

THE BEAT GOES ON

# DRUM



## Traditional Matters



**Scammed out of R1.3 million by a sangoma: Iris Morris tells her story.**



**Exclusive!**

Photo essay on sea cleansing ceremony







# Traditional healing Experience

By: Charmian Africa

As the Port Elizabeth sky clears up after a week of rain, deciding where to meet on a Sunday afternoon is still problematic. “I don’t have a house, the woman I’m currently living with has left with the key to Motherwell,” says Iris. After a few calls and smses are exchanged, it is decided that we’ll meet at Settler’s Park opposite St. George’s Hospital as soon as she gets a lift from a friend. At 16:00 my phone flashes, it’s an sms from Iris, “Hi, I’m near the

entrance of St. George’s Hospital in a reddish Hyundai,” she says.

The red Hyundai has dark tinted windows. As the passenger door opens, brown boots are revealed first, probably a size four. A short petite woman emerges in a black dress that is loose enough to flutter in the wind but tight enough to show off her body. I can’t tell if she’s blonde or brunette, a brown headscarf that is loosely tied in an African-like style hides her locks

but a few strands managed to escape the oversized headscarf that looks clumsy on her small head. The locks that are sticking out suggests that she has long hair, strands of brown, red and blonde reveal grey areas at the roots. She removes her brown shades that cover half of her face to reveal flamboyant eye make-up with hints of silver glitter in it. As our eyes meet for the first time, she stretches her hand out to greet me. The beads around her wrists

jingle to the rhythm of her firm handshake as she apologises for being late but explains again how difficult it is to get by when you have to depend on people for minor things like getting a lift.

**“ I saw an advert saying “100% a woman for your healing and peace of mind”. A healer? I didn’t know what type of healing.”**



**Iris Morris looks into her reasons for considering a sangoma as her last resort to get healing.**



**Check the legitimacy of your sangoma by asking for legal documentation. All legitimate sangomas should be registered with the Traditional Healers Organisation of South Africa.**



**Sangomas use herbs that have been shown to them in dreams by their ancestors to cure different diseases.**

Unfamiliar with Settler’s Park, I allow Iris to lead the way. “I used to come here as a child, it’s not the same anymore,” she complains as we tread through the wet unkempt grass in search of a dry bench. Her familiarity with the territory brings a calmness to her jittery demeanor. We eventually find a bench, her high pitched, child-like voice doesn’t match the years on her face or the seriousness of our conversation. She begins by telling me of a mysterious illness that came over her during last year after a Black colleague

made romantic advances towards her which she simply ignored.

Iris emphasises that the illness she was suffering from can only be described as not having been human. “I went through all the medical doctors, I was even taken up in the mental hospital in P.E., none of them could find anything wrong with me medically and none of them could find anything to cure me,” relates Iris. Out of desperation for her life to get back to normal, it was then that Iris decided to seek help outside of the scientific medical field.

Iris speaks with hand gestures which add a frantic melody to her speaking as the beads on her wrists move to her explanations. “I saw an advert saying “100% a woman for your healing and peace of mind. A healer, I didn’t know what type of healing,” she



says in retrospect.

**“She opened the package in front of me, I saw it with my own eyes, it was real.”**

She dialled the number on the advert and set up a meeting with a traditional healer who she simply knows as Ma’Mary. On her first visit, the traditional healer threw some bones and sea shells and told Iris that the disease she is suffering from is as a result of being bewitched by her Black colleague whose romantic advances she dismissed. Iris was glad to finally have some sort of explanation for what she was experiencing and admits that Ma’Mary’s explanation seemed plausible to her. The healer told Iris that she is able to cure her of this mysterious illness that gave her bouts of paralysis and an inability to speak sometimes for weeks at a time. The healer who is originally from Madagascar assured Iris that her healing would come from certain herbs that can only be found in her home country. Iris paid an undisclosed amount to the healer who then arranged for the herbs to arrive from Madagascar to Port Elizabeth via courier.

“She opened the courier package in front of me, I know it was real, I saw it with my own eyes,” Iris says.



Different traditional healers have varying prices for each consultation. The individual seeking traditional healing should be informed of the price that the sangoma is going to charge before going forth with the consultation.

**“Friends and family kept telling me how young and healthy I looked but no-one knew why.”**

The herbs were taken, placed in a bowl and she was instructed by Ma’Mary to cover her head over the bowl and inhale the fumes of the burning herbs. “It was terrible, it feels like you’re going to die but you have to stay in there,” explains Iris. After this one session, Iris claims to have gotten better. “Friends and family kept telling me how young and healthy I looked but no-one knew why,” Iris says with a smile. This new radiance and vitality faded soon after the herb inhaling session and Iris relapsed.

Because of her short lived health, Iris was convinced that Ma’Mary’s methods do work and that she

may just need more herbs. She went back to the traditional healer for another session but now she was told that the herbs were not fully effective because her house is tainted with evil. “I believed her because my son and I were never happy in that house,” says Iris. Ma’Mary instructed her to sell the house and move into another place. Iris then put her house in the market but it was just not selling. Ma’Mary then told Iris that she needs to gather all her “sweat money” in the meantime so that it can be cleansed. “I asked her what “sweat money” is and she told me that it was all the money

I have ever worked for,” Iris explains. Iris started by quitting her job then later selling her car and cashed all that money so that it could be cleansed. She bought a BlackBerry phone with some of the proceeds but Ma’Mary told her that the phone will also need to be cleansed because it was

Iris was instructed to place all the money and the new cell phone, which amounted to approximately R1.3 million in two safes which the healer had prayed over. She wrapped the money in red and white cloth and then placed it in her own two safes. With the money secure in her safes, Iris’ communication with the healer dwindled. Her son became suspicious of his mother suddenly quitting her job and selling everything she owns. Upon his enquiry, Iris told him that she would reveal everything to him once the time is right. During this time, Iris discovered that the keys to the safe went missing. “I couldn’t live like this anymore, I said, if I have to die, I must die and if the money is in ashes, it must be in ashes,” says Iris as she made the decision to have the safes

**“I said if I have to die I must die and if the money is in ashes, it must be in ashes.”**



**An emotional Iris recalls bursting into tears when she discovered that she had been scammed out of R1.3 million by a sangoma who is widely known in the Port Elizabeth area.**

**“The money was just the way I had packed it but it wasn’t money anymore”**

The next day she asked her son and friend to open the safes with a crowbar. “The money was just the way I had packed it but it wasn’t money anymore, it was plain white paper,” Iris says wide-eyed with her hands in the air. She tried calling the healer who said that she was in Johannesburg and that she would be back soon to help Iris – she hasn’t heard from her ever since.

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**Report sangoma related crimes**



**Traditional Healers Organisation of South Africa.**

Tel: 011 337 6177


Fax: 011 337 2889



# *Showers of Blessings*

**Members of the Soweto on Sea community arrive at New Brighton beach in Port Elizabeth early on a cold Saturday morning for a sea cleansing ceremony. The ceremony is meant to rid people of their bad luck; promote a clearer life path and help with employment opportunities.**





Having received the 'calling' at the tender age of 13, Nophendule Simeke, otherwise referred to by her maiden surname, Ma'Dlamini out of respect for her 'calling' arrives to do the sea cleansing ceremony.





**Ma'Dlamini gives her nephew, Dumisani Simeke who is her helper for the ceremony instructions on how to group people and how many people she wants to come in per anointing.**



**Ma'Dlamini mixes the sea water with litlanga (herb which causes itching) and prays for it before anointing people with it.**



**Hierarchy and patriarchy are important in African culture, for this reason, teenage boys are blessed in separate groups.**





**A fresh batch of water is prepared for new gender and age groups.**

**Males in their twenties wait in line to be cleansed. Individuals seeking cleansing are to be completely naked so that they can be washed off properly.**



**Females with children out of wedlock receive a separate group cleansing.**



**42 Year old Musa Mlahleki spends some time rubbing her face and body with the anointed water. She has specifically come to the cleansing ceremony in the hope of getting better luck with employment opportunities.**

**A fresh batch of a stronger concoction of herbs and sea water is mixed for the older men. It is believed that the older one is, the more impure you are and therefore need much more cleansing than younger individuals.**







**Older men are not blessed in a group setting, they receive individual blessings.**

**After the cleansing ceremony, people depart from New Brighton beach with transport they organised themselves. After being anointed with the sea water, individuals should just get dressed and not wash for the day.**

