

**Rising Up**  
*Moving On*

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*women writing our lives*

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*The opinions of authors or participants in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the Nisaa Institute for Women's Development, OXFAM, its staff or the BMZ.*

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# Foreword

**T**his publication aims to make visible women's voices and experience. It aims to inspire other women facing violence to seek support and find ways to overcome the abuse they experience. It aims also to promote our ongoing public awareness and lobbying work at the Nisaa Institute for Women's Development (Nisaa) and to serve as a tool for our organisational learning.

The rationale of the writing project was to take women's empowerment a step further to enable women to experience healing and closure through the writing of their own stories. Writing enables the writer to step back to look at her life, to get a clearer understanding of her past and present reality. Writing takes the writer into a depth of introspection, and can serve as the beginning of a longer, more profound process of change. Writing enables what is in the heart to come through in words.

The conceptualisation and planning for this project began in March 2012 through internal consultation between Nisaa Institute for Women's Development and Oxfam Germany in liaison with the BMZ (the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the German Government). External consultations were conducted with Shamim Meer to customise the healing and writing workshops.

Initially our plan was to select former women residents from the Nisaa shelter. However, our plans had to be modified in relation to the realities faced by many women. Some did not have child care to be able to attend a residential workshop. Some were unable to take time off work, and others were not ready to share their painful experiences in a publication.

This publication is testimony to the fact that we all have powerful stories to tell. Even though the women writers of these stories had no prior experience in writing, and no time or space to write on their own, they have done a sterling job in articulating their stories.

I would like to congratulate the women participants for digging deep into their souls in order to write these stories. The process was not an easy one, especially since it often meant re-experiencing and grappling with past trauma as they wrote.

Nisaa would like to express our appreciation to Oxfam Germany and the BMZ for the sponsorship of the project as well as to the facilitators: Shamim Meer, Michel Friedman and Nyasha Mukuwane, for their wonderful effort and commitment to this project and for working alongside Nisaa in a constructive, amicable and sisterly manner. ■

**Zubeda Dangor**

Nisaa Executive Director  
September 2013

# Introduction

**T**he stories in this book tell of women rising up to find the strength to say no to abuse. They tell of women finding the power to move on, to assert that they are people of worth, that they are beautiful, courageous and strong. That they are full human beings deserving of dignity and love, for who they are, and not for what their families and society expect them to be. The writers tell of the depths of their hurt by the men they loved and who seemed to love them back – until things began to change.

The experiences of these eleven writers are not unusual. In the world we live in today violence from intimate partners continues to be the experience of far too many women.

As these writers tell us, the messages to young girls from parents and society continue to be that a woman must submit, obey her man, and sacrifice her own happiness to make men feel they are important and to keep families together. That the man is in charge even when he beats you, makes you feel like nothing. Even when he does not support you.

These messages from parents and society across religions, cultures and countries get women to submit. And they enable the situation where women become victims of abuse. Each writer tells of her personal journey – of reaching a point where she resisted these messages and of reaching a place of freedom.

The writers want to send out one central message: that there is life after abuse. That women can rise up, rebuild their lives, and move on through finding support from other women, from counselling support and from entering a shelter in times when they need a place of safety.

In the words of the writers:

“If one woman reading my story will know she is worth it, then I am happy.” (Charmz)

“My aim is to spread the message to other women who may be trapped in violent relationships, who may not know where or how to obtain assistance, that there is life after abuse.” (Umme-Muhammed)

“When you share your problems, it is easy to move on with your life.” (Fikile Zikhali)

“There is life after abuse – we can discover we are strong and we can be happy if we live our lives free.” (Cindy)

For each writer an important part of her journey was the realisation that life could be different. This realisation took each woman out of a situation she had come to see as normal, as her lot in life.

“I realised there is life out there without an abusive relationship.” (Judith Mbatha)

“What I had to do was leave this poisonous relationship which was eroding my self worth and confidence.” (Veena Naidoo)

Each writer relates her struggles to get to this place of freedom. The writers relate the wisdom they grew from their wounds. Fikile Krollis tells us: “My bruises, pain, suffering, and disappointment did not discourage me. In fact it gave me the strength to go forward, working hard for the goals I wanted to achieve.”

While each one of these women writers found her personal way to freedom from continued oppression at the hands of the men they once loved, and who once loved them, their stories all cry out for a better world for all women. A world where women are

seen as full human beings worthy of dignity. Sedibe tells us: “Every woman deserves respect and dignity. Women need to be loved and accepted. Women need to be listened to and should not live in threatening situations.”

None of these women would have seen themselves as writers. They wrote these stories in a series of workshops which provided space, time, inspiration and support. The workshops were led by three facilitators who brought together our skills in writing, healing and counselling. Our workshop design was inspired by the work of writing teachers Loiuise Dunlap, Michele Weldon and Natalie Goldberg. We drew on Capacitar and other mind-body-spirit healing techniques.

There were long stretches of time over the days we spent together where the women just wrote. Their words poured onto their pages as they sat under the shade of huge trees, or in a flower-trimmed corner of the retreat garden where we held our workshops.

These writers were brave enough to delve into past pain, to reflect deeply on their lives and to share this through their stories. They searched deep within themselves. They used their words to paint pictures of their experiences.

Writing their stories was at times painful. And as they wrote they supported each other and were supported by the three facilitators.

The writers found the writing journey challenging but also exhilarating. At the end of the process, as we celebrated, each writer spoke of a sense of accomplishment at having written a story she is proud of. As Jade said: “When I came I was a rosebud, now I am a rose. I have never written Matric, but I felt like I was writing Matric – and now I can go to the Matric ball.” Veena told the facilitators: “You brought out things in us we did not know were there.”

The blossoming was not only in their writing but also in their whole being. Brenda who runs the retreat centre was convinced that the women leaving at the end of our process were not the same women who had entered the centre on day one. “But they look so different,” she marvelled. The smiles, the sense of freedom, the delight and joy on the writers’ faces led her to remark: “You ladies look like you have spring in you!”

The writing and healing combination helped the writers to unburden themselves, enabled a shining to come through the wounds, and helped them to see their lives in new ways.

“Each lady was treated with respect and dignity. It became very emotional at times but the facilitators gave us the support we needed. There were times we laughed together; there were times we cried together. I really enjoyed every moment and it was a pleasure for me to be part of this book.” (Charmz)

“Writing the story helped me. There were many things I kept inside and could not talk it out. But with writing I told it. I felt like telling more, like I can write and write and write. It healed me, made me see things in another way. It is now time for me to take the right decisions to do things for me – I have lived my life pleasing other people.” (Fikile Krollis)

“To write it down makes me see things differently. And I saw the other side of me that I never knew existed. I looked at my life and how to take it forward. I learnt a lot. The experience that I have had, nobody can take it away.” (Fikile Zikhali)

“For seven days writing our stories I think I learned more about how to cooperate with other women who have similar problems that I have. All of this

made me heal inside and out as if I am born again.”  
(Judith Mbatha)

“I felt so relaxed after writing, and free. Because I kept everything inside me for so long.” (J. Sothole)

“What a wonderful journey. A journey to be appreciated and enjoyed. A journey that brings back the good memories and the bad memories. It brings back the memories that I used to cry thinking that I am alone. But I am not alone. The only thing I need to do is stand up and speak about what is hurting me inside. And the time I speak or write I feel emotional and I will cry. My facilitators comforted me through the feeling I felt during the time of emotion. They made me feel better by giving counselling and exercises that will make me feel better and strong, love, courage and proud. And I will believe that there is hope in my life and my life is a gift from God and I will have to appreciate it no matter what I come across. I thank the facilitators for believing in me, for understanding me and giving me the time to understand them.” (Cindy)

Many of the writers have used pen names.

The drawings illustrating each story are by the writer of the story. ■

**Shamim Meer**  
September 2013



# From being nothing to being someone

Fikile Zikhali

*From being nothing to being someone*

**I was born in KwaZulu-Natal. I am the first born to my** mother. My mother got me outside marriage. I never knew my father. I still don't know him. After I was born my mother got married as a third wife. I grew up in a big family, but there was no love whatsoever. There was always fighting, name calling and swearing. I don't remember even once someone in the family telling any one we love each other.

As a child from outside my mother's marriage I felt so lonely. I didn't know the love of my parents. As I got older my stepbrother and stepsisters started to give me the feeling that I was not from their father. If I did something I would get punished more than the others. When they started to tell me in my face, "why don't you go and ask your father," I realised that I was in trouble. I started to ask my mother about my father. My mother did not want to tell me where my father was because when my stepfather paid lobola for her they agreed that they were going to raise me in his family. For her to break that promise would be not respecting of the elders. I did not understand this. I thought if my mother and father were together my life would be better.

My life was so different from the other children who had their fathers and mothers. They were happy and that is what I wanted to experience. I was always the last to get something I needed. When things got tougher for me and there was no one to talk to I felt so lonely, so angry at myself. I thought maybe I was a curse to that family.

I realised that I had to leave home. I decided that I could not live like this my whole life. I was so angry with my mother for not giving me anything. I was so angry with my father. What kind of a man was he, who could leave his child without knowing what is going on? I felt I had to find my father. But I had no information about him, no idea where he was, no idea what he looked like. It was so confusing. So I decided to forget



about him. I told myself that he doesn't deserve me and I don't care about him anymore.

### **Moving to Joburg, meeting my boyfriend**

Coming to Joburg was the biggest decision I ever made. It was a very difficult decision because I was in need of family and love. It was very difficult because I didn't know where I was going. I just packed my clothes and left.

I started to look for a job and to find a place to stay. I was happy because no one was swearing at me. If I felt lonely, I just told myself that I do not have a family.

Then I met my boyfriend. Wow! Where can I start? The year was 2003, the month was February. I don't remember the exact date. I was staying with a friend. And my friend introduced me to him. He was my friend's cousin. We sat there talking and one thing led to another and we became friends. He used to come over every day and we would watch television. We ended up being in love.

Things were very good for us. We did everything together. We cooked, went out, we shared everything. One day he asked me to go with him to visit his family. I was so scared because I did not know how his family was going to react when they saw me. I went to his mom's house, he introduced me to his family, and they loved me. So we decided to take things to the next level, and we moved in together.

It was so wonderful. He used to wake up in the morning to make breakfast. Those breakfasts were magical. I remember one morning he made me cereals and he forgot that I do not take milk. He then went back to the kitchen to make me a breakfast of two slices of bread, slices of tomatoes, lettuce and fried eggs. It was the best breakfast I ever ate.

I had never heard anyone telling me that they love me. He was

the first person in my life who told me that. Those words were so powerful. From that day I told myself that he is the one. When he walked out the door he would tell me he loves me. To know that there is someone who loves you! I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life with him. He was my friend, my lover, my everything.

We planned to start a family together, and after a few months I got pregnant. I gave birth to my baby girl. We were so happy.

### **The fights start**

But soon after my first child was born things started to change. We started to fight a lot. We didn't do anything together. He would sit in the lounge doing nothing. The fighting went on until the point when he started to hit me. He would not allow me to see my friends and he did not give me any money. Sometimes he would not talk to me, but at night he would force himself on me.

We had two more kids. I continued staying with him. I loved him and he didn't even notice that. He was jealous and angry with me all the time.

One Saturday morning while I was busy making breakfast he just left the house without saying anything to me. When he came back I was sitting at the table drinking my tea. He pushed the table and started screaming at me. He said he was very tired of me and my kids, that he does not get enough sleep because the kids cry all night. He told me that I must sleep on the floor. I did that.

One night when I was asleep he just grabbed me by my arm. He told me that he wanted to sleep with me. I said no, it was his idea that I must sleep on the floor. He told me that if I did not want to sleep with him, I must pack my bags and leave that night. I told him I was not going anywhere with the kids. He forced himself on me.

### **Becoming aware of being abused**

One day at the clinic I heard two ladies talking about violence against women and children. People were handing out pamphlets about abuse. I read the pamphlet and that's when I realised that I was in an abusive relationship. That is when I realised that I have been abused, that I have been raped. The pamphlets explained all the kinds of abuse. Before I didn't even realise that I have been abused physically and financially.

The abuse continued up until the time I decided to leave him. He told me that if I left him he would kill me and my kids. I realised that it was no good and I was so frustrated and angry and confused.

### **The day I had enough**

One day we were sitting on the couch and my phone rang. I answered the phone. Out of nowhere he punched me in my ribs and I could not breathe. He said I am disrespecting him because I am talking to my boyfriend in front of him.

I had no idea what he was talking about. I was talking to my brother who was studying in Durban. I tried to explain this to him, but he did not want to hear anything.

I had enough of him and I just left him on the couch and started to pack my bags. The children were playing outside. I told them we are going to visit my sister. They were happy. I was very sad and confused because I did not even know where I was going with my kids.

From that pamphlet at the clinic I knew there are some organisations who help women who have been abused. I just took the taxi to the Nisaa offices in Orange Farm. That was where I found the social worker who referred me to another office in Lenasia. I took the train to Lenasia. When I got there, the offices were closed. I did not know where to go. I had no

money and my kids, my 3-year-old, 6-year-old and 9-year-old babies were very tired. I said to myself I am not going back to that house. I will wait until tomorrow.

I walked around with my babies, not knowing where we were going to sleep. We decided to go to the public toilet. When I was in the toilet I thought to ask the lady who was working at the toilet to lock us in for the night. I explained my problem and she understood. She locked us inside the toilet. I made up a bed with boxes and we sat and ate the bread I had bought.

The children were very tired. They just slept. I cried as I looked at them. I soon fell asleep. But I woke in the middle of the night and could not go back to sleep. In the morning I woke my children, wiped their faces and waited for the lady to open up. When she opened the door I was so happy. I thanked her and we rushed to the Nisaa office.

### **Finding support and strength**

By eight o'clock we were at the Nisaa gate. Me and my children were very tired. I was so scared because I did not know what would happen next.

I was sitting in the room and I saw posters and pictures on the walls. I remember one poster that read, "A real man does not rape." One thing that came up in my mind was that if a real man does not rape, it means my boyfriend is not a man. This stuck in my mind but I did not have the answer to that question. As I looked for the answer I heard the door open. I quickly sat down.

I was scared because I did not know the person who was coming in. I wondered what she was going to say when I told her my story.

I saw a beautiful woman with long brown and gold hair, wearing a short dress and brown sandals. She greeted me and

introduced herself as Jabu, a social worker. She explained what social workers do and she asked me to tell her everything. She told me that I have to be free because everything I tell her will stay between the two of us.

I was very tired. My body was sore. As I told her my story, I knew from the look on her face that she believed me and understood exactly what I was going through. She was so sympathetic, she gave me the confidence to tell my story.

When I had finished she just got up and hugged me. She told me that I am very strong and that she is proud of me. She told me that everything was going to be okay and I must not blame myself for what happened to me. She told me they will help me and my kids with accommodation at the Nisaa shelter and with food parcels.

Oh that hug! It was the biggest hug I ever had. And that feeling – it was as if she knew that I needed it. For the first time that day I felt safe and I knew that we were safe. Her words were very powerful, they gave me strength because people used to tell me that I am nothing. Nobody had ever told me they were proud of me and that I am strong. It was like she had taken the baggage off my shoulders. I felt so relieved.

From that day I knew that I am strong and I do not need a man to run my life. I knew that I am capable of taking care of my kids.

From that day my life started to change. I made a promise to myself that I will leave that relationship. You know what? I did that even though I did not have anything. I did not have money, I did not have a place to live with my children. But that promise to myself kept ringing in my ears.

I learned so much and Nisaa helped me with so many things. I didn't know about my rights. I thought my boyfriend could do whatever he wants and it was okay. When he abused me

physically, emotionally and financially, I thought it was my fault. In the process of finding help I was surprised to find that I was not the only one on this path. I gained the confidence to leave that abusive relationship, and I learnt that I am stronger than I thought I was.

I was so shy, I did not know how to communicate with people. I felt angry even when talking to my kids. But I learned to talk with my kids and to listen to them. I learned to share my problems with other women. I learned that I was not alone. I learnt to appreciate myself the way I am, not what other people want me to be. Now I know that I can do whatever I want to if I put my mind to it.

I learned that when you share your problems it is easy to move on with your life. I gained confidence and started to make the right decisions for me and my kids.

I became so independent. Today I am happy. I am trying to put my life together and Nisaa is giving me support. If I have a problem I talk to my social worker, Jabu.

At home we are a family of four, me and my three girls. We live in a one room shack. We are always happy even though I am not working right now. The smiles on my girls' faces keep me going through every day. I take my two older girls to school and my little one to the crèche, before I prepare myself to go to my beading project – Basadi Pele – at Nisaa where I spend the whole day making jewellery. I buy myself beads and make the jewellery to sell. Sometimes the stuff sells fast and I have money to support my family.

The project helps a lot because I do not have other skills. It is the only way to keep me going. I depend on the grant money and the transport money Nisaa gives us to come to the project. And the support I get from other women is great.

I want to pass on to my kids that no matter what situation you

are in you can come out and find help from organisations like Nisaa. They help so many people. They saved my life and my kids' lives. I am so grateful that I took the decision to find help. Because my life is not the same anymore.

I have changed my life. I got out of that abusive relationship, I found a place to live and I am happy now because I have peace in my heart. I don't need money to be happy. All I need is my freedom and my kids. I don't need a man to take care of me or my kids. That's how my life changed.

### **My experience about coming to writing**

From the first day when I heard that I was being given the chance to write about my relationship and being abused I was very happy. When that day came I was so excited and sad at the same time. Because I lost my brother the weekend before, I had to make a decision if I am coming to the writing workshop or not. But I am glad that I decided to come because it helped me a lot. I needed the time to grieve, at the same time I wanted my brother to be proud of me.

And the ladies helped me a lot, especially the facilitators. They helped me to deal with the situation and enjoy the experience. I missed my kids a lot but to be alone was good for me. To find the time to think about myself only. To be with people who understand and who were in the same situation like me, was good. I was happy to make some new friends and to be reunited with other ladies that I stayed with at the shelter. I was happy. We cried, laughed and comforted each other with no judgements.

To get the chance to write my story is like God is giving me a second chance in life. To write it down makes me see things differently. And I saw the other side of me that I never knew existed. I looked at my life and how to take it forward. I learnt a lot. The experience that I have had, nobody can take it away. ■



# My life is like a rose now

Jade Shari Abrahams

*My life is like a rose now*

**W**hen I was a little girl aged six years I lost my mum.

My mum was abused to death by her boyfriend. So I grew up with my mum's mum in Ennerdale. I grew up with my two cousins and my elder sister who was eighteen years old and in Matric. My grandmother used to do dressmaking for us to survive.

My sister got a job at Shoprite and she soon moved out to live with her boyfriend in town. I thought that my sister would always be with me, but she just left me. I felt that everybody just leaves me, first my mother, then my sister. My granny was not a person you could tell your problems to. So if something happened at school, or I had a boyfriend, I couldn't talk to her. That made me feel so empty.

## **Learning of my mum's death from abuse**

My grandmother told me the story of my mum's death when I was 15 years old. I was so shocked to learn how she died, and it was very painful for me. I thought that my mum passed away through sickness or something. I did not know she died through abuse. This affected my school work and I went for counselling.

It was very difficult for my grandmother as she was getting a foster care grant for me but this was stopped when I turned sixteen. I left school after the first term of grade 11.

I was doing nothing with my life. I then got my first job in the middle of the year at Fruit and Veg. I was a cashier for one year. The following year I met this loving, caring, 20-year-old charmer boy. Eight months of this relationship was good.

## **The abuse starts**

When I fell pregnant with my first child that is when the abuse started. It started off with him slapping me. I thought this was fine. Then it was slap after slap. Then it went to punching me and leaving blue marks.

It got much worse because he started kicking me, verbally abusing me, sexually abusing me, financially abusing me and I just stuck with it. I thought I was to blame for what is going on. For eight years I believed I was wrong. I took the abuse for no reason at all.

A week before I left the abusive relationship there were some arguments. Myself, the father of my kids and our three kids were staying in a three-roomed house in Ennerdale. It had a bedroom, a small bathroom and a kitchen. My fourteen-month-old son was lying on the bed, lethargic, refusing to take the breast. I tried feeding him. He just refused. I realised he had a fever and I started to undress him to bring the fever down. I said to his father, "This child is very sick." He responded, "What must I do about it?" And he just left, not telling me where he is going. He just left me with our sick baby.

I knew my baby was very sick, because I had that experience with my second son who had severe lung problems. I phoned the ambulance and when the ambulance arrived we went to the hospital. They took us straight to the doctors. The doctor said if they did not admit my baby immediately to ICU I would lose him, because his one lung was not getting enough oxygen. I was crying. I phoned his father to tell him that the baby is being admitted to ICU. I thought he would come to the hospital. I was so wrong.

Every day I would visit my son in the hospital by myself. There was no one to come with me, to give me support. This really made me sad. The father was busy doing drugs and drinking at the tavern. He never even asked how is the baby. It just made me think how little he really cares about our kids.

After a week my baby was out of ICU. He was now in the baby ward. I was so happy. I cried and thanked the doctors of the ICU ward for helping my baby boy. I got home, wanting to tell his father the good news about our baby. He was not home.

I waited up for him half the night. He never came home that night.

The following day I got home around 5pm from seeing my baby boy in the hospital. His father was home. He asked me where did I come from. I said, "How can you ask me such a stupid question?" So I just got up and was going to get some fresh air. As I got to the door he kicked me in my back. I fell so hard I could not get up. He started punching me in my face. My nose, my mouth were bleeding. I screamed for help. My daughter came running to see what was going on. She saw me bleeding. She said, "Please Daddy stop hitting mummy. You are going to kill her." He continued until I was unconscious. My daughter ran to get help from my friend across the road. I heard her saying, "Aunty please help my mummy."

When I opened my eyes I was in the same hospital as my baby boy. I tried getting up to ask someone to help me. They called a social worker to speak to me about what had happened. I kept asking, "Is my baby boy fine?"

The social worker asked me, "How long have you been in this abusive relationship?" I told her, "Ten years, and now I want to get out of this relationship." She asked me, "Why only now?" With tears running down my cheek I told her that I lost my mum through abuse. She died through abuse. So the social worker said it is not too late, she is going to send me and my three kids to a home for abused women and children.

As I sat in that office with a blue botched up face I felt so cold. As the social worker made that phone call to the shelter I was so nervous. I was not sure whether to stay in the relationship or to go. She told me I must be at the shelter the next day.

I went to see my baby boy in the ward. After an hour with him I left. I was so afraid as I went to get the taxi to my mother-in-law to fetch my son who was with her while I was at the

hospital. She was so angry about what her son had done to me. I told her I am leaving and going to a home of safety before her son kills me. I stayed the night at her place, it was so emotional.

The next day we made arrangements to fetch the baby from the hospital. I went with my son to the Nisaa office and my mother-in-law went to the hospital to fetch the baby. When I got to the Nisaa office I did not know who to speak to. One of the employees came up to me and asked, "Are you Jade?" This was a counsellor. Her name was Nyasha Mukuwane and she told me that she would be my counsellor while I was staying at the shelter. Once I entered her office I just started crying because I knew my kids and I would be safe now.

### **The shelter**

During the ride to the shelter, I was excited and scared at the same time. When we arrived at the shelter the house mother gave us a food parcel. I packed my groceries in the cupboard in the kitchen. Then the house mother gave me my room, and she gave me bedding. My older son had his own bed. My daughter arrived at the shelter after school and she also had her own bed. I made the beds and unpacked our clothes into the cupboards.

I then made supper for me and my kids – my family. My kids enjoyed the warm loving plate of tin fish and rice that night. I went to the bathroom to run a bath for my kids, they put on some clean clothes and by 7.30 pm they were fast asleep. They could feel they were safe now.

I then introduced myself to the other lady who was staying at the shelter, and who had come back from work. She made me feel welcome. We sat in the lounge, sipped cups of tea and spoke. She asked me what had happened to me and I told her I have been abused. She told me she had also been abused and that coming to the shelter is really changing her emotions and that I will overcome it. After a hot bath I went straight to bed. I

had a peaceful night's rest after all I had been through.

After a week in the shelter I learnt a lot about the rules, the roster, the chores we ladies had to do – cleaning the kitchen, the lounge, the passage, the bathrooms, the scullery. I enjoyed the chores, they kept my mind busy. The house mother looked after us, and made sure there were no fights or arguments.

There was a backyard with swings and a jungle gym for the children to play on, and my kids loved that. It used to keep them busy and to get them to know the other kids at the shelter.

The first time I went for counselling with Nyasha Mukuwane was with tears of joy for me. I say this because I never ever had a chance to tell anybody about my abuse. I told her what has happened to me. As I was telling her I cried. She was so supportive she told me about the cycle of abuse and she said I broke the cycle that I was in because I made a choice in my life by leaving the abuser. She was a motivation in my life. When I cry she cries, and I can thank her for making me the person I am today. I was very fragile before she gave me counselling sessions. I am so strong today. I got my self esteem back.

There were some ups and downs at the shelter. I made friends with two ladies, Mam Judy and Fikile. But with Fikile I had lots of fights, but as time went on, we learnt to respect each other and to get along and it made our relationship strong.

Mam Judy is like a mum to me, a mum I never had. She gives me advice, she is always there to comfort me when I am down and crying and she and her kids play a big role in my children's lives. Till this day we are still together. Our relationship is like the colour lilac, like rose petals that we can make pot pourri out of. That is the smell of my relationship with Mum Judy.

### **Reconnecting with my sister**

The day I reconnected with my sister Micarla Franks was the

2<sup>nd</sup> January 2013, a very cold wet day. It was raining. It was a day of tears. It was very emotional. After three years with no contact, with her not knowing where I was and what has happened to me.

The day I phoned her was like a fresh start for me. I had this knot in my throat as she picked up the phone. I said “hello” and then kept quiet, saying nothing more. She asked, “Who is this?” I said, “Jade” with tears in my eyes. All I could hear was her silent cry at the other end of the line. I said, “Please I need you more than ever.” She asked me, “What is wrong?” I said to her that I’ve been abused and had to go to a shelter for abused women and children. She said I have to come to see her. So I made arrangements to go to her place.

When I got there with my three kids, she and her seven-year-old daughter Aidan were so happy. It was like I started only knowing her then. It felt like I never knew her. I stayed four days with her. It was so sad to tell her what happened to me and the kids. I still remember her saying, “Don’t worry, everything will be fine and he will never hurt you again.” She helped me. Today she is my daughter Jayrece’s guardian. Jayrece is staying with her and is so happy to be with her aunt who really loves us. My sister gives me all the support I need and my sons Joshua and Jordan love her to bits. She is my role model.

There was a time in her life where she also went through abuse and she is a single mother and a survivor. She helps me financially, emotionally, physically and I love my sister just the way she is. She does not have to change. The way she is, is the way I love her.

### **Moving on and forgiving**

I am so happy I learnt to move on. I had to forgive myself to be able to forgive my abuser. And by doing that I love and respect myself and my kids like I have never done before. ■





# Love is blossoming

Cindy

*Love is blossoming*

**M**y two brothers and I grew up in Mpumalanga with our grandparents – our father’s parents. We were separated from our mother when I was five years old, my older brother was two years old, and my younger brother one year old.

Our cousins also lived with my grandparents. Their mother would come to see them and take them on visits to her house in Orange Farm. But my brothers and I never saw our mother and we were scared to ask our grandfather about her.

## **Moving to Orange Farm**

When I was sixteen my father got his own stand and I moved to Orange Farm to stay with him and my stepmother.

My father was so happy I was there. He was proud for his friends to see me, and he liked to talk with me and test me to see how I can think and remember. I never knew he was testing me. Once he asked me to go to the license department in Meyerton to pay for his van. I went and came back. I did not get lost.

My stepmother never treated me like her own daughter. She never gave me money for lunch at school, she never washed my clothes. She did not want me to join the youth club, to do drama and gymnastics. I did not want to tell my father about my stepmother because he would think I wanted to separate them.

One day my brother came to visit and asked me, “How is she?” I told him, “She is bad news, she likes to shout.” I asked my brother why we were sent to stay with our grandparents when we were young. My brother said it was because our father didn’t want us to see our mother. I asked him, “How do you know?” He said, “You can see by the way things were when we were growing up.” Then I started thinking that things were happening here that I didn’t know about.

I started to remember that my father used to beat my mother and that once when I went to see my mother crying my father

pulled my feet and threw me to the wall, as if I was not his daughter. My mother tried to fight him until we found a way to get out of the house and we ran to her sister. These fights happened often until my mother decided to leave my father. This made me feel sad.

But my father was now treating me like his daughter and I was happy living with him.

### **Meeting a guy one windy day**

The following year I moved to Heidelberg to attend school, I completed grade 11 and 12 and then I came back to Orange Farm. I started to date.

I met this guy at the steps. It was a windy day and as I got closer to him the wind became strong and he tried to protect me from the wind. I allowed him to do so, and he asked me where I stay. I said, "Extension 6A here in Orange Farm." He asked for my cell phone number and I gave it to him.

He called me every night and after six months we decided to meet again. We were in love. He decided to move from Joburg to Orange Farm so that we could spend more time together. We met every weekend. I was still living at my father's house.

After a year I got pregnant. I was so excited because I was going to have a baby with someone I loved. My baby's father was so loving. He understood me and supported me during the pregnancy. Even though we had a few fights he was still there for me.

After I gave birth to my daughter we were still seeing each other. Our love blew like it was our first time being in love. He supported me and the child financially.

After a year he decided to marry me, but my aunt – my father's sister – fed my father with lies that my baby's father, "is not working, he is a thief, he doesn't deserve Cindy."

My father could see there is nothing wrong here, but he hated my baby's father without a reason. He then used traditional muti to separate us. So after a year and a couple of months we separated because of my father and my aunt.

### **A guy with sweet words**

After a year I met this other guy, a police reservist. He was so loving and caring and he used to tell me sweet words. He used to tell me that he loves me, that my body is so portable, that I have Spanish eyes and an English nose. He said if he has me, he has everything. He wants to marry me and have children with me. He was tired of moving around and wanted to settle down.

I felt special that I can still get married and have my own house and enjoy life. We married in court. He found a place for us, living at his friend's place. My daughter was now three years old and living with us.

After a few months I met my husband's ex-girlfriend. He had never told me about her. She told me everything about him. How he hurt women, that he makes promises but will never do what he promises, that he is a good liar, that he can make women believe his lies.

When I asked him, "Is this true?" he said this woman wants him back and she is trying to break us apart because she can see we are good for each other.

We were happy together only for a few months, not even a year. The abuse started when I told him I wanted to look for a job, that I want to do something with my life, that I can't stay at home and be a housewife while I have my matric.

I wanted to look for a job because my daughter wanted many things and he did nothing about this. She wanted toys to play with, she wanted clothes and she wanted to go to the day care like other children.

I told him, "I cannot depend on you while you do nothing for me and my daughter. You always promise and you never do it because you pay insurance for your first wife behind my back." He was so surprised that I knew about this. I also knew about the money he gave his daughter behind my back. I always heard them talking on the phone.

He told me that all the women he was in love with used to take good care of his child. They used to buy her sweets, take her to the shops, and I must do the same thing, so that his child will feel loved by me. But he never did these things for my child.

He did not want me to work. He told me the supervisors will fall in love with me and they will want to sleep with me. I said to him, "If that's what you think of me then you don't love me and you don't trust me because I want to do it for myself and my daughter."

I could not think for myself. He always wanted to think and do things for me. If I told him I wanted to cook rice, he would say, "No, cook pap." He would choose my clothes. He would even choose friends for me. If I went with friends I have chosen for myself he would say, "No, not that one."

### **Leaving after abuse**

One morning we were at home, just sitting and talking and I decided to talk to him again about going to work. I told him, "If you loved me you would understand me and support me with what I want and you would make me happy. You would not stand in my way." Then my phone rang. It was my friend.

He said, "That is your boyfriend." I said, "No, I can see why your ex-girlfriend was telling me these things about you." He looked me in the eyes, kicked me, and called me names. Names like "prostitute, toilet, any man who wants to urinate will come to you. You bitch, I did you a favour by marrying you."

My body was bruised, I was in pain. I was so tired. I could not speak properly and I could not fight back. He dragged me outside and he started to undress me. People were looking at me and saying, "hoooo," and they did nothing about it because they were afraid of him, a police reservist.

I felt insulted and I was very shy to tell anyone what had happened to me because I thought they would make a joke out of me. I decided I had to come out of this relationship before my daughter saw what is happening to me. I decided to leave him and I went to live with my mother.

He came to fetch me, and I went back to him. After a few days he started to hit me again.

On 5 July 2011 I decided to go somewhere else. I went to the police station and they sent me to Nisaa. At Nisaa I told my story and they told me about the shelter.

### **At the Nisaa shelter**

I went to stay at the shelter with my daughter. While I was at the shelter I got a protection order. Every time I was at the police station some of his friends called him and told him that I am at the police station and he would call me immediately.

I decided to tell the lady who was helping me with the protection order and she suggested I leave the protection order with her, that she would talk to the station commander and they would make him sign while I am at the shelter.

He called me at the shelter saying I am in love with the station commander, that I must tell my boyfriend to help me with the divorce.

The women I was staying with at the shelter were not that supportive. They would talk about me behind my back – saying that I don't have money and a place to stay, how am I going to survive all this because I am depending on my daughter's

grant. My social worker was more supportive because she could see I am a survivor.

During my days at the shelter I sometimes felt down. Sometimes I felt I am going to survive everything and that made me feel good. Getting help from the social worker and talking to her about how I was feeling was helpful to take out all my anger.

One day, my social worker told me that she wants me to talk about my experience of abuse on the local radio station. I was so excited. It was my first time to talk about my experience. I left my daughter with a lady at the shelter and they listened on the radio. My daughter had no idea what was happening. She just heard her mother's voice.

I was free to talk about my experience – not to hide anything. Even though there was the moment when I wanted to cry, I said what I wanted to say. The women from the shelter and from the office listened to me. The manager of the station also listened and he looked on the computer to see how many people are listening to my story. Others were starting to open their radios to hear my story.

Some of the listeners did not know there is a shelter to go to. They did not know there is someone to listen to them, someone to give them courage and hope.

My going to the radio was a light to them. I showed them that there is life after abuse. That we can discover we are strong and happy by ourselves and we can do better if we live our life free. Some were in the cycle of abuse and thinking that it is their fault that they are abused, but they have seen that is not their fault.

### **My life today**

Today I am out of the shelter and doing just fine for myself. I

am happy to be out of the abuse. I am happy because I know I can choose for myself and no one is choosing for me or telling me what to do.

My daughter lives in Limpopo and she is attending school there. When I left the shelter I was not working and my daughter had to go to school. I had nothing, no one to help me and it was stressing me. I decided to take my daughter to her grandmother and grandfather – the parents of her father.

I found counselling through Nisaa. Nisaa brightens my eyes and put a smile in my heart. Now I am strong and happy that I can make my own decisions.

I have joined Nisaa's Basadi Pele project and this helps me because I have forgotten about the abuse – not as such – but it is no longer in my mind any more. We meet as women and we do beading. We come with our different creative things and we learn from each other. We talk about our differences and we laugh. At the end of the day we are happy – we go home with big smiles on our faces.

I have become a better person because I am doing things for myself like finding a job. Now that I am no longer with him I am free. I can see I was not supposed to be in that relationship. Somewhere, somehow he showed me that I have to take time before I can involve myself in a serious relationship. I have to take time as much as I can because rushing into a relationship because of love is not a good thing.

Now I am strong and I live better without him. I am living a free life, taking control over my life. Today I am happy because I don't have to think about him and there is nothing that will make me think about him. We do not have a child together. Even though there is the good memory of how the relationship started where he used to tell me he loves me, I am beautiful, I have a nice body, he likes my eyes and nose.

## **The journey of writing the book**

What a wonderful journey

A journey to be appreciated and enjoyed

A journey that brings back the good memories and the bad memories

It brings back the memories that I used to cry thinking that I am alone but I am not alone

The only thing I need to do is to stand up and speak about what it is that is hurting me inside

And the time I speak or write I felt emotional and I will cry

My facilitators comforted me through the feeling I felt during the time of emotion

They made me feel better by giving counselling and exercises that will make me feel better and strong, loved, courageous and proud

And I will believe that there is hope in my life and my life is a gift from God and I will have to appreciate it no matter what I come across.

I thank the facilitators for believing in me, for understanding me and giving me the time to understand them. I thank them for that bubbling magic to make me bubbly like they wanted me to be. The other ladies helped me find family and friends. ■



# The storm is over

Charmz

*The storm is over*

**A woman of value! That was my grandmother.** Inspirational to all who knew her. I loved her dearly. She became my role model and my best friend. I would spend weekends and holidays with her. We would sit under a peach tree and she would tell me stories about her past. One story was about street kids who came asking for food. Even though my grandma had ten children of her own and had to make sure there was food on the table for them, she did not hesitate to provide these kids with a plate of food.

I learnt from her to have a giving heart, to care for people in need, to love unconditionally. I drew strength from her as I observed her selling sweets at a school, finding a way to bring in an income despite so many chores. She gave me the strength to believe that I could face each day with a smile. The day she was called to rest, I knew I had to accept that she would no longer be around. Today, my heart goes out to her as I remember her while writing my story.

## **Growing up**

The wish I made when I turned sixteen was to be a successful woman, strong, intelligent, happy and healthy for the rest of my life. My first wish is what carried me throughout the storm until I found happiness.

I grew up in Johannesburg. I was the oldest of seven kids. We lived under very difficult circumstances. Poverty was the norm. There were times we didn't know where our next meal would come from. At times my mum would have to share a few slices of bread between us. She would sometimes go to bed without eating. I looked forward each morning to be at school just knowing that I would be provided with a sandwich at school. I couldn't wait to grow up and complete my schooling so I could help my parents.

As the eldest child, I unfortunately, had to witness how my

mum would go through abuse from my dad. Because women at that time had no rights, my mum accepted the abuse. She did what she needed to do as a mother.

My ambition was to become a social worker, but I didn't get the chance to accomplish this dream. At seventeen I had to make choices. Like I said, being the eldest child and having to go through the stages of poverty – with no food at times, no warm clothes during winter, no electricity, no bathrooms, just two outside toilets that almost eight families had to use – I really wanted the best for my family.

I decided to leave school and find a job. My parents were shocked when I told them that this is what I intended to do. But I also saw the happiness on their faces from knowing that there would be some income and things would be a little better. I wanted them to be happy for the choices I made.

I was blessed with a job one week after leaving school. It was exciting and challenging hard work, but I knew that I would make it. I worked in a supermarket as a cashier. My salary was R800 per month. I would have to work weekends but I did not have a problem with that. I was a bit worried that I didn't have enough time to spend with my siblings but I made sure they understood why I had to work and they were so happy that their older sister could take care of them. Just that smile on their faces made me believe that I could do it and made me go through each day when I felt drained and tired. I became very responsible.

We then were given the opportunity by the Department of Housing to move to a bigger house which had three bedrooms, a bathroom and a toilet, with electricity and a big yard.

There was excitement for our family and a time to celebrate! That was a turning point for my parents. It was joy and happiness for my siblings.

## **Marriage and children**

I met my husband at the age of 20. He was job hunting at the time, and a great soccer player. We spent a lot of time together. I worked and would spend my free time with him. He was very respectful, quiet and well-behaved. Ten months after meeting him I conceived. This was not planned at all.

My parents were planning a huge 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party for me, when we broke the news to them. My parents were very disappointed, they were angry. I had mixed emotions. I was undecided on what I wanted to do.

A week later I was told we were having a family meeting! It was a Sunday afternoon, my parents and my grandmother were present together with the two of us. I really felt awful knowing that I was not married, and didn't plan having a baby! A sense of confusion swept over me. I was asked to have my say. And all I said was I would have the baby, work and be a good mum to the baby. But I refused to marry, I was not ready to make that decision.

For the elders it was all about us having to get married. I looked at my boyfriend and he seemed very excited, while my face dropped! Even as I said I am not ready my family gave me no option. As far as they were concerned there is a child involved and that is how it will be.

It was so difficult, but my family made all the arrangements for the wedding. My boyfriend was not working and his family could not afford to contribute much. We got married on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 1993. We lived with my parents. I continued working while he was still job hunting. Tiring months went by for me. I worked until I was 37 weeks pregnant. My due date was the 19<sup>th</sup> of November the day I was born. My baby was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, a week before my birthday. A beautiful baby girl! All went well with us.

The baby was two months old and it was really becoming very difficult financially, so I decided to go back to work sooner than I thought I would. The circumstances at home were now not the same. My parents were furious because I was having to do everything by myself, with little help from my husband. We then moved into a two bedroomed house which we rented. I could afford this, due to my promotion at work.

While we were living with my parents there was no communication. I would get home from work, he would be away on soccer training. We had no time to communicate. I thought it would get better if we were on our own but in fact it was the same. He gave up playing soccer. This was strange! I loved soccer and I was proud of being with a man who was an excellent soccer player. I questioned him on why he stopped but he said he was tired and wanted to relax! I accepted his decision.

In July 1994 my husband started his first job. This is when I saw his true colours. There was communication only if I spoke to him. If family came to our home he would go and sit in the bedroom, I would have to do all the entertaining on my own. It was so strange. A new situation that I had to deal with.

As time went on nothing changed. Thank God for my baby girl! If she was not around I would have gone crazy. Every evening after supper I would get her toys out and play with her until it was time for her to go to bed.

I tried speaking to my husband and all he would say is that he is that type of person, he can't help it. I never gave up. I prayed. I did all I could be to be the best wife and mother. I worked hard, took on all the responsibility. But all went unnoticed. Not even a thank you from him. There were nights I was so lonely and really wanted to be with him, but he was cold towards me, himself and everyone around him. I couldn't understand all of this!

My husband became very insecure. He started accusing me of having affairs. Lots of arguments took place. I had had enough.

It was the fifth year of our marriage – he refused to go for counselling. I went for several counselling sessions with our pastor. My husband attended one session and the situation just got worse. His family started getting involved. It was really so hectic, I thought about going through a divorce but whoever I spoke to disagreed. I kept working and taking care of my family.

My husband started burning my clothes – those that he would not allow me to wear. He would take me to work and pick me up from work, but still he accused me of having affairs. He would wake me up in the early hours of the morning and ask me to sit up with him, just so that he could stare at my face. This became scary.

After ten years I conceived my second child, a handsome baby boy! I thought, “Ok let me keep trying to make this marriage work.” But still nothing happened.

My husband would not attend family functions, church or school meetings. I had to do this on my own. Even when it came to disciplining the children he would not do what was needed as the father. The shopping, paying bills, all of this I had to do as well. Working extra hours didn't affect me at all because I was so used to working and not resting.

I would make sure I spent weekends with my kids taking them shopping, to the park, to church, telling them bedtime stories, listening to them! And there were all the funny things they would say. My little boy would ask for an “understanding” egg instead of an “underdone” egg. I am glad I could laugh just listening to them!

When my little girl started school I said to her, “Please don't fight with other kids because that is bad behaviour.” After a



few weeks she came home with a note from her teacher asking me to be at school the next day. There had been a fight in the classroom. My daughter told her friend to slap another girl and her friend did that. When I asked my daughter why she told her friend to slap the other child, she said, "But mummy you said I should not hit anyone so I told my friend to hit her." As much as I wanted to laugh, I had no words! No words at all.

### **Deciding to leave**

It was after fourteen years of marriage that I decided I had enough. I couldn't go through all this abuse anymore. It had got worse. There was now verbal abuse and physical abuse. I made appointments for counselling for my husband and myself but he would not attend.

We had arguments about him giving in to everything my daughter wanted, over his never wanting to leave the house or take the kids out, over his being content to sit in front of the TV with his cup of tea, passing on his responsibilities to me. I thought, "Have I become his mother to him?" I had to laugh and say to myself, "Oh no!"

So I then decided to speak to him about a divorce. He was so hard and so cold. He said I must do whatever I want to do.

The reason for me not divorcing him sooner was that I was told that my daughter would be psychologically affected by a divorce, and that put fear in me. Although I knew I could make it on my own, I wanted to protect my daughter. I wanted the best for her even if it meant my being unhappy.

### **New storms with my daughter**

My daughter was in high school and she understood what was happening. Now that she was a teenager her dad started acting like this caring dad, but in a shrewd, very manipulating way.

Soon my daughter's attitude changed. She started going with

her dad to his family, sleeping over at her dad's sister's place without even telling me, raising her voice at me. I now began to wonder, "Mummy's girl, what is happening?"

I started getting horrible messages from my in-laws, disturbing calls in the early hours of the morning. My daughter became very rebellious. If I would disagree with something she wanted, her dad would agree. He let her have her way. I thought, "Oh no, this couldn't be."

I still did everything that a mom had to do. I never gave up even though the situation was getting out of control.

I went to Nisaa to seek counselling for my daughter but she refused to change. We got into huge arguments, the most terrible ones a mother and daughter could ever have.

But her dad kept on smiling. The police would be called almost three times a week to avoid domestic violence. I felt like I could never do this on my own any longer. I just felt like wanting to die. But looking at my little boy's face every morning made me strong.

It became so bad I was advised to get a protection order against my husband and his family, which I did. His family would come home, they would bring food for him, take his clothes to wash at their place.

I worked extra hours to make sure I could still afford to give my kids even more than they had. At times I felt drained but I still stood strong.

Our son was not noticed by his dad at all, it was as if he never existed for his dad. I showed love to my kids no matter how terrible the situation might be.

One day during this time, my daughter came home from school and told me that her cell phone went missing. I purchased another phone for her. Not even two weeks later, she came

with the same story of a missing phone. I purchased another phone for her. A month later the same story. I then called the school. I was told by the headmaster, “The kids are selling their phones for drugs. Maybe just take her for a drug test.” This was happening to many other students at school. I was shocked and thought, “No, not my daughter!”

Finally I arranged for her to do a drug test, and the results were positive. Again I felt like wanting to die.

I got in touch with her dad and told him what the problem was and he was cool about it. Again I sought professional help, but still she refused to cooperate.

I got to work one Monday morning and a family friend called me to tell me that my 16-year-old daughter was at a club with her cousins – she was drugged and sitting in a corner, and this family friend went to help her.

I couldn’t believe this. I was stressed out! I got home that evening and had a long chat with my daughter, trying to get to the bottom of this. I found to my surprise that she had been introduced to the drug two months ago by her cousins, her dad’s nieces.

Our situation at home became unbearable. Her dad continued to support our daughter in all she wanted to do.

### **Things get even worse**

My daughter now started dating a guy who was twenty-five years old. I objected but her dad agreed. She failed Standard 8 and refused to go back to school. Again I disagreed with this choice she was making, but her dad agreed.

For a moment I thought, “Is my husband going off his head?” I had sleepless nights crying out to God. It seemed I was the monster! Because I was the one that reprimanded and disciplined her.

My daughter left the house and moved in with her boyfriend. I couldn’t for the life of me accept this.

It was scary but I had to be a strong mother. There were nights my daughter would come knocking on our door and I would take her in and make sure she was ok.

There were early mornings I would get a call from her saying she is being beaten by her boyfriend or that she is walking on the roadside. I would get out of bed and look for her, not forgetting I have to work, that my son has school. I would take my son out of his warm bed, find transport and go and find my daughter. This kept going on and on.

There were times I felt threatened by my daughter. One Sunday afternoon I read an article about a teenager who lived two streets away from me – he had been on drugs and had murdered his mum. When I spoke to my daughter about this she said to me, “Yes be careful you might be next,” seeming very serious.

One evening I was assaulted by my husband. He called me names, like “bitch”, “rubbish” and he also punched me on my head. I lost consciousness – I had no idea of what happened next. The darkness lasted for some twenty minutes. I finally came to my senses and found myself in an ambulance on the way to hospital. My daughter was with me. To my knowledge she had called the ambulance and the police. As I looked at my daughter’s face that evening I saw how sad and also angry she was with her dad.

### **The strength to make the right choices**

I now sought help from Nisaa for the abuse from my husband. I had no idea what to expect from counselling, but to my surprise when I got to the office I was offered some tea or coffee. I got this welcome hug from Jabu. She took me through to her office and made sure I was comfortable. It was the caring that made

me know I could trust her. I was given the opportunity to speak about my problem. She sat and listened without interrupting me. I cried! She gave me some tissues and she gave me a hug again. After I had spoken she asked me a few questions, I was able to answer her comfortably about having to live in fear from my daughter, and husband, about being a busy mother with no time to even read the local newspaper.

I was given answers to my question. My question was what could I do about the abuse. The lady who counselled me was called Jabu. She told me that I should not accept abuse from anyone! And also that I am a strong woman, and I have the right to say no to any kind of abuse.

Jabu advised me that there was a shelter of safety available where I could stay together with my eight-year-old son. I immediately felt a sense of relief, and agreed to go to the shelter with my son.

As I walked into the shelter there were a few ladies around, and a few kids as well. The place was so neat and tidy. The smell of chicken stew made my mouth water! I was taken around and then given a bedroom that I would be using.

The warmth at the shelter made me feel secure. I had time to relax, to think about my life, to make decisions and most of all to find myself. It was quiet and peaceful. I stayed at the shelter for two weeks. This was where I found my inner peace and the strength and the courage to go out there and be a strong woman, and to make the right choices.

My husband had to face charges of abuse, and he was given a five year suspended sentence. He decided to move out. He moved in with his sister. I was all alone with my son but I felt a sense of relief.

I finally had a talk with my daughter and really had to draw the line. This time I gave her options. One of which was to go

to rehab. It took her two days to decide. I was at work when I got the call from her saying, "Please book me in. I am ready to make a change." My eyes filled with tears I could hardly speak.

I made arrangements to have her booked in. When I heard what the cost was for her to get the help she needed, I just closed my eyes not knowing where the finance would come from. I then spoke to my boss and he was so kind to help me with R20 000, which I had to pay back to the company but I didn't mind. It was for my daughter! Whom I loved with all my heart.

### **Moving on**

My daughter made it. She is now clean and says she never would go back to what she came from. She fell in love with a man in 2012. And she had a baby boy in May 2013. My husband has moved on, our divorce is in process. My son turns 10 in August, he is doing very well.

And I finally found happiness in 2012 with a man who is a gentleman. I do believe there is light at every dark tunnel. I have never been this happy and blessed as well. I feel like an eagle spreading my wings and flying so high. My dream was to rise on eagle wings.

I must be honest. Like so many abused women I thought all men are the same. But I can say with assurance that I was dead wrong. I met a completely different kind of man who respects himself and everyone around him. A man who is intellegent, brave, responsible, caring, honest, kind, loving and who has a good sense of humour. As each of the five fingers on my hand are different so are men all different, none are the same. I am so happy and I could never ask for anything more than I have.

To the man of my dreams: I appreciate everything you do for me. You are sometimes a funny bunny! But you are my honey! I will always love you!

Here I am today, proud and happy standing out like a rose on a rose bush with many thorns and dry burnt leaves and if someone notices this rose bush with just one rose on it, this would be me – the rose that blossomed and never dried out or got burnt by the rays of the sun! The rose which still has the aroma and is full of petals! If only my wish hadn't come true I would be one of the thorns on that rose bush.

**Poem**

No one can stop you!  
Ony you can make a difference  
In the blink of an eye everything can change  
Never give up  
Women have a right  
There is no space for women abuse  
Remember it is not easy  
But it is worth it  
Thanks to all the women who fought women abuse!  
You made a difference!



# Dress and heal

Judith Mbatha

**I** am the second daughter in my family. First comes my sister, then me and then four younger brothers. My parents were happily married. They were both Christians so were the children. All the children were very close to each other – that’s what our parents taught us.

We were not rich but not poor also. Our parents could afford to put enough food on the table. The problem started when I passed my Grade 12 (which was matric at that time). My parents could not afford to pay my college fees which was so expensive in my country Lesotho – the place where my heart is, because of the big and nice mountains.

## **A special feeling of love and happiness**

After a year I decided to move to Johannesburg to look for a job. I stayed in Soweto with my cousin. After two weeks I found a job as a cashier at a shop that sells fried chicken.

So one day, it was a day they called a stayaway, when nobody was supposed to go to work and we were all at our homes, I was outside the gate when two men approached me saying, “Hello lady.” One left and the remaining one said in Zulu, “Can I talk to you for a moment?” I said yes. He introduced himself and asked my name. I told him, and he was so attractive, smiling at me and saying how beautiful I look. He looked so clean, with his hair, not tall but just medium, also dark in colour. I explained to him that I cannot speak Zulu – then we spoke in English. He told me he likes me and I smiled back at him. I did not say I liked him back. But I think he could see I liked him also. So we promised to see each other the next day.

Early the next morning he fetched me from my house. He was staying just across the street with his family. He walked me to my work and then went to the station to catch a train to go to his work.

We saw each other whenever we had a chance. If I was not

working on a Sunday he would take me to his church with his clean suit and smelling so nice with that aftershave. He was a Christian, but his church was so different from mine. But I enjoyed it so much. On weekdays when I was not working he used to take me to the movies or out shopping.

After two months he asked me to move in with him. I agreed and things were very good and promising in the way that he showed much love by always telling me that he loves me, that he will never hurt or leave me. He promised me that one day he will marry me and we will have kids together. I felt the same and I felt safe with him. Maybe, because he was a good Christian who was always saying and doing good things for his family and for me.

I trusted him with my life. He introduced me to all his family and everything was fine. He told me that he drinks beer – not every time – only on special occasions.

Many good things happened. He used to spoil me by buying me gifts and taking me out for lunch. When I was hurt I could see that he feels the same. On holidays we even visited his father's place in KwaZulu-Natal in the town called Vryheid where he grew up. I met his extended family, even his grandmother who raised him. They all liked me and made me feel so special.

After three years staying together, the first man I made love to, asked me to marry him. I told him that I have to ask for permission from my mother first because my father passed away a year before he proposed to me. In my culture I had to ask for permission from my parents. My mother said yes and we got married at the church.

It was a wonderful day – I bought myself a new blue and white dress and it was hot so I bought myself a big straw hat – it was white also. We went to church, two couples and the priest to the ceremony and we signed our marriage certificate. From that

day I changed my surname and used his. After the wedding ceremony he took me to a special place to have lunch.

After one month, I got pregnant with my first kid. He was more excited and very happy because he wanted to have kids with me. I was always telling him that I was not ready for kids and I was using pills to prevent pregnancy. But I felt so special and very happy when I found that that I was pregnant.

After nine months, I gave birth to a baby girl who was so adorable and beautiful. Her father named her Nokuthula, which means “having peace”. He was a good father to his daughter.

Now, I really felt loved as he will spend all his time with us when he was not working. I felt so blessed because my baby girl was everything to me, she brought more peace like her name was saying. The whole family loved her, mine and his.

After one year and six months, I decided to visit my family in Lesotho so that they can see my daughter. When I arrived my mother was so happy and my sister with her kids, my brothers, everybody was so happy. Then my mother gave my daughter another name. She called her Lemohang, that's a Sesotho name meaning “Love of God”. After one month I had to go back to Soweto.

### **Problems start and get worse**

I was not working anymore, so my husband was the only one who was working at the big shop in town. I don't know whether it was the stress of working alone or the company of bad friends – my husband started drinking again. He would come home late, and he was wasting money. I tried to talk to him about his behaviour but that did not help.

When our daughter was five years old, my husband was retrenched from the company he was working at. Now the drinking got worse. He was always going out with friends,

smoking dagga with friends. He would come home late, sometimes he never came home.

We could not afford to pay rent anymore, and we had to move out to stay with his uncle. I started to feel lost, because my husband was always saying things to me like I am useless, I cannot even find a job to help him.

I felt so useless I could not find a job even though I had a South African identity document. He found another job which was paying a lot of money and he tried to change but not for long.

My daughter was six years old when I fell pregnant again. I was only three months pregnant and we had moved out of his uncle's place, when one night he was very drunk and started swearing and calling me names while I was trying to sleep. He chased me out of the room saying he does not love me anymore. I was wearing only a short nightdress. I asked his younger brother who was staying in the same yard to help me.

This behaviour of his continued over the next months and at times we called in the church elders to help solve our problems.

After nine months I gave birth to a wonderful and beautiful baby boy. His father was so happy. He called him Sifiso after his uncle whom he loves very much. When my son was six months I took him to visit my mother in Lesotho. We went there with my seven-year-old daughter for two weeks.

After we came back from Lesotho things changed. I found that he made new friends, he even had a new girlfriend. I know that because he would tell me that he knows better women out there who he can sleep with whenever he wants, so he does not need me anymore. He said I must go back to Lesotho and leave his kids with him.

I told my leader at the church to talk to him and suggested he go for counselling. He tried but did not understand about

counselling. He said the people who are giving him counselling favour me.

He started beating me up. The first time I thought I was dying. He used to break everything in the house – he would even swear at the kids, especially at my daughter.

It was a Saturday afternoon in 2010. He was out drinking as he used to do. He came late in the house at about 11pm. He found me sleeping and my daughter was still watching TV in the lounge. He started swearing at my daughter saying she takes time to open the door and we did not cook supper that day. When he arrived at our bedroom he wanted to sleep with me. I refused then he started beating me up in the face till I got a blue eye. He beat me with his fists.

### **Realising there can be life without abuse**

Soon after that, I was attending a session at the clinic as I was about to take treatment for depression. My doctor said something to me that made me realise that there is life out there without an abusive relationship.

I remember that day. It was a Monday morning in December 2010 at the Chiawelo clinic in Soweto. I was wearing jeans, a t-shirt and takkies with sunglasses to hide my blue eyes.

My doctor was an Indian lady, who was very nice and polite to me. She was ready for me sitting in her office. She was also wearing black jeans, a black t-shirt and flat shoes. She greeted me nicely, calling my name. I sat in the chair and looked at her. I took off my sunglasses and she looked at my face with my left eye blue inside and out, and she was so shocked. She almost cried. But I cried first and she started comforting me. There was no need to ask me how I felt. She could see in my face that I was not well.

She stood up and gave me a big hug calling my name and

asking, “Did your husband do this to you?” I replied yes. She said to me, “This is enough.” She asked me if I still wanted to stay with my husband. I said no. My voice was shaking. I was crying and confused. I was afraid to go back to my husband. I told her I don’t have any choice because I am not working and I have no family close by who can take me and my kids. She promised me she will make a plan for me.

We talked about my family in Lesotho – if they can help me to find a small room to rent and live with my kids. We also discussed whether my church leaders could help me financially.

I started by applying for a protection order and warrant of arrest. I asked my family in Lesotho and they promised to help with money to pay the rent and to buy food for my kids. My church members and leaders also helped me a lot. I found a room and moved with my two kids. I continued to go to school to do my ancilliary nursing.

I was able to use the protection order in May 2011. We were staying at our house and he beat up my daughter so badly that I could not take it any more. So I called the police and I opened the case and he was arrested.

He went to jail for one week. His family paid bail and when he was released he stayed at his family’s house. I forgave him. After a month he moved back to his house and after only two weeks he started the abuse, blaming me and the kids as the ones that made him go to jail.

### **Back into abuse and needing shelter**

After staying in our room for nine months, in September 2011 me and my kids decided to go back to try again with my husband, hoping he would change the drinking, swearing and beating. But it stopped for just two months.

This time he tore up the protection order, and the warrant of

arrest that I got in 2010, so that I could not call the police as I always used to do.

My doctor introduced me to an organisation called Nisaa. In November 2012 my children and I moved to the Nisaa shelter and we stayed there for three months.

My first day at the shelter was on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2012. My daughter had just finished writing her matric final exams and my son had finished his Grade 5 final exams. We told my husband that we are visiting my family in Lesotho. So he had no idea that we are going to stay at the shelter. I had to arrange for transport to take us to the shelter. A lady who works with the community and her husband who is a pastor came with their private car to take us to Nisaa.

When we arrived at the Nisaa office it was early in the morning. We sat at reception and the lady who brought us introduced us to the social worker. We stayed for the paper work and she left with her husband back to Soweto.

The social worker, Jill, took me to her office to fill out forms. My children were still in the reception. My eighteen-year-old daughter was crying, my eleven-year-old son was trying to be strong. After I filled in the forms they said we qualify to stay at the Shelter.

We were given the rules of the shelter and taken to the shelter. The social worker introduced us to the house mother who was very happy to see us. We entered that big house on a Thursday, when clients at the shelter get their groceries. Me and my daughter were given toiletries, new face-cloths – everything that a lady uses – even a big vaseline for my son.

A young lady by the name of Jade welcomed us and was asked by the social worker to show us everything because they had to go back to the office. Jade has three kids, one girl and two boys who were staying with her at the shelter. She was so nice to us



and made us feel at home, showing us our room, the kitchen, bathrooms, even the playroom for my son outside where the kids can play.

It was so nice and clean. There was a lounge with a TV which is watched by everybody. The kitchen which is also used by the clients and the house mother. Two toilets, two showers and one big bathroom. Each of the clients had her own bedroom which she shared with her kids. It was so nice to finally have a peaceful place and for me this was the first night I slept like a kid. No noise, only peace at last.

There were only two other ladies in the shelter, Jade and another lady with two kids. So I joined them with my kids. Jade became a big part of my life. She calls me mother and she is so lovely and treats me with respect and always comes to me whenever she feels depressed.

I stayed in the shelter for three months. We were given free groceries, free toiletries, and counselling support from a social worker. We were given help with finding a job, and help with applying for a grant for my son.

When school opened we had to go to the office to ask for transport money. They could help me with my son's transport. For my daughter who had passed matric and was to go to college, I had to speak to my husband. And that is what made me meet my husband again. Things did not go well because he was always drinking and he gave us no money to pay for my daughter's school fees.

### **Struggling to live a life without abuse**

After three months at Nisaa's shelter I found a small room and I stayed there for only two weeks with my daughter. My son wanted to go back home to his father, and so he went to stay with his father.

While my daughter and I tried to settle into our room my husband found out where we were and he tried to fight me to come back and stay with him. But I was not ready to go back.

My doctor wrote another letter for me to go in another shelter, Ikhaya Le Themba. The Nisaa shelter was not able to take me as I had already spent three months at the shelter.

I moved to the new shelter with my daughter. The shelter does not allow boys over the age of 11 so my son stayed with his father in Soweto.

Whenever I visit my son my husband is there – he will leave his job to come home to see me expecting me to sleep with him. He shouts at me and makes me feel that I am a bad mother to my son. He complains that I am not spending enough time with him and my son, making me look bad to my son, his family and even the neighbours.

He makes all this noise saying me and my daughter have to move back in the house. He does not want me to take my clothes that are remaining in the house. I decided not to go to the house anymore. I decided to find another place to meet my son in peace.

He is now accusing me of having another man. "Let's divorce, it's been too long since we separated. Have a good life with your new husband." These are the words he sent me through an SMS. He tells me that I have to give my son money because I have a rich new husband.

We are still married and the abuse is not stopping. He is not even paying maintenance for my daughter. That's the kind of life I am living now.

### **Where I find support**

Emotionally, I am getting support from my social worker and the house mothers in the shelter. Also there are other older

women who are always supporting me, showing me that I am not alone.

Spiritually, I am getting support from my church leaders, even their wives are giving me support and good advice. From my family in Lesotho – my sister and my three brothers are helping financially. Every month they send me money through my bank account.

I have been living on my own for seven months now without my husband's financial support and I'm a survivor. I am not working and I am looking for a job as a careworker. For my depression I am getting a government disability grant and my son's grant. At the shelter I am doing computer courses for free.

I call myself a survivor. ■



# Flowing with the river

Veena Naidoo

*Flowing with the river*

**T**he good place that I find myself in now. Wow! Finding that life has so much to offer. I conquered a fear! I went out dancing this Saturday. I only realised now that I did not need a partner to go to a Dinner Dance. I could just lose myself in the music. What a discovery! Where was my head these past years? To think that I was a lesser person without him in my life.

He had been my be all and end all for twenty-six years. Now my time had come. I realised it was time to start living again and not just existing, as I had been for these last nine years.

## **Knight in shining armour**

My parents had just gotten divorced that year, after a three year separation, when I was 20 years old. My father, already living with his new family was trying to keep his hold over my two younger siblings and I. This was not working. We were not interested in what he had to say or the rules he made for us, since he had abandoned us for his new family. The one vow I made to myself then, was that I would marry forever. No divorce for me, ever. Not an option.

That very year, my knight in shining armour came along and swept me off my feet. We were so in love, but my father was not happy. He wanted me to leave this man I loved, but I refused. I moved out of my parents' home and found a place of my own. Our love just grew. We decided to buy a house and move in together, knowing we were totally suitable for each other, not needing the marriage certificate for the commitment we made to each other.

What a blissful time! We travelled endlessly, worked tirelessly and enjoyed being together. In 1990 we married. My daughter was born six months later, and my son eight years later – in 1998. My husband's scrap yard business thrived initially, but he lost interest in the business, and over the years the

business failed and eventually closed down. I became the main breadwinner.

We were still totally in love – until I found that message in 2004. And even then, we still could not keep our hands off each other.

### **Nine years ago: The message**

Boxing day, 2004. I had been busy preparing roasts and salads all morning for a celebratory lunch. My feet were killing me and I went to put my feet up for five minutes. Ting ta ta ting. I looked around in confusion. My husband never ever left his phone lying around. This was a message that came through. Should I or shouldn't I? My hunch was that I should look at his message, to confirm whether my suspicions were correct.

These past months he had been coming home at odd hours from the “casino”, some days going to the “casino” without money. I owed it to myself to check, as by now I was almost certain.

Lo and behold, it was a complex love message: “I want to take you up on your offer of taking me away to a far off place. Don't you know of any hit men out there to get rid of all these bad people around me? Hope you had a better Christmas than I did.” This was his cousin's message with her name.

The total and utter devastation I felt that day was the beginning of a nine year long fight to keep this marriage going.

He vehemently denied the affair between him and his first cousin (their fathers are brothers). He told the family that I needed help, that I am mentally disturbed. He was so convincing that the family began to believe him. They believed him based on the fact that they were first cousins (considered in our tradition brother and sister and not allowed to have a sexual relationship). They believed I must surely be mad.

The heartbreak continued. I worked harder and harder, some days not even wanting to come home. Due to the nature of my work, I would return home late some evenings after delivering trucks to different parts of the country. I relied on my mum who lived with us to take care of our children.

He cleverly took the focus off himself by telling my family and his, the community, the world, that I was having affairs.

Lies! Lies! And more lies!! Because, in spite of everything, I loved him and nobody else, I never even looked at another.

The arguments and the fighting got worse. Once he choked me, but I got away. Another time I was on the floor and he was tramping me into the ground. Eventually the physical and mental abuse got so bad that I ended up leaving for the Nisaa shelter. The strange part is that my children stood firm with him. He always told them, “Mummy does not care about this family.”

### **The Nisaa shelter**

At the Nisaa Shelter, I was given space and time to reflect on the consequences of leaving my home. This was the first time I had done so since setting up home with him twenty-four years ago.

One evening, coming back to the shelter from work, I sat in the green TV lounge, a calm, serene space with lime green couches, green potted plants, the smell of potpourri furniture polish. The bright light streaming in lent support to my dark and gloomy thoughts. This was the perfect space to reflect on my crumbling walls. I was under no illusion that my marriage walls, built on such a strong loving foundation, over twenty-four years, were crumbling all around me. Everywhere I turned bricks and mortar were falling and I was lost in the dust, all the while reaching out, trying to reclaim what once was.

I sat there thinking a myriad thoughts, which spiraled out of control. Was this the life I could live? The simple life without frills? After working hard all my life, building our family to a point where we were short of nothing materially, where we had a beautiful three bedroom home with all the comforts. Could I give all of that up and walk away with nothing, if I decided to walk? My savings were all used up. I had no money in the bank, no house or property in my name. I would have to leave, rent a house or flat and live with bare necessities.

“Hey, why do you look so gloomy?” Shabnam, my friend from the shelter asked, with a flash of concern. “I am worried, how am I going to fend for myself or my kids, if I have to leave home! Everything I own is in his name and we are married by antenuptial contract without accrual.”

Shabnam, with her bright, white, smile on a chocolate porcelain face said, “You are a survivor, Veena. You will find a way.” Here was a woman, whose circumstances were worse than mine and she was giving me the courage to do what I had to do.

What I had to do was leave this poisonous relationship which was eroding my self-worth and confidence so that I could not leave a man who was emotionally, physically, verbally and financially abusing me.

My children believed this cunning person, who so cleverly hid all that he did to me. Like everyone else they too did not believe that he was having this affair with his cousin.

“Veena if you could come to Nisaa, you can move out of your house. It’s a house now, no longer a loving home. You will find the courage to do that. I know you will.”

I looked at her with shock. “Shabnam,” I said, “you have so much confidence in me. Thank you for the encouragement.”

That wise young lady set things in motion that day. It took

months of planning, but I worked towards leaving the abusive situation and my once-loving home behind to begin life anew.

### **The beginning of the end**

A warm sunny day, October 2009, at the family court in Johannesburg. The judge asked two questions and granted the divorce with joint custody of my eleven-year-old son. Oh my word! Was this it? I was stunned. So clinical. Almost as if those twenty-four years were just wiped out in a flash!

He did not come to court, had even refused to speak about it since the sheriff had served the summons. Shoulders sagging, I made my way home, to inform the family that “it” has gone through. That we now don’t exist as a whole family. He was unconcerned about the divorce, only saying that I was to blame for the break-up of our family.

Soon the excitement of the holidays was upon us. Deepavali first and before you knew it, Christmas. Even though we were divorced, I continued staying in my home, still sharing the same bed with him. Then one December morning he woke and said, “Please let’s go see if we can still make this relationship work. Let’s go to the Kruger National Park. Just us, you, me and the kids.”

I was elated. My heart sang. I thought that is the best thing I have heard in a very long time. I could only think about the good times and the good life that we had shared six years ago, prior to my finding out about his affair.

(Sometimes I marvel at myself! Did I stay there knowing what I knew for so many years and just carried on with life as normal? How dumb!)

“Yes, I’d love to go,” I heard myself say. The long, lazy days in Hazyview were magical. Driving through the Kruger Park, watching the bats and monkeys, sightseeing the Mac Mac Falls,

Bourke's Luck Potholes, the fairies and gnomes in the Sudwala Caves, the Tyrannosaurus and Pterodactyls outside the caves. Laughter and fun in the sun, playing under the waterfalls. Camp fire braais in the evenings, with karaoke singing sounding like the crickets in the bush. Oh, what a blissful two weeks of December.

**Soon January came and I started work again.**

One Friday evening I was at our house on the Vaal River, waiting for my daughter and her father, to join my son and I. We expected them late as they had attended a Nalangu, (pre-wedding function) for his nephew. He had called around 11pm to say that they would see us in an hour and a half.

I expected he would call when he was nearby. I was awoken by the shrill tinkle of the phone, "I'm going to open for you," I said in my confused, sleepy state. Looking at the clock, I saw it was four o'clock in the morning. "No, no," he said, "we are still here. I had to rush this child to hospital because she got very sick in the car, I'm coming to fetch you now." "What? What happened? Is it serious?" Alarm bells were going off in my head.

That was the start of ten long months of illness for my daughter. For me months of worry about her condition, and months of financial worry. We had no medical aid, and with him not working and not contributing, I had to find the cash to pay the doctors' bills.

One fateful morning, at the end of October things came to a head. My daughter wanted to study again. She had enquired about a Microsoft specialist course. My son's school fees were also due for payment. I suggested to my ex-husband, (as I said, we were divorced, but still staying together) that he pay my son's fees of R1 500, and I would pay the R5 500 for my daughter's fees. I thought he would readily agree. But was I mistaken?

He started shouting and screaming, "If you want her to study, you just pay for it. And you can't do something for her and do nothing for him. You just pay everything."

I was shocked. Were these only my children? Was I the only person responsible for their growth and development? He was using my love for them against me. Abusing my love, was more like it.

Now I was fed up, my anger at boiling point, "Why should I pay for both of them? Why can't you take some of the responsibility off me? I am going to call your mum and tell her what you are doing," I screamed while grabbing the phone off the bedside table. I began dialing and that was the biggest mistake. I felt a blow from his fist on my right temple. With his other hand he tried to get the phone away from me. All the while he reigned blows to my head, back and shoulders as I protected my face.

I screamed for help from the children who were in the next room and as quick as they had started, the blows stopped. "I don't know what she is screaming and performing for," this monster said to my children as they rushed into the room.

"He hit me again," I sobbed uncontrollably. "She is lying," he said, "I was trying to get the phone away." The children lost interest and left the room. This was just another fight for them.

I sobbed uncontrollably for the next half hour, with hopelessness and despair overtaking me and going into depths of my body, mind and soul. I knew I had to go to work, and get my son ready for school. But my body felt like jelly. I could not move. I sat on the bed with my head in my hands.

I vaguely heard him, (the monster, my lover, my love for twenty-four years), getting my son ready for school, telling him, "Your mother doesn't care whether you go to school or not."

The truth was that I was at a point where I cared about nothing except how I was going to extricate myself out of this twenty-four year old relationship. One which I was clinging onto for the sake of being with the one I love. This was getting out of hand. He was in love with another. I had to make a decision.

I jumped up, rushed into the shower, because it dawned on me that I needed a family meeting with his family to tell them about the abuse.

I called his elder brother, Jay, and told him that I wanted to speak to him and I was on my way. I hoped Jay would talk some sense into this man whom I loved dearly, but who was acting like a real barbarian. As I pleaded with Jay to talk to his brother, his eyes took on a glassy look, showing his lack of interest in the events of this morning. The little hope that I had, faded away. Yet he said he would speak to his brother, "I will call you just now Veena and tell you what he said." I warned him that if his brother was not going to apologise to me, I would have to do what was now necessary.

I waited for the phone call, but none came. I then went to the Vereeniging court, taking my first step in a long hard process, to apply for the protection order. I then took the application to my local police station. I opened up a case of abuse. The police went home with me to serve the protection order.

As we got close to the house, we realised that my husband was leaving in his friend's car. I stopped the police and pointed him out to them. They arrested him immediately and took him to the holding cells at the local police station. The police asked me to accompany them to the police station so that they could serve the protection order on him.

I was facing him for the first time, since he had beaten me twelve hours before. Unsure of myself, at that moment I could not help thinking, "How could I have this man, whom I love so

much, locked up in this dreary prison cell, with its dirty floor and thin threadbare grey blankets?"

"I will now read this protection order out to you Mr. Naidoo," the policeman's words broke into my reverie. When the policeman was done, my ex-husband looked at me with pure hatred in his eyes and said, "B\*\*ch, you will f\*\*k out of my house before I get out of here or else you are going to see." "Don't you dare threaten her, Mr. Naidoo," the policeman shouted at him, for his audacity.

"I will not get out of the house as we bought this house together twenty-two years ago and I have been supporting and maintaining it for the last few years," I said. "Well the bond is in my name and there is nothing you or anybody, can do about it," he pointed out nastily.

At this point I knew that he was right. Our divorce had gone through with no settlement granted. What recourse did I have? I had no leg to stand on. Not even one inch. I saw our lives flashing by in front of me. This once ecstatically happy family, which others looked up to, was now slowly becoming history. I knew I had to leave. How I was going to do this, was beyond me, but I had to take my children and leave.

### **Time to move**

That evening I called my brother and we went flat hunting. We found a flat – I had to pay a R3 000 deposit. I could move in the following Friday. As much as I hated the thought, in my heart I knew it was time. Time to move. Scared of the inevitable changes, the unknown even scarier.

The big question now was, "Were the children coming with me?" I pondered this question, knowing that I had wiped away the chances of them coming with me, since I had their father locked up. This was a father who was a master at manipulating them.

The next evening, heart in mouth, looking at their angry, insolent, expressions, I asked them anyway. “I found a place in Honey Hills and I would like the two of you to move with me. I found a school for. ....” I never got to complete my sentence.

“What!” they said in unison. “If you want to move, then you move,” said my son in his half man, half boy voice, while they both shook their heads. “You break up our family, and now you are asking us to leave our friends and our father? It’s never going to happen.”

“You had my father locked up,” screamed my daughter, “and you expect us to go with you? We have our own house. Why must we move with you anywhere and go stay in someone else’s house?”

My world came tumbling down and I felt defeated. Could I take them unwillingly? But I knew that they would just run away and come back here. How was I going to leave my children? What would everyone say? I didn’t know what to do, except I knew that I couldn’t stay any longer with this monster, my lover, my darling, my love.

The next night when I came home from work I started packing. He had been released from police custody and the court case was coming up the following week. For the next two weeks, we steered clear of each other until I moved to my new flat, only taking my mum’s bed, my clothing and some oddments of sentimental value. I had decided to leave all of the furniture, crockery, cutlery, curtains and bedding which had been mostly purchased by me.

### **Falling apart, picking up the pieces, mending fences and building bridges.**

The move to Honey Hills to a large, spacious, bright, sunny, flat, was not as great as I thought it would be. I pined for my life, my children and ex-husband at home.

I bought a fridge and washing machine. There were cupboards in the house, but I had to buy everything else over a period of eight months. Because my car was giving trouble, I saw the children only once a week, less often than planned.

These were bleak, dreary days, with me falling into this black hole. I fell completely and totally apart. I would cry endlessly. I cried in the car, at work, and any part of the day that I wasn’t busy.

My shock came after about eight months, when I went to visit my son one day and he refused to come to the car, saying he didn’t want to see me. My darling twelve-year-old had lost his beautiful smile, he looked haggard. Seeing him looking like that, I made up my mind to move back to my hometown of Lenasia South.

I had by now emerged from my black hole and was beginning to blossom once more. I found a place and moved two weeks later. My son moved in with me, but my daughter stayed with her father until she also joined us about a month later. My mum, who had left the previous year to look after her dying sister, moved in with us two months later and this was to be our family now.

It took lots of chats, quarrels and endless days of trying to resolve issues, to regain my children’s confidence and trust in me again. They had felt abandoned, they said, in spite of my asking them to come with me. It was hard for them during the time I was away as they hardly had any food except what I would bring for them and what their father’s girlfriend would provide for them.

I don’t know if they will ever forgive me for not trying with their father one last time. What I do know is that my children and I are in a better place now, than two years ago. I am trying to make them believe in me again and to think of me as a



lioness, whose only concern is her cubs. It is a huge challenge because every now and again, the ugly distrust rears its monstrous head.

I have become strong again and find that I can still be a part of society. Society has not rejected me. I sit on many community organisations and through helping others, I have been healing.

My pet project is a Youth Leadership Development Programme, addressing social issues and giving leadership skills to youth aged six to thirty six. I have found my inner strength and have come through my tunnel of challenges.

My mum, children and I are moving to a new home. My ex-husband is moving on with his life.

The light has welcomed me as a new day dawns. I am in the flowing river which will still take me through many more waterfalls and rapids, before reaching my Garden of Eden. ■

### **Last night**

Last night I heard the owl hoot in the boughs of the old oak tree  
Last night the crickets chirped for all to hear and see  
Last night my mind was opened by a book I read  
Last night I heard the wind blow the oak leaves to shreds  
Last night, a night with a Silver Orange moon  
Was sent for me, to take away my doom and gloom.



# Strong and proud – leaving sorrow behind

Sedibe

*Strong and proud – leaving sorrow behind*

**I met a guy in 1999 at church. We fell in love – it was nice,** exciting, sweet and romantic. And he was a charmer. We loved each other. We called each other at sunset every day. It was dreamlike.

I was in love with the guy. He was an original person, working as a gardener, earning small money. But we planned to get married with that small money, because of that love. We planned that our parents should meet and get to know each other, and according to tradition he paid lobola. We were happy in our one small room. Of my two children from my previous marriage, my son lived with us and my daughter stayed at her father's place.

After we made a decision to build a house, the guy started to change. He complained about my body. He said I am old and I am useless, that I must go and find a job. He now came home every Friday with shortage of money, with no food. He did not buy clothes or cosmetics for me because according to him I was a useless woman, shapeless. I realised that the guy was cheating with some other lady in our church.

One day I went shopping. When I came back home I opened the wardrobe and found some of his clothes were missing. I saw that some linen, blankets, cutlery and dishes were also missing. It seemed he had taken some of our things and some of his clothes. I was amazed as he had left that morning as usual to go to work, not saying anything. When he did not return home that night I started to get worried.

The following day I decided to go to his workplace. I found him busy working. He said to me he can't talk with me, I must not disturb him on the job, and I must not worry about him, I must go home and he will come. A week later he came home. But he did not sleep at home every day. He would stay over one day and I would next see him two days later. Another week went by.

When I asked him why he was not sleeping at home every day he told me he has a new lady who is younger. I asked him if there is anything wrong with me or if I am not doing things right for him. I told him that I will do whatever he says to change.

He told me I am not loving his family, that I must not ask him about his salary, that in his culture women do not ask where is the money. I must submit even if he is coming home without a salary.

### **Trying to find a solution**

I had stayed a long time – four years – in that abusive marriage, where I had been abused emotionally and spiritually. I now came to the decision to report the guy. I told myself maybe after reporting this matter there will be a solution, that the problem will be solved when they call both of us.

I spoke to my mother-in-law but she took her son's side. I felt useless, like I was nothing. I felt lost and wanted to commit suicide because the guy I love did not love me anymore. I was stressed, emotional, losing weight and depressed.

In the end I met with a lady at church. She lived in the next street. I talked with her about my problem. She comforted me. She introduced me to Nisaa. I started to join the sessions for counselling. But things were not easy for me. I realised at the second counselling session that there is something in my mind that needs to come out. After some time I felt released. I could see that there is hope in this life. I realised I am beautiful, and strong.

### **Living a free life – strong and proud**

My husband left me in February 2003. I got divorced in 2004. I was able to stand in the magistrates court without fear.

Now I am happy. I encourage all women not to accept

emotional abuse where you get no love, where you are made to feel depressed, to feel useless and like you are nothing.

In my new life I am living a free life with my children, a boy of 17, and a girl of 25. My daughter came to live with me after I settled the divorce.

Today my life is very easy and calm. I do it all myself without any fear. I am strong and proud. I enjoy being a single mother.

What has helped me to live a brighter future is that I started to learn more, and to get skills. I was a person who did not have any qualification. I started to volunteer in the Community Policing Forum as a patroller. I made myself busy and this gave me more strength and the opportunity to look forward. I got more information as I attended some of the police services programmes about fighting crime. I became a reservist policewoman and I got trained for 12 months as a reservist constable.

I got training about Batho Pele principles for the community. I learnt more about domestic violence, sexual harassment, women abuse, emotional abuse and all those characteristics of abuse. I attended other training courses about firearms and when I finished the SAPS training courses, as an experienced member of the Community Policing Forum, I was able to wear a police uniform.

When Nisaa organised training for the police I made myself available to attend those sessions. I learnt about counselling. When we finished the Nisaa training we got certificates.

I got my driver's license, and award certificates for performance at SAPS – for working so hard and for treating the community nicely, for helping the community with that respect to solve problems. I was promoted to the rank of police reservist sergeant. I received another medal for 10 years loyalty long service.

As I got more knowledge and experience my life got more easy. I found myself having more strength. I managed to pay my children's school fees, buy clothes and groceries, and to buy a house. I joined a women's group. I go to church. And I enjoy myself with my kids, When I am off duty I like shopping, moving around in the shopping complex.

I want to reach goals such as buying myself a house in the suburbs and driving a nice car. I want to see my kids finished at school and university. I want to help my mother and brothers and even the community. I would like to help women who do not have skills.

I hope other women can learn from my experience of how I gave myself hope and with a brave heart appreciated myself when no one appreciated me.

Women should not accept abuse. Every woman deserves respect and dignity. Women need to be loved and accepted. Women need to be listened to and should not live in threatening conditions. ■



# Building a brighter future

## Mapule

**M**y name is Mapule. I am black and tall. I know that I am a beautiful woman. Growing up in Soweto was tough. My parents were struggling. My mother made sure that we didn't sleep on an empty stomach. I helped my mom to clean sheep's heads and feet to bring in some money. I don't regret this because today I am a really strong woman. I can stand up by myself. My mother taught me a lot.

### **Falling in love**

When I met my hubby I was still at school, doing Standard nine. He was really a loving person. He really loved me. I loved him too. To tell the truth he was my first boyfriend.

The first time we met I was going to Kliptown on the train to buy sheep's heads and feet. Most days when I came back from Kliptown I would find him waiting for me at the Orlando station. He would carry my parcels and we would talk.

He would tell me he loves me. I also had strong feelings for him but I was too scared to tell him how I felt. I really fell in love with the guy. I couldn't sleep when I thought about him at night. I was crazy about him.

He made friends with my uncle, and he would come home and watch TV with my uncle. After watching TV we would meet at the corner and talk. On Saturdays we would go to the cinema to watch a movie.

Our love grew to be very strong. He treated me like I was really a queen. I felt really in love. But I was hiding it. I did not want even my mom to find out that I had a boyfriend.

I was nineteen years old. You know love will drive you crazy if you are in love. Sometimes I would just duck and not sleep at home. I will be with my boyfriend.

One morning I returned home and it was really a nightmare. My mom was really angry because I had to help her with the

chores at home that morning. I was scared to go inside the house so I just went to the toilet. My mom, she just poured a 25 litre bucket of water on me. I screamed. She started swearing at me. I was very scared, but because love is love, if you are in love you become blind.

Unfortunately I fell pregnant. Imagine making love for the first time and falling pregnant! I didn't even know I was pregnant. I was doing Standard 10. Imagine, I had to drop out of school.

### **From school girl to wife and mother**

My mum was sitting with my grandmother and I told my granny I had a dream. I saw a big snake lying under the bed. My granny said, "That snake is the baby in your tummy!"

Shoo! I couldn't believe this. I started shaking. I did not know what to do. Then I phoned my boyfriend and told him I was pregnant. He said to me, "Please don't panic, we will speak when I arrive at your home."

He told me to wait for him at the station and he will take me to the doctor. I went to the station at around 6pm and waited for him. We went to the doctor. There were butterflies in my stomach. I felt so embarrassed falling pregnant while still at school. We waited in the queue until the doctor called me. He examined me and said, "You are two months pregnant, my girl." I just burst into tears.

I started panicking that I have disappointed my mom, my sisters and also myself. I couldn't believe it because the first time we made love I did not even enjoy it. We were fighting. My boyfriend comforted me, he told me not to worry, everything is going to be ok.

I dropped out of school. My family took care of me. In our culture if a girl is pregnant they will take you to your boyfriend's house early in the morning to tell them that you are

pregnant. They will call the guy and ask him if he agrees that he is the father of the child.

So he sent a letter home and his family said that they are going to visit my elders, and he is going to pay lobola. My mom was so excited. I was excited that I was going to get married. They came as promised to pay lobola. It was the best day of my life. I could not believe it was happening to me. My uncles were proud of me and so happy.

I gave birth to a baby girl. Fourteen hours in labour was so traumatic. I thought I was going to die. The nurses told me, "If you don't push the baby is going to be tired and die, then what will you say to the father?"

Really it was a traumatic experience. They used steel to make me open up my legs. A doctor put his knee on my stomach. Finally, I gave birth to a baby girl. Our families were very happy. I went home scared and excited, not knowing how to raise a child, and asking all those questions like, "Am I going to be a good mother?"

My granny was there for me. She took care of me, she brought soft porridge for me. I was really happy.

Then came the time I had to go and live with my mother-in-law. My husband was living at the time with his mother, stepfather and younger sister. Me and my hubby now stayed in the garage, while they lived in the main house.

My mother-in-law was a loving person, she welcomed me with warm hands. She treated me like a daughter. My husband's younger sister did not treat me okay. She watched every step I took and every move I made. She watched what I did or what I ate – like a hawk.

When I cleaned the house she would bring her friends to the house, make tea, and leave dishes lying around. She knew I

would clean the mess. I would not say a word, but my hubby would notice that I am not happy. He would ask, “What’s the matter?” And I would not say a word because I did not want to cause friction.

The house was very big, very nice. But the way the younger sister treated me my hubby decided we needed a place of our own.

### **Happiness in our own home**

We found a stand in Orange Farm. It was a nice place. We built a shack and after a year and six months we went to stay at our place.

I was glad but worried at the same time about starting a life at Orange Farm. When it was hot it was like being in the desert. It was very, very hot. I don’t want to talk about the rain, it was scary when it rained, and the lightning was frightening. But if you don’t have a choice there is nothing you can do.

Imagine staying at Orange Farm, both of us unemployed. But both of us were hard workers. I would wash dishes for people in order to bring food on the table. My hubby was a jack-of-all-trades. He knew how to fix TVs and do electrical work for people. So it was not that bad. All that mattered is that we were okay.

He was a loving husband. We always did things together. If I swept the yard he would come with a spade to help me. When he was cutting grass I would be there also to help him.

People were always talking about us. They would say that I gave him korobela (love potion). We were really in love. I loved him with all my heart and also he loved me with all his heart. We were like a team, a loving couple. When we were on the street we were like Romeo and Juliet.

I don’t want to talk about lovemaking! It was like a small

heaven. I really enjoyed having sex with him. Our sex life was like a wow. You know I liked to be romantic sometimes. I would just call him if he is busy outside doing the chores. I would call him to the bedroom and we would make love. It was very special the way he touched me, the way he kissed me. I would never think of anything but him.

My life was like a fairytale. My hubby would never forget my birthday. He was always special to me, he was my everything.

Then it happened that he got a job. He started to work and I was a housewife. I fell pregnant with our second born. We were very happy that our family is increasing. He made sure that we had everything we needed. When our second daughter was three years old, I was lucky to get a job. It did not pay much but it was better than nothing.

The job I got was selling scratch tickets from a kiosk at Checkers. I earned commission – if I sold 200 tickets I got R40. My earnings depended on how many tickets I sold per day. I was hard working. I would sell four or five packets and I would make R160 a day. It was a lot at that time.

### **Things start to change**

Then my husband started to change – because I was also working. When he was supposed to give me money he would come with stories that he is a loan shark (mashonisa) who lends people money. I asked him, “How could you do that when you need to feed your family?” He said to me, “You are also working, you can feed the family.”

Really I could not believe that he told me that. Then I asked him, “Are you having an affair?” He kept quiet. He did not answer me. But the signs were there.

If a person is having an affair you can see that he is a changed person. He used to come home at half past six. Suddenly he

was now coming home at eight. He did not touch me in the way he used to touch me. I saw that this man has changed. When we had a conversation he would not look me straight in the eye. When they say “actions speak louder than words” they are telling the truth.

I couldn't believe he could do something like this to me, but it was real. It was happening. I was now the only one providing. When I asked for money he would say he has so many things to do. He bought food only when he felt like it.

He started to drink liquor, to go out with friends. The kinds of things we did together in the past was finished. I thought maybe he was bewitched. But no, he was having an affair. The mistress would call on his cell phone. He would just go outside and answer the call.

It was so tough with my hubby not doing anything for his family, although he was working. And my commission was not enough to make ends meet.

Things started to fall apart. It was painful. If I confronted him, he would walk out, banging the door and not come back. I felt useless. I started having doubts. I asked myself, “Why did I marry this man? How could he do this to me?” I asked myself, “What am I going to do about this life?”

### **Becoming the breadwinner**

Then luck was on my side. I was selling tickets at Pick n Pay Ormonde and there was a lady who usually came to Pick n Pay every month. I told her, “Please if it happens that they want a person where you are working just tell me because here I am not permanent.” She promised she would look out for a job for me.

Then one day the lady told me that they want a lady at work. Really I could not believe it when she told me that the following

day I was going to work with her at the factory where she is working. I screamed, I was so happy. I thanked God for what he did for me.

The bosses at the factory really liked me. It was a big factory manufacturing plastic and I was going to help to do the labels. Most of the workers were men. There were only three ladies. The men made the labels, one lady washed cars, the other made tea. I was the only lady making labels.

My husband was not happy about my job. He was jealous. Unfortunately, around this time he was retrenched and so I was now the only one at home who was working. It was really tough because I had to support the person who did not want to support us when he was working. I was furious.

Since my mom passed away, I had to help my siblings at home because there was no one working at my mom's place. Every month I had to support my siblings to buy food. I could not let them suffer. I had to provide for them.

I thought the best thing was to help my nephew and my younger brother to get jobs. I helped my nephew get a heavy duty licence, and he got a job as a driver with Nestle. I sent my younger brother to a diamond polishing course. The course cost R10 000, my brother did that course for ten months, and he then got a job. This made things easier on my side because my nephew and brother could now provide food at my mom's place. I could now focus on my children and me.

One day when I was having lunch at work with the ladies I told them, “I am tired of living in a shack and I want to build myself a nice three room house.” The other lady said to me, “Why don't you build a six room house?” I screamed at her, “Six rooms is too much. I cannot afford to build a six room house!” She told me that I am strong, a hard worker, she trusted that I can do it.



The problem was I had to speak to my husband about my wish to build a house for us, for our children. I did not know how to tell him. I then told him, "I want to build a two room house for us because I am working." Shoo! he screamed at me, telling me I am crazy, who am I that I can build a house.

I felt humiliated, I was very angry. I told him that I had a chance, I am working, I want to do something for the kids. I told him that I grew up in a shack, and I did not want my kids to grow the way I grew up. He said over his dead body. That I must wait for him to get a job, then we will do it together.

I told him he mustn't forget that when he was working he did not provide for us. I asked him what if he does not get a job? Must I still wait for him? He responded that as the head of the house he will get a job.

I started to panic. I did not know what to do. I went to my mother-in-law and explained the situation to her. My mother-in-law promised to speak to him. She spoke to him but still he did not want to hear anything.

### **The struggle to build my beautiful home**

My heart was sore. Time was running out. If you have an opportunity you must use it, because these things come and go. But my hubby didn't want to hear anything. If I talked about building a house he would just say I am crazy.

I told myself that I am going to win him over. I told him with or without his help I'm going to build the house, that the house I am building is for the children, me and him, that I am going to do it for the kids. Then he was just quiet and did not say a word.

I kept on praying, telling God to give me strength, that I want to build my kids a beautiful home.

I knew this was not going to be easy, so the best thing was to save money first. I worked overtime. Every day, even Sundays,

I was at work. I had a goal. I knew that my dream of building my children a home will one day come true.

I spoke to the ladies at work about a stokvel to save money together. We started saving four hundred rand a week. Every one of us contributed and we took that money to the bank. It was so tough, they were so strict. I could not be absent from work, I had to work every day because of the saving.

When we shared the money each of us received R20 000. It was the happiest day of my life. I had never touched so much money. The first thought that came to me was I could now make a future for my kids. My colleagues said to me, "Let's go to Wimpy and celebrate." But I took a taxi straight home. I didn't want anything to happen to me. When I arrived home I locked the doors. I was very happy. I sat on the bed counting the money.

I built a six room house one step at a time. I bought furniture for the house and we finally moved into our new home.

I had no help from my husband. Instead he continually criticised and made me feel bad about myself. There were times he stole money – up to R500 – from my bag. Yet I had managed to build the house on my own.

After we moved into our new house my brother came to stay with us. I asked my husband, "Is it okay if my brother comes to stay with us?" He agreed. But he suddenly changed, saying he did not want my brother in our home. I asked him, "Where will he go because he is my blood?"

I was tired. Every time my husband got drunk he would swear, using terrible, ugly words. I thought the best thing was for me to buy my brother a stand so he could build a place of his own.

### **Finding love, support and encouragement**

I went to the office to meet someone who is selling stands.

While I was waiting for him I saw four ladies chatting and going to the library. I asked a lady selling air time, where are these ladies going? She told me there is a workshop to help abused ladies. I decided to cancel my appointment and to join the ladies. I introduced myself and told them my story. I told them how my husband swore at me, how he came home drunk, how he criticized me, how he stole money from me.

This was my first time to have contact with Nisaa. The Nisaa social workers were very helpful, and the ladies were very supportive. When I heard their stories I could not believe it. I thought I was the only one. Every time I met with the social workers and ladies I felt at home. Their love, encouragement and support were great.

When it came time to depart for home, my heart would beat very fast, I felt pain, I felt empty inside. Imagine living in a very beautiful house, but in that house there was no happiness. In that house I was made to feel useless. I wished I could go far away, to get peace of mind.

Today I am still with my husband, but I don't have feelings for him anymore. Because I am married in community of property this means that he owns half of everything I built or own. If I knew this I would not have married in this way.

I am the one who did everything – just imagine if I want to get divorced I will have to share everything with him even though he did not provide or buy anything in the house. Really it is so frustrating.

But with the ladies at our group at Nisaa I feel strong. To tell the truth Nisaa has helped me. I am a beautiful woman, very strong, and no man can take me down. I am what I am today because of Nisaa. Viva Nisaa. ■

The Story



# Learning from life's challenges

## Ukufunda ezingqinambeni zempilo

J. Sothole

**R**eaders, I would like you to read my story and learn about people because we never stop learning in life. You go through challenges in life so that you can grow. You have to face minor problems and major problems so that you can learn and teach others.

Growing up my life was never great. I was raised by my aunt who did not treat me well. As a child I could not play. I was always doing chores. I was beaten up and was not even given food.

Eventually, I ran away to my mother. I asked her why she let me stay with my aunt. She told me it was because she felt sorry for my aunt as she did not have any children. I told my mother I was not going back to my aunt.

It was really nice staying at home with my mother.

Unfortunately, things became tough when my sister passed away and the father of my deceased sister's children abandoned them. I had to leave school and get a job because my mother earned very little money. With both of us working things got much better at home and the children grew up well.

### **Marriage and problems**

Some years later I met a man. He was handsome. He loved me and I loved him. Things were very smooth between us. He bought me clothes, shoes, there was nothing he could not give me. I fell pregnant – this was a very beautiful thing to happen to me. We got married.

Then the big problem started. This man was not sleeping at home. When he came back I asked him why he was not sleeping at home. He told me he was a man and I had no right to ask him such a question. I told his family about this problem. They spoke to him, but this did not make any difference. He hit me and went to stay with the woman living next door to us.

This woman started insulting me. It was heartbreaking. This man bad mouthed me and made me look like an evil person. He made a fool of me. I was like a play thing.

He was not supporting our children – they were always crying as there was no food. We lived in the dark. We had no electricity and the children’s school fees were not paid. He took my household goods to pay off the loan sharks he owed money to. I did not know what he was doing with his money.

My mother helped us out. I wept because I was embarrassed. This was very painful for me. I was supposed to be helping my mother, not the other way round.

The man who married me saw that I had a very good relationship with my children and he decided to abuse me by leaving and going to live with another woman. He thought I would cry but I did not care.

One day this man came back. I did not trust him anymore but he told me this was his house. He told me all our problems were caused by witchcraft. I kept silent because I could see the war was raging. I kept silent because I was too scared to say anything to him.

When I told him I was not happy with what he was doing to me, he did not want to hear this. I lived like that for years.

### **He did not want to grow up and be a father**

I keep saying “this man” because of the way he lives. He conducts himself like a young man, he does not want to grow and be a father. Also, his lifestyle embarrasses me. He has affairs with four women, I am the fifth one.

Yes, I am the one he married. But when I say he sleeps at the other women’s places, I mean sometimes when I go to the shops in the morning, I see him in one house and the next day I see him at a different house. That is the life he lives.

Then when things don’t go well with the other women, he comes back home. When he comes home, he expects me to cook and wash for him, even though at the other places he does his own washing and does everything for himself. He just wants to make our lives unpleasant.

There are strange things that affect people negatively. My children grew up afraid of their own father. They saw how he lives, and they asked him why he keeps going to live with other women. He told them not to get involved in our issues. He tried to defend his actions and then he would go off to sleep at the other women’s homes. He lived like this and he wanted us to be fearful of him.

### **Finding help and ending that oppression**

This man was killing me inside. One day he told me he would hurt me until my dying day. I wept because he really hurt me just as he said he would.

One day I told a woman I go to church with that I was tired of the life I was living. I was being abused, my children were having a tough time, we were starving. Nothing was going right at home. This lady advised me to go to Nisaa as they would help me. I went there first thing in the morning with a huge headache. I felt like I was carrying a heavy load on my shoulders.

I arrived at Nisaa and told them about my situation. I told them my biggest problem was sex. My husband was forcing himself on me. My children and I were starving, our household goods were taken away from us. The Nisaa people were heartbroken when they heard my story.

What I like the most is that they showed me that they loved me. They taught me a lot of things about life. They restored my humanity. Even though it took me a while, they empowered me. My eyes opened. I used to be blind. I used to be like a piece of

paper that was being blown by the wind. I like Nisaa because they have shown me love.

Today I am not hurting anymore. He is the one who is feeling the pain. He is now like a person with nobody. Today the other women are living with other men. He no longer goes to them. Now that he has run out of money he wants our attention. Now he does not know what to do.

I have had enough of this man. I am really tired of this man because he has no humanity, he is hard. It is now ten years that we are not sleeping in the same bedroom. We now live like siblings and it is good.

Now he cannot tell me what to do because he chose the kind of life he wanted. I feel free because I am living a much better life without him

I now live happily. There is no one controlling me. Nisaa showed me many things, Nisaa empowered me. If not for Nisaa, I would still be living under that oppression of my husband.

What makes me happy is that my children do everything for me. I can see that their father is not happy about this, but there is nothing he can do about it. He who laughs last, laughs best. What I mean is that all that he used to do to me is over. It is now his turn to feel the pain he used to inflict on me. That is why it is said that, "he who laughs last, laughs best".

Here is the good news. My children have grown and now I live a good life because they respect me. They don't earn a lot of money where they are working, but I go to sleep with food in my stomach. They want to see me happy. They tell me they want me to be happy because I have done my job and now they have grown.

My children took me travelling by bus, I am talking about

Greyhound. I travelled in luxury and got to see the beauty of the country. I got to see the livestock, the cattle along the way and the beauty of nature. When I got to Durban, I stayed in a hotel and slept in white sheets and ate delicious food which I cannot even name. My child just kept saying, "eat, mom, eat." I enjoyed the food such as rice, meat and salads. I ate so much I could not move. Thereafter we had dessert. You know, it's very good to notice things when you have children because they are also watching you all the time.

Life is something you must handle in the right way otherwise you will be hurt quite badly. Your life must be like a book that others can read and be a beautiful picture for people, a beautiful flower.

I have learnt many things in this world. I never knew that a person would love you just to abuse you. I learnt from my own experience.

I have cried all my life, but I respect Nisaa very much because they showed me great things in my life because when you have problems, friends desert you, but you end up being helped by a stranger. ■

**M**fundi, Ngithanda ufunde ngomlandu wami, uphinde futhi ufunde ngabantu abangayeki ukufunda empilweni. Ekukhuleni uhlangababezana nezingqinamba eziningi ezikusiza ukuthi ukhule. Ufanele uhlangabezane nezinkinga ezincane kanye nezinkulu ukuze ufunde futhi ufundise nabanye.

Ngikhuliswe ngu mamkhulu wami, bekungemnandi lokhu ngoba ebengangiphethe kahle. Bengingavumelekile ukudlala ngoba kwakufanele ngenze imisebenzi yasendlini. Ngangishaywa nginganikwa nokudla.

Ekugcineni, ngabalekela kumama wami. Ngambuza ukuthi yini engivumela ukuthi ngihlale nomamkhulu wami. Umama wami wathi wayezwela umamkhulu ngoba enganazingane okungezakhe. Ngamtshela umama ukuthi angisabayeli kwa mamkhulu.

Kwakumnandi ngempela ukuhlala nomama wami, ngeshwa izinto zaqala ukuba lukhuni uma kushona udadewethu, kanti nobaba wabodadewethu wabashiya. Ngafanele ukuthi ngiyeke isikolo ngifune umsebenzi ngoba nemali eyayiholwa ngu mama wami yayincane, kodwa kwathi lapho sesisebenza sobabili kwaba ngcono. Lokhu kwasiza isimo sasekhaya ukuthi sibe ngcono.

### **Umendo nezingkinga**

Kwadlula iminyaka ngahlangana nensizwa eyayinhle futhi ithandeka, yangithanda kanti nami ngayithanda. Izinto zazihamba kahle kithina sobabili. Wayengithengela izimpahla, nezicathulo nakho konke engangikudinga. Ngakhulelwa, kwabayinto emnandi okwenzeka kimi sabe sesiyashada.

Izinkinga ziqale lapho lensizwa ingasalali ekhaya. Uma ngimbuza ngaloku wangiphendula ngokuthi, uyindoda lapha ekhaya futhi anginayo imvume yokumbuza lutho. Ngakhuluma nomndeni wayo ngalesisehlo. Bazama ukukhuluma naye

kodwa akusizanga ngalutho. Wangishaya, uma eqeda wahamba wayohlala nomuntu wesifazane ongumakhelwane.

Lomuntu wesifazane waqala ukungithuka, kwakubuhlungu futhi kuphula nenhliziyo yami. Lensizwa yayingikhuluma kabi engenza ngibukeke njengomuntu omubi futhi oyisiwula. Wayethatha izimpahla zasendlini ayokhokha ngazo komashonisa ngoba wayengabakhokheli imali yabo. Wayengasakhokheli lutho, sasihlala ngobumnyama ngoba singenawo ugesi. Izingane zona wayengasazondli futhi engasazikhokheli nemali yesikolo. Ngangingazi ukuthi wenzani ngemali yakhe. Ngasengisizwa umama wami, lokhu kwakungenza ngizizwe ngimncane ngoba kwakufanele kube yimina engisiza umama wami ngemali. Ngasengihlala ngikhala ngenxa yobuhlungu benhliziyo kanye namahloni.

Lensizwa yabona ukuthi kukho konke lokhu, nginobudlelwane obuhle nezingane zami, lokhu kwamenza angihlukumeze abuye ahambe ayohlala nomunye umuntu wesifazane. Wayecabanga ngizokhala kodwa angizange ngigqize qakala.

Ngelinye ilanga lensizwa yabuya empilweni yami. Ngangingasamethembi kodwa wathi uyabuya lapha endlini yakhe. Wangitshela ukuthi izinkinga ziqaliswe wubuthakathi.

Angizange ngimpendule ngoba ngangesaba ukusho nokuncane kuyena. Ngamazisa ukuthi angeneme ngendlela angiphatha ngayo, akazange afune kuzwa lutho ngahlala kanjalo iminyaka.

### **Wayengafuni ukukhula abengubaba**

Ngiloku ngithi lensizwa yingoba uziphathisa okomfana omncane ongafuni ukukhula futhi akhombise ukuthi ungubaba. Kanti futhi nendlela aziphatha ngayo ingibangela amahloni. Uthandana nabantu besifazane abane, yebo abane. Ngingowesihlanu, kodwa nginguye lo amshadile. Uma ngithi ulala kwezinye izindlu zebesifazane yingoba kwesinye

isikhathi uma ngiya ezitolo ngimbona emizini ehluhahlukene. Yiyona mpilo ayiphilayo lena. Uma kungamlungeli nalaba abanye abafazi ubuyela kimina. Uma ebuya ufuna konke kuhambe kahle, ngimwashele noma ngabe kuleminywe imizi eziwashela. Ufuna ukuqhubeka enze impilo yami ingabi mnandi.

Kunezinto eziningi ezingajwayelekile ezihlupha abantu kabi. Izingane zami zikhule zisaba ubaba wazo. Bayambona ngendlela aphila ngayo. Bayambuza ukuthi kwenziwa yini ahambe ayohlala nabanye abantu besifazane, uvele abatshele ukuthi bangangeni ezindabeni zabadala. Ubephila lempilo ngoba futhi efuna sihlale simusaba.

Labafazi ebehlala nabo sebehlala namanye amadoda manje. Njengoba manje engasanamali ufuna ukunakwa. Ngikhathele yilendoda enganabantu futhi elukhuni. Sekuyiminyaka elishumi singalali egumbini elilodwa. Ngizizwa ngikhululekile. Ngizwile yilendoda, manje sihlala njengezalamani, kuhle loko kimi.

### **Ukuthola usizo nokuqeda incindezelo**

Akasangitsheli lutho ngoba uzikhethele ukuphila ngalendlela. Lendoda yayingibulala ngaphakathi. Ngelinye ilanga wathi uzongilimaza kuze kufike ilanga lami lokufa. Kwangizwisa ubuhlungu, ngakhala.

Ngelinye ilanga ngatshela omunye umama engisonta naye ukuthi ngikhathele ukuphila ngalendlela engiphila ngayo. Ngangihlukumezekile, izingane zami zazingaphili kahle futhi zihlale zilambile. Kwakungenalutho olwaluluhle ekhaya. Lomama wathi mangiye eNisaa bazongisiza. Ngavuka ekuseni ngaya khona, nganginenkunzi malanga yekhanda elibuhlungu, ngizizwa namahlombe ami ethwele umthwalo onzima.

Ngafika eNisaa ngabatshela ngesimo sami. Inkinga enganginayo kwakungezocansi. Umyeni wami wayengiphoba

ukuthi ngilale naye. Izingane zami zazilala ngendlala, kanti nezimpahla zasendlini zathathwa. Inhlango ye Nisaa nabasebenzi bakhona bezwa ubuhlungu uma bezwa udaba lwami.

Engikuthanda kakhulu bangibonisa uthando. Bangifundisa okuningi ngempilo. Babuyisela ubuntu bami babuye bangifaka uqgozi lwempilo. Amehlo ami aqala ukuvuleka, ngangiyimpumpithe. Ngangifana nephepha elipheshulwa ngumoya. Ngiyabathanda eNisaa ngoba bangibonisa uthando.

Namuhla anginabuhlungu engibuzwayo. Wuyena manje ozwa ubuhlungu nongenamuntu empilweni yakhe. Okungijabulisayo wukuthi izingane zami zingenzela konke engikudingayo. Ngiyabona ubaba wabo akaneme ngalokhu kodwa akukho lutho angalwenza. Nesisho siyasho ukuthi isinamuva liyabukwa. Engikuchazayo ukuthi konke loku ayevame ukukwenza kimi kudlulile. Yithuba lakhe lokuzwa ubuhlungu ebebuzwisa mina. Yingako ngithe isinamuva liyabukwa.

Okumnandi wukuthi izingane zami zikhulile futhi ngiphila impilo emnandi ngoba nezingane zami ziyangihlonipha. Labesebenza khona abaholi imali eningi kodwa ngijabuliswa ukuthi ngilala ngidlile. Bafuna ukungibona ngeneme, bangitshela njalo ukuthi mangithokoze ngoba ngenze umsebenzi omuhle wokubakhulisa.

Izingane zangithatha ngohambo lwebhasi, ngisho u Greyhound belu! Ngihamba kamnandi ngintofozela ngibona ubuhle bezwe. Ngihamba ngibona imfuyo endleleni kanye nobuhle bendalo. Uma ngifika e Thekwini ngahlala ehotela, ngalala ngamashidi amhlophe qwa ngidla nokudla okumnandi okunye kwakho ngingeke ngakwazi nokukubiza ngamagama. Ingane yami yayiloko ingiqquguzela ukuthi mangidle. Ngadla ukudla okumnandi okunje ngenyama, nelayisi kanye nama salad. Ngadla kakhulu ngendlela yokuthi ngangisakwazi nokunyakaza. Sathi singaqeda sabe sesidla lokhu

ukusamaswidi. Kulula ukunaka izinto uma unezingane ngoba zihlala zikubhekile ngaso sonke isikhathi.

Impilo iyinto yokunakwa kahulu ngoba uma ungakwenzi lokho uzizwa uhlukumezekile kakhulu. Impilo yakho kufanele ifane nembali kanti futhi ibe yincwadi nomfanekiso omuhle lapho abantu bengafunda khona. Uma uphila impilo ephakeme nenokuziqgaja ubese uphila ngendlela oyithandayo, uzohlala ukhala impilo yakho yonke.

Ngizifundise okukhulu kabi empilweni kanye nasemhlabeni. Bengingazi ukuthi kungaba khona umuntu okuthandela ukukhulumeka. Ngikhale kakhulu empilweni yami yangaphambili kodwa ngibonga i Nisaa ngokungibonisa lukhulu empilweni. Uma unezinkinga abangane bayakushiya kodwa ugcina ususizwa umuntu wezizwe. ■





# I did not drown, I survived

**Fikile Krolis**

*I did not drown, I survived*

**I was 14 years old when I was raped by the stranger. I say** the stranger because there was no relationship between me and that person. He was old and I was a kid who knew nothing about love. He destroyed my life. I was a virgin. He broke my virginity without my consent. And I fell pregnant in that rape.

I did not know that I was pregnant and I did not report the rape or tell anyone about it. I was ashamed and scared that I would be blamed and punished.

And I blamed myself. I thought maybe I had done something that attracted that man to rape me. Maybe I didn't scream enough to get help. Maybe I wanted it to happen. I thought about my father. He was going to kill me if he found out.

When my other siblings were around the table with our parents, I would sit in a dark corner, not talking to anyone, feeling sorry for myself.

My mother suspected I was pregnant. Now I had to talk.

After many months of isolating myself, finally the truth came out that I was raped and was pregnant from the rape/my rapist.

I became a child mother of a very beautiful girl. But after I delivered my baby girl I did not want to see her or hold her. I did not understand how I came to have a baby. I was confused. I was hurting. The baby was a reminder about what happened to me. I just wanted to forget about everything. But how could I, since I had a baby?

It took me three weeks and help from psychologists to accept that baby in my arms. My mother took full responsibility for the baby. She raised her to become a beautiful girl, who I fell in love with at a later stage.

Today she is 29 years old. I have become her buddy and she calls me sister.

### **Abducted to be a wife**

But believe me, my life was not honey and roses. When I was 18 years old I was taken away from my parents by that same stranger, to be his wife. They call this *ukuthwala* in Zulu.

I did not love that man. He abducted me and he sent the lobola to my parents while I was locked inside his house for two weeks. Everything was done without my consent. Believe me it is a very, very painful situation to be in.

My parents accepted the lobola, and I had no choice but to stay there as a wife, even though I did not want to. I had to obey my parents and not disappoint them by making them give back the lobola that was paid for me.

After two weeks they let me out of the locked room and I was given the *muthi* and cuts were made all over my body by a person who was a traditional healer (*inyanga*).

I started the process of being a wife. I would wake early in the morning to fetch water from the river far from home, all alone. After that I would walk a long distance to collect firewood. It was not easy, but I had to do it. I had no choice. I was expected to do everything at the house.

It was a big rural homestead with six rondavels and one five-roomed house. I cooked for my husband's large family, I fetched water for all of them, washed clothes for all of them, cleaned for all of them. But even though I did all these things for them, I was not appreciated.

My mother-in-law hated me. She was a heavy drinker. She would go out every morning to drink alcohol, and she would come back late in the evening. She would swear at me, call me names and shout at me when she came home. She would tell me that she hates me and she does not want me at her house because I am useless and stupid, and I don't deserve her

son. This would go on each and every day of my life. But I respected them, I obeyed them, I stayed and I persevered.

You know why? Because I thought that the person who was called my husband loved me. He was working and staying in Johannesburg. He was not around when his mother abused me. He was not aware that my life was a living hell with his family.

He used to come home three times a year. And he showed that he cared about me. Every time he came home he brought nice things for me – like big packets of sweets, chocolates, first grade apples, oranges, bananas, beautiful clothes and shoes. That was a sign of love, wasn't it? I thought so. Even though I was not in love with the guy, I learnt to live with him.

### **My wedding day**

After three years our parents decided we must get married. The wedding was prepared. The day came. It was 31 April 1994. It was going to be a white wedding. I was wearing a wedding gown and he was in his tuxedo. We had many bridesmaids and best men – four people from each of us.

The sun was shining and people were in their bright dresses. The colours of the day were peach and red except my wedding gown which was white. No one knew or could feel how I was feeling. No one asked how I was feeling. People were over the moon about the wedding. I was not given the time of expressing my emotions.

I did not even choose the wedding gown I was wearing that day. I don't know who chose it for me, because I was told to go and fetch it. It was just like that. I wanted to collapse and die on the spot. I wanted to just vanish. I didn't want to be there.

Believe me, to other people it was the best day of their lives, but to me it was like my funeral day. It is where I started to be angry. I felt resentment I never felt in my life.

A week after the wedding my husband left for Johannesburg where he was working as a carpenter in a furniture factory. He left me for three years with a five-year-old child. We were left there.

He did not send money. We were on our own. I was just a housewife. I was not employed. We needed food to eat, clothes to wear. Winter or summer he was not there for us. On holidays other men came from Johannesburg, but he did not come.

It was so hard to explain to my family. I felt they were the ones who put me in that situation. They had given me away without my consent so why did I have to tell them what was going on in my marriage? I didn't tell them. I was a married woman but my husband was nowhere to be found.

### **Trying to leave, pressured to go back**

At the end of the third year I decided to leave the marriage. I went back home. I stayed with my family and started to look for a job so that I could take care of my child's needs. My mother and my brother helped me.

After a fourth year my husband came to my mother's house and claimed that he wanted to take me back. I refused to go with him because I did not want him anymore.

But my family told me that I have to forgive him, because he came to ask for forgiveness. I told them that I forgave him but I did not want him back in my life. That was not enough for my family and for him. He wanted me back and he wanted to take me with him.

I was told that I must go with him because he paid lobola and he married me. Because I am his wife. And to be a good wife is to forgive and let go. So I was forced to go with him. He promised to love and take care of me and my child, and everyone at home believed him.

That is how I came to Johannesburg. My husband was employed and living in Johannesburg. To tell the truth I was excited to come to Johannesburg. It was the place I always dreamed to be in. My daughter was left with my mother because she was at school. There was no way she was coming with us. And she was happy to be with my mother because she grew up knowing her as mother. So she had no problem of letting me go.

### **Life in Johannesburg: dreams and reality**

Let me tell you, as we were travelling to Johannesburg I was sitting next to him. He was driving. I looked at the mountains we passed on the way. I looked at the beauty of the valley, at God's creation. I totally forgot about him even while he was next to me. I was day dreaming about my life in Johannesburg.

My dream was to be a nurse. On my way to Johannesburg I thought my dreams could come true. My husband's words showed me that he cared about me. It was like he was reading my mind. At last he said something I wanted to hear. He told me he wanted me to be educated so that we could help each other financially. At last he wanted me to do something that would change my life.

After a month in Johannesburg I was surprised to see my husband enter our room carrying a six month old baby girl. I was shocked to find out that for four years he had been living with a woman who was the mother of his baby.

He told me that the baby's mother who lived in Johannesburg, had given him the baby. He could not reject her, and I must look after her. I felt like he had brought me to Johannesburg to be his slave. He did not prepare me for this. There was nothing I could do.

It was not easy, but I accepted the baby. I took care of her, washed her nappies, bathed and fed her, took her to the clinic.

I was there for this baby even when sick. She was innocent and knew nothing.

The following year – in 2000, I registered at a school for nursing. I learnt health care work for six months and I was employed at Sandrigham to take care of elderly people. I enjoyed working there and I just fell in love with the elderly people.

After one year and six months my contract was terminated. But because I was a hard working student, when the Netcare Rand Clinic needed a care worker they recommended me to the Rand Clinic, and I worked there as a nursing assistant in the ICU.

Believe me, my dreams were really coming true. And I didn't know I was observed. At the end of 2002 the matron called me to her office and told me that there was an opportunity for me to study further at the Netcare Nursing College. I was excited. I can't explain the joy in my heart.

I told my husband the good news. And this is where the problems started. He got very angry. He was furious with the fact that I was going to study further, that this was going to be an opportunity for me to be somebody. He told me that he did not bring me to Johannesburg to study.

### **Things get worse before getting better**

My husband forced me to leave my dream because of his selfishness. My life became very difficult. He started to become aggressive and violent. He started beating me. He abused me verbally, physically, emotionally and financially.

I was isolated from my family and friends. My husband would beat me if the baby cried. He would beat me if she played and became dirty.

My husband turned my life into a living hell. He did not allow me to watch TV. When he came home and found me watching

TV he would be furious. When I heard his footsteps I would stand up, afraid to let him find me sitting. I would not know what to do – I would just walk around the house.

One day his girlfriend, the mother of his child, called at his work and claimed that I had abused her on the telephone. I told him I had not phoned her – I did not even know her phone number – but my husband believed her and he beat me so badly that I ended up in a hospital bed.

My bruises, pain, suffering and disappointment did not discourage me. In fact it gave me the strength to go forward, working hard for the goals I wanted to achieve.

After I came out of the hospital I met a lady who was employed by the Nisaa Institute for Women's Development. She was very friendly. She didn't judge me, but she introduced me to the organisation.

I learnt that they are helping women in my situation. I started to open up and told her about my situation. They arranged counselling for me with a social worker. I went for counselling and then I went for classes to become a counsellor.

I was employed by Nisaa as a permanent volunteer. I was paid for working three days a week. That is how my life started to flourish, the support Nisaa gave me went far.

I registered as an auxillary social worker with Lethikukhanya College, and I registered with SACSSP (South African Council for Social Services Professions) as a student social auxillary worker. Nisaa then employed me as a staff member.

After I finished my auxillary social worker certificate I was encouraged to get a driver's licence. A year after getting my licence I bought my own car – a red Hyundai Accent. Red is my colour of inspiration. I love my car and I named him Blessing because to me he was a blessing from God.

I am now studying with UNISA for a degree in social work.

From Zero to Hero that is who I am. I didn't believe that I would see myself in the streets of the big university called UNISA. The first time I arrived there it was like it was not really me. Because of where I come from no one ever thought that I can be at the University.

That is my success story. I don't think that I will ever be over all that has happened in my life. It makes me angry every time I think about this. The pain is still there.

I am glad to be part of the book project because writing helped me to deal with my demons face-to-face. And this helps me emotionally and psychologically.

Writing my story took me from where I was to be a new creation of God, facilitating a future where I am talking about letting go of the past. My mind was opened by writing my story. And now I have to make the hardest decision of my life – the decision to end my marriage. It took writing to see this. It opened my mind, and brought a new awareness in my life. ■



# There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you\*

Umme-Muhammed

*There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you*

**S**tanding at the crossroads of the lowest point in my life, a decision weighed heavily on my shoulders – to either remain in the longstanding abusive relationship I found myself in or walk away and face the reality of being homeless with a newborn baby.

## **Love at 15**

Thinking back to the warm summer evening, many years ago when we first met. The annual fete in Lenasia, the aroma of different foods emanating from the stalls, the competing sounds of Indian music above the chatter of people. The amusement park lights lighting up the stadium.

At fifteen years old, tasting freedom during this night out with my older cousins, his gaze and mine locked. It was love at first sight for the two of us. Inexperienced in interacting with the opposite sex, the butterflies in my tummy were unruly.

The attention Nishal gave me over the following weeks was irresistible. His words were charming. His jealousy all consuming. My 21-year-old lover succeeded in contorting my perceptions so that I began to see my once loving family as autocrats. We eloped two months after having first met.

Two weeks later I found myself back home, my hopes and dreams of a successful future in the medical profession outweighing my taste of love at 15. Not to mention that my parents had tracked us down to Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal, with a brigade of policemen from the Lenasia SAPS. They had opened a case of statutory rape against him. In an effort to redeem myself and regain the trust of my family, I vowed to never see Nishal again, no matter how much it hurt.

## **Marriage at 18**

A few years later, I was enrolled at university, when I decided to marry and settle down with Irfaan. This was probably a relief to my family. It was not an arranged marriage. Irfaan was

smitten, which made my acceptance of his hand in marriage seem noble.

All was bliss from the outside, but my new husband did not bother provisioning a plate of food on the table each night. I remember crying myself to sleep due to ravenous hunger. I was made to tag along with him to rave parties every weekend as the trophy wife, but abandoned at the door.

I would leave home each day before sunrise to earn a living while Irfaan spent the entire day in bed. Added to this, my in-laws laid claim to anything and everything that I owned and worked for.

In an effort to meet my travelling budget to university and to complete my studies, I began sourcing second hand clothing from friends to resell at a flea market on Saturdays, and sold koeksisters on Sundays.

I approached my dad to assist by paying for my husband's studies in the Information Technology field. I hoped this would mean we could be equal breadwinners and live a more comfortable life.

Despite the gruelling times, I succeeded in my studies and was awarded my degree with honours as a medical professional on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2002.

Five years into the marriage and having completed his studies, my husband was suddenly retrospectively perturbed that he had not had the opportunity of marrying a virgin. He wanted out!

At the same time, I was changing, My growing religious spirituality did not fit in with his expensive party lifestyle. But it was too late as by now we had a two-year-old – a most amazing toddler. So the lies and deceit began.

As if the emotional and financial abuse was not enough, soon physical violence followed. The first time I truly experienced

the physical strength of a man was when my husband shoved my head down our toilet bowl and flushed. My body went limp. I could not resist his hand against my head. I tried screaming but only ended up coughing. My eyes and nostrils burnt like I had never experienced before. I prayed to drown quickly so as to end the ordeal. But this was only the beginning of the physical violence.

He would beat me. Often he would drive at night at high speed and threaten to throw me out of the car. He threatened to have me raped. He stole my money and bank cards.

I had attained a respectable position within my employ, and was chosen to travel abroad to attend additional courses and conferences. Each time I travelled my husband would throw my luggage out of my bags just before my departure, and eventually put me under surveillance. Fear encompassed me. But worst of all, my husband had contacted Nishal one evening, and threatened him for having messed up our life.

The events of that night set the ball rolling! Three hours later, the police drove my husband away, hand-cuffed in the back of an official van. Our eight year marriage was annulled at the police station a week later by his utterance of one simple word – Talaq (divorce)! with laughter and joy, cheered on by his brother. I became overwhelmed and consumed by the devastation and embarrassment of being a divorced woman.

### **Getting back with Nishal**

Nishal now had full knowledge of my life circumstances and made his move. Looking back, I believe that my husband and Nishal had more contact than I was aware of. Whether it was in a friendly capacity or not, remains to be uncovered. My vulnerability and the loving memories I held of him, allowed Nishal in.

I was now living with my parents. Given the previous history

of our relationship and because Nishal and I were of different religious backgrounds, which is taboo not just within my family but within the larger community too, I kept the relationship underground.

Almost immediately the physical abuse started. I often returned home all beaten up and bruised, after seeing him. But I pretended that nothing had happened. And Nishal was so smart – he never hit me on exposed areas of my body.

Nishal explained his physical violence as due to the fact that I had dared to get married to someone else, instead of contacting him when I turned 18, when my parents would have had no legal rights over me. He told me that he loved me so much, he didn't want to lose me again, that he got carried away at times by the fear of losing me, and that is why he hurt me. Since his expensive gifts, lavish lunches, and sweet words outweighed the violence, I believed this was the truth.

Nishal took the time to coach me for the court proceedings to settle the divorce from my husband. I reasoned that surely only someone who loved me would give me such gifts and take such a deep interest in me and my well being.

But I also understood early on that Nishal was on a vendetta against me and my parents. Yet our relationship moved on rapidly and so too did time. Before I realised it, I was in so deep that I felt no one would believe me, even if I tried to seek help.

One day Nishal delivered an ultimatum that I move in with him. I obeyed. My naivety once again got the better of me. Despite being with him for a few months, I had no idea that he was married. Nor did I notice the tell-tale signs that he was a drug addict. He was often irritable, restless and mostly paranoid. Another sign was the nasal congestion and constant "hayfever". Was this possibly due to my sheltered life with no

exposure to drugs or the behavioural patterns of people who consume drugs?

Obeying his command to move in, I attempted to take my four-year-old toddler with me. However, when my parents sabotaged this attempt I did not pursue this. I was afraid of Nishal and I could not place my son's life at risk by allowing him into the same home with Nishal.

So to safeguard my son, I left him with my parents. This painted a picture of me as an unconcerned mum who abandoned her son, especially as no one knew about the violence in our relationship.

My ex-husband now had visitation rights to my son on Saturdays and he would allow my son to call me on these days. I now began living for Saturdays.

One Saturday morning Nishal did not go to work, and he listened to my telephone conversation with my son. He then followed me into the bathroom, waited for me to get into the shower, before he smacked me with great force across the left side of my face, injuring my eardrum.

I immediately became aware of a decrease in my hearing – the shower water sounded as if it were running in the distance. I then felt an excruciating pain across my right thigh. I saw that he had his belt in his hand, and that blood from the several open wounds on my thigh ran all the way down my right leg into the water entering the drain. He shouted a warning that I was never to utter my son's name ever again.

Losing my son began to take its toll on me. A failed suicide attempt landed me in the psychiatric ward of a local private clinic. I do not remember much of my stay at the clinic. However I do remember having been medicated.

Colleagues and friends alike began turning their backs on



me. On my return to work I found a change in the once warm, welcoming and understanding department that I remembered. When I entered a room, colleagues would disperse or stop their whisperings. I found that one colleague who had listened to my problems with the appearance of caring, had carried this information to my ex-husband.

I was appalled at how my colleagues of seven years had changed toward me, at their unaccommodating manner. How could females working within the largest hospital in the southern hemisphere be so inhumane toward my suffering? This is a question I still grapple with today.

### **Isolated from family and friends**

When I was offered a better position elsewhere, I resigned from the hospital. This was my chance! I packed up and moved my things out of our flat while Nishal was at work. I went back to my parents' home. Holding my baby boy in my arms was pure euphoria. I was not going to give this up for anybody. A week passed without Nishal being aware of my new place of employment.

At 4pm on a Monday I walked out of a hospital I was visiting and there stood Nishal, arms extended, palms open. I knew exactly what he had come for. I placed my car keys in his hand and smiled as my new colleagues went on their way home. I couldn't bring myself to ask for help, I couldn't bring myself to scream, I couldn't bring myself to run from him. I was paralysed by the embarrassment of being a professional woman experiencing domestic violence.

My car was driven off by a man I had never met. I was driven home to our flat by Nishal. Nishal told me that he had resigned his job and would now be spending all day, every day with me at my workplace. He began to accompany me to work and to hang around my office, on my balcony or in the gardens outside

my office. My new colleagues were so engrossed in their own work, they did not seem to notice him.

My abusive partner had eventually triumphed in isolating me from any support structure, leaving me with no friends and with a family that had disowned me.

By now my family did not have an iota of trust in me. Especially since I had gone back to them for a week and then suddenly left without any explanation, never to return. Knowing this gave Nishal free reign over me. I was afraid to leave him. I was convinced that the consequences of leaving would be far more devastating than bruises, broken bones and hospital admissions.

Not long after I returned home, I realised I was pregnant. At the same time Nishal's drug addiction was becoming more apparent. The time period between his "fixes" were narrowing. Along with this came his suicide threats, self-pity episodes of crying, stealing of money from me, pleas for forgiveness, intertwined with him picking fights, beating me to a pulp over weekends and then locking me up in the flat only to return days later.

I hated the 8x4m walls that enclosed me. At times I would bang at the walls with household objects trying to break through to the other side. With only one window that faced a deserted downtown Johannesburg street, there was no chance of anyone hearing my screams during the weekend. When he disappeared on weekday "sprees", he would leave the flat key behind so that I could get to work as my income was now supporting his habit.

With no money and no access to a car I would walk through Braamfontein after five in the evening to get to the other side of the city. This was terrifying. A young, unaccompanied, pregnant Indian lady in the centre of town, at that time of the evening, drew unwanted attention. Men using alcohol and

openly smoking drugs on street corners would make vulgar comments. On Nishal's return from his sprees he would beat me for walking home at that time of the evening as opposed to sleeping the night in my office.

I had by this stage developed an excellent coping mechanism. I buried the memory of my family and my son into the depths of mind. I mastered the art of maintaining a smile and I learnt to wear clothing in a fashionable manner so as to cover all evidence of bruises.

I was not allowed to have lunch in the staff room at work so I did not have to anticipate answering awkward questions posed by colleagues, particularly relating to my son or my relationship with Nishal.

During my pregnancy the physical violence worsened. Nishal's new rationale for the beatings was that I was a slut because I had a baby with Irfaan during my marriage. A new development was the emotional and psychological abuse that I now endured. He said I was ugly with the weight gain of pregnancy, that the stretch marks made me look like a pizza with toppings, and my acne was gross. The sad truth was that I began to believe him. I felt worthless!

It didn't help approaching Nishal's parents for help. His father drank too. His mum, seeing bruises on my face, arms or legs, would ask "What did you do to aggravate him?" She rationalised his behaviour in her own way. Perhaps it was my fault!

### **A defining moment**

The birth of my second son was the defining event in my life. Due to complications, I was wheeled into theatre for an emergency caesarean section. The maternity ward nurses phoned Nishal to come to the hospital.

I was clad in a theatre gown, with a hat to cover my hair. The room was cold, which didn't stop the hustling and bustling of the theatre staff. Their sounds echoed as though we were in an empty hall. In the distance I heard my surgeon's footsteps approaching. The bright light directly above my head was blinding. Nishal stood in view through the corner of my eye. I could see traces of his previous spree – his face was swollen, his eyes glassy.

The anaesthetist gave me a spinal block (an injection) which almost instantly gave me the feeling of paralysis from the waist down. I felt a cold substance on my tummy as the doctor prepared me for the cut. A screen was put up so that I couldn't see the actual cutting procedure. I felt tugging and as the doctor pushed downward on my tummy, I saw my precious baby lifted up and out of me.

All my fears disappeared. I did not have to worry about how to get to the hospital anymore and whether it would be on time. I did not have to worry about being locked up alone in my flat and unable to leave during labour. All these fears dissipated with my baby's cry resounding through the theatre. Within seconds he was placed in my arms. I placed his tiny head at my cheek and made a promise in his ear that I meant to keep. My promise gave me hope. I instantaneously felt warmth creeping into my body, joy into my heart, and positivity into my life.

I stared at my baby and a tear trickled down my cheek as I also thought of my estranged preschooler. I decided then and there that their lives and their rights upon me as their mother far superseded my fears. The happiest moment of my life was the life changing decision that I made, for the well being of my two sons forever more.

Abandoned by Nishal at the hospital for several days thereafter made me the "talk of the ward". Although I was discharged, my baby was ill and admitted to the neonatal intensive care

unit (NICU). With no food and no money – as Nishal had taken my bank cards – the matron sneaked me into a ward late every night so that I had a safe place to spend those nights. Not having food coupled with the stress, meant that I was unable to produce enough milk to feed my baby. Still I pursued breastfeeding as I was afraid that if my baby took to the bottle, Nishal and his family might take my baby away from me.

When Nishal did eventually arrive at the hospital, he signed an RHT, refusing hospital treatment, and took my baby and me home. I could not allow my fears to resurface. Just as Nishal was manipulative, so too I needed to play him at his own game. He now required a fix almost daily and this was affecting his heart rate, breathing and body temperature. The paranoia and violent outbursts were increasing to a couple of times a day. I spent most of my time, sitting with my newborn baby in the empty bathtub of my locked bathroom.

### **Journeying to freedom**

It took me two months to convince Nishal's parents to enrol him into a drug rehabilitation facility. On the day of his admission, I stole back my cellphone and arranged a lift to the Nisaa head office in Lenasia.

As I entered the reception area, I was barely able to hear my voice above the sound of my thudding heart. Anxiety coupled with the embarrassment of my exposure as an abused woman seemed to take over. I was introduced to a social worker. Although sceptical of her and the institution itself, I could tell immediately that she was not out to judge or criticise me. She seemed genuinely concerned. For the first time in my life, I felt that someone understood what I felt and why I felt it. Nisaa offered me a place to stay at their shelter until I found my footing. With past encounters of people misjudging, distrusting, blaming, lying and hurting me, the first thing I did after being shown to my bedroom at the shelter was put pen to paper. My

diary had become my only trusted companion over the years. I wrote a poem in which I expressed my disgust of hiding abused women in shelters so that society did not have to deal with them. I include an extract from this poem here:

*I thank God that I have survived and reached this point  
A new beginning! The end!*

*Society's shame is quickly hidden in shelters.*

*Safe haven?*

*I fear not!*

*Do not dump her there to be taught a lesson!*

*She has already learnt with every blow,*

*Every lash of his tongue,*

*Every intimidating look.*

*Has she not suffered enough?*

*What would happen should your shelter destroy an already  
broken woman?*

*Please understand!*

*Her recovery is not about mending the family name*

*It should be about mending her bones, her heart, her pride and  
her soul!*

*Allow me to be selfish this time around*

*And you might get to see me bloom yet again*

*Spreading joy, laughter and peace*

*However not without defences at first!*

*As loving myself will be the most difficult lesson of all*

*That I am yet to learn.*

### **Walking the healing path**

Living in the Safe-House, as I later preferred to call it, provided me with healing far beyond words. I was welcomed by strangers and cared for as if I were family. We were a group

of seven women with two babies and a toddler, yet Nisaa fed and provided for our basic necessities – groceries, toiletries, nappies, a warm bed and peace of mind. Nisaa assisted me with an explanation and rationale for my resignation at work. Although it was risky being unemployed, my safety was more important.

Interacting with the other women at the shelter provided insight into my own past experiences and emotions. Group sessions allowed me to express my feelings in a constructive manner. I especially benefitted from the one-on-one counselling sessions. The social worker listened, but most of all she equipped me with necessary tools to shape my new destiny.

There were multiple facets in my life which I needed to repair. The Nisaa counsellors listened and proposed unbiased options, whilst allowing me to lead and make the decisions I deemed feasible and important. I received factual information in areas where my knowledge was lacking, especially pertaining to the law and my rights as a citizen of this beautiful land, South Africa.

Through the grace of God Almighty and the efforts of the social worker, I reunited with my older son and was accepted back into my family. My mother and I rekindled a beautiful relationship in which we have become the best of friends. Furthermore, strategies were put into place to ensure my safety and that of my sons.

During the initial days at the Safe-House, I would have preferred to hide behind those walls and never face reality. It was easy and comforting being amongst women who cared and understood first-hand my experiences and emotions.

Nisaa however showed me that my real accomplishment was to go out into the world once again, to stand tall and reach for the stars. This was not an easy task, but I had Nisaa holding my hand as I walked the healing path.

I have, since leaving the Safe-House in March 2010, started my own allied medical practice, enrolled in a counselling course offered by Nisaa, and completed my Masters Degree.

However, my most outstanding achievement is that I am able to be the mother, the daughter and sister who loves my family very much, and I have learnt that the love of family is one of life's greatest blessings.

From the depths of my heart, I thank Nisaa, especially the social worker assigned to me, for restoring my sense of self worth, my respect and love for myself; so that I may be able to respect and love the next person.

My aim is to spread the message to other women who may be trapped in violent relationships, who might not know where or how to obtain assistance, that there is life after abuse.

I live up to the values that Nisaa promotes, that “activism is being a role model by means of actions and words; and educating communities about violence against women” so that women may rise up and let their lights shine.

“I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.” (Maya Angelou)



- The title and closing lines of this story are borrowed from Maya Angelou

## **Organisations offering support to women who experience abuse:**

**Stop Gender Violence helpline:** is a national toll-free helpline in South Africa for survivors, witnesses and perpetrators of gender-based violence.  
**0800-150-150**

### **Johannesburg-based organisations**

#### **Nisaa Institute for Women's Development**

Counselling services via a helpline: (011) 854 5804

Nisaa has offices in:

Lenasia: (011) 854 5804/5

Soweto: (011) 984 8928

Orange Farm: (011) 850 0637

The Nisaa shelter accommodates women and children who have experienced violence and provides a range of strategies for women to explore in their healing and empowerment.

**Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT)** provides counselling and support for abused women, children, young people, the elderly and men.

ADAPT is based in Alexandra Township: (011) 440 4047

**People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA)** provides counselling, legal advice and shelter services for women and their children who have been the victims of abuse. POWA is based in:

Berea: (011) 642 4345/6

Katlehong: (011) 860 2858

Vosloorus: (011) 906 4259/1792

Evaton: 081 383 7698

Tembisa: 084 843 2644

Soweto: (011) 933 2333/2310

**Family and Marriage Association of South Africa (Famsa)** offers counselling to strengthen marriage, assists with divorce, mediation, domestic violence, trauma. Famsa has 27 offices around the country.  
Johannesburg: (011) 975 7106/7 or (011) 788 4784

**Life Line Johannesburg** provides 24-hour telephone counselling:  
(011) 728 1347

Counselling is available at offices in:

Norwood: (011) 728 1347

Alexandra: (011) 443 3555

Soweto: (011) 988 0155/6

**Eldorado Park Women's Forum** provides shelter, advice, empowerment and counselling to abused women with their children.  
(011) 945 6433

### **KwaZulu-Natal organisations**

**Advice Desk for the Abused** provides crisis intervention and advisory services in the event of domestic violence at their offices at the University of Durban Westville and through a 24-hour telephonic crisis intervention service: (031) 262 5231

#### **Domestic Violence Assistance Programme**

(031) 260-1588

#### **KwaZulu-Natal Programme for Survivors of Violence**

(031) 305 3497

#### **Famsa Durban**

(031) 304 8991

#### **NICRO Women's Support Centre**

(031) 304 2761/2/3

#### **Western Cape**

#### **NICRO Women Support Centre**

(021) 422 1690

#### **Ilitha La Bantu**

(021) 633 2383

#### **Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children**

(021) 633 5287

## **Eastern Cape**

### **Famsa**

Grahamstown: (046) 622 2580

Port Elizabeth: (041) 585 9393

### **Life Line**

East London: (043) 743 7266

Crisis: (043) 722 2000

## **Masimanyane Women's Support Centre**

East London: (043) 734 9169

## **NICRO**

East London: (043) 722 4123

Port Elizabeth: (041) 582 2460

Queenstown: (045) 838 1602

## **Limpopo**

### **Famsa**

Limpopo: (015) 307 4833

## **Mpumalanga**

### **Famsa**

Highveld Ridge: (017) 631 1593


## **Free State**

### **Famsa**

Bloemfontein: (051) 525 2395

### **Life Line**

Welkom: (057) 352 2212



The Nisaa Institute for Women's Development is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation working on gender, gender-based violence and the empowerment of women from intimate abusive relationships.

Nisaa's vision is to enable women and their children to live in a world free of violence and discrimination. In order to empower women Nisaa provides sheltering and counselling services and undertakes advocacy initiatives. Nisaa's Basadi Pele project enables women who are not employed to gain skills in jewellery making.

*[www.nisaa.org.za](http://www.nisaa.org.za)*