# The "I" Stories

Speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa

Volume 2

2006



Gender Links is a Southern African NGO that is committed to a region in which women and men are able to realise their full potential and participate equally in al aspects of public and private life.

The Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network is an umbrella organisation of institutions and organisations that promote gender equality both within and in the editorial content of the media.

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Sponsors:
Hivos
Fokus through the Norwegian Council for Africa












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# Acknowledgements

We salute the courage of all those who, by telling their stories through this series, help to lay bare the injustices that continue to afflict women in our society. Several partners cooperated in producing this second volume of "I" stories: Gender Links, the Gender and Media Southern Africa Network (GEMSA), People Opposed to Women Abuse (POWA), Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), GEMSA Zambia, Gender and Media Zimbabwe (GEMZi) the Mauritius Media Watch Organisation (MWO-GEMSA) and Kaya FM. We wish to thank our sponsors, Hivos and the Norwegian Council for Africa for supporting 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 2006.



# Foreword



The testimonies in this second volume of "I" stories are not for your comfort. Told with the rawness and pain with which they have been experienced, they will shock and upset you. They will make you angry. They may even make you feel violent. But they will also give you hope. Hope that women in our region are speaking out. Hope that many years too late politicians have recognised that women's rights are human rights. Hope that our best bet for getting action taken is by breaking the silence.

These are not stories about strangers. The people telling the stories could be your neighbour; your work mate; your sister; your friend; your daughter; your mother or even your grandmother. Gender violence knows no age, class, race or religion. Those telling the story could live in a posh suburb or an informal settlement. Common threads run through each. Typically it all starts out as a fairy tale love affair. It ends in gruesome violence. There are no easy explanations, no easy solutions.

It's easy to stand on the outside and say: why did she not run away? In many of the stories, love and loathing are like the flipside of the same coin. Often there are children involved. Sometimes women do not have choices. For example, a domestic worker who finds herself a sex slave in the backyard of a posh embassy has little recourse. Lesbians suffer as a result of the prejudice not just of men but also of women in our society; in one instance, of even a mother.

Formal systems are of little help. **"What justice!"** one of the writers in this series exclaims. She has spent over a decade trying to get custody of her children from a man who gave her hell. Yet according to the courts, a man in a suit and tie with an overseas degree must certainly be better placed to care for his children than a "deranged" woman who filed for divorce after the most gruesome of abuse.

Despite the years of campaigns, police refuse to understand that most rape is committed by people known to their victims. Often they are in cohorts with the perpetrators. Files get lost. Tales of human rights violations become just another number in the heap of unresolved cases.

As so many of the stories in this series reflect, in addition to the hostile environment that they have to cope with, the chances are high that women carry the added burden of finding out after what is probably the most traumatic experience of their life that they are HIV positive.

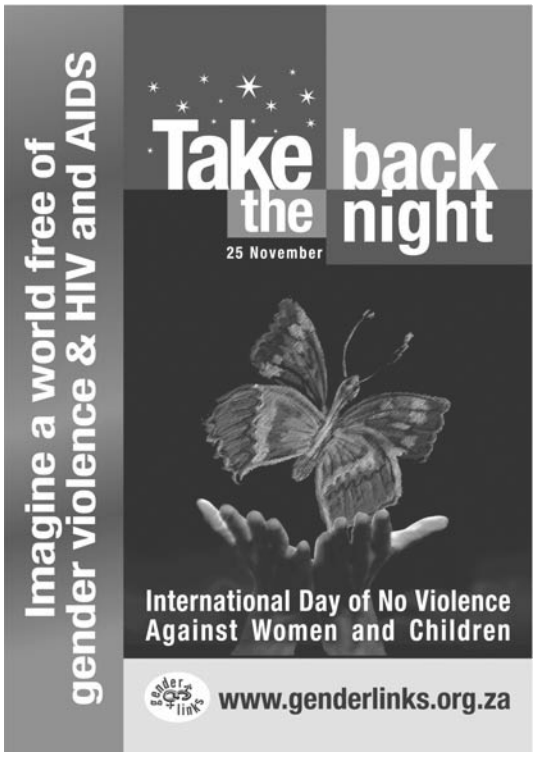
There are moments in the reading when you will feel that death would surely be better than living. But these are not stories of victims. They are stories of survivors. Consider, for example, the case of a grandmother who survived three instances on rape and contracted HIV but is now an AIDS activist with her daughter and grand daughter. Could there be a more poignant example of turning anger to action?

True, for many women the bitterness they feel towards men who have violated them is deep and healing will take a long time. But this series also carries a story by a man who healed himself by confronting the violence within and becoming a gender activist. And there is the case of a young woman who left a loving relationship to have an affair with a man who raped her, but is pulling through with the support of a forgiving partner. It is said that five in six men are not abusers. We need these men at the front of the march. And we need those who are abusers to be helped to see the light.

The second volume of "I" stories will be launched at the **Take Back the Night** march on 25 November, the first day of the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence. The convergence of these two events is symbolic. Women do not only have a right **not** to be violated. They have a right **to** freedom; in the day, and in the night. As we reclaim the night, let us also reclaim our souls. The "I" stories are a powerful reminder that both are possible.

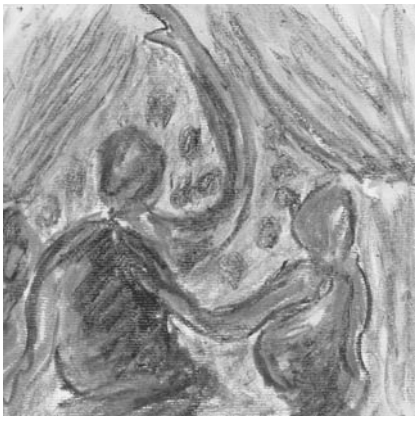


**Colleen Lowe Morna**
Executive Director, Gender Links
Chair, GEMSA





# Gender violence knows no bounds



## Lesotho:

# Journalists are not immune

By Palesa*

Domestic violence happens to other people. I told and reported their stories as a journalist – until my husband slapped my face so hard that I could feel my mouth bleeding and my jaws displaced.

In Lesotho, violence against women is widespread. However much of it goes unreported. Although there are many reasons for not reporting, in many instances women are intimidated by the support services (police and medical personnel) or threatened into silence.

My intimate male partner physically assaulted me. Unfortunately, that is not a rarity. According to the World Health Organisation, one in four women around the world, experience violence during their lifetime.

It all began on 31 December 2004 when my husband dragged and assaulted me, the first of what came to be a tradition of beatings. I carried this burden and secret silently for two years, praying for relief. I never spoke about what happened to me because I was ashamed to do so.

I had no idea things would never change until July 11th 2005. My husband hit me again, and this time harder and worse than before. I made up my mind. I pressed charges, moved out of the house and we have since separated.

I used to wonder why some women stayed with men who beat them. It all became clear when it happened to me. I thought it would not happen again because that is what he promised me. I should not have believed him. If he laid his hand on me once, he would definitely do it again.

My marriage was a struggle of its own kind, unique in some respects but not distinctively different from the stories I had been reporting. I struggled to make ends meet but this man never appreciated my efforts.

All he did was to drink more alcohol and abandon his responsibilities as a husband and a father. He spent all his weekends away from home and would come home in the wee hours of the morning drunk and shouting with the boys, waking up the neighbourhood.

The next morning, with him still wrapped up in his sleep, I would leave for work without a goodbye. I missed my husband terribly even though we lived under one roof.

I convinced myself that things would get better. I remember telling him that it's the things he does that bother me and not the fact that he was not working, life is all about sharing isn't it, especially when you love someone?

His friends always asked me to give him a little more time arguing that he would eventually get a job and grow up to be a man, a husband and father. They claimed his behaviour was a result of an inferiority complex many men go through when they are not working and their partners are providing for them.

Meanwhile my friends thought I was a hero and brave for being a sole breadwinner supporting my husband and his family. I was pretending to be strong but breaking apart and dying inside.

I desperately wanted to live happily ever after and to prove I had everything under control; I could not admit I had a problem and needed help. I fooled myself, so it seemed.

I always wondered how long I had to wait for my man to come around. What if he never gets a job all his life, could this be what I had vowed, through sickness and health, till death do us part while the slow death was happening inside and we were already apart?

I had a choice to stop the cycle of abuse, a privilege some women in my position and state do not have. I was empowered, and fully aware of my rights as a woman, a person and a citizen. As a journalist, I knew all the steps I could take to report domestic violence. I could advise survivors of domestic and other forms of violence on my shows, but I distanced myself from this practice and suffered in silence.

One day I decided to share my story with my editor and she told me she was going through worse. I knew of a number of my colleagues who were also survivors of violence but as empowered

as we were, often encouraging others to open up and report abuse, it did not make us less vulnerable.

A very close friend of mine, a television presenter, could not read news one time because her boyfriend, who was a boxing champion, had given her some of his famous TKO blows.

Many times, women have no economic recourse, have nowhere to go and feel they are in a state of helplessness. They lack the physical and emotional strength to get up and go, make that most important call or take that walk and seek help.

My colleagues in silence and I have a buffet of choices to stop the cycle of violence; reporting it, opening up and talking about it as well as choosing to get out of it. We are survivors but we perpetuate the culture of silence nevertheless. We know what many forms gender-based violence takes, and are aware of the support systems available in our countries.

We know that most incidents of gender-based violence remain unreported for reasons including shame, social stigma, and fear of reprisals. This despite and the fact that violence is the 10th leading cause of death for women aged 15-44 years.

I think we need to address our own prejudices and baggage first in order to effectively make a difference and fulfill our role in publicising gender-based violence. I personally value the important role that we, as journalists, play in publicising gender-based violence, which is critical for raising public awareness and political accountability. We cannot fulfill this role adequately however if we do not count ourselves in the statistics we normally report on.

I have some regrets today that I should not have waited until the water ran dry, but I gained wisdom and self-appreciation. To other women I want to say - don't tolerate abuse in any form, not once; not ever!

(* Not her real name.)

South Africa :

# The stories that shaped my life

By Babs*

I had nobody to tell my problems and my feelings to. I would say in my life I have had to be my own therapist because the culture of communicating how I felt in my family and in society was rare. It took me a few years to realise that my boyfriend raped me when I was 15. He asked me to come out of my house late at night and I refused. I was not allowed to go out late at night and he beat me and raped me.

My name is Babs and I am a 23-year old single mother to a 16 month old daughter. I would like to share my stories with you. These events have shaped my life from childhood into adulthood.

As a child I was physically, psychologically and emotionally abused by my late father. He was an alcoholic. On many nights my mother, my sisters and I would run to relatives and our neighbours for assistance. My father would sometimes chase me away from home at night, for no particular reason. This continued and I was exposed to many bad influences like drinking and smoking, two things that I would not advise any young woman to do. I did these things to escape from reality, which is why today I feel that the therapy I received back then was not enough.

In 2004 I was doing my third year in journalism at the Durban Institute of Technology. I went to a party. I was the unlucky one and I got raped by a guy I did not know. He beat me up like a little child. I cried for help but the people that were in that house, including the ones I called my friends did not come to my rescue. He took me to his house and had unprotected sex with me. He threatened to kill me. He had a gun.

I reported the matter to the police and the case is still being heard in court but not in the way that I would like it to go. I also discovered that the accused could be HIV positive. The

inspector who is handling my case told me that he is very sick. The case has been temporarily withdrawn because he is ill.

I thank God everyday in my prayers that he gave me a "Don't give up" attitude. If I had not told my sister what happened I would have not taken Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), the ARV that is given to rape survivors to minimize the possibility of contracting HIV.

In all of this I feel that I have failed myself somehow, because if I had been strict with myself not being influenced by friends and certain lifestyles, and doing things just because I wanted to fit in, things could have been different.

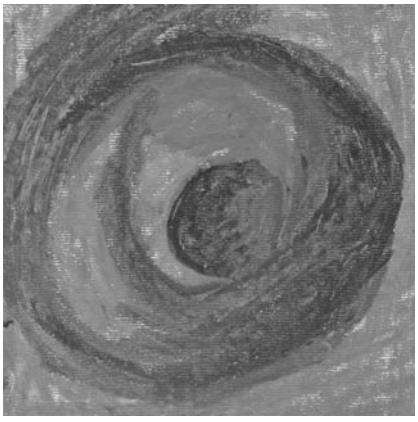
I got pregnant during the same year. The man I had truly loved told me to abort my baby, my Precious Pearl. Through all this I am still standing, even though sometimes I feel that society has failed me and other women out there. I wish women could just think carefully and be cautious when meeting people and making friends.

What I regret most is that my mind, body and soul have been shaped in a way that makes me defensive towards men. I challenge them. Even with boyfriends, I can't seem to feel the feelings that I would like to.

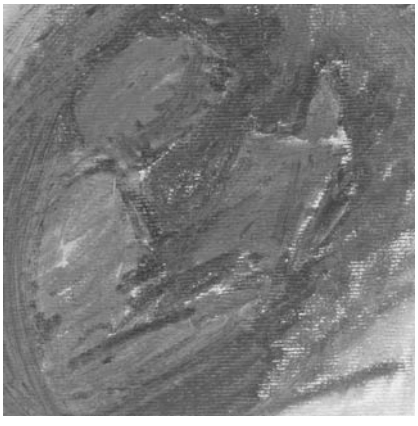
What I would like most is to have a good normal life like any other person. I am telling the painful stories that have shaped my life to help me heal; to help me move on.

(* Not her real name.)





# The legal system is failing women



*South Africa:*

# What justice!



By Mamokhothu Santho

Mine is a story of a fairy tale marriage that went horribly wrong and of a decade-long fight for justice that has seen me lose everything, including my most precious treasures: my two sons. It is hard for me as a South African woman, writing my story in 2006, to understand what democracy has brought when every avenue I have pursued has left me more hopeless and disempowered than before.

What does justice mean, when I the victim am victimised even more; when every system seems to work to the benefit of the perpetrator? I left no stone unturned. I have canvassed ministers and deputy ministers. I am breaking my silence because it is time we as women put the facts as they are: the legal system is not working for us.

At the beginning, I was madly and unconditionally in love with this man. On the 18 July 1992 we tied the knot. We lived happily for the first few months. But in April 1993, six months after I gave birth to our first child and nine months after our wedding my ex-husband's behaviour began to change.

One day he came home drunk after work accompanied by two women and a man who claimed to be his friends. One of the women asked why I was not employed and told me that I was too fat. My ex-husband left with the trio and come back at two o'clock in the morning. I freaked out and refused to open the door for him. When I eventually opened the door he beat me up.

This marked the beginning of what would become a way of life for me with this man. The incidents became many. I documented all the abuse I suffered. One fateful day - November 24 1997 - we had another fight after he came home after two o'clock in the morning. When he got home he tried to force himself onto me and I resisted. I needed him to explain where he had been all night. He beat me and threatened to kill me. I managed to free myself and escaped from our bedroom into the children's bedroom, broke their window and jumped through. I was stark naked. Blood was oozing all over my body. I ran to the neighbor's house.

I went to report him to the police and he was arrested at his Nedbank offices. He appeared in court but was released on bail of R 1 500.

I filed for a divorce in February 1998 and moved to Johannesburg after I had received advice from a psychologist who ironically had been tasked by my ex-husband to assess if I had a mental illness. My ex-husband was in denial.

Ironically, the family advocate, at the behest of the psychologist, granted my ex-husband custody of the children despite the fact that an earlier psychologist had concluded that my ex-husband was the one with a problem and not me. I on the other hand, was granted "reasonable access" to the children.

It was difficult to visit my children as I relied on public transport from Johannesburg and would sometimes fail to get to the venue we were supposed to meet on time. Since then this has become the struggle to gain the so called reasonable access to see my children. But the family advocates do not listen to me.

In October 1998 when my first son was five and the second three years old I began to fight for custody of the children. After going through an assessment my ex-husband's personality profile was found to be "favorable". Reading the court records I sometimes wonder if we are talking about the same man. According to the white Afrikaner psychologist of Bloemfontein, his conduct is directed towards the welfare of the children; he is warm hearted, has showed good leadership; has internal control over his emotions; is well educated and has a good job and reputation in the corporate sector.

On the other I am considered to be unstable, unpredictable, impulsive, selfish and self centered. After all I have been through it hurts to read these comments. I had not sought employment because I wanted to be available for my family and be a good wife. Now I was considered too poor to take care of my own children.

I made another attempt to get custody of my children after learning that my husband was changing girlfriends frequently and did not want this to affect my children. An inquiry was held on 19 January 2001. In support of my ex-husband, the family advocate quoted a certain professor A. Hofman B.P Pincus who says: "The word mothering devotes a function rather than persona and this function does not necessarily reside in the biological mother. It seems now

to be generally recognized that for mental health and proper character development young children need the emotional security that comes from stable surroundings and a recognized and predictable routine". I lost the case.

Meanwhile I had filed assault cases against my ex-husband. To my horror all the lodged dockets went missing at the magistrate's court. I believe that my ex-husband used connections to hide all the vital information: court book, charge sheet, tapes, and dockets. The documents were eventually found and my ex-husband was fined a mere R4000, compared to the R20 000 that I spent in my quest for justice. What justice! In January 2001 I filed for damages under civil claims in the same court. In February 2003 I received R 17 000.00 as a settlement.

I made a third attempt to get custody of the January 2002 when I discovered that he had moved from Bloemfontein to Klerksdorp with the children without notifying me. The enquiry, held in September 2002, concluded that I was putting the children through unnecessary emotional stress; that my constant resistance to accepting custody orders is to the disadvantage of every one; and that despite being tormented during my marriage, I must for the sake of the children accept that my ex-ex-husband now has other relationships and so on.

They also concluded that I have a tendency to undermine professional opinions and recommendations: from psychologists, counselors and advocates. They intentionally avoided my comments about his failure to give me reasonable access to the children as granted by the court. This was manipulated to make it seem like I was crying over a broken marriage, rather than concern for my children.

The past nine years have been a painful and expensive struggle to see my children. The last time I saw them was in December 2002. This is because my ex-husband's behaviour became frightening. Each time I went to see the children I had to have a lawyer to intervene. It became unaffordable for me to see my boys.

I am at a dead end where to turn to for legal representation and help. For three years I have been waiting for the outcome of my complaint with the Free State Law Society about a lawyer who has contributed to the delay in my obtaining justice. I am breaking my silence during the Sixteen Days of Activism to help me overcome the torture that for more than a decade has crippled me emotionally, physically and financially. If there is anyone out there listening, my question to you is: where is justice, when a woman who is abused ends up losing everything, including her own children?



# Gender violence and sexual orientation



South Africa:

# Finding the real me in a sea of violence



By Marco P. Ndlovu

I am a 39 year old black lesbian from Pietermaritzburg born into to a family of eight, of whom only five survived. Gender violence has been so much a part of my life that at times I wonder if there is such a thing as a life free of violence.

As a lesbian, hate, violence and misogyny follow me wherever I go. I became pregnant as a result of being raped by a man I believed to be a friend. I have been beaten almost to pulp because of my sexual orientation at the instigation of none other than my mother.

Yet the vicious circle of violence that has left such deep scars in my life began from the moment of my birth: in my family; with the uncle who raised me and with the death of my three brothers. One was a still born. My drunken mother accidentally squashed the other to death. The third brother suffered from mental disorders after he got gang raped by monsters in a night club. He committed suicide at a tender age.

At five, my mother married another man after she had broken up with my dad whom she accused of being a womaniser. I had to be taken to my uncle's place where I lived a miserable life. My uncle used to abuse his wife. On the many occasions when my aunt almost died in front of us my uncle punished us severely for screaming. He would compel us to tell him who called the ambulance for his wife but we wouldn't dare to tell him, since we knew exactly what he would have done.

At twelve, my cousin got pregnant from the guy she went out with for seven years. He denied being the father of the child, but later claimed the child after my cousin had endured the hardship of giving birth without him. I vowed then never to marry or have a relationship with a man. I said I would prefer marrying a woman: that was the start of me discovering my sexual orientation.

For a time, I got involved in politics. In the heat of the anti apartheid struggle, I joined the United Democratic Front (UDF) till one day the police tortured me and left me for dead in a ditch somewhere near Howick.

I withdrew from politics but earned a reputation as a tomboy since I liked dressing like a boy; playing boyish games like soccer with boys. Up until now there are people who ask me if I am a boy or a girl. I enjoy this power I have over them: the power of not fitting easily into anyone's idea of who I should be.

At seventeen I started dating Nonhlanhla, a woman who stole my heart with her inner beauty. Oh! She had the most amazing personality! Nobody knew about our relationship. Everybody thought we were just friends.

Then, out of the blue, my mother decided I should get married to a man older than my daddy: a priest whose wife had died. I ran away from home wondering how much money he had promised her because my mother has no scruples when it comes to money. I went to stay with my cousin in Durban. She was married to a doctor with a friend called Theophilus to whom I became very close. Even though I loved Nonhlanhla, I could not tell anyone. For the sake of everyone around me I hung out with Theophilus. Then one fateful day that shattered my dreams he flung himself on me and raped me in just three to five minutes. I screamed and kicked but nobody came to my rescue.

When I threatened to lay charges against him, Theophilus apologised and asked for my forgiveness. He compelled me to take a bath threatening not to let me go if I refused to do so. I was bleeding. I wanted to take my panties that he tore and had hidden away. In those days, when no one, least of all your parents, talked about sex, rape or abuse, I had no idea that he had torn them to destroy the evidence.

Soon after this ordeal my cousin took me to the doctor for a pregnancy test. To my horror, I discovered I had become pregnant as a result of the rape. Theophilus wanted me to terminate the pregnancy but in those days it was not the done thing and it was illegal. Theophilus tried to contain the situation by paying two cattle as "damages" to my mother. We agreed that he would pay child maintenance voluntarily. I delivered the baby: my beautiful twenty one year old daughter whom I love dearly, though I will never forgive her father for ruining my life.

After two years, I moved to Johannesburg and found a nanny for my daughter. I got a job as a security guard and eventually got into a relationship with Bob, a charming guy who proposed marriage to me. But I could not get sexually interested in him.

The relationship came to a crashing halt when I found him with another girl. I told him I would leave him peacefully with his new lover. But the next day he refused to go to work and at night he tried to strangle me, stripping me naked and tying my arms with my legs. The following morning he freed me and apologised. Even though I was two months pregnant with his child, I decided to go. My second daughter is now fourteen years old but she doesn't know her daddy since I also do not know his whereabouts.

I started dating Shiela S, one of the most loving people I ever knew. We raised my children together and I owe her a lot even though we parted after she developed a drinking habit.

In the meanwhile, after I parted with Bob, my relationship with my mother took another turn for the worse, as he used to spoil her with money. She called the street committee and told them that I was a lesbian and she did not want anything to do with me. The street thugs almost beat me to death and I was told not to go back home.



I opened an assault case against them, but the courts dismissed the case supposedly for lack of evidence, despite all the scars I have to show for it. I live in a shelter, like a refugee in my own country. I am undergoing counseling.

I have a female lover, but since she is not ready to be open about our relationship, we have to keep it secret. While I look for whatever job I can get so that I can build a home for my children and grand children, I write poetry and create the world of my dreams with the words that flow from my pen.

Each day I pray for my mother, the woman who brought me into this life and yet who has added so much to my misery. I forgive her and hope that one day she, and all South Africans, will accept me for whom I am. I am Marco, a proud woman, who loves her two daughters, who loves other women, and who - despite the pain and suffering that I have endured - am finally finding the real me.

*South Africa :*

# Who are you to tell me who I am?



By Kebarileng Sebetoane

On the 7 March 2004 when I was 17 years old I started hating all men. It took one man to make me hate all men. I hated him so much. The only thing I could think of was killing him. On that night I made a promise to myself that I'd never associate myself with any other man. I blamed myself. The thought of him on top of me, unable to defend myself made facing tomorrow impossible. I saw no hope and lost faith. My dreams were shattered, and the freedom to say, I am me was lost.

Kingsley (not his real name) and I were friends, more like a brother and sister. I was on my way from the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) offices where I attended life skills and computer training when I first met him. He introduced himself as a gay man, but not many people knew about his sexuality, so he said. He warned me not to tell anybody especially his friends because he was not 'out' to everyone. We'd spent most of our days together if I was not with my girlfriend or my other friends, and it would feel odd if days passed without seeing each other.

One evening we went out to a 'club" near his home. It was nice there because then I met some of my friends from high school. I started dancing with other people and was really enjoying myself until suddenly his mood changed. He complained that I was spending too much time with other people. I didn't want to upset him, and sat with him. It got really late, and had the only key for the house so I insisted on going home.

It was a bit chilly and he wanted to get something warm to wear. We went to his place since it was close by. I went to the outside toilet and I thought he was getting a jacket. He was standing right in front of the toilet. I was shocked to see him. He did not look happy so I asked him what was wrong. He did not reply, he went to his room and I followed him with a hope of finding out. That was the worst mistake I ever made.

I got a bit tense when he started giving me the 'you make me sick look'. He locked the door. I was really confused he was swearing me and saying how much he hates people who pretend. I then asked him what he was talking about. He was furious with the lesbian life I was living. He said that I should stop taking other people's girlfriends and that I was beautiful and capable of getting myself a boyfriend. I got angry and started arguing back. He slapped me on the face, and warned me not to shout at him or will regret it. He said: " Tonight I'm going to change you, and as from now on you are my girlfriend."

I got angry and told him that I know my rights. I started to leave. He got up holding a screw driver and threatened to stab me if I didn't co-operate. I became quiet, trying to find a way to calm him down and find a way to leave his place without anyone getting hurt. He ordered me to take off my clothes while he hit me with anything he came across. No matter how hard I cried or how loud I screamed, he told me it won't help because he was not scared of anyone or anything. He punched me and I thought he was going to kill me if I fought back.

He raped me repeatedly for over an hour. I was quiet with tears streaming down my face. He continued to beat me even though he had succeeded. He kept asking me if I loved him and I when I said no, then the beating got worse. "You go about pretending you are attending classes in Jo-burg while you hook up with your Nigerian boyfriends, and then you come pretending to be something you are not," he said.

A little after midnight he fell into a deep sleep. I dressed silently and left. I went straight home. I cried the whole night. I couldn't asleep. My face was bruised. When my family asked what had happened I lied and said I was in a fight with a friend.

His smell was all over my clothes and body, and it felt like he was still with me. I took a bath three times. I called Zanele Muholi; she was the only person I could relate to and someone who'd come up with a way to deal with the mess I've put myself through. I took a train and we met in town. We went to People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) for counseling.

We then went to Medico in Johannesburg for medical examination and treatment. We didn't get help because there were neither nurses nor doctors on duty and they had no crime kits. They also said that it was not possible for a doctor who is based in Johannesburg to testify in a case originating in Krugersdorp.

They offered me a slice of bread and a pain killer. Muholi organised a car and we drove to Leratong hospital in Kagiso. There was no doctor on duty and no crime kits at the crisis centre. While waiting for a doctor, the police came by to drop the crime kit. They said they were rushing to Margaliseburg to attend to another urgent rape case.

The doctor came after three hours. I was examined and then he took the statement for the medical report. I told him that the guy raped me because I was a lesbian. As soon as he heard this he stopped writing and posed questions regarding my sexuality. He said: "Why are you a lesbian at this age? Do you know that it is against the constitution to make such a decision without the consent of a parent? You are wearing a cross of Christ, did you know that it is an abomination in the eyes of God to be lesbian."

I asked him: "The guy raped me because he wanted to change me, are you saying that was a right thing to do?" He didn't answer me but instead he scratched off the report and said, "there is no sign of forceful penetration because the girl had already broken her virginity and the blood stain in the eyes are due to constant rubbing and they might develop further if they are not treated." Without a medical report I had a weakened case.

The police arrived at 21h00. I opened a case and then went home but could not stay long, my safety was not guaranteed. I got a call around 22h30 to inform me that the guy had been arrested and I'll be notified in advance about the case and court details.

I wanted to be away from Johannesburg, to ease my mind. I left for Kwa Zulu Natal for a month. When I came back I heard that the guy had been released. I then called the sergeant who was handling the case. He told me the same thing: "they'll l notify me in advance".

On the 28 August 2004, I saw my rapist; he approached me and threatened to kill me. I felt cold, betrayed, angry and very scared. I called the sergeant again, but this time I couldn't get hold of him. I went to the station. They couldn't find the docket, and said it didn't exist.

I was failed medically and the justice system proved its inexistence. South Africa is celebrating twelve years of democracy, but with written policies that are not implemented. We are told to co-operate and not take the law into our own hands. Others harm us and get away with it; we have no way getting justice. Will South Africa ever change and accommodate everyone?

*South Africa:*

# Is it a crime to be a woman who loves other women?



By Lindiwe Radebe

Growing up as a lesbian woman in this country is not easy. It is a country that is ruled by homophobia and where we are not protected. I know this because I have been assaulted because of my sexual orientation.

One Saturday afternoon after watching a soccer match with a group of friends in the Lakeside township, we decided to go and get cool drinks not far from where we were visiting. While we were busy walking and minding our own business, a group of young men suddenly came to confront us because they had noticed that we were lesbians as a result of our cross dressing. We could see that these boys were drunk.

My friends and I initially decided not to pay attention to them until one of the guys forcefully pulled my friend's hand and attempted to force her to talk to him. She resisted. All hell broke loose. Being the reputed peace keeper in the group I tried to stop a fight from breaking out by standing between my friend and the young man who was harassing my her. All I said to my friend was "Let's go" and just saying that triggered something in these guys.

They started saying nasty things to us. One of them accused me of being a snob and said that I did not belong in the township. Out of nowhere, I was kicked from behind by one of the group members who were standing behind me. I fell flat on my face. The impact of the kick was so hard that I could hardly breathe for a few seconds. All I remember was that I became so dizzy but was clueless to what was really happening to me.

They surrounded me and started kicking me and continued calling me names. I remember one of them said "You think you're a man wena stand up and fight!" I could not do anything. This went on for a couple of minutes. It was terrible. I only managed to stand up through God's mercy. But one of them continued slapping me and hitting me with fists while the other one attempted to throw a stone at my face. Fortunately, I noticed I managed to block the

stone from hitting my face with my left hand but my thumb was hurt and was seriously bleeding.

At that time my friends decided to come back for me but when the group of attackers saw this they went after them. My friends ran away again and the bashing continued. I started running and that is how I escaped from one of the guys. The other three came back and all I could think of was that they were going to finish me off. But I told myself going back was not an option. I went to my friend's place.

By then I was in I was in so much pain; my hand was bleeding, my head had a bump and my shoulder was in serious pain. In fact my whole body was bruised. I felt the worst pain around my breast because it had only been about eight months from the time I had got an operation. This was accentuated by the fact that I had fallen flat on face and kicked, all of which had an effect on my stitch. I cried like a baby. All my friends could say was "sorry" for there was nothing else that they could do for me.

They finally managed to make me calm down and we went to the nearest police station. As we walked I kept on looking back because I felt as if those guys were coming back to attack me. I was really scared. It was a long walk to the police station but we finally got there. We sat for a couple of hours before we were attended to, only to find out that we were in the wrong police station and was supposed to have gone to a different police station De Deur police station instead of Evaton police station we had come to. They took us there.

As in the previous station, we sat for hours before we were attended to. One of the police officers eventually took my statement. One of my friends sat next to me because I was not feeling well at all. I began explaining what had transpired to the officer. When we came to a section during issuing of the statement that questions whether there is anything different or special about the complainant, I told the officer that I was a lesbian.

I vividly remember him changing his facial expression. He looked at me and exclaimed "What?" I repeated what I had said before - "I am lesbian". He stared at me again. My friend got irritated and answered on my behalf. She reiterated "She said we are lesbian". Then the real emotional trauma began. He started giving a lecture about how wrong and unholy it is to be a lesbian. I became really angry and asked him if he wanted to help me or not. He told me that I had an attitude problem and that is when I asked to see the station commander.

Following my threat he started taking my statement but with a nasty attitude. He allocated me a case number. I still remember it. It read "Lindiwe Radebe Case Number 388-05-2006", and promised that an investigating officer would call me.

By then it was in the early hours of the morning. We had to wait at the station until there was a free car to take us back home. We only got to leave at about three o'clock in the morning in a police van at the back since the front seats were occupied. This made me feel more pain. Everyone was dropped at the places they wanted to go except for my friend and I. The officer would not drop me in town which he said was too far for them to take me. I had no choice but to go and sleep at my friend's parent's house. What a terrible day I had experienced!

On the following morning, I called my sister and my partner and told them what had happed. I sent a mobile message to Zanele Muholi from an organisation called Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW). She promised to arrange help. FEW is an organisation that caters for black lesbians in the townships. My partner and FEW really helped me to come to terms with what happened to me.

I went to see a Doctor the next day. Only then I did I find out that I was supposed to have brought a certain form from the police for the doctor to fill in and explain that I had suffered injuries as a result of the assault. I had to call everyday to find out who was handling my case. A week later I got a name but it took him over three weeks to come and assist me. Two days later he informed me that someone else had taken over the case.

I gave up the fight for justice. Up to this day my case has not been solved. For us homosexuals, the Constitution is just so many words. Everywhere I go I have to be cautious. I walk with fear on a daily basis because I do not know when and who will try to hurt me. It really frustrates me that I can not be myself even when I am waking down the street with my partner. It gets to me when I hear that almost everyday a lesbian is assaulted. I am still living in a community that does not want to accept me for who I am and not my sexual preference.

The only difference between me and the girl next door is that I am attracted to women and not to men. That, surely, does not make me a criminal! Assaulting or raping lesbians will never make us straight.



# Gender violence and domestic work



Zambia:

# Sex slave in the backyard of an embassy

By Pamela* with Zarina Geloo

A year ago, just when I thought that I was finally getting ahead in my life, a terrible thing happened from which I am still recovering – painfully. I grew up in a rural village with no nearby schools or any social amenities. My brothers and I had little schooling because our parents were too poor to pay for even the basic things we needed, and besides, we had to work to help them.

My two younger sisters and I were to wait for marriage. Two of my brothers tended other people's cattle or helped my father till his small piece of land. We were very poor. There were days when we had to forage in the bush for wild fruits to eat.

In desperation, my mother sent me to the city to try to get any kind of job. I had no schooling, could only speak basic English and had no skills whatsoever. My aunt enrolled me at a training centre for domestic workers. I was happy because I was finally going to work and send money back home. I applied myself diligently to my studies.

The most coveted jobs were those in expatriate and diplomats' homes where the work is light and the pay is regular and good. Just as I finished my six-month course, a woman married to a diplomat came looking for house help. I was the first choice. I could not believe it. I thought finally I can make something of my life; I will have a regular salary and maybe my youngest sister can now go to school.

There were warning signs that should have aroused my suspicions but I was too excited. For example, the woman was not interested in my qualifications. She was interested to see what I looked like without clothes! I had to strip to my bra and underclothes. She also demanded that I undergo a health check, which included an HIV test.

I left with my new employer a month later. At first, everything was fine. I learnt how to run the house the way the family wanted. I was given new clothes and even some earrings and necklaces. I looked very pretty.

After the second month, my employer said she was going back home for two months to see her sick mother. I was a bit apprehensive because I would be alone. Then came the night my employer's husband came into my room while I was asleep and simply pushed me on my back. I screamed but it was pointless. I lived in a small guest room attached to the main house. There was no one around to hear my screams as the children were far away.

I screamed, kicked, and tried to bite him as he raped me, but rather than deter him, it appeared to excite him and he raped me at least three times during that night. I cried so much that the next morning I had no voice, my body was aching and I was bleeding the whole day. I had no one to turn to no one to talk to.

I worked that day, but I was so traumatised I burnt my hand while cooking for the children. That night, even though I had locked the door, the husband came back again. When he saw my bandaged hand, he grabbed it and said he would pinch me on my burn if I denied him sex. It was over in a few minutes but I was in so much pain that I could not wake up the next morning.

He told me that he would get the children off to school and get take aways for their lunch but that in the evening he expected me to be 'ready' for him. He locked me in the house. When the children came home from school, I took advantage and sent a note back with the driver, to the Embassy secretary who spoke English telling her what was happening.

That evening, he raped me for the third night in a row. I threatened him; I told him I would report him to the authorities and to his wife. He laughed saying it would be his word against mine, and that no one would believe me. I thought he was joking.

The secretary informed the authorities but rather than come and interview me, they went straight to my employer's husband. The next thing I knew, my employer came and said her husband said I was stealing things and she was giving me to someone else. I told her that her husband had been raping me, but she said her husband could not rape a young girl and certainly not a maid.

At my new employment, there was a couple with three grown boys and a grandchild. I worked in peace for a while. The woman of the house was very kind. She guessed I had undergone some trauma but did not question me. Unfortunately, she was hospitalised with cancer and subsequently died.

The night my employer went into hospital, her husband came into my room and raped me. I screamed, but the boys just increased the volume of the music and I could hear them laughing about how 'the old man' was still energetic. This went on for a month, every night sometimes twice.

I managed to get word again to the secretary at the Embassy. This time she came to get me and hid me in her home for a couple of weeks while she tried to get my passport (which the first family had retained). She informed the authorities and then I heard the true story.

Apparently, my first employer's husband had instructed her to find a replacement in the bedroom because she no longer satisfied him. He wanted a healthy, strong young girl with small breasts and wide hips. If she did not find such a girl, he would divorce her. I was also to 'service' his friends for a fee. The second family I worked for paid a fee for 'finding' me. I was to be passed on to another family before I ran away. In the meantime, I fell pregnant. I managed to get a back street abortion. I also managed to go back home. I told no one why I came back or what had happened.

I am constantly sick. I suffer horrible headaches, stomach cramps and vomit a lot. I have tried to work but, apart from ill health, I cannot stand being in the company of males. I am in a real sorry state and I am afraid of having tests as I suspect I might have contracted HIV.

I am living with my brother who is a garden worker and lives in one room. He wonders why I cannot work but does not ask too many questions. I know I should go to the YWCA, get counseling and perhaps even find a job there. But I feel so traumatised that sometimes I just want to end my life. I am trying to take each day as it comes. It's not easy. I look forward to the day that I am able to rouse myself sufficiently to start seeking retribution. I know that day will come - just not now.

(*Not her real name.)



# Gender violence and children



*Mauritius:*

# A teenagers advice - do not suffer in silence

*By Christelle*, with Pouba Essoo*

*I am Christelle and I am 17 years old. My sister is 12 years and my brother is 9 years old. We have lived at the Centre d' Education de Developpement pour les Enfants Mauriciens (CEDEM), a centre for abused children in Mauritius, for three years now.*

*Since I was 6 or 7 years old, I saw my father beating my mother almost every day until the day he killed her.*

*As I grew up, it was hard for me to witness the suffering endured by my mother and I stood up for her against my father. My father became very violent towards me. I was often hurt and had bruises all over my body. Once he broke my head, and fractured my arm.*

*My mother brought me to the hospital when I was injured, but did not disclose anything, saying that I was playing. Once she said that I fell down from a tree.*

*On one occasion, the doctor started questioning my mother. She denied that I was a battered child. She stopped bringing me to the hospital and I suffered in silence and without medical assistance. I could not go to school regularly. I felt sad and anxious to leave my mother alone at home with my father.*

*I could not study. I could not do my homework. My teacher was not aware of my family problems and scolded me. During the same period, my father was very sick and we all went to stay at my grandmother's place. I left school. I was 10 years old.*

*One day, when I was 11, my cousin's husband raped me. My cousin knew I was very afraid of my father. She advised me not to say anything to my parents. I was in pain and could not remain silent. I told my paternal grandmother who informed my father. The court found the rapist guilty and sentenced him to imprisonment.*

When my brother was 2 months old, my father cut my mother's hand and she stayed in hospital for sometime. I took charge of the household, my sister and brother.

The situation worsened when my mother returned. Everyday they both drank, and quarreled which ended in violence. My father threw things and once tried to strangle my mother with an electric wire.

When my mother ran away at night, I always took my sister and little brother with me. Sometimes I left them with my neighbour, and in the dark, I went to look for my mother.

It was a Wednesday evening; both my mum and dad were drunk. In the middle of the night, I got up hearing my mum screaming and my sister crying.

I saw my mum lying on the floor and my dad kicked her in the stomach. I tried to remove my mother, and was angry with my father. He gave me a slap. When he heard my sister and brother crying, he went outside.

I saw blood coming from my mother's mouth. I tried to clean it. What I can still remember is that my mum wanted to speak to me but the words she uttered were not clear.

When my dad came inside, he asked me to help him to place my mum on the bed, which I did. He then asked us to go to bed.

At about 6h 00 in the morning, my dad came to my room and told me that my mum did not want to wake up. I talked to her but she did not respond.

I thought she was pretending not to hear us. When my father left to look for his mother, I told my mum not to be afraid as dad was out, but she still did not answer.

My grandmother came and as she touched my mum, she told us that she had passed away. We all started crying and neighbours came.

My mum's relatives came with police officers who took my father to the police station. The post mortem examination confirmed that my father battered her to death.

My mother's brothers and sisters did not want to see any of us, and did not allow us to go to the funeral. My mother's family has always made me feel guilty about what happened to my mother. My aunt even said that I was sleeping with my father.

I still regret being denied the right to attend the funeral. The last picture that I have of my mum is police officers placing a body wrapped in white cloth in a police van. Since my mother's death, I have lived a very hard life. I felt ashamed to walk in the street because everybody had an eye on me. My little sister faced all sorts of humiliation at school. Even adults did not hesitate to question her on what happened. She started having epileptic fits.

My little brother, then 3, was very aggressive to other children at school. I had nightmares everyday. I often thought of committing suicide and once I took some poisonous drink. One night I just left my grandmother's house and walked for hours in the dark without knowing where to go and what to do. I realised that something was wrong; I was scared and went to seek help from a nun.

The following day, she informed my grandmother and the Child Development Unit (CDU) of the Ministry of Women's Rights & Child Development of my situation. The officers of the CDU brought me to CEDEM for a weekend.

I opted to stay in the shelter. The magistrate ordered that my sister, brother and I should stay together at CEDEM.

Despite all the problems with my father, I still love him and want to talk to him. I have spoken to him by phone and he has told me to look well after my sister and brother. Had I not been to CEDEM, I would have surely committed suicide because I could no longer cope with the situation. I can say that with the continuous support of Mrs. Rita, the director, I have overcome many psychological problems.

I am now learning how to work with physically handicapped children. I am very keen and happy to help these children.

I have chosen to tell my story because I know that many children my age suffer like me. What I have to say to them is: "Please do not suffer in silence. Speak out your problems and somebody will offer you a hand as they did to me."

(* not her real name.)



# Gender violence, HIV and AIDS



Zambia:

# How the dream of a white wedding turned into a nightmare

By Nyarai Madzima

It had always been my dream to have a white wedding and I thought I had met my soul mate in Tom.* He seemed besotted with me and I thought it was just a matter of time before he popped the question. I was ecstatic.

When he suggested we move in together, I quickly agreed telling myself this would give us the chance to get to know each other better. I was already renting a lovely place, so he naturally moved in with me.

A few months into our relationship, I fell pregnant. I began to see signs of a bad temper, but was determined to make the relationship work. We had our first child, a son and five years later, we had another son. Still no lobola, and no white wedding, but I was still hopeful.

During the second pregnancy, Tom became very abusive. My story is about the violence that each day corroded this man until it eventually took his life, and very nearly took that of my child as well. Telling my story is one of many ways in which I am trying to find myself again.

I guess the real turning point in our lives came one day in my eighth month of pregnancy. I came back from work to find my domestic worker sitting outside with a child. I learned the child was Tom's from an affair with his former domestic worker, which caused his first wife to divorce him. I was devastated.

Now, in addition to my own young children, I had a disabled boy who needed special care. At seven, he still wore diapers throughout the day and could not feed or bath himself.

My blood pressure shot up and I was hospitalised three weeks before my due date. Tom visited in the first week, but when I gave birth, he never came to see me. I looked enviously at attentive spouses fussing over other young mothers. I cried myself to sleep most of the time. I resolved to leave Tom, but when the time came, I could not do it.

Tom beat me. He also beat his helpless son. Eventually, I sought counseling from my church and some friends advised me to take the child to an institution where he would receive proper care. When I raised enough money, I told Tom of my idea. He refused and beat me up demanding that I continue to look after the child.

For the first time in our relationship, I disobeyed him. I enrolled the child in the home where he remains today. His father never visited him or phoned to check on him.

I thought this would give us breathing space and we could try to work at our relationship and make a happy home for our children. Tom became even more aggressive. If I refused him sex, he would force himself on me and accuse me of having affairs. He beat me up in front of the children and I grew thin and scared. One day, my boss saw my blue eye and asked me what I was doing with such a violent man. When I started coughing up blood, she demanded that I seek the help of a lawyer before it was too late.

This gave me courage. In the presence of a lawyer, I told Tom that I wanted him to move out. The lawyer also notified Tom that he would get a peace order against him. I was so relieved, but I did not realise my worst nightmare was about to begin.

When we left the lawyer's office, Tom spoke reasonably and promised he would move out that day. I went back to the office and he went back to his work, or so I thought.

Tom drove around trying to buy fuel. The country had a fuel shortage, so he only managed to get a five-litre gallon of petrol. He picked up our four-year old from pre-school. He went to the house and doused the curtains, lounge suite and beds with petrol and set everything on fire while our son waited in the car. He drove away in search of more fuel.

He phoned and told me what he had done. He said he had our youngest child and was heading for our other son's boarding school to collect him. He said he would kill himself and the children. I did not think he was serious because he had threatened to do this on several occasions in the past. I thought he wanted me to change my mind about wanting him to move out.

Half an hour later his office phoned to warn me that he had called them with the same story.

I panicked. I phoned my son's school and asked them to get police protection. I also phoned the police who promised to mount a roadblock somewhere along the road towards my son's boarding school.

Meanwhile, Tom had laced a packet of fresh chips and some biscuits with rat poison. He urged the four-year-old, who had seen him sprinkle the poison, to eat, but he refused. Tom drove towards the school, searching for fuel. All the time he had a rope around his neck.

The car was low on fuel and he drove into someone's farm a few kilometres outside of Harare. After sitting the little boy on a rock and again encouraging him to eat the poisoned food, he hung himself from a tree in full view of his child.

My four-year old son narrated this whole ordeal to me. An old woman who was looking for firewood discovered him crying and walking around the tree. Tom was driving a company car inscribed with the company name, so the farm owner called his office.

We have been in counseling for the last two year to help us deal with this trauma. At first, I blamed myself for Tom's death but the love and support of friends and colleagues helped me work through my confusion, pain and feeling of helplessness.

I feel stronger now, but I am afraid of men. Maybe one day I will meet someone who will help me overcome the way I feel. I still yearn for a fulfilling relationship but memories of the nightmare I went through are still very vivid in my mind.

Right now, I also feel I should focus more on raising my children, help them forget this horrible chapter in our lives. I am struggling to give my children a sense of security. My self-esteem is much better today and I feel stronger. I know now that I should never have accepted brutality.

(*Names have been changed.)

Zambia:

# Celebrating a new life at 30

By Shirley* with Zarina Geloo

I had just finished boarding school and joined my parents in their home while I explored opportunities for college. I started working part-time and began to develop friendships with other girls my age and in similar circumstances.

Newly widowed, my friend's father seemed a pleasant man who took a great interest in me. He was kind and loving – just like a real father. Before I knew it, I was in a relationship with him. My parents were livid, my best friend was no longer speaking to me and I was pregnant.

I think I could have weathered my parents' hostility and my friends anger if my new partner was supportive. I found out too late that he was a monster. Food was a major issue in our household. I was not working so did not have money. Yet, I was expected to find food for him and his three children who all had jobs. My partner would sometimes buy old and wilted vegetables from roadside vendors and would throw them at me expecting a proper meal.

First it was only him that beat me when there was no food. Then, even his children who were about my own age, began to physically fight with me and abuse me verbally if the food was not to their liking or if it too little. They threw food in my face saying their mother cooked better or would just empty food into the dustbin.

He stayed out late at night and expected me to wait up for him. Sometimes he got violent and chased me out of the house. He never allowed me to take my son, so I always went back.

I have a big family and could have gone to them for help, but I was embarrassed. My partner was their friend and older than them. They warned me about going out with an older man with big children. Many times, they told me that all he wanted from me was sex. I had refused to listen to them. I could not go back to them now and tell them they were right.

There were some good days, like when his children where not there and it was just the three of us. Or when he had some money and I could do grocery shopping. However, these became fewer and fewer.

In addition, the violence in the home was beginning to affect my son. He began to stammer and was frightened of all his half siblings because they were always attacking me.

My home looked like a bomb shelter. The doors were full of holes where the children or their father were trying to break down the door to beat me up. We had no television because that too had been broken in some of our fights. I lived in fear of all them.

I took refuge in religion. But I never got close to anyone in the congregation because it would have meant visits to my home and I did not want people to visit me and see the conditions under which I lived.

The last straw for me was when I contracted tuberculosis and discovered I was HIV positive. Because I knew I had never had sex with any other person other than my partner, and the fact that his wife had died of a mysterious illness, I was quite sure where I contracted it from.

I told my partner who immediately went into denial and accused me of being unfaithful. He beat me up and chased me from his home. This time when I left, I took my son with me and went to one of my relatives and begged for a room to stay. I also ate humble pie and begged one of them to give me a job.

I had settled down in a small room and a job as a sales clerk when my partner began to woo me again. Like a fool, I fell for it especially as he seemed genuinely sorry and was really missing his son.

It was not long after that I had moved back that my former friend attacked me in front of her father. I beat her so bad that her father began to beat me and for the first time I fought back rather than cowered. I matched him fist punch for fist punch, I kicked, I bit and grabbed his private parts. I knew there was something different about my strength. I knew it was because I had tasted independence.

I left and have not looked back since then. As I celebrate my 30th birthday this year, I am throwing a huge bash because not only I am a year older but I am also celebrating my new life.

(* Not her real name.)

*South Africa :*

# I'm doing well and surviving

By Mickey*

My life changed in the year 2000 when my daughter was brutally raped and murdered. I thought that would be the worst year of my life. But unfortunately that was only the beginning of several tragedies in my life.

I was working for a warehouse in Isipingo in the south of Durban in 2001. We had to do shift work and sometimes we would finish late. Usually we would have our own transport taking us there and back. One day I had to go to a friend of mine to collect some money for my mother. I left my friend's place in the early evening between 19h30 and 20h00. She wanted to walk with me and I told her not to bother it was still early.

I know Wentworth. I have lived in this place all my whole life. I decided to take a short cut because I was in a hurry to get home and get ready for the next day. I went along a pathway in the area and nothing struck me because it was a routine to walk on that path. Many people were using it.

As I was walking I suddenly felt somebody grab me by the back of my collar. I fell hard on top of a big stone and dislocated my hip immediately. When I looked up two of the three guys were taking all my jewelry. It happened so fast: my rings, watch and earrings were gone.

When I looked again the third guy was holding a knife to me because I was screaming. The two guys ran off with the jewelry and the money I had collected for my mother, the R260. I still remember I had a lemon top which I got as a gift. The third guy ripped it apart and dragged me into the bush and raped me.

I was trying to feel and imagine the situation. I know that I am a strong and a smart woman. I figured that this person was not drunk because if he was I would have wrestled with him. But because he had so much power, I decided he was on drugs. The other two called him and said: "Come on ekse, we got what we wanted, leave her!" He said: "No she's going to point us out, let's finish her off!"

I have never prayed so hard in my entire life. I prayed that what happened to my daughter must not happen to me too. History cannot repeat itself, so I said to him: "You have already taken what you wanted, why don't you leave me alone, leave me, just leave me." He walked away with the knife still opened, walked away a little distance then he stood for a while and turned and came back.

This time I really thought he was coming to finish me off. In that time I prayed to God to save me, I didn't want to die because I have a grandson to raise, there's nobody else for my grandson.

He stood a little while and after that he ran. I managed to get up. I could only walk on one leg but I managed to drag myself to the main road. I was hysterical and felt I was losing my mind. That was the worst day of my life. A car stopped. The owner realised what had happened, and he took me to the hospital.

Before being raped I hadn't had a partner since my divorce in 1996. I just had a HIV test done and it came back negative. So I told myself there's no way you can be raped once and get it and I said I'm not going to bother going back and I didn't bother. Last year in January something just told me: "Hey Mickey just go and test yourself." I had a boyfriend who wanted to get married so we both went for tests. His was negative and I was positive. What do I do, where do I start, where do I go?

I went back to that horrible day. I' have since broken up with the man I truly loved. After that I decided that this is life, I'll take it from there. My strength has grown since then and I'm thankful to God that he gave another chance in life. He has kept me here for a reason, and for my grandson.

I'm doing well and surviving.

(* Not her real name.)



# Three generations of courage



South Africa:

# From HIV victim to AIDS activist



By Rose Thamae

I am the founder of a community based organization in Orange Farm called Let Us Grow that provides home based care and support to people living with HIV. We also train peer educators among the youth who work night and day to reduce the spread of HIV in this desperately poor community.

Two years ago, during the month of August- Women's Month in South Africa- we staged a vigil every night that a woman died as a result of an AIDS-related illness in our community as a way of demanding the roll out of anti retroviral drugs or ARV's. We were out there every night: in other words, at least 31 women died during that period.

But our campaign succeeded and now we have an ARV site. The number of deaths has been reduced to about two a month. I care for others, as I care for myself. I became HIV positive as a result of a gang rape.

I know, in the most painful way possible, the link between HIV and AIDS and gender violence. I tell my story, over and over again, to get the government to provide Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) to survivors of gender violence in the hope that others will avoid the fate that befell me.

I tell my story to heal the pain of a life punctuated at every turn by violence, yet redeemed by the power of turning anger into activism. This is not only my story: but the story of three generations: of me, my daughter Mpho, and my grand daughter Kgomotso.

I was born on 17 February 1953 in Orlando East. My grandmother told us that my mother left us when I was three years old, because my father was very abusive. I had four brothers. Three have passed away and I have only one left.

I was raped at the age of nine by my father's friend. He took advantage of me because I was alone and he knew my father was not home. He came to the house and told me I must go

with him to find my father. He took me to his place where he raped me. It was 10h00 in the morning. I was young I could not understand what this man was doing to me. There was no one in his house. He ordered me to lie down, so that he can lie with me while we were waiting for my father. I did. He was my father's friend and I trusted him. As I lay down, he raped me. He kept on saying be a good girl I'll finish right now.

While he was raping me there was a knock at the door. It was my grandmother, calling my name. He opened the door and ran away. My grandmother grabbed me and asked me what he had done to me. I told her what had happened to me. They took me to the police station. I was then taken to the doctor. I had to be taken several times because I contracted a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD). I don't know what has happened to this man. No one told me anything. My grandmother, everyone kept quiet.

If my mother had been around, maybe she would have given me support. I was on my own, I was all alone. I was not allowed to ask any questions especially in those days. I had to wait for people to tell me or ask me how I felt. I think that's why my father's friend took advantage of me, he knew I would obey him.

When my uncle (my father's youngest brother who was jailed with Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe on Robben Island) came back from jail my grandmother told him what had happened.

She asked my uncle to find out where my mother was.

After these long years he finally found my mother who was married to another man. She agreed to take us in. To me it was a victory to find my mother. As time passed my life began to change. I was called names, Le tla le pepiwe, vezandlebe which means I'm not the child from that family. I had one half sister. Whenever there was a family gathering they treated me like a joke. I was like a slave to them.

In 1970 I had a boyfriend and in 1971 I gave birth to my daughter. When my daughter was four years old I was raped again by five boys behind Orlando Stadium. My friends and I were coming from the stadium. They managed to run away. I was not so lucky. I didn't escape: they raped me. I went home and told my family. They said it was my fault: why didn't I run away like the others.

*I have never had peace in my mind. I lived because I had to live for the sake of my daughter. I tried to go on with my life. Another boyfriend tried very hard to make me happy.*

*One day, as we were coming from the cinema, very happy, a gang of young men, carrying pangas and knives pounced on us. My boyfriend ran away and left me with these monsters.*

*I tried to fight, but I was stabbed in the back and in my head. I lay there with blood all over me. They raped me one by one. They had no mercy at all. No one could hear me screaming as it was an open space. After gang raping me they left me there.*

*I managed to make my way to the police station and found my boyfriend there. The police asked me what kind of a boyfriend leaves his girlfriend behind. They blamed my boyfriend. They did nothing to help us. My family blamed me.*

*Two years later in 1990 I was diagnosed as HIV positive. The world was falling apart. Telling my story made me feel strong. I keep telling my stories again and again to my kids, to my friends, to my neighbours, to the world. I have learned that if bad things happen to you it is not the end. I find strength in my work. Each week there is a funeral to attend. But there is also a life being saved; a new lease of life being given.*




*Let Us Grow children's dance group.*

South Africa:

# Why I chose to follow in my mother's footsteps



By Mpho Thamae

My name is Mpho Thamae and I am a community health worker. I always dreamed of having my own my own hair salon. I did not plan on being a community health worker and it has not been easy for me. But I decided to take this course because of what my mother has lived through.

One day my mother told me that she had been diagnosed as HIV positive. She told me the whole story: how she had been raped. The world was falling on top of me. I am her only daughter. I thought of death, thinking she was going to die and leave me alone. I asked why this was happening to her and how my daughter and I were going to do survive without her.

At that time I was working as a stylist a hair salon. Everyday when I arrived home I found everyone happy with no stress at all. Instead they had new information, were planning a future and were strong. I wanted to know what kept her happy. I was told that she was attending a support group at Aids Link.

I found that the person I was most worried about (my daughter) had organised young children to do dramas, poems and dancing. She was teaching people about HIV/AIDS and abuse. I asked myself why I was worried about my mother, she was fine. I started to accept that my mother is not just HIV positive: she is positive!

The bond between my daughter and my mother became stronger. I became supportive too. One day my mother said they will need youth to run education programmes at school about HIV/AIDS. She was surprised when I told her that I would join them in the education campaign.

My mother was proud of me because I gave her all the support I could. When some people discriminated against her I told her that I loved her more than anything in this world. She became stronger. We managed to face the discrimination as a family with the support of other community members.

I trained as a basic HIV/AIDS counselor at the Family and Marriage Association of South Africa (FAMSA). We continue to educate schools about HIV/AIDS, women and child abuse. I was promoted to Women and Child Abuse Co-ordinator at the CBO called Let Us Grow started by my mother. I assist school children and women in the community by referring them to the right resources. I also run education workshops at local churches and I do counseling.

After we started a support group, many women responded. We teach them the different skills to equip themselves, solving their problems, making them deal with their problems and to go on with their lives and doing home visits.

I went for training on basic counseling; home based care; HIV/AIDS; first aid and self esteem. The Department of Health called me to come and train and as a trainer of volunteers of Orange Farm for World Aids Day. In 2003 and 2004 the Department of Health nominated 3 people within the Let Us Grow to train for 69 days. I was one of the three. Now, I am working as a Treatment Supporter at Ext 7a Clinic in Orange Farm.

After we started meetings with counselors from other organisations at Orange farm I was nominated as a facilitator for my group, and we went to the training as facilitators we call Umhlangano (meeting).

The work that I am doing gives me strength and keeps me helping more and more people in my community by supporting those who have been emotionally, spiritually and physically abused.

*South Africa:*

# An activist at 13



By Kgomotso Thamae

My name is Kgomotso Thamae. I am 13 years old and I live with my grandmother in Orange Farm. After I discovered my grandmother's HIV positive status I felt very sorry for her. I kept asking myself, "Why is this happening to my grandmother?" I am very close to her; I always watch her; trying to pretend that everything is fine. Sometimes I find it hard to go to school and leave her alone at home. Sometimes I wish I could stay with her to protect her from this world of sorrow.

In my mind I keep asking myself how many people are suffering. How many children are suffering? Who takes good care of them, are they having enough support from their friends, families and neighbours or are they all alone?

I asked my friends about us starting a support group to help children who are in need. They agreed with me. Our first trip was to Nkosi's Haven to visit children who are HIV positive to show them that there are children outside who love them; who care for them; who pray for them. When we came back people joined us because they were touched by what we had done. There are ten people in our group. We have activities like dancing, singing, drama and much more.

We fundraise for the orphans by going to town and dancing in parks, on street corners and at events. Sometimes we take them out to the Zoo, swimming and to other entertaining places. We want to take orphans out during the December holidays.

If young girls like my friends and I can carry on giving support to other kids, love them and treat them like us we can make the world a better place. It is not their fault that they have lost their parents. Our government must do something about HIV/AIDS. Orphans are the leaders of tomorrow. The future is in their hands; help them to help themselves to fulfill their dreams.



*From left to right: Kgomotso, Mpho and Rose Thamae*



# From victim to survivor



*South Africa:*

# I am angry, but I am also a survivor



*By Nono Tintela*

He was perfect; he was my hero; my superstar; my everything. Whenever he was around, I felt safer, I felt loved. I thought nothing or no one could hurt me as long as my daddy was around. He loved me very much. I was his princess.

If anyone hit me, I would just keep quiet until he came home then I would start crying. He would throw dangerous things at the person who hit me. At the time, I didn't know that my father was abusive. I thought he was just protecting me.

When I was eight years old, we were playing house with my friends when an older man (a friend of my brothers) got into the bed with me and raped me. He told me not to cry or make a noise. At the time I did not know what was happening to me. I felt so afraid and guilty.

When I took a bath that night, my mother noticed the blood on my panties. She asked me to open my legs and checked me, but then said nothing. I have lived with this terrible guilt all my life. I have tried to block it out but when the same thing happened to my daughter several years later, it all started to come back. When I see this man, who is now a politician, I feel very angry. I have not yet had the courage to confront him, but when I do, the question I want to ask him is: why?

As a child, it was only when my mother ended up unconscious in the hospital that I started questioning my father's love for me. Then he started being abusive even towards me. I cried everyday wondering what happened to my loving, caring, protective father, what happened to my hero?

When they sent me to boarding school, I started to wonder if my parents still loved me. No one was there to protect me from the bullies in boarding school. I started to feel alone and longed for my father's protectiveness. I went home for holidays. I could hardly recognize the man I found: an angry and abusive man; hardly the man I loved and worshipped as my father.

I didn't know this man anymore. I wanted my father back. I so wanted the school holidays to be over because I could not stay in that house anymore. My younger sister would sit in the corner and cry when me and my older brother called the police. They would come and just tell my father to stop what he was doing and solve his family problems.

When the police left, my father started beating and swearing at us. I wanted my father back. I wanted my hero back because there was non one to protect me from this monster.

My older brother told my mother that if she did not move out of the house, he would kill my father. I was devastated because I loved my father so much. My mother moved out with me and my younger sister. When they divorced, I fell apart. I hated my father so much that when he died, I did not go to his funeral.

I grew up hating men. I would have a boyfriend for a short while then I would just break up with him.

One of the relationships I had was with a man who made me pregnant during my final year of matric. I wrote my exams while I was pregnant. When I gave birth to my first daughter the man denied being the father, saying that I had so many relationships he could not be sure that the child belonged to him. My mother raised my daughter. I could not bring myself to touch her even as a baby because of the anger that I felt towards her father. I kept remembering my father. Even today I have this anger towards all men.

I last saw my first daughter at the age of five. I have not been able to see her again because I am scared of how she would react. I don't know what she knows about me or how she feels. I am scared of being rejected.

I met my husband about ten years after I had my first child. At the time he did not know about the child. He was so sweet and loving, he reminded me of my father.

At first, I thought he was protective of me because he loved me just like my dad. I did not see the signs. I think I missed my father so much that I did not notice the signs. It was as though my hero had come back to life again. He told me that he loved me just like my father did. I needed to hear that. I always felt safe in his arms and inside me; I felt my father's love.

Then he started beating me and all the anger inside me started to surface. My daughter was eight months old when the abuse started.

The police would come to my house and tell us to solve our problems. Then they would leave me at the house for him to finish me off. The three court interdicts against my husband did not help me. He simply ignored them and the police seemed powerless to act. Ironically it was I and my daughter who ended up in the police cells. I have never been arrested but I have slept in police cells for more times than I can count so that I and my daughter would be safe.

My daughter was raped when she was six years old and my husband blamed me for it. I was so devastated I wanted to die. He used to tell my daughter that she was stupid that is why they raped her. Whenever he said those words, I felt a sharp pain piercing my heart. I thought of all the pain my father caused me and my mom.

I left my husband, stayed at People Against Women Abuse (POWA) for a month then I decided to return to my husband. As a born again Christian, I believed that God had changed him. But when he started abusing us again, I remembered what my mother told me: "you can scrub a leopard off his spots but it will remain a leopard".

Soon after, I found out that I was HIV positive. I was so angry. I am so angry that I do not know how to deal with this anger.

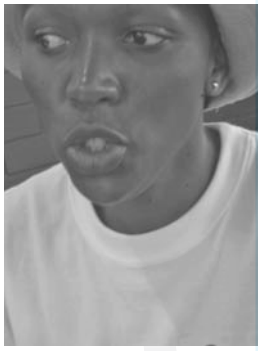
I am angry at our justice system for not protecting women and children. I am angry at our courts for releasing these monsters back to our homes. I am angry at the man who raped me as a child and now walks the streets as a respected politician. I am angry at the man who made me pregnant and then walked away, leaving me so angry towards my first daughter (now twenty yeas old) with whom I have never been able to bond with her.

I am angry at all men for treating us like door mats. I am angry at my father for not protecting me. Worst of all I am angry at me for not protecting my second daughter when the very same thing that happened to me happened to her.

If I could be the president for just one day, I would bring back the death sentence for all the men who abuse women and children. I am angry but I will turn my anger into being a survivor because God made me a survivor. This is how I must direct my energy.

*South Africa:*

# Reclaiming my life



By Maleshoane Motsiri

I knew I had to let go, but it was never going to be easy. Letting go is the most difficult thing for anyone who is in an abusive relationship. We learn to love, trust and believe the people we are in relationships with. When they hurt us we ignore the abuse and instead try to find excuses for their wrong doing with the hope they will eventually change.

I was born and raised in an environment full of love and respect in a location called Naledi, Soweto. I am a mother of two children whom I love dearly. I fell in love with their father when I was 15 years old. We started dating. For the first three years the relationship was wonderful. He was the love of my life, so I thought.

One day things changed and the relationship turned sour. My boyfriend suddenly became jealous and stopped trusting me. He began asking me unusual questions like where I had spent the day; that I was with and what I had been doing throughout the day. I responded to his questions truthfully but he would not believe me. He also started slapping me and beating me up for no reason at all. I would explain everything to him over and over but he would not listen to me.

I never got to know the reason why he stopped trusting me. He also became unfaithful and started cheating with other women. When I confronted him about it he would lie and subsequently beat me up. Because of this I started isolating myself from my friends hoping he would notice that I was always at home waiting for him to come. But he hardly showed up to witness this. I found excuses for his prolonged absence from home from time to time. And the few times he decided to come back home to see me, he would ask me to forgive him and would give me lots of excuses.

I blindly believed and forgave him. Each time I felt he really meant it and would not do it again. I never stopped loving him and he never stopped beating me. Because I believed in him I stopped listening to my parents and tried to be the girlfriend he wanted me to be. Alas, he was never satisfied. Instead the situation became worse.

When I turned 21 years old I fell pregnant with his child. When I told him about it, he got upset and told me that he was not ready to be a father. He disappeared and only showed up after a week. He apologised for his disappearance. His excuse was that he had been shocked by the sudden news that he was now a father and I forgave him, again with no doubt in my mind that he was sorry.

My parents were very upset with me for not obeying their rules and for becoming pregnant out of wedlock. However because of the nature of mothers who quickly learn to accept and find a way to deal with difficult situations, my mother quickly forgave me and accepted what had happened. That was not the case with my father who did not talk to me for a long period until the day I went into labour. On that day he took me to the clinic and returned to fetch me the following day after I had given birth. We were all excited to have a baby in our house.

It was then that my boyfriend showed up from out of the blue, asking for permission to see the child. Again he said he was sorry for going away and was happy to see his child. Our relationship changed for the better. I was excited. My parents did not want me to continue in a relationship with him but I disobeyed them until my father became very upset and chased me out of his house.

I was 24 years. I moved in with the father of my child and his mother. That was the worst mistake I had ever made. He became very abusive. He abused me physically, financially (since I was unemployed at that time), verbally (he used to call me names, telling me how useless I was), psychologically and mentally (as he was shifting the blame, telling me how I had ruined his life) and sexually (he forced me to have sex with him after beating me or when I simply did not feel up to it).

Three years later he asked me to marry him. Even though he was abusive I agreed. I had hoped this would change the situation but I was wrong. He became worse than before. On some days he did not return home and would fight about this almost every week. We separated for a year but we reconciled. Typically, he begged for my forgiveness and promised to change for the better. For the sake of my child and for the love I had for him I forgave him.

That year our relationship improved. I fell pregnant with my second child. After the birth of our son, my ex-husband was happy and supportive but this lasted for a short while. When the baby was about three months old, he started his old ways again. However this time he

did not beat me up but would push and shove me around, call me names. Eventually I was diagnosed with severe depression. I was hospitalised for seven days and when I came back the situation got worse, and ended up in hospital again.

One day as I was listening to the radio I heard about Teddy Bear Clinic, a shelter for abused children and I wrote down the contact details. The next day I called and asked to volunteer my time with their organization. I went for training and started volunteering as a court supporter. While I was there I learnt about abuse and also got to know about the organisation, People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA). I also got information about their training programmes.

The following year I went for domestic violence training at POWA. That is where I began to understand the situation I was in. After eight weeks of training, while waiting for my turn for mentoring I did some soul searching and I found what I really wanted to do with my life.

I had had enough of abuse so I filed for divorce and while waited for the court date I applied for a protection order. The court date was set for the 20 March 2006, seventeen days after my birthday. On that day I was declared a divorcé'8ee. I thought to myself, "Finally I am free!"

I realised that I had been in love but I was never happy. When asked about whether I regret all the time I wasted in the relationship the answer is 'yes' and 'no'. Yes because I lacked information about abuse and was not strong enough to say 'no' to domestic violence. No, because from the relationship I have learned to accept myself for whom I am. I have two beautiful children who bring a smile to my face every time I think about them. They are my source of strength and give me a reason to live.

It might have taken me years to let go off my ex-husband, but I have come to know the people who truly love me, stood by me and believed in me. I have lost my house and everything I worked for in my six years of marriage but I refuse to cry over spilt milk.

Today I am a proud poet, clinical counselor and a house mother at POWA shelter for abused women. My advice to you is, love yourself, believe in yourself, trust God and have faith. I hope and believe that by reading my story you will be able to gain something and be able to share it with others.

South Africa:

# Accepting the pattern, or making the change?

By Lesley Eel*

It is said that you go through a change in life every seven years or so, and although I always look for scientific proof that will substantiate such claims ... my life has proven it to me, in fact it's been slapping me in the face - and I have been so looking for the "good" in everyone as I was brought up to believe people are good and I was never exposed to the bad and the ugly, I just didn't see it coming. I went off to a weekly boarding school and then when I left school I found myself a job, as financially there was no chance of a tertiary education.

I worked hard at my job as I had been taught, growing up with the understanding that if you started something you gave it your all. I grabbed every opportunity to advance up the corporate ladder, and then I reached the top... I was promoted at only 25 years old to the most senior position under the MD. What more could a girl want? Only, it was a mans world... and I had to stay on my toes, or the staff (all much older than me) would take me down. And for the next few years, I devoted my life to my work. My MD was my mentor, and I believed everything she told me. The "rush" of the success, enveloped the simplicity of the situation, I was proud that I helped build the company back up after we lost our biggest client. But I was used like a piece of meat, always presenting to potential clients, male of course, in a low cut top, a little skirt and heels... I wonder if they actually liked our work or just the cattle market!

The first drastic change in my life was in my early twenties, when my brother passed away suddenly. He was HIV positive and had died of AIDS. We had always been extremely close. He had been so different from other boys all his life and when he finally announced he was gay, my father rejected him as his son. He fell ill, and, after being in hospital for only 13 days, he passed away. According to the hospital he had galloping lymphoma - bone marrow cancer, but I read his chart. Sadly, to this day, my family believe that he had cancer. It has never even crossed their minds that he was HIV positive. He had contracted it during a blood transfusion after an accident and back then, blood was not checked before it was used.

I hardly spent time with my boyfriend as we were always entertaining clients, so he left me a few times. But I thought I was 'somebody important' and I would go out to have a good time... but I always avoided all situations I knew I couldn't handle... Sweet sixteen and never been kissed... that was me! Until one day I found myself in a situation I was not 'big' enough to handle, and had no way of getting out of. I lay dead still while he raped me, and although one of my co-workers was within hearing distance, I kept quiet in my fear of failure and future acceptance.

Those few minutes seemed like a lifetime, and brought back so many memories of growing up,which I had tried so hard to forget. I had kept quiet as a young girl, knowing I would not be heard if I mentioned how I was used at the age of four by immediate family to explore their growing pains, and which only stopped when I was fourteen and went away to boarding school. Nobody would have believed me had I told them. I had tried before, but nobody listened - and I then knew that I was alone. So I decided I would keep quiet about this too. Too much depended on me keeping my job.

I felt that my dignity had been stolen and couldn't make my relationship work with my ex, even though he wanted me back. I had lost all respect for men. And I wanted my power back... so I put on my 'tom boy' shoes and when the opportunity knocked, I would lay down on my back and let myself be abused, but when the time was just right I would get up and walk out as if nothing had been going on. I tattoed and pierced my body to punish and hurt myself... but I still felt nothing.

I started to become afraid of myself - it was not me - and I was afraid of myself at times, so I went back to my only ex-boyfriend, my first school love, thinking it was a safer place for me. I was responsible for everything financially in our lives, but it didn't matter to me as I thought he would be with me forever and I was giving all I could to build us a future, as we were engaged to be married. Until he cheated on me, and again, and again, and so many agains...

I did nothing - I accepted it, as it was still safer than out there, and looked at it as the price to pay for safety. Then when he made me pregnant with my son, only then did I start to feel again. I had been told that I could not have children without fertility drugs. So of course I was shocked when I found out... and, I was not married. I felt so ashamed! After six pregnancy tests I knew there was no way out of this situation. How was I going to tell my parents? Everyone still thought I was perfect.

For the next few months, I watched as our friends carried on their wild lives, and I did not even miss it a bit. Something in me was now different and I could not explain it to anyone. I didn't even understand it myself. Maybe it was my time for the perfect 'white picket fence, live happily ever after' life to start. I did everything to build towards the dream family, everything except see reality. I financed a new business for the father of my child and took credit wherever I could access it, still believing I was helping to build a wonderful future for us... until one day I took the afternoon off to surprise him and surprise him I did.

As I walked into the house, I knew something was just not right. I found him in our bed with a "good friend"... I was surprised... and again I felt nothing. I turned around and just left. I was 8 months pregnant with his child, but for the first time in my life, I did not feel alone. I had a strength that I had not known existed in me, and after fourteen years together all he ever gave me was a lot of debt and the knowledge that he was never going to be a good father to our son.

I gave natural birth to a huge baby boy. All the pain was worth the reward. He saved me from a life that was going nowhere. He was such an easy child, but just 12 days after giving birth, I had to go back to work as I had no form of income and plently of expenses. We had had no luxuries growing up, but now times were harder and I was far too proud to tell anyone. I went to work and spend every free minute with my child. I never went out and I had no desire to even meet people. One day a friend at work insisted I take her to a night club I used to frequent, and she was not taking no for an answer. That was the first night out and the night I met the man that I am now with. He welcomed my son into his heart and that meant the world to me.

My next 7 year change came just after my son was born and I could rely on no-one but myself. As he needed more of my time, and I desparately wanted to spend more time with him. My child was growing up and I was not around to see it, as I was always working. His father was unrealiable in every way, and when he tried to take him from school without permission, everything changed. I cut down on the wining and dining with clients, in order to spend more time at home. Then one day, I was called into the boardroom and given a letter of retrenchment. My career in the company that I believed was my family and to which I had sacrificed my life for nine years, had abruptly ended.

*I went home broken. I had given them my all and now they had just taken everything away. I was so angry and so scared! I was 29 years old with a six month old child who had no one but me. Once again he gave me the strength to handle the situation. I was offered a job to work for a friends husband. After three months of not getting my full salary, I approached him and realised that he was expecting me to give more than my time and expertise. So I resigned and left, again with nothing.*

*After just four days I announced I was opening my own business. With nothing to my name except debt, I approached the bank, but they would not give me a loan for a computer to start the business. So I took the last funds accessible in my credit card budget and made the purchase. At that stage it was all or nothing for me.*

*And now yet another 7 years later, I find myself in a challenging situation. I am in my sixth year of business, every year I grow stronger financially, but I never realised that not even money and success will solve all my problems. It is amazing that the many disasters life has challenged me with have given me the strength not only to go forward, but to turn my life around 'til now. But, perhaps I am just too strong, all the insecurities of men around successful women are exposed in the strangest of ways. But at what cost do I stop the pattern of being there for others when they are not there for me. And to what extend do I sell myself short in order to stroke the egos of the men in my life? Because it's no longer just about me, my son deserves better, and it is my responsibility to do right by him.*

*I want my son to understand that he does not need to emotionally manipulate a woman one day in order to feel in control. So I need to make a change for the first time by choice, and am confident enough that I have the strength to get through it ... I now realise that in the past my desparation to just be loved and accepted for the person that I had blossomed into, allowed me to be weak and submissive, in order to avoid dissappointment and confrontation. The question is I ask myself is will I find myself doing it alone once more? All alone again?*

*(* Not her real name.)*





# Men as partners



South Africa:

# One man's love eases the pain of another's assault



By Proudia Mosupi

My story is one of pain, but also of love.

I am a 22 year old woman from Soweto who hardly knows her father and got separated from her mother at an early age. In a spurt of recklessness that I now truly regret I left a loving relationship with a caring boyfriend to go out with a man who ended up raping me.

As I write this story, I am living in a shelter where I am getting help to lay charges and pursue my case. Because this is a case of date rape, or rape by someone I know, I am getting very little co-operation from the police, who fail to understand how you can be raped by someone you know. Even though my rapist is well known, he has not been apprehended.

My main source of strength and support in these trying times is, ironically, from the very man I left for the man who raped me.

My story begins on 24 April 1984. I was raised by a single mother who, at an early age, gave me to my sister to take care of me after she moved in with my step father. My sister did not sleep at home all the time. Often I would be left alone in a four room house until my cousin came to stay with me.

He worked at a Vodacom shop while I went to school. When I was with him one day, my uncle came from jail after a very long time. He became ill and I had to care for him. No one in the family came to see him. My cousin and I took him to the hospital in the middle of the night. My uncle had passed away on my birthday in 2005.

My cousin hated my uncle for not being there for them when they needed him. My other uncle came to my uncle's funeral. He told us that he was coming the week after the funeral.

I said to him "I know you won't come back, we will see you after five years." He said, "I promise to come back."

I became very ill with an unstable appendix. I had an operation surrounded by my family but without my father. I was hospitalized for over one month. My father came on the last day to take me home. I never saw him again.

I got involved in my first relationship with a man at age 13. The guy made me happy. I got involved with him for five years, until we got separated because he wanted a baby and I was a virgin and scared to have sex. I was still at school that time doing grade 10. I was not ready to be a mother the age of 17.

After separating with him, I got involved in another relationship and I am still in the relationship now. But things went awry when I cheated on him with several guys. He used to come to my place and when he could not find me, or when he asked where I was, I told him that it was none of his business or lied that I was at my mother's place. He would never fight with me on even assault me but rather say something like: "Baby you know I am not violent person and I won't do anything to hurt you." He begged to think very carefully about what I want in life. I would not listen and went on being reckless.

I started dating another guy. After two weeks he started assaulting me for no reason. He took my cell phone. When he found messages from my boyfriend, he would read them and start assaulting me. He never wanted me to go home and asked me to cook for him. He would assault and kick me; when I cried he kicked me more and told me I made noise when I cry.

I remembered my boyfriend's words and cried again because I regretted everything I had done. The man crashed my cell phone against the wall. I begged him to please let me go. He asked if I loved him. When I refused to answer, he assaulted me. At abut 3 o'clock in the morning on 21 August 2006 my world came to a shattering halt when this man raped me. He locked me in the house and came after two hours. I was shocked and seriously injured.

His cousins would not help me because they were also scared of him. They tried to stop him, but he did not stop. He told them that they were not there when he met me. He kept telling me that he was going to burn me with petrol or shoot me and scratch my face with a razor blade.

He realised that I was seriously injured and told me that I would not go home until I got better. He locked me in the house again and came back drunk at 8 o'clock at night. He fell asleep with his keys in his pocket. After I had made sure that he was asleep, I took the keys from his pocket, opened the door and ran away.

I jumped over the wall and kept on running. I became brave and scared at the same time but survived and went straight to the police station.

I arrived at the station at 10 o'clock at night. I opened a case of rape and assault. The police took me to the hospital to be examined by a doctor who wrote a report saying that I had been raped.

The police and I went to look for the rapist but he could not be found. The police took me to a shelter because I had no place to stay. I was scared that he would find me and kill me. The police are still investigating the case. They keep telling me that they cannot find the man. I cannot understand how this is so, since his whereabouts are well known. I know, from the comments they make, that they do not take my case seriously.

After all that had happened, I felt so alone, and plagued by guilt over the way I treated my boyfriend. One day at the shelter my world lit up when received a message from my boyfriend asking where I am. We spoke on the phone. I told him I had been raped. To my surprise he said: "Baby don't cry, everything will be okay. I am sorry for not being there to protect you when you were raped." I switched off the phone and cried.

He called in the morning and came during the day. He told me he is going to Venda but came back to see me in November. I take all the mistakes that I have made as a wake up call. I live in hope, that my case will be resolved and that I will pick up my life again. I am lucky to have the support of the shelter, my counselor and my boyfriend. I am finding the courage to make another go of my life.

## Zimbabwe:

# How I overcame my violence

By Mukanya* with Tapiwa Manyati

I am an active member of Padare Men's Forum on Gender and am currently the Mabvuku/Tafara Chapter Chairperson. My story is part of Padare's efforts to document cases of men who were once abusers but have since changed their ways.

I was born in 1967 and lived in Harare's high-density suburb of Highfield with my parents. I grew up with the belief that to be a man you have to use power and force in everything that you do. As I grew up I developed an interest in music and night clubbing. I became a womaniser, an abuser. I also relied heavily on marijuana. Effectively I just became a lost soul.

In 1984 I started working for a popular local band. We used to travel to Zambia, London, South Africa, and Mozambique among other countries.

Back home in Harare the band played at most popular nightclubs. I worked as the door attendant during shows. I was very popular with the girls because I was their ticket into the performances. Some women would do anything to get in so I let them come in exchange for sexual favours. There were always so many women who wanted to see their favourite band playing so some nights I had sex with five or more women.

All this happened while I was still married to my first wife Nozipo (not her real name). I usually spent nights away from home, leaving her alone with our little child. I never gave her room to ask where I was or to complain about anything. I felt I was being a real man.

Being a man meant that my word was final and women or other men who spoke their mind annoyed me. I used to beat her up just to make her realise who was the boss or the man of the house.

Neighbours watched helplessly as I beat her with my fists. Just to make sure she got the message I would batter her with a broken chair. Once she collapsed I would then walk away boasting about my machismo and manhood.

It was not the first or last time I was to humiliate her publicly. She was also not the first or last woman to suffer the blow of my fists and the sting of my insults. All the band members knew about this.

To have one wife to me was not man enough because of my ill-placed ego. I started comparing her with those commercial sex workers I used to hang out with and I felt she was not worthy to be my wife. I stopped buying her food or clothes and whatever she wanted she needed she had to ask for from me and I would buy for her if I felt like it. I abused her economically and psychologically. I started calling her names until one day she scalded me with boiling water and I had to be hospitalised for five months. We divorced and I got married again.

In 1994, I got sick until the band manager took me to a doctor and it was discovered that I had TB. I was diagnosed HIV positive. My health deteriorated from 70kgs to 24kgs and my second wife left me. At this time, my family took me to Mashambanzou centre for the terminally ill where I was given medication, care and support. From 1994 to 1995 December I was wheel chair bound. I thought a lot of committing suicide but later realised that it would only deprive my children of a father.

At Mashambanzou other people who were also living with HIV/AIDS visited me. Five special such individuals visited me regularly. They belonged to a support group.

Eventually I responded well to treatment. My immune system was boosted and my weight improved from 24kgs to 40 kgs. By the time I went back home I was almost fully recovered. I then joined a network of people living with HIV/AIDS called ZNNP+, which began in 1994 with a few members. My behaviour and attitude changed and I accepted my status and committed myself to living positively and plan for the future.

In 2000, I met the Director of Padare/Enkundleni/Mens Forum on Gender at a workshop which was arranged by ZNNP+ in Harare and one of the sessions facilitated by the Director was on Male Involvement in Fighting HIV and AIDS. I was impressed by the idea of Padare and especially of male involvement in gender and violence. When I got back home I called for a meeting with willing men to start our own Chapter of Padare. The network of men started and I discovered that more men were ashamed of disclosing their status. I became a gender, and HIV/AIDS activist.

*As a chapter we chose a theme on Men, Sex, HIV and AIDS. Padare changed my life in many ways because I managed to deconstruct male power in sex, challenge the notions of patriarchy and masculinity that suppress women and children in meeting their strategic gender needs. At the moment I am a trained male voluntary caregiver and other men have been trained in Home Based Care, Nutrition. Our group has increased from 30 trained male caregivers to 45.*

*I am now a reformed man and my life has changed in many ways. I am now happily married and am living positively with HIV at the same time. I no longer beat up my wife and children. I have now thrown myself into a world that tries to create a safe home and society for its family. I have three children with my previous wives.*

*I still regret my actions, and no longer openly find pleasure in instilling fear and creating a myth of invincibility. I love living peacefully.*

*So much has been said about anger being one of the sources of abuse, and gender socialisation has been blamed for the derogatory manner in which men treat women.*

*I still believe the lack of positive role models lies at the centre of this problem and the road to change has not been an easy one for me. When I was growing up my mother would freak out if she saw me playing with a doll. I was expected to beat girls and not the other way round. Playing rough and proving your strength to both girls and boys was essential for survival.*

*I knew I was a man from the time I was a boy. My manhood was often referred to – to make a point that I was above women and more superior.*

*Today I stand before the same community, before the men who knew me as a band member as a new man. I am now an active member of Padare Men's Forum on Gender and I have been the Chairperson of Padare in my suburb since 2000.Currently Padare has a campaign to work with men to combat gender violence, the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS. Everyday we are witnessing a positive change in men who were abusive or violent.*

*(* Not his real name. The story is written with the assistance of Tapiwa Manyati, Knowledge Management Officer, Padare).*

*Epilogue:*

# You are my heroes

By Maureen Xaba

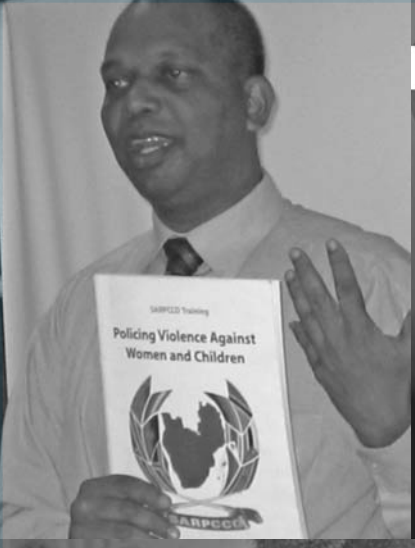
As a counselor at People Against Women Abuse (POWA) I want to salute all women who are survivors of gender based violence who are breaking the silence. You are heroes. And to all those who are fighting women abuse, I say: forward with a struggle.

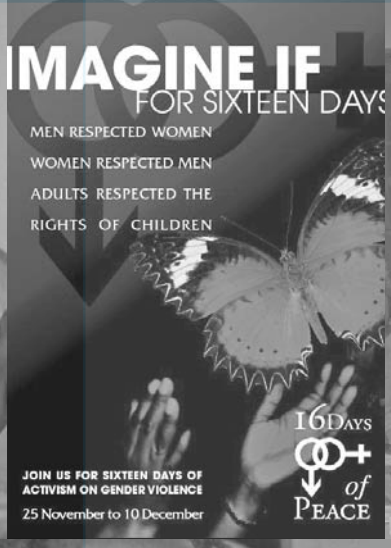
Twenty years ago I witnessed a horrific incident. I remember it very well because it was my first year in secondary school. I was doing standard 7 (Grade 9 in today's language) staying with my uncle and his family. One evening we heard a woman screaming and went out to see what was going on. A man was stabbing his wife. He was holding wife's head between his thighs and was stabbing her in the neck and back. The woman was crying and he kept apologising to her husband.

All the neighbors were outside watching. Nobody did or said anything. No one helped. Everybody went back to their homes. Nobody called the police or an ambulance. I tried to sleep but kept listening, thinking that I will hear an ambulance siren or a police car there was nothing. The following day still there was no word about it. Even today I am wondering what happened to that woman. Today I understand that it was domestic violence and people felt it is not their problem. It is twenty years on and people's mindsets have not changed. They do not regard domestic violence as a social problem but as a 'family secret' or 'family problem'.

In 2002 I volunteered at the Katlehong police station. I heard about POWA. I attended their volunteer training in April the same year. Then I volunteered at POWA. I believe what POWA is fighting for and in their mission that says 'to create a society that does not tolerate violence against women, were women are powerful, self-reliant and equal'. This is the struggle I want to be part of, a struggle against gender based violence.

In 2004 POWA employed me as a receptionist. From April this year I started working as a counselor. It feels good to listen to somebody and have them say at the end of the session: thanks for listening and believing me. You feel that what you are doing as a counselor is just a drop in the ocean, but you know that the ocean wouldn't be full without that drop.


Policing Violence Against
Women and Children


IMAGINE IF
FOR SIXTEEN DAYS
MEN RESPECTED WOMEN
WOMEN RESPECTED MEN
ADULTS RESPECTED THE
RIGHTS OF CHILDREN
JOIN US FOR SIXTEEN DAYS OF
ACTIVISM ON GENDER VIOLENCE
25 November to 10 December
16 Days
of
Peace


Sixteen Days of Activism
Peace begins at home
GEMSA
16 days



# Khuluma, Bua, Speak Out!




gender links

GEMSA
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HIVOS

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FOKUS