

WE ARE THOSE GIRLS



WRITING OUR STORIES

We are those girls
Smiling through storms
Overcoming things thrown in our paths
We are those girls
Conquerors
Beautiful, intelligent, wise, strong,
Proud of ourselves
Willing to move our country forward
Not judging or laughing at other girls' wounds
Sisters making a single bond
Breaking the chain of fear
Making our voices heard

WE ARE THOSE GIRLS



WRITING OUR STORIES

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Nisaa Institute for Women's Development
19 Link Street Extension 1 Lenasia
Tel 011 8545804
www.nisaa.org.za/

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Nisaa Institute for Women's Development is a non-profit non-governmental organization working on 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. 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.



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Foreword

Zubeda Dangor & Sima Diar

(Nisaa Executive Director & Nisaa Programme Manager)

*To write means more than putting pretty words on a page,
the act of writing is to share a part of your soul with the
world.*

(Anonymous)

While working with youth through the Date Rape Campaign, Nisaa realised that there are so many stories untold and so many voices that go unheard, especially the voices of young girls. Nisaa's Date Rape Programme has been on going since 2002. It provides youth with valuable information on gender, sex, dating, HIV and AIDS. It also allows youth to debate and actively think about their future and how their actions affect their lives. Nisaa constantly ensures that the programme evolves as trends and practices amongst youth change. Over time, Nisaa found that boys were making significant positive shifts in thinking about sex, dating and gendered relations. However, shifts amongst the girls were not as prominent. It was evident that there was need to work more closely with girls who felt that it was normal to date older men and engage in risky sexual practices. The girls highlighted that they entered into sexually active relationships as a result of peer pressure. We also observed that most girls were a lot quieter during date rape discussions. We wanted to hear their voices and learn about their lived experience as teenage girls. As such, Nisaa undertook this writing project to get a better understanding of the lived experiences of young women from the south of Johannesburg.

The conceptualisation and planning for this project began in 2015 through internal consultations between Nisaa Institute for Women's

Development and Oxfam Germany in liaison with BMZ (the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the German Government). External consultations followed with Shamim Meer to plan and customise the girls writing workshop.

Nisaa recruited girls for the writing workshop from the schools visited through the Date Rape Programme. Pupils had been introduced to Nisaa's previous publications during that campaign and they had viewed Nisaa's public service announcements with scripts which were written by pupils. This brought to the fore that girls had the ability to write and share their stories in order to be better understood by teachers, parents, male peers and other stakeholders whom they may encounter. As one writer says, *"Last week's workshop was a path finder for me. I found who I am and what I want. I learnt that we all come from different backgrounds but at the end of it all, we are just the same. It also sunk into my head that women have the power to change the world."* It is evident that they have written powerful stories, even though the process involved grappling with past trauma in their lives. *"I felt so emotional as I wrote about my story. It felt so real because it took me back to those days of sad memories. As I was writing I felt relieved to share the things we as young women face in our everyday lives."*

Although a difficult journey, most writers were pleased and felt that the process was helpful. *"It was very good to be associated with different people who made me feel strong. This made me feel very special. I blossomed. I realise I am not alone. I have come to understand myself and other people."*

Nisaa extends heartfelt congratulations to all the writers. We appreciate your strength in telling and sharing a piece of your soul with us. Nisaa would also like to thank Oxfam Germany and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the German Government who supported this project. Thank you to the facilitators Shamim Meer and Nyasha Mukuwane for their effort and commitment to this project and for working alongside Nisaa in a constructive, amicable and sisterly manner. Thank you to the support staff, Fikile Thusi and Francinah Mokoena who assisted in supporting the girls as they wrote and thereafter.





Introduction

Smiling Through Storms

Shamim Meer

The stories in this book were written by sixteen schoolgirls during a three-day writing workshop in January 2016. In the words of one of the writers: *This book was written by a group of girls who have faced many challenges in their lives. These girls are strong, intelligent and beautiful. They were together like a rainbow nation. They wrote this book to give other girls inspiration.*

The writers, at the time of the workshop, were between the ages of 15 and 21, in their last two years of high school. They share pieces of themselves in these stories - writing of their hopes and dreams, their pain and sorrow. More than anything they want their voices heard so as to bring hope to other young women. They say: *We want to talk about the problems we are facing because we want to empower young women. We want to share our hard, painful stories so that we can help other girls who are scared to tell their stories.*

Through their stories they share past and present traumas and hurts, give voice to their experiences, and help themselves, other young women, their teachers, parents, male peers and others better understand their realities. These stories from their hearts touch our hearts and create an awareness and understanding of their lives. Working with these girls was a profound experience, surfacing anger and sadness within the two of us providing writing support, as well as our admiration at their resilience and hope.

As the stories in this book show, writing can enable a different kind of voice that is true to self and hence powerful. In addition, the process

of writing itself is empowering and healing. While the three-day writing workshop surfaced painful experiences, the writing process helped to heal, brought hope, a blossoming, and an awareness for each one that she was not alone. The writers say:

I felt so emotional. I had to be open about my story. It felt so real because it took me back to sad memories. As I wrote I felt relieved to share the things we as young women face in our everyday lives.

It was very good to be with different people who made me feel strong by sharing their stories of hope. This made me feel very special. I blossomed. People were passionate about themselves. I realised I am not alone. I have come to understand myself and other people. I realise how strong and talented we are as human beings.

I heard sad stories that made me see that some things in life are not good for us as women of South Africa. I saw that in South Africa we have big problems.

The ‘sad memories’ these schoolgirl writers carry are the results of a breakdown of family, community, economy and society which in turn result in continued suffering twenty-one years into South Africa’s new democracy. Their writings express the real lived experience of their generation – a generation born in post-apartheid South Africa, and known as ‘born frees’. This generation was supposedly to pluck the fruits of the new democracy – but as their stories show, the wounds of apartheid and of unresolved poverty continue to haunt their lives.

Many write of pain at being left in rural areas with grandparents who were old and unwell and whose government pensions were the only source of income. The parents of these young girls went to the cities to find jobs, but were often not able to find work and so were unable to send money back home. Some of these girls write of the deep ache of not eating for days while waiting for their grandparents’ next pensions to arrive. Many write of the anger they feel at men in their communities

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– uncles, neighbours, boys living on their streets – who have abused their trust through rape and other violent encounters. Their stories give us a glimpse into the real meaning of the national statistics in South Africa of growing poverty and inequality, of violence and rape.

The criteria for selecting this group of girls was not the extent of past pain or deprivation. The objective was to recruit girls in grades 11 and 12 who were interested in writing. The first sixteen to sign up were selected. It is therefore likely that their experiences are no different from those of other young women in their informal settlement, no different from the vast majority of school girls across South Africa today. Furthermore, what these writers were able to express over three days of writing is clearly just the tip of the iceberg.

The realities shared in these stories raise challenges for a range of actors – in communities, in social movements, in NGOs and in government - on how best to support young girls and young women such as these who dare to dream. And despite huge odds these schoolgirl writers do dare to dream. Their dreams are that among them one day there will be a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, an engineer, an office administrator, an accountant, a traffic cop, an oceanographer, a dancer and travelling chef, a poet and actress, two scientists and two social workers.

Over the three days the schoolgirl writers learnt from each other, gained strength, a greater awareness of self, an awareness that things can be changed, and that they can make change happen. As one of the schoolgirl writers said, writing about her experiences made her aware that ‘women have the power to change the world.’ There were moments of laughter, happiness and enjoyment during the three days and for some the workshop brought a sense of peace. For all there was the sense of accomplishment of having written a story. The writers expressed a sense of bravery – they recognise that writing takes courage.

The writers say:

The workshop was a path finder for me. I found who I am and what I want. I learnt that we all come from different backgrounds but we are just the same. It also

sunk into my head that women have the power to change the world.

The workshop was so good and exciting. It encouraged me and gave me strength. I was blessed because we shared our experiences. It showed that we can move on and let the past go. It has taught me to like writing.

Sharing my story with others was so amazing. It is a great journey for me because I learnt many things.

When I was at the workshop I felt peaceful and wonderful. No one was making noise at me. I enjoyed being here. I got to know people. I exposed my feelings and thoughts. Learning to do so I feel I've grown up.

Being at the workshop helped to keep all my troubles away. Being out of the house allowed me to be happy and not angry.

I love the people here. I have never been so happy before. I feel blessed to get an opportunity to come here and lucky to be chosen to write for this book.

When I think about the workshop I smile. Because I learnt how to write a story. I did not think I would write a story.

I am glad we managed to write and finish our stories without backing out. We were all brave up until the end, because we were able to come out with whatever had been bothering us for the last decades.

Creating a space for writing and ongoing support

Years of working with high school learners on a Date Rape campaign brought to the attention of Nisaa Institute for Women's Development

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the need to bring together a group of schoolgirls to write about their lives both as a means of empowerment and a means of communicating the realities of their lives to teachers, parents, and others.

As facilitator of the writing process, my aim was to create a supportive space for reflection and writing while making clear that everyone has powerful ideas and the ability to write¹. During all three days of the workshop, each wrote intently and by day three had completed their piece of writing.

From previous experience I knew that writing often surfaced painful experiences. Both Nyasha and I were armed with Capacitar² techniques for dealing with emotional stress and we drew on these techniques on all three days. The guidance teacher from one of the schools, and a Nisaa auxiliary social worker were in attendance to also offer support. Nyasha and I each took responsibility for providing feedback and support to the girls - assigning half of the group to each of us.

On the afternoon of day one the schoolgirls worked in groups of three to read a piece of writing and to offer each other supportive feedback. Nyasha and I were not part of these groups and when we asked what the feedback session had been like the schoolgirls responded that it was painful. This was the first indication we had of the deep, deep pain the schoolgirls had experienced in their lives.

As facilitators we became acutely aware of our responsibility to provide emotional support at the same time as we wanted to help them give voice to their experiences. We met with the writers twice following the workshop. We ensured that each received at least one counselling session with Nisaa social workers. We encouraged some to agree to ongoing counselling with Nisaa.

Working with these beautiful, courageous, loving young women has been a truly profound experience. Their writings are gifts to themselves

¹ My writing support work is inspired by writing teacher Louise Dunlap. See her book *Undoing the Silence* here: <http://www.newvillagepress.net/book/?GCOI=97660100545190&>

² Capacitar is a system of body-mind-spirit practices for healing. For more information see: <http://www.capacitar.org/index.html>

and to all of us. It is our hope that these stories will inspire other young women to speak out and give voice to experiences that are unacceptable, untenable and that need to change. It is our hope that these writings will be read by those who can help to make change happen so that young women in South Africa today can turn their dreams into reality.

Reflections on the writing process

Nyasha Mukuwane

Having worked with Shamim before, I thought I was prepared for the rigour of the writing workshop. The process of recruiting went seamlessly and I could not wait to look at the fresh faces writing with wonder and excitement.

We were not looking for painful or extraordinary stories. Quite the contrary, we were looking for the lived experiences of young women in South Africa as they navigate their sexuality, growing up and relationships. No requirement was given other than a willingness to write. I imagined stories of teenage angst, issues and experiences. I planned in my head how everything would work out. I knew the final list of the girls' names by heart, though I had yet to meet some of them. I thought I was ready for the challenge.

On the first day, the girls shuffled into the room, some happy, some anxious, and some unsure. They spoke to their friends and some sat in solitary corners waiting to begin. They were all different, yet united in the quest to write their stories. We did tai chi on the first day and for many of the girls, it was their first introduction to tai chi. They enjoyed it and they giggled at some of the poses.

The topics they wanted to write about ranged from childhood stories to puberty, sexual assault, abusive relationships and family members. They wanted to write for other young people, to inspire them and to raise awareness.

The venue was accommodating of our rambunctious crew. The girls found nooks and crannies all over the conference centre to practice free

writing and to start writing their stories. It was an ideal venue, surrounded by scenic bushveld and as luck would have it, we were the only group there that weekend. The young writers sat outside and in the lobby writing and searching for inspiration whilst taking a selfie or two or several! During plenary feedback, the girls were active and talkative and when it was time for writing, they were quiet, studious and serious. They were given freedom, not to worry about grammar, spelling and prose but to concentrate on writing for the reader, to draw a sincere and vivid painting of themselves.

I was initially taken aback by the reality in their stories. I was not prepared for the raw, delicate, unearthed and sometimes painful writing. The three days of writing were such a roller coaster yet we pulled through. Shamim was able to keep the writing going like the captain of a ship in choppy waters. Through Capacitor exercises like tai chi, fingerholds, head holds and hand massages, we were able to quell any emotional upheaval that the girls may have experienced.

During the three days, whilst reading and giving feedback, it was clear to Shamim and I that we had a responsibility towards the girls, and that further emotional support was required after the writing. I am glad to say their stories are complex, well written and genuine. I am sorry to say that many have experienced the ills of modern society. However, these stories do not want the reader to feel pity or to view the writers in binary terms of either victim or victor. These are stories of young womanhood, resilience and a resolve to live a better tomorrow. There is not a single young woman who participated in the writing who believes that her fate in life is set. They are willing to succeed despite odds and they acknowledge that it is not easy to get there.

Though the facilitation of the writing stretched me thin in a way I had never experienced before, I am glad that young women in South Africa have been given, and have taken a platform to tell their stories in their voices. These are the everyday stories of young women all over South Africa whether in rural Eastern Cape, urban Johannesburg, Soweto or KwaZulu-Natal. They are a hopeful and assertive group and I am honoured to know them and their experiences.









*Only The Brave Will
Conquer*

Mkay Khumalo

It was a fine Monday morning. The sun was already sparkling through my window. I slowly came out of sleep, feeling like something was wrong. My 55-year-old mother was still sleeping. Most mornings I did not even know what time she left the bed to make the fire and boil water for us, me and my siblings, so we could bathe and leave for school. Most mornings she would wake me to go to school.

I went outside but I could not find the firewood. I remembered that our father did not want to see any of us kids at the fire site. I ran back to the hut where my mother and I slept so that I could wake her to make the fire for us. We were running out of time. By now we should have already been bathing.

I found my mother rolling on the floor. I was only 6 years old, but I managed to push her over so that I could look her in the face. I asked her ‘Mamma are you okay?’ I saw that she was covered with sweat. She did not reply. This got me scared. All she did was stare at me when I asked what was wrong. I asked her many times, but she wouldn’t answer my questions.

On the other side of the bed my four-month-old sister had started to cry. As helpless as my mother was, my sister just looked at me with those puppy eyes of hers and pointed to the baby milk. I gave my baby sibling the milk. Then I changed her nappy and she was quiet. I had run out of time to go to school.

My older brother and sister, who slept in the rondaval hut had by then left for school. I stood looking at my helpless mother. I went to the kitchen to make her some porridge, hoping she would speak to me after she ate.

The bravery that came into me

When I came out of the hut the sun was shining so bright you could swear it was already afternoon. But it was still morning. I heard dogs barking all around the yard, a sign that something was wrong. I went to the kraal and tried to milk the cows so I could give milk to my mother whom I thought was dying of hunger. Luckily I managed to get enough milk and I forced my mom to drink this in order for her to recover, even

though I did not know what was wrong with her.

After she drank the milk I helped my mother get back on the bed so that she could sleep next to the baby in case the baby needed her. I sat next to them till they fell asleep. I then sat outside under the pine tree, which was calm as the waters. I sat waiting for my father who usually left for gardening first thing in the morning, as soon as he woke. As a traditional man my father did not believe in breakfasting. He believed that breakfast made him tired.

I fell asleep and by the time I woke I saw that my father was about to reach the gate. I called out to him “Baba, Baba!” He replied in a deep angry voice “Why didn’t you go to school?” I could not answer because I had been taught that responding directly to an adult is disrespectful, and hearing his voice of anger made me unable to say why I had called out to him in the first place. He left me standing at the gate as if I had nothing better to do with my miserable life.

I waited until my brother and sister came back from school. I told them about the state our mother was in. They told Baba in the evening when he came back from the fields, and he rushed my mother to the hospital that night. She was admitted to hospital and stayed there for about six months.

While our mother was in hospital things were not good at home. We would sometimes sleep on empty tummies.

On better days my father would come with something to eat. When my mother recovered she did not stay home for long. She took our little sister, leaving a note that she was going to find us food. We were very hurt that she left us behind. But after some months she sent food and money so that we could buy the things we needed. She sent us food and money every month for seven years.

Growing up without a mother figure in your life is not something anybody wants. My father would call us names and I would not blame him. My mother came back when I was 13 years old, my brother was 15 and my older sister had finished standard eight.

When I heard that my mother was coming all the way from the City of Gold (Johannesburg) to fetch us and take us to live with her, the thought

kept me up all night. I would wake in the middle of the night thinking the sun had risen, but all I could hear were mosquitos, dogs barking and birds singing. I heard a motor scooter outside, and then my mother's soft voice and her laughter. I thought it was a dream as I drifted off to sleep. Even when my siblings screamed "Mama, mama" I did not wake. When my mom woke me the next morning all I could see was this weird red lipstick and her voice sounded weird. All I wanted was to sleep after all these hours of sleepless waiting. But I was happy to wake up next to my mother that morning.

My mother took us with her to the City of Gold, Johannesburg. We found it very hard to adapt to all the noise. The vibe in Johannesburg was something we were not used to. When my mother sent us to the shops we were surprised at how the people of Jozi behaved, some drinking every day, streetlights that were just too bright, all that dirt on the streets.

My sister fell pregnant after her matric so she could not further her studies. She is still with her husband today and they have a 6-year-old son. My brother passed his matric, but unfortunately he could not go to university because my parents could not afford it. My father also decided to come to Jozi to find work.

Through my story I hope to empower people who are experiencing poverty, to encourage them not to lose hope because good things come to those who wait, and when you do get a chance of getting out of poverty do not lose focus of what is at stake. Use whatever opportunity you get wisely. Remember, your background doesn't determine your future. You may know what you are at this stage, but not what you might become in the future. Try by all means to bury your past and don't let your feelings overwhelm you. The best is yet to come.

About the writer of this story

I am 19-year old girl, medium-sized, light in complexion, with curves. I am in Grade 12. I grew up in the rural areas where nothing is important except traditions. I am a girl of dreams, a mirror of my family, a girl who wishes to someday see herself in a lab trying to find cures for diseases.

I like traditional music (Maskandi), simply because this music follows traditions without losing the secret of its origins. I enjoy going out with my cousins, talking about issues, advising each other about boyfriends, our situations at home and how we should break the chain of poverty. We listen to Maskandi music when we're done brainstorming ideas of how to cope with or adapt in this cruel world.

I am grateful to both my parents for raising me to this point although it was not easy. I want to make them proud.



The Choice Is Mine

Gabriel

When Noluthando got her new cellphone, she was so excited because all she wanted to do was chat on Whatsapp. It was her favourite app. Her friends added her on to their crazy group chats where there were many people she did not know. They would invite her and inbox her. Most of them were boys from other provinces, but they seemed nice and very funny.

One day a guy sent Noluthando a message. She did not know how he had got her number or even what he looked like. She assumed that he was from some group chat. They talked a lot and she really enjoyed talking to him. He had a cousin who looked like a nerd but wasn't really one. The guy asked her to be his girlfriend but she was not really into the long distance relationship thing.

By the June holidays Noluthando's heart was really broken. A few weeks earlier she had broken up with her boyfriend from school. They had been dating since February and unfortunately had broken up by the end of May. Noluthando had really loved him. 'Oh well', she now thought 'life goes on'.

She now told the long distance guy that she could meet him in his hood. She was willing to make the trip to his province even though it was a long way. He was very excited. By now she knew what he looked like.

It was a very long trip and she went on her own. She got to the taxi rank, where the buses ended their journey. She was freaking out. Her heart just went down to the tip of her toes. Her head was spinning. And as for her face, she couldn't feel it because of the fear. It was the first time she had traveled such a long distance alone.

She called the guy and asked him how to get to his hood. He said it was far and that she should take a taxi from that rank to another taxi rank. When she got off the bus she saw many people. The rank was a pretty scary place—dirty and full of criminals. She saw a woman selling fruits and veggies who asked Noluthando if she was going to Joburg. Noluthando could see that this woman really wanted to talk to her. She had a soft smile. Noluthando just nodded yes without opening her mouth. The streets were very very busy. Taxis were coming in and

out of the rank. You'd swear everyone in the world was there.

Noluthando asked for help with finding the taxis that go to the guy's hood. A guy with a gold tooth went with her to the taxi she was looking for. Noluthando asked how much it cost. It was very expensive. The taxi was empty and it took a very long time to fill up with passengers. You can imagine by now just how much Noluthando regretted this adventure, which was now turning scary. But she was already into it and she felt that she had no choice but to proceed. She had so many worries. Her cell phone battery was very low. When she got off the taxi with her bag she was at another rank. She was supposed to take another taxi from there to the guy's hood. She asked people where she could charge her phone and they helped find a place at the rank. She was now shaking. She called the guy and she shouted at him. She told him that she didn't know where to go. All she wanted now was to go back to Johannesburg.

His voice suited his picture. But she was full of nerves and anger. She almost had a heart attack after what had happened. When she finally reached the taxi rank the sun was already setting, because it was winter. Fortunately she was able to get a bus that evening to take her back to the safety of her family in Johannesburg. She learnt her lesson. No more crazy trips to places where she did not feel safe.

About the writer of this story

I am 16 years old and in grade 11. I was born in KZN but came to Orange Farm in 2000. I grew up in a township of Orange Farm called "Farmton." It was a very disadvantaged place. We never had tarred roads and many houses were shacks. As time went by that all changed.

I have happy memories of going out with my parents and having ice cream. Ice cream makes me happy and like a free soul. I was also very happy to see my parents happy on that day. My brother was born in 2013. It was the happiest time of our lives. I was very happy that I was not going to be alone anymore.

I love my parents. My parents want the best for me. They are always

there for me, even though at times they are overprotective.

The things I like to do for fun include listening to music and hanging out with my friends. I love jokes. Even if a person jokes about me I just laugh, because I know it ain't personal. I also like to watch television the whole day.

I don't like looking at life the normal way. I look at it in an extraordinary way like finding out what people say is impossible. Which is why I want to be a scientist—to explore the world. Some people say life sucks and is boring, but this is because they don't know what to do with their lives.



How DOES N/AADPE AFFECT TOOTH



*How Nyaope
Destroys Youth In Our
Community*

Yamkela Nondudula

Mpumie was born in Baragwanath Hospital in 1995. She was raised in Orange Farm by her grandmother, because her mother died giving birth to her.

Mpumie, her grandmother and her three brothers lived in a very small one-room shack. They lived with the support of a government grant. The clothes Mpumie wore were given to her by the neighbours or were knitted by her grandmother.

In grade 1, Mpumie was so clever and very beautiful. All her teachers loved her because she was respectful. She had three friends and you would always find her with these friends. Mpumie always had a smile on her face. You would never see her angry. When she got home from school she always made sure to kiss her granny and ask about her granny's day.

Her granny was very strict. She had a strong voice and you would hear her shouting at Mpumie. But since Mpumie was used to this, she did not mind her granny's shouting.

When Mpumie was in grade 7 the learners at school were talking about what they were going to wear at the farewell. This was their last year of primary school and they would be going to high school the following year. One of the learners asked Mpumie 'what are you going to wear for the farewell?' Mpumie answered in a very low voice, 'I am not going to the farewell, my granny doesn't have money. She only has money to buy us food. So I am not going'.

Mpumie was so hurt she even cried. One of the teachers asked Mpumie why she was crying. When Mpumie told her, the teacher offered to pay her fee and to buy her clothes for the farewell.

Mpumie was so excited. It was her first time at a hotel. She was over the moon. She couldn't wait to tell her grandmother. When she got home she told her granny the good news. Her granny celebrated the good news with her.

On the day of the farewell Mpumie woke at 5:00 a.m. She dressed herself in her new dress with joy. She was full of smiles and happiness. Her granny woke and asked her 'Did you see what time it is?' Mpumie replied 'Nope granny'. Her granny laughed at seeing Mpumie so happy.

Mpumie enjoyed herself at the farewell.

The next year Mpumie went to high school. She had new friends. But these friends smoked and dated taxi drivers. Her grandmother tried to show her how she should behave now that she was in high school. But it seemed like Mpumie did not want to hear.

Mpumie started to date a grade 10 learner. The guy was charming and humble but since her friends wanted her to be corrupt they told her that he was not a good guy for her.

She eventually dumped this guy and started to date a taxi driver much older than her. He gave her money to buy food and clothes. One day he invited her to his house. Mpumie was still a virgin. They watched movies. They started to kiss and the guy started to take off her clothes. Mpumie stopped him. She told him that she was still a virgin. That she won't be able to sleep with him. The guy told her that he wanted back each and every rand he had spent on her. Mpumie didn't have a choice. She ended up sleeping with him without protection.

When she got home from her boyfriend's house, Mpumie found that her grandmother was very ill. She could not wake her grandmother. She tried to get help from the neighbours, but it was too late. Her granny was already dead.

Mpumie's grandmother did not have a funeral plan or any insurance. Mpumie did not know where to start asking for donations. At her home there was no food to eat. Luckily, the community helped by contributing donations so that her grandmother could be buried in a dignified way.

On the funeral day Mpumie was hurt because she knew that she now had no one. She would have to hustle for herself. She cried painfully and loudly. She could not bear that pain.

After three months Mpumie dropped out of school so that she could get money for food. She ended up selling her body for a living on the N1 highway. And that was where she got introduced to nyaope. Today she lives with a group of nyaope boys and she is an addict. One of their friends died recently, he was beaten up by the community.

It is so painful to see one of our sisters, one of our friends suffering from this disease, nyaope, because of poverty. It makes us ask 'who is

next?' Who will be stolen from us by nyaope? Sometimes I ask myself, who is this cruel person who introduced nyaope to our youth?

Nyaope has destroyed our sisters, brothers and friends; Ingumbulalazwe uqobo abantwana bomzantsi bayaphela ngenxa yale Nyaope, (let's stand up as we are youth and fight this Nyaope).

About the writer of this story

I am 16 years old. I was born in Cape Town. I lived with my grandparents and when I was in grade 7 I moved to Johannesburg, the City of Gold to live with my mother, a single parent. We lived in a shack. My mother did not work and we were poor. There were many nights we would sleep without food. But still I never lost hope. I have had so many disappointments in life. I tried to do things I am not proud of. When I went for counseling I saw that life has its ups and downs whether you are from a rich or poor family.

I am in grade 11 and my dream is to become a poet and actress. I would like to build a house for my mother and siblings and a home for children who live on the streets.

I like to spend my weekends at church with my church mates. Talking to God makes me relaxed and feel protected. I like gospel music especially Zion music. If I am in pain, I listen to one of these songs and I feel blessed. I love these songs because they have a deep message.

Happy moments in my life were when I heard that I was going to be the chairperson of Young Rise Women and Peer Educators, and when I performed a poem at my church on Good Friday, and they recognised me as a talented young poet. I felt like an artist because they wanted to take pictures of me in my traditional clothes performing the poem. My happiest moment was when I went to visit my family in Eastern Cape. I was so happy because it is good to spend time with family. They performed a ceremony to welcome me as their granddaughter. That made me feel so special and blessed.



Journey Does not end !!!



*The Journey Does
Not End!*

Valencia

I am a living human being with a great smile, I am tall, charming and a loving person who loves laughing a lot. I am a young teenager wanting to learn about the stories of different people whom I don't know. I want to write stories and achieve more and carry on being myself without changing for anyone.

Each day I ask myself is this world good? Are we safe? Can I trust anyone around me? I ask myself: am I free enough to tell my story? How will people react if they hear my story? Will they judge, laugh and tease at the same time? Why can't I be me and forget about those who don't care about me? Why don't I tell stories that will help build a nation? Stories that will help each and every one to succeed. Why should we carry burdens in ourselves? What have we done to deserve this? Why us?

I would like to share my story with the world and let them know that if you have a problem you are not alone. There are people who care to help. There are those who are truly willing to help in such a way that you will not think of killing yourself, that you will not think of crying out loud at the pain you have gone through.

That pain made me feel like killing myself. It made me feel like I wanted to go and live somewhere peacefully without any noise, without the pain that burdened me and made me cry. I wished I could live somewhere where nobody would miss me, where there was no shouting, no screaming.

When I look back at what I have gone through, I feel like I cannot express what I'm feeling to someone who will judge me because of my background. I cannot express this to someone who was not there when my life fell apart. But when I think of the people I love deep down in my heart, the ones who make me keep going without blaming me about my past, I feel strong enough to share my story.

The journey of my life started in a bad way. People could not see the pain I felt because they saw only the beauty of the outside. They could not see the inside of what I felt, or what I have gone through.

Life started to get easier as we became aware of our lives, of what we could do, and as we set our own goals. Now I can see what the future

holds for me because my friends were always there to help, to give me courage, to remind me that we should not lose hope and that we should keep on trying our best.

Starting my journey

My journey started when we were born, me and my twin sister. That is where my life started - when we were given birth by a very special person in my life, my mother. My mother and my father are the most significant people in my life. If I have a problem I can go to them and tell them what is wrong or right. I am happy to have such kind parents who are now happy since my father quit drinking. He is a very lovely father, and we are a family that understands each other. We are strong and believing Christians who have a very big future, and that's it!

But it wasn't always like this. When we were growing up things were very harsh, my father used to drink a lot and beat my mother. This was not a good thing to see when we were young. Our feelings started to be aggressive and we were always under a lot of stress. Life was cruel, painful, tough, and challenging. We were judged, laughed at, and as a human being I felt pain. This led me to bully other kids and to cry over some unnecessary things.

We lost everything, our family fell apart. Our older brother had to leave the house to live in the streets because my father led him to do that - he always beat our brother in front of our mother, and he kicked him out of the house.

Happy moments came when I stood up for myself and pleaded with my parents to stop what they are doing and start afresh, respect us, make peace and solve their problems without getting into fights. Because fighting won't fix problems, it will only make them worse. That showed them that we care, that we love them and are part of their lives as their children.

Now I see progress in my life. I am happy that my father quit drinking because he went through counseling. He finished his counseling about a year and half ago. This shows that if you truly want to change you can without anyone forcing you.

Being in that kind of a family taught me many things because now I know what is wrong and what is right and what I should do to be better, to believe in myself, without putting myself under pressure. No matter what, I will always love my family as they are and I will show them respect.

Liquor - the destroyer of homes

Each and everyday I see men carrying plastic bags with brown bottles inside and I ask myself, “what is in there?” This thing is a destroyer of homes. The person who is going to drink this won’t bring peace to his/her family. This stupid liquor is bringing our nation down, breaking it into pieces, killing peoples’ homes, breaking them apart from each other.

Each weekend night I hear children shouting ‘STOP! don’t beat him! Don’t hurt her. Please STOP!’ It is painful to hear 9- to 10-year old children shouting, crying for a better life. I wish I could take these young children to a safe place where they can live in peace. I see myself in their situation. I think of the time I had to shout and scream at my father, asking him to stop beating my mom in the streets of Orange Farm, where everybody always cares about what people are doing, laughing and judging them. People are always discussing you when you pass by, where they sit on corners playing Faffi (cards), where taxi hooters call out to school children, promising them better things.

One Saturday morning, walking down the road I saw a woman with a Black Label beer in her hand sitting at the Tavern. What came into my mind is ‘have her kids eaten? Did the kids feel happy about what they saw their mother doing? How did her kids feel seeing their own mother waking up in the morning saying she will come back?’ But NO! that did not happen because of the brown bottle breaking families apart, destroying homes, giving us stress and pressure. Seeing a child walking around the street without shoes or pants and his face full of anger and hunger at the same time, people saying ‘Hawu bandla (Shame) where are his parents?’ What did this child do to deserve this? But hell no, life is cruel!

What about our lovely childhood, when we played around without any concern? Now people are being killed, people are dying. I realize that in life things come in unexpected ways, and you have to always watch your back when you go outside, fearing that you might get robbed or be killed for no reason. What have we done wrong? Has God now started to punish us?

Even in darkness we can find hope

I would like to say to people that they have to live the life they want. Try it and live it!

Let me just say, let us be one and think of our future. Let us unite. I have decided that no matter what I will just LET IT GO! And carry on with what God has given me to share and always be me, not to change for anybody.

Now I am able to walk in the street without any concern about what people will say because I am free to share and I think my mind has calmed down. My mind is relaxed and I would love to share more stories about my life, with people who are kind, loving and who respect my opinions and my vision.

About the writer of this story

I am 16 years old. I am in grade 11. I am a science student and my dream is to become a mechanical engineer. This is my passion and I need to study hard to fulfill this dream. It was very good to be at the writing workshop with different people who made me feel strong about telling our stories of hope. This made me feel very special. I blossomed. People were very passionate about themselves. I realised I am not alone. We are together. I have come to understand myself and other people. I realise how strong and talented we are as human beings.



LOVE
and
Peace

Think Before You Act

Payile

My brother was the breadwinner at home. He was 21 years old, doing matric and working at the same time. He really loved our mother and did not want to see her suffering without food and money.

As we were growing up we always had stupid fights and I really loved to play with him. He did not like to play with me because I am a girl. He was a caring brother and we loved joking.

A few years ago, when I was 18 years old, I liked going out with naughty friends and smoking weed. One day when I got home my brother was in the kitchen cooking. The smell of weed was all over my clothes and he asked me ‘Are you smoking weed?’ I laughed at him and said ‘No!’ He took my hands in his and smelt them. He was really angry with me. He said to me ‘Stop smoking weed. It will affect your brain’.

One day in March 2013 my cousin sister took maternity leave and moved in with us in the last days of her pregnancy. She did not want to go to her boyfriend because they had had a fight.

My cousin sister gave birth to a baby girl. My cousin sister adored her baby. She carried her baby with a smile that showed love for her daughter. Her boyfriend came to our home to see the child. But he was not happy, as his mother had fed him bad stories about my cousin.

That Saturday, my brother and I came home from extra classes at school, really hungry. We even fought for the four slices of bread, until my mother gave my brother money to buy another loaf of bread. I heard a knock on the door. It was 12 o’clock in the afternoon and I found it was my cousin sister’s boyfriend at the door. He said ‘Hi my love, can I see Zodwa?’

I said yes and I went to the room where my cousin sister was sleeping with her beautiful two-day old daughter. I told her that her boyfriend was there to see her. She woke up and left her baby asleep in bed. She went outside to see her boyfriend.

When my brother came back from the shop he saw them outside. He came into the house and started preparing food for us. I heard a gunshot but I ignored it. I thought it was a distance away. Then I heard a second gunshot and a scream right outside the door. I hid under the sofa, not knowing what was happening outside. My cousin sister ran into the

house and locked the kitchen door. Her boyfriend broke down the door and shot my cousin sister nine times, killing her. He shot my brother twice. He then went outside and shot himself in the head.

I came out from under the sofa and went into the kitchen. I saw a lot of blood. My cousin sister was lying on the floor. My brother was still alive and he called me. Instead of going to him I screamed and ran into my bedroom because I was scared of blood. I climbed out of my bedroom window, shaking, scared and not knowing what to do. But I managed to call the ambulance. An old man, one of our neighbours, gave my brother water because my brother asked for water. By the time the ambulance arrived it was too late. My brother was dead. He died five minutes before the ambulance came. My cousin's boyfriend was not yet dead. The ambulance took him to hospital but he pulled out the drips the paramedics had set up and did not make it.

The day of the funeral was really painful. Someone had put me down to say the obituary but I was not strong enough to stand before my brother's coffin. I had a guilty conscience because he had called me before he died and instead of going to him, I just ran away. But I managed to talk about my brother in front of all the people at the funeral.

After the funeral my aunt and my mother were going up and down to the police station because the boyfriend's mother wanted his and my cousin sister's two children. She did not get the children. Both children are staying with my aunt, their maternal grandmother, in Lenasia. They are a happy family. Their father made his daughters orphans for no good reason.

After all that trauma we did not even go for counseling. I could not sleep at night for six months. I felt loneliness in my life because my brother was everything to me. My brother died for nothing.

God gives and takes—it is part of life. But my message is: think before you act. If you don't, you will regret hurting innocent people.

About the writer of this story

I am a grade 12 learner. I am 21 years old. I hope to pass my matric with flying colours so that I can go to University and study Office Administration. My dream is to have a brighter future for my son.

I was born in Queenstown. I stayed with my grandmother for six years, then I came to live with my mother in Lenasia. My mother is a single parent. I like visiting my friends or going out to parks with my friends. I like dancing to the beat of hip-hop music. I also love house music. I like songs with good and positive messages.

My happiest moment was when I saw my father for the first time in 2010 when I was 16 years old. I was very sick and the doctors could not find the problem. One doctor said to my mother that my father might know what the problem was because my father is a prophet. We went all over Soweto looking for my father. Because he is a well-known prophet we thought it would be easy to find him. We asked many people and luckily one person told us that my father stays at Pennyville. I took the train with my mom and aunt to Pennyville and we found my father. I was very happy and I got better. I am happy to be in contact with my father since then—I visit him and he sometimes comes to visit me.



" LOVE
" CARE
LOYAL "



" RESPECT "

My Mother

Innocencia Hlope

My mother is a loving, caring and protective person. She is a single parent who raises us on her own. She is the most wonderful, beautiful mother in the whole world. She cares about her children and she does not care about what people say about her family.

My siblings and I face many challenges. My father is in jail. My mother does whatever it takes to protect us. She supports our family with grant money. My mother's brother is not working but he tries to make sure that we children go to bed with a full stomach.

My mother makes sure we are well cared for. When she says 'I don't have money' we try to understand.

I hope to visit my father in prison. I wait for him to be out of prison and to have a nice life with him. Our father wants to have his family united and my mother wishes to marry my father even if he is still in prison. One day she will buy the beautiful mansion of her dreams.

About the writer of this story

I am 18 years old. I am in grade 11 and my hope is to study hard and pass so that I can go to grade 12. I want to be a lawyer and to buy my own mansion and my own car.

When I am at home I do many things for fun. I play hide and seek. I play soccer. I go to parties some Friday afternoons or Saturday nights. When I listen to house or RnB music I feel that my world would never end. I am over the moon. The messages in the songs cheer me up. I enjoy dancing especially when they put my song on.





*When Things Go
Wrong You Must Not
Quit*

Oluthando

I was 13 years old when my family left me in the Eastern Cape with my grandfather. My family was going to Cape Town and my mum didn't have enough money to take us all with her. I enjoyed staying with my grandfather. My grandfather was 70 years old, and he always tried by all means to keep me happy. It was nice but hard at the same time because we sometimes slept hungry because there was nothing to eat.

One night my grandfather told me that we didn't have anything to eat. I told him to tell my mom and he said there was no need to do that. That night I slept hungry, full of tears in my eyes. I told myself that my family didn't care about me, that they only cared about my sisters and brothers.

My grandfather told mum and dad that it was hard but he liked staying with me. My parents didn't know what to do because they were not working. It was hard but I managed to cope. After a year my grandfather was ill. He also had an eye problem. It was very hard because everything was on me. I was supposed to go to school and after coming from school I had to do all the house chores and sometimes I would have to take care of my grandfather.

My mum came and took me to her sister who was living in another rural area. I didn't want to leave my grandfather alone. He was sick but I had no choice. My grandfather told me to go and come back to visit him. I cried and it seemed like my family did not care about my grandfather.

At first, it was nice staying with my aunt but she hated me. She made me feel like I did not deserve to be alive. I was angry with my mum because she had taken me to live with her sister who abused me.

One day I thought of escaping. I wanted to go to my grandfather. It was at night and I was afraid of zombies. I walked on the road as fast as I could, crying. I saw someone in front of me. It was a young man looking for his father's sheep that had been stolen a week before. He saw that I was crying and he asked, "Where are you going?" I told him that I was going to my grandfather who was sick.

When I arrived, the gate was closed as if there was no one there. I ran to the house and knocked. No one answered. I pushed the door because

there was a dog barking at me. Grandfather was sleeping. I cried asking if he was okay but I didn't get any answer. I looked for something to eat and there was nothing to eat. After a few days he told me to go back to my aunt. I told him that I was not going there. I told him to go to a clinic and he said, "I am fine my child don't worry". Two days passed with nothing to eat. It was hard but I wanted to see my grandfather happy.

One evening my mom came to fetch me. I decided to hide so that she would go back. My grandfather told her to leave and my mom listened. I was happy because she also got us something to eat.

After a week my uncle got married in a traditional way and his wife came to live with us. She was pregnant, and I thought she was there to help my grandfather. Instead she made things harder for my grandfather. My aunt made me cook, and wash blankets every day before I went to school.

She gave birth to a baby girl. After she gave birth I was the one washing her baby's clothes and cloth nappies. My grandfather didn't like that but he could do nothing.

My mom heard about this and she came again to take me to where she and my dad were living. It was nice living with my mom and dad, but I always thought about my grandfather, of how he was coping with my aunt treating him badly.

On the 11th of October 2014 I received a call from my grandfather telling me that he loved me. He also told me to be strong. I didn't know how to answer him. I cried very hard. I felt the pain my grandfather was going through.

After two days I found out that my grandfather had died the day he called me. I asked my mom and dad, "Why did you keep this from me?" Their answer was, "We were protecting you my child."

After that my family moved from Cape Town to Johannesburg. And that's when I told myself that no matter what the situation you have to be strong. Right now I think I have a clue of how life is. And I am strong enough to face any challenge.

My father told me that everything that happened in my life was a lesson. It was not that he and my mom did not want me. They wanted me

to be strong and know how to fight and understand the situation I was facing. My dad always tells me that there are times in life when things won't go the way you want them to. He tells me to forgive and forget whatever happened in my life.

About the writer of this story

I am in grade 12. I am 17 years old. I would like to study to become an Oceanographer. One day I would like to build a house for my family and take care of them.

I like reading short stories. I also like making jokes with my friends and family. At home I am always laughing. It's a good thing to see your family smiling.

I like gospel music. When things go wrong gospel music helps me cool down. I like Sifiso Ncwane. The song I like most is "kilungile baba konke ekwenzeka ezimpilweni zethu umakuyintando yatho" (Everything is good only if it happens because of you God). No matter what is happening in life, it is because of God. God has never made a mistake. He always has reason for everything.





The Story Of My Life

Lulu Mcabashe

When I was 5 years old and my brother was 17 we lived in the Northern Province in a place called Modjadji with my grandmother and grandfather. My grandmother had four children. Two boys and two girls. The boys were unemployed and the two girls were still at school.

Life was hard but we survived. When my grandfather passed away it was more difficult. We had to accept he was no longer with us and we had to survive only on our grandmother's grant money. After school all I wanted was to go out and play at the river with other children. But I couldn't, as I had to take care of my grandmother who was sick with a kidney problem. It was so painful to live with someone with a kidney problem. I felt sorry because my grandmother was still young, and because she could not eat the food we were eating.

Two years later my grandmother passed on. My grandmother was the person I lived with; she knew what I liked and what I did not like. I thought to myself 'Oh my God why did you do this to me? To lose someone you love is so painful.'

After my grandmother's funeral my uncle took me to live with him and his wife in Soweto. But they did not do things for me that they did for their own children. After a year I made up my mind to go to my mother in Orange Farm.

My father had his own stand at Orange Farm and he built a tin house with two rooms –a kitchen and a bedroom. We were a happy family because my mother was working in a big hotel in Sandton as a cleaner and my father was working as a driver for Putco. We were not rich, but we were not poor either. My parents could afford to put enough food on the table. This was a happy moment for me. I found a new life in Orange Farm.

Some years went by and one day my father decided to marry my mother. My grandmother from my father's side came to live with us, and this is where the problems started. My grandmother did not appreciate my mother. She wanted my mother to wake at 5am every morning, sweep the house and cook porridge for her before preparing to go to work. My grandmother wanted to separate my father and mother. She

would say to my father ‘this wife of yours is not the best wife for you’. She wanted to throw my mother out of his house so that she could find another woman for my father.

My father decided to find another place in Extension 1 in Orange Farm. He built a big house so that we could move there.

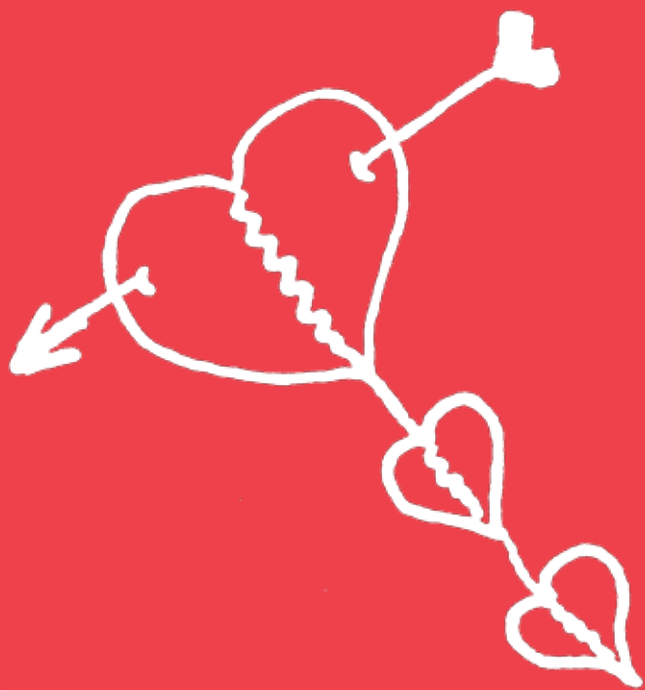
My father started a small business selling alcohol while he was still working as a bus driver. The business brought in a lot of money and things at home were getting better. In 2014 my father resigned from Putco to work in his own business. He is now self-employed. His business is doing well and he can now do as he wishes. That’s how our dream came true for our family.

My message is that no one can stop you. Only you can make a difference. In the blink of an eye everything can change. Never give up in life. It is not easy and there are ups and downs, but it is worth facing life’s challenges.

About the writer of this story

I am 17 years old and in grade 11. My dream is to become a doctor to help people who are sick. My happiest moment was when I moved to Orange Farm to stay with my mother and father. I like house music. I like to dance and to read short stories.

UNREALIZED TRUTH



The Unrevealed Truth

Memory Kau

One morning when I was 13 years old, and in grade 6, I went to visit my friend Portia. She was sick and I wanted to check up on her. Portia lived with her father and her house lacked a woman's touch. When I got there I did not find anyone home so I decided to play in the small playhouse we had made in their yard. We both loved to play in this house.

Portia's dad found me there and he called me inside the house. He was very dark in complexion. He had huge gaps between his teeth, brown eyes, a very dark mouth and half his ring finger missing. He liked to drink a lot. I went in because he was my friend's father and I trusted him. When we got inside he told me that Portia was admitted to hospital that day. I did not expect to hear this. I had not realised that she was sick enough to be taken to hospital. I could not take the weight of this news and I started to cry uncontrollably.

Portia's dad gave me comfort as I thought any parent would. But it was not just comfort. Minutes later I could feel him touching my breast. I asked him what he was doing. He said 'whatever happens in here you must never tell anyone'. That was the first time in my life I did a lot of thinking in just a few seconds. He took off all of my clothes, pulled down his pants and raped me so hard that even when I screamed the person next door could not hear me. After he was done he bathed me and told me that if I ever told anyone what happened he would kill me and my mum.

I went straight to MamNomsa's place. She is a neighbour, whom I went to every day after school until my mom fetched me when she got back from work. So I went to MamNomsa and took the keys to our house from her. I ran home, opened the door and locked myself inside for the rest of the day. I couldn't stop the bleeding. My mom had taught me that if a girl is bleeding this means she has a baby inside her. I stayed in the bathroom for about two hours. After a long bath I stopped bleeding. My mom came back from work tired as always and occupied herself with chores and cooking. My heart really wanted to tell her about what had happened. But my mind kept going to what that man had said about killing me and my mum if I told anybody.

The next morning I woke, bathed, ate and left for school as usual. But I was very different. I couldn't hear the teacher. I did not want to eat. I sat alone. I could hear my own voice screaming to myself, asking myself 'how can this happen to me?' Thoughts went through my mind that maybe I deserved it. Maybe it is my fault. Blaming myself seemed the only thing to do.

Soon after this Portia and her father moved away from our area. I lived with this secret. I was not interested in dating guys. I hated male people. I saw them as cruel and I did not want to have anything to do with them. I dated girls for a very long time. But I was never able to be free in a relationship because I heard how lesbians were treated, how they were killed.

In grade 10 I saw Portia coming to school to register for grade 9. Everything came back to me – the hate, fear, confused emotions. I went to the toilet and burst into tears. Because the person who turned me into what I had become was Portia's father. Now that she and her father had moved back to our hood I had no choice but to bump into them on a daily basis.

On the 14th of February, Valentine's day, I saw Portia's father early in the morning. My heart beat like it was going to leap out of my chest. I was shaking like never before. I went back inside and looked in the mirror. I told myself 'I won't let him rule my life'. I went back outside to check if he was still there. He was a distance away.

My friends and I decided to go out since it was lover's day. At 17 it was my first time drinking. We were in a pub in our area and some hours later Portia's father showed up. I was tipsy, but funny enough I did not have any fear. I looked at him once and just kept on drinking. After a few hours I approached him and vented my anger throwing insults at him. It came straight from my heart. He just stood there with a very big smile on his face. It felt like a knife was stabbing me right in my heart. I looked around for a bottle and hit him hard. When the bottle broke I could not stop stabbing him. He had eight holes and was immediately taken to hospital. A few weeks later he was back home and I expected police to be knocking on my door. But they didn't.

Everyone wanted to know why I did such a thing. My mom tried to talk to me. I never gave her the explanation she wanted. She then called a meeting. My elders, my father, and Portia's father all came to the meeting. They asked me why I had done that. I told them to ask Portia's father. Funny enough we both did not want to speak. I was so furious I decided to open the wound. I told them that he had raped me, and that was the point when my father beat that man to death.

Everyone in the room was surprised. I was crying. My uncles tried to stop my father but he was unstoppable. That's when Uncle Thami called the police. My father was arrested and it was all because of me. The guilt in my heart made me lose my mind.

After six months my dad appeared in court for sentencing. I asked myself what if he got a long sentence. What then? That would mean I would lose my father forever. The judge came in with a long black robe, his eye glasses at the tip of his nose. He said lots of things and ended saying 'I am sentencing you for three years'. My family was so happy. I was very, very upset. My father was skinny and he had a lot of bruises. My heart bled for him. All this was happening because of me. While he was being escorted by a policeman he asked my mom to promise to bring me to see him. After 48 hours we went to the prison. We took a home cooked meal for him but when we got there the security was so tight, the policewoman searched us even in our private parts and they mixed up the food.

We met my dad. He was in an orange uniform. I was ashamed to give him the food it was so mixed up. Our visit went like this:

Daddy: Hello Nana. How are things at home and how are you?

Me: Are you okay daddy? Are you being treated well? (taking a deep breath) Yes I am fine but worried about you.

Daddy: Miriam can I speak to my daughter alone please

Miriam: Okay (goes outside to wait)

Daddy: Nana I need you to listen to me very carefully.

Me: Yes Daddy.

Daddy: I know what happened to you is really painful but I did what I did to protect you. There is no need for you to worry about

me. Go to my house in Lakeside and in my left drawer is an envelope. Open it and what you find just tell your mom only. She will know what to do. Okay?

Me: Ke ho lorale papa o ya ntshepisa hore o tio loka mona tronkong? (I dreamt of you Papa. Are you promising that you will be safe here in prison?)

Daddy: Yeah I will be fine and bear in mind that this is the last time you are coming here. Promise me?

Security Guy: Visiting hours are over.

I went outside. My mom was waiting for me. I told her that we could go home. A week later I went to my father's house. I told my mom nothing. As I got in I smelled rotting food, and saw lots of insects. I quickly tidied up, not wanting to waste time. I went to the bedroom and opened the drawer on the left. I found a cheque for R 30 000 with a letter. It said 'use the money for your needs' with a smiley face.

Since I don't go to the prison my dad and I talk on the phone. My mom found a very decent job and in 2017 my dad will be a free man.

About the writer of this story

I am 18 years old and in grade 12. My happiest moment was when I first won the poetry award at school. I got undivided attention. People clapped and there were tears of joy and obviously the prize money. I knew my family needed the money for us to be more secure. I was inspired by Bonolo, who won SA's got talent. I told myself that if she could do it, then so could I.

I like going for a walk with my son or just chilling in the park. Most of the time window shopping does it for me. Listening to music is part of it. But most of all writing poems is very fun and like a hobby for me.



Hope is Real

Ebenezer Msibi

I was brought up by my mother, her twin sister, her brother, her mother and other very close relatives. I appreciated everything that was done for me. But deep in my heart I wasn't happy. I had a void that I needed to fill. My dad was not around. No matter how much my uncles and grandfather were there for me to close dad's gap, I still needed him. It pained me that there wasn't anyone that I could share this with because it would have made me seem like an ungrateful child.

I was grateful. But having dad would have been awesome. Years went by with me feeling vulnerable and unwanted, until I met Sihle. It was a chilly day when we met but when he opened his mouth to greet me, everything blossomed. A dull day turned into a beautiful day. He asked to take me home and I agreed. His smile was that of a newborn baby, it just lightened me up.

It was March 2014 when we met. I was in my final year of secondary school. The beginning of our relationship was the most beautiful thing that had ever happened to me. He said the sweetest things at the right time. He touched me like I had never been touched before. His touch was that of silk.

Before I knew it I was in love with him and he was in love with me. Well so I want to believe. But we hardly saw each other as matric was a very strenuous year for me, and he had a job that required him to be outside of the country.

Even so, we carried on with the relationship. The year 2014 came to an end and 2015 began. I passed my matric and he was happy for me. He even encouraged me to further my studies and he offered to pay. I was flattered. But my family had other plans which I had no problem with—that I upgrade my subjects. This meant I had to rewrite a few of the matric subjects. But because of a lack of funds I would lose the entire year. This nearly killed me but I understood.

Sihle and I began to have more time to ourselves. I loved that at first. I mean, who wouldn't love to spend time with her partner. But sadly as time went by things changed dramatically and drastically. Two weeks would go by without hearing from him. When I tried to reach him on his phone there would be no answer. When I asked him about his where-

abouts he would fume into anger and tell me it was not my place to ask him. I respected him very much, I loved him more than I loved myself, and I needed him. It was not the money or the fancy clothes or jewellery that I needed. I needed his attention. I longed for it. I longed for some sense of belonging. He was a father figure to me. Each time we were together he would ask who had been making moves on me, and he promised to sort out whoever did. Finally! I had a father, someone to protect me.

My father eventually came into my life and I welcomed him. I had no time to cross-question him about why he hadn't played his role in my life. We shared so much, we got along very well and to this day, he is the only person on earth whom I am able to offload and share my thoughts with, and whom I feel understands me. With my father in my life, you would think I would have ended things with Sihle. Because daddy was now present to fill the gap. No! I was in love with Sihle and didn't trust that dad was here to stay.

One sunny morning I went out to buy bread, dressed in a beautiful white bubble dress. I walked past his house, which was not far from the shops, Sihle came out, gave me the warmest smile, and a long hug. Then he whispered in my ear that he didn't like my dress, it was too revealing. How I laughed! My laughing must have got to him. He pulled out a gun on me, then and there. My body went from energized to numb. Fearing for my life and respecting him, I apologised and asked him to put the gun down. I assured him that I was never going to wear that dress again. He hugged me and told me he loved me and that he wanted what was best for me.

As I walked home, I wanted to scream. Tears rolled down my face. I realised that I was afraid of Sihle. He had taken advantage of the fact that I respected him and bowed down to him. But even as I realised this, I had some hope that things would not get worse. Like the verse in the bible says, "love always hopes."

Sihle's disappearing acts began again, this time for as long as two months. I understood that his job was a demanding one. It needed him to be on the go, but I wanted him to make time for me. I wanted to be

his priority. I was attached to him, he had become my drug. I called his phone but there would be no answer. I would leave messages but get no replies.

Whenever Sihle came back he would want to have sex with me but I would refuse because in my mind I thought, “this guy has been away for a very long time, I don’t know whom he has been having sexual intercourse with.” But sadly I would give in and agree to everything he asked for. What tore me apart was that he did not want to use protection. Still, I gave into him. Having unprotected sex would show him that I was committed to no one else but him. I shut out my feelings and needs and took care of his. I also shut out that I could be infected with a disease or have unwanted pregnancies.

One evening Sihle came to my home very angry. I did not know what had angered him. He took his anger out on me in every possible way. Again he pulled a gun on me. As if the beatings and insults were not enough, even if I screamed for help nobody would hear or help me. It was just the two of us in the house. My family was away. Sihle left me crying my lungs out, without even an apology. A lot of questions came to my mind. What happened to the man I met in March 2014? Who is the monster I am with now? Where has the man who used to give me goose bumps gone? Where has my protector gone? The man who gave me a sense of belonging. It felt as if Sihle was treating me like a stranger. I got used to the beatings and the insults. They had become a norm. I wanted to leave the relationship but I couldn’t. I wasn’t strong enough. I felt defeated.

A relationship is like an investment, no, a seed. A lot is planted. My trust was planted and so was my love. So I felt as if throwing in the towel would make me seem like a failure. Not realising that I was killing myself.

On the 10th of September 2015 Sihle delivered the most upsetting news to me. I was at his place, washing the dishes. He was mopping the kitchen floor. He dropped the mop and sat on a broken chair next to the fridge. His face was serious, he asked me to sit on his lap. I did. I was shaking already. I thought he was breaking up with me.

He told me that he had three children and that he was married culturally. He explained what being married culturally was. My mind was not there. I felt as if my world had come to an end. I had been with this man for a year and six months and it was only now that he was revealing himself to me. All this time, the man I thought I knew was not the one. As if this news were easy to stomach, he went on to tell me that I should be his second wife.

I sobbed like I had never sobbed before. I felt indebted to him. Even though I knew that I didn't deserve to be in a polygamous relationship, I considered it. I went home feeling betrayed and robbed. Robbed of my happiness.

While I was still in that confusion of mixed emotions, on the 12th of September 2015, I received a call that my 10-year-old brother who had brain cancer had passed on. Need I say more? My world was shut down but as ugly as it may sound, it took my brother's passing on for me to finally gather strength and end things with this man.

During the funeral preparations I made a call that changed my life. I called Sihle and expressed my anger, from the beatings to the polygamous relationship. I gave him no chance to speak. I hung up the phone when I was done. It was not easy without him, but I knew I deserved better. My inner voice had been saying this to me all along. Prayer and meditation became my lifestyle and above all my father promised to fund my studies. Great things came my way. Some people say there is good that comes out from the bad. Unfortunately for me the bad was losing my brother.

I wish I had listened to my inner voice from the beginning. I also wish that my father had been a part of my life from day one, perhaps none of this would have happened then. What people, men in general, do not understand is that the role of a father is very important. A father is like the main structure. The father lays the foundation, gives you direction. It is not only poor girls or underprivileged girls that fall into the trap I fell in. Take it from me, I had everything at home. It was simply the void in me that drove me into this. Had I received attention and guidance from the main man, I might have been a better child.

I am wiser now. Being wiser starts with forgiving ones self and the next person. Letting go of all that has happened. Looking back at everything that has happened, I realise that nothing really lasts forever and it is important to always hope for the better. Hope keeps one going, looking forward to tomorrow.

I hope my story will inspire you, the reader, in many possible ways. I hope that reading my story will rescue other women from making the same mistakes I did. I did not notice abuse on time and it took me a long time to act. Abuse comes in many ways and we need to act when we notice it. It is wise to listen to the inner voice within you. It is always true.

About the writer of this story

I was born and bred in the West of Johannesburg. I'm 20 years old. I was raised in a Christian home, groomed to live a Christian life and serve Christ. I'm my mother's only child, which makes me a bit spoilt. I come from a very family orientated family.

I like soul and pop music. Sade is my favourite artist. Her music moves me. It feeds my soul and blesses me. I love ballads as well. My mother always says that I am an old soul because of this. There is an old group by the name of Stimela. I listen to their album without skipping any song. I enjoy taking road trips and spending time with family. We are always there for each other. I enjoy watching movies – I am glued to the TV until the movie ends. I also take walks for fun.

One happy memory was when I received an award in primary school for being neat. Another happy memory is when my father took me to his parents' house in the Free State to meet my grandparents for the first time. I was 9 years old, and I remember the very warm hug from my paternal grandmother. This hug said a lot of things—one was, 'I'll always love you'. My happiest moment was when I passed my Matric in 2014. This was the most beautiful thing that had ever happened to me. I had done my best, my mum was proud of me. I will never forget the endless hugs and kisses she gave me, I felt appreciated.

My favourite writers are Zakes Mda and Iyanla Vanzant. I don't read much but I love the following books, Yesterday I cried, The Secret, and Cry The Beloved Country.

I would like to become a teacher, no, an educator. That sounds perfect. Public schools don't put their hearts into the job. I feel I have the power to change this. I want to give the pupils everything I have. I believe that there is some power or fire burning in me, wanting to do better for the world. I believe that I should be the change that I want to see in the world. I want to leave a legacy, something that will live on forever. I want some day, someone to come to me and say, "Because of you, I didn't give up."



No Life Is Perfect

Charmine Beauty

Beauty was born in Johannesburg. She lived at her grandparent's home in Soweto because her mother was very busy making a living for the two of them. Beauty's mother came to visit her on weekends but she never got a chance to be with her father because he had never wanted her. Her grandparents were always there to support her.

One day when Beauty was 11 years old she and her mother went out to bond. Beauty enjoyed that day. She was so happy to be with her mother. They went out to eat at KFC. Then they went to a dress shop and her mother bought her a princess dress. Beauty loved this dress with all her heart. She wanted matching shoes but her mother didn't have enough money. Beauty was sad but at the same time she was excited and she could not wait to show her grandmother her new dress.

When they got home the house was full of visiting cousins and aunts. Beauty greeted everyone and when she wanted to show her grandmother her new dress, her grandmother said 'Not today. You will show me tomorrow'.

The next day Beauty woke to find her granny dressed beautifully. Beauty asked 'Where are you going granny?' Her Grandmother replied 'I am going to a wedding'. 'When will you see my dress?' Her grandmother replied 'When I come back from the wedding.'

Later that day they got a phone call that her grandmother had passed away at the wedding. Beauty was hurt and sad. She had not expected her granny to leave her. Her granny was the only person she understood. Beauty was sad that her granny had passed on without seeing her dress.

Beauty, her mother, her stepdad and cousin went to her grandparents place in Diepkloof. They found everyone in tears. Some were shouting. Beauty was quiet. Her grandfather was in tears. Beauty tried to comfort him. 'Khulu don't stress. Granny is watching you up there. Khulu remember before Granny left this morning you said to her: My wife, today they will take you away from me because of your beauty.' Her grandfather smiled and Beauty said 'Your words will always be with her wherever she is.'

Beauty asked her cousin what happened at the wedding. Her cousin explained that as they were about to eat grandma started bleeding from

her nose and mouth. An aunt rushed her to the hospital and on the way grandma passed away. Beauty started crying. She hated the new dress because she thought it had taken her granny away. Her Granny had left so happily that day. They had never expected they were seeing her last smile. It took time for the family to heal from this loss.

Months later, Beauty moved to live with her mother and stepdad. Beauty started to love her stepdad because he was a caring and loving father who took care of her like she was his own daughter.

Beauty now attended a new school. On her first day she made friends with a group of girls. These friends would judge the girls at school. They started to laugh at Beauty saying that she wasn't clever. Beauty started to feel unwanted and like an outsider from the group. When their bullying got worse Beauty stopped being friends with this group.

She started a friendship with another group of girls. One day the group decided to help the community. They joined a club next to the school. They went to the club every day after school. The programme helped Beauty to know what to expect in life. They taught learners to stand up for one other no matter how hard the problem. But the programme soon closed because the teacher was leaving the club.

Beauty decided to play netball at school. When she played her first game the netball teacher was shocked and asked 'Where did you get your talent? You are gifted'. The teacher asked Beauty to play for the school team. Months later Beauty received an award for being one of the top goal scorers. Her parents were proud of her.

Beauty was anxiously waiting for the results of her final primary school exams. She rushed to school to get her results. Back home she waited for her mother to open her report. When her mother opened the report she said, 'After all the worries my child you have made me proud, you are going to high school'. Beauty was so happy she started to cry.

The next day her stepdad told her that they were moving. Beauty was sad to leave her friends but when they got to the new home Beauty loved it. The house was big and her new room was twice the size of her previous room. Soon Beauty's mother gave birth to a handsome boy. He was a blessing to the family and Beauty loved her brother very much.

Beauty started high school, in town. On her first day at high school she was quiet and shy. One of her friends from primary school came to greet her. She was so relieved that she had someone to talk to.

One day at school a guy came to ask her out. Beauty was not interested but the guy did not give up and Beauty was charmed. They started dating. One day Beauty heard that her boyfriend was dating her friend and that this girl was sleeping with him. Beauty decided to end things because she didn't want to be the 'side chick'.

Beauty started to date another boy for almost a year, until she found out that this boyfriend had never loved her. He just wanted people to see that he could get any girl he wanted. Beauty found out that he had cheated with every girl he came across. When Beauty ended things with this guy, he couldn't believe that she had dumped him before he could do so.

The next morning the principal called the pupils together and said she wanted to put an end to dating amongst school learners. The principal asked everyone who was dating to come up in front and break up with the person they were dating. The numbers of learners that came out was amazing. One girl dated eight boys at the same time. Others were dating three to four guys. The principal called the first group to come up front, and said to them, 'Please dump each other'. That was the day enemies were happy to see enemies exposing themselves in front of the school.

In grade 9 Beauty started to be serious about schoolwork, putting boys aside and focusing on her future. Then she fell in love with a guy. She had known this guy as her friend's boyfriend and when her friend broke up with him, he and Beauty became close. They went to the same church and lived in the same area. They fell in love and the guy wanted a committed relationship. One day his parents came to tell Beauty's parents about the relationship. Beauty was in bed, pretending to be asleep. Their helper came into the room and told Beauty 'Today you are dead. Your mother is calling you'. Beauty's mother was very angry. She told Beauty that the boy's parents want her out of their child's life. That they did not want Beauty coming to their home. His parents wanted to protect their son's future, as he was still too young to date. Beauty agreed.

Inside she felt happy that she could still look for a better guy.

As soon as they left Beauty's mother gave her one hell of a beating. Beauty met the guy later that day and he didn't want to end things with Beauty because he loved her. She gave him a chance. But a few weeks later they broke up. The relationship was not going to work out because they had differences in style and living.

Beauty started a relationship with another guy she had had a crush on and who she did not expect to like her back. One day he greeted Beauty with a very beautiful smile and asked for her contact number. Oh God, she thought, it's nice to have a crush on someone who means a lot to you. She felt great that her crush was finally becoming interested in her. They spent time getting to know each other. Then he told her that he likes her and that obviously "Like turns into love". Beauty and her boyfriend told each other about their past lives and relationships, how they had been hurt and what they had gone through.

One day Beauty's stepfather had serious pains and they had to rush him to the hospital. They found that he had liver cancer, which had spread throughout his body. Her stepfather went into a coma. A few weeks later Beauty's mother came home at midnight, carrying her dad's clothes. Beauty was so excited when she saw her dad's clothes. She thought her dad was home. But her mom said 'your dad passed away, I am sorry'.

Beauty couldn't stand to see her mother in pain. She held back her own tears until the next morning on her way to school. She didn't want to show her mother her pain. She thought of her little brother. How would he cope without his dad? Beauty was hurt that the only father who cared for her and had given her love had left her.

Things could not go back to normal because they were short of one family member. Her mother took time to get back to herself because she had lost the person who had understood her and given her the love she deserved.

Beauty and her boyfriend decided to be in a committed relationship. One day they went to a braai and Beauty got drunk. Her boyfriend took her home. Beauty was acting silly, singing and dancing, and fighting

with him. He got her home safe and sound. When her mother got back from work and saw her condition she started beating Beauty. Beauty felt nothing. The next morning her mother woke Beauty early and gave her a beating with the steel belt buckle. Beauty had pains the whole day. Her boyfriend came and cleaned the marks the belt had made on her body.

Then one day Beauty's mother caught her and her boyfriend inside the house. Beauty's mother started a huge fight with them. Beauty and her boyfriend went to the police station and Beauty spent a night at the police station for her own safety. She was scared her mother was going to beat her.

Her boyfriend never gave up on her. Beauty thought 'He still risks his life being with me. Wow, God gave me an angel'.

After two months Beauty found out that she was pregnant. Her mother wanted her to have an abortion and took her to a traditional healer. They asked Beauty to open her legs. Beauty refused. They forced her to open her legs so that they could put a pill inside her. Beauty fought and they gave up. The traditional healer was scary and Beauty kept dreaming about her.

Beauty and her boyfriend fought with both their families about getting an abortion. Next Beauty's mother took her to the clinic for an abortion but the clinic refused to do it without Beauty's permission.

Then Beauty's mother chased her out of the house. It was tough, very tough. Beauty's boyfriend tried to find them a place to sleep. For three nights they did not sleep. Her boyfriend did not sleep trying to protect his baby and his girlfriend. One of his friends found them a place at a shack in Fine Town. It was very bad. Beauty's mother then found them and took her back home. Beauty and her mother continued to fight. Beauty did not talk to her mother. She stayed in her room all day. Her mother refused to let her go to school. Beauty wanted to protect her child. She did not trust her mother. Her mother called her a whore and that hurt her the most.

After everything Beauty lost her baby. Her baby was stillborn at Bara Hospital. He came out with his insides on the outside. Beauty was so

hurt. She couldn't forgive herself. She blamed her mother for all this. At the hospital they put her in a ward full of babies and that made things worse. The nurses at the hospital and clinic never had time for Beauty during delivery or after delivery. They had judged her and not shown her care.

The day Beauty buried her son she could not believe it. It was as if she was dreaming. It was painful to both the father and the mother to bury their stillborn son at the young age of 16.

Growing up Beauty was loved. Then negative things happened. Becoming pregnant made her relationship with her mother worse. Today Beauty is trying to cope but it's hard. She lives with her mother and her little brother and she is back at school. She is trying hard to improve her life and her relationship with her mother. She wants to put the past behind her. She would like to go to University and to one day live a better life with no one controlling her. She would like to be involved in the community, helping others, especially those who may face situations similar to hers.

Beauty's story shows what some young women face, and that young people need a support system. Beauty realises today that self-love is the key to our destiny and success in life. Beauty has not yet learnt to trust. What she saw through the prism of her experiences has made her who she is today.

About the writer of this story

I am 16 years old and in Grade 11. I am working hard to do well in school. I want to become an accountant and to be involved in helping my community.



I Rise Like The Sun

Diketso Tladi

The night I will never forget was the night my friend was raped and beaten by two guys who lived in our street. We knew these guys very well and we often spent time with them. That day they did not seem to be the same guys we knew from our township.

It was the night of 16 December 2012. My best friend was 18 years old. We had gone out with friends to have drinks. We partied all night and around midnight my friend told her boyfriend she wanted to go home. They did not notice that two guys were following them. When they got to the park the guys beat them, and they raped my friend. They left my friend and her boyfriend in the park. No one saw them until the next morning and they lay there for hours without help.

Two ladies came to my friend's home that morning and told her mother that they saw her and her boyfriend at the park beaten and raped. Her mother came to my house. She asked me where my friend was. I told her that she was with her boyfriend—that the last time I saw her was at the party. She started crying as she told me that they had found my friend raped and beaten. I did not know what to say. I went to the park and they were there, naked, beaten and raped. The police were there, helping them.

The boyfriend was in a coma for three weeks. My friend was in the hospital Intensive Care Unit for two weeks. A week after getting home from the hospital she wanted to kill herself. But because we were there for her she did not do so. I told her that it was not the end of the world, that there was still the future to look forward to. Her boyfriend also wanted to kill himself because of what happened to them. They both went for counseling with social workers and many people showed them the love they needed.

For a year after this my friend did not go to school because of low self-esteem and not having the heart to see people. She did not want to hear people talking about her and what had happened to her that December.

After a year my friend went to school. She did her matric and went to college for three years. She told the young ladies at college about her experience when she was just 18 years old.

One day my friend was on her way home from college when she met three guys. They asked her to get into their BMW. When she refused they forced her into the car and told her to get naked or else they would kill her. Maybe because this was not the first time that this was happening to her, my friend jumped out of the car while it was moving. The driver of the car behind them took her to the hospital.

My friend was very sad that she was in this situation again. She asked ‘why me?’ But there were no answers to that question. Only God knew. After two weeks she was out of hospital and she decided to take the place in her community, to talk to ladies about her experience. She wants to help those who have been in such situations and those who might face such situations.

As a friend I was there for her whenever she needed me. When days are dark friends are few. But because she was not just a friend, but also my best friend I was there whenever she wanted me in her life.

Today my friend is a social worker and she has a cute little son. She is a speaker for women who don’t know their rights, a speaker for women of South Africa. She helps women know what’s right and what’s wrong. She tells them that when you say no, people must respect that. She is a good woman who wants to help others as others helped her when she went through painful times. If my friend could move on with her life, this shows that all ladies can heal and move on.

Today we have to tell ourselves that enough is enough! No more women abuse in this country of South Africa!

About the writer of this story

I stay with my aunt, grandmother, sisters and brothers. I lost my mother at the age of 7, and was brought up by family who love and care for me. I am 21 years old this year and doing my matric. I want to be a social worker because I want to help young people who need help.

I enjoy being with my family and friends. I like to listen to music and to have friends around so that we can have fun. This is better than going

I Rise Like The Sun

to parties where you could meet the wrong people. The music I like is house music because it is not only about dance. Sometimes there is a message that we have to listen to. House music makes me happy.

My happiest moment was when I got into grade 12 this year. I could not believe it. I was so happy and it made my family proud of me because grade 12 comes once in a lifetime. I was nobody, but now I am somebody. Just because there are people around me, I have hope that I can do it.

In life most young people do not get the chance to be where I am today. At last I made myself and the people who care for me proud. Now it may be time to rise like the sun in the morning. I know what I want in life.





One Love

One blood

We Are One

Love

*One Love, One Blood,
We Are One Love*

Nonhlanhla Ndlovu

In February 2012 Nonhlanhla found out for the first time that her mother had passed away when she was 8 months old. She never knew her father. She grew up living with her grandparents and her sister. They tried to give her everything she wanted, because both of her parents were not there for her.

On the 3rd of March she was not feeling well. We were at school and I told her to go the clinic. That Friday, she went with her sister to the Benny Morokwane Clinic. She had no idea what was wrong. She wondered if it was an infection.

There was a line of people waiting to be seen. A nurse in a blue and white uniform said to her 'go and sit on that bench we will call you'. A cleaner came to her and said, 'What are you doing here?' She responded 'I have come to get some tests'. She was afraid to look the cleaner in the eye. The cleaner looked scary. She had only one eye.

The test was done and the doctor said to her 'You are HIV positive'. She could not believe what she heard. Her mind was everywhere. She cried on her way home. No one noticed. She walked down the road and when she got to where people dump their waste and expired pills she sat down and cried her heart out.

I was walking near our school when a school learner told me that my friend was crying at the waste dump. I was surprised. I asked myself 'what does she want at a dumping place?' When I got there I could not see anyone. I stood on my toes to see more clearly. I saw a red jacket next to pile of dirty nappies. I ran to that spot and when I got there I found her still crying. I cried with her even though I did not know what was wrong.

'What's wrong?' I asked my friend. She said 'Nothing is wrong.' I gave her a huge hug. I looked into her eyes and asked again 'What's wrong?' She responded, 'I went to the clinic and they said I am HIV positive'. I was shocked. I did not know what to do or say to her. I had never seen anyone so hurt.

My friend did not tell her grandparents. She did not want them to know. One day her sister decided to tell her grandparents about her situation. My friend was angry with her sister. But her grandparents did not

ask any questions. They supported her even though they were having a hard time with money for food and clothes.

In 2015 my friend was still taking her medication and she was still my friend. We shared everything. We loved each other. In June of that year she met a handsome guy at school and they were in love. After two months the relationship was serious and my friend wanted to tell this guy about her status. He loved her and she wanted to keep things good between them.

When she told him that she was HIV positive, he could not believe it. She showed him her medication – her ARVs. But still he thought it was an excuse not to have sex with him. They went to a support group at the clinic. They met doctors and nurses and a white lady who works with people living with HIV. My friend got tested and the results showed she was positive. The guy realised that she was really HIV positive. He wanted nothing to do with my friend. He was scared of her, and would not look her in the eye. He would not drink from the same glass as her.

After a few months the guy came back and asked her forgiveness. She forgave him. They got back together and my friend fell pregnant. She was happy. She attended the clinic and when her baby girl was born she was happy that her baby was negative. The baby is healthy and strong and my friend and her guy are planning a wedding in 2016.

The message from this story is that if you love someone you will love them the way they are even if there are ups and downs. We have to love one another no matter how bad things are. You have to believe in yourself

About the writer of this story

I am 15 years old. I live with my grandparents in Orange Farm. I lost my mother when I was 5 years old. I have a little brother. I don't know my father. I love hip hop music and my favourite colours are black and blue. When I finish school I want to be a social worker. I love working with people. I am a hard worker. I am always smiling and happy.

I like listening to my favourite artists. Over the weekend I like watching soccer especially when Chiefs and Pirates are playing. I also like going to the gym and playing soccer.

One of my happiest moments was when I got my report saying I passed grade 10. Another very happy moment was when my grandpa bought me a new phone to say thank you for making them proud by passing grade 10.

I am happy that I made my grandparents very proud by learning how to write for this book. I felt happy to be at the writing workshop for three days. It has been great to be at the workshop. I love the people here and I enjoyed learning new things and how to write. I have never been so happy before.

I hope to become a social worker and to one day take care of my grandparents.





*She Was Here,
Now She Is No More*

Lady M

Losing people you need in life is so painful. You think about them every day. Not a day passes without thinking of them. You are left with memories. Life is sometimes not fair. There are troubles, ups and downs.

I lost my sister in 2014. She was my inspiration. She was there whenever I needed her. She was like a mother to me. Losing her was traumatic. To this day I cannot go to bed without thinking of her.

She was sick for a long time. In 2011 she gave birth to a baby boy. This was my happiest moment. We had a new person in the family. I was now an aunt. We were all very happy and we thought my sister would get well. She would say ‘when I get well I want to work for my son and give him love, because he did not get love when I was pregnant’.

But suddenly in 2013 she became very sick and died. I will never forget the day she died. My tears were like a river flowing from the mountain. I thought of her son left behind. Of how sadly she left us. Sometimes when I am alone I wish the earth would open up and take me in. There is nothing I can do. I ask ‘why did this happen to my family?’ Only God knows why he gave me a precious gift, only to take it back.

My sister was kind, ambitious, intelligent, wise, and always smiling. You would never find her angry or fighting. One day we went to Southgate Mall. We had such fun, eating whatever we wanted. She has left me with good memories like this. She would always say, ‘When you finish school you have to go to university and study further’. I would say to her, ‘that is what I want in life’. These were the hopes and wishes she had for me.

Losing her teaches me to be strong and to be responsible for myself. I tell myself to keep on moving because after all life still goes on. Often we lose people we love the most.

*Everything Shall Be
Alright*

Lady M

I am a kind, happy, loving, caring person. I was born in 1998. I live with my family – two sisters, an older brother and our mum. Life was very bright and wonderful when I was growing up. It was very simple and easy and we played without fears or troubles. Back then we did not know the bad things people do to girls.

Walking home from school with my friend, past dams, parks and the railway line we would feel the smell of nature. Sometimes we would be approached by a man who we called Malume (Uncle). He often offered us a lift, but we would refuse.

One day it was raining and we were playing with lollypop sticks in a pool of water on the side of the road. It was around 7pm. As we were playing a black Mini Cooper stopped behind us. We knew it was Malume. We were not worried. He called to my friend and asked her to buy bread from the nearby shop. My friend took the money for the bread and we continued playing, putting the sticks in the water and watching them go down the road.

After some time we realised that we had lost Malume's money. We went to Malume and told him we lost the money. In a very gentle voice he said 'Sit down girls, nothing to worry about'. He said to me 'Go home, it is getting late'. I told him I did not want to leave my friend. But Malume chased me away. I did not tell my mom what had happened.

I became scared to play outside. Scared that Malume would call me to buy bread for him. One day at school I found my friend crying. I did not know whether to ask her why she was crying or to leave her alone. I called our teacher to help my friend.

I did not see my friend for a long time after that. I did not really think about why she was not around. After some months I was happy to see my friend again. After a few days she said to me 'Malume is calling you.' I went to Malume with my friend, not thinking about what had happened those months back. When I got there he said 'Take off your pants'. I said 'Malume for what?' Then he said 'Ngizothenga amasweet' (I will buy you sweets). I cried out loud. He said 'Move, move, get out. I thought you wanted this too'.

I was young. I did not know what was going on. I went out crying. He

said ‘don’t tell people that you were here’. I stood at the door. I heard my friend crying ‘ouch, ouch don’t hurt me.’ I could hear she was in pain.

I got home and told my parents what had happened. They did not believe me. I tried to make them aware. But they thought I was not telling the truth. My friend lost her virginity, her kindness, her self-esteem, and after three years she found out that she was HIV positive.

Where is the love of human beings? Why are older people so cruel? Why did Malume do this to my friend? I ask myself these questions. Yet I believe there is hope for a better life. I believe there is hope of love from our brothers, uncles and fathers.

About the writer of this story

I am 17 years old and in grade 11. I hope to be a traffic cop one day. I like to sing because singing makes me smile and laugh. I like people to hear my ‘golden’ voice. I like listening to zion music and I like house music. Music keeps me moving.

I am very glad that my mum taught me how to handle troubles and the things that stand in my way. This helps me to keep on going.

I am glad to share these experiences. All love and respect to the writing workshop facilitators Nyasha and Shamim. They showed me that I can be a better person and that I am able to write about who I am. And yes I can see that there is something in me that I didn’t see before, that I was not aware of.

Rising up
and moving
onward
shining so
bright so



*No One Knows How
I Feel*

Pontsho Mosia

I am writing for people who have experienced difficulties similar to those that I faced. I am writing so that they may be strong, and rise up and fight for what is good, for them to be free and for them to be proud of themselves.

My young sister and I grew up living with our grandmother and grandfather in Qwaqwa. They were not working. They received government grants and they provided for us from their grants. We were so happy.

My older aunt came one day and said to my grandmother: “These girls are old now. We must get them foster care grants”. My grandmother said, “Yes, no problem”. I can’t remember what age we were then.

Once the foster care money came, my aunt started to fight with my grandmother saying that she wanted us to live with her because she had done the work to get the foster care grant money. My grandmother said, “these are my grandchildren, they should stay with me”. My aunt said, “No, I must be the one that they live with”.

I asked my grandmother, “Why is she fighting with you?” And she said she was fighting because she wanted our money. I asked, “Why is she wanting our money? She has a job, she is a teacher”. My grandmother said, “No girls, you need to go and live with your aunt”. So we moved to my aunt’s home, not far from our grandparents’ home.

My aunt has one child, a boy, who is older than us. My aunt was teaching at the primary school and her son went to the same school. My sister and I were not schooling. I was old enough for school but my sister was still young. It was nice living with my aunt.

Then my younger aunt came to my older aunt’s house and started to fight for us to stay with her. So we moved to our younger aunt’s home and I started grade one at the age of 9. My aunt started to teach us housework – cooking, cleaning and washing. When we did something wrong she would beat us with a big shambok.

Every day after school we would go to our grandmother and grandfather’s house, which was nearby. Our young aunt came one day to our grandmother’s house and accused us of stealing her money. She wanted to beat us. My grandmother told her “They did not steal”. But our aunt

still beat us.

Years went by and one day in January 2010 when I was 16 and my younger sister 14 years old, our younger aunt told us that my father did not care about us, that he moves around Gauteng with lots of women, that he does not send us money, and he does not care to even know what we eat, where we sleep, where we are living. She said she is the only one who cares for us. She said she would call him and talk to him.

After five or six days my aunt told us that my father was coming to take us to live with him. My grandmother did not want us to go with my father but we made the choice that we wanted to live with him. My aunt sat us down and talked to us. She asked us, “Guys are you going with your father?” We said, “Yes we are happy to go with him”. She said, “Ok its fine, but I need you to know something. You have a little sister, okay”. We were surprised and said, “Oh! We want to see her!” But our aunt warned us, “You need to watch what goes on with you and your little sister. She is precious to your father. If you do something wrong to her you are going to get it”.

The following day we moved to Gauteng. Oh Wow! We could not believe we were going to Gauteng. We were so happy. We had found our father. We were moving in with him.

We caught a taxi. From the taxi we got on a bus—a very beautiful bus, warm inside. My father bought us bread and roast chicken, cold drinks and fruit. We ate this on the way. We were happy.

At Qwaqwa the houses are separate, like in Lesotho. Here in Gauteng we saw beautiful houses, shops and malls. We said Yoh! This is a city of gold! We saw street kids and we asked, “What is happening here?” My father told us, “It’s the kids that did not listen to their parents”. We did not know about street kids because in the rural areas we don’t have street kids.

We arrived in Orange Farm. In Lakeside we got to a big shop with the sign “Ntlapo’s Butchery” outside. My father said, “We have arrived”. He stopped the bus and we saw many two-roomed houses. He pointed at one and said, “We are going to that blue two-roomed house”.

About the writer of this story

I am 21 years old and in grade 11. I hope to complete matric. I would like to become a dancer and a travelling chef. I dream of a happy future. I like to dance. I like art, spending time with my boyfriend and my two young sisters. I like to sing and to listen to music. When I am angry I listen to the messages in songs and get healed.

My message to young women is that we have to rise up and fight, find our own voices and stand for our rights. Don't let people defeat you. We are the women of tomorrow. Others who have the power try to bring us down. Life has its ups and downs but we can rise up and fight and find a happy future.





It Ain't Easy

Monica

Once upon a time there was a girl named Zanelise who lived with her family in the south of Johannesburg. She was a passionate young lady. She used to write in her diary everything that happened to her. One day on her way to school she met a guy named Zakhele. He asked to go with her to school. On the way he confessed that he loved her. She was surprised, as she knew him to be a shy guy. She had a little crush on him, but she said to him ‘Lets talk later when we get out of school’. And he was like ‘I don’t mind waiting for you’. This made her so happy.

When she got out of class she found Zakhele waiting for her outside. She was like ‘did you really wait for me? Seriously?’ The boy responded ‘Yes. Why not? I already told you that I care a lot for you. If you could just give me a chance to prove to you that I really care about you everything will be just great for us’. As Zanelise walked down the street, Zakhele’s friends came out of the blue to warn her that Zakhele was not a good guy. Things started changing. Zanelise changed the way she felt about Zakhele. She used to love him very much in a way that even her friends did not understand. When she got home she did not want to talk to anybody. She locked herself in the storeroom. Not even her room. Her mum realised that something was going on. She did not know Zanelise was dating. And Zanelise did not want to tell her what had happened.

Her mother asked ‘what happened?’ Zanelise just told her ‘I’m fine. Nothing happened. I just need to be alone’. Her mum asked ‘Why?’ Zanelise shouted at her mother ‘Stop controlling me, Leave me alone!’. Her mother was shocked and tried to talk to her. But Zanelise did not listen to her mother. Zanelise moved out of her parents’ house. She stopped seeing her friends. She stayed in the streets. Her parents and her friends started hating her. They told her she had low self-esteem. This did not sit well with her. She felt that she did not have the support she needed from the people she loved.

She felt like a dumb fool. She did not want to go to school because she did not have friends any more. Everybody just laughed at her. She started smoking and drinking alcohol because she thought this would

make her feel better, only to find she was making things worse.

One day she met a guy called Sibulele at the tavern. She was drunk that day. They had sex in the toilets without protection. After a few weeks she found she was pregnant. When she told Sibulele she was pregnant he seemed not to care. She now had regrets.

She was sleeping on the streets and begging for food as if she did not have a home. She did not know where to go now that she was pregnant. She saw her mistakes. She realised she had done a lot of bad things.

She gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. After the baby's birth she decided to go back to school, and today she hopes to fulfill her dreams and to enjoy her life. She is now in grade 11 and she wants to go to University when she completes her matric. She has fixed the problems she had with her family and friends. She learnt from her mistake of falling pregnant at an early age. Her parents and friends started loving her again. Sibulele accepted their child and they are now happy as a family of three. Sibulele got a job as a security guard, and Zanelise is now a happy girl.

The message of this story is that puberty ain't easy to control. It's a thing that shows you are growing each and every day.

About the writer of this story

I am 16 years old. I live with both my parents. My father is a teacher and my mother is unemployed. We live in a six-roomed house. I have five siblings. We are three girls and three boys. We are the happiest family ever. We like making jokes and having happy moments together.

My happiest moment was when I passed grade 10. I like reading my books, singing and cooking. I like going out with my friends, going to church and spending time with my family.

My favourite colours are black and white. I like making friends but I sometimes become shy around people I don't really know. I like thinking before doing something. I am a joyful person and I sometimes feel like everybody is my friend. I don't have a best friend and lastly I like Facebook social networking.



Where can I get help?

The following organisations can help you or someone you know who has survived physical or emotional abuse or a sexual assault—including rape, attempted rape, child molestation and sexual harassment.

National Toll-Free Helpline: 0800 150150

Child-Line Toll-Free: 0800 055555

South African Depression and Anxiety

Gauteng:

FAMSA Johannesburg: 011 788 4784

Lenasia South: 011 855 2359

Soweto: 011 984 0266

Alexandra: 082 885 0744

Life Line Johannesburg: 011 728 1331

Dobsonville: 011 988 0155/6

Jabavu: 011 930 2180

Nisaa Institute for Women's Development

Lenasia: 011 854 5804

Soweto: 011 984 8928

Orange Farm: 011 850 0637

POWA Yeoville: 011 642 4345/6

Evaton: 081 383 7698

Soweto: 011 933 2333 / 2310

Katlehong: 011 860 2858

Vosloorus: 011 906 4259 / 1792

Wits Trauma Clinic 011 717 4513

Kwa-Zulu Natal:

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| <i>FAMSA</i> | Durban: | 031 202 8987 |
| | Pietermaritzburg: | 033 342 4945 |
| <i>Advice Desk for Abused Women (ADAW)</i> | | 031 262 5231 |
| <i>Careline Care Centre</i> | | 031 765 1587 |
| <i>Chatsworth Community Care Centre</i> | | 031 406 1242/3 |
| <i>Lifeline Durban</i> | | 031 303 1344 |
| <i>Crisis line</i> | | 031 312 2323 |
| <i>Reservoir Hills Crisis Centre</i> | | 031 262 0157 |
| <i>Wings of Love Centre</i> | | 031 468 6829 |
| <i>Clermont Women's Project</i> | | 031 707 2221 |
| <i>Isipingo Support Centre</i> | | 031 902 2158 |

Western Cape:

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| <i>Ilitha la Bantu</i> | | 021 633 2383/78 |
| <i>Life Line</i> | Cape Town: | 021 461 1113 |
| | Gugulethu: | 021 461 1111 |
| | Wynberg: | 021 762 8198 |
| <i>Mosaic</i> | | 021 761 7585 |
| <i>Rape Crisis Centre</i> | Observatory: | 021 447 9762 |
| | Athlone: | 021 633 9229 |
| | Khayelitsha: | 021 361 9085/ 021 447 9762 |
| <i>RAPCAN</i> | | 021 712 2330 |

Eastern Cape:

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| <i>FAMSA</i> | East London: | 043 743 8277 / 8577 |
| | Grahamstown: | 046 622 2580 |
| | Port Elizabeth: | 041 585 9393 |
| | Brighton: | 041 585 9393 |
| | Stutterheim: | 043 683 1418 |
| <i>Life Line</i> | East London: | 043 722 2000 |
| <i>Rape Crisis</i> | Port Elizabeth: | 041 462 2371 / 041 484 3804 |
| <i>Masimanyane Women's Support Centre</i> | | 043 743 9169 |

Northern Cape:

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| <i>The Tamar Shelter Society</i> | 053 831 2368 |
| <i>Ethembeni Community Centre</i> | 053 631 4379 |
| <i>Bopanang One Stop Centre</i> | 053 874 9263 |
| <i>Grace Divine Outreach Centre</i> | 078 365 2415 |

North West Province:

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| <i>Grace Help Shelter</i> | 014 5743476 |
| <i>Lethabong Legal Advice Centre</i> | 012 270 1343 |

Limpopo:

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| <i>Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme</i> | 015 963 1222 |
| <i>Khuseleka</i> | 015 293 1182/5 |

Free State:

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| <i>FAMSA</i> | Bloemfontein: | 051 525 2395 |
| <i>Life Line</i> | Welkom: | 057 352 2212 |

Mpumalanga:

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| <i>Victim Support Centre</i> | 013 243 2732 |
| <i>Tirisani Victim Empowerment Centre</i> | 012 721 3872 |
| <i>Leseding Women Shelter</i> | 013 947 2737 |
| <i>Badplass Shelter</i> | 017 844 1454 |
| <i>Louville Women's Support Centre</i> | 013 710 0105 |
| <i>Grace Victim Support Centre</i> | 072 223 3660 |
| <i>Calcutta Shelter</i> | 013 700 0865 |
| <i>Mhala Shelter</i> | 013 773 0871 |
| <i>GRIP</i> | 013 7524 497 |

