The "I" Stories

Speaking out on gender violence

Swaziland

2008

Peace begins at home



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.

The Gender and Media Southern African (GEMSA) Network is an umbrella organisation of individuals and institutions who work to promote gender equality in and through the media. Swaziland Media and Gender Watch (SMEGWA) was established in April 2004 as an independent media body in the tiny Kingdom of Swaziland to promote media freedom and professionalism. SMEGWA is also a member of the GEMSA network.

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Theatre to raise awareness about domestic violence
Photo: Gender Links



Times of Swaziland speaks up during 16 Days of Activism
Photo: Gender Links



16 Days of Activism 2006
Photo: Gender Links

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Foreword

by Qondile Shongwe

Being a woman is very difficult, especially in our country, Swaziland. The reason behind this statement is that in our culture a woman is considered a child and has no say when it comes to decision-making. Moreover, in our society women are not given the chance to voice their opinions.

Issues on gender based violence still need to be given serious attention because many people still have the mentality that it is a domestic issue (*tibi tendlu*) and that it should be swept under the carpet. We still have a lot to do in sensitising people that violence against women is inhumane, and it's a crime.

However, it is sad that even though some do stand up and report such cases, they are usually disappointed by our justice system. The police are always quick to say it is a family matter and that those involved should sit down and talk. In cases where they are willing to offer assistance, that case often takes forever to be completed and, in the event that the perpetrator is taken to court, they always come out with a pathetic sentence.

In 2005, the King assented the constitution and, as with all constitutions, it encompasses a Bill Of Rights. Certain provisions in the very same constitution provide that women and men are equal and should have equal treatment. However, these are just words on paper because women are degraded each and every day and there is little those provisions do for them.

Being part of this *"I" Story* project has really helped me a lot, because I have had the opportunity to listen to some of the survivors sharing their stories. They talked about the reasons preventing them from exposing the kind of lives they live and why they stay in abusive relationships. At times, it is difficult to see abuse even if it is staring you in the face. Meeting with these powerful women was a real eye opener for me.

I must admit that the level of activism in Swaziland is at its lowest peak and people have not grasped the gender activism concept. However, that should not be a reason for ignorance. Do not just stand and watch a woman being abused, stand up and do something. It is time people, especially women, accepted that abuse is there and it can happen to anyone. Women must stop looking down on each other but instead focus on empowering one another. In that way, we can overcome gender based violence.

I understand that one of the reasons women refuse to walk away from abusive relationships is because they are dependent on these perpetrators. They are often too scared to talk and choose to accept the abuse because they have nowhere to go and no means to a decent living.

I was shocked when I heard one victim of abuse say she tolerates the abuse by her husband because she knows that at the end of the month she will receive a bag of mealie-meal and a tin of jam.

It is for such reasons that women need to be empowered and assured of security. In this way, they will be able to stand up in the fight to end gender violence.

To the women out there: no one has a right to beat you and there is no love associated with beatings *(Indvuku ayiwakhi umuti)*. As hard as it may be, stand up and fight gender based violence. By speaking, you will be helping another one who is also faced with a similar problem, so let your voice be heard.

One of the survivors in her *"I" Story* said, "Your husband, after beating you, will buy flowers and will keep doing so until he buys you flowers for your funeral." The abuser eventually kills too many abused women. Never let an opportunity pass you by, put a stop to gender based violence whilst you still can.

Acknowledgements

This book would not be here if it were not for these women who plucked up the courage to share their stories with the whole world. They graduated from being victims of abuse to being survivors. By sharing their stories, they have already helped other women out there who are going through the same problem.

We also could not have done it without the contributions by Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA), Swaziland Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (SWANNEPHA), Women Together, Gender and Media Swaziland (GEMSWA) and Gender Links.

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*

The painful reality of sexual violence



Overcoming a nightmarish childhood

by Thandi Mayber*

Twice raped in childhood by a relative and a gang of schoolmates, but I am still going strong and not letting all those difficulties distract me from my goals. My name is Thandi Mayber. I am single with one child. In the early days of my life, I knew nothing and was innocent because of my traditional background. Growing up was hard for me. We were four in the family, two girls and two boys. My mother had been married in the traditional way. Unfortunately, I never knew my father but he is still alive. All I heard about him is that he was once in love with my mother but one day that love was gone, and worse, that his love for us was also gone.

He never looked back. He never thought of us. I endured life in that loveless environment. My mother was working hard to put food on the table. She was barely home. I was home with my youngest brother as the other siblings were away with relatives. We were always out of our home playing in the neighborhood. We only returned home at night.

One day my nightmare started. I was still a baby, not yet at school. We were out playing at a neighbour's homestead. They also happen to be my mother's relatives. I remember it as if it was yesterday. There was no one at home except for the uncle. While we were playing, the uncle called us. He wanted to send us to the river to fetch water, but surprisingly he wanted me to stay behind and do other things for him.

I was alone with him. He said I must come near him, "come, come closer Mshana wamalume ungesabi I won't hurt you," I remember coming closer without any clue of his intentions. He started touching my private parts. That was hurting, I started to cry, but he said, "Mshana stop crying", and he closed my mouth with his big hand. I screamed but it was nothing to him, only music in his ears and, to my horror, he proceeded to rape me.

When he had finished with me, he warned me not to dare tell anyone about the ordeal, threatening to beat me or repeat it if I did not comply. I was so afraid and I was shivering with pain. After the nightmare, I ran back home to find my mother. She was not at home. I had to sit there by myself the whole day waiting for her arrival. When the night fell, my mother was back. I went to sit next to her. I wanted to say something, but all that malume had said came back in a rush to me. I was tongue-tied. She never suspected anything or maybe she was tired having worked the whole day. She seemed oblivious to what I wanted to say. She did not hear my moaning.

Days passed without me going to play. I was afraid of malume. On the second week, I sheepishly joined my friends and I was relieved when I could not see him. I concluded that he was not there. How wrong I was, because he just appeared from nowhere. I could feel my whole body shake with fear. I ran away and, to my horror, he called me back. "Come have some sweets." I stopped and returned to take the sweets that he gave to the other children and me. That day he did not harm me. Many days passed and I had started to forget about the whole thing when suddenly the nightmare happened again. And it went on for a long time until my family moved to another place far from where we were living.

Unfortunately, bad luck followed me. One day I was coming home from school when I met a group of young boys. There were five of them. The same things that the uncle did happened again, except this time the boys were holding me down. They gang raped me. My life was horrible. It was hard to tell my mother who was often home late and going out early to buy things to sell in the market. I am not blaming her for not being there for me. She was a single mother with no one to help her.

So, I grew up engulfed in great fear. I was afraid to tell anyone about my nightmares. My age group was hostile to me. It was as if they knew something about me. Growing up without a friend to tell about my burden was hard. I am 34-years-old now, a widowed mother trying very hard to survive life with my child. However, my child did not come from the earlier rape. I had a boyfriend and I thought we were in love. When the baby was born, he showed his true colours. He turned out to be very selfish.

My story is like a chain. It is very long because it is a story of burden after burden. If I have to tell everything I won't ever finish, but I decided to relate the things that bother me everyday.

My horrible rape ordeal

by Siphiwe Gumbi*

It was 2 January 2004 when I was sexually abused by a well known somebody. The time was 5:00am on Monday and I was on my way to Manzini from Mvutjini.

I got a lift in a maroon Cressida with a foreign registration. The man who was driving the car was between the ages of 25-27. He promised to drop me in Manzini but that was not the case. When we reached Mahlanya, he turned to Malkerns road. I started being curious in that I ended up asking him why he is taking that direction. He told me that he needed to pick up a few things at Mhlambanyatsi.

I was not at ease and my instincts were telling me that something bad was going to happen but I decided to keep quiet. When we reached Mhlambanyatsi, he took a gravel road. The car was moving very fast. I started to be suspicious and I asked again where he was driving? He didn't reply at all. There was dead silence in the car.

He then drove the car into the forest and he parked, I quickly jumped out of the car and ran crying for help but that did not work because, while I was running, I fell on the ground. He got a chance to get me back to his car. He was fuming about what I did (trying to escape); he slapped me with his big hand, calling me names. After that, he told me to remove my clothes, I was shocked, I did not understand what the meaning of that was.

He repeated with a sharp voice, pushing me on to the ground. I did not stop crying since he was beating me heartlessly and I was bleeding. He tore my skirt and forced himself on me while I was lying on the ground. He raped me, without any worries, because that place was so quiet. After he finished he told me that I was his girlfriend, he is taking me to his place but before that, we had to pass by his friend's place.

On the way to his friend's place, I did not show any anger. I acted as if everything was fine because I did not want him to kidnap me. When we reached there, he left me in the car

for a while and talked to another woman then he came back. He told me to get out of the car and go to the lady, pointing at her. I dragged myself to her and my whole body was painful.

The rapist drove off and the woman asked if I was okay, I told her the whole story. She took me inside her house and borrowed me her skirt. After that, we went to the police station carrying my torn skirt.

I was still bleeding; shivering because of the trauma I went through. The police took a statement and took me to RFM Hospital for a medical check-up and they referred me to SWAGAA for counseling. When I reached there I found Funekile Dube, a counselor. She rescued me and relieved me of the trauma.

I wanted to commit suicide but the counseling I got from her was enough, I regained my purpose in life. I felt free to go for my second blood test and I still tested negative. The perpetrator was arrested and he is still in custody serving his sentence for rape. I thank SWAGAA for rescuing me.

A victim of abuse

by Ntombie Kuhlase*

I have been trying to write but still, finishing a single paragraph, is difficult. However, I pray that today God will make me strong and enable me to write my ordeal to the very last end, especially because it is my 23rd birthday.

I am a victim of rape. My biological father has raped me for seven years. It all started when I was doing standard three in 1995, I was ten years old then and staying with both my parents. My mother was a naturally short-tempered person (unelulaka) so I was very scared of her. Each time I was in trouble with my mother, my father would stop her from beating me but I had to pay for it later when my mother was away at work. She would work four dayshifts, be off for two days, then work four nightshifts.

He started by telling me to share their bed with him, when mom was on nightshift. I remember the first day; he started by telling me nice things. He asked me if I knew what my name means. I told him I did not know, and he told me he and mom prayed and asked for a baby girl and they had me. He told me many stories until I fell asleep. I thought I was very safe because he said if someone broke into the house, they would not harm me since he will protect me. In the middle of the night, he forced himself in me. It was very painful and I cried. He said if I said anything to my mom, he would kill me and he promised to continue protecting me from my mom's beating.

He continued doing that for years. It was hell. When I was in Form Three, my friends were telling stories about their boyfriends and how they lost their virginity. When my turn came, I created a story about a boyfriend who never existed. I then decided to have many boyfriends to cover up my otherwise hellish life. Sometimes I would sit by the door of my bedroom to stop my dad from coming in; I would sit for the whole night. The only time I slept peacefully was when my mom was on dayshift.

Then one day the deputy headmaster called me and complained about my strange

behaviour and about my schoolwork. With difficulty, I told her, she was shocked but she said she could not help me. She advised me to go to my grandmother. I did not take that advice. I started isolating myself; I continued my many relationships for comfort. Those relationships saved my life because I was thinking of killing myself. I told one of my boyfriends of my problem and he was very supportive.

Things did not change, I was in Form Five and it had been six years since my father started his devilish acts. It was 2002. By then I had a strong relationship with my boyfriend (the one I spoke to about my problem) but my dad was too violent against him or any other male who showed interest in me. One day it came to my mind that I have suffered enough and I was worried my dad will do the same thing to my younger sisters. So, after he had paid the last amount of school fees, I decided to stand up and act.

I went to the same deputy head teacher that I had told the story to years back. I told her that my dad still rapes me every time my mom was on nightshift. She was shocked and blamed herself for not acting when I told her the same problem two years back. She asked if I want to report him to the police but I told her that the only thing I am worried about is for him not to rape my little sister. She promised this time she will do everything in her power to help me. Indeed she did!

She wrote a note to my mum and asked her to report at the school the following day. She told my mom the whole story from two years back when I told her my problem. My mom almost fainted. She went straight home and asked my dad about the news. He never denied a thing, he simply said he was very sorry. "I was misled by the devil, I promise it will never happen again," and that was the end of it. It was kept as "tibi tendlu" (a family issue) till today!

No one raised that topic again and no one took me for counseling. Whenever I think of the whole thing, tears fill my eyes. I have been trying to write about my experience for four years now but, each time I take my pen and begin writing, I just break into uncontrollable tears. I thank the almighty God that after four years of trying to write about my ordeal, at least today He has given me the strength to write this for the first time since it happened.

I do not wish to see someone going through the hell I have been through, and I advise parents to be very careful when raising female children. Men are heartless; I will never get married.

My dad destroyed my future and he ruined my youth, he took my innocence!

Gender violence & HIV and AIDS



Abused by the man I loved

by Thandekile Maphalala*

I am 33-years-old. I was born at Nhlangano in the Shiselweni Region but I now live in Matsapha. It is here that I fell in love with the man of my dreams and he even promised to marry me. True to his words, he set the wedding date and the preparations were at an advanced stage. However, two weeks before the wedding was supposed to take place, I heard that his in-laws had come to his homestead, together with his wife, to ask for forgiveness on her behalf.

I was really shocked because I never knew that he was married and that there was a misunderstanding between them. When I asked him, he told me that he never knew that his wife would come back because she cheated on him and gave birth to a child belonging to another man. He asked me to forgive him and that we continue with our plans. I refused and insisted that it was over between the two of us.

When I got home, I told my mother about what had happened and that I had broken up with my fiancé. She told me that she was not against the idea of stopping the marriage but said that breaking up with the man was a problem because he maintained the family and would sometimes pay for the children's school fees. She reminded me that life would be difficult and we would have to start from scratch and live in poverty once again. This man was the solution to our problems because he helped us in every way he could.

He, on the other hand, also begged me to forgive him and asked that the marriage go ahead as planned. I loved him dearly and it was the first time that I had fallen in love with someone, but I still had difficulty in forgiving him for what happened. Looking back at the kind of life we would live without the support of this man forced me to forgive him. Still the wedding had to be postponed and it was very painful for me and my mother but there was nothing we could do.

This was in 2000. Even though I continued to stay at home because I could not go to my boyfriend's home, my boyfriend would come and visit me. In 2001, I fell pregnant and gave birth in April 2002. At that time, my mother was ill and she died in July that year. That was very painful and hard for me to handle. Being the eldest in my family, the burden to bury my mother was on me, and my boyfriend was the one who rescued me from the situation. He gave me money to buy the coffin and food for the funeral.

Everything was fine and my mother's funeral went according to plan. All was well even the following year. However, in 2003, things changed. My boyfriend started having other girlfriends and would disappear for months. He seemed to have forgotten that the baby needed milk, clothes and other things. Things were really difficult for me, he would sometimes beat me when I asked for money and would tell me that he had no hand in me being poor.

In 2004, I found a job and life became better for my family and me. I was able to provide food for my family and we would eat freely without anyone complaining. My boyfriend would always come to my place of work and demand that I go with him. I often refused and he would insult me in front of my colleagues and other people. He would call me a prostitute and say his friends tell him that.

Soon after, his wife chased him out of their homestead. He then came to me and told me that I was the cause of all his problems. He said, because his wife had gone, I should come and stay with him and, if I failed to do that, I should bring back all the money he gave to me, the money he gave me to pay for my school fees, feed my family and to bury my mother.

He constantly came to my house and abused me in full view of my siblings and he did this without fear because he knew that there were no elders there. I tried going to the police but they failed to help, instead they said the normal, "go and talk." This is when I decided enough is enough; I left my place of work, and my home, and came to live in Matsapha.

Although I thought that this was the end of my problems, I was wrong because he found out where I was and my nightmares started all over again. Soon after that, I became ill and the sickness would not go away. I decided to go and get myself tested and the results were positive.

Strange as that may be, that's when I got my freedom because when I told him that I tested positive for HIV, he told me that he was not prepared to spend his life with someone who would kill him. Just as I was enjoying my life, he came back with more violence than before. Whenever we met, he would ask me how my HIV was and say that I was going back to Matsapha to contract more diseases.

One day he asked me to come and meet him in town with the baby. He told me it is over between us because he is alive and I am HIV positive. He said I should bare it in mind that he wants all his money back. He forcefully took the child and beat me up.

I went to report, to the police, everything that happened. The police summoned him and told him to give me back my child. He refused and said his child will never stay with someone who will infect him with the disease and that it would be better if my mother was alive to take care of the child. After hearing this, the police sided with him, telling me that I have heard what he had said, that they could also see that I am incapable of raising the child because I am working and, at the same time, no one will look after him as my mother had passed away.

That is when I decided to go to SWAGAA for help. I got help in a great way because I received counseling and I am now staying with my child. I am also able to help others out of the mindset that being HIV positive means the end of the world and that people live with the virus for a long time.

To me, SWAGAA is like a home whereby you are free to put in the picture all your problems and they straightforwardly solve it. My biological parents are late and SWAGAA now takes the role of my parents. I also have the confidence in telling anyone who is in the same dilemma, or abused in any way, to go to SWAGAA for guaranteed assistance.

My marriage turned into a nightmare

by Nonhlanhla Zwane*

I am a 32 year old woman living at Zombodze. I was once a happily married wife taken through Swazi law and custom. I was 29 years old then and ecstatic about the whole issue, because it was my wish to get married before the age of thirty.

My husband was a bit older than I was. He was 42 years. I told myself that at least I had found someone who was mature instead of those young guys who like playing stupid games. Before I met this person, I already had four children from a previous relationship and the last born was two years old. I did not hide that from my husband-to-be and, after some time into our relationship, he told me that his family wanted to meet me at his home.

Everything was okay for four months and after that, he formally made me his wife. During that time, I worked in a shop in Manzini and lived at home. Soon after, I moved in with my husband in his family home and continued going to work. My husband was supportive and helped maintain my children. He even paid their school fees, since their father was dead. He really showed love towards my children and gave them everything they needed. However, his family was against all that.

All was well that year and my youngest child would often come and visit. Just when I thought everything was fine, my husband came and told me that his family had serious discussions about our relationship and came to the decision that I should quit my job because I couldn't perform my duties as a wife.

I asked him how he expected me to cope because he knew that I had four children who needed my attention. He told me that he was the man in the house and should listen to

whatever he says. He told me that he would do everything for them. He went on to say that he holds a high position in the Army thus will be able to make sure that my family is provided for in every way possible.

I had no choice but to agree to their terms. All was well in the first two months, and then things started to change. He stayed in his place of employment and would often come back home but, all of sudden, he did not come back home and gave flimsy excuses. As if that was not enough, he refused to buy food and told me that he didn't have money as he was paying debts incurred from shylocks, buying booze and cigarettes, saying I know he drinks and smokes and should just accept that.

I then discovered that he had another girlfriend and they stayed together at the army barracks. I was very hurt because I trusted my husband. He used to come home with dirty clothes whenever he came home, but then he starting coming home empty handed. When I asked him, he told me that the younger soldiers did his laundry.

When I asked for money to buy food, he told me that he had enough food at the barracks and thus could not afford to maintain the family. He then beat, kicked and called me all sorts of names. He went on to say that I killed the father of my children because I thought I could force him to maintain my children.

I reported the matter to his family but his mother told me straight in the face that I was lying and that her son could not do anything like that because he was a kind person. My life was miserable and a kind person saw the kind of life I was living and gave me money to start my own business. I became a hawker but, before venturing into my business, I reported to my mother-in-law and also to my husband, who was at work.

Whenever I would go out and sell the clothes, I would report to my mother-in-law about three times a week. When my husband came back from work one day, she told him that I no longer stayed at home and was always in and out of kombis. She even said that I was now involved with one of them. The moment he came in the house, he beat me so bad and even called me a prostitute.

That became life for me. One day he came home and asked me to bring him his credit cards that he always left in the car. Just as I was taking them, he came behind me, started assaulting me, saying I was a thief and wanted to steal his money. He then threw me inside the car and my mother-in-law saw what was happening but did not say or do anything. We proceeded to nearby bushes where he said this is where we would finish our business. Inside the car was a big Rambo knife so, instinctively, I run away. Although he tried chasing me, I was able to outrun him. I found refuge in a homestead and related my story to the old woman I found there. She told me that running away was not the solution and she escorted me back home.

She also narrated the whole ordeal to my mother-in-law and she just laughed it off, saying her son would never do that and was just scaring me. After realising that no one was taking my story serious, I decided to try my luck with the police and they promised to talk to him. I am still waiting for that to happen.

One day my husband came home in the company of his girlfriend and they were both drunk. He left her inside the car but, in the process, fell asleep. I was already asleep when he came in and was surprised when I heard noises coming from outside. Just as I was concentrating on the noises, someone opened the bedroom door and it was a woman.

She came towards me and started beating me. She was holding a beer bottle and I took it and threw it on her head. I rushed out of the house and explained to my mother-in-law what had just happened. She just ignored me, saying she doesn't like to talk.

My husband took her to hospital and that incident made life for me worse than hell. I starved most of the time and had nothing to eat, emotional and financial abuse became food for me. Sometimes I drank water and slept or would eat soft porridge without sugar. I cried everyday, thinking of my children and the hell they were going through because of my marriage to this man.

I became worried because of my husband's ways and the fact that we never used a condom. My worst fears were confirmed, I was HIV positive. I was confused as I did not know what to do and that's when I decided to go to SWAGAA for counseling, they also told me to come with my husband so he too could be counseled.

I explained to my husband the whole situation and regretted the day I was born, he went and told his mother and they both agreed that I go back home so that my family could talk to me.

My father asked what I had done, but my husband could not respond to his question. Seeing the situation I was in, he told them that he was happy that they had brought me back home alive.

I spent about three days at home and I received a call from my husband telling me that he no longer needed me in his life and that he wanted to live with his girlfriend. He went on to say that I should keep my disease because he and his girlfriend were clean. He said he would burn all my clothes. Upon telling my family what he had just said, my father said it was not right and that I should go back and get my clothing.

I was in the company of my younger sister and when we got there, they threw the clothes at me and told me that I was no longer needed. Indeed, the girlfriend was inside the house.

Today I stay at home with my children and they are happy to see me live a happy life. Even though I am unemployed, I am enjoying every day of life and live without fear. I know it is difficult but I hope there is a way to separate traditionally married people because I don't see myself going back to that home. I had a terrible life there.

He goes around telling people that I am his wife yet he told me that he does not need me by his side because I am HIV positive. Please help me.

Love, abuse and HIV

by Nonhle Sibandze*

In 1997, I fell in love with my boyfriend and life was very nice because he provided me with everything that I needed, anytime that I needed it. In November 1999, I became pregnant and had my first baby. After giving birth, things changed for the worst, it was the beginning of my problems and I regretted the day I was born.

One day his mother, who rented a flat in Manzini, came home and accused me of abusing her child. Together with my boyfriend, she refused to give me food or money and they reminded me everyday how useless I was. His mother went on to say I was a witch and engaged in witchcraft practices because I wanted to destroy their lives. My only sin was that I was friends with some of the tenants in the home.

I became really depressed and was hurting each and every day. What made it worse was the fact that, whenever I related my problems to my boyfriend, he would just ignore me but, at least, he would give me something for the baby. Soon after that, I developed Herpes Zoster (Libhande). I think it was because I had too much stress because of the constant thinking and because I had just lost my mother.

My boyfriend would come into the house in the company of his other girlfriends and, whenever I tried talking to him, he would beat me up. I decided to return back home but he would always come back and take me to his house and force himself on me, until I discovered that I was HIV positive. I had no other option but to go back and live at home which was also unbearable. My own sisters discriminated against me and would make fun of me in front of other people. They told anyone who bothered to listen that I was sick and had AIDS. What was sickening was the fact that they also beat and swore at my father and would beat me. Because I was weak, I could not protect myself and my father.

I decided to call a certain lady who works for SWAGAA, I knew her before she worked there. She really helped me and helped me to overcome my problems.

Growing up in a polygamous family

by Temusa Kunene*

Growing up in a polygamous family is not a bed of roses. My father had two wives. Because we lived in our father's homestead, we stayed with our uncle and aunt. My mother had six children and the other wife had eleven. My aunt disliked my mother and was a friend to the other wife.

I got involved with a man and got married. In 2003, my in-laws decided they wanted to pay dowry for me. Since my father had passed away, my aunt heard about that and told me that there was no way they could come because we were still in mourning.

I went back and reported to them what my aunt had said but my father-in-law said they were coming either way because they could see that it was all about jealousy. He said that my aunt was jealous because he hated my mother and was not happy that they were paying my dowry.

The date was set and my in-laws came. However, we could not proceed because my aunt, stepmother and half brother stole the bile, which was to be used during the ceremony. The bile is very important and, without it, the whole process is meaningless.

I was very hurt and, because I am living with HIV, I became very sick and the doctor told me that my CD4 count was very low. I started anti-retroviral therapy. He also warned me to avoid thinking too much but I find that impossible because that really hurt me and I still can't get over it.

Speaking out against domestic violence



How I lost my mother

by Ncamie Mthombeni*

I was four years old when it happened. We are a family of three, two girls and my brother - I am the last born. Mother was 24-years-old when she lost her life in my father's hands. I used to see him beating my mom, but I did not know that he would end up killing her like a goat, but it happened one day, the day that I will never forget.

My father was a very dangerous person, with no respect for any other person, even those who warned him against beating my mother. He could not even respect the police when they tried talking to him. He was not taking any drugs. He neither smoked, nor drank and would sometimes go to church (he was a Zionist), pretending to be good.

One fateful day, which I will never forget, he killed my mother with a knife and she died on the spot in front of my eyes. He chucked me outside so that I could not see mother bleeding and groaning like a cow. Unfortunately, I saw everything that happened. Mom was an orphan; both her parents passed away and they were both South Africans. They did not have relatives in Swaziland.

My sister and my brother grabbed me out of the house and we ran away and reported this matter to our neighbours, who quickly called the police. They arrested him the same day. Our neighbour also reported the issue to the elders of the community. The neighbours wanted them to report the matter to the organisations that looks after children's welfare as we, at that time, were still young.

They got a place for us at SOS in Mbabane, where we were taken care of in every way. My sister is now a nurse and my brother is doing his third year in the University of Swaziland. I am doing Form Four (4) at St. Francis High School.

My father has finished his sentence and he wants us back home, especially me. I am afraid of him and I am not prepared to see his face. I hate him with all my heart. What brings me to Swaziland Action Against Abuse (SWAGAA) is counseling. I was counseled but I felt like it was not enough because, the trauma I went through, comes in my mind every time I think about my mother. I still see her in the pool of blood; hear the scratchy voice of my father shouting at her.

I received counseling from SWAGAA three times and it is Counselor Funekile who rescued me. I also wanted revenge against my father. The counseling I received was more than enough, now I can sleep very well, eat like other children and play with them well. I would like to thank Aunt Funekile who rescued me as now I am fine and coping very well in everything I do. I also forgive my father, though it is still hard to see him face to face.

How I lost my virginity

by Leko Nkambule*

I was doing Form 2 when I met my boyfriend, a soccer star. He had other girlfriends from his school. At that time, I went to an excellent private school. Our affair continued until I was in Form 4. In November 1997, I lost my virginity and became pregnant.

He was playing for the Swaziland National Team in the Council of Southern Africa Football Associations (COSAFA) Games in Botswana and Lesotho. He came back in January 1998 and asked me if I had had my periods for the past
two months. I could not answer the question; he was gentle and asked me again. I said no.

He then requested that I not think of getting an abortion. He will take care of the baby and me. He reported to his mother about this, and she did not tell my boyfriend's father about the matter. He came back to me five months later to give me money for transport to his home to report the pregnancy. I stayed with his family and everything went well until the baby was born.

Financially, my boyfriend was not stable. He used to get allowances from his team, which his parents would demand from him. At the same time, they would tell me to stop bothering their son. To them, he was still too young to be responsible. I had to go back to school in January 1999 to repeat Form 4 then continue to Form 5. His parents demanded that my baby stay with them. My parents said NO! My parents were aware that his parents could not even bother to buy a bar of soap for the baby.

It was a long struggle but I finally went to school in February 1999, at a boarding school in the Lubombo region. I passed very well out of Form 4 and Form 5 and I got seven credits. Then I got a job as a temporary teacher. My baby was healthy and strong. He was 3 in April, when I got my first salary. I paid for him to be taken care of at a crèche and soon he started going to school.

His father had been out of our lives since losing the struggle to have my boy stay with his parents. I took care of my son. I hated men more than anything. I did not want to have a boyfriend. In 2003, I applied, and was accepted, at the University of Swaziland into the Faculty of Agriculture. My son was six years old by that time and he had started his Grade One. My ex boyfriend heard about this and, in 2004, he began to come and see us each time he knew I was visiting home to ask for forgiveness, carrying a lot of goodies for his son.

Thinking that I did not want to have children with different surnames, I forgave him. He requested that we visit his parents as they were missing us. At first, I refused. Then, he threatened me and took us forcefully to his home and he traditionally married me. Later, he gave me his cell phone and I noticed that girls were most often the callers and some would even insult me. I could not stay with him as his wife. Once again, I moved back home to my parents.

When school closed for the 2004/2005 academic year, he asked me to visit him. I and my son visited him and we ended up staying together. Everything was good for the first two weeks; but after that he would leave us and come back after a few days drunk and demanding food. He would shout at me saying I should use my allowance to take care of us. Once he slapped me for telling him that we did not have any food in the house. He even beat me very hard.

What would hurt me more is that he would do this in front of my child. After a few days, I told him that I had to write supplementary exams. He refused to allow me to write them and tried to persuade me not to continue with my studies. That was too much.

Once again, I went back home and my parents paid for my supplementary, which I wrote and passed. He called to tell me that he hated my parents. The 2005/2006 academic year began and I went to school for my third year. Unfortunately, I was pregnant again! I told him, but he said that if it was his I must be five months pregnant, since I left him in July. He gave me money to go for a scan, and the results were positive.

He called me to come and fetch money. I went to his house only to find that he was with another lady. He never gave me the money. Thanks be to God that I always had money to return to my parent's home. I was so hurt! In January, he failed to pay his son's school fees

and my parents took the initiative and paid. When I was seven months pregnant, he called me and apologised, telling me he would give me money to buy clothes for the unborn baby.

Again, I believed him and I went to see him and, once again, I found him with another lady. He called me names. I was so hurt but he did give me R400. I started crying and he kissed the woman in front of me! They hugged and left me standing next to the hose house. The door to the house was not locked so, as soon as they were out of sight, I rushed back into the house and searched for more money. I only found R200, I took it and left. In the evening, he called to confirm if it was me who took the money and I said that yes, it was! He was furious but I was not sorry.

In April 2006, I delivered my second boy. My mother cared for him as I was preparing for my exams. His father called me saying he wanted to see his second son. I thought the baby should go to see his father. When he came to fetch us, my parents refused to let us go with him. When he left, his car was moving slowly. He called me the next morning and asked if my parents were true Christians. I said yes.

He further told me that when he came to my house he wanted to kill me so that he could remain with the boys. He went on to say he was tired of my parents taking care of me and that he knew they would release his sons after my death. I was shaking and crying. I could not believe him. My parents comforted me and told me to be a woman and be strong and also reminded me of my responsibility to take care of my sons.

In November 2006, I was alone in my room at the campus, preparing for my exam. My husband arrived asking for money saying he would bring it back in December as that was his bonus time. I gave him R2000. He went to my home at the end of the semester and asked my parents to release us so that he could be with us during the Christmas holidays. They released us.

The first week we stayed in his company house and, one day, he came back very drunk and asked if the second child was his, he asked for his surname so I gave him the health card. He was angry, he told me to get a surname for my son and he started beating me, saying that I had made him buy clothes for a bastard.

I told him he was not the one to tell me that because I was the mother of the child and knew

him very well and I even told him that maybe his parents could help us confirm what he was saying. He took us to his parental home, they were happy to see their grandsons and said the younger one was an image of his father. The older one looked like his grandfather. I did not bother talking about this issue while we were there.

The following day, 26 December, he left with all the money we had. He even took my purse with him. The children and I were left with nothing and yet I was expected to think what his whole family would push down their throats three times a day. Days passed and he only came back on the 2nd of January.

One day, I found my children playing and, as I approached them, they both cried and I could see that they were hungry. I quickly gave them water to drink and cooked something small to feed them. Unfortunately, before I could give them their supper their father came back. He demanded food. To my surprise, he had nothing with him besides his car keys. I kept quiet and gave him the food I had reserved for my children in case they got hungry again.

That night our menu was pap and white beans. He became furious and started beating me. I was so angry but I never cried, I just told myself that this is the last time he was going to do this to me. He kicked and punched me very hard. I tried to protect my face especially my eyes. All this was happening in front of the children and they were crying. Later, I took the younger one and breastfed him.

Strangely, it was like that action was adding petrol onto a lake of fire. He punched me on my right eye very hard. I could not cry, I kept protecting my boys from this monster and my tooth was broken. I did not want to fight back; I had had enough. Then he left. My older boy held me tight and asked if I was hurt. I said no. I took my boys to their grandmother and told her I was going to the forest to fetch firewood. She agreed to look after them.

I went away, boarding a bus without my boys and with no money. My body was aching all over especially my back where I got a hard kick whilst I was picking up my crying son. The bus conductors demanded money. I told them I did not have any money and they started making fun of me. I boarded a second bus and made them wait so I could fetch money from my parent's home since it was near the bus stop. I could not speak when I reached home. I just wanted to sleep.

My parents woke me up for supper and forced me to eat. From outside, we heard the last bus stopping and my name was called. I went to the bus - my boys were there, I took them and thanked the conductors and went home. I told my parents the whole story and they fed, bathed and carefully put my boys into bed. The next morning, I haemorrhaged and my eyes could not open, I was swollen all over. My tooth was aching. I went to hospital but they refused to treat me, saying it was a police case.

I told my parents that I did not want to put my children's father in jail. I would rather just go back home. My mother spoke to the nurse and asked for prescriptions and she bought the medicine. I woke up at 4am the next day and did washing for my boys, cooked and cleaned the house. I could not see when it was light. My eyes were painful. I took the strongest pill but it didn't help. As time went on, I healed but I always suffered headaches until my parents bought me glasses: my eyes had been damaged. My colleagues would laugh at me saying I should leave the monster alone. I had already made a decision that I would leave this relationship forever.

For him, however, it was not over. He came to my home area and saw me on a Sunday when we were coming from church. My older son said he wanted to walk with his friend and my mother was carrying the younger one, I jumped into my friend's car. She was with her fiancé. I sat in the back seat and we drove towards the shopping center. His car followed us. He parked his car just next to ours and came over to us. He asked for me, I went to him and my friend and her fiancé left. He asked me a few questions concerning our children, started accusing me of having an affair, and said that if I did have one then I should not show off about it.

He was repeating this over and over again, which annoyed me, so I moved away from him. He grabbed my jacket; I stopped as he was trying to make me fall. Just then, my phone rang, he grabbed my hand. I think he wanted to see the callers' number but I refused. He twisted my arm and threw my phone down so that it broke into pieces. People were looking at us in surprise. They helped by picking up the pieces of phone.

I was annoyed by the fact that he had never done a thing for the boys, yet he wanted to control my life. Who did he think he was? I went to the police station to report the matter. He was referred to the Swazi Court of Law where he was charged 9 months or an option of E180.00.

I am now seeking a protection order for myself and maintenance for the boys.

Sometimes he would come to my home and take the children then leave them alone in his house without food for the whole day. He would call and say he was at business meetings and that he could not go back to the house, that I should go and fetch them. At times, that was around 4:30pm and my home area is far from where he lives. I always went because I cannot let my children suffer but it is difficult for me to protect them the way I want to because I am scared. He could kill me before the court protection order. I have a feeling that he also abuses the kids now. They are so innocent and do not deserve this kind of life.

Knowledge is power and I would like to thank my parents for encouraging me to pursue my education. I have met many people who have tried to make me realise that I was in an abusive relationship but I would not believe them. UNICEF organised a workshop on peer counseling which was held at Emafini where we were thoroughly taught about HIV/AIDS and STI's, which was an eye opener for me. Mr. Sizwe Ndlangamandla and Mrs. Khumalo conducted the workshop and they encouraged us to report hidden crimes to the police.

They also helped me to get help from the right people - SWAGAA. These people brought light to me, as I became aware of how to live the kind of life I want. The weapon I liked most was just a red pamphlet written in black that talked about battering. It is not very long but the information there is complete.

Worst experience

by Mpheni Lulani*

My worst experience is one that I am neither proud to talk about nor do I like to be reminded of, but it is always there and will be there forever. I have survived all these years although, when I think about it, I feel anger boiling inside me. This wound cannot heal ever! God forgive me because I cannot forgive. I grew up in a polygamous family, my mother being the eldest wife with six children and my stepmother with eleven. I am the third born in the family. We shared the same compound but had separate houses. Life was not easy for us sharing the same yard because we were a big family and many bad things happened because of the jealousy between the two families.

My father, a troublesome person, was not working; he would wake up early in the morning and go to the nearest shebeen, drink alcohol and, when he got home, he would pick a fight. This would happen every day. He would say the food is half-cooked and send my mother to go and re-cook it. He would kick her or slap and hit her with a knobkerrie on the head. Her face was full of blisters and scars. When the scars were close to healing, he would beat her up again. The same thing would happen to my stepmother.

Fortunately for me, my uncles from my mother's family took me to stay with them when I was six years old. With their support, I managed to finish my O Level. My stepmother would go to her parental home since it was not far from our home. The abuse became daily bread in my father's home and it made us really sad. At times, it would happen even during broad daylight and one day my mother's arm was broken because of the abuse. You could see my mother's body was full of scars. Her face was ruined. She once had a bright complexion, but no more, as her head was full of marks from the knobkerrie.

No matter how hard the situation was, my mother would never give up on her husband. The elders would call occasional meetings to discuss this, but they were of no help at all even if they got around to addressing the concerns. My mother finally decided to report to her brothers

who advised her to report to the police. She would agree but, on their way there, she would start telling them, "NO! I cannot press charges against the father of my child." My uncles also failed to convince her. Even when she was very hurt and went to the hospital, there was nothing much they could do for her because she refused to reveal the real cause of her injuries, even when it was obvious.

A few months after one of these incidents, she died. My father started to feel sorry but it was too late. I just wonder if my mother was treated in a good way would have she had died so young? My father is alive and enjoying life. So, please, if you are abused, don't keep it in; fix it before it is too late. Tell someone the truth.

A very abusive grandfather

by Nokzola Mkwanazi*

I grew up staying with my grandparents in one of the peri-urban areas of Mbabane, Nkoyoyo. In the family, we stayed with my mother's brothers and sisters, together with my granny, most of the time. I was 14 years when my uncle would tell me to come to his bedroom so he would help me with my studies. One day my granny was not around, he started stroking my hair, telling me that I am beautiful. I tried removing his hand but I could not because he was strong. He began to touch my breast and, fortunately for me, while he was busy doing this one of my other uncles came into the room, since they shared the same room, and that is how God protected me from being raped that day. At times, he would wink his eye at me.

My mother works and lives in town and, as I did not see her much, I could not relate all that happened, to her. When school closed, I requested to go and visit my grandmother (my father's side) because I really felt at home when I was there. I overcame many things that were bad but felt it was better than being raped. My grandfather used to beat my grandmother and insult her (and us) in such a way that when we heard his car entering the gate, we would panic and start doing some work, even if there was nothing to be done. The minute he walks in, we would all be nervous because we knew he would start insulting us.

One day he did not come back home and we were very happy. Days passed and he started coming on weekends, something we enjoyed. My grandfather was staying with another girlfriend and he treated her like a queen. Things changed again and came home more frequently. He would insult grandmother and also beat her until she was unconcious. The beatings were my grandmother's daily bread. One day we called the police and they told us to give the phone to someone older because they didn't want to play with children over the phone. We told the police that the only people who are older are the ones who are fighting and they never listened.

One day my grandfather started beating my grandmother and we got out through the window, ran to our neighbour and asked her to help us, to call the police and, luckily, the police came.

It was of no use because the police said this was a family matter and my grandmother should call a family meeting, of which she did. My grandfather acted like a lunatic and started chasing, and insulting, the family away and they had to leave. After they had left, my grandfather started beating us and we nearly died. He wanted to find out who called the police. I will never forget that day, I still have visible scars on both my legs as a result of my grandfather's beating.

He was involved in a car accident in January 2007, it was a bit better but he still verbally abused us and, to make matters worse, he came back to stay with us again.

Ignored by my father

by Phindile Gule*

I was staying at my home in Sigombeni with my stepmother. My father was working at Big Bend. He used to come home once every month end. Life was very tough for me. My stepmother used to call me a prostitute child, and all other bad names one could think of. Sometimes, my half sister would beat me, for no reason, and she also call me a prostitute child.

I did not have clothes, always unhappy but I had faith that one day I would complete my school and work for myself. Surprisingly, each time my father was home, my stepmother would treat me very well calling me "Sisi, do this, do that", etc. This made my father to beat me each time I reported to him about the bad treatment I was getting at my home. He used to say I was telling lies about his wife and I wanted to spoil his home.

Sometimes he would even beat me after my stepmother had lied to him about me saying I have done this and that yet I had done nothing. Sometimes, I would report to one of my aunt's what had happened like when my stepmother had beaten me for no reason, or any other kind of ill-treatment. My aunt always comforted me and told me to work hard at school so that I would have a bright future.

I passed Grade 7 and my stepmother, together with my father, told me to search for a Form 1 place on my own. I enquired and I finally got a place at Mbekelweni High School. My stepmother and my father let stay in one of my aunt's homes at Mbekelweni so that I would be nearer to school. When I was staying there, my father and my stepmother would not pay maintenance for me and yet they knew that my aunt was a very strict person.

My aunt started telling me not touch anything, let alone her soap to wash my uniform, I would go to school on an empty stomach and I would not have money to buy, at least, lunch so I remained hungry for the whole day. Fortunately, one of my friends noticed my problem so she used to carry extra food to accommodate me. At my aunt's home, I used to only eat supper, my aunt would only give me a little portion of food.

Each time I reported all this to my father when he had come home, she would deny it and say I was telling lies. Sometimes, he would tell me off and that if I kept on telling lies about her, he would send me back to my mother. He used to say this because he knew that my mother was married and unemployed, she had many children (9) from her marriage. He knew that if he sent me, my stepfather would not be able to support me.

One time I was at home during second term holidays. I was asleep and I had a nightmare. I awoke and jumped, only to find my stepmother carrying a big kettle trying to pour hot water on me. She poured the hot water where I was sleeping. I ran, opened the door and stood far away from the home yard. My stepmother cried aloud claiming that I had beaten her. She called my stepsister and my stepbrother and they beat me up.

After the incident, I went to sleep at my aunt's home (the one who always comforted me). The following morning my aunt took me home and my stepmother produced a bush knife and threatened to kill me if ever I set my foot in her house. She told my aunt the same lies that I beat her, yet I had not. She had already packed my bag (all my belongings) and she sternly warned my aunt that if I came back to her home, she would kill me. My aunt gave me money to go to my father to report the incident. At Big Bend, my father sided with my stepmother and told me to go back to my mother and never set my foot again at Big Bend. He even told me that, even if I ever get married, he does not need my dowry cows; my mother can take them and use it. He also said his children are my stepmother's children, not 'things' like me. He kicked me out from his house.

I left and went to my mother's place at Sivunga. After narrating the story to my mother, she took me back to my father. To her surprise, my father repeated the same words he had previously said to me. Together with my mother, we left my father's place and went back to my mother's marital home. When we reached there, my mother told me that I have to go back to my aunt's place (Mbekelweni) so that my father can continue paying for my school fees. She further explained that my stepfather could not afford to support me, especially with school fees, and that was obvious to me as they had many children.

I went back to my aunt's place and my aunt treated me like the way she did before. In fact, things got worse because I would sometimes even go to bed on an empty stomach. Each time I went to Big Bend to ask for money so as to cater for my needs, my father would tell me he

had one home, one wife and his children, therefore he could not afford to support me (a child born out of marriage).

He would send me back to my aunt's home (Mbekelweni) empty-handed. He would further say his wife and his sons would complain if he gave me money. The kind of life I was living affected me a lot. Sometimes, I ran away from my aunt's place and went to my other aunt's home at Mfabantfu, where they used to give me food. When I came back, my aunt would beat me saying that I was coming from my boyfriend's house yet I didn't have a boyfriend.

One day I came from school only to find my aunt with my stepmother. I do not know what they had discussed because my aunt told me to pack all my clothes and leave her home. I did as she told me and I left. Fearing that I had not asked for permission to stay at my other aunt's place at Mfabantfu I went to my friend's home. She knew all my problems and practically lived alone at her home since her mother was a hawker.

Her mother loved me so much and she treated me as her own daughter. Her father also liked me and treated me like his daughter. Even her brothers liked me, except for one who started proposing to me.

My friend's brother continued to propose to me, despite all my efforts of begging him to treat me as his own sister. He was at the Police College training to be a Police Officer. One night my friend's mother and her brothers went out and I remained at home alone. My proposer came from college that night and found me sleeping. He woke me up and told me to go to his house to collect food that he had bought for the home.

When I went inside, I found 3 two-piece suits, skirts, shirts and dresses he had bought for me. He told me he had bought the clothes to prove that he truly loved me. He further gave me money and told me to ask for anything I needed. He also started to pay for my school fees and supported me. I learned that he was a good man and I fell in love with him.

He supported me up to Form 3, where he even paid for my Examination Fee. At that time, he was stationed at Mankayane, where I used to go and collect money for my needs. By that time I was already staying at my other aunt's place (Mfabantfu) because his mom chased me away from her home after learning that I was in love with her son. Because I was with

him full time, I fell pregnant. At first, he had no problem, he accepted the pregnancy. However, later on he changed and supported his mother who no longer liked me.

He completely changed. Each time I would go to Matsapha, where he was later stationed, to ask for the child's maintenance, he would make fun of me in the presence of his girlfriend. At times he did not give me anything (money), complaining that he had debts, therefore he did not have money for the baby. Finally, he told me that it was over between us.

By the Grace of God, I met another man in 1996. Just by his appearance, I could see that he was a good, loving and caring man. After narrating my story, he told me to go and get a place in school. He rented a two-roomed house for me and paid for my school fees for Form 4 and 5. When I completed my O Level, we got married.

My father and my stepmother were very jealous of me. I lost my mother in 2002, and my father began to pretend as if he loved me. He used to tell me to take my husband to Sigombeni so that he could also get to know him. One day my father called me to Sigombeni and ordered me to take my husband home. He complained about why I delayed to take him there as the family longed to see him so that they can also know him, since my mother passed away. Without knowing their plan, I agreed and set the day.

When I took my husband there, I found that they had called him to force him to pay dowry. I was surprised since I was not expecting such. My stepmother told me that I was not supposed to utter a word since this was a plan by the elders and there was no need to involve me when they were discussing it. They even set the date for my husband to pay the dowry.

I tried to remind them that my husband paid for my fees for my schooling and also rented a house for me, but they ignored that and said it was none of their business. My father even said he saw nothing wrong, even if I was not educated, (meaning that there was no need for me to complete my education). Fortunately, I managed to solve the issue in my own way, without my husband paying any dowry to them. I am still with my husband and he still loves and cares for our six-year-old son and me.

The reason why I wrote my story is that I do not like my father because if I recall all that I went through, he is the one to blame. He was an irresponsible father who let my ex-boyfriend

and my husband support me, yet he was working at Big Bend. Now that he is no longer working, he is forcing my husband to pay dowry to him. As long as I live, my husband will never pay dowry for me because he paid it whilst paying my school fees and renting a flat for me. He also paid my fees at college when I was training to be a pre-school teacher.

Therefore, I see no need for him to pay dowry. The only thing is that my father and my stepmother wanted to use me to get dowry yet it will never ever happen like that. My father will get dowry from the children he fully supported, not me.

One day I would like to meet with my father so that we can discuss these issues, so as to get a clear explanation about all these things that befell me, all the ups and downs I went through, as a result of him being an irresponsible father. As of now, I totally do not like him. Finally, I thank SWAGAA for allowing us relieve ourselves. Above all, we are so grateful to the founder of SWAGAA because so many people have been helped.

Growing up without a father

by Lindi Moyo*

I am a young woman of 22 years and have a 3-year-old child. My mother had nine children and I am the last born. Most of us have different surnames, five of them have since died and there are only four of us remaining now.

My mother worked as a maid and that was her only source of income from which she fed us and also paid our school fees. When my turn to go to school came, my mother went around looking for a space in one of the local schools. I was five years old and the head teacher refused, saying I was still too young. My mother was under pressure because she sometimes had to go sell vegetables in town. While she was gone, I had to remain with the garden boy and that did not sit well with her because she had to be gone for the whole day.

One day she sent us to go to our father and ask for some money for school fees. It was during the school holidays and we usually visited him when schools closed. He worked in South Africa, together with his wife and their children who were older than we were. After we told him that we had come to ask for money, he told us that he did not have money and only gave us bus fare to come back home. That was just the beginning of our problems.

When I finished grade two, and was on school holidays, my mother's employers came to the house they provided for us and told us that her job was finished. It was raining and they sent us out with all our belongings immediately. My mother begged them to take us back to her family's homestead and they agreed. We slept in the back of a van, covered with a black plastic bag, together with our belongings, to protect us from the rainfall.

Before our mother went to work for that family, we had stayed at our father's place together with our grandmother. My mother had to travel a long distance when going to work until they asked her to come and stay in their home. We once again went to stay with our grandmother but still life was not good for us. For one thing, the house we were living in was

full of leaks. Our uncles and cousins also made life difficult for us and they treated us like outcasts.

It was very difficult for us that my mother was unemployed and we had to struggle to make ends meet, yet my father was working, had cars and was able to pay school fees for his other children. My father seemed to have completely forgotten about us.

When my brother turned ten years old, our father came and asked my mother if he could take us to go and live with him, my mother directed him to talk to us first. My brother agreed to go with him and go to school in South Africa. I refused to go and opted to remain with my mother and my elder half brother. My mother and brother both tried to keep meeting the needs of the family.

I blame my father for the misery of my school years: I was in and out of schools because my mother had no money to pay for my fees. As a result, I don't like my father and, although he is now trying to come back into my life, I find it difficult to forgive him. I owe my life to my elder brother who tried, in all possible ways, to cater to my needs and till today, it is him I regard as a father.

Nowhere to go

by Gugulethu Siphanga*

I am a 29-year-old woman and I live with my husband and in-laws. I was tkaed (traditionally wedded) at my mother-in-law's place because that is where my husband grew up. Because of that, all the uncles and aunts are there each and every day and they have made my life miserable.

When I came, I already had two children from a previous relationship and, because of this, they call me all sorts of names. They say that I am an old woman but married to a young man. The father of my children died before he could make me his wife and, for that reason, they say I am a widow with HIV/AIDS. I really try to be patient but, at times, I just cannot take it anymore.

Both my husband and I are unemployed but we are scouting for a place to build our own home so that we are free from this hell. However, since the two of us have no source of income, it has been very difficult and my husband has resorted to drinking alcohol.

After drinking, he comes home, joins his family, and hurls all sorts of insults at me and that really hurts me because I have nowhere to run away to, since I have no family; they are all dead. So each and every day of my life, I have to endure the pain of being labeled a useless woman, widowed and infected with HIV and, because of this, I have considered committing suicide a number of times.

However, the assistance I have received from SWAGAA has really made me strong and I am progressing in life. I am now receiving counseling and attending a number of workshops where I am educated about my rights as a woman.

My wish in life is that I work and be able to provide for all my children. My marriage is really difficult and I'm in it now because of my children, and also because I have nowhere else to go at the moment. I have four children altogether.

I now own a market stall where I sell stuff and that is how I make a living. I really have a talent when it comes to business but my downfall is that I do not have money to finance any of my business plans. If I can get the necessary money, there is a lot that I can do and I am still hoping that one day I shall realise my dreams.

I really pray that the Lord, working through GEMSWA, will help me out of this abusive home and make my life worth living.

What kind of love is this?

by Mirriam Zungu*

I was 16 years old when I met this guy in April 1998 and he told me that he loved me more than anything in this world. I allowed myself to fall in love with him. He promised that he would wait for me until I grew up and we would get married. I was so deceived.

I was very happy about all the things he was saying about us, especially when he told me that we had come a long way and that no one could stop us from tying the knot. He then convinced me to sleep with him. I was reluctant to do so at first. However, after constant begging from him, I gave in and slept with him, after a year into our relationship. I became pregnant and, when I told him, he said he did not see a problem because I would become his wife but he made me promise that I would give him a son, not a daughter. I started to worry because the mother cannot decide the gender of the baby, only God. He even told me that if it was not a boy, I should see what could be done with it. In February 2000, I gave birth and called him to let him know that we had a baby boy. He was very excited.

When my boy was 20 months old, he told me that he could no longer go on with the relationship because I came from a poor family, and he was a high-class person. He asked what people would say if they discovered that he had someone like me for a girlfriend? From then on, he stopped maintaining my baby. Then, one day when I had gone out somewhere, my family explained to me that he had come and taken the baby without saying a word. I was really hurt when I learned that my baby had been taken away from me especially because he was still at a tender age and needed my attention. He was also breastfeeding at the time. I decided to go look for a job at Dvokolwako and I was fortunate in finding employment. After receiving my salary at the end of the month, I went to see how my baby was doing.

Two months after being employed, my boyfriend started following me. He told me that he was very sorry about what he had done and that there was no other woman to raise his baby the way I would do it. I really believed that he was sorry, and meant it, and I forgave him. We started preparing for our traditional marriage and things seemed to be going just fine. He

told me that all was ready and that he was waiting for me to get my days off at work. The time came and I called to tell him that I was coming home. I could not believe what I heard with my two ears. He told me that he had taken a wife the day before and no longer needed another one.

Everything became dark in my life, I just could not understand why all this was happening to me. Was it because I was from a poor family? I could not talk to anyone about how I was feeling because no one wanted to hear anything about that guy. Two years passed and I was still trying to come to terms with what had befallen me.

In 2004, I met another guy who promised to wipe away the tears from my eyes and make me his wife. He showed himself at home and asked for my hand in marriage, promising to pay a dowry for me. Because he lived in the area, my ex-boyfriend heard about this. My ex-boyfriend went to my husband-to-be and said that it was impossible for us to marry because I was his wife, not just the mother of his baby. This made my boyfriend very angry, such that he called off the wedding. He said that I was untrustworthy and he could not marry another man's wife. When I asked my ex-boyfriend why he did such a thing, he told me that he loved me and would never let another man marry me. He really made my life impossible including depriving me of the right to see my baby.

It has now been ten years of hell. There is no one in my family who can help or save me from this situation and the police also haven't been of assistance. They always say "Go back and talk". His family says I deserve all that is happening to me.

As I am writing my story, I am wondering if anyone can come up with solutions for my problems or some kind of assistance. How long will we woman and children live in such agony?

Not every male is a man

by Temangweni Zwane*

How does one differentiate between a male and a real man? This man loved me, I loved him, he married me, we had three beautiful children, and that was the beginning of abuse.

My husband and I stayed together and life was good. However, there was an issue that gave me sleepless nights. My mother-in-law hated me, she didn't want to see me and used to call me names, telling me that I am an old woman.

For about ten years staying with my husband, he showed me that he loved me and loved his children. He really took good care of us. I thought all was good but I was wrong. There is this one day that I do not like to remember in my life, that day we went to bed without food.

My husband had started cheating on me; he had a girlfriend who was a divorcee. He had a child with this woman; I never had peace after my husband got involved with this woman. My children were starving; he could not even buy clothes for the children. I fell sick and I had to take care of myself, he ended up marrying her and the misery continued.

I cried each and every time, lost weight and I then got sick again and ended up dropping from a size 44 to a size 32. I became a laughing stock to my husband. My children got used to this kind of life. They knew that they will only get something nice when their mom got her salary. I worked in a firm earning a meager E290.00; I bought them the little I could afford. However, I made it a point that we always had mealie meal, even if there was not enough soup. Life was very tough; we used hot chillies for soup and my children were used to this. They ate bread once a month and the rest of the days, soft porridge.

Whenever my children went to their father's workplace to ask for money, he always told them he does not have any. He just did not care about them, to the extent, that he stopped paying their school fees. The kind of life I was living was very painful, especially for my children, and he hardly visited us to see how we are doing.

When we got married, my husband built me a house next to his mother's house because I couldn't stay with her since she hated me - so my husband said. Even when he comes to see his mother, they just pass together with the other woman or else sit under a tree next my homestead.

One day I asked my mother-in-law why they always sit next to my homestead whenever they are around and she asked where do I think they should go or should they hide? She told me that they have a right to use any route they wish to use. She then advised me to have my own secret lover.

There was no peace, I wished I could die, I fell sick and bled profusely and it did not stop. My husband was insulting me, calling me names and I would always cry. I lost strength, lost appetite, and my eyes could not open. When I sent the children to him, the wife would come out of the house to insult my children, and the husband would refuse to see them and continue staying in the house.

One day a taxi passed by with my husband and the other wife, they were coming from buying groceries. I was really hurt because the wife would normally call my children to give me a ten litre mealie-meal bucket and some powdered soup. I would take it because I was hungry. After that, my husband would beat me and then call the wife saying he had beaten the dog. At times, he would say he does not want the dog in his homestead; it should go and leave his children behind.

"How is the world really… ?" When I was admitted to the hospital and had an operation, my children were by themselves. The firstborn was going to do Grade 6, the second born to Grade 4 and the last born was going to start his pre-school education.

When discharged from hospital, I found that he took my children to stay with his wife and transferred them to another school. The firstborn went back to Grade 5, the second born Grade 3 and the last born did not go to school until now.

It is really painful to stay without your children. I have even lost my appetite. The man has now taken all the children. They are very young and they still need their mother's love and to be taken care of by me than to be taken care of by another wife. I do not like them to stay

with her. She destroyed my life, I am what I am today because of her and I will never forget. Even though they stay with her and their father now, they do not have school shoes, let alone clothes. My husband pays school fees for his stepchildren. Does being a wife to a man mean being his slave especially when he is married to another woman? Even when I came back from hospital, after having the operation, he never bothered to come see me.

When and how does the church help a person? This question pops in my mind each and every time I am in church. I reported this matter to my pastors, thinking they would help, but they failed me. They told me that they would convene a meeting to talk to my husband but they never did. They were all against me and only listened to what my husband said. It was painful in such a way that I could not even concentrate in church and the problems kept growing each and every day.

My life is in a mess and I'm confused but I know one day things will be alright. However, I still ask myself, will one ever get peace.


G. Masuku



A final word on speaking out

by Deborah Walter

Every year as part of 16 Days of Activism, Gender Links invites people affected by gender based violence, women and men, to share their experiences through the telling of first hand accounts or *"I" Stories*. This year, workshops for survivors and country specific books are being published in Swaziland, South Africa, Namibia, and Mauritius, but the stories flow in from across the region and, in March 2009, GL will publish a regionally focused *"I" Stories* book. Launching on International Women's Day, this *"I" Stories* book is part of a strategy to ensure that women's voices are heard all year round, as part of 365 days of action.

Writers contributing to the past four years of the *"I" Stories* series come from every country in the region. 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. There are constants in many of these stories - unequal power relations (often associated with financial dependence or cultural expectations), multiple forms of abuse, fear, lack of support from family and justice systems, and a desire to speak up, even if anonymously.

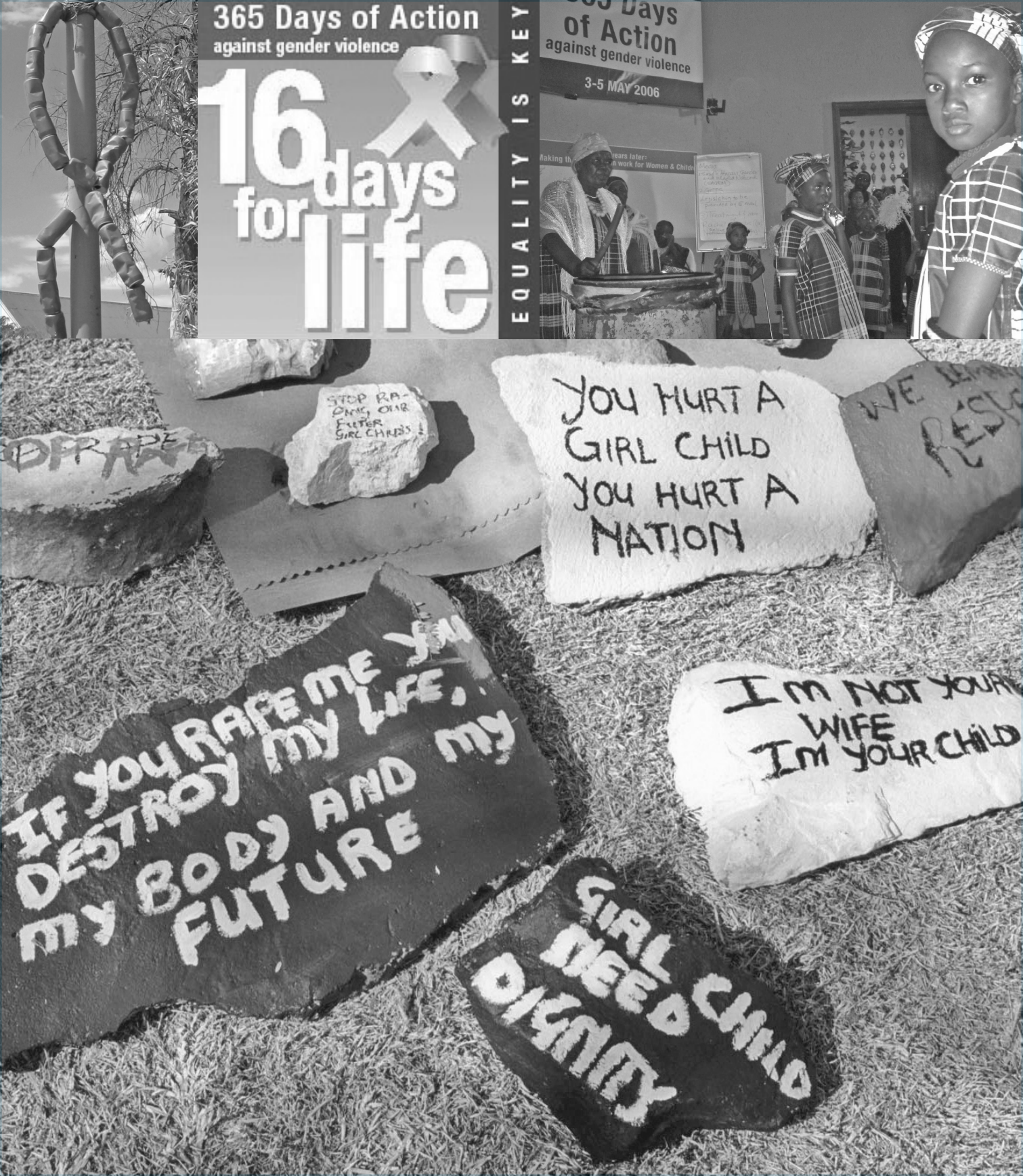
Survivors of domestic violence, rape, and any form of sexual, economic, or physical abuse rarely have the opportunity to speak out in the media or have their experiences positively documented. They are talked about and for, with their voices mostly silent. For many, the *"I" Stories* are the first time that they write or speak about their experiences to anyone.

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 organisation, 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. One common thread in almost all of the stories is that the abused are told, "it is a family matter," they should "go and talk."

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. While speaking out is part of the solution, it is time to move behind talk, to make real change on the ground. As anyone who has read this book from beginning to end knows, the very lives of women and children depend on it.

Deborah Walter is the editor for the Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service and has been involved in the "I" Stories for the last three years.


365 Days of Action
against gender violence
16 days for life
EQUALITY IS KEY
3-5 MAY 2006
STOP RAPING OUR EVEN GIRL CHILDS
YOU HURT A GIRL CHILD YOU HURT A NATION
IF YOU RAPE ME YOU DESTROY MY LIFE, MY BODY AND MY FUTURE
I'm NOT YOUR WIFE I'm YOUR CHILD
GIRL CHILD NEED DIGNITY



DFID Department for International Development

GEMSA Gender and Media Southern Africa

gender links

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