

CLIENT: COCA-COLA

AD CONCEPTS: CONNECTING WITH THE LAND; CONNECTING WITH THE BRAND
YOUNG MEN (15-16) – SOUTH AFRICA

You ask me to explain the importance of the land -- why it is important to me, an African -- and to my people. This is something almost impossible to explain.

I do not own any land. My father does not own any land. It's value cannot be measured that way. Yet my roots are there -- out there -- beyond the hustling offices and stores and automobiles of the city where I will work when school is over... past the humble dwellings of the township where I was born...

The blood of my ancestors is in the land. And I am the continuity of that blood. I will live in the township; I will work in the city; perhaps I will even travel far away from the land. But someday I will marry and pass on the blood of the land to my children. And someday I will lay down my head in peace, and my blood will return to the land. That is what there is. My land... my home... my family... me. My identity. What there is all comes from the land. My land.

There are few things one can compare to the way in which I feel about the land. What metaphor can I possibly try?

My father, my uncle, my mother, my sister... her baby boy -- my new nephew... Just seeing their faces makes my smile, cry, laugh, shout, ache in my heart, want to hold them near me for always.

This is how I feel about my land. Always changing, moving, dancing, maddening, thundering, despairing, and growing, still... growing... to be joyful, delightful, refreshing.

I'm not sure I really understand it or if I ever will.

What else can make me feel this way? Bring me the memories, the connection, the ties, the promise, the future...

Once my uncle bought a truck. He let me help him work on it, to make it go. We worked and worked in the hot sun. The heat radiating off the metal of the engine baked our faces all day as we worked... well my uncle really worked... I got to hand him the wrench, the rag, whatever he needed...

My father laughing at us, saying, "You'll never make that heap run to Jo'burg... or if you do, you'll never get it to bring you back home! Don't get in that thing with your uncle... you may never see your mother or your sister again if you do!"

My mother came out on the porch and called to me to do my homework. To get out of the sun. To help my sister... but I wouldn't come in. I must make this truck run... to get to go to Johannesburg...

My sister came out on the porch and called to us to come have some dinner. It was getting late. Father was going to eat it all himself. Mother was getting angry... But we worked on.

And then my uncle told me to go sit in the driver's seat and turn the key. And the engine turned over. And everyone came out on the porch to see.

And my father brought out the Cokes he had sent my sister for before dinner.

We were so hot; the sweat drenching our shirts. But we had done it, my uncle and me. We turned to each other and raised our cans high. We popped the lids and heard that promising fizz... And then we soothed our throats with the liquid that gushed down like a sweet spring rain. For a moment it was just the two of us. Triumphant. Looking in each others eyes. Knowing what we know because we share the blood. The blood of the land. And we shared a moment.

That split second in time is preserved for me every time I pop open a can of Coca-Cola. I remember my uncle as he was then... my best friend. I remember the secretly proud look on my father's face. I remember my mother's laughing, scolding eyes. I remember my sister's love for me. I remember that day. And I will carry it with me. Always. And one day I will offer my nephew a can of Coke and I will tell him about driving to Jo'burg in that truck with my uncle for the very first time.



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YOUNG WOMEN (15-16) – SOUTH AFRICA

When I finish school, I want to work for awhile. Maybe I'll work in the city. When I make some money of my own, maybe I can buy Mama that set of ruby red table glasses she's wanted for so long. A whole set of those glasses like her mama always said she wanted...

My mama's mama -- my grandmother. I hardly remember her. She gave her blood back to the land when I was just ten years old. I cried and I cried and my salt tears seasoned the land too... for months after she laid down.

Child, don't ever forget that you come from the land and you're going to go back to the land. The land belongs to you and you belong to the land. Someday it will come to claim you, as it will soon claim me.

The land will tug at you...

First it will pull your feet to wander across it. When you're young you want to go everywhere; see everything.

Then it will tug at your heart. A young man will come to you from your own land and you will know he is the one. You will recognize him because the land will be in his heart, too.

The land will tug at your belly as you grow big with your first child.

Then the land will tug at your head as you tell your children and your children's children all that I am repeating... all that my mama told me... all that I remember and all that you remember. How the land was always there under the beautiful blue sky, under the relentlessly hot sky, under the cool rains that come from that sky to refresh us and bring us new life again.

And, eventually, the land will pull your eyes back to it as you grow old and bent like me and you can no longer look up and ahead but only back down to the land to seek the future of your people... the future of your family... the future of your darling granddaughter... How far will she go? What will she do? How will she change the land?"

Grandmother would talk on and on... about things I hardly understood. About the land that she claimed would claim her and claim me someday. I didn't understand... We never owned any piece or parcel of land to call our own. What did she mean? When would I start to feel all this "tugging?"

I would look at Grandmother when she was through and I would sigh. I wanted to understand. Grandmother would search my eyes for the understanding and then she would sigh...

Then she would go inside for awhile while I stayed out in the yard and played with my little brother. Then Grandmother would come back... with a can of Coke in one hand and her favorite glass tumbler in the other. That single ruby red glass...

Grandmother would tell us to make a wish. Then she would pull open the tab on the Coca-Cola and slowly, very slowly, let the "kissssss" come out. She said it was the spirit of our Coca-Cola flying off to make our wish come true. Then she would pour half the can into her glass and let me and my brother share the rest of the can. We'd sit out there and sip our Coke and wonder when I'd understand about the land.

When Grandmother had drained her glass, she'd hand it to me so I could look through it with one eye squinted. My little brother, Grandmother, the back door, the tree, the sky, the neighborhood... and yes -- even the land -- all looked very, very different through that ruby red glass. I thought that maybe when I grew up, I might see the land that way all the time. The way that maybe my grandmother always saw the land after so many years of tipping up that glass and peering through it.

I don't know what happened to that glass of my grandmother's. But when I finish school, I'm going to work in the city. I'm going to find a store in Johannesburg where I can buy my mama a whole set of those ruby red glasses. Then she can sit out in back of the kitchen when I have some babies and tell them all about the land... and show them the way my grandmother saw it.

