Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: Subira Subira by Tololwa Marti Mollel, Linda Saport", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1310. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Tololwa Marti Mollel , Linda Saport

# Subira Subira

*United States of America (2000)*

TAGS: African Storytelling African Traditions




*We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.*

| General information | |
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| *Title of the work* | Subira Subira |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United States of America |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United States of America |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 2000 |
| *First Edition Details* | Tololwa Marti Mollel, *Subira Subira*. New York: Clarion Books, 2000, 32 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 039591809X |
| *Genre* | Adaptations, Folk tales |
| *Target Audience* | Children |
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## Creators



**Tololwa Marti Mollel (Author)**

“Tololwa M. Mollel, an Arusha Maasai from Tanzania, grew up on his grandfather’s coffee farm, an hour’s drive from Mount Kilimanjaro. After receiving a BA in Literature and Theatre at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Mollel left for Canada in 1966 to complete his master’s degree at the University of Alberta*”, where he served as President of the Writers Guild in the late 1990s. He worked as an actor and university theatre director both in Tanzania and Canada. He has also worked extensively with theatre and arts groups, schools and libraries as performer, presenter and storyteller.

As children’s author, dramatist, and storyteller, he has written seventeen internationally published books, and several plays and stories, some of which he adapted for performance. Some of his works include: *Rhinos for Lunch and Elephants for Super*, *My Rows and Piles of Coins* and *Big Boy* (which won the Writers Guild of Alberta R. Ross Children’s Prize in 1996). His works have been published in several places including Canada, the US, England, and have been translated into some European, South African and his native Kiswahili languages. Mollel lives in Edmonton, Canada.

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* Subira Subira, available at Amazon.com, (accessed: August 6, 2021)

Sources:

Official website (accessed: August 6, 2021);

fitzhenry.ca (accessed: August 6, 2021);

Amazon.com (accessed: August 6, 2021).



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Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com



**Linda Saport (Illustrator)**

Linda Saport is an American author and illustrator of children's books, who has been praised for the vibrant colour and emotional expressiveness of her illustrations. She has illustrated many children's books including *The Face at the window*, *At your Baptism*, *Before you were Born* and *All the Pretty Little Horses*. She lives in Boulder, Colorado.

Source:

alibris.com (accessed: August 6, 2021).

Bio prepared by  Eleanor A. Dasi, The University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com



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## Additional information

Summary

A few months after the death of their mother, Tatu's father makes her understand that she must take on the responsibility of caring for Maulidi, her younger sibling, before and after school, while he is at work. Maulidi, naughty and unruly as he is, disobeys and fights Tatu at every turn: he refuses to walk to school with Tatu and refuses to do the chores at home after school. Tatu complains to their father who gives her a sound scolding, but this does not help as Maulidi's fights with Tatu get worse. One night, their father tells Tatu that he does not know what to do with Maulidi anymore.

Concerned about her younger brother's change of behaviour, Tatu leaves for the forest to seek counsel from MaMzuka, a mysterious spirit woman, singing *Subira** as she goes along. Having charmed MaMzuka, the mysterious spirit woman, with her song, she agrees to help on the condition that Tatu plucks three whiskers from a lion on the clearing with the giant anthill. That same night, Tatu heads to the clearing MaMzuka had mentioned and decides to soothe the lion with her beautiful singing voice but her first attempt fails. Resolved to be courageous and above all patient, as the spirit woman had cautioned, Tatu gives another try and on the third night, accomplishes the dangerous task.

The next day after school, she meets MaMzuka. But she is taken aback when the spirit woman blows the whiskers away. Then she tells her that she can bring back her brother to order in the same way she used to get the whiskers from the lion. Tatu returns home and begins to tame Maulidi with songs, as their mother used to do, while exercising a lot of patience. Finally, Maulidi becomes a good kid once again.

* The Swahili word for patience and the title of a song.

Analysis

The story is an adaptation of a popular folktale found in many parts of Africa and Asia. This version of the story, though not very different from the other versions, exposes the circumstances under which Tatu must bear the burden of taking care of her kid brother and bringing him up to be responsible. In many African societies, adolescent girls



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| | are expected to replace their mothers in the home in case of the mother's absence whether by death or otherwise. This is the case with Tatu in the story. Probably because of the trauma of losing his mother, Maulidi becomes stubborn and aggressive, pushing Tatu out of love to look for ways to bring him back to the rails. Their father, under an escapist excuse of working long hours, as typical of many traditional African fathers, leaves Tatu with this huge responsibility of mending the broken relationship with her kid brother. When Tatu uses her strengths, song, courage and patience, to win back Maulidi, it is mainly because Maulidi sees his mother in Tatu, since Tatu takes after their mother in singing. This highlights the importance of a mother figure in the life of a child and confirms the adage that music soothes the soul.<br><br>The story suggests, not only to children and young adults but also to adults, that one can get whatever s/he wants if they exercise patience, courage, and determination. There is no task too difficult or too complicated for one to accomplish. It also underscores the fact that tolerance, calm and understanding are much more effective in solving conflicts and misunderstandings than bullying and fighting. Readers can share in Tatu's experiences and learn these virtues from them. The author incorporates a song (*Subira Subira* of the title) in the narrative to accentuate these virtues while Linda Saport's illustrations also speak along with the story. |
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | African Storytelling African Traditions |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Child, children Girls Orphans Relationships Siblings |
| Further Reading | Badejo, Deirdre L., "African Feminism: Mythical and Social Power of |



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