyfully answer to. May you continue to flourish and never tire to do good.