The traditional Shona story that I have chosen to represent a “proto Joseph Story” is the story Kamhuka Kasina Guse (Little Animal without Fur) which could also be named Nherera neMbondo (The orphan and the lions). The story was told to me by the late Dr. Herbert Katedza. I first knew Dr. Katedza when he was a secondary student at Hartzell High School at Old Mutare Mission in 1954. I was then teaching in the Teacher Training school at the same mission. The next time I was with him was at Nyadiri Mission where we were both teaching in the Teacher Training School, 1971-1975. He later was appointed the deputy headmaster of the school. In 1975 he received a scholarship for an MA in English literature at Emory University. When he completed the M.A. he continued at Emory in the Theological School completing the M.Div. and later completed the Dr.Ed. at Georgia State University. When he returned to the newly independent Zimbabwe in 1980 he was appointed as the ambassador to Japan and later served as an ambassador to Italy. When he retired from Zimbabwe’s diplomatic service he became a United Methodist pastor. He died after an extended illness while serving as a pastor.

Dr. Katedza told me the story Kamhuka Kasina Guse when he was still working on his MA in English literature at Emory. As part of his studies he took classes in Anglo-Saxon and became fascinated with Anglo-Saxon literature, especially with the epic of Beowulf. He wondered if there was any Shona oral literature that could be characterized as “epic.” The story that came to his mind was Kamhuka Kasina Guse because it was a story that followed the life of its hero from that of a small boy until he became and old man. I recorded the story as he told it in traditional fashion to his children. The children responded with the expected Shona response of dzepfunde.

The story was important to me because it included an important theme of the Biblical story of Joseph. It was the story of a boy who had been mistreated and sent away from home. Eventually he became an important chief and the people from the country that had once rejected him, now moved to live under his chieftainship. His original tormenters now became his happy subjects and there was thus something of a final reconciliation.

Dr. Katedza pointed out an important feature of this story which increased its appropriateness as a “proto-Joseph story.” There is an undergirding religious significance to the story. The word for lion, mhondo, has another meaning beyond that of naming a particular wild animal. The word is also used to refer to the Va- teteguru, the very ancient ancestors to whom prayers are directed in traditional Shona religion. Traditional Shona religion includes the belief in one supreme God, Mwari, who is the creator of mankind, Musikavanhu, and the one who is far above the world, Nyadenga (the one who dwells in heaven). But Mwari is too far away to be concerned with the day to day affairs of men. It is thus the practice in traditional Shona religion to address prayers in times of need to the midzimu, the ancestral spirits, first the immediate parents or grandparents that have died in recent times. If the difficulties faced are very serious the closer spirits are requested to pass the prayer on to more ancient spirits, even on the those whose names have been forgotten. In extreme situations the ancestral spirits are asked to pass the plea on to Mwari Himself.

Traditional Shona society was built around the family, the immediate family, the extended family, and the many interrelated obligations between members of the family, both the living and the “living dead.” The importance of family relations is what makes the beginning of this story so moving since the hero lost all of his family and was left as an orphan, nherera. When the entire community feared that he would spread the disease that was destroying the country he felt totally abandoned. In desperation he ran into the forest and it was there in his helplessness that he came upon the mhondo who responded to his need as one who had suffered enough.

The story ends with the moral that the good king is the one who does not hesitate to turn to the ancestors in time of need. So also in the Joseph story it is understood that it is God that is working behind the scenes to lead Joseph from the rejected brother sold into slavery to the administrator of all Egypt and the savior of his family and his people.
1. Long, long ago,  
2. There was an epidemic in a certain country.  
3. Many people died.  
4. Now there was a family in that country with both parents and only one child.  
5. The parents caught the disease and died.
6. They left their only child without anyone to look after him.  
7. He had no sister.  
8. He had no brother.  
9. He had no relatives to look after him.  
10. He was taken in by a family that took pity on him and they looked after him.  
11. After a little while one of this family got the disease.  
12. The one that got sick died.  
13. They thought that he got the disease because they had taken in the orphan boy.  
14. So they told him to go away and he went without any food.  
15. So he was in a lot of trouble and did not know who to turn to for help.  
16. So he used to join with other little boys who were herding cattle or playing games and he played with them.  
17. When they went home to eat, he went home with them and ate with them.  
18. It went on like this for awhile until the children’s parents where he was eating saw what was happening and didn’t like it.  
19. So they told their children not to bring him home.  
20. They said that if he starts to follow them home just say to him, “We’re going home to eat, Goodby.”  
21. So now he was really in trouble.  
22. He thought maybe he could just go and stand at the doors.  
23. He thought maybe someone would take pity and take him in and give him food.  
24. But often he was even driven away like a dog.
25. He thought to himself, “Oh! There is a grandmother nearby who is very kind.”

26. “Let me go to her door. I believe that that grandmother will take pity on me and take me into her home.”

27. He reached the grandmother’s place and she saw him standing at the door.

28. She said to herself, “So the orphan boy has come here! Today I’ll show him!”

29. So she took her cooking pot that had left-over porridge soaking in water in it.

30. And she threw the water with the left-over porridge all over him.

31. He was soaked, even through his clothes, and it stuck to him.

32. This really made him feel awful!
33. He said, “Oh, What’s wrong with me!

dzefunde.

34. “I don’t have any brother here on earth!

goon.

35. “I don’t have any sister to look after me!

goon.

36. “I don’t have any relative to take me in and look after me!

goon.

37. “I only belong to the forest!

goon.

38. “I just as well run away into the forest and get lost!

goon.

39. “If I am killed, ...

goon.

40. “If I am saved, ...

goon.

41. ”Or whatever, ...

goon.

42. ”Whatever happens, that is what I want to do.”

goon.

43. He cried.

goon.

44. He got up and was crying.

goon.

45. And he went straight toward the forest.

goon.

46. This forest was very scary.

goon.

47. It was a forest known to have wild animals in it.

goon.

48. It had elephants.

goon.

49. It had elands.

goon.

50. It had buffaloes.

goon.

51. It had giraffes.

goon.

52. It had lions!

goon.

53. The roaring of lions could often be heard in this forest.

goon.

54. But he said to himself, “I’m going! If I die, I die!

goon.

55. “Where is there no death?”

goon.

56. So he got up slowly and began his journey.

goon.

57. At night he slept under a tree.

goon.

58. In the day he got up and journeyed forward.

goon.

59. It took him many days and nights to reach that place.

goon.

60. Finally he got into the forest.

goon.
61. He said, “Oh! If I go into the forest and I am destroyed by wild animals, go on.

62. “My troubles will be over.” go on.

63. So he entered into the forest. go on.

64. He walked for a long time deep into the middle of the forest. go on.

65. Oh! He saw animals passing by. Little rabbits cutting across his path. go on.

66. Duikers also crossed his path. go on.

67. All sorts of animals! He saw them, but they didn’t eat him. go on.

68. He kept on going, go on.

69. Until one day, as it was getting toward afternoon, go on.

70. As he was walking along, he heard something like people talking. go on.
71. It sounded like men talking, “Hm-hm hm-hm
hm-hm hm-hm.”
72. He said to himself, “Oh! Let me go and see what
it is!”
73. So he went up close to hear what was being said.

74. When he was up close he heard this sound,
“Clap-clap-clap clap-clap-clap-clap-clap.”
75. Like people clapping their hands.
76. So he said to himself, “Oh! Have I reached the
country of another people?”
77. “Let me go and see!”
78. His heart was beating fast with excitement!
79. He was eager to see what was going on!
80. He began to run to get there in a hurry!
81. Oh! Suddenly he was there!
82. Oh! He saw before him a large open shady
place!
83. There were reddish creatures sitting in a circle in
the shade!
84. There was one of the creatures in the middle!
85. He stopped there in wonderment!
86. He heard them going, “Hm-hm hm-hm hm-hm
hm-hm.”
87. He heard them going, “Clap-clap-clap clap-clap-
clap-clap-clap-clap.”
88. He said to himself, “Oh! What’s going on here!
89. “Let me get closer and see!”
90. He got closer.
91. He saw something very scary!
92. These creatures were lions!
93. When he saw the lions, he said to himself,
“What can I do?
94. “Can I run away?”
95. “Or what can I do?”
96. Just as he was wondering what to do, Oh! He saw some of the lions had gotten up and were coming toward him!
97. He heard someone say, “M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m,” stopping them.
98. Some others got up, hoping to get some meat.
99. But the oldest lion spoke to all of them, “Sit down.”
100. Then he called to the orphan boy and said, “Little animal without fur, come here.”
101. When he came close the old lion said, “Oh, we don’t eat little things like you, something so little and thin.
102. “I think you’re in trouble. Where you came from you were in trouble.
103. “Sit down and tell us about it.”
104. Zvino iye akagara pasi.
105. Akataura mhonodoro huru iyi zvese zvakange zvaitika.
106. Achiombera nekutya, achiombera kukudza.
107. Achitaurire zvese zvakange zvaitika.
110. “Hakuna munhu anotambudza kairi.
111. “Munhu anotambudzika kamwe chete.

104. So he sat down.
105. He told the old lion everything that had happened.
106. He clapped his hands in fear, and he clapped his hands in respect.
107. He told him everything that had happened.
108. “Oh!” the old lion said, “You’ve arrived, Little animal without fur.
109. “You have really had your troubles!
110. “Noone should have to suffer twice!
111. “A person should only have to suffer once!
112. “The second time he should be saved from his troubles.
113. “So you’ve arrived, Little animal without fur.

114. “We were looking for someone to do a big job for us.

115. “The job we want is this, you will play on our flute to tell us when the animals have come together so we can get meat.”

116. So the old lion sent some young lions saying, “Hurry! Go get timber, a lot of it, and build a platform and on it a house for Little animal without fur, and make it good and strong.

117. “Little animal without fur will stay there.”

118. Oh! Now those young lions began to run to built the house.

119. They went to cut timber.

120. They went and got bark fibre.

121. They got together everything needed to build the house.

122. They built that house.

123. Imagine! They built it in one day, like powerful people!

124. The sun set, and it was finished!

125. They plastered it with mud and grass.

126. They thatched it and now he really had a nice house!

127. The old lion said, “Oh, put up the ladder.”

128. He said, “Little animal without fur, here is your flute.

129. “You stay with this flute.

130. “Now, you see that valley over there?

131. “That’s where animals we eat live and come to drink water.

132. “Now, when you see the animals coming and filling up the valley,
133. “You sound the flute for us, and we will come out and kill them, killing is easy for us. **go on.**
134. “But we can’t play a flute, and you can. **go on.**
135. “But we want you to play it very well!” **go on.**
136. So he climbed up on top. **go on.**
137. The old lion said, “Little animal without fur, **go on.**
138. “I’m taking away the ladder so anyone else coming can’t climb up there. **go on.**
139. “When we come to talk with you we will put the ladder up again. **go on.**
140. “If you want to get down, call us and we will put the ladder up for you.” **go on.**
141. So he took the ladder away and there the boy remained in his house. **go on.**
142. Oh, this was the first day from the time his parents died that that boy was in his own house. **go on.**
143. He said, “What a day this has been!” **go on.**
144. Now he stayed there until early the next morning. **go on.**
145. He said, “Oh, let me see the animals I was told about.” **go on.**
146. He got up in the morning and looked out, but there were no animals in the valley. **go on.**
147. He waited. **go on.**
148. He got up again and looked out like this, “O-o-oh.” **go on.**
149. He saw the valley so full of animals you can’t describe it! **go on.**
150. Now he started to play his flute, **go on.**
151. As he was taught by his ancestral spirits. **go on.**
152. The flute sounded like this:

Gutetete gutetete tegade

Gutetete, gutetete tegade
153. Oh! It made that sound, “Terekede, terekede.”

154. The lions plunged into the animals killing them.

155. The boy stopped playing.

156. The lions were still killing the animals.

157. But they saw that his flute had stopped.
158. The lions also stopped like this, “Oh.”

159. So he started to play again:

- *Hunzanza murira* (Oh, our little creature)
- *Terekede* (Little animal without fur)
- *Hunzanza murira* (Play clearly on your flute)
- *Terekede* (And call us from afar)
- *Hunzanza murira* (Terekede, terekede)

160. They killed many animals.

161. Oh, they took one of the animals.

162. The elder lion came with it.

163. He came close to the house up on the platform.

164. He said, “Little animal without fur, this is your meat.”

165. “Please skin my meat for me.”

166. The elder lion said, “Oh, we don’t know how to skin it. We just tear it out from the middle.”

167. “Then we take out the meat we like from the middle.”

168. Ah! The boy took that meat.

169. He ate it.

170. “It was difficult since he didn’t have any fire.

171. He had no knife, so he ate the meat raw.

172. Oh, it’s a lot better than going hungry!

173. The next morning,

174. So he just ate it.

175. It happened again just like that.

176. The lions also stopped like this, “Oh.”

177. They killed many animals.

178. Oh, they took one of the animals.

179. The elder lion came with it.

180. He came close to the house up on the platform.

181. He said, “Little animal without fur, this is your meat.”

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188. He had no knife, so he ate the meat raw.

189. Oh, it’s a lot better than going hungry!

190. The next morning,

191. So he just ate it.

192. It happened again just like that.
178. Mhuka zhinji dzakauya mubani muye futi. 

_ dzefunde._

179. Akawamba zvekare

Gutetete gutetete tegade  
_Hunzanza murira_
Terekede

_Hunzanza murira_
Hekani kana keduwe
Kamhuka kasina guse
Tsoni yako kuririsa
Yodana vari kurefu
Terekede
Terekede
Terekede, terekede

180. A! Akaramba achiridza.  

_ dzefunde._

181. Mhondoro handisingaba rekuti dziuraye.

178. Many animals came again into that valley.  

_go on._

179. And he began again:

Gutetete gutetete tegade  
_Hunzanza murira_
Terekede

_Hunzanza murira_
Oh, our little creature
Little animal without fur
Play clearly on your flute
And call us from afar
Terekede
Terekede
Terekede, terekede

180. Oh, He continued to play.  

_go on._

181. And those lions were really killing.
182. They just killed whatever they wanted.  
183. And they took and brought meat to him.  
184. And with that the boy said,  
185. “Oh, Grandfather.”  
186. The old lion said, “Yes, Grandson.”  
187. He said, “This meat you give me.”  
188. He answered, “So?”  
189. He said, We people, we don’t eat meat raw.  
190. “We eat cooked meat.  
191. “Now, Grandfather, I’ve been learning about you.  
192. “I’ve seen what great power you’ve got.  
193. “You can go anywhere.  
194. “Maybe you could find me some fire.  
195. “Maybe you could find me a knife.  
196. “Maybe you could find me a pot.”  
197. “Very good! Oh, you’ve done well,  
198. “Little animal without fur, we will find you everything you want.  
199. “You’re a good boy to speak up  
200. “About what you need.”
201. So the old lion sent out the young lions  
202. To go far off where people had their villages.  
203. They went there, and they scared away the people who were in the fields.  
204. The lions took the pots in which they had been cooking pumpkin,  
205. And the knives that they had left there when they had been scared away.
206. And they even took a piece of burning firewood from the fire.
207. And so they brought everything. Even the fire was there!
208. Now it was easy to kindle a fire in his house up on the platform.
209. So he brought it up there since it had an earth floor.
210. They lifted up his pots to him.
211. They each took turns
212. Going to fetch water for him.
213. It went on like this for a long time.
214. The animals were killed, he was given meat, and he lived well.
215. And then one day
216. The old lion looked at the boy in a curious way
217. Zvikanzi, “Aa! Kamhuka kasina gushe, 

dzefunde.

218. “Asi wekumera makushe semhondoro!”

dzefunde.

219. Zvikanzi, “Kwete, Vasekuru, kumusha kwedu, 
kana takura, tinomera makushe akadai.”

dzefunde.

220. Zvikanzi, “Ndoo kutaura kutii?”

dzefunde.

221. Zvikanzi, “Ndokutura kuti ndava murume, 
Vasekuru.”

dzefunde.

222. Zvikanzi, “Kuti ‘ndava murume’ ndokuti ku- 
dii?”

dzefunde.

223. Zvikanzi, “Dai ndanga ndiri kumusha ndingadai ndaa kutsvakirwa mukadzi wekuroora.”

dzefunde.

224. Zvikanzi, “Aa, zvakanaka, Kamhuka kasina 
guse,”

dzefunde.

217. And he said, “Oh, Little animal without fur, 
go on.

218. You’re starting to grow fur like a lion!”

go on.

219. The boy said, “No, Grandfather, at home, when we grow up, we start growing a little beard like this.

go on.

220. And the old lion said, “And what does that mean?”

go on.

221. The boys said, “It means that now I’m a man, 
Grandfather.”

go on.

222. The old lion said, “And what does it mean, 
“Now I’m a man’?”

go on.

223. The boy said, “If I were at home they would look for a wife for me.

go on.

224. The old lion said,”Oh, very good, Little animal without fur

go on.
225. “What kind of wife would you like to have?”

dzefunde.

226. Oh, now he began to describe her, “I would like her with a lovely light complexion,

go on.

227. “With black eyes that glance this way and that,

go on.

228. “With her teeth as white as the new moon,

go on.

229. “Just like that!”

go on.

230. So the young lions were sent running to look for just the girl with all their strength as lions.

go on.

231. A girl like the one the boy described was just then going into the forest.

go on.

232. At that very time the lions reached the well.

go on.

233. So they met at that well.

go on.

234. So the lions took the girl along with her water pots.

go on.

235. They brought her to the Little animal without fur.

go on.

236. Oh, that child, she really cried.

go on.

237. She was really disturbed, but she was just taken along like that.

go on.

238. They went like that until they reached there.

go on.

239. The young lions said, “Little animal without fur,

go on.

240. “We have brought the person you described,
your wife.”

go on.

241. Oh, Little animal without fur climbed down.

go on.

242. The Old lion was there.

go on.

243. Oh, he thanked the Old lion very much. He clapped his hands in gratitude.

go on.

244. Oh, his wife climbed up to his place, and they lived there together.

go on.
245. But he kept on playing his flute.  
246. He played his flute, the lions killed and brought him meat.  
247. After awhile he had children.  
248. And he said, “Grandfather,  
249. “What troubles me is my children don’t have anyone to play with.  
250. “Because at home when little children are born.  
251. “They like to run about outside around the house,
252. “Playing happily with others.”

dzefunde.

253. “Oh,” the Old lion said, “So what were you thinking about doing, Little animal without fur?”

dzefunde.

254. He said, “Oh, I was just talking, Grandfather,”

dzefunde.

255. “There wasn’t anything I meant for you to do for me.

dzefunde.

256. No, I was just talking.”

dzefunde.

257. Oh, now the Old lion went away.

dzefunde.

258. He sent the young lions to bring some more people.

dzefunde.

259. They came and settled around the place he lived.

dzefunde.

260. The Old lion said, “Now look, Little animal without fur,

dzefunde.

261. “There are people here. We don’t want to scare them.

dzefunde.

262. “So we will stay below the valley over there.

dzefunde.

263. “When you play your flute we will kill the animals over there.

dzefunde.

264. “We will take our meat and go away from the forest.

dzefunde.
265. “Iwe zvawa ane vanhu vako ava. dzefundzwe.
266. “Unovatuma vachizotora nyama yatinenge taipa. dzefundzwe.
268. Aridza tsuri yake yachinduva. dzefundzwe.
269. A! Mhondoro dzichiraya. dzefundzwe.
270. Vanhu vake vachindotora nyama. dzefundzwe.
271. Vakadaya, vakafara. dzefundzwe.
272. Zvino vanwe vavo vakange vauya ava. dzefundzwe.
273. Vakaita dzekumbodzokerewo kumusha kwavanga vabva dzefundzwe.
274. Kwakanga vabiswa nemhondoro kuti vambondokuona. dzefundzwe.
276. “Nyika yakasungwa nembariro, dzefundzwe.
277. “Mbariro dzemhondoro!” dzefundzwe.
278. “Hatina chatinotya. dzefundzwe.
279. “Hatina chatinoshaya. dzefundzwe.
285. Vese vakauya vari kumusha kuye. dzefundzwe.
286. Vazhinji vakabidinuka vese dzefundzwe.
287. Kuteera kamunhu kaye, Kamhuka kasina gushe. dzefundzwe.
289. “Inga hamuna kutitaurira kuti ndiye mwana atakadzinga uya!” dzefundzwe.
291. “Ndiye Mambo!” dzefundzwe.
265. “You have your people here. go on.
266. “Send them to take the meat we have left for you. go on.
268. So he played his flute that he had. go on.
269. Oh, the lions made a big killing. go on.
270. His people went and brought the meat. go on.
271. They ate and were happy. go on.
272. Now some of the people who were brought there. go on.
273. They went back to the village from which they were taken. go on.
274. From where they were taken by the lions, just to go and visit. go on.
275. They arrived and said, “Oh, we are in a very wonderful country! go on.
276. “A country surrounded by a wall. go on.
277. “A wall of lions! go on.
278. “There’s nothing we’re afraid of. go on.
279. “There’s nothing we lack. go on.
280. “We don’t have to work. go on.
281. “We have settled ourselves over a large area. go on.
282. “It’s a wonderful place!” go on.
283. Now, others started saying, go on.
284. “Looks like we’re missing out!” go on.
285. Everybody from that village came. go on.
286. Many from the whole countryside came there. go on.
287. To follow the little man, the Animal without fur. go on.
288. When they arrived they said, go on.
289. “You didn’t tell us that this is the little boy we drove away long ago! go on.
290. But they said, “This is not the boy you drove away. go on.
291. “He is the king!” go on.
292. Oh, he was called King Little animal without fur.

dzefunde.

go on.

292. A! akabva anzi Mambo Kamhuka kasina gushe.

dzefunde.

293. Now the people began to live there like people do everywhere.

dzefunde.

go on.

293. Zvino vanhu vakavamba kugara iko semagariro evanhu vese.

dzefunde.

294. They cultivated their fields.

dzefunde.

go on.

294. Vakarima.

dzefunde.

go on.

295. It was a wonderful forest.

dzefunde.

go on.

295. Masango akanga achiri kunaka.

dzefunde.

296. There wasn’t anything that didn’t grow. go on.

dzefunde.

296. Asina akanga ati aarima.

dzefunde.

297. They grew a lot of millet.

dzefunde.

297. Vakaona zviyo zvakawanda.

dzefunde.

298. They grew a lot of groundnuts.

dzefunde.

298. Nzungu dzakawanda.

dzefunde.

299. They grew a lot of maize.

dzefunde.

299. Zvibake zvakawanda.

dzefunde.

300. No, you can’t imagine any life better than they had there!

dzefunde.

300. Aiwa, handi upenyu hwakanaka kudaroba uhu!

dzefunde.

301. Little animal without fur was happy to be a king.

dzefunde.

301. Kamhuka kasina gushe akafara samambo ndava akanga ari mambo.

dzefunde.

302. He had a kingdom that was surrounded by the lions.

dzefunde.

302. Ane umambo hwakusungwa nemhondoro.

dzefunde.

303. The lions helped him govern his country.

dzefunde.

303. Dzamubatsira kutonga nyika yake.

dzefunde.

304. Anyone who went out of line with the law, he would see the lions.

dzefunde.

304. Aizotsautsira mutemo aingoona mhondoro.

dzefunde.

305. The lions were near to scare him into line.

dzefunde.

305. Yapadyo ichimuvhundutswira apo.
306. Anyone who did anything that the Little animal without fur did not like, he would see the lions nearby and would be afraid.

307. They lived in their country very well.

308. They were bound by the law of the lions.

309. That is the story of the Little animal without fur.