



Moon Boy

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Artwork: Toni de Jager

Theme: Never, never, never give up

Appropriate age group: All age groups



This is the story of two boys, Moon Boy and Prince, who were born on the same night in the same place. They were born on the night of the full moon in a small village in the desert. They grew up together but they were very, very different.

When Moon Boy was born he landed gently on the soft sand. He took his first breath and let out a small cry but nobody heard his newborn cry and nobody noticed him lying in the sand. Everybody in the village was waiting for the King's son to be born. When Moon Boy opened his little eyes to look at the world, the first thing he saw was the full moon – big and round and bright and beautiful. His little hands reached up to touch Moon. Then he heard a gentle voice saying, "Ah, my boy, you are so small and already you want to do the

impossible. You cannot touch Moon but from today you will be known as Moon Boy and you will grow up to be a giant in the land."

At that very moment the King's wife gave birth to a son. The newborn Prince gave a healthy cry and a roar of joy went up from the village: "Our King has a son and heir and the village has a Prince". There were days and days of celebration in the village to mark the Prince's birth. Everyone was too busy celebrating to notice Moon Boy.

It was only when the excitement was over that an old woman noticed Moon Boy. She hurried to tell the village: "There's a strange baby lying on the sand and he seems to be reaching for the sky." The King was still in a good mood so he said: "Let us welcome the stranger to our village and let him grow up with our little Prince". The King's sister who had no children of her own took Moon Boy as her child.

Prince and Moon Boy grew up together but they grew up to be very, very different. The Prince was like a tree that took root and grew strong and tall but Moon Boy was like a little desert plant creeping on the sand. When the boys were twelve years old the handsome Prince was as tall as a man but Moon Boy still looked like a little child. The Prince became a hunter and carried home buck on his strong shoulders. He loved showing off to the village girls and at night he entertained them by doing war dances around the fire. Moon Boy never went hunting. He took care of animals – he even looked after baby scorpions and saved a snake that was caught in his neighbour's hut. At night he stared at the sky for hours, counting the stars and waiting for Moon to rise.

Some nights Moon did not appear and only the stars shone in the night sky. Some nights Moon appeared only as a thin crescent. But there were wonderful nights when Moon showed her full glory and lit up the whole night sky. On those nights Moon Boy jumped as high as he could, trying to hug bright Moon.

One of the village grandmothers noticed Moon Boy's strange behaviour. She told her neighbour, who told her husband, who told his sister, who told her husband (who was the King). People started keeping an eye on Moon Boy and soon everyone was talking about him. Stories spread like wildfire through the village. "He likes to play with scorpions." "He sleeps with a snake next to his mat." "He talks to himself when he sees the full moon." These stories were true but as you can guess there were plenty of untrue or exaggerated tales about Moon Boy.

People gossiped about him, they glared at him, they kept their children away from him. Moon Boy felt unwanted and unwelcome in the village where he was born. He had many friends among the animals and snakes and insects but he had only one human friend, a young girl called Bright Sun. He was very sad when Bright Sun's parents told her: "Stay away from Moon Boy – he's dangerous." (This pleased the Prince because he liked Bright Sun ...)

One day Moon Boy said to himself: "There's only one thing to do. I have to leave the village and follow Moon as she moves across the night sky." The next time Moon shone full in the sky he set off as fast as his little legs could carry him but of course he couldn't keep up with Moon. He watched sadly as Moon disappeared from the sky. Then he said to himself, "I'll mark this place with a heap of stones on the sand. Next month when Moon is full I'll come here in the afternoon. I'll rest here until Moon is right above my head and then I'll follow her as far as I can."

And that's exactly what Moon Boy did. When it was almost time for Moon to be full, he walked all the way to the heap of stones and spent the afternoon resting there. He waited until dark. He waited until Moon rose in the sky. He waited until Moon was right above his



head. Then he walked as fast as he could, following beautiful bright Moon. He walked and walked and walked all night long. He didn't stop walking until Moon disappeared from the sky. Then he rested.

At sunrise Moon Boy came to an oasis in the desert. There were green trees and fruit and flowers. There were caves big enough to shelter a whole village. There were all sorts of amazing creatures. Most precious of all, there was a fountain of cool water. Moon Boy spent happy days in this wonderful place.

When he went back to the village people whispered to each other: "Where's he been all this time? What's he been doing? He's definitely up to no good." The very next day the King's wife was bitten by a snake. Someone said: "It's Moon Boy's fault – he's brought more snakes to the village. We must chase him away once and for all!" An angry crowd chased Moon Boy out of his hut, out of the village, out into the desert.

There were two people who wept when Moon Boy was driven out of the village – the woman who was a mother to him and his friend, Bright Sun. They said: "Moon Boy never hurt anyone. He belongs here and the village has no right to chase him away. This is a terrible injustice. He will die in the desert."

Little did they know that Moon Boy had made his way to the oasis – his own little paradise in the desert. He missed his mother, he missed Bright Sun, he missed the life of the village but he was happy enough. Then one morning as he stood watching the sky his heart was gripped with fear. There were strange dark clouds in the distance and heavy thunder. He remembered what the old people used to say, "One day a storm will come from the desert, bringing judgement upon us." Was this the judgement storm? Was the village in danger?

Moon Boy didn't stop to think. He set off for the village running as fast as his legs could carry him. He forgot his pain, he forgot how people had rejected him. He had to save his village. He ran for hours until he reached the village. He called out a warning: "Follow me or the storm will kill you! Hurry, we have little time!" His mother and a few other women followed him, with their children. As they hurried over the first sand dune, Bright Sun called, "Wait – wait for me". She ran to join them and Moon Boy's heart leapt for joy.

Of course, most of the villagers did not trust Moon Boy. They called on Prince as their leader. When Prince heard Moon Boy's warning he laughed loudly and said. "Don't listen to that little fool!" Within the hour the people in the village felt the earth shake beneath their feet and the sky grew dark and heavy. A grandmother cried out: "It is the great judgement – we have done wrong. Let us follow Moon Boy before it is too late." The mothers cried out in despair, "Oh Prince, what can we do to save our children?" But Prince had already fled to save himself.

A giant sand storm blew into the village, destroying the huts, filling the water fountain and suffocating every living creature in its path. Prince was buried deep in a heap of desert sand as he tried to make his escape. By the time the storm reached Moon Boy and his small group of women and children, its anger was long gone. It blew over the oasis as a gentle

breeze, lifting the butterflies from the flowers. That evening, the group sat next to the fire, weeping for those who had died and praying for the safety of the hunters who were away when the storm hit the village.

Bright Sun thought for some time before she spoke. "Moon Boy, forgive us for being so blind. Because you looked different to us, because you did not behave like us, you were cast out of the village. You understood things we did not understand, Forgive us for not seeing how special you are." Moon Boy sat with tears running down his cheeks. He wiped away his tears and smiled up at Moon. At last he understood that he was special. At last he felt tall enough to touch Moon.



Possible discussion points:

What are your strengths?

Are there some things that make you different and set you apart from other people?



Monique Strydom

Monique Strydom and her husband Callie were in a group of 21 people kidnapped in Malaysia. For four long months they were held hostage in the Philippines by a terrorist group. After surviving this harrowing experience, Monique came home and dedicated herself to her fellow South Africans. She and her husband set up the Strydom Trust and the NGO, Matla a Bana, to help children who have been sexually exploited, neglected or abused, a cause very close to her heart. Monique has been nominated for an award by the American Biographical Institute (as "one of the greatest women of the century") and she recently received Rotary's Paul Harris Lifetime award. She and Callie have a son, Luc, born a year after their release.