The "I" Stories

Speaking out on gender violence

South Africa

2008



The “I” Stories is an annual project of Gender Links (GL), in collaboration with partnering organisations, to share first hand accounts of women and men affected by gender based violence. GL is a Southern African non-governmental organisation committed to a region in which women and men are able to realise their full potential and participate equally in all aspects of public and private life.

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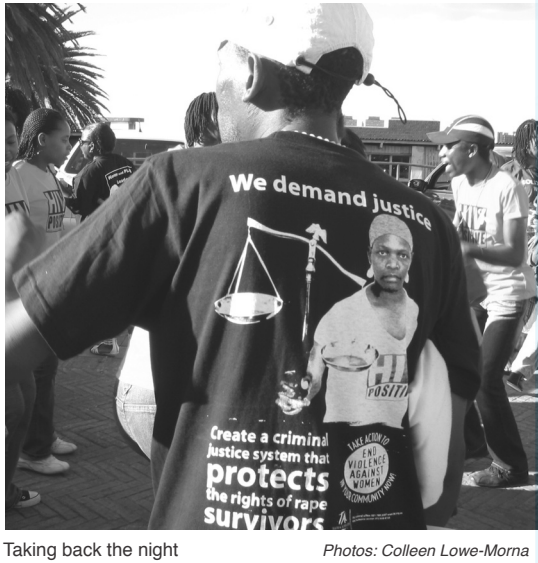
In this series, where writers have given their consent face photos are used with their stories



Puni Matsimbi, “I” Stories 2007



POWA councilor Maleshoane Motsiri, “I” Stories 2006 & 2007



Taking back the night *Photos: Colleen Lowe-Morna*

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Acknowledgements

The stories in this book represent the voices of tens of thousands of women and men affected by violence in the region; we salute their courage in speaking out. Several partners co-operated in gathering stories for this fourth volume of *"I" Stories*: Gender Links, Engender Health, the Department of Public Service and Administration, the Association for Burundian Solidarity in South Africa. Special thanks to Maleshoane Motsiri of People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), Alexandra Councilor Sinah Gwebu, Pascal Akimana of Engender Health, and Cindy Dzanya of CMFD productions, for their assistance during the production of the *"I" Stories*.

Loveness Jambaya Nyakujarah of Gender Links co-ordinated the overall project as part of a regional Sixteen Days series of *"I" Stories* booklets to make every voice count in the region. Countries that participated include Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland. A regional booklet will also be produced featuring stories from across Southern and East Africa, to be launched in 2009.

We wish to thank our sponsors, the Department for International Development (DFiD) UK and FOKUS (Norway) for supporting in-country workshops and the production of the stories in print and radio formats, as well as several media houses in the region for disseminating these stories widely as part of the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence Campaign in 2008.



Agnes Odhiambo and Loveness Jambaya Nyakujarah, Taking Back the Night *Photo: Colleen Lowe-Morna*



A word from the editor

by Deborah Walter

Every year Gender Links invites people affected by gender based violence, women and men, to share their experiences. This years' stories highlight the voices of some of the most marginalised communities, such as people living with HIV, women with disabilities, refugees, migrants, the lesbian and gay community, etc. Though this volume of the book is the "South Africa" edition, the contributors represent many nations and cultures, showing how truly diverse the country is.

Yet what these stories show is that regardless of differences of country, culture, sexual orientation, age, or religion, women and men's accounts of gender violence are remarkably similar.

Survivors of domestic violence, rape, and any form of sexual, economic, or physical abuse rarely have the opportunity to speak out in the media or have their experiences positively documented. They are talked about and for, with their voices mostly silent. This is even more apparent in the case of marginalised communities.

For many, the *"I" Stories* are the first time that they write or speak about their experiences to anyone. There are just over 20 stories in this book. What they share - the slow realisation of a deteriorating relationship, social and cultural expectations, concern for children, feeling like there is nowhere to go, decisions to leave and the challenges of standing alone, demanding change, and the overwhelming desire to speak out - echo thousands of more voices across the country and the region.

In August this year, leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) signed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which commits states to a whole range of actions to address gender violence. This includes enacting and *enforcing* prohibitive legislation, eradicating social, economic, cultural and political practices and religious beliefs that legitimise and exacerbate the persistence and tolerance of gender based violence, and adopting integrated approaches, including institutional cross sector structures, with the aim of reducing current levels of violence.

There is a need now to turn this progressive legislation into action on the ground. Leaders must show their ongoing commitment to the Protocol by allocating financial resources needed to put these actions into practice. However, violence is not just the responsibility of leaders and organisations, but of every individual and community. Many of these stories show that families and neighbours who keep quiet, or worse blame the victim, lead to devastating circumstances. On the other hand, reaching out to help, to say no to violence can very truly change lives. By telling their story, each "I" Story undoubtedly helps expose the injustices that continue to harm not only individuals, but also society as a whole.



Foreword: Telling our stories

by Sweetness Gwebu

The stories written in this series of *"I" Stories* are beyond description, they leave you with unanswered questions, heartbroken and devastated after reading them. Words cannot adequately capture the pain endured by those who wrote the stories. Their experiences can make you angry and afraid of marriage commitment. If you are already married, you may feel you do not want to make the same mistakes. Yet, these stories also give you a sense of hope. Whether they have chosen to leave their situation, or are still struggling with how to cope, the strength of each person who has chosen to share their story with the world shines through.

Gender Links, in partnership with other organisations, worked with women, and men, affected by violence to put down their stories on paper, without necessarily offering advice or solutions to the problem. From my experience, the therapy comes from the healing process made possible by writing and reading your own story. It allows the abused to break the silence.

Gender violence knows no class, no age, no status core and no tradition. You may be poor as a church mouse, or be rich, living in a luxurious house, and still you have no peace if you are in an abusive situation. Abuse attacks like a slow poison and destroys you physically, mentally and spiritually. Abuse does not knock at the door when it comes, but it creeps in unexpectedly in a quite happy marriage and damages it, steady but sore. Abuse, in whatever form, drains the mind and one's self esteem and leaves you helpless and brainwashed, hoping for an undefined change of the situation.

It is particularly difficult in South Africa to deal with gender violence, especially because of corruption in the justice system. Most abused women prefer to be silent and suffer the consequences of being a victim of circumstance, instead of reporting the matter to the police. Some victims recount being harassed, ridiculed and sometimes chased away by the police to go to the community to resolve their dispute.

What will become of South Africa in the near future since the moral standard is so low? We will have abusive presidents, judges, magistrates, lawyers, doctors and clergies, all emerging from cycles of abuse. I know a woman who was raped by her husband in front of their children. From the outside he looks dignified and classy, and is well respected by neighbours. Yet inside his home, even his children are afraid of him.

Abuse has spread like wildfire all over the country and no one seems to have an appropriate solution to stop it. Organisations like Gender Links and other women's organisations are trying their best to help survivors of violence to heal wounds and empower them with the courage to march on.

When Sweetness Gwebu first participated in the 2007 "I" Stories, she used a pseudonym and chose not to use her photo. She is now an active campaigner against gender violence.

Finding our voices, speaking out



Proudia Mosupi, Survivor of gender violence, "I" Stories 2006

Photo: Colleen Lowe-Morna

Living positively with my children beside me

by Blessings*

I moved to South Africa 14 years ago from a very small country in central Africa. I always wanted to give my children a chance to grow up with a father figure since I had been a single mother for the first 15 years of their lives. I started corresponding with an old boyfriend living here in Johannesburg, and in January 1995, I visited him, rekindling the spark. We decided that I would stay to make a life together. Before long, in March the same year, my children came to live with us.

Everything was going well until two months later when his true colours started to come out. He would leave the house in the morning around ten o'clock and only return the next morning at two o'clock, dead drunk. All his friends and acquaintances loved him because he would buy alcohol and even paid rent for some who could not pay for themselves. However, at home we begged for money for food. In desperate times, I would actually steal it from him, especially when he was very drunk. I could not leave him because I had nowhere to go, and what made it worse, I was foreign and could not speak English.

Our life became unstable. During the period that I was with him we did not stay in a house for more than six months, we were always evicted because he did not pay rent. This was not because he did not have money but because he just did not bother to be responsible enough to pay it. Sometimes we stayed in very ugly motels that you could never imagine. Sometimes he would come home drunk just to find us evicted outside. The situation became so unbearable that my children would go to the park and beg for money so we could eat. Instead of getting a new place to stay, he went and bought a new Isuzu 4x4 and took us to stay with his friend. His friend got so tired of us that he moved out of his house leaving us there with nothing.

So many nights he kicked us out of the house because we did or said something he did not like. This trend continued until 2000 when we moved into a furnished apartment South of Johannesburg. As always, he did not pay rent on time, but we were fortunate because our landlord was very understanding. He would kick him out but let us stay. Once the landlord kicked him out and he said he would not pay unless he kicked me and my children out. At

least by this time my children were working. Because my children worked, we managed to pay the debt as well as the rent. Eventually he went his way, we stayed on our own. He went to stay in a very "low class" hotel in the east and carried on with his drinking and his wayward ways until he got very sick and needed me to look after him. We took him in and nursed him back to life.

At that point, he humbled himself and started working again but my children still paid the rent. He then came up with the idea of buying a house. When the house was completed, he decided instead for his family to come live with him. My children and I accepted this because my children were working.

My ex-boyfriend and his family then separated. He stayed in his new house and they found a house of their own. He became sick and got worse by the day. He got weaker and weaker and had no one to look after him or cook for him, and he could not work. One day he visited us and continued to live with us. He deteriorated until he could not even go to the toilet on his own so much that he had to wear nappies. In 2004, he passed away.

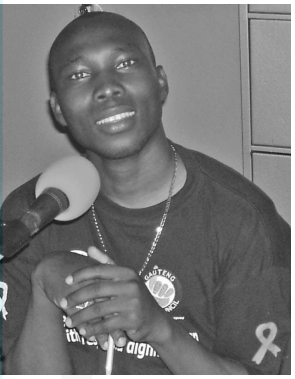
After this, life had to go on, but I always felt this nag in my heart that I could be HIV positive, since I did not know what my late boyfriend suffered from. One day I shared my thoughts with my friend and my suspicions about the state of my health. My friend held my hand and accompanied me to get tested.

To my horror, my results came out positive. It was the most devastating news I could ever get. I prayed and asked God to carry my burdens for me and give me the courage to tell my children. Along came my colleague with whom I usually work who asked me to come along to a workshop that would present me with an opportunity to write my own story about my experiences.

After the first "I" Story session, I felt a sense of release after speaking out for the first time about my status, and immediately began my process of healing. I got the courage to tell my children. I thank God for my children because when I told them, they did not cry.

Instead, they said, "You will make it, it's not a death sentence all we have to do is change our lifestyle and be positive. Together as a family there's nothing we can't beat, not even HIV can put us down." As I write my story, I feel good that my children have accepted my status. We eat healthy, exercise daily, think positive thoughts and give all glory to the Almighty.

* not her real name



Honouring my mother and sister

by Pascal Akimana

I was born 27 years ago in a little village called Gatumba, 15 km from Bujumbura in Burundi. I am a product of a teenage mother forced to marry the man who impregnated her and later had three more children with him. I grew up in a very violent home. Gender based and sexual violence was daily bread in my life. My father assaulted my mother every day in front of the entire family and no one said anything. Sometimes he would force my mother to have sex in front of me. This puzzled me because it didn't seem normal, nor did my mother like it.

As a child, I asked myself why my father fought with my mother every day, but could not see the answer. I found out after that the main cause of the fights was my father cheating on my mother. Later, I realised that women in the entire village experienced gender based and sexual violence. To my father, beating and assaulting my lively mother was his way of proving his manhood. He used to say that he is the man, and all things must be directed to him to have the final say. He used to beat my mother almost to death. When she talked to her family and elder women, they said that is how you build the house! You must stay; he will change.

Sometimes she would wake up with a swollen face and fear telling the truth, so she said that she fell at night because it was dark. However, it was always because of the beatings. He would kick her against the wall or beat her with sharp objects. He would insult her in front of us, telling her that she's less than a woman, she's nothing, stupid, ugly, she doesn't know how to cook, etc.

When he started beating my mother he would turn to my sisters, and me, beating us, chasing us away, saying that we were ugly like my mother, we were stupid, we were nothing. I grew up with a lot of anger and hurt towards my father and until today, I am still finding ways of dealing with it and forgiving him.

In the end, my father finally chased my mother away naked. I remember that night: he took all my mother's clothes and he burnt them, saying that he's the one who bought them.

According to Burundian culture, if a women separates from her husband she must not take the children with her, so she was forced to leave me and my sisters behind.

Two hours after my mother left that night, my father brought another woman, who then became my stepmother. Some people have the good fortune to have a good and kind stepmother, but it was not the case with me. This stepmother came with full information about my mother and father; she started harassing and abusing me a lot. Many times, she would report me to my father and when he came, I would be punished and tortured – disciplined, as he used to call it. However, my father disciplined me in a manner as if he was disciplining a criminal and not his own child. This continued for a long time. I remember, my father learned that I had gone to visit my mother. He beat me as if I had committed a crime or unforgivable sin. He did this to cut the ties between my mother and us.

Not long after, the community started dividing themselves in two, some calling themselves Tutsis others Hutus, and killing one another. In 1993, the democratically elected Burundian president was killed, and the whole country was in havoc, with many people fleeing to different countries. I left Burundi at the age of 12. My father and my stepmother with two other kids took a different direction, so my sister and I joined a crowd of people running to DRC. Just as we entered DRC, Congolese soldiers stopped us, raping my sister in front me. I was screaming and shouting but could not find or get any help; instead they beat me seriously. Once they finished, they left and UNHCR officials took my sister to hospital.

Because I have experienced all this violence - abuse in my family, community and the whole country - I decided to advocate for women's rights, because whenever I hear or see an abused woman, I see and remember my mother and what we went through.

Before I started this work, I was a dangerous young boy, maybe because of the violence I grew up with. I used to be very angry. Many times, I would fight and this led me to join a bad group of people who abused women and girls. Later I realised I did not want this, because whenever I reflected on my mother's situation, I could see that what my father did to her is what I was doing to girls. I became conscious and started to think how I could change, though it was very difficult.

I still find it difficult to date girls. Many girls expect me to be violent or behave in a violent manner, and when I behave the way I want, they push me back in the gender box. Some drop me, saying that I'm a confused young man, or that maybe I was supposed to be a gay so I don't

know what I want.

My father and I still have many disagreements. When I try to raise these issues he denies them, but I have taken the decision to confront him with the whole truth and remind him of all the bad things he has done to me.

I am writing this down, as it is a healing method for me. More importantly, I want to share my story with others, especially those who are working with displaced people: refugees or women and children who are in abusive relationships. This story of mine can be an eye opener to other people and help them to take necessary measures.

Men can change and men are actually changing. Personally, I have changed and I know those who have changed. The shocked expression I see and stories I hear from men when I conduct training shows that they don't know about women's violence, and later they recognise that their own sisters, mothers, daughters are going through abuse and violence.

When you involve men in solutions to sexual and gender based violence, men will use their power in a positive way by working together with women. I have seen women go back home excited after participating in training, sharing the information that they gained, and the violence started. When we train men, those men leave with a pledge of changing themselves and a promise to communicate better with their partners. If we engage more men, together of course with women, we shall get solutions. I have dedicated my life to this work based on my principle of honouring my mother's experience, my sister's and myself, and as a man I will use my voice to bring change.



Losing everything and finding myself

by Gugu Mofokeng

Freeing myself from a psychopathic* lover came at a great cost to me; having lost my house, part of my ear, my self-worth and my dignity. It is still not easy for me to cope with that situation, but I am trying very hard to face my giant. In the name of love, I again found myself trapped with a psychopath, but because of God, who is the source of my life and destiny, he gave me another chance to prove to the world that he alone "can turn my scars into stars"; "my pains into other people's gains" and "bad into good."

All my life I have experienced abuse, and yet today I am a strong and confident woman in pursuit of my destiny and because I understand that God was training me for a great battle that women, children and men are facing. The experiences were not easy, but today I believe it was worth it. There is this myth that Christian women cannot be abused, it's not true, I think many are wearing masks and are scared to tell the truth. Abuse has no gender, colour, race or religion.

I got myself trapped with a psychopath in 2006. At the time, I was still hurting and on the run from another abusive man. Initially I thought to myself that God must finally be answering my prayers, giving me a father, a friend and the man of my dreams.

He loved me and couldn't live without me. He asked me to move into a back room with him at his mother's house. I loved him so much, so I left my house to stay with him. For a year and five months, I totally abandoned my house and it was broken into twice. We were together 24 hours 7 days a week and lived as if we could not breathe without one another.

He introduced me to pornography and dagga, so that I can be high and do the things we saw in movies. Again because I thought this was love, I did those things. Because of my desire to please him, I turned into a sex slave. He enjoyed sex in such a way that when I was busy or tired he would cry. He would literally lock me in the room for us to be together. If I wanted to go to my house or to visit my family he would accompany me, but two hours away from his

place was too much. When his friends came to visit him five minutes was too long, after which he would chase them away. He allowed some friends to stay longer, but on leaving, he would accuse me of having affairs with them and beat me up.

His method was this: he would never beat me during the day; he would switch the lights off, sit on my torso with my arms at my side and only my head exposed, He would slap me non-stop for what felt like three or four hours, until my face became numb and swollen. While beating me he would accuse me of "ukumfebela" while also telling me about how much he loved me. In the end, he would blame me from having pushed him to do what he did, cry, apologise, then lock me in the room and buy me gifts. He would still have sex with me as part of saying sorry.

When went to buy food, clothes, furniture and even my underwear, together. He abused me financially, he never gave me money, he chose the clothes I wore and the food I ate. Sometimes he would prevent me from seeing my family and from checking my house. There were times I ran away only for him to find me.

One day I decided to run away to a place he would never suspect. I switched off my cellphone for a month, but he finally found me. Since I loved him, I went back with him. In the month that I had left him, he found himself another woman who moved in. He told me he did not love her and he was sorry. When we went back to "our home" that night, the woman came. He tried to stop her from entering, but she fought her way in. He tried to solve the matter but the woman refused to go anywhere.

She undressed and got into the bed that I thought was only for the two of us. At midnight, he carried me onto the bed. He raped me, in his words, to justify his love for me. After that, the other woman asked him for sex and they did it in front of me. I felt dead and useless, as if this was not happening. The following morning, I went to open a rape case. After much pressure from his family and friends and as a way to leave him, I withdrew the case.

I ran away again and I found a home for abused women in Boksburg, where I stayed for six months. On my return in January 2008, he found out I was back. He came and told me he was a changed man and that he wanted to marry me. He begged me until I fell for it because I still believed I loved him, but I soon saw he had not changed. Instead, he accused me of sleeping with white men while I was at the place of safety. He saw that my life had indeed changed and that I was now pursuing my dreams. I went on radio to counsel and motivate

other women and to train them on abuse. He became jealous that I had found myself, and his new mission was to oppress me.

At the end of February, I told him I was ending the relationship and he said he would rather we both die than end it. I repeated this for a whole week until he saw that I was serious. On March 3 2008, he came to my house drunk and took me out by force, threatening throughout the night to kill us both. On our return to the house after midnight, I told him to stop coming to my place. He then began to beat me, he grabbed me by my hair and bit off a part of my left ear and tried to bite off another piece, leaving my ear in two pieces. He was also poking my eyes, he pulled my hair and when I broke free, he was holding a clump of my hair in this hand. On top of it all he also stabbed me in the head. After a mammoth struggle, I was able to run away and 15 minutes later, my house was on fire.

I opened a case. I struggled to understand the court proceedings, but the matter is still on. What I like is that I am still alive to tell other women out there that "get out early while you are still alive and stay beautiful". Don't let your vulnerability and need for love expose you. Know the difference between love and obsession. Finally, I was able to take charge of my life and I am now single, strong and have regained my sense of worth .I am empowering other women out there. I am busy registering a shelter for abused women and children. I am unstoppable now.

*I chose to call him a psychopath because of his behaviour and actions, only he wasn't one as he was fully aware of his dehumanising actions.



Hidden truths

by Kathy Barolsky

I met my abuser who I confused as my partner for three and a half years when I was seventeen, on the set of his first big break. He was alive and enthusiastic with a magnetism that lured me and catapulted me back at the same time.

We raised many eyebrows in the supposedly new South Africa, me the white suburban Jewish girl from the northern suburbs paired with an unknown ghetto boy with a shady past from the depths of Zola. It seemed mismatched from the outside, but to me at eighteen it was proof that race, culture and class differences meant nothing for two people who delighted in being with one another. It became a fairytale, spending time in Yeoville as we waded through the sea of constantly glaring eyeballs on the streets.

In a matter of months, he had a meteoric rise to fame. Finding his way in the chaos, he decided having a white girlfriend did not suit his image. Now a huge part of his life, it seemed like I had to agree with this. I allowed myself to be hidden from the public in order not to damage his career.

In public, he sprouted monologues about being progressive and forward thinking in all spheres from domestic issues to culture and politics. Publically he was the man with an answer for everything. I watched this from a distance, agitated as he grew louder and I grew more silent.

The engaging debates and conversations we used to have spiraled into tirades of rage. I would try to hold him to get him to listen, to understand, as his uncontrollable energy bulldozed through all that I believed in about us. He would lie like it was the truth, fight against me as If I was his worst enemy and slump into my arms like I was the only thing left in the world. Scenes at clubs, restaurants and in the streets would ensue, leaving me begging for a rational response, which never came.

Eventually, he had lied to, cheated on and emotionally battered me so many times that the adrenalin to fight, to beg, to talk, to become hysterical, ran out. I threw him out as he had thrown me out so many times, but this time there was no inviting him back. I knew after three and a half years this was not going to easy.

He began to stalk me, peering through my windows, waiting for me outside my house, serenading me with love songs that were to further delude the country that this man was not only a representative for all people, but a lover boy too. I thought if we could be friends, it would calm him down. For a while, it worked, until I started a serious relationship and reflected on the kind of person I wanted to become, and how I could process my past in order achieve that.

I went to his house where he embraced me with open arms. For the first time in our relationship, I stood up for myself knowing what I really wanted. I told him that we had been broken up for two and a half years and that for respect for the person I was now dating and myself, I had to break all ties.

In a split second, I was right back in that ugly place. He started screaming and shouting, hurling abuse. I stood there numbed and silent for a while, feeling like I was in a warped tunnel with these obtrusive sounds whooping round, my head urging it to explode. I had not experienced this for such a long time, it was so abnormal yet I was right back in the throws of it.

In my frustrated stupidity, I vaguely attempted to slap him. He grabbed my hand, said, "If a woman can hit a man a man can hit a woman," and proceeded to punch me blow after blow. I am a fighter and so I tried to slap him in return to get him off me until I managed to flee.

For two weeks after the incident, I was not able to drive, somehow though I managed to get to my sister's house, which was in the same suburb as his. Without her support, I would have been lost. She took me to the police station to lay a charge. As I walked in the police officers jovially told me my famous ex had already been there to get an affidavit, an attempt to cover his back. As I dictated my statement, they slowly absorbed that the hero and ambassador of all worthy causes had over-stepped his mark.

The next step was to get a protection order against him, another obstacle of bureaucracy that you have to plough through to be heard and taken seriously. However, this incident did not seem to deter my ex-boyfriend's illusions of grandeur.

After the beating, I deliberately had not gone to the press. I felt that the fact that this had gone so far with his "mama'sekhaya" and that he would never see me again was enough. Also,

the experience of the police, the family courts and the Zuma rape trial that was going on at the time was not much encouragement. I was coming to terms with my own battles and was not willing to take on the countries' responses too.

I retreated; intimidated by the fact that my abuser was such a huge public figure who had successfully deceived a large sector of the South African public into thinking he stands for everything that he is the opposite of in his private life. Fighting women abuse is a difficult thing in a country that claims to be supportive of women where in reality patriarchal attitudes dominate.

Last year I discovered a major campaign where men speak out against women abuse had appointed him an ambassador. I was horrified, my mouth ran dry and my stomach flipped inside out. How could he even dare after what had happened? Did he have no limits? Even though I realised I could answer that myself.

When I saw the proposed ad and him heralding the flag for real men, I realised it was time to do something. I contacted the organisation, shedding light on the personal history of the ambassador. They immediately pulled the campaign before it got any more airtime. Yes, it was a small victory for me, but I also realised that if I could not stand up against him, how could I expect other women to stand up against women abuse too?

I write this story in the hope that other South African women will share their stories to highlight the fact that we are not isolated in our experiences. Relationships are complex, they force us to examine who we are and it is not always comfortable. However, if we find the strength to take responsibility that we do have power, and that we are not alone, women's voices can be mobilised to become far greater than just voices.

Xenophobia means no protection

by Alain Kasanda*

My wife, daughter and I live in a room, sharing a house with other people. We are foreigners, who left our country to find a better life in South Africa. The problem I have is that one of these people sharing my home is a stubborn man who abuses my wife almost everyday, verbally and physically. He is also a foreigner, but not from the same country as mine.

I work sometimes at night, so it is difficult for me to always be there to protect her. Last week, it was Sunday around 9pm. My wife heard my daughter crying out, and when she rushed to see what the problem was, she found that this man had pushed his way into the toilet, where my young daughter was inside.

My wife of course began to shout at the man, demanding to know what he was doing inside, and telling him to get out. The man became very abusive to her.

My wife called me at work. I immediately left my work and rushed to the house. When I arrived, I found them still shouting, and the man had my wife's head under his arm, holding her.

I do not like to fight, but in this case, I had no choice. Myself and the man began to fight, and my wife rushed off to get the police. They delayed for some time, but when they arrived we began to recount the story of what had happened, and the many problems we had with this man.

We hoped the police would assist us, and arrest the man. However, after listening for a short time, the officers told us that they are sick and tired of us foreigners. They said, "If the xenophobia attacks can come again, it's better, then you will all go back to your countries."

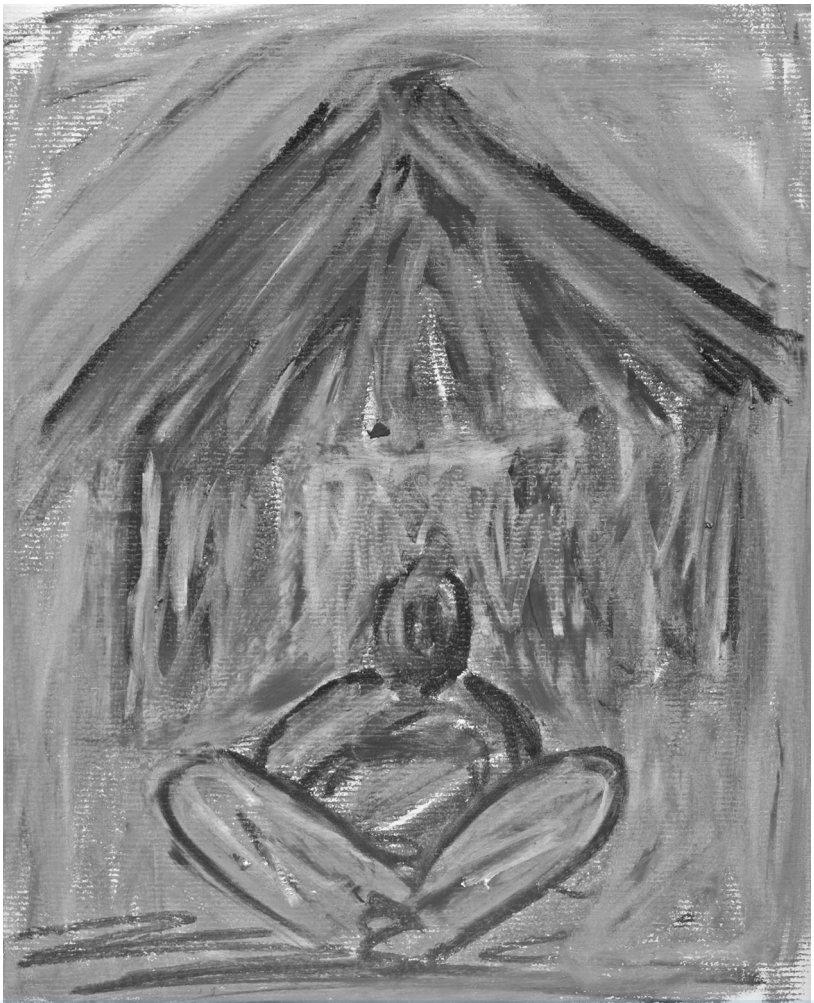
I am very much desperate and disappointed with the police for not assisting in such a sensitive matter as women and child abuse. All women and children have the right to be protected

no matter where they are from. As for myself, the government has granted me documents to live and work here with my family, so why are we not entitled to the same protection?

My only choice now is to move from the house and find another room, but it does not seem fair as we did nothing wrong. My wife and child are the victims, but it now they must leave their home. Worse, this man can do what he wants to other families, and know that he can get away with it.

For that, I have decided to speak out so that there might be a change. South Africans and people living here from other countries should have the same protection.

** not his real name*



Breaking cultures of violence



Drumming for change during 16 Days

Photo: Gender Links

For the sake of my child

by Saphia Mugisha

I am a woman of 25 years; I got married when l was 19 years old. Being a woman is one thing and being a Muslim woman is another. Muslim woman are supposed to obey their husband, we do not have any say in whatever decision one made in our homes.

I do not think my story is any different from many other women. Women have been abused for many years, and l think it is time we say no to the abuse. The truth is, many abused women die.

When women who do not have work, men take advantage of that, because they know that the woman doesn't have any financial support. They know that you won't have anyone to turn to.

Some women say they stay because of their children, saying that they needed their father, but is it really? I think we are afraid of coming out of our abusive marriage because we are afraid of the challenges that are out there. If it is for the children, why let your children suffer emotionally by seeing their father beating their mother all the time?

I have an experience from my daughter, she loved her father more than anything in this world, but when he began beating me in front of her, she started changing towards him. She would not let him hold her again.

One day when he hit me, she made me run into the guest bedroom and closed the door. It was around 8pm. She is still very small, but she stood at the door for almost two hours. I kept on telling her to come and sleep, but she could not. She told me "if l leave the door, Papa would come in and hit you." I realised that she was not going to sleep so l told her, let's go to her uncle's house. It was around 10pm. I put her on my back, we walked to her uncle's house and slept there.

Another day he beat me so hard that I started bleeding from my nose. When my daughter saw how l was bleeding, she stood at the gate and started calling for the neighbours to come and help me.

Sometimes kids would tease her, telling her that your father has to beat your mother. She would be so furious. She would tell them, don't talk like that or mum will get cross.

People used to say that what does not kill you makes you stronger. When these men are busy using us as punching bags, they do it to show us that we are less.

However, in my experience, it made me to grow up, it taught me how life can be sometimes, and how one should learn how to survive it. It showed me what is most important in my life. It was not the food on his table, it was not the house and the comfort in his expensive bed, it was not definitely me, it was my baby girl, my angel. I had to be strong for her and get out of that marriage before it took my baby's smile on her face, the happiness in her heart.

Some people say that when you talk about it, you feel much better, and that you can heal by talking about it. In my opinion, no matter where you go or how long, one can never forget that abusive partner. They also say you can forgive but you cannot forget. Every time when l think about those days, l have tears in my eyes.

I sometimes thank God for having the family who supported me during the hard times, if it was not for them, I do not know what l would have done. And l thank god for giving me a strong woman as a mother, who always put me and my sister first, and that is what I am going to do for my daughter.

To all the woman who have been through the worst, I hope that you will come out of it safe and sound with your children. God bless us all.

Turning life around

by Alisha Maharaj*

I grew up in the arms of poverty, having just basic meals and two sets of my uniform throughout my primary and high school years. One pair of sandals got me through many years right up to high school. As a Hindi speaking child, I had to live within a certain protocol. I felt as if I did not have any rights. I was not supposed to demand, but to do as I was told.

Doing household chores and my schoolwork was not enough. I had to do the homework of my brothers as well. If I did not, I would be beaten, called names, and sworn at. At times, I felt I deserved what came to me. To keep the peace I would do all that I was told to do. Numerous times, I hated my body and wished myself death.

My teenage years became more torturous. My brothers were very dominating and demanded a lot from me. The load of homework from them became a lot and it had to be done right. At age 14 years, my dad passed away and poverty grew intensely, and so did the abuse. My mum could not do much about it. Even if she tried to defend me, abuse would come her way, my brothers swearing, screaming, and breaking of dishes. High school was difficult. To me, this was how Indian girls grew up and it seemed normal. My tears did not seem to be exhausted and the downpour would continue. When I finished matric my mum found an escape for myself and that would be marriage.

She found a suitable suitor for me straight after matric. I was not allowed to study afterwards, as it was not what Indian girls did. I was married off against my wishes. My husband seemed to be the knight in shining armour that was going to make my problems disappear. He seemed to be angel like, sent by God to protect me and carry me away from all the pain. At first the marriage was a perfect bed of roses. Then, the alcohol and abuse started. The dominating behavior took off like a jumbo jet. The verbal, psychological, emotional, financial and sexual abuse became a normal thing in marriage. There was no way of getting out of the marriage. To get out meant going back to the abuse that I left. Indian girls do not leave their marital home at all. There cultural beliefs and myths were that they stick to their marriage and endure all no matter what.

I told no one of the abuse and continued to cry in silence. About ten years back I found out

about an advice desk. This took me by surprise as I had then only come to realise that I had been a victim all my life. As a way of getting out, I applied to learn counseling skills and worked as a volunteer at the advice desk. This too, was against my husband's wishes and I would continue to serve the advice desk without his knowledge. When he would find out I served a shift, I would take the brunt and abuse. I became so numbed that I became a living corpse and shut everything out. The abuse did not matter anymore because I could not feel.

The only love that prevailed in me was the love for my children. There was no other love. Going through all the programmes and workshops made a huge difference to me and I have healed and become stronger. I became a mediator and am now financially secure and a little independent. The abuse still continues from time to time. I have since learnt not to let it affect me emotionally. The programmes and the workshops that I have attended has made me realise that one can turn their life around.

I have come to a stage in life where I realise that life is a gift and we need to live it. I received my gift very late in life and I plan to live it to the fullest. Life is never perfect but I have learnt to make each day count and face every challenge life throws at me. My experiences had taught me to teach others that abuse is never right. One should not have to endure abuse and stay quiet about it. Speak up and make that difference. Life is for living. Live life to the fullest! No one should take abuse especially not by the opposite sex. You are made for them to love you and that's the way it should be!

* not her real name

Not a victim, a survivor

by Sally Kisten*

My story is about culture, belief systems, early marriage and alcohol abuse that negatively affected my life as a teenager. My children paid the price as well. My story however has a happy ending. Allow me to give voice to my story.

When I was 16, young and vulnerable, had not even experienced puppy love as yet, I was chosen while at a wedding, to be married to a man 10 years older than myself. While growing up as a typical South African Indian girl, deeply held morals, values, and belief systems were passed on to me. I had to fulfill my parents wishes. That mainly meant I had to get married, have children, be a slave to my husband and his family. I did this for 17 long, dreadful and painful years.

After marriage at the tender age of 16 years, I had 2 children, a boy at 17 and a girl at 19. I had to cook, clean, take care of 10 people in his family, my children and myself, whom I had little time for. During my marriage, I realised that my husband was an alcoholic, but it did not bother me because we lived with his family and I felt safe. He used to have terrible fights with his mum.

He had a wonderful family whom used to care for my children and myself. We did not go out much because I used to stay home and be the maid. I sometimes visited my family. I was not allowed to speak to people that I grew up with. Thinking that my husband loved me, I accepted his rules and had no social life. I thought this was his way of showing that he loved me. Due to his abusive behavior towards his mum we were thrown out of his house a few times until we found a place to rent.

We moved into an outbuilding and here I thought this would bring my family bliss with no outsiders but our little family. The reality was that his mum was not around but I was. We did not have it all but we lived comfortably regarding the rent, food, children's clothes and school. He could not miss his weekend binges of alcohol. When he opened a bottle, he had to finish it and if it is still the weekend, he had to get more alcohol. I used to buy and pour his drinks believing that's what I had to do as a good Indian wife.

I did not finish school; I had poor knowledge of the outside world. I did what I knew best on how to be a good wife, who loved her husband despite his insults, physical and verbal abuse. He drank the whole weekend, he could not even eat, he vomited all over the place and I had to clean up after him. I still did not complain because both sides of the families said that "he will change as the children grow older." This is what most Indian parents say - I later found out.

We moved to a home that we applied for, which I had forced him to initiate the process. We moved in with my mum's assistance and not his, but nothing changed. In fact, our lives got worst. He drank more often, locking the children and myself out of the house a few times. My neighbour, an elderly woman always stood by me. We never opened the door during weekends and we rarely attended functions, because we were too embarrassed of his drunken state. I had never put him down to the children; I was father and mother to them. We did not have proper meals or slept on weekends, due to his abusive behavior. He was however a good man when he was sober, which was rarely. I convinced him that I should get a job so that we could live a better life, while the auntie next door looked after the children.

I went to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He wanted to know where I went with his sister and brother-in-law and this is how he attended the meetings. This failed after six months. He refused help from Social Services and the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA) until I spoke to a lawyer, who advised me to take legal steps. I applied for a divorce with the lawyers assistance, put it on hold when he fell and broke his leg. He left home which was what he did often that I eventually lost count of. This was the last of many times that I was accepting him back. I signed the divorce papers, he tried to oppose it but it was too late and I was granted the custody of the children and the house. He had to be evicted from the house. My life changed with many years of new challenges.

I was depressed for two years, but had to wake up and smell the coffee, because I realised that my children needed me. I worked long and hard hours in a clothing company, while maintaining the house; I had to fend for my children and myself. I was an extreme introvert until my daughter assisted me in getting out of my shell, by changing my style of dressing, meeting other people, most importantly talking to men, which I had never done previously unless they were relatives. While working in the factory I volunteered my services to assist women and children of Domestic violence. I was trained by Social Department at that time, which helped broaden my horizons.

I grew from strength to strength with now my 8th year of counseling. The programmes and workshops have helped me heal tremendously. My children and I have dealt with our past and have moved forward with positivity and prosperity. I now work as a mediator assisting many people with similar problems. My children are responsible and reliable adults, working and independent. With positive thinking and most importantly prayer, I have never looked back but progressed abundantly. To the women out there, I did it so can you; let's build bridges instead of walls.

** not her real name*



Peace begins at home



Family support makes a difference, Rose Thamae (far right) with daughter Mpho (centre) and granddaughter Kgomotso

Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna



When a child is raped

by Natasha Kangele

My name is Natasha Kangele and I am from Malawi. I came to South Africa when I was ten years old. As a child, I grew up with my mother's sister due to family problems. Growing up in my aunt's house was not a piece of cake. It was like living in hell because she did not like me that much.

So one of the horrible days of my life came, the day I lost my womanhood in a way that I did not expect. I was raped when I was 12 years old. We were living with another woman by the name Anne. That morning, Anne sent me to the shops to buy something. Coming back from the shops, a man was following me. He came to me and said that I should follow him or else he will kill me.

I felt a gun on my back, so I had no choice. He took me to his place in Berea. There he raped me. When he finished what he wanted with me, by God's grace he took me back home. It was not easy getting home but I managed to get there.

Before going in the house, he threatened me by saying that "if you tell anyone about what happened…I know you... I will kill you." When I got home Aunt Anne was waiting for me, and she suddenly noticed that something was wrong with me. So, I told her what happened to me that morning. She suggested that we wait for my aunt who at that time was at work. We waited from 9am until 6pm, that's when she came home.

When she saw me, she said that I was not raped, but that it was my boyfriend. She managed to tell everyone at home that I was lying, saying that I was raped. Everyone believed her story. Can you believe this? Even my best friend believed the whole story.

I was so disappointed and I was very angry with everyone. I needed my family and friends, but they where nowhere to be found. For me, home was no home; it was just a place to live because I had nowhere to go as a child.

As a child, I felt the rejection and I started to hate my family. I hated them all, I hated myself

and everything around me, especially men. The biggest reason that I hated men was because I had lost my pride as a woman in a way that I have never dreamed in my life.

All these years I have carried this secret with me, until recently I spoke to a very good friend of mine about what happened to me years back. He said that it was not my fault and he made me realise that I have to let go of the whole situation and move on with my life. One day he phoned me when I was at work and he asked me if I was ready to speak out and let other women know about my story.

I agreed because I needed to move on and I was tired of living with that anger and hatred. He took me to the "I" Stories workshop speaking out on Gender Violence in Southern Africa. There I met great women and men, some who lived in abusive relationships and some are still living in abuse.

So, now that you heard and read my story of abuse, please women and men of South Africa say "NO" to abuse. Abuse is abuse! Remember that there is no abuse in love. If someone is abusing you in the name of love, then you are living in hell. For love is a gift from God. Love is not abuse.

If you know someone who is living in abuse, my brother, my sister, my mother and mothers of Southern African please give them as much support as you can. If you are going through the same situation that you think is abuse, then say, "enough is enough". Say no to violence in your life because that is not love but that is violence abuse.

I pray that may God give you the strength that you need to say no and to go on living even when you feel like you cannot go on. Remember that you are the reason that the sun is shining out there and, because you live, a new day comes. For you are the pillar to the women and children of this country.



When family betrays you

by Ritsepile Pretty Mlauzi

"Its either you have sex with me or you get deported." Living a life like this is far away from the hopes I had growing up in Zimbabwe, dreaming of becoming a doctor after completing school.

My dreams where shattered when my father passed away before I even completed my ordinary level. Partly out of desperation, I fell in love with this old businessman in our village. I thought I loved him, though looking back, at that time l knew nothing about relationships. He promised to take care of my mother and me, and to pay for my school fees. He took advantage of me, impregnated me and dumped me.

I dropped out of school. Since l had no qualifications, my only choice was to find a job as a maid so that I could fend for my old mother and my unborn child. Under all this pressure, l gave birth to an immature baby at six months. I had to stay in hospital until he was old enough to get out.

My stepsister down here in South Africa felt sorry for me and asked me to come and look for something here, since there are few opportunities in Zimbabwe's economic crisis. I thought that was the end of all my problems, not knowing that l was walking into the lions paws.

I entered the country illegally, and so I would stay home afraid of being deported. My sister promised me to help me get an asylum paper so that I could look for work, and while I was waiting, I would care for her kids.

I respected my sister's husband like my own brother. He looked like a good caring husband and father, until all hell broke loose. It started one day when l was coming out of the bathroom. I got inside the house to realise he was back from work earlier than usual. l had only a towel around me. As l took my clothes so that l could go and dress in the bathroom, he moved faster towards the door and locked it from the inside.

He became aggressive, violent and stronger - l could not take his hands of me. He pushed me on the bed. He had totally changed from the man l know to a monster. This man touched

me everywhere he kissed me and forced me to have sexual intercourse with him without protection. He threatened to kill me or even hand me to the police to be deported if I tell my sister.

This happened for almost three weeks and I suffered in silence. It was hurting me inside, I felt so lonely and helpless. I would cry and at one point I even thought of committing suicide.

As a coincidence, I saw my sister taking medication, I was suspicious and anxious - I had to know what she was suffering from. I asked her and then she told me the whole truth about her HIV status. Not able to stand the truth I collapsed. After a while, I woke up and I had questions to answer. My sister asked me what had made me collapse.

I related the whole story of her abusive husband. Instead of comforting me, she became angry, was angry at me, and even accused me of seducing her husband. She told me I was loose and that is why I had a child at home out of wedlock. Therefore, she decided to throw me out of her house before I can cause much damage. That is how I ended up in the streets.

Wandering up and down the streets of Joburg with nowhere to go, no money and no relative, I met a guy who is also a foreigner who proposed and asked me to move in with him. Homeless and without options, I did. So currently, I am staying with him through one problem to another.

The first few days we had a nice time until he started to show me what he is capable of doing. He brings girlfriends home and even sleeps with them in my presence and tells them that he just took me off the streets because he felt pity for me otherwise he does not like me much.

This so-called boyfriend of mine comes home drunk and abuses me physically and verbally. He even tells me to pack my belongings if this life does not suit me. I should have sex with him to get what I want, which is food and clothing and accommodation, or else I would be back in the streets if I don't co-operate.

I am asking for help. I would like to enroll and train so that I get a certificate, I want to be able to stand on my own feet, spread my wings and fly higher and be able to support my mother and child whom I left back home. Please help me get out of this abusive man's house before it is too late.

Changing family violence

by Debbie*

I was brought up in a very strict and conservative family of 9 children. As an Indian girl, I was taught to respect others and myself at all times. Decisions were forced upon me whether I approved of or not. When someone visited my parents, they did not allow me to be in the same room and listen to their conversations. My dad just had to give me one of those looks that said it all. I attended a primary school and later a high school where white teachers taught me. This is where I realised that as a young Indian woman I had rights as well. I exercised some of these rights I learned at school and put my bullying brothers in place.

When my mum passed away when I was still at school, I was devastated. This had an adverse effect on the rest of my teenage years. I felt betrayed by mum when I most needed her. Thereafter my dad became overprotective and a control freak. He put emphasis on how I should carry out my duties if I was going to be a perspective future bride. He did not allow me to talk to boys, as they will hurt me. For me it was like "if they did not touch me how would I be hurt?". This affected me and I became rebellious and had no faith in men.

After I had completed my studies, I worked at a recoding company as receptionist. This place was male dominated from the clerk to the salesman. When things did not go right and everyone was having a bad day, it was Debbie's fault again. They took advantage of me as a young naïve girl who was at her first job, the abuse became intolerable, and I resigned.

A few years later I met a young man and I fell in I love. The first week into our relationship I had to introduce him to father for his approval. I had come under a lot of criticism in terms of still being very young. Whenever I was out of line for some reason my father would verbally abuse me saying, "I was in a hurry to get a husband." I used to cry myself to sleep and pray to get away from my dominating father.

Two years later I married and thought my dream had come true. Only to find my in-laws were in their own domestic violence conflict. My mother-in-law, who was a very beautiful women, was in an extra-marital affair. At night, my father-in-law physically and verbally abused her. In the next room, I would hear the screams for help. As the detail of the affair was exposed, my mother-in-law felt very embarrassed, as I was her new daughter-in-law. One

night he dragged her out of the room and threw her into the yard and, as a result, suffered neck injuries.

My husband and I took her for medical attention where she was treated and discharged. The sad thing about this all was that she had to return to this abusive environment all over. I became very supportive and learned very early in my marriage about gender based violence. My mother-in-law and I became best friends and supported her through the divorce. I learned that my father in-law was a man who could not apologise or make amends. This was something that he passed on to my husband.

A few years down the line, I had three sons and found I was pregnant with my fourth child. My husband had lost his job and things became difficult. I had a family to support and a maid that I had to pay salary for. To survive I cleaned sheep heads and trotters in a nearby clothing factory, using this for the maid's salary and other bare essentials. I felt I should not be crying poverty but to overcome it. My husband never assisted but socialised with friends and returned home drunk. When I confronted him he would verbally abuse me and blamed me for trying to have a daughter. The next day he would blank out what happened and not apologise. He did not believe a man should say sorry. A good outcome of all this was that I was blessed with a daughter.

Ten years ago I joined a domestic violence network where I empower women to educate themselves about domestic violence. Women should overcome poverty, move away from the domestic violence environment, and know their rights. I am currently a mediator with a local organisation helping women. Today I am a proud mother of four successful children. I am an excellent wife, mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother, and still married for 36 years.

* not her real name

Standing up to families

by Likeli*

I am married to a man who is not from the same ethnic group as mine. We are from Burundi, though he has been staying in South Africa since 2000. His family does not like me and some members of my family did not appreciate him. We got married in 1994 and we have three kids together. When our first son was six months old, my husband decided to flee the country because of the war.

He went to a neighbouring country, Tanzania, and I moved out of the area because of security reasons and went to stay with my family in another area. One year later, I joined him in Tanzania because the killing was getting worse and worse and the new neighbours were harassing me because of my husband's ethnicity. My family went to Rwanda for the same reasons.

Life was not easy at all in Tanzania; we had no job or any other income. We had a small amount of money left from our savings, so in 1999 decided to move forward. He came to South Africa and I went back to Burundi because transport was expensive and we did not have enough money for all of us to go to South Africa (two kids and a pregnancy).

All these 5 years, his family was in charge of our possessions and the family's possessions. When I went back, I was expecting to have a place to stay because my husband and I had a house. However, I stayed at my younger sister's place. I was not comfortable there because my sister did not have kids at that time, and it was too much for her - 4 extra mouths to feed. She was also going through a process of divorce. I was supposed to support her, not have her supporting me. I decided to move out to a small township and rent a house, but my sister was still always there for me.

Two months later, I went to talk to my in-laws about my own house; they told me that they would contact me after a family meeting, but they didn't, until I went back a second time. To my surprise, they told me that I was not welcome in their family anymore because they heard that I divorced their son before I came back, and that even the pregnancy was not his. It was a big shock to me because they were lying, and that house was my only hope for financial support. They knew that we were still married because each time I went to visit them he

would phone me and talk to his family through me.

I met an old friend, a neighbour of my mother-in-law (she died before our marriage) who is a judge. He knew about the story, and he advised me to go to court because it's my right to have the house - even if it was true that my husband and I are divorced - as long as I am the one who has the kids.

I went to court and the judge told us to come back in a month for the decision. After a month, I was told that I lost the case because I was no longer married to my husband and didn't have any right to the possessions. I was not surprised by the verdict because my husband's uncle was also a judge. I just asked for an appeal. During that time, I had a lot of support from elders who knew my husband and his mother. His aunties from his father were also cross about what was happening to me, but I told them not to fight, I will deal with them myself.

I went for the appeal with my letter, and while waiting for my turn, someone in the audience asked me why I was there. I was seven months pregnant at the time and he was feeling sorry for me. I told him the whole story and he gave me all the information regarding the rules and rights around families and marriage. He told me everything that I needed in order to win the case. When I went back to hear the court's decision, I won the case and got the keys for the house.

This selfishness ruined the relationship between my husband's family and me, as well as between my kids and them. But the worst part, it ruined the relationship between my husband and his family.

In 2003, UNHCR contacted me to join my husband in South Africa for family reunification. My husband told me to sell the house and bring the money. We bought a house in Johannesburg where stay until now. We have a wonderful life and we are trying to rebuild the relationship with our families.

What I want to say here is: women stand up, fight for your rights; there is always one way or another to meet your needs.

* not her real name

Violence tears a family apart

by Sandy*

Have you ever dragged yourself up the staircase just so you could find a place of safety only to find yourself in a corner of no escape? Have you looked for answers while your eyes tear, or hands bandage your own wounds caused by your spouse only to find out you are living in confusion and hurt? Well! This is me. I am 30 years old. I have been married for 10 years and l have two girls. I was happily married to a man who is now 40 years old. 3 years ago I woke up one morning only to realise last night was not a dream.

I should begin by revealing my childhood and this would be scary stuff. My parents were good to me yet harsh to each other, which was triggered by my father's extra-marital affairs. My mother kept silent, as she was afraid of my dad throughout the abuse. There were times when he would burn her clothes and hit her, leaving long-term bruises and scars. I felt helpless and hopeless watching. I was only 7 years old. Now I am 30 and reliving this nightmare. Gender violence can be very influential, instilling a sense of fear, thereby silencing the voices of women. I believe strongly that gender based violence towards women needs to end in every manner possible.

An affair also triggered my husband's violent behaviour, which drastically affected our family lives. I was not happy but I thought it was normal because of my upbringing. I live in a society whereby we are supposed to honour our husbands and accept life as it comes. From fear, I was unable to speak out as it might tear our family apart. My daughter felt abandoned by her dad because there was no family times anymore. When I questioned him, he became angry, verbally abusing me, saying I am useless and not a career woman. My husband is a diligent worker and a progressive provider, something that I would love to do as well. He felt he was the man and he dictated the rules.

Due to the affair, I saw this man change from an angel to a very different man, and this was a quick transformation. There were many instances when he would come home late from work and, if I questioned his whereabouts, he would get aggravated and violent. He even threatened to kill me. He would come and go as he pleased, without any warning as to his whereabouts. I could not do the same, if I had to visit or go out shopping without him, knowing he would approach me later with vulgar words and physical violence. My husband could

even throw a chair or fan at me very forcefully. If I tried to retaliate, it worsened the situation and he would get so out of control and, believe me, I would be looking at Satan. I did not know who he was anymore. If things don't go his way or on his time, he would resort to violence.

Once I moved his beer to another shelf and one broke, he noticed that and started swearing, telling me to leave him and his things alone. The very next day I replaced his beer which, I thought, was the right thing to do. To my amazement, he threw the bottle at my feet and aimed it at my back again. This was insulting to me as he did that in the presence of his friends. The violence intensified within 3 years. Whenever I tried to communicate, he shut me out by punching me on the head. Once he pulled me down the stairs, that's when I dragged myself upstairs only to find myself in a corner where I could not move. He had the upper hand in our situation, he kicked me continuously on my back and legs, punched me over twenty times on my head. I could not feel the pain because of the numbing impact. I only remember awakening about ten minutes later by the voices of my screaming children. My legs were swollen and I could not walk properly, I could barely move. The angel that I thought I knew fought like human without heart.

My husband did not seem to consider my feelings or even that I am human, until I took a step to reconciliation with the police, S.A.P. who then handed us over to the Justice and Restoration Programme (JARP). JARP showed me that even when it is dark there are still many stars that shine. They rebuilt my confidence, enabling me to empower myself. Domestic violence can cost you your life if you do not seek help immediately. Gender based violence tore my family apart. Being a man did not give my husband the right to violate women and abuse our kindness. Men should not treat women like dirt, use them to flirt and hurt. My appreciation goes out to those working with women, for a job well done on my today improved marriage, I am able to provide for my children and myself a safer and happier home.

* not her real name

Defined by Sexuality

by Patricia Rose

I was only four when I first saw a picture of my mom; she was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my entire life. My grandmother raised me from when I was a child. I knew her as my only mother and the only person I could relate to. I lived with her until she met her death, but my life began with her. I learnt to be responsible; I wanted to make her proud. She always knew what to say to make me happy or encourage me. Then she died and my life was hell. I had to be my own mother and father. I was only fourteen.

I always knew that my mother was a sex worker, and at that time, I called her names; prostitute was the only word near my tongue. I hated her life but recognised her regardless. I would listen to debates on TV and radio, with the hope that maybe I would see my mother. One day, I did see her, on a newscast about some research on sex workers. I didn't want to see her like that, being a prostitute, and it killed the faith I had in her. But I still loved her, and wished that she could be a mother to me. However, she wasn't; she was never there.

I remember when I was about four years old, my mother came to the house where I lived with my grandmother. In my understanding, she wanted to leave with me. That started a fight between herself and granny; it seemed as though my grandmother didn't want to allow that to happen. She won the fight after pouring boiling water on my grandmother. I was scared; I did not what to leave my grandmother like that.

But as a child, seeing all these things I never thought would come into my life - the flashy car, the white boyfriend and all the goodies they had bought for me - I left. My mother lived in a very tall building in Johannesburg - very beautiful. On the same night, she left me in the flat alone, and after some time she still had not come back. It was not long before I left the flat hoping to find her. I saw her across the street with other beautiful women, so I crossed the street to get to her. I was very young and had no knowledge about traffic lights and safety precautions when crossing the road. The cars were so loud, and I was scared. When she saw me, she crossed the road and we ran back to the flat. That memory has never left my mind; it has shaped the thoughts I have about my mother.

I went back home to granny. Life was back to normal for another 10 years, until she passed

away. I went to school. It was not an easy path, as I had to provide for most of my own needs. I was born again in a Christian church, and I have lived a very conscious life ever since. I could not judge anyone, regardless of their "sins," and that included the woman I so much needed in my life.

I was 17 when I first realised that I had intimate attraction towards people of the same sex as myself. I knew little about homosexuality and in my church, "such behavior was considered to be an abomination before the eyes of God." I did not like the idea of coming up against my church principles, but I could not see myself with a man. I hated men, though I never had a specific reason why. Was it my father's absence or was it the opportunity I never had of having a male figure in my life? I still don't know.

Just after matric, I was introduced to women's rights organisations. I didn't know what my role would be; all I wanted was a job and the possibility of furthering my studies. Three months later, I was raped. I turned to the same organisations and they gave me more than I expected. The offered me the opportunity of being part of trainings and workshops. I spoke out about my experience of sexual violence, which was hate-crime motivated. On the surface, it was about reaching out and tying to advocate lesbian rights, but was there another reason behind that? Mommy was never there at all. Did she see the newspapers, the documentaries? I wondered.

I never viewed myself as a victim, let alone a survivor. Based on the choices I made after the experience, I saw myself as more of a conqueror. Yet, I still hated my mothers' choices. I still called her a prostitute.

I attended the Women in Leadership Programme with the Gender AIDS Forum (GAF) in Durban. The training was about enabling consciousness amongst women. I left the training with an understanding that the "Personal is Political." All women are victims of patriarchy. It wasn't easy - it took almost the whole year - but ultimately I forgave my mother. I started seeing her as a victim in all that was going on in her life. But I hated men even more.

I still battle with the thought of my mother as a sex worker, though I no longer call her a prostitute. She says she has changed; I believe her and support her. I want my mother to know about her sexual health and rights; maybe she will realise just how much that has affected me or how it has shaped her life. I would love to see my mother in one of these meetings, but just don't know how to introduce her. It is easy to advocate for any other woman's rights but

not when the issue hits home.

I no longer hate men as such, but the mentality behind gender roles and responsibilities that oppress women and put them in the margins. I believe that there is a system of patriarchy; I believe that women and men are not equal.

I feel that if it weren't for my sexuality or my experiences of sexual violence, there are things I wouldn't have achieved, but is it really a great honour to be an activist or feminist because of the painful things that happened to you? Is it possible that we can be experts in our fields of interests and passion without being labeled victims or survivors of gender based violence and other issues influenced by the patriarchal system? What I mean by this is: I am a human rights activist and define myself as a feminist who has experienced sexual violence, but I also love math and information technology. I would love to be known as someone who loves math, and has a passion for change with regard to women's position in the world globally, instead of simply the rape victim, or the lesbian.



Life will never be the same

by Sindie Bless*

In 2004, I met this guy from the Eastern Cape. I am from the same place, but a different town. It was before Valentine's Day when we met and believe me it was love at first sight. The feeling was mutual.

At the time, he did not have any family except his aunt, who only gave him a place to stay. He was still searching for a job. I was so touched by his background, the problems he had, and losing his mother as well. I felt pity for him. I felt bad and moved in with him, because I had a job at that time. It was a big mistake to move in with him - everyone warned me about that big step, especially my mother, friends and my young brother. However, truly speaking, at that time love was in the air.

By October that year, he was employed with one of the biggest companies in Johannesburg. This was something we were both praying for. Our lives changed from the day he got the job because he was earning more than me. In December, I discovered that I was two weeks pregnant. The joy, love and happiness we had cannot compare with anything. After some time, I realised that his aunt was not happy about our relationship, though even today I cannot tell you the reason. At the time we were staying in her house, and she started to act funny. At first, she said we must pay rent, which was not a problem for us because we both had jobs. She continued demanding money, but still we overcame that.

In January 2005, we had a serious problem. His aunt started to demand more money, saying she has no children to take care of her. We could see that there was a motive behind it, but my boyfriend and I would start fighting and arguing about it. It would lead where my boyfriend would start to beat me, saying I had no respect for his aunt. Eventually we were fighting every day, especially when the aunt is around, and I would leave them and go to my parents house. My boyfriend suspected that his aunt might be using muthi to separate us.

The beatings continued harder and stronger. I thought the pregnancy was playing a role as well because I became so jealous when he would go out. The fights would start again and he would beat me.

He paid lobola as our tradition says. In august 2005, I delivered a baby boy; we were both so happy. Before the end of 2005, we officially got married. In 2005, we bought a house in one of the biggest areas in Johannesburg, and in May 2007, we moved in. After we moved to our new home, everything changed. He would leave the house 8am and come back at 11 or 12pm. When I asked him where he was coming from, in the blink of an eye I would be bleeding. The situation continued until one night I called my cousin, who is a police officer, and asked him to come around to try to talk to my husband as a man. That did not work. One night we quarreled again and he beat me up until my neighbour came to rescue me.

In October 2007, he packed my stuff and said I must leave his house; he dropped me at my mother's house at about 11pm. After that, I did not know his whereabouts because his phone was always on voicemail. It was so painful and stressful as his two-year-old son would cry and ask about his daddy. It was not easy - with the trauma and depression, I was miserable and crying.

I went to our house in the beginning of 2008 to check who was staying there. I found out that other people were renting the house, as he was not able to sell it to them without my signature. He had sold them everything that was inside the house, including my furniture and I was left with nothing except my family and my child. After some few months, I received a call from a woman saying I must forget about him because she was preparing to marry him, but that time I had no tears. I said to myself, "God, you said if you are for us, nothing can be against us."

On 21 July 2008, he came back apologising. I forgave him because I'm a Christian, but we are not staying together yet. I still do not trust him and we are both unemployed. Though I forgave him, the trust is broken and life between him and I will never be the same again. A big thank you to my mother, my friends and family, and my pastor who supported me through all this.

* not her real name

Violence and Disability



Activist Grace Dimakatso Maleka

Photo: Tonya Graham



Disability does not mean inability

by Grace Dimakatso Maleka

My name is Grace Dimakatso Maleka, I was married to my husband for 20 years. We were blessed with three children, two of whom are still alive. Since we began to live together we did not have a happy relationship, we used to fight every weekend when he came home drunk.

Shortly after my first child was born, in 1990, we separated and I went to my mother's place. He later came to my mother's place accompanied by his mother to apologise for what he had done and promised not to do it again. As he is the father of my children, I forgave him and offered for us to start a new life with him.

In 1995 I helped him get a new job where I was working. He started to drink heavily again and often came home in the middle of the night. He would insult me in front of my daughter. Each time I spoke to him about his behaviour he promised not to do it again.

The following year, I fell pregnant with my second baby. The doctor asked me whether I had problems at home and said I did not. He warned me that I should not keep quiet about the problems. Meanwhile, we used to fight a lot when I was pregnant. I lost my baby boy. I explained to him what had caused the loss and he apologised, promising that he would be a real father to his daughter.

The following year life dealt us a heavy blow when we faced retrenchment. I persuaded my husband to go to Ratanda and get a house there because we were not working. Later that year I returned to work as I had found a new job in July 1998. Transport from Heidelberg to Balfour is very scarce. I had to wake up in the morning and come back late. He started to grumble and sometimes promise to beat me about this. He was very aggressive especially when he smoked dagga.

I again spoke to my director and we worked together. He also experienced the same transport

problems and so he opted to go and stay with his relatives in Balfour. I suggested we must find a place to stay together, but he said no. I spoke to my neighbors at Ratanda to look after our house, as we would come only on Fridays. I stayed in Balfour with my mom while he stayed with his relatives. On Fridays, we met at the taxi rank to go to Ratanda.

At the end of the month he did not want to buy food. Instead, he would become moody and leave me to do everything by myself. Meanwhile I fell pregnant with my third child, who was born on 1 March 2000 and by then my husband was in temporary employment. This was hard on me because I was on maternity leave.

When my baby was about two months my husband started to beat me when I requested that he show me love. He beat me until neighbours shouted at him. They threatened to report him to his family. He said to me that his mother and sister come first in his life and me I'm the last person to talk.

When our house was broken into and things got stolen my mother-in-law blamed me and insulted me in front of our neighbours telling me that I am a white lady, I trust people from outside rather than the family. I told myself that I should leave Ratanda and live in Johannesburg since I did not feel free. On 1 October 2000, the day before I was supposed to start a new job, I was involved in a car accident that left me disabled. I stayed in hospital for four months hoping that my leg would be okay. When I went to Baragwaneth hospital, the doctors told me that my leg must be amputated.

I phoned my husband and told him. He responded that the doctors needed to make a plan because he was too young to stay with a disabled woman. He said in front of his family that he could not stay with me if they cut off my leg. I explained to him, "I didn't make any application to be disabled."

In 2002, doctors amputated my left leg. I stayed in hospital for three weeks. When my husband called, I told him that my leg had been cut off. He came to the hospital to see for himself if this was indeed true. He brought me nothing, not even bananas, instead he just looked at me without a saying anything. After, I went to my mom's place.

My husband then came to fetch my children and me. Things appeared to be rosy and he even bought me a cellphone. However, after two months he took it back and said he needed it. He would not allow me to even touch it when it rang. We fought a lot because he was earning

a lot of money and did not want to take responsibility for his family.

I started seeing a social worker by the name of Florence Mohloai. One time she took me to Lesotho to visit with her relatives as part of her way to assist me in relieving stress. My children were traumatised to see their mom crying all the time. That social worker helped me regain my confidence and taught me to believe in myself, despite my condition. My husband used negative words and then afterwards apologised saying he was joking. The God that I worship certainly has way to heal broken hearts so I chose not to let my disability take control of my life. In 2004, I moved out with my children to my own house and obtained a protection order that prohibited my husband from coming to my place. This was such a relief to me.

The decision to move on with my life with a disability meant taking a risk into an unknown future that was likely to be full of challenges. Learning that I would not walk properly again was devastating, but I knew that I had to strengthen my state of mind and think positively. That is when I decided to join an organisation for disabled people. They empowered me to know my rights and to accept myself; I started to participate in different activities including those organised by the community and government.

The following year I got a job at Heidelberg hospital. I was later elected to lead women in the province as chairperson for women with disability and I am now representative for Disabled Women in Africa. When my husband noticed these achievements, he begged me to come back and I refused. The opportunities I have made me view my condition as a blessing to me, in a very painful way. We need to change the perceptions of our families to become more tolerant and accepting of disabled people. Our families disable us, not our disabilities. Women with disabilities enjoy relationships and are indeed highly sexual, just as any women.

It helps me to talk openly, hoping to break stigma and dispel some of the myths attached to disability. I believe that I am a beautiful creation of God. I may not be physically attractive (whatever that means) but I believe my spirit and soul carries a beauty that cannot be measured. I wish to share this beauty with the rest of the world at every waking moment so that we can appreciate that we are very privileged human beings. If one door shuts, then you must know that another one will open. There is no time to look back, but move forward, nothing is impossible for today's women.

I want to thank my mom's sisters, Pote and Martha and my younger sisters, Gladys and Lindiwe for being so supportive.



Chased away for being disabled

by Etty Khoza

I was born 3 of July 1955 at Katlehong and grew up with polio after being diagnosed when l was eight months old. I stayed at the Germiston Hospital, Baragwaneth, and later ended up in Natal-Spruit Hospital where they kept disabled people. In 1993, l received an RDP house. It was nice because l was working and l could do whatever l wanted. My house was very beautiful.

In 2001 trouble started when my neighbour said to me, "Why can't you go and stay where the disabled people are staying?" I was heartbroken and reported him to the street committee. We talked about it and he apologised. After two weeks, his kids broke my window with a ball, l told him about the incident, and he did not reply nicely. He said the kids were just playing and it is because I did not have a child that I complained.

After that, his kids started throwing tins and garbage in my yard. Most of the time l stayed in the house because if I went out I would be greeted by strong words that will hurt my heart. Whenever I wanted to go out, I would first look out through the window so that l don't have to see him and he doesn't have to see me. The painful thing was that l cannot run and even when I am locking the door, he can follow me, saying painful words that hurt.

One day I was coming from work. There is one road where l have to pass by his house. He made sure to see me and said, "Here is this disabled woman." I ignored him and kept walking towards my house. Before l got home, he followed me with his car wanting to hit me. Lucky enough there were kids playing and they blocked the car as l passed.

When l was heading home my heart was broken and l was hurt, because he said to me that I am a disabled person, why am l working while his wife is not disabled but she is not working. At last, when l was nearing home he said to me, "Disabled grandmother today l want you in a box dead." l just stood and stared at him.

I do not know why I became his target, if maybe he had a problem in his house and was solving it by abusing my feelings. I asked him, "Do l owe you anything so that l can pay you and you can leave me alone." He did not want to listen to me. He came to me and kicked me. I fell on the ground. While l was on the ground, he took my walking stick and hit me with it twice in my head. During this time, he was verbally abusing me and the blood was all over.

l could not see where my walking stick was. I could not move and I needed someone to lift me up. God is there for us all, and at that moment, a man came and helped me to get up. He looked for my walking stick and gave it to me.

I went to the police station. When l arrived they sent me back saying l should go to the hospital because l was bleeding. At that time, it was too late and there was no taxis until in the morning. l realised that he was jealous of me, because I was working and had a house, though I could not understand why he was so jealous of a disabled person.

My mother said I should come home and my younger sister must go and stay at my house. That was in 2001. Okay no problem, I am still working and I have my life. But l would like it to get this memory out of my heart. I still have scars on my face that remind me of that day.

Many people they feel sorry for us because we are disabled. For me l am okay. l have the belief that God loves us all and if you believe, good things will be yours. However, I want to tell people, do not take people with disabilities for granted, we are human.

Healing body and soul

by Germina Setshedi

I am a mother of 4 children. I was staying together with them and my husband. My husband was jealous, and as for me I did not have any suspicions about him. He was cruel and I did not realise that at the time. He used to beat me up for nothing but I was not aware, I sometimes wondered if I was born to suffer. I cried everyday, I prayed for years asking God to change my life for the better. Instead, my problems were getting worse everyday. I had given up on having any chance of happiness with my husband. Sometimes he would strangle me and I would wake up crying, and he would tell me to stop making noise.

I tried to talk to him many times, about how his behaviour made me feel inadequate and unhappy but that still caused a big fight between us. The violence continued for a long time until in September 1996. On Sunday 7 September 1996, two days after a car knocked down my son and he was admitted to hospital with a head injury, I was preparing to go to the society. My husband was not around. When I was about to leave, he came back and found me wearing my uniform. He came in and locked the door, swearing and pointing at me with his fingers in my eyes.

When we where arguing, I was so scared because I was afraid of him. He started pushing me. He pushed me until he threw me out of the window. It was from the 4th floor to the ground. Both my legs and my spine were broken. I spent three months in a General Hospital sleeping. When I came out of the hospital, I opened a case against him but nothing was done because my husband was friends with one of the officers. I was staying with my younger sister and he kept on phoning, telling me to come back home. I was using crutches and could not walk perfectly or move my body because the plasters were so heavy.

When I was still staying at my sisters, he would come knowing that my sister is at work and the children are at school, obviously, I would be alone. He would kick the door roughly and just open the door. He would tell me that he wants me home as soon as possible. All that I could do that time was to sit and cry.

Within a short period, I moved back home to my husband. Oh…oh…oh…God, after three

days he had started swearing and pointing me again. Remember that by that time I could not walk fast, I was still on crutches. That was the beginning of the end. One day he hit me with a hammer on my head. I was bleeding so badly and that was a good chance to get him arrested. With the help of my neighbours, the police where called and I told them what happened to me. They arrested him, I was able to open a case, and he went to Sun City prison. He was on trial for three months and in the following months he went to court.

He then asked me for forgiveness, I forgave him. After the courts, he never slept at home but would arrive the next day. We did not speak to one another, it was very hard for me because the kids where at school and I would be alone in the house. I trusted in God and prayed all the time. I would say this" God help me because this man is going to kill me." Nothing changed; I stayed in that horrible life. He started not to eat at home, coming home late and sometimes not coming at all. Life in that house was that way until he decided to leave the house. He packed all his belonging and left.

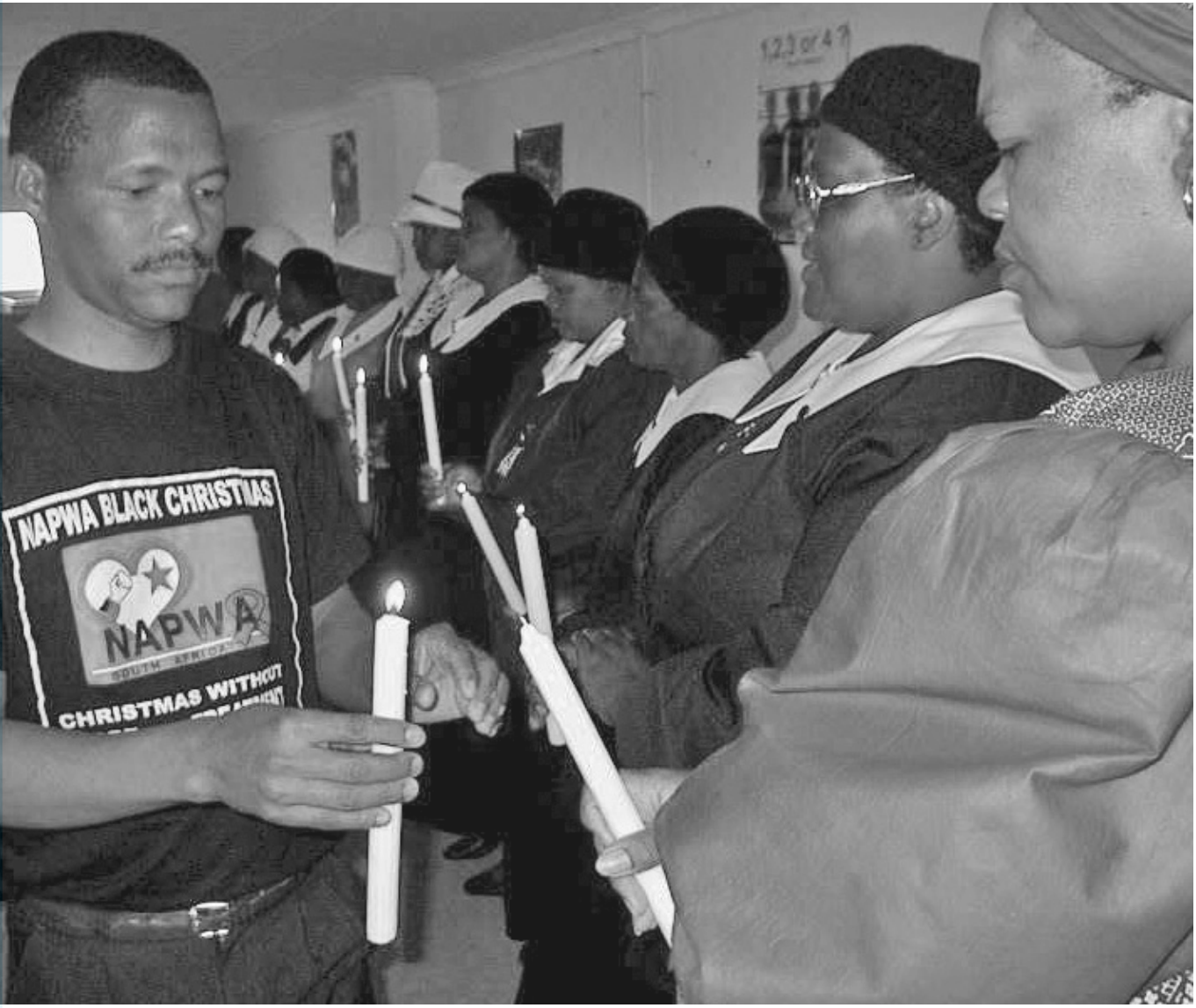
When I thought it was over at last, he went to the police and opened a case against me. He said that I had chased him away. The police told him to go to family violence and open a case there, because they believed that he was lying. His case ended nowhere.

Now I have realised that he is in love with my neighbour's daughter and they have a baby boy. But I don't care and I haven't said anything till today. I just kept quiet. He is suffering and wants to come back home, unfortunately, he does not have the space in my house anymore.

That took me back to my mother's words before she died, "what are you doing with that hooligan, a thug and a monster." My mother did not like him at all but because they knew that I loved him they accepted him. As for now he does not even a have a place to put his head down and he wants me to assist him but I won't.

I had a choice to stop the cycle of abuse, a privilege that some women in my position do not have. I was empowered and became fully aware of my rights as a woman, a person and a citizen. I knew all the steps I could take to report domestic violence in my community, but distanced myself from this practice and suffered in silence. I did not tell anybody about my husband who was abusive. I now advise survivors of domestic and others forms of violence in my community, It is because what I would like most is to have a good normal life like anyone. I am telling a painful story that has shaped my life, helped me to heal and most importantly to move on.

Leaving violence behind



Imagine a world of peace

Photo: Gender Links

Breaking free and moving on

by Kalamauwa*

It was July 2006 when I met a certain guy from Cameroon. At first, he was everything to me but after just two months of moving in together problems began. I was only happy for a short period. He was an excessively jealousy and over protective man. He always accused me of having affairs with other man of which it was all wrong. He started beating me telling me that "I am bitch and cheap". He beat me sometimes four times a month.

He started exhibiting strange behaviour. For instance, he would receive phone calls at midnight. When I asked him about it he would say it is not important. In September 2007 I began my fasting period. After two weeks of fasting, we began to fight and he told me to go to my boyfriend otherwise he was going to kill me.

So I ran off to my friend in Turffontein. The following day I went to meet with my boyfriend's friend in Braamfontein. I waited for two hours but he would not open the door. Then I remembered that his friend had a hair salon and so I went there since I had nowhere to go. I found our friend's younger brother who told me that his brother was there at home. So, we went and knocked at the door and for sure his brother was there with my boyfriend and another girl. Because they were not expecting me, my boyfriend locked himself in the toilet.

I asked the girl and she confirmed that she was with my boyfriend. She told me everything about how they met. This was a painful period because I was fasting. In retaliation, I took his wallet and cellphone. He started calling me and I continued to ignore him. After three days, I went back and that same day he beat me up.

I cried asking myself why, what I had done wrong to deserve this and asked the Lord to help me. I tried desperately to show him that I was not a prostitute like the one he thought. I cried and was even thinking of killing myself. He accused me of dating someone. I lost weight from a size 34 to size 28.

He would not even come near me for three months and slept away from the house. When he came home, he beat me up. He sometimes left me with no food in the house until I decided that I had had enough. I asked myself why I was not leaving. I left the house and went to

stay with my friends in Turffontein, luckily, there was an unoccupied room and I took it up. I wanted to start a new life but my boyfriend started following me everywhere.

He would come to my place and if did not let him in he would break the door. This happened for two months. He would beat me up until I decided to call the police. The police never caught him red-handed because he would run away before they arrived. I stopped picking up his phone calls even though I still loved him.

Now I pray to God that He gives me strength to forget about him and God has answered my prayers. I am fine and I do not think I will go back to him again. Even if I do not have a job right now, I am fine.

If I knew then what I know now, I would not have gone to live with this man in the first place. However, it is never too late. I am happy I am moving on. I pray that every one who is going to read this story will think twice before jumping into a relationship before they get to really know the other person.

* not her real name





She didn't look like an abuser...

by Lesego Magwai

A hot September morning in 2005, a slight puff of air coming through the window woke me up with a smile. The first thing I did was to go look at myself in the mirror and appreciate life. That was the first time I woke up with a smile on my face, because I usually find it difficult to wake up. I was excited to see what the day had in store for me. Everything about that day felt right, the flowers were bright and vivid whilst the trees were so green, I felt like I was seeing the garden of Eden. It was probably one of the most beautiful days of my life; the day just felt right.

On the day, I had a workshop to conduct. I arrived at the venue 45 minutes early and I began to prepare the training room. There was a knock on the door, as I turned I saw this innocent looking young woman was participating in the lesbian sexual health workshops. She came early just to tell me that she would be starting at work and that she'll join us a bit later. After she left, I could not stop thinking about her, and fortunately, she did join us later in the day.

After the workshop, the group decided to play pool and I went, even though I could not even hold a cue stick. That very same evening we both realised that we liked each other and we decided to take it further. She was my first love; she was very sweet, kind, loving and our connection was amazing. "She's everything I've ever wanted," I thought.

Just three months later, she was telling me what to do, where to go and she even started choosing friends for me. My first thought was that this was a sign of her love. She took this further by coming to my workshops and meetings and for a while, I enjoyed it, until it started being too much. I had to report to her where I was going, when and with whom. On my return, she would follow me around, I never had time on my own, she would even go through my phone checking my received dial.

I started doing things she didn't want me to do like talking to other lesbian women in the clubs. Every time I would break one of "her rules" she would be pissed off and demand we

leave the club. During one outing, I spoke to another lesbian woman and, as usual, my partner's reaction was to get angry and demand that we go home immediately. Once in the car, she slapped me. I was so shocked that I didn't even cry. I think my decision to forgive her for this, made her think that she had power over me.

She complained about minor things, like her view that making eye contact was giving people the impression that I wanted them and this lead to more fights. We were staying together at a flat. She kept on coming to all my workshops, even during the week. I asked her why she was available every day especially on weekdays and her response was that, as the boss at her own work, she doesn't have to go in everyday. It bothered me because being the boss does not mean that you have to stay at home everyday and expect your colleagues to do all the work.

As a volunteer at OUT LGBT organisation, all they could offer us was a stipend. I kept asking her what was going on at work and she still wasn't honest with me. She lied about other things as well, such as her age. She was so tiny she looked 22, whilst she was 30. I was 20 years old when I met her. I remember she told me she was 24 years old. I believed her until her ex girlfriend told me her true age. I confronted her about it and she laughed at me saying, "I can't believe you believed that I was 24." For her that was the funniest thing ever.

She started being physical in her fights with me. When I realised she was no longer employed, we eventually had to move out of the flat because we could not afford to pay both the car and rent. Once she couldn't pay for the car anymore, she became violent and hated every human being, including herself. She became this cruel ugly mad woman, whom I believed no longer had a heart. She would push and slap me for smiling with other women. Every time she fought with me, I would tell her to stop and she wouldn't listen, until one day when I laid my hands on her and fought back. It didn't feel good but I had to do it so that she could stop.

Two months later, I ended the relationship and initially she acted as if she was accepting my decision. Shortly after, she tried to commit suicide and the police came to the restaurant where I was working at the time to ask about her suicide attempt. The police woman suggested that I give her another chance, and then I told them the whole story so as to give them the full picture. The fighting continued whenever we met (even though we were no longer dating). One time she took my bag and cellphone and I opened a case of theft against her, which led to her arrest. I later withdrew the case.

We did not talk for a long time until I accidentally bumped into her at a club and we had

another fight. I couldn't understand why she was still fighting with me because we were not an item anymore. I told her that I didn't ever want to see her again. I left and I didn't see her again after that night. On July 15, I got a call from her friend telling me that she had passed away. I didn't believe it and my immediate thought was this was one of her schemes, until I called her mother to confirm. I was really hurt and couldn't even go to the funeral because I had to attend my aunt's wedding. The funeral and the wedding was on the same date and I had to follow my instinct, which was being my aunt's bridesmaid.

I do miss her a lot. I think what hurts the most is the fact that I told her that I did not want to see her again. I'm still healing and I think the first step is to forgive myself because I believe that for me to fight back it means I also contributed to the domestic violence.



Demanding change

by Grace Ayanda*

I am a 38-year-old woman born in Lubumbashi, who did not enjoy love from her parents. At the age of three, my father passed away and my brother and I had to separate from my mother. The way the culture was then, the husband's family must take over everything including the children.

My mother remarried her husband's brother and we started our new life with problems in a house with two wives and nine children. I did not understand why my mother had chosen to marry her husband's brother. When I reached twelve years I started to see that this was wrong and then this new father chased me out of his house. I went to stay with my other uncle until I got my matric.

Because of this life, I was forced to leave my family and start my own life. I met a man whom I thought would make me happy in this world. It was a very good beginning when I got my first child in 1995, but eight months after the child was born, everything changed. The first time he beat me was after his mother had left her house keys with me, on his arrival later, I could not find the keys and he got angry and started beating me. During the beating, he tore my dress and he left me half-naked in the lounge. After the beating, he went to the bedroom and I used that as a chance to run to my neighbour's place for help and peace of mind. Following this incident, there was a family meeting and I had to stay with him as it was expected of a wife to obey her husband and to forgive him.

A year later in 1998, we came to South Africa because of what was happening in Congo. Fortunately, I found a job and I was away from the house from 7am to 7pm. My love, unemployed at the time, would be at home waiting for me to come back from work in order to do the housework. This situation was very stressful to the point where I felt happier at work than at home. Going home was like being in prison charged with slavery. He expected me to perform my duties as a wife and to provide the money for us to survive.

In 2006, on Christmas Day, he came home with two men and they started drinking from 8am until 10pm. During this time, he left the house to drop people off and while he was away one of the man started to fight in my house. I asked him to leave but when I wanted to close

the door, he pulled me out onto the steps and opened the gate, which came back and hit me on the face, and my face became green with bruising. When my husband returned he did not react. He said he could not take me to the hospital unless I put petrol in the car. I went to open a case at the police station, but I did not know the guy who had assaulted me because it was my first time to see him. My husband did not want to show me the guy and he said I deserved what I got because I'm a bitch. His reaction hurt me.

On a another day he came home late drunk, he found a letter from school that my son had jumped through the window. At the time, I was sleeping and I didn't know anything about the letter; he entered the bedroom demanding an explanation about the letter and when I had no answer he started to hit and strangle me and said he would kill me. I went to apply for a protection order and after a postponement and several appearances, the matter was concluded after a year.

During the time of the case, the two of us were not even communicating. For example if he wanted to talk to me, he would send one of the children to talk to me. Throughout this, I tried to leave but because of the children, I had to go back to him. On the last day of the court appearance, he apologised for his behaviour and promised not to hurt me again. I chose to forgive because I believed him. I am glad to say that he has not beaten me since.

I decided to speak out about my story to help other women to know their rights and if there is an abuse problem to ask for help from organisations working with abused women and they will get help.

** Not her real name*

The Rainbow Nation

by Maleshoane Motsiri

South Africa, the land so beautiful,
The land full of hope, love and prosperity,
The land I choose to live.

Yes, I remember the first time,
You warmly embraced me,
You opened your heart and warmed my soul,
You opened your gates and allowed me into your home.

You smiled, told me relax and be home,
You instilled hope, I trusted you,
You gave orientation, sharing your beauty,
Narrating your struggle, your sorrow, your pain,
You laughter and your dreams,
You promised to let me be, I learned and trusted you.

I saw all men as my brothers, all women as my sisters,
I even saw older women as my mother,
I let go of fear, pain and suffering,
Thinking yes! I am home.

After so long, you rudely chased me out,
Calling me names, you raped me, emotionally and physically,
You burned and killed me,
You ruined me to believe in you, to be at ease,
You gave me a home, food, clothes
But now 'I am a thief" you say,

How can you be so caring and yet cruel,
How can you be so loving and yet so heartless,
How can you be so warm and yet so mean,
You should have sat me down, told me I have over stayed,
Gave time to pack and leave peacefully,
With the respect I had for you,

South Africa, the land so beautiful,
I loved you then, I love you now, I will always love YOU.

Photos right:
Upper left, Natasha Kangale (left)and Nthabiseng Sibeko (right) making radio features
Upper right, Take Back the Night, Johannesburg
Bottom, Pedro Simao (left), Tonya Graham (right) of CMFD Productions in radio workshop



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Khuluma, Bua, Speak Out!



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